Negotiating Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa

A System Analysis after the Arab Spring, the Iran Nuclear Deal, and the Rise of ISIS

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The MENA Negotiation Report

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PREFACE

This report invites the reader to reflect systematically upon the broad range of actors, interests, and narratives present in the ongoing, interlocking conflicts in the Middle East and in North Africa.

Our research initiative included scholars and students from Harvard University, IDC Herzliya, Tufts University, and Brandeis University. The final report contains a comprehensive mapping of the MENA conflict system. It identifies and analyzes the various conflicts, parties, issues, and relationships that shape the current political situation in the Middle East and North Africa. As such, this negotiation stakeholder analysis includes many actors, both state and non- state, that are involved in the interconnected conflicts in the MENA region and that have a significant impact on its future. It also aims to identify opportunities for peaceful intervention by means of negotiation.

We would like to thank our research assistants, research facilitators, and research contributors for their hard work and collaborative creativity that made this project possible.

Eileen Babbitt, Arvid Bell, Alain Lempereur, Brian Mandell, Dana Wolf
May 2017

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

What are you interested in?	You should look here:
I am looking for in-depth information about one specific actor in the Middle East or North Africa (for example, an analysis of Iran).	Part Four of this report contains comprehensive assessments of a variety of state and non-state actors.
I am interested in a brief and concise overview of a party's interests (for example, a portrait of Israel.)	Part Three contains brief portraits of 59 parties that are active in the MENA region, including external powers and organizations.
I want to find out more about a specific conflict in the Middle East (for example, the war in Syria).	Check out Part Two (key findings), chapters II and III.
I want to learn about an issue that plays a role across the MENA region (for example, water).	Check out Part Two (key findings), chapter IV.
I want to know more about the people who created this report.	See Part Five.
I want to know more about project background, funding, and methodology.	See Part One.
I am interested in future developments and in what may happen next in the Middle East.	Several scenarios are mapped out in Part Two, Chapter VII.
What shall I read if I only have limited time, but I want to read more than just the Executive Summary?	We recommend starting with Part Two, Chapter I.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

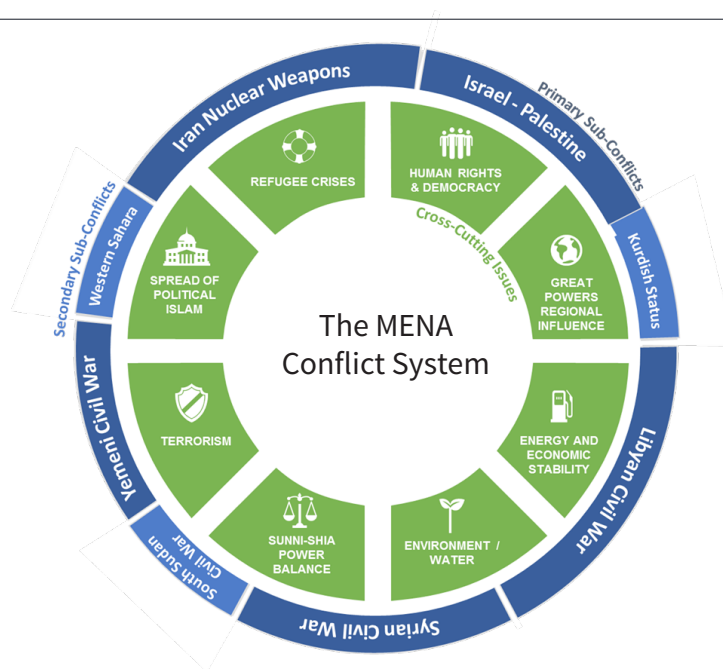### A changing region defies simple explanations

- The **Arab Spring**, the rise of **ISIS**, and the **Iran nuclear deal** have profoundly changed the Middle East and North Africa.
- Simplistic conflict narratives that focus on two opposing camps are **increasingly outdated**. The conflicts in the Middle East are about much more than just the Israeli-Palestinian or the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the relationships within and between these conflicts are changing. For example, Arab governments tend to realize that they share certain interests with Israel as a result of the new political reality.
- Future negotiation initiatives have to take these **new conflict narratives** and the **shifting balance of power in the region** into account or they will not be effective.

Strategic action requires in-depth analysis

While regional initiatives in the Middle East are not a new idea, they lack analysis that deals with the regional repercussions, unintended consequences, and system effects of new political moves. While new alliances are emerging, the ripple effects of these power shifts across the region are difficult to predict. In this situation, an in-depth analysis of the MENA conflict system is both an important "conflict management database" as well as a strategic commodity for actors and third parties within and outside the region.

A complex conflict system needs a new approach

Many observers assume that one specific conflict (for example, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) is the main source of instability in the Middle East. Instead of making such an assumption, this report treats all conflicts in the MENA region as **interconnected within a complex regional conflict system**:

This interconnected way of looking at the MENA region can help answer questions such as:

- *What are the practical implications of "regional" negotiation initiatives?*
- *Which parties care about which issues? How are these issues connected?*
- *If a specific regional issue is resolved, what are likely spillover effects?*
- *What are the connections between the conflicts, parties, and issues within the region?*

This reports provides the reader with a **systemic conflict mapping** of the Middle East and North Africa. It lets the reader discover the various interconnections across the region and allows for the experimentation with new, creative regional initiatives. It organizes complex data in an easily accessible way.

The report identifies and analyses:

- Five **primary sub-conflicts** *within the MENA region that have a significant impact beyond their respective borders* **→ Part Two, Chapter II**
- *Three* **secondary sub-conflicts** *with a more limited regional impact* **→ Part Two, Chapter III**
- *Eight* **cross-cutting issues** *that impact the parties across the region* **→ Part Two, Chapter IV**

Selected Findings

- The two sub-conflicts that are connected with the greatest number of other conflicts and issues in the region are the **War in Syria** and the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict**.
- The **spillover effects** of these two sub-conflicts have a significant impact on the MENA conflict system.
- The top issue that connects with the greatest number of other conflicts and issues in the region is **terrorism/violent extremism**, followed by regional **forced displacement** crises, **human rights and democracy** issues, and the **rivalry between great powers** for regional influence.

Opportunities and Leverage Points

- Relying on systemic stakeholder mapping, this report contains in-depth assessment of various conflicts and parties as well as summaries, overviews, and rankings of key conflict features.
- It contains portraits of **59 state and non-state actors**, including regional players and outside powers, and their conflict narratives, networks of relationships, and sources of leverage.
- The portraits are summaries geared towards **real-world applicability**. These summaries are based on longer, in-depth assessments available in a separate section. **(Party portraits: → Part Three, In-depth assessments: → Part Four)**

CONFLICT SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Out of the 59 actors that are analyzed in this report, the following 10 parties have the **greatest conflict system involvement**, i.e. they have "the most at stake" in the entire MENA region (vs. other parties who may have isolated interests in selected sub-conflicts only):

- States within the region: **Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Government, Turkey**
- Non-state actors: **Hezbollah, ISIS**
- External actors/organizations: **EU, UN, USA**

Note that "involvement" does not necessarily mean that a party has the capabilities to effectively pursue its interests. (→ Part Two, Chapter V)

Network of Relationships

The multi-faceted network of relationship in the MENA conflict system connects the parties as allies, partners, rivals, adversaries, active armed opponents, proxies, external sponsors, and aid donors/recipients.

Example: All negative relationships across the region

Key:

──── Active Armed Opponents   ──── Adversaries   ──── Rivals

Selected Findings

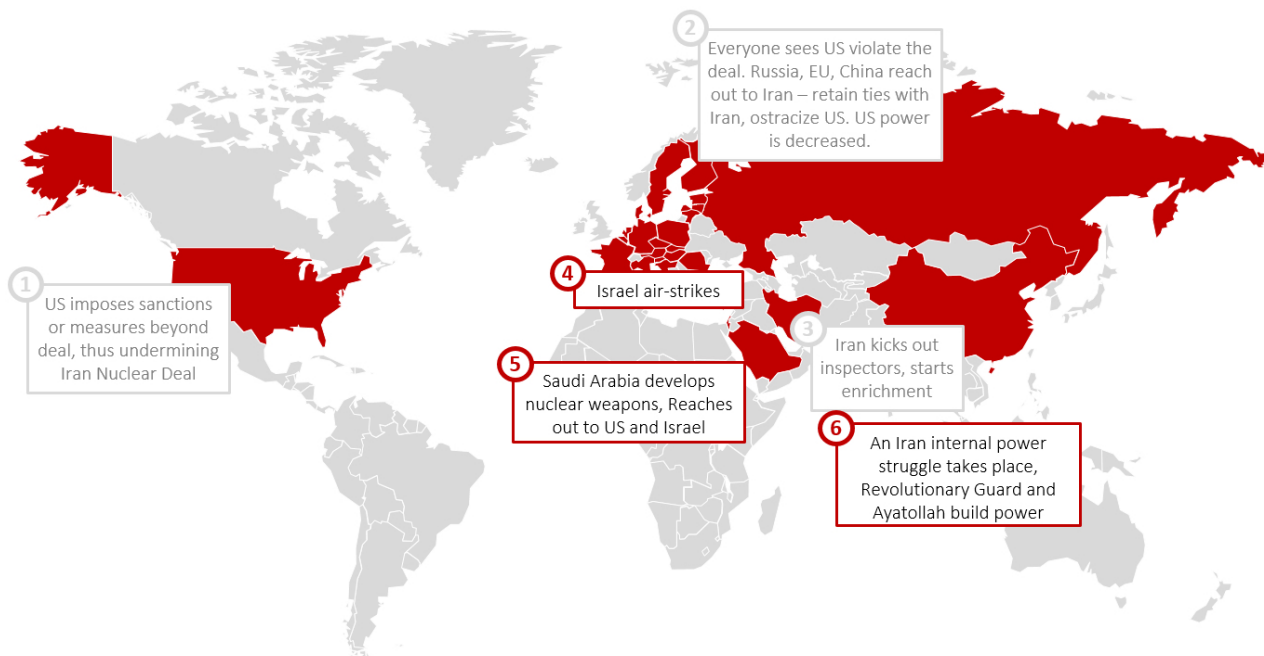- **ISIS, Iran, and the Syrian government** are facing an especially high number of active armed opponents, adversaries, and rivals across the region.

- In the cases of **Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia**, the high number of their negative relationships significantly reduces their net relationship score, even though these three also have a substantial number of allies and partners.

- Vice versa, the especially high number of alliances and partnerships that the **United States** was able to build allows it to balance the high number of its negative relationships.

All network diagrams: Part Two, Chapter VI

A tactical and strategic navigation tool

- This report is helpful for those interested in navigating the complex political landscape in the Middle East and North Africa.
- It can inform future negotiation initiatives that may move the region towards a more cooperative system.
- It allows the reader to "play out" new political moves by identifying the connections through which ripples effects will be relayed. It can hence serve as an "early warning system" and help classify ineffective or counterproductive moves with destabilizing consequences.

Sample scenario: the unraveling of the Iranian nuclear deal

Full scenarios: → Part Two, Chapter VII

PART ONE   BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

I. Relevance and Objectives

Relevance

With the Arab Spring, the Iran nuclear deal, and the rise of ISIS, the reality in the Middle East and North Africa has changed fundamentally over the past few years. Civil war is raging in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. Iran and Saudi Arabia are stepping up their proxy wars. Negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians are deadlocked.

Against this background, the balance of interests between countries in the region is shifting. A simplistic "Arab states against Israel" narrative fails to grasp the complex reality of seemingly "stable" governments and their precarious internal and external alliances, of extremist threats and failing states; of the regional balance of power between the U.S. and Russia; of the multi-faceted role of Iran and Turkey; and of the complex interdependencies between Sunni and Shia Islam. The conflicts in the Middle East are about much more than just the Israeli-Palestinian or the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the relationship between these two conflicts is changing. For example, Arab governments tend to realize that they share certain interests with Israel as a result of the new political reality. This new reality, including the escalation of threats, ongoing terrorist activities, and the use of different sources of power by a variety of parties across the region, also has an impact on international peace and security beyond the Middle East.

This report aims to make contributions to the understanding of the interconnected conflicts in the MENA region. It assess the shifted network of relationships and alliances in the Middle East and North Africa and helps evaluate the effectiveness of future negotiation strategies to be employed by key actors with influence in the region. It does not seek to make specific policy recommendations.

Objectives

1. Identify the **key state and non-state actors in the MENA conflict system**
    *   Identify the **key interests** of these parties to the conflict
    *   Understand **internal narratives** which differ from external views
    *   Analyze **internal factions**, divisions, and subgroups and their diverging interests within each party
    *   Map out the **internal network of relationships** within each party
    *   Target **hidden dimensions** of the current conflict and move to a more nuanced understanding
    *   Capture **salient issues** and assess their emotional and symbolic values

2. Identify the **key conflicts** in the system
    *   Understand the **connections** between these conflicts
    *   Identify the most important issues which **cut across** these conflicts and impact different actors
    *   Map out the **external network of relationships**, including with outside powers, of each party
    *   Identify how the relevance of these issues has **changed** since the Arab Spring, the Iran deal, and the rise of ISIS

3. Assess how the recent changes in the MENA conflict system impact today's negotiation options and strategies that, if employed by specific parties, could **move the region towards a more stable and cooperative system**.

II. Funding, Disclaimer, and Release Date

Disclaimer

Harvard University, IDC Herzliya, Tufts University, and Brandeis University as institutions do not take positions on public policy issues and thus will not take a position on direct or indirect recommendations or conclusions that this report may contain. Opinions expressed in this report are either the opinions of individual research contributors, or the opinions of the investigators.

Release Date

This report is accurate to the best of the research team's knowledge as of May 2017.

III. Literature

The construction of the MENA Negotiation Report relied on a Negotiation Stakeholder Analysis Framework that was developed specifically for this project. The framework outlined instructions for the composition of the individual papers on actors and clusters of actors. Data gathered in the first phase of the project underpins the identification and analysis of the primary and secondary sub-conflicts and cross-cutting issues, as well as the construction of the stakeholder portrait tables.

The PRIF Central Asia Stakeholder Report[1] provided a template of systemic stakeholder mapping in a regional conflict system. Albeit a shorter and more focused report, the PRIF report informed the design and the construction of this MENA report. Similarly, several notable publications have analyzed conflict in the Middle East at the regional-level viewpoint that the MENA negotiation report intends to show, although with a more limited scope. In particular, the concept of a "regional conflict formation," (RCF) also sometimes referred to as a "regional conflict complex," has been used by a number of publications as a framework to explore the interconnectedness of neighboring conflicts[2]. The RCF model was pioneered by Raimo Väyrynen in his 1984 report, "Regional Conflict Formations: An Intractable Problem of International Relations," and describes conflicts whose outcomes have, for better or worse, become inextricably linked to the dynamics of their region[3]. Väyrynen further concludes that regional conflicts are initiated in their regions, but shaped by global systems; therefore, such conflicts are best analyzed through their effect on and from global powers[4].

More recently, the RCF model has been used as a framework specifically for conflicts in the Middle East. Reinoud Leenders' "'Regional Conflict Formations': Is the Middle East Next?" examines the interconnectedness of conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon through the RCF model, but suggests the current RCF focus on military, political, economic/financial, and social networks should be enhanced to include significant symbolic-political resources. This addition, Leenders argues, would also shed light on the endogeneity of Western culpability in the roots of Middle East conflict[5]. In "Beyond the 'Land of the Two Rivers: A Regional Conflict Formation?" Leenders further recommends that RCF analysis of symbolic capital incorporate "material cross-border ties, regional symbolic capital, and foreign intervention" in order to present a comprehensive picture of regionally connected conflict[6]. In such an effort to cover the breadth and depth of influence on conflict in the Middle East, the MENA Negotiation Report includes Western powers, such as the United States, the European Union, and others as well as humanitarian and financial institutions as key actors influencing conflicts and issues.

Also helpful to expanding the concept of RCFs, and the general trajectory and definition of conflict, is Mary Kaldor's idea of "new wars." This type of war is fought between both state and non-state actors, including in the latter those who fight not to create another state, but to shift the balance of power of political identities, primarily sectarian, ethnic, or tribal identities. Many actors in these wars rely heavily on networks, leading to spillover of the conflict into other areas or states beyond the initial location[7]. In "The Contagiousness of Regional Conflict: A Middle East Case Study," Graeme P. Auton and Jacob R. Slobodien use the metaphor of contagion to explain why such spillover occurs. In regional conflict, they argue, the Patient Zero of the conflict, that is, the initial driver, is likely to lose control of the conflict and the ability to resolve it to their satisfaction[8]. Thus, it is likely that a strategy to end such a conflict would require a regional-level solution incorporating all relevant entangling factors.

Also helpful to understanding the nature of interconnectedness in Middle East conflicts is the idea of a regional security complex. A regional security complex is a situation where several countries have security needs which are so similar that one cannot change the security situation without having a positive or negative impact on the others in the system. This complex differs from the

regional conflict complex in that it focuses specifically on military defense needs and capacities among states[9]. The MENA Negotiation Report covers this subject to some extent in its definition of regional strategy and sources of leverage, including military, to achieve that strategy.

Several publications describe in more detail how alliances and partnerships shift and align in response to new political developments or changing conflict dynamics. In "Sectarian and Regional Conflict in the Middle East," Aaron Reese describes how different Middle East conflicts advance or deter various stakeholders' interests. The article notes specifically how regional powers have developed proxies among the state and non-state actors initiating the conflicts, and describes how battle lines are drawn along sectarian loyalties[10].

Additionally, in "Israel's relations with the Gulf states: Toward the emergence of a tacit security regime?" Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky write about Israel's emerging security relationship with a number Gulf Arab countries. The move is posited as an attempt to maintain Israel's security in response to the US's projected shift in regional alliances. The article takes a regional-level viewpoint of Israel's security decisions. It sets out to describe not only which of Israel's partnerships are changing, but how: specifically, the article suggests that the pursuit of strategic interests and threat perception may replace the continuation of collective norms. While the MENA Negotiation Report does not focus much on the theoretical debate of the nature of partnerships, such an analysis can be useful in understanding how such a change in relationships may occur[11]. The CNAS Two-State Solution Report's[12] chapter on regional security is another example of concise analysis of Middle Eastern issues.

Prior to this report, other publications have sought to analyze the instability of the Middle East by graphically demonstrating links and relationships among actors, issues and conflicts with charts and diagrams. The below-mentioned diagrams serve to briefly highlight aspects of the overall tensions and actors involved. This report aims to produce a similar effort, but delves deeper into the nuanced dynamics of each issue area to present a comprehensive picture of the complexity of the Middle

East and North Africa.

The Economist has produced a diagram of the main political friends and foes in the Middle East, called the Middle Eastern Mesh. The graphic was produced in response to the question of how the then-newly signed Iran Deal would affect the rest of the conflicts in the region. It shows splits in national actors for crises in Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and their various support by major influencers (the United States, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia) and minor influencers (Turkey, Qatar, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, and Pakistan). The graphic is very useful for finding at-a-glance information on the major sides in a conflict, and whom each side is supported by. It also highlights the differences in the number of conflicts each outside party is involved in: while the US, Iran, and the other major actors support partners in several conflicts each, Russia is shown to only back the Syrian government. The supplementary text describes the primary battle lines as drawn over issues of ideology, ethnicity, class and religion, particularly the sectarian Sunni-Shia rift. The MENA Negotiation Report similarly acknowledges the complexity of interconnectedness of conflict in the Middle East and North Africa, but examines a larger list of actors and their connections to more sub-conflicts and cross-cutting-issues[13].

Similarly, in Slate, Joshua Keating and Chris Kirk's Middle East Friendship Chart visualizes the dynamics of affinity and enmity in the Middle East. Unlike the Economist's graphic, Slate does not center its chart on conflicts, but on actors. It also works with a different cast of characters, namely: al-Qaeda, Egypt, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, Iraq, ISIS, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States. This graphic categorizes the positive/negative/complicated nature of relationships among actors in Middle East conflicts with color-coded, user-friendly smiley faces accompanied by a description of the latest development in the relationship[14].

Finally, ThinkProgress's Adam Peck eschews breadth for depth in a single conflict, with The Tangled Web in the Fight for Syria's Future. This graphic shows the allegiances and enemies of the states and non-state actors who

compose the main players in the Syrian conflict. As with the MENA Negotiation Report, the ThinkProgress graphic acknowledges the multilayered nature of interactions in a conflict, and characterizes relationships based on direct conflict, indirect conflict, monetary assistance, alleged monetary assistance, and supply of weapons and/or fighters. Several actors are connected by both constructive and destructive interactions, such as the Islamic Front and the Free Syrian Army, who have attacked each other's fighters even while coordinating attacks on ISIS. The accompanying text describes the subsequent drafts of the graphic which increased the complexity from what had originally been anticipated, in order to accurately display the complexity of the Syrian conflict. In effect, this graphic represents a smaller effort to what the MENA Negotiation Report aims to produce in describing the complexity of the conflicts of the Middle East, compounded by adding more actors, conflicts and issues[15].

Of course, no overview of visualization of conflict in the Middle East and North Africa would be complete without the notorious Afghanistan "bowl of spaghetti" slide shown to Gen. Stanley McChrystal in 2014. The diagram showcased the dizzying intricacy of American involvement in Afghanistan through seven sections, split into thirteen sub-sections and dozens of sub-sub-sections, connected by an intricate web of lines and arrows. McChrystal, who at the time headed American and NATO troops in Afghanistan, famously stated "When we understand that slide, we'll have won the war."[16] Needless to say, the diagram successfully impressed on its audience the density of this single, extremely difficult, conflict.

This report aims to shed some light on the "spaghetti" of the complex interlocking conflict zones of the Middle East and North Africa. It seeks to build on the progress made by the above publications, and add to the general knowledge about the interconnectedness of conflict in the MENA region, while stimulating the formation of new negotiation moves and new research and development of useful ideas for conceptualizing conflict and modeling solutions in this important region.

IV. Structure and Definitions

This report proposes a systemic framework for looking at a regional conflict system. As a result of this new approach, the research team had to wrestle with methodological challenges as the project evolved. The following is an overview of the report structure and crucial terms used throughout the report. The research team welcomes feedback from scholars, practitioners, and other interested readers on how the research framework, as well as its application, can be improved for future analysis.

The MENA Negotiation Report is the product of an intensive two-phase effort to map out and analyze conflict dynamics across the Middle East and North Africa region. Phase 1 consisted of an intensive research project on the key actors across the region, while Phase 2 built on these analyses and mapped out the most critical conflicts and cross-cutting issues that have wide-ranging implications.

In the first phase of this effort, research contributors (most of them graduate students) submitted comprehensive negotiation research papers on the key parties in the MENA region. These papers sought to identify and evaluate new, creative negotiation moves by key parties and their likely impact on regional political or security dynamics. These papers were based on a Stakeholder Analysis Framework, which seeks to identify: (i) conflict narratives and threat perceptions; (ii) sources of leverage; (iii) internal conflicts and network of relationships; (iv) external conflicts and networks of relationships; and (v) potential negotiation moves. These findings can be found in Part Four of the report.

The second phase of the project consisted of mapping interconnected conflicts, cross-cutting issues, and the most relevant actors across the MENA region based on the gathered data. This phase connected the actors' networks of relationships, interests, narratives, sources of leverage, and potential negotiation moves and their implications with the wider region. These findings can be found in Parts Two and Three of the report.

The key findings in Part Two contain a classification of the region's most pressing challenges into three main categories: (i) Primary Sub-Conflicts; (ii) Secondary Sub-Conflicts; and (iii) Cross-Cutting Issues:

Primary Sub-Conflicts refer to the most destabilizing conflicts in the region, with a key property being that they have a significant impact beyond their respective borders. These include: (i) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; (ii) the Iran nuclear program; (iii) the Libyan civil war; (iv) the Syrian civil war; and (v) the Yemeni civil war.

Secondary Sub-Conflicts indicate conflicts that are either frozen, or do not have as far-reaching or destabilizing consequences beyond their borders. These include: (i) the conflict over Western Sahara; (ii) the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan; and (iii) issues relating to Kurdish autonomy.

Cross-Cutting Issues refer to the underlying challenges that impact various actors across the region, and which cause the greatest regional – and in some cases global – instability. These include: (i) regional forced displacement crises; (ii) human rights and democracy issues; (iii) rivalry between great powers for regional influence; (iv) energy and economic stability; (v) environment and water challenges; (vi) the regional Sunni-Shia rivalry; (vii) the increase in terrorism and violent extremism; and (viii) the spread of political Islam.

Based on these classifications, the party's degree of involvement in each sub-conflict and issue, as well as in the overall conflict system, is assessed.

Conflict involvement is defined as an aggregate of the degree to which a party is being impacted by a conflict or issue and of the degree to which the party is influencing this conflict or issue in return (highly impacted + high influence = 4 points; low impact +

high influence = 3 points; low impact + low influence = 1 point; super-peripheral involvement = 0 points).

Conflict system involvement refers to conflict involvement across all conflicts and issues.

Furthermore, Part Two contains an overview of the networks of alliances of the various parties and identifies the key actors in both positive and negative regional relationship networks.

In addition, Part Two discusses some of the potential escalatory and de-escalatory negotiation moves across a select few issues (Israel-Palestine, Iran Nuclear Weapons, Great Powers Regional Influence, Energy and Economic Stability, Spread of Political Islam, and Terrorism). These issues were selected as a demonstration of the global impacts that a hypothetical increase or mitigation of conflict would have across a wide range of actors. Importantly, the scenarios that are discussed in this section are not a reflection of the research team's views, but rather serve an illustrative purpose to show the complexity of conflict dynamics in the region. In terms of the definitions of terms used in this section:

Escalatory negotiation moves refer to actions taken that would further exacerbate a conflict or dispute.

De-Escalatory negotiation moves refer to actions taken that would reduce tensions, or lead to a resolution, of a conflict or dispute.

Part Three consists of the full collection of stakeholder assessment summaries that discuss key details regarding each actor that was analyzed.

Most of the tables are drawn from the negotiation research papers of various stakeholders. Some additional actors that were not included in phase 1 of the analysis have been added to this section given that the research indicated that these actors play a critical role in political, economic or security affairs in the region.

Internal actors "within" parties are only listed here if they have their own networks of external relationships, which is mostly the case in fragile states, civil wars, or when political entities have disintegrated significantly. (For example, Hamas and Fatah are listed as separate actors, but Israeli political parties or factions are not. Israeli political factions and internal conflicts are still analyzed in-depth in the respective chapter in Part Four.)

Specifically, the section analyzes the following aspects of each actor:

Party Portrait. Brief summary of identity, conflict narratives, and threat perceptions of each actor. What holds this party together? How does the party "see" the MENA region and its role in it? How do these perceptions shape its behavior?

Key interests. Aims to address what the party is primarily seeking to accomplish in the MENA region.

Regional strategy. Brief description of how the party is currently pursuing their key interests.

Sources of leverage. Aims to briefly answer the following questions: What is it that allows this party to influence the situation in the Middle East? Why and how is this party able to influence or not influence others?

Powerful individuals. Most important individuals that hold formal or informal authority over this party, including their official titles.

Potential negotiation moves. What could this party do that that would further exacerbate a conflict or dispute? What could this party do in order to reduce tensions or help resolve a conflict or dispute?

Internal conflicts. Brief summary of the following questions: What are the different political, social, economic, ethnic, religious groups within this party, and how do their identities, perceptions, motivation, interests, and positions differ? How relevant are these cleavages? How has the internal network of relationships been affected by key political and conflict dynamics in the MENA region?

Memberships. List of the key relevant organizations or alliances of which the party is a member.

Allies. The relationship with these parties includes stable and extensive arrangements for security cooperation with a long history, as well as significant material or financial support, often directly related to a party's armed struggle against an armed opponent

Partners. The relationship with these parties is characterized by material, financial, or ideological support, which may or may not be linked to an armed struggle. Parties with whom the party maintains channels of cooperation and assistance may also be listed under this category.

Rivals. Parties with whom the party is in a state of political, ideological, or economic rivalry but with whom there is no direct armed combat. Rivalry does not exclude the possibility of cooperation on specific issues, and it captures a wide range of competitive behavior including conflict over contested territory as long as there is no ongoing armed combat.

Adversaries. Parties with whom the party is in a state of open, most likely mutually acknowledged, hostility, yet not in a state of direct, active, armed combat. Cooperation with an adversary is very unlikely, and diplomatic recognition (either of the adversary or by the adversary) may be missing.

Active armed opponents. Parties with whom the party is currently in a state of direct, armed combat.

Proxies. Internal factions within another party, which are politically, financially or militarily supported, without extending cooperation to the entire party.

External Sponsors. Parties that maintain a cooperative relationship, of a political, financial or military nature, with internal factions of another party.

Aid Recipients. Parties that receive considerable economic, humanitarian or development support.

Aid Donors. Parties that provide considerable eco-nomic, humanitarian or development support.

Note that the summary portraits provide a brief overview per party and that more details are available in Part Four.

Part Four features the collection of negotiation research papers on most of the key stakeholders discussed in Part Three. These chapters present a comprehensive and in-depth discussion of the complex internal dynamics, regional role, and possible negotiation moves of each stakeholder.

PART TWO   KEY FINDINGS

I. Summary

The MENA Conflict System

Explanation of Summary Diagram and Terms Used
Based on separate assessments detailing the individual actors playing a critical role in the MENA region, the reports classifies the region's most pressing challenges into three key areas:

• *Primary Sub-Conflicts*
• *Secondary Sub-Conflicts*
• *Cross-Cutting Issues*

Primary Sub-Conflicts refer to the most destabilizing conflicts in the region, with a key property being that they have a significant impact beyond their respective borders. These include: (i) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; (ii) the Iran nuclear program; (iii) the Libyan civil war; (iv) the Syrian civil war; and (v) the Yemeni civil war.

Secondary Sub-Conflicts indicate conflicts that are either frozen, or do not have as far-reaching or destabilizing consequences beyond their borders. These include: (i) the conflict over Western Sahara; (ii) the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan; and (iii) issues relating to Kurdish autonomy.

Cross-Cutting Issues refer to the underlying challenges that impact various actors across the region, and which cause the greatest regional – and in some cases global – instability. These include: (i) regional forced displacement crises; (ii) human rights and democracy issues; (iii) rivalry between great powers for regional influence; (iv) energy and economic stability; (v) environment and water challenges; (vi) the regional Sunni-Shia rivalry; (vii) the increase in terrorism and violent extremism; and (viii) the spread of political Islam.

In addition to describing the Primary Sub-Conflicts, Secondary Sub-Conflicts, and Cross-Cutting Issues, the report analyzes the web of relationships between each of them. These issues are deeply interrelated, and hence understanding how they connect to one another is crucial to developing a more in-depth and clearer insight into the complexity of the MENA region.

The shape of a circle was chosen purposefully to display these sub-conflicts and issues in random order, to demonstrate that this report does not prioritize any one issue over another. Further, this report analyzes how each issue area impacts the others in an interlocking matrix, rather than in a linear fashion.

The key actors for each sub-conflict or issue are represented in 2x2 quadrants. These diagrams are bounded by an actor's **influence on** the issue area, on the north axis, and the degree to which the actor is **impacted by** the issue area, on the west axis. "Influence" and "impact" are hence two dimensions of **involvement** in a conflict or issue, with "influence" referring to the active dimension and "impact" referring to the passive dimension.

II. Primary Sub-Conflicts
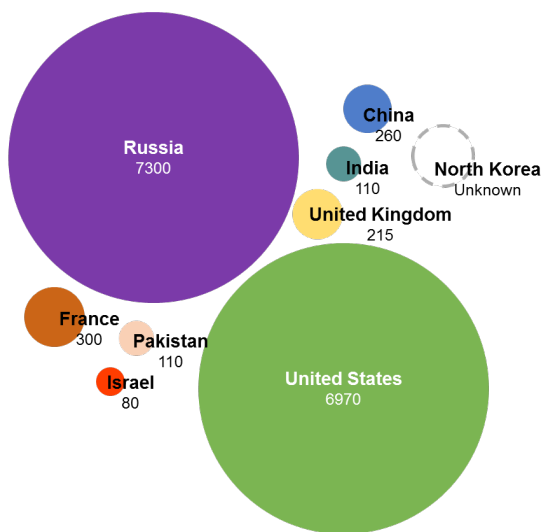
Iran Nuclear Weapons

In July of 2015, a deal was reached between Iran and Western powers regarding Iran's nuclear program. The deal reduced the number of Iranian centrifuges by two-thirds, placed bans on enrichment and key facilities, and limited uranium research and development in exchange for a lifting of sanctions. However, tension between Western states, Gulf monarchies, Israel and Iran continue to be high, as evidenced by the recent backlash over Iran's test-firing of ballistic missiles.

Key Issues
- Iran has been pursuing nuclear energy technology since the 1950's, with western support until the Iranian revolution in 1979. Clandestine research in 2002 and 2003 raised concerns by the international community that Iran's ambitions for its nuclear program lay beyond peaceful intent.
- After twenty months of talks, the US and Iran reached a deal regarding Iran's nuclear weapons in July of 2015. The deal reduced the number of Iranian centrifuges, limited uranium research and development, and capped uranium enrichment in exchange for relief from sanctions. The deal also allowed Iran to continue its atomic program for peaceful purposes, though it introduced a significant monitoring program by the IAEA.
- Israel is the only country in the Middle East that is alleged to currently hold nuclear weapons. Given the perceived existential threats from Iran, the Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Netanyahu has been a fervent advocate against Iran acquiring nuclear weapons.

Connections with Other Issues
- Israel-Palestine
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Sunni-Shia Power Balance

Note: Data from BBC (2016)

Note: Data from BBC (2016)

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, AQAP, ARAB LEAGUE, CHINA, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, ERITREA, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INDIA, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, ISIS, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, JAPAN, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, KUWAIT, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, MOROCCO Government, MOROCCO Polisario Front, OMAN, PALESTINE Fatah, QATAR, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, TUNISIA, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, YEMEN Government	3) EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, LEBANON Hezbollah, NATO, PALESTINE Hamas, RUSSIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) BAHRAIN, ISRAEL, KURDS of Iran, LEBANON Government, PALESTINE Civil Society, SAUDI ARABIA, YEMEN Houthis	4) IRAN

Israel-Palestine

Since the establishment of the State of Israel (known to Israelis as a triumphant fight for independence and to Palestinians as a catastrophe of displacement) in 1948, Israelis, Palestinians, and international bodies have been engaged in intermittent conflict and, in recent decades, in a stop-and-start peace process. Discourse around the conflict is characterized by divergent narratives and deep-seated differences in perspectives. Israelis perceive their country as a beacon of democracy in the midst of a hostile Arab World, beleaguered by terrorism and anti-Semitism, and unjustly singled out for its policies. Palestinians perceive the situation as that of a colonizing military power denying rights and seizing land in contradiction of International law. Both Palestinians and Israelis have deep internal divisions and complex external connections, causing the negotiations process to be multi-layered and international. Stark power asymmetries complicate the negotiations: ongoing occupation of the West Bank and closure of Gaza, Israeli military and economic power, and financial and political support from the US bolster Israel's position; Palestinians rely on international sympathy and local resistance ranging from non-violence to acts of terrorism.

Key Issues

• *Security***:** For Israelis, 'security' means life without fear of terrorist attacks, wars, or existential threats. For Palestinians, 'security' means life without fear of home demolitions, occupying forces, or bombings.

- *Mutual recognition:* Currently, many Arab states do not officially recognize Israel, and Palestinians do not have broad international recognition as a state. Palestinians desire self-determination, either through an independent Palestinian state or through equal civil rights in a shared state. Israel desires international recognition, particularly from Arab States and Palestinian groups, of its right to exist as a Jewish state.

- *Borders and settlements***:** Approximately 400,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank, with an additional 375,000 in disputed East Jerusalem.

- *Freedom of movement for Palestinians:* Currently, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have severely limited mobility due to closed borders, checkpoints, and restricted areas.

- *Environmental Resources:* Control of water resources in the Palestinian Territories, including the Mountain Aquifer, the Coastal Aquifer, and the Jordan River are major areas of contention. Currently, as per the Oslo II Accords, Israel uses approximately 80% of the water from West Bank aquifers, with Palestinians receiving 20% and purchasing additional water from Israel.

- *Right of return for Palestinian refugees***:** Based on UNRWA registration records, there are over 4.9 million patrilineal descendants of Palestinians displaced in 1947-48, now living in neighboring countries and around the world.

- *Status of Jerusalem:* Neither side accepts the possibility of the other retaining full control of Jerusalem.

Connections with Other Issues
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Environment/Water
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Iran Nuclear Weapons
- Refugee Crises
- Spread of Political Islam
- Sunni – Shia Power Balance
- Syrian Civil War
- Terrorism

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, AQAP, ARAB LEAGUE, CHINA, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, ISIS, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KUWAIT, MOROCCO Government, NATO, RUSSIA, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, TUNISIA, UNITED NATIONS	3) IRAN, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) EGYPT Government, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, PALESTINE Civil Society	4) ISRAEL, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas

Libyan Civil War

After more than four decades in power, Muammar Gaddafi's death in October 2011 was a significant turning point in Libya's history. After months of protests and a popular uprising against his rule, National Transitional Council (NTC) forces captured and killed Gaddafi in Sirte, a small town to which he fled after the fall of Tripoli.

Key Issues

- *Power vacuum:* A power vacuum emerged, with various actors seeking to fill the void to assume power as the legitimate government of Libya. A highly volatile environment sparked the proliferation of armed militia groups and jihadist entities across the country, and an intensification of violence amidst raw inter and intra-tribal rivalries.

- *Competing governmental actors:* Now, after a series of transitional administrations, a series of different actors claiming to represent Libya have emerged: most notably the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord, the executive recognized and supported by the UN and the Western powers, and the Tobruk-based legislature, the House of Representatives. Significant disagreements persist between the two institutions, sparking intense rivalry for recognition and representation on the GNA's Presidency Council. Field Marshal Haftar, commander of the Libyan National Army, also holds a significant degree of power, bolstered by external partners.

- *Recruitment of combatants:* Eastern Libya, and Benghazi and Derna in particular, offer a fertile environment for jihadist activities such as the Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council (BSRC) coalition. The most notable, and most menacing, BSRC partner is Ansar al-Sharia, an Al-Qaeda affiliate that has built strong ties with local communities and fought alongside the Islamic State to combat Haftar.

Connections with Other Issues

- Refugee Crises
- Terrorism
- Spread of Political Islam
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Environment/Water
- Energy and Economic Stability
-
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Sunni-Shia Power Balance

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) AQAP, BAHRAIN, CHINA, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, ISRAEL, JAPAN, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON Government, OMAN, PALESTINE Hamas, RUSSIA, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, TURKEY	3) EGYPT Government, FRANCE, ISIS, NATO, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) ALGERIA, ARAB LEAGUE, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, ERITREA, EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAN, LEBANON Hezbollah, MOROCCO Government, QATAR, SOMALIA Government, TUNISIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS	4) LIBYA Government of National Accords, LIBYA House of Representatives

Syrian Civil War

During the Arab Spring in 2011, protests in Syria were met with violent suppression from the government, under control of President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-government opposition is now represented by multiple armed groups, including the Islamic State (ISIS), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Jabhat a-Nusra), Jabhat al-Ahrar, the Free Syrian Army, and others, all vying for territory, recognition, and external support. Now in its sixth year, the civil war has created over 4.9 million refugees and over 7 million internally displaced persons. The Syrian Center for Policy Research estimates the February 2016 death toll at over 470,000, with 1.9 million additional individuals injured (totalling 11.5% of the population wounded or killed). The Syrian Civil War is a violent manifestation of the intersection of conflicts between political Islam and secularism, terrorism and democratic governance, Russian and American influence in the region, Sunni vs Shia power relations, and division of territory and scarce resources between ethnic, political, and religious groups. In this sense, this sub-conflict has become a conflagration of cross-cutting issues in the region, far beyond its Arab Spring beginnings.

Key Issues

- *Future of Assad:* The future of the Assad government is a precondition to negotiation for many: multiple opposition groups refuse to negotiate unless Assad agrees to step down, yet the government refuses to come to the table unless there is no such precondition. There is currently no viable political structure in the opposition to replace the Assad

were a regime change to take place.

- *Security & Territory:* Minority groups, specifically Christians and Alawites, are concerned about their safety if the government is deposed. Similarly, refugees and IDPs are insecure returning to their homes if the current regime remains in power. The Islamic State, which emerged largely from the Syrian Civil War, has become a key focus for international anti-terrorism campaigns. As the US and NATO fund anti-government groups to combat ISIS as part of a wider war on terror and Russia supports the Assad regime, the Syrian Civil War has become a proxy war for great powers to achieve regional influence. Kurdish opposition groups are fighting for self-rule in Syria, which will affect the broader issues of Kurdish statehood in the region. Some groups advocate for dividing the country, while the regime refuses.

- *Refugees:* The Syrian Civil War has caused a refugee crisis of over 4 million people, who live in dire conditions in neighboring MENA countries or have migrated to Europe. The crisis is causing instability across the region as governments and aid organizations attempt to stem the flow and care for refugees.

Connections with Other Issues
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Environment/Water
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Israel - Palestine
- Kurdish Status
- Refugee Crises
- Spread of Political Islam
- Sunni – Shia Power Balance
- Terrorism

Source: Thomas Leger (2016)

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, AQAP, ARAB LEAGUE, EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, ISRAEL, NATO, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES	3) IRAN, RUSSIA, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) FRANCE, GERMANY, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Turkey, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, TURKEY	4) ISIS, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, KURDS of Syria, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, SYRIA Government

Yemeni Civil War

Yemen, the Arab world's poorest state, is locked in a seemingly intractable conflict and an acute humanitarian crisis. A multipolar civil war backed by competing regional and global powers has created a bloody stalemate with little incentive for any side to negotiate.

Key Issues

- *Humanitarian emergency:* Conflict has displaced approximately 3.2 million Yemenis. 14 million citizens are food insecure, and 5 million face a severe food shortage. Eight in ten Yemenis require some force of humanitarian assistance. However, insecurity severely constrains the ability of multilateral agencies and international non-profits to provide these resources to vulnerable populations.

- *Power competition:* Power has changed hands rapidly and often violently in recent years in Yemen. The winds of change of the Arab Spring forced the ouster of former President Abdul Ali Saleh in 2011, before Abradduh Mansur Hadi took office in early 2012. Houthi rebels subsequently seized the capital Sana'a in 2014, and continue to vie for control of much of Yemen's territory. A litany of external stakeholders - most notably Saudi Arabia, the leader of a coalition of Arab states - *has intervened militarily to neutralize the Houthis.*

- *Proliferation of terrorist actors:* Chaos in Yemen has provided a window of opportunity for Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), described by the Obama Administration as "the most active and dangerous affiliate of Al-Qaeda today." While both the Houthis and Hadi-led administration oppose AQAP, and despite a substantial campaign of drone strikes led by the US Government targeting AQAP assets and resources, the group presents a significant threat to regional peace and security. ISIS has also strengthened its position in the country, launching a series of violent attacks upon Yemeni soldiers and government targets in Aden.

Connections with Other Issues

- Terrorism
- Sunni - Shia Power Balance
- Refugee Crises
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Environment/Water
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Spread of Political Islam
- Great Powers Regional Influence

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, CHINA, DJIBOUTI, ERITREA, INDIA, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, ISRAEL, JAPAN, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON Government, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, MOROCCO Government, NATO, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, RUSSIA, TUNISIA, TURKEY	3) IRAN, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
High Impact	2) ARAB LEAGUE, BAHRAIN, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, ISIS, LEBANON Hezbollah, SOMALIA Government, SOMALIA Al-Shabaab, SYRIA Government, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES	4) AQAP, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis

III. Secondary Sub-Conflicts

Kurdish Status

The status of the Kurdish populations in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey As the world's largest stateless minority, ethnic Kurds desire political autonomy from their host governments, albeit to different degrees. The Kurds of Iraq aim for full statehood. The Kurds of Iran, Turkey and Syria aim for equal political representation, with security and freedom of cultural expression. The Kurds of Syria may achieve their political goals in the Russia-brokered Syrian peace agreement.

Key Issues

- *Kurds of Turkey:* The Kurds of Turkey reside in the Southeastern part of the state. They make up an estimated one-quarter of the Turkish population. During the nationalization of Turkey in the 1980s, Kurds were subjected to brutal assimilation tactics, such as forbidding the Kurdish language in schools and proper political representation. Since 1983, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, or Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), has been engaged in armed struggle with the Turkish Government. To date, there have intermittent ceasefire agreements, then a vicious cycle of violations, spoilers, resumptions of violence, etc.

- *Kurds of Syria:* The Kurds of Syria are a distinct ethnic group in Northern Syria, making up 12 percent of the total Syrian population. They exist in three main cantons, Afrin Canton, Cizre Canton and the Kobanî Canton. Together they make up the region known as Rojava. These cantons are not contiguous, but the Kurds are speculating the goal of joining them. In 2016, the Syrian Kurds established Federasyona Bakurê Sûriyê, or the Federation of Northern Syria–Rojava. They have historically been abused, displaced and marginalized by the Syrian regime. Since the 1930s, Arabization was forced upon the Kurds in a systematic manner that suppressed their culture and social and economic mobility. This has created a narrative of self-reliance, distrust of Arabs, martyrdom and resistance. Their economy is currently in shambles due to the Syrian civil war, but they have the potential to establish agricultural and petroleum export industries.

- *Kurds of Iraq:* The Kurds of Iraq are a distinct ethnic group in Northeastern Iraq. One of the four groups of Kurds, they are predominantly moderate Sunnis, seen as a stable, progressive and Western looking society. They are historically oppressed and manipulated by Iraqi and Iranian leaders. They have narratives of victimhood, fierce soldierhood and honored martyrdom. They seek security and self- autonomy. Their biggest threats are internal corruption, Islamic (Shia and Sunni) extremists and loss of legitimacy when applying for autonomy.

- *Kurds of Iran:* The Kurds of Iran reside in Northwestern Iran. They are the second largest minority in Iran and are estimated to make up 7 percent of the Iranian population. Although they have not endured the same horrors as the Kurds of Syria or Iraq, they have still endured systematic and cultural oppression. After the Iranian revolution, Kurds were severely politically constricted and in turn revolted with Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), leading the fight. The rebellion was quickly crushed. These events give the Kurds of Iran a strong sense of nationalism and victimhood, but also of pragmatism. Teheran is swift to dismantle Kurdish separatists with executions. The Kurds note these repercussions and are seeming less likely to promote pro-Kurdish autonomy political

parties than their counterparts in greater Kurdistan. The Kurds of Iran also have a unique aspect to them in that the largest percent of Shia Muslim Kurds live in Iran. This creates an internal dynamic between the Kurds, as the Shiite Kurds to some degree identify with, and some even prefer to live under, the Shia Iranian regime.

Connections with Other Issues
- Syrian Civil War
- Terrorism
- Environment/Water
- Human Rights & Democracy

Kurdish Territory

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) AQAP, CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, HOLY SEE, ISRAEL, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, SAUDI ARABIA	3) RUSSIA, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) ISIS, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham	4) IRAN, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, SYRIA Government, TURKEY

Western Sahara

Western Sahara is a disputed territory claimed both by Morocco and the Polisario Front separatist group, which is backed by Algeria. The Polisario have announced a sovereign claim over the entire territory, although the group currently controls only 20%. The primary issues in the conflict are the questions of mutual recognition, the establishment of a Saharawi state, and the fate of the approximately 90,000 displaced Saharawi refugees.

Key Issues

- The Western Sahara conflict is the major foreign and domestic policy point of contention in the Maghreb region, with links to the greater Middle East conflict system. Morocco's dispute with the Polisario Front, and Algeria as their backer, has been both contributor to and beneficiary of regional instability.

- Today, Morocco maintains its sovereignty over the territory, having divided the land in two, with a heavily fortified Moroccan zone that constitutes 85% of the land area and is protected by defensive earth walls built in the 1980s and manned by 150,000 soldiers.[1] The Polisario Front, the indigenous Saharawi independence movement, controls the remainder of the territory, which is deemed by Morocco to serve the purpose of a buffer zone with no strategic or economic value. The governing body of the Polisario Front, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), is based in Algeria and controls further territory in refugee camps surrounding the Algerian town of Tindouf.

- As a result of violence between Morocco and the separatists, roughly 90,000 indigenous Saharawi tribesmen and women remain displaced from their homes. The majority of them reside in refugee camps in Algeria.

- One effect of the conflict on the region is to rob the Middle East and North Africa of the good Morocco and Algeria could do if they collaborated more closely on security efforts. As both countries possess possess advanced intelligence services and military capabilities, their security partnership could assist in stabilizing the region.

Connections with Other Issues
- Refugee Crises
- Terrorism
- Environment/Water
- Human Rights & Democracy

The Demarcation of Western Sahara (2002)
Source: Irenees.net

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) EUROPEAN, UNION, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES	
High Impact		4) ALGERIA, MOROCCO Government, MOROCCO Polisario Front

South Sudan Civil War

South Sudanese statehood has thus far been characterized by political instability, extensive violence, and dire humanitarian need. A considerable percentage of the population has fled the violence and is unable to return home, adding to the global refugee crisis.

Key Issues

- *Internal violence and political instability.* A year and a half after South Sudan gained independence, a power struggle arose between the president, Salva Kiir, and vice-president, Riek Machar. The conflict has gained an ethnic dimension, as Machar's Nuer ethnic group has been accused of attacking Kiir's Dinka ethnic group. The conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives. The presence of a UN intervention of 15,000 troops has frequently clashed with the president's desire to avoid Western influence in the country.

- *Humanitarian crisis.* Approximately 4.8 million currently risk extreme hunger. Due to the severity of the violence, farmers in the agricultural-based society are largely unable to plant crops. Widespread attacks on aid workers and

convoys make it difficult to reach vulnerable populations. Parts of South Sudan are presently enduring famine, with 100,000 facing starvation, and 5.5 facing food insecurity. That number is likely to grow if the violence continues. For the past two years, the UN has fallen below its funding goals for South Sudan. In 2015, the UN only met 62 % of its $1.6 billion goal for the 4.6 million people affected. For 2016, only 88% of the more modest goal of $1.29 billion was funded. The resulting gap in resources leaves vulnerable populations in South Sudan more susceptible to starvation and disease.
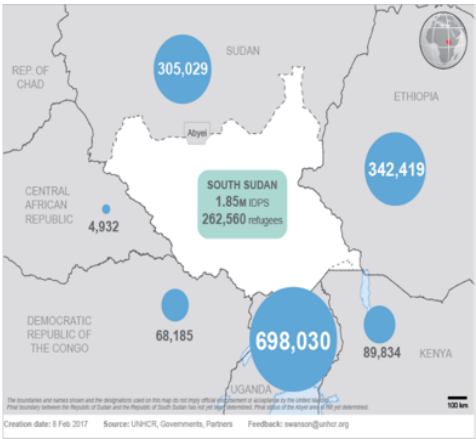
- *Internal and external displacement.* Roughly ⅓ of South Sudan's population, or about 3.6 million people, have been displaced since the beginning of the conflict. Approximately 1.5 million of these citizens have fled to countries nearby, and over 2.1 million are displaced internally. After Syria and Afghanistan, South Sudan rates as the third most-fled country worldwide.

Connections with Other Issues
- Refugee Crises
- Terrorism
- Environment/Water
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Great Powers Regional Influence

Key Facts
- South Sudan's current famine is the world's first since 2012.
- South Sudan's rebel groups are plagued by frequent fracturing and creation of new rebel groups. Each new rupture or additional actor adds to the complexity of the situation and the increases the difficulty of resolving the conflict.
- Attempts to mitigate the effects of the conflict have absorbed a huge amount of funding from donor states and organizations. The US alone has donated $11 billion in humanitarian and other assistance, and the UN $20 billion.
- Several solutions have been proposed to stem the ongoing violence and financial hemorrhage, including administration of the country by an international coalition.

South Sudan Refugees and IDPs, 2017

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) AQAP, ISIS	3) AFRICAN UNION, EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) SUDAN	4) SOUTH SUDAN

IV. Cross-Cutting Issues

Spread of Political Islam

Political Islam is defined as groups participating within existing political institutions, with Islamic ideological views of law, politics, and society. The Arab Spring amplified the political voice of various groups across the MENA region, and in particular those of political Islamist groups. In Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon and Gaza, for example, these groups have formed part of governments or governing coalitions, while in other countries – such as Iraq, Syria or Yemen – militant Islamist groups have begun violent uprisings against existing governance structures.
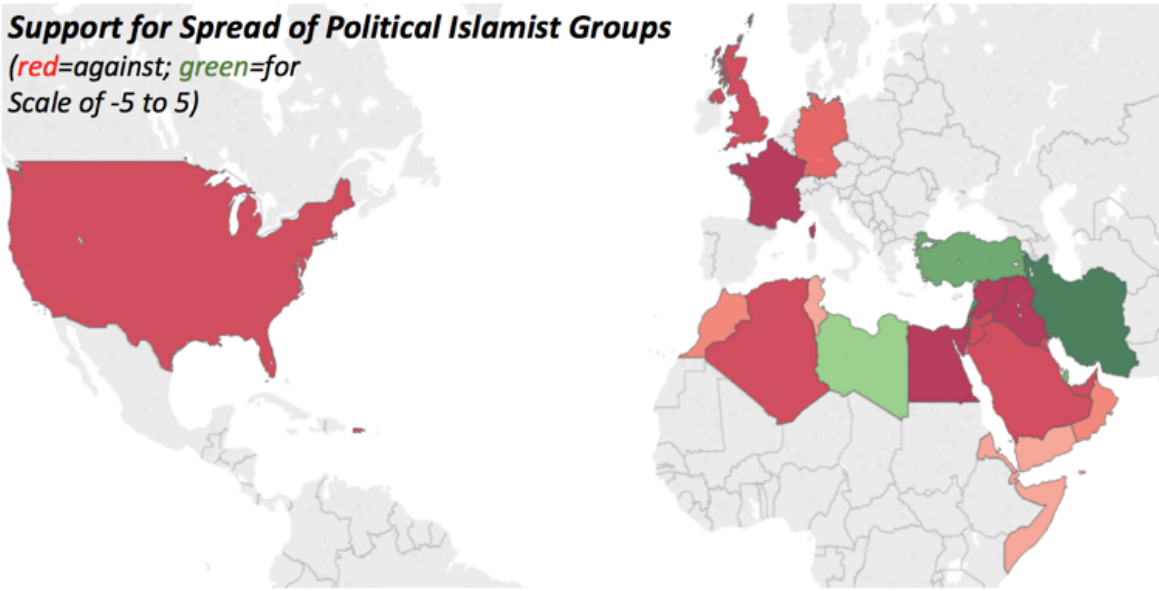
Key Issues
- *Domestic Political Contestation.* Political Islam arguably poses the most significant domestic political threat to various regimes across the MENA region. This is particularly true in Egypt, as evidenced by the electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood, and thereafter the violent repression of Brotherhood members following the 2013 military coup. Furthermore, this issue is critical for Gulf monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, whose domestic legitimacy is challenged the most by Islamist groups, dating back to the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca by Islamic extremists.

- *Repression and Political Participation.* The repression of various political Islamist groups in Egypt as well as in the Gulf may lead to further radicalization and violent extremism in the medium- and long-term. As some groups perceive that the political sphere is closed for their participation, they may elect to employ violent tactics against the state. Conversely, Tunisia is an example where an Islamist party (Ennahda) has been a key and active stakeholder in the ongoing transition to democracy.

- *Militant Islamism. Militant Islamic groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah have consolidated power in Gaza and Southern Lebanon. In addition to the upheaval they have caused in their respective domestic political environments, their emergence has led to numerous direct military confrontations with Israel since 2006.*

Connections with Other Issues
- Iran Nuclear Weapons
- Israel – Palestine
- Libyan Civil War
- Syrian Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Sunni-Shia Power Balance
- Terrorism
-

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) AQAP, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, KUWAIT, MOROCCO Government, OMAN, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups	3) ISIS, QATAR
High Impact	2) ALGERIA, ARAB LEAGUE, BAHRAIN, ISRAEL, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, LIBYA House of Representatives, PALESTINE Fatah, SOMALIA Government, SOMALIA Al-Shabab, SYRIA Government, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government	4) EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, IRAN, LEBANON Hezbollah, LIBYA Government, PALESTINE Hamas, SAUDI ARABIA, TUNISIA, TURKEY, YEMEN Houthis

Source: MENA Negotiation Report (2017)

Refugee Crises

Conflicts across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have created a severe forced displacement crisis with regional and global implications, placing immense pressure on states with already fragile political, economic or social conditions. Around 20 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have flooded across the MENA region, representing the most significant forced displacement crisis since World War II.
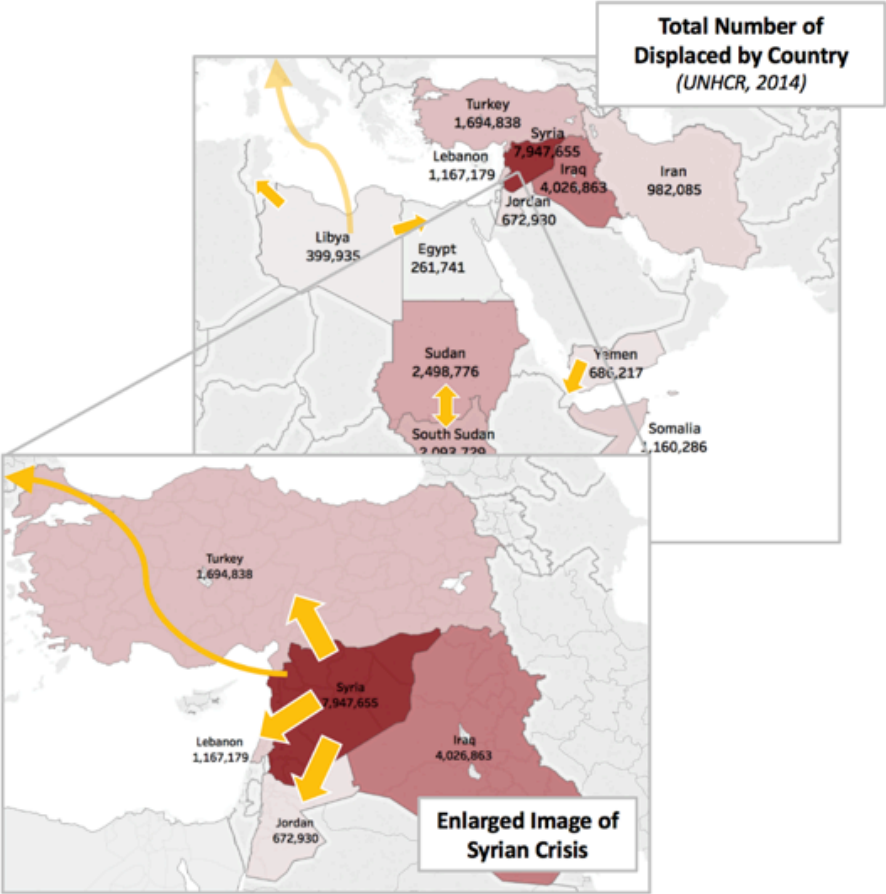
Key Issues

- *Global Implications of Syrian Crisis.* The Syrian refugee crisis in particular represents a critical humanitarian challenge to the international community. Around 7 million have been displaced within Syria and over 4 million people have sought refuge across the MENA region.

- *Regional Impact of Syrian Crisis.* As a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, countries in the region are facing an extraordinary shock, threatening to further destabilize the region. In particular, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have taken in the wide majority of Syrian refugees (634,000, 1.2 million and 2.85 million, respectively), resulting in significant economic, social and political challenges. In Lebanon, refugees comprise about 30 percent of the population, placing significant stress on an already politically, socially and economically fragile country.

- *Western Political Ramifications.* Refugee crises have had important political ramifications in Europe and the United States. Though 1 million refugees have entered Europe, states in the European Union have been sharply divided on this issue, further fomenting the rise of right-wing nationalist parties in certain countries. In the United States, the new administration has threatened to altogether ban further inflows of Syrian refugees, and significantly cut the overall number of admitted refugees.

- *Escalation of Existing Conflicts.* In addition to urgent humanitarian and development support, it will be critical to resolve or mitigate the further escalation of conflicts in the region. At this stage, there is no clear indication that many conflicts behind many of the forced population movements (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Sudan/South Sudan) will be resolved in the near future, thereby threatening to further amplify the current forced displacement crisis.

Connections with Other Issues

- Israel – Palestine
- Libyan Civil War
- Syrian Civil War
- South Sudan Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- Western Sahara
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Environment/Water
- Terrorism

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ARAB LEAGUE, EGYPT Government, ERITREA, FRANCE, HOLY SEE, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, KUWAIT, LEBANON Hezbollah, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, NATO, PALESTINE Civil Society, SAUDI ARABIA, YEMEN Houthis	3) AQAP, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, ISIS, SYRIA Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, SOMALIA Al-Shabab, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) DJIBOUTI, PALESTINE Fatah, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KURDS of Syria, LEBANON Government, MOROCCO Polisario Front, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, TUNISIA, YEMEN Government	4) EUROPEAN UNION, GERMANY, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, SYRIA Government, TURKEY, UNITED NATIONS

Total Number of Displaced by Country *(UNHCR, 2014)*

Turkey 1,694,838
Syria 7,947,655
Lebanon 1,167,179
Iraq 4,026,863
Iran 982,085
Jordan 672,930
Libya 399,935
Egypt 261,741
Sudan 2,498,776
Yemen 686,217
South Sudan 2,003,720
Somalia 1,160,286

Turkey 1,694,838
Syria 7,947,655
Lebanon 1,167,179
Iraq 4,026,863
Jordan 672,930

Enlarged Image of Syrian Crisis

Human Rights & Democracy

The sweeping winds of the Arab Spring appeared to herald a new dawn for democracy and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa. Protestors from Cairo to Tunis, and from Damascus to Sana'a, hoped to user in a new era of individual civil liberties, freedoms and participatory decision-making. Yet today, Israel and Tunisia are the region's only true electoral democracies, with Somalia having also recently conducted free and fair elections.
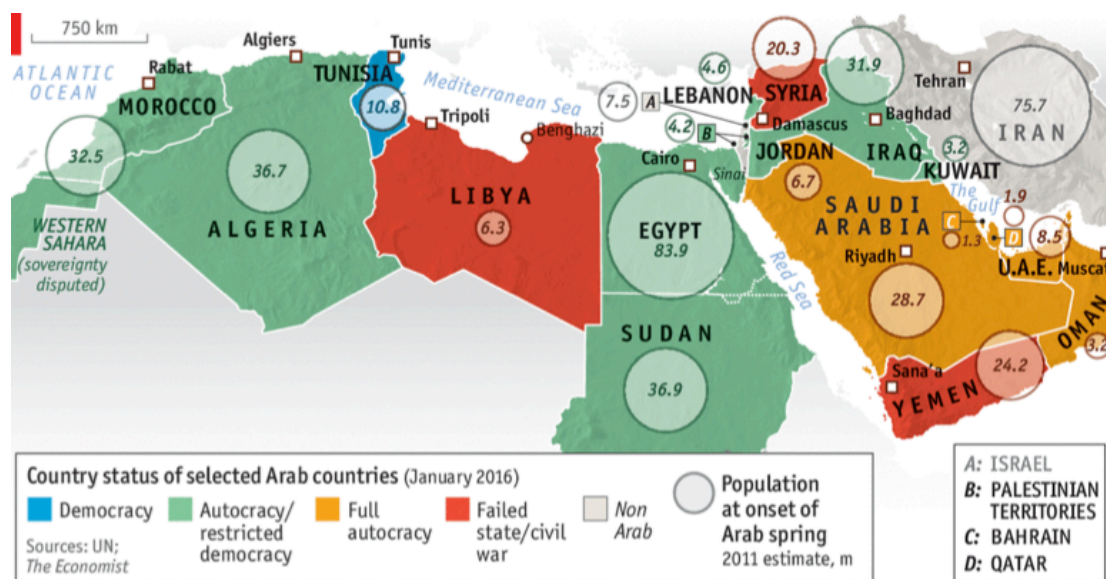
Key Issues

- *Democratic deficit:* Autocracy, theocracy and monarchy remain the prevailing governing structures, and governments continue to stifle voices calling for change, often violently. Academics continue to debate the root causes of obstacles to democratization in the Arab world: different accounts highlighting the role of arbitrary sovereign borders imposed by colonial powers in creating unstable polities; the prevalence of primary commodities, and of oil in particular, in centralizing resources and power in the hands of government; or even something inherently undemocratic about Islam.

- *Human rights violations:* Violations of basic human rights are widespread. This includes freedoms that have been challenged for several decades including the right to freedom of expression, and the ability to criticize the government without fear of repression; the right to freedom of assembly, including mobilizing to protest or join opposition political parties. The 21st century context has created new threats to human rights in the Middle East. Climate change increasingly threatens many Arab peoples' right to water and food, with resources constrained by rising global temperatures.

- *Gender and inequality:* The single most pervasive human rights violation in the Middle East and North Africa, however, remains the denial of equal rights to women. In almost all countries in the region, women are denied social, economic, cultural and other rights and freedoms that are liberally afforded to men. Even in the most liberal democracies with constitutionally codified rights for women, such as Tunisia, significant disparities between men and women continue to hold back the region's development and equality.

- *Promoting democracy and human rights:* External actors - particularly the United States and European Union - continue to invest their taxpayers' resources in promoting democracy and human rights in the region, hopeful that such efforts will generate increased stability and prosperity. The EU has sought to make its Free Trade Agreements with regional actors contingent upon respect for human rights. Non-Western global powers such as China and Russia, however, offer an alternative vision for partnership, with no such conditionality upon human rights or elections.

Connections with Other Issues

- Spread of Political Islam
- Western Sahara
- Kurdish Status
- Environment/Water
- Israel – Palestine
- Libyan Civil War
- South Sudan Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Terrorism
- Refugee Crises
- Human Rights & Democracy

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, BAHRAIN, CHINA, DJIBOUTI, ERITREA, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INDIA, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, ISIS, JAPAN, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, LEBANON Hezbollah, MOROCCO Polisario Front, NATO, OMAN, QATAR, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, SUDAN, SYRIA Government, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis	3) FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE
High Impact	2) ARAB LEAGUE, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, IRAN, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON Government, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, MOROCCO Government, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, TUNISIA	4) EUROPEAN UNION, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

Source: The Economist

Great Powers Regional Influence

In recent years, the United States' place as the dominant power in the Middle East has been challenged by its weakened financial position, as well as by the ascendant influence of Russia, China, and Europe. While all the powers are concerned with maintaining political stability and access to oil, Russia has been exerting increasing influence in Syria, with its part in the peace process, and China in Djibouti. China has recently constructed an naval base which is close in size and proximity to the US's nearby naval base. The US and Europe remain concerned that increased Russian and Chinese influence will threaten democracy and human rights in the region. The US also harbors concerns regarding oil access, despite increased energy self-sufficiency. The powers also clash on conflict issues like the Syrian Civil War, where Russia has taken a lead role in pursuing a peace agreement.

Key Issues

- *US and Europe influence lessened.* The influence of the US has waned in recent years, in part due to the 2008 financial crisis. However, the US, and Europe to a lesser extent, still exert considerable influence through soft and hard power tactics. Lately, the US has been lessening its energy dependence on the Middle East by lowering consumption and developing domestic resources like shale gas. The US also has a strong interest in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And although the Iranian nuclear agreement was regarded as at least a moderate success, the new US administration's negative view toward the agreement may threaten its implementation.

- *Russia consolidation of influence.* Russia pursues a Middle East Strategy characterized by three principal goals:
    1. To consolidate a Russian sphere of influence in former Soviet satellite countries
    2. To tighten domestic political and economic control
    3. To restore Russian influence in critical regions such as the Middle East, where Moscow maintains important economic and political interests, and wants to fight terrorist threats. Moscow views the progress of its influence as operating in competition with the United States and its partners.

- *China increase of economic development and political stability efforts:* China's priorities have shifted from solely oil and commerce concerns to encompass economic development, political stability and energy security. As the US makes moves to become more energy self-sufficient and rely less on the Middle East, China fears for a security vacuum which may threaten Chinese energy interests. As such, China has been increasing its own Middle East security efforts, including the construction of port facilities from the Chinese mainland into the Suez and the Mediterranean. Additionally, China recently constructed a sizable naval base in Djibouti. While the US initially welcomed the additional security support, the size of the naval base and its proximity to the US base nearby have been listed as causes of concern.

Connections with Other Issues
- Syrian Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- Israel-Palestine Conflict
- South Sudan Civil War
- Libyan Civil War
- Iran Nuclear Weapons
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Sunni-Shia Power Balance
- Terrorism
- Spread of Political Islam
- Refugee Crises

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, ARAB LEAGUE, BAHRAIN, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, INDIA, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, JAPAN, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, KUWAIT, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, MOROCCO Government, MOROCCO Polisario Front, NATO, OMAN, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, QATAR, SOMALIA Government, SUDAN, SYRIA Other Syrian Opposition Groups, TUNISIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM	3) AFRICAN UNION, EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) AQAP, ISIS, LIBYA Government of National Accord, SOUTH SUDAN, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, TURKEY, YEMEN Government	4) CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, IRAN, ISRAEL, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Energy and Economic Stability

One third of exported crude petroleum still comes from the Middle East. However, significant changes to the industry have occurred in recent years - including volatile energy prices, civil wars in previously high-producing countries, and extremist control of territory rich with oil resources. These factors have also had a negative impact on the economic stability of the region, resulting in conflict, massive loss of life, and an unprecedented refugee crisis.

Key Issues

- Significant shifts in the oil sector are transforming the geopolitical situation in the region. These include: (i) the United States' reduced reliance on the region's resources, (ii) Iran's potential emergence as a regional competitor after diplomatic successes with the United States, (iii) volatile energy prices, (iv) increased Chinese demand, (v) deep crises in Libya and Iraq leading to production well-below potential, and (vi) extremist control of oil-rich territory.

- The recent downturn in oil prices poses a significant risk to regional economies, both oil-producing and oil-importing states. Though Gulf states have supported policies constraining the supply of oil, they face economic challenges as they deplete their reserves and cannot fulfill their welfare-heavy social contracts due to low revenues and undiversified economies.

- Large-scale conflicts and forced displacement have resulted in massive and persistent economic costs to the region. Conflicts like those in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen have caused deep recessions and a decreased capacity of state institutions needed to make economic reforms.

Connections with Other Issues
- Iran Nuclear Weapons
- Israel-Palestine
- Libyan Civil War
- Syrian Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- South Sudan Civil War
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Environment/Water
- Terrorism
- Refugee Crises

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, AQAP, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, ERITREA, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INDIA, ISRAEL, JAPAN, JORDAN, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, LEBANON Government, MOROCCO Government, MOROCCO Polisario Front, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, SOMALIA Al-Shabab, SOMALIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis	3) CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, NATO, RUSSIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) BAHRAIN, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, ISIS, LEBANON Hezbollah, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, SYRIA Government, TUNISIA	4) BAHRAIN, IRAN, KUWAIT, OMAN, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Share of World Oil Reserves

- 15.90% Saudi Arabia
- 9.40% Egypt
- 9.10% Iran
- 6.10% Kuwait
- 5.90% UAE
- 53.60% Rest of the World

Note: Data from CNN(2014)

Gov't Revenues from Hydrocarbon (2014)

Percentage of government revenue from hydrocarbon sector

Note: Data from CNN (2014)

Environment / Water

Increasing desertification, environmental change, poor agricultural processes, and population growth have depleted water sources across the MENA region. Shortages create conflict over resources, exacerbate territorial disputes, increase migration, and raise levels of instability. Scarcity of environmental resources contributed to the breakout of the Syrian and Yemeni Civil Wars and the war in Sudan. A 2008 EU report calls climate change a "threat multiplier which exacerbates existing trends, tensions and instability." With 60% of water in the region crossing national borders, climate change could increase tensions in an already contentious context or could provide an opportunity for adversarial parties to unite around shared interests and unified threat.

Key Issues

* *Water Shortages:* Jordan and the gulf countries are facing severe water shortages and are some of the most water-stressed countries in the world. Many countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, are using well over 100% of renewable freshwater resources each year, depleting their already-low resources. Groundwater tables have become polluted with industrial and agricultural waste, further depleting available water resources.

* *Control of water resources:* Control of water is a major source of leverage in the region and a key point of tension in territorial disputes. For example, ISIS seized the Fallujah Dam and aims for the Mosul and Hadith dams, which would allow them to control approximately 95% of water in Iraq.

* *Technology:* Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, and Israel have water desalination plants and technology, which is the most effective tactic currently available for addressing water shortages. It is currently a high-energy, high-cost, and environmentally hazardous means of increasing availability of fresh water. Technological and policy examples in certain countries could be the basis for regional strategies for water use: Tunisia and Morocco price water based on use rather than area, while the UAE uses 'smart' irrigation technology to increase agricultural efficiency. Joint conferences and agreements such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project, while contentious, may provide a basis from which to move forward with regional water sharing.

Connections with Other Issues
* Energy and Economic Stability
* Human Rights & Democracy
* Israel - Palestine
* Libyan Civil War
* Refugee Crises
* South Sudan Civil War
* Syrian Civil War
* Terrorism
* Western Sahara
* Yemeni Civil War

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, INDIA, JAPAN, NATO, RUSSIA, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES	3) ARAB LEAGUE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, TURKEY
High Impact	2) ALGERIA, AQAP, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, ERITREA, IRAN, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, MOROCCO Polisario Front, OMAN, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah,	4) BAHRAIN, ISIS, ISRAEL, KUWAIT, MOROCCO Government, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, TUNISIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Note: in this case, influence is determined by sources of leverage with regards to water. Water-rich countries and countries with strong water technology are included here as 'high' influencers while more water-vulnerable countries without sustainable resources are listed as 'low'

Sunni-Shia Power Balance

Sunni Islam and Shia Islam are the two major denominations of Islam. This divide has grown increasingly hostile in recent years as leaders of Middle Eastern States have used the ideological difference to promote aggression and motivate proxy wars. Sunni and Shia hostilities have fueled the Syrian war, violence in Iraq, and revived transnational jihadi networks.

Key Issues
- Since 2013, sectarian violence has intensified in the Middle East. Extremism in Syria, Lebanon, and Pakistan has been motivation by the Sunni-Shia divide. Extremist groups on both sides are gaining strength, including Sunni al-Qaeda and ISIS, as well as Shia Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen.

- Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran have developed a rivalry for leadership in the region, resulting in proxy battles – including the current war in Syria and the fighting between the government and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

- Saudi Arabia has acted to suppress Shia uprisings across the region, including in Bahrain. Most recently, in response to the threat of Iranian influence in the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia assembled a coalition of ten Sunni-majority countries – and backed by the United States – to fight Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Connections with Other Issues
- Iran Nuclear Deal
- Israel – Palestine
- Syrian Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Terrorism
- Spread of Political Islam

Source: Council on Foreign Relations (2017)

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) CHINA, DJIBOUTI, ERITREA, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INDIA, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, JAPAN, NATO, MOROCCO Polisario Front, PALESTINE Fatah, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS	3) RUSSIA, UNITED STATES
High Impact	2) ALGERIA, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, KUWAIT, LEBANON, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, MOROCCO Government, OMAN, QATAR, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis	4) AQAP, ARAB LEAGUE, BAHRAIN, EGYPT Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, IRAN, ISIS, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Hamas, SAUDI ARABIA, TUNISIA, TURKEY

Terrorism

The MENA region is not only one of the largest contributors to global instability, but is also the most impacted region by both domestic and transnational terrorism. The spread of groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab has significantly destabilized regional and global security, with terrorist groups exerting control of territory in the Levant, Yemen, Libya, Gaza, the Sinai and Somalia.

Key Issues
* *Threat to Regional Stability.* The spread of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as well as its affiliated groups across the MENA region, poses the most significant threat to stability in the region. In the Levant, ISIS has controlled large swathes of territory since 2014, posing the most direct challenge to the Sykes-Picot borders that have existed for a century. Similarly, in Libya and the Sinai, ISIS-linked groups control vast amounts of territory as well.

* *Global Impact.* The spread of ISIS has not been limited to the MENA region, as the group has also successfully executed numerous terrorist plots in Europe and Turkey. This has led to an intensified fixation on security in Europe and the United States, and stoking nationalist fervor in domestic political environments.

* *Security Vacuum in Fragile States.* In addition to ISIS, various jihadist groups - most notably Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) - threaten regional stability as well. AQAP has been particularly active in Yemen, where it has had a resurgence as a result of the void in power left by the civil war.

Connections with Other Issues

- Israel – Palestine
- Libyan Civil War
- Syrian Civil War
- South Sudan Civil War
- Yemeni Civil War
- Western Sahara
- Human Rights & Democracy
- Great Powers Regional Influence
- Energy and Economic Stability
- Environment/Water
- Sunni-Shia Power Balance
- Spread of Political Islam
- Refugee Crises

Total Number of Terrorism-related Fatalities by Country (GTD, 2010-2015)

Key Actors

	Low Influence	High Influence
Low Impact	1) ALGERIA, BAHRAIN, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council, KUWAIT, MOROCCO Government, MOROCCO Polisario Front, NATO, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah, QATAR, RUSSIA, UNITED NATIONS	3) AQAP, GERMANY, IRAN, KURDS of Turkey, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Hamas, YEMEN Houthis, UNITED KINGDOM
High Impact	2) ARAB LEAGUE, EGYPT Government, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, LEBANON Government, LIBYA Government, LIBYA House of Representatives, SAUDI ARABIA, SOMALIA Government, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, TUNISIA, YEMEN Government	4) EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, ISIS, ISRAEL, SOMALIA Al-Shabab,, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, TURKEY, UNITED STATES

V. Conflict System Involvement

We define **conflict involvement** as the aggregate of the degree to which a party is being impacted by a conflict or issue and of the degree to which the same party is influencing this conflict or issue in return.

> *highly impacted + high influence = 4 points*
> *low impact + high influence = 3 points*
> *low impact + low influence = 1 point*
> *super-peripheral = 0 points.*

Conflict system involvement refers to conflict involvement across all conflicts and issues. We display this value for each party below as a percentage of total possible points. (In other words, if a party scored 4 points for each conflict and each issue, its total system involvement would be 100%.)

Note that "involvement" does not necessarily mean that a party has the capabilities to effectively pursue its interests.

Actor	Conflict System Involvement	Rank (# out of 59)
UNITED STATES	72%	1
IRAN	66%	2
TURKEY	59%	3
SAUDI ARABIA	58%	4
ISIS	58%	4
EUROPEAN UNION	55%	6
LEBANON Hezbollah	50%	7
ISRAEL	48%	8
SYRIA Government	48%	8
UNITED NATIONS	47%	10
QATAR	41%	11

Actor	Conflict System Involvement	Rank (# out of 59)
FRANCE	41%	11
TUNISIA	41%	11
EGYPT Government	41%	11
GERMANY	41%	11
PALESTINE Hamas	41%	11
AQAP	41%	11
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS	39%	18
UNITED KINGDOM	39%	18
RUSSIA	39%	18
ARAB LEAGUE	38%	21
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	38%	21
SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham	38%	21
BAHRAIN	36%	24
LEBANON Government	36%	24
YEMEN Houthis	36%	24
JORDAN	34%	27
LIBYA Government of National Accord	34%	27
LIBYA House of Representatives	34%	27
MOROCCO Government	33%	30
INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITU-TIONS	33%	30
KURDS of Syria	33%	30
IRAQ State of Law Coalition	33%	30
KUWAIT	31%	34
ALGERIA	31%	34
SYRIA Other Opposition Groups	31%	34
EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood	31%	34

Actor	Conflict System Involvement	Rank (# out of 59)
YEMEN Government	30%	38
NATO	28%	39
PALESTINE Fatah	28%	39
SOMALIA Government	28%	39
SOUTH SUDAN	27%	42
KURDS of Turkey	27%	42
IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties	27%	42
KURDS of Iraq	25%	45
KURDS of Iran	25%	45
IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council	25%	45
CHINA	23%	48
IRAQ Sadrist Movement	23%	48
HOLY SEE	22%	50
OMAN	22%	50
MOROCCO Polisario Front	22%	50
PALESTINE Civil Society	22%	50
SOMALIA Al-Shabaab	22%	50
SUDAN	20%	55
DJIBOUTI	19%	56
ERITREA	17%	57
JAPAN	13%	58
INDIA	11%	59

A overview of conflict and issue involvement per party can be found in the respective party's portrait in *Part Three*.

VI. Networks of Relationships

The following graphs visualize the positive and the negative relationships of all analyzed parties in the MENA conflict system. An overview of relationships per party is available in Part Three. In-depth assessments of all parties are available in Part Four.

Allies: These relationships include stable and extensive arrangements for security cooperation with a long history, as well as significant material or financial support, often directly related to a party's armed struggle against an armed opponent.

Partners. These relationships are characterized by material, financial, or ideological support, which may or may not be linked to an armed struggle. Channels of cooperation and assistance may also fall under this category.

Rivals. These relationships are characterized by a state of political, ideological, or economic rivalry, excluding direct armed combat. Rivalry does not exclude the possibility of cooperation on specific issues, and it captures a wide range of competitive behavior including conflict over contested territory as long as there is no ongoing armed combat.

Adversaries. These relationships are characterized by a state of open, most likely mutually acknowledged, hostility, yet not by a state of direct, active, armed combat. Cooperation with an adversary is very unlikely, and mutual diplomatic recognition may be missing.

Active armed opponents. The parties are currently in a state of direct, armed combat.

Proxies and external sponsors. These relationships include those cases in which factions are politically, financially or militarily supported against another party, without the sponsor extending cooperation to the entire party. (Note that stable and extensive arrangements for security cooperation with a long history are treated as "alliances.")

Aid Donors/Recipients. Relationships are characterized by considerable economic, humanitarian or development support.

Memberships. This includes all formal memberships in organizations or alliances that are part of this assessment.

Positive relationships. The positive relationships of a party include its allies, partners, memberships in organizations, external sponsors, and aid donors. All positive relationships in the conflict system can be visualized above.

Negative relationships. The negative relationships of a party include its rivals, adversaries, and active armed opponents. All negative relationships in the conflict system can be visualized above.

Relationship scores

For each party, giving equal positive weight to all positive relationships, and equal negative weight to all negative relationships, we can now compare their "net relationship score" within the MENA conflict system by subtracting the number of negative relationships from the number of positive relationships:

Actor	Positive Relationships	Negative Relationships	Net Relationship Score
UNITED NATIONS	39	5	34
UNITED STATES	47	16	31
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS	40	13	27
EUROPEAN UNION	31	6	25
ARAB LEAGUE	28	4	24
QATAR	28	7	21
TURKEY	29	9	20
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	26	6	20
UNITED KINGDOM	25	5	20
HOLY SEE	25	6	19
FRANCE	22	3	19
KUWAIT	22	3	19
JORDAN	27	9	18
TUNISIA	21	3	18
JAPAN	21	3	18
SAUDI ARABIA	33	16	17
YEMEN Government	25	8	17
BAHRAIN	21	4	17
ALGERIA	19	2	17
EGYPT Government	27	12	15
MOROCCO Government	18	3	15
NATO	17	2	15

Actor	Positive Relationships	Negative Relationships	Net Relationship Score
GERMANY	16	3	13
OMAN	15	2	13
INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL IN-STITUTIONS	13		13
PALESTINE Fatah	19	7	12
SOMALIA Government	16	4	12
DJIBOUTI	13	1	12
RUSSIA	24	13	11
LEBANON Government	17	7	10
LIBYA Government of National Accord	15	5	10
INDIA	12	3	9
KURDS of Iraq	12	4	8
KURDS of Syria	10	2	8
SUDAN	15	8	7
LIBYA House of Representatives	8	1	7
IRAN	29	23	6
IRAQ State of Law Coalition	16	10	6
SOUTH SUDAN	11	5	6
CHINA	11	6	5
KURDS of Turkey	6	1	5
ISRAEL	21	17	4
KURDS of Iran	6	2	4
ERITREA	6	3	3
MOROCCO Polisario Front	4	1	3
SYRIA Other Opposition Groups	8	7	1
IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties	5	5	0
PALESTINE Hamas	9	11	-2
PALESTINE Civil Society	5	7	-2

Actor	Positive Relationships	Negative Relationships	Net Relationship Score
EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood	3	6	-3
IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council	2	6	-4
LEBANON Hezbollah	5	10	-5
IRAQ Sadrist Movement	2	7	-5
SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham	1	8	-7
SOMALIA Al-Shabaab	2	11	-9
YEMEN Houthis	5	17	-12
SYRIA Government	8	21	-13
AQAP	2	15	-13
ISIS	0	32	-32

VII. Negotiation Moves and (De-)Escalation Scenarios

The following projections of negotiation moves and escalation and de-escalation scenarios each represent one possibility among infinite options for conflict in the Middle East and North Africa. These projections are simply exercises to explore in a limited way the potential interactions of major actors, given certain triggers considered probable in the current political climate. These sub-conflicts and cross-cutting issues were chosen for their significant complexity and degree of interconnectedness to other issue areas.

Primary Sub-Conflict: Israel - Palestine

Escalation Scenario

1. The Trump Administration has discussed the possibility of moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. US Law authorizes the president to do so, but since 1995 the decision has been successively postponed every six months.
2. If the Administration were to move the embassy, protests would likely break out in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in anger over the United States' de facto approval of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.
3. If the US signaled support for Jerusalem as the capital of Israel through moving the embassy, Palestinians and citizens of Jordan and Egypt may protest their government's cooperation with Israel, destabilizing those countries. In addition, terrorist groups may respond with acts of terror and use the event for recruiting. Many Arab States are likely to condemn the move, distancing themselves from Israel, the US, and further peace talks, as the move would undermine the Arab Peace Initiative.
4. Protests and condemnations are likely to cause increased security risk and economic instability in the region, further straining resources, freedom of movement, and government control of populations.
5. The European Union may condemn US actions and align further with Arab States.
6. If these actions were to occur, the US would likely lose credibility as a mediator and any regional security or peace agreement depending on US support would be much less likely.

De-Escalation Scenario

1. With internal pressure and a change in the governing coalition, as well as a back-channel assurance from Saudi Arabia that this move would lead to talks, Israel could announce cessation of building within or beyond settlement blocs.
2. This could open the door for Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, and Egypt to enter into talks with Israel and Fatah around a regional security and environmental agreement, though these may be clandestine at first and may take many iterations over many years. Perhaps an initial focus on water-sharing could provide commitment to deal-making and a first stage for success. Officials from these four countries may take on mediator roles or negotiate bi- or multi-laterally.
3. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Egypt and Fatah may be able to gain commitment from Arab League countries to recognize Israel if a deal is achieved with certain conditions, or at least gain tacit support for the talks. Many of these countries have already affirmed the Arab Peace Initiative. This commitment may give the talks enough legitimacy to be announced publicly.
4. Given divided public opinion within Palestinian society, protests and even terror attacks may occur when talks become public. Iran may feel threatened by the growing Sunni coalition and increase funding to Hezbollah and other Shia partners in the region.
5. If talks were to become public and parties to come to tentative agreement, the US may be able to convene a summit of all parties, including Russia and the EU. With the right terms, and over a staged and iterative set of upheld agreements, a regional security agreement and environmental agreement may be reached.

Primary Sub-Conflict: Iran Nuclear Weapons

Escalation Scenario

1 US imposes sanctions or measures beyond deal, thus undermining Iran Nuclear Deal

2 Everyone sees US violate the deal. Russia, EU, China reach out to Iran — retain ties with Iran, ostracize US. US power is decreased.

3 Iran kicks out inspectors, starts enrichment

1 US imposes sanctions or measures beyond deal, thus undermining Iran Nuclear Deal

2 Everyone sees US violate the deal. Russia, EU, China reach out to Iran — retain ties with Iran, ostracize US. US power is decreased.

3 Iran kicks out inspectors, starts enrichment

4 Israel air-strikes

5 Saudi Arabia develops nuclear weapons, Reaches out to US and Israel

6 An Iran internal power struggle takes place, Revolutionary Guard and Ayatollah build power

1. **United State Imposes Undermines Nuclear Deal.** President Trump could impose sanctions or measures in an effort to take a firm stance toward Iran, thus undermining the Iran Nuclear deal.

2. **Russia, European Union, and China Reach out to Iran.** The world would witness the US violate the deal and Russia, the EU, and China may reach out to Iran while ostracizing the US, decreasing American power.

3. **Iran Begins Enrichment.** Iran would likely kick out inspectors and restart their nuclear program.

4. **Israel air-strikes Iran.** This would alarm Israel, and so Israel may attack Iran.

5. **Saudi Arabia Develops Nuclear Weapons.** Saudi Arabia would also be alarmed by the potential nuclear power of its Shia rival and try to develop its own nuclear weapons, allying with the US and Israel against Iran.

6. **Iran Internal Power Struggle Takes Place.** In response to the failure of the deal, a domestic power struggle may occur in Iran, with the Revolutionary Guard and Ayatollah Khomeini, the stronger anti-western voices, building power

De-Escalation Scenario

1. **United States and Russia Intimidate Iran into Stopping Their Missile Program.** Presidents Trump and Putin partner to effectively threaten Iran to strop testing ballistic missiles.

2. **European Opens its Markets Further to Iran.** The EU continues to engage with a deal-abiding Iran, further opening its markets.

3. **Iran Focused on Oil.** A more globally-connected Iran develops its oil industry.

4. **Oil Prices Remain Low with Increased Supply.** Increased supply means that oil prices would likely remain low, which would be negative for places like Saudi Arabia.

5. **Russia and China Increase Ties to Iran.** The US continues to focus on domestic energy production and Russia and China buy more oil from Iran, increasing their ties to the country

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Cross-Cutting Issue: Great Powers Regional Influence

Escalation Scenario

Map 1 labels:
- 4. US comes to Israel's aid
- 2. Israel bombs Iranian nuclear facilities
- 1. Iran crosses Israel's comfort zone (Ex: Iran deal rescinded → Iran starts building nuclear weapons)
- 4. Russia comes to Iran's aid

Map 2 labels:
- 11. United Nations Security Council gridlock. US withdraws UN funding. UN disbands.
- 4. US comes to Israel's aid
- 6. Refugee crises worsen. Entry points in Turkey, Italy, and Greece are swamped.
- 2. Israel bombs Iranian nuclear facilities
- 6. Sunni vs Shia uprisings (Bahrain, etc)
- 5. Syria becomes a proxy battleground: US/Sunni vs. Russia/Shia
- 1. Iran crosses Israel's comfort zone (Ex: Iran deal rescinded → Iran starts building nuclear weapons)
- 4. Russia comes to Iran's aid
- 8. Heightened Chinese border security aggravates Russian border security
- 7. Oil prices rise. China becomes concerned about energy security and increases naval power and border security.
- 9. Heightened Chinese military presence aggravates India. India ramps up border security.
- 10. Heightened Indian military presence aggravates Pakistan. Pakistan ramps up border security.

1. Iran triggers Israeli hostility (for example, by beginning to develop nuclear weapons if the Iran deal is breached).

2. Israel responds aggressively (in this case, likely by bombing Iranian nuclear facilities.

3. Russia comes to the aid of its ally Iran, and increases military presence in the region.

4. The United States likewise comes to the aid of its ally Israel, and increases military presence in the region.

5. Given that Russia and the US support opposing sides in the Syrian civil war, Syria becomes a proxy battleground for US/Sunni vs Russia/Shia tensions.

6. As a result of the heightened conflict, the refugee crisis worsens dramatically. Entry points in Turkey, Italy, and Greece are swamped and refugee camps overflow.

7. Oil prices rise. China demonstrates its concerns about energy security in the region by increasing naval power and security along borders and trade routes.

8. Heightened Chinese border security aggravates an increase in Russian border security.

9. Heightened Chinese military presence aggravates India, which ramps up border security.

10. Continuing the security dilemma, heightened Indian military presence aggravates Pakistan, which ramps up its own border security.

11. With permanent members Russia, China, and the US in active or near armed conflict, the United Nations Security Council becomes gridlocked. The US withdraws funding from the UN, and the UN consequently disbands.

De-Escalation Scenario

1. US-Russia-China collude to defeat ISiS

2. US/Russia/China cooperate to manage Sunni/Shia tension

6. China and US cooperate against Afghanistan drug trade

3. US' sphere includes Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan

5. Trump gives Putin free rein in Syria.

9. Turkey-Russia relationship warms. Russia helps Turkey eliminate Turkish Kurds' (PKK) military arm.

10. Germany and EU concerned about China/US/Russia collusion. Offer Turkey EU membership.

8. Russia gains leverage with satellite states

1. US-Russia-China collude to defeat ISIS

2. US/Russia/China cooperate to manage Sunni/Shia tension

4. China and US cooperate against Afghanistan drug trade

3. US' sphere includes Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan

5. Trump gives Putin free rein in Syria.

6. Russia allows Assad to remain in Syria

7. Russia creates Kurdish autonomous region in Syria

1. The United States invites China and Russia to collude over their shared interests of political stability, energy security, and economic development in the Middle East. Their first joint project combines their respective military efforts to defeat ISIS.

2. The success of this effort leads to other shared initiatives, including mutual actions to manage Sunni-Shia hostility by mediating tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

3. The Powers start to divide areas into spheres of influence. The US consolidates its sphere of influence over Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan.

4. The US-China relationship warms, and they cooperate in efforts to stem Afghanistan's illicit drug trade in order to bring stability to the country and trade routes.

5. As a goodwill gesture, US President Trump rescinds support from Syrian opposition groups, and gives Russian President Putin free rein to settle the Syrian civil war.

6. Russia allows Assad to remain as president of Syria and brutally crushes the opposition groups, to the chagrin of the United Nations and other humanitarian actors.

7. Russia strong-arms a peace agreement between the Syrian parties. As part of this agreement, Syria creates a Kurdish autonomous region in the Rojava area.

8. As part of its growing influence in Central Asia, Russia gains leverage with its satellite states.

9. The Turkey-Russia relationship warms. Russia proves its allegiance by helping Turkey eliminate the Turkish Kurds' PKK military arm.

10. The European Union becomes alarmed at the growing US/China/Russia collusion. To increase EU influence in the region, they offer Turkey full EU membership.
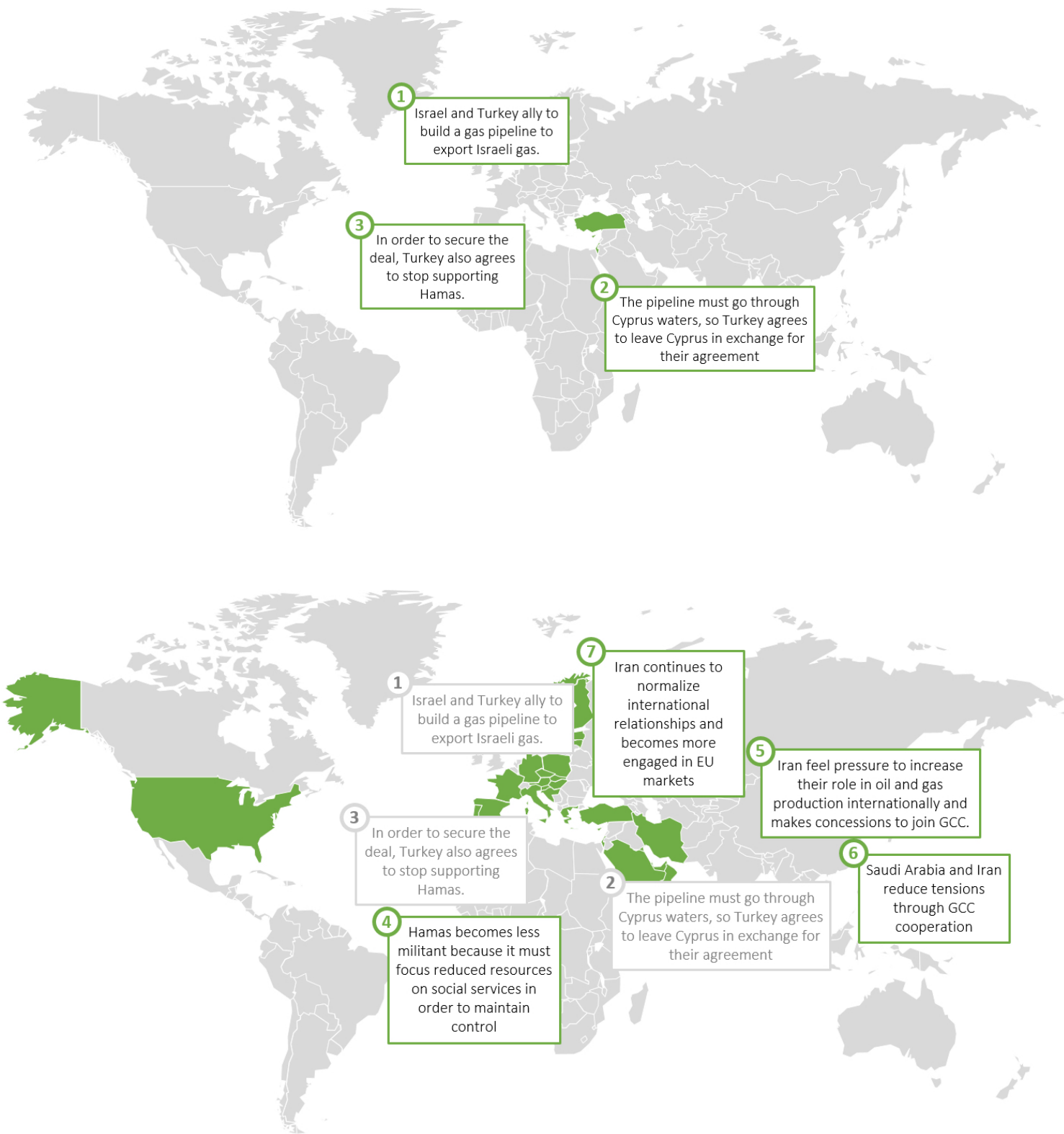
Cross-Cutting Issue: Energy and Economic Stability

Escalation Scenario

1. Israel and Turkey ally to build a gas pipeline to export Israeli gas.
2. The pipeline must go through Cyprus waters, so Turkey agrees to leave Cyprus
3. In order to secure the deal, Turkey also agrees to stop supporting Hamas.

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3. In order to secure the deal, Turkey also agrees to stop supporting Hamas.
4. Hamas turns to Iran and Qatar for more funding, thus increasing militarization.
5. Iran also increases funding to Hezbollah in Lebanon in order to try to stop the construction of the pipeline near Lebanese waters
6. Turkey relies less on Russia for gas and influence and turns more to the west. Russia sees this as a major threat and allies with the PKK and/or invades Turkish borders
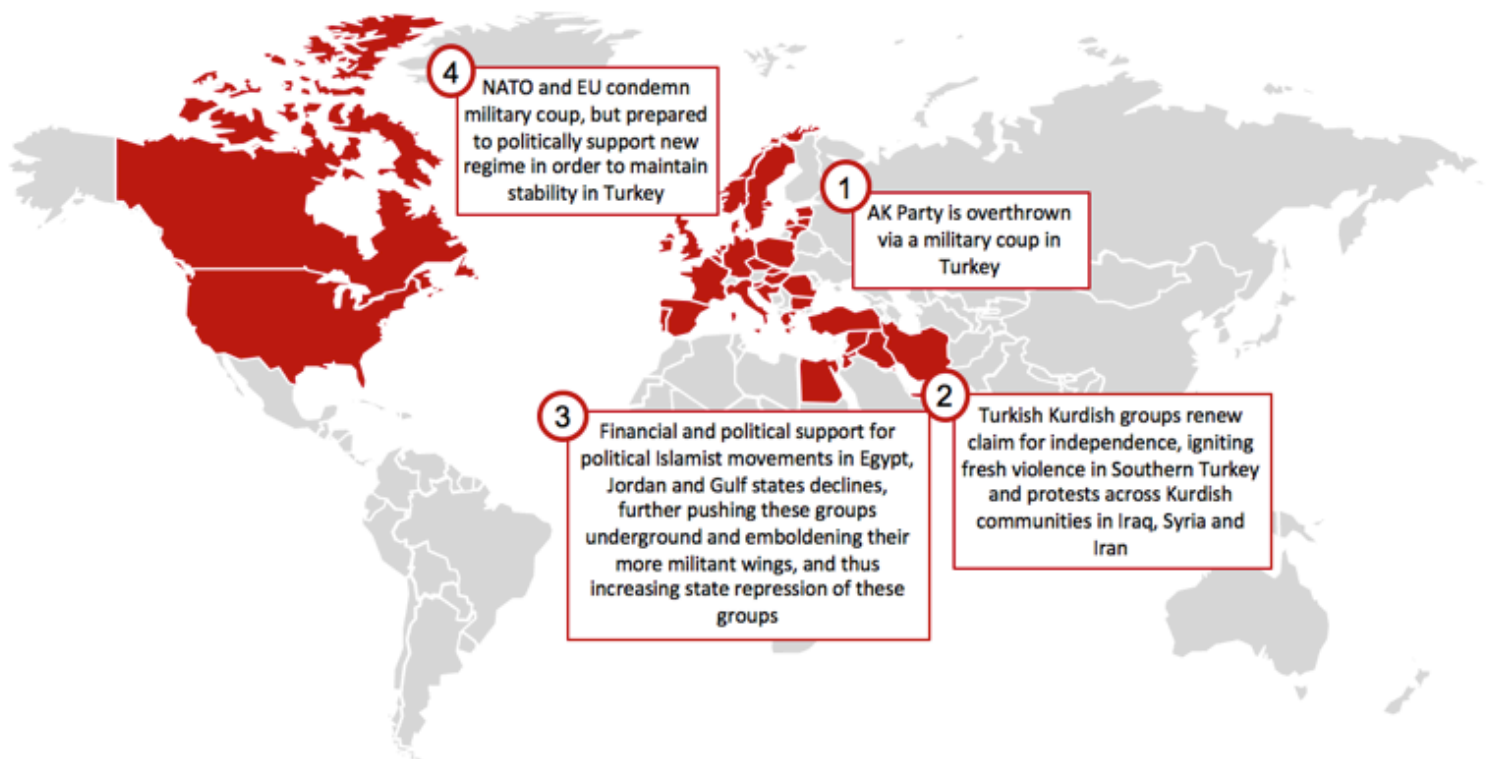
1. **Israel and Turkey Build a Gas Pipeline.** Israel and Turkey ally to build a gas pipeline to export Israeli gas.

2. **An Agreement is Made with Cyprus.** The pipeline must go through either Syrian or Cyprus water. With Syria in turmoil, Cyprus is chosen with an agreement that Turkey will leave Cyprus.

3. **Turkey Concedes on Hamas.** Turkey also agrees to stop supporting Hamas

4. **Iran and Qatar Increase Funding to Hamas.** Hamas turns to Iran and Qatar for more funding. As a result, it increases militarization.

5. **Iran Also Increases Funding to Hezbollah.** Iran also increases funding to Hezbollah in Lebanon in order to try to stop the construction of the pipeline near Lebanese waters.

6. **Turkey Relies Less on Russia.** Through the pipeline, Turkey relies less on Russia for gas. Russia sees this as a threat and takes action to hurt Turkey. This may include partnering with the PKK or invading Turkish borders.

De-Escalation Scenario

1. Israel and Turkey ally to build a gas pipeline to export Israeli gas.

3. In order to secure the deal, Turkey also agrees to stop supporting Hamas.

2. The pipeline must go through Cyprus waters, so Turkey agrees to leave Cyprus in exchange for their agreement

7. Iran continues to normalize international relationships and becomes more engaged in EU markets

1. Israel and Turkey ally to build a gas pipeline to export Israeli gas.

5. Iran feel pressure to increase their role in oil and gas production internationally and makes concessions to join GCC.

3. In order to secure the deal, Turkey also agrees to stop supporting Hamas.

6. Saudi Arabia and Iran reduce tensions through GCC cooperation

4. Hamas becomes less militant because it must focus reduced resources on social services in order to maintain control

2. The pipeline must go through Cyprus waters, so Turkey agrees to leave Cyprus in exchange for their agreement

1. **Israel and Turkey Build a Gas Pipeline.** Israel and Turkey ally to build a gas pipeline to export Israeli gas.

2. **An Agreement is Made with Cyprus.** The pipeline must go through either Syrian or Cyprus water. With Syria in turmoil, Cyprus is chosen with an agreement that Turkey will leave Cyprus.

3. **Turkey Concedes on Hamas.** Turkey also agrees to stop supporting Hamas

4. **Hamas Focuses on Social Services.** Hamas becomes less militant with fewer resources since it must focus their resources on social services.

5. **Iran Engages with Global Market.** Iran is eager to compete in the global market and makes concessions to be able to join the GCC so that they can export more oil

6. **Saudi Arabia and Iran Reduce Tensions.** Working through the GCC, Saudi Arabia and Iran reduce tensions

7. **Iran Normalizes International Relationships.** Iran continues to normalize international relationships and becomes more engaged in EU markets

Cross-Cutting Issue: Spread of Political Islam

Escalation Scenario

4 NATO and EU condemn military coup, but prepared to politically support new regime in order to maintain stability in Turkey

1 AK Party is overthrown via a military coup in Turkey

3 Financial and political support for political Islamist movements in Egypt, Jordan and Gulf states declines, further pushing these groups underground and emboldening their more militant wings, and thus increasing state repression of these groups

2 Turkish Kurdish groups renew claim for independence, igniting fresh violence in Southern Turkey and protests across Kurdish communities in Iraq, Syria and Iran

1. **Coup in Turkey.** The ruling AK Party is overthrown via a military coup in Turkey.

2. **Renewed Claims for Kurdish Independence.** Turkish Kurdish groups renew claim for independence, igniting fresh violence in Southern Turkey and protests across Kurdish communities in Iraq, Syria and Iran.

3. **Increased Repression of Political Islamists.** Financial and political support for political Islamist movements in Egypt, Jordan and Gulf states declines, further pushing these groups underground and emboldening their more militant wings, and thus increasing state repression of these groups.

4. **Mixed Western Response of Coup.** NATO and EU condemn military coup, but prepared to politically support new regime in order to maintain stability in Turkey.

De-Escalation Scenario

2 Tunisia gains preferential trade status from European Union, as well as additional financing from international financial institutions, strengthening its economic situation

1 Tunisian democracy is further consolidated in next legislative election following power-sharing agreement between Ennahda and the ruling secular liberal party

3 Support for political Islamist groups in countries across the MENA region – in particular Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt - rises as a result of the example of Ennahda in Tunisia

1. **Successful Consolidation of Tunisian Democracy.** Tunisian democracy is further consolidated in next legislative election following power-sharing agreement between Ennahda and the ruling secular liberal party.

2. **International Support to Tunisian Economy.** Tunisia gains preferential trade status from European Union, as well as additional financing from international financial institutions, strengthening its economic situation.

3. **Increased Regional Support for Political Islamist Parties.** Support for political Islamist groups in countries across the MENA region – in particular Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt - rises as a result of the example of Ennahda in Tunisia.

Cross-Cutting Issue: Terrorism

Escalation Scenario

3 Following its military gains, ISIS consolidates control in Iraq and Syria, allowing it to expand its recruiting efforts abroad, as well as launch terror attacks in greater frequency in the West

5 The long term impact would be the increase in support for nationalist parties across Europe and the US

1 ISIS retakes full control of Mosul and regains pockets of territory in Syria as the country further destabilizes

4 As a result of the increase in terror attacks in the West, the United States increases its bombing campaign in Syria and Iraq, seeking cooperation with Russia

2 As a result of the escalating conflict, there is an uptick in refugee flows from Syria and Iraq, particularly into Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as Europe

1. **ISIS Maintains Territorial Gains in Syria and Iraq.** ISIS retakes full control of Mosul and regains pockets of territory in Syria as the country further destabilizes.

2. **The Refugee Crisis Deteriorates.** As a result of the escalating conflict, there is an uptick in refugee flows from Syria and Iraq, particularly into Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as Europe.

3. **ISIS Launches Additional Terrorist Attacks in West.** Following its military gains, ISIS consolidates control in Iraq and Syria, allowing it to expand its recruiting efforts abroad, as well as launch terror attacks in greater frequency in the West.

4. **US Bombing Campaign Against ISIS Intensifies.** As a result of the increase in terror attacks in the West, the United States increases its bombing campaign in Syria and Iraq, seeking cooperation with Russia.

5. **Consolidation of Support for Nationalist Parties in West.** The long term impact would be the increase in support for nationalist parties across Europe and the US.

De-Escalation Scenario

1. The US and Russia strengthen their coordination of airstrikes in Syria against ISIS targets

2. This cooperation allows the UNSC to agree on resolution authorizing use of force against ISIS in Syria and Iraq

3. Following the UNSC resolution, the bombing campaign against ISIS broadens, with greater inclusion of Arab partners. US and Western allies agree to putting boots-on-the-ground in Syria and Iraq

4. Conflict escalates in the short-term, but ISIS loses territory and becomes more dispersed

5. With ISIS being driven out of key cities in Syria, Assad is able to consolidate power, leading to a gradual de-escalation of the war in Syria

1. **US-Russia Military Coordination in Syria.** The US and Russia strengthen their coordination of airstrikes in Syria against ISIS targets.

2. **UN Security Council Resolution.** This cooperation allows the deadlocked United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to agree on resolution authorizing the use of force against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

3. **Military Campaign against ISIS Intensifies.** Following the UNSC resolution, the bombing campaign against ISIS broadens, with greater inclusion of Arab partners. Additionally, US and Western allies agree to putting boots-on-the-ground in Syria and Iraq.

4. **ISIS Loses Territory.** The conflict in Syria and Iraq escalates in the short-term, but ISIS loses territory and becomes more dispersed.

5. **ISIS Driven Out of Syria, but Assad Regains Control.** With ISIS being driven out of key cities in Syria, Assad is able to consolidate power, leading to a gradual de-escalation of the war in Syria.

PART THREE   STAKEHOLDER PORTRAITS

ALGERIA

Party Portrait

After gaining independence from France in 1962, Algeria witnessed increased Arabization and conflict, particularly in its eleven-year-long civil war. Presently, the Algerian state is plagued by domestic rivalries among the Army General Staff, the Presidency, and the recently dismantled spy agency, the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS). This split is further complicated by internal clan and factional conflicts within the groups. These groups compose the shadowy business, intelligence, military, and political forces controlling the nation. They act behind the scenes in pursuit of their own various interests, either through the elected government or around it.

Key Interests

- Maintain military dominance of the North Africa region
- Strengthen and expand military and intelligence cooperation with Western powers
- Settle the Western Sahara dispute in favor of the self-determination of the indigenous Polisario Front

Sources of Leverage

Military – The Algerian military boasts the largest defense budget in Africa; at $13 billion USD, it is over twice the size of its Egyptian counterpart. Algeria also possesses robust military power projection capabilities and widely acknowledged counterterrorism experience.

Regional Strategy

Algeria seeks to maintain its military dominance of North Africa, and to strengthen military and intelligence cooperation with Western powers while seeking non-threatening economic innovations. Diplomatically, Algeria aims to become more engaged in the region, and avoid being isolated for its strong support of self-determination and national sovereignty in the case of Western Sahara.

Powerful Individuals

Ahmed Gaïd-Salah (Chief of the General Staff and Deputy Defense Minister) Abdelaziz Bouteflika (President), General Mohamed "Tewfik" Mediène (former head of the DRS), Said Bouteflika (brother of the President and advisor), Abdelmalek Sellal (Prime Minister), Ali Haddad (prominent businessman and presidential advisor)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Come to the table for Western Sahara peace talks - Talk with Morocco and the Polisario Front regarding Western Sahara. Since Morocco refuses to come to the table without Algeria's participation, this would be a positive step toward settling the conflict. However, Algeria's internal fractures may impede Algeria's ability to engage in negotiations.

Internal Conflicts

Algerian politics are complicated by the strong internal conflicts among the Army General Staff, the Presidency, and the former DRS. The former DRS is still able to manipulate extremist groups, civil society, and media; it is unknown whether the erstwhile agency retains influence in the government.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, AU, IAEA, MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies
MOROCCO Polisario Front, UNITED STATES

Partners
EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, NATO, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, TUNISIA

Rivals
HOLY SEE, MOROCCO Government

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
N/A

AQAP

Party Portrait

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was created from the unification of al Qaeda groups in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. With size estimates at around 4,000 fighters, AQAP punches far above its weight in terms of geopolitical influence. AQAP has been labeled "the most lethal Qaeda franchise." It is seen as a top priority for U.S. counterterrorism officials and a destabilizing force in Yemen, a country already racked with governance issues. AQAP threatens powerful regimes like the Saudi royal family and Sultanate of Oman. In many ways, it has become the face of Al Qaeda (AQ) since the death of founder Osama Bin Laden in 2011 and the dismantling of AQ in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. At the same time, it remains a strongly Yemeni outfit, dedicated to the parochialism of Yemen as much as to global jihad. Although the group faces an existential threat in the rise of Salafist rival ISIS, AQAP has taken advantage of the Yemeni civil war and lack of territorial control to become more powerful than it has been in years.

Key Interests

- Hold on to territory gained as a result of Yemen's collapse
- Disrupt the current Middle East powers and competing regional actors in Yemen, the region, and around the globe
- Take the mantle of Sunni Salafist leadership from ISIS
- Maintain and expand support of Yemeni population

Sources of Leverage

Geographic - Mountainous territory presents a challenge for military intervention
Military - Local Yemeni population possess an abundance of weapons which AQAP can use to its advantage; AQAP's integration into local groups makes it difficult to attack without harming civilians
Soft Power - Grievances of the local Yemeni population with Middle East regimes
Political - Yemeni Government's lack of territorial control and poor central governance

Regional Strategy

AQAP's strategy includes: learning from ISIS' strategy in Syria and Iraq to gain more territory; expanding and strengthening its forces in the Middle East, Western states and elsewhere; obtaining support from Gulf donors; and cultivating relationships with Muslims all over the world as a method to recruitment and enhanced capabilities.

Powerful Individuals

Qasim al-Rimi (Amir)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Reconcile with ISIS as it is weakened by Western forces, to form a combined Salafist terrorist organization

Internal Conflicts

There is evidence that AQAP has in the past shirked orders from AQ central, specifically the directive from AQ central not to establish Islamic governance

Memberships
N/A

Allies
N/A

Partners
SYRIA Jabhat Fatah a-Sham

Rivals
ISIS

Adversaries
EGYPT Government, ISRAEL, JORDAN

Active Armed Opponents
EUROPEAN UNION, IRAN, OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
Private citizens in mostly GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia

ARAB LEAGUE

Party Portrait

The Arab League – or League of Arab States (LAS) – is an organization focused on building cooperation between Arab states, defending their sovereignty, and working with international bodies on issues of economics, peace, and security. While the LAS is a political umbrella, each member of the LAS is responsible for conducting its own foreign policy. Historically, the LAS has strongly respected the principle of state sovereignty, thereby not supporting regime changes in its member states. Shifting away from these non-interventionist goals, the LAS has recently taken on active roles as a conflict mediator, crisis manager, and international intermediary.

Key Interests

- Maintain regional order and stability;
- Uphold state sovereignty;
- Reduce Shi'a/Iranian influence across the region; and
- Mitigate the impacts of conflicts and humanitarian crises across the region.

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power - The primary sources of leverage for the LAS are soft power. There is potential for oil-rich states to use their wealth to gain traction and attention during conflicts, but this leverage is largely unrealized due to rivalries between member states. The LAS' main source of leverage is grounded in its credibility and legitimacy as the only Pan-Arab organization.

Regional Strategy

Due to serious divisions and conflicts within the League, there seems to be no overarching regional strategy. Prior to 2008, the League's strategy was to ensure that powerful elites maintained domestic control and stabilized their states. Since the Arab Spring, most LAS actions seem aimed at maximizing Sunni influence in the region, minimizing Iran's Shi'a influence, and, generally, preventing conflict and instability.

Powerful Individuals

Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit

Potential Negotiation Moves

Intervene in Conflicts – In the early stages of conflicts, the LAS is likely to intervene and attempt a mediation effort. Alternatively, it may refer issues to the UN Security Council with recommendations/requests for additional mediation efforts, ceasefires, or military intervention by regional or international actors

Build Regional Military Alliance – Build on its 2015 commitment and establish a voluntary joint military force with peacekeeping role

Act as Guarantor - Position itself as the guarantor of political resolutions to conflict

Engage with Donors - Engaging with international donors for reconstruction and recovery aid

Internal Conflicts

There are numerous divides and conflicts within the League. Much of the conflict and indecision in the LAS can be explained by the Sunni-Shi'a divide. Saudi Arabia supports Sunni factions throughout the League while Shi'a states are largely supported by Iran. This leads to proxy wars in Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen and instability throughout the region.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
EUROPEAN UNION, UNITED NATIONS, Informal partners of some member states include: IRAN, TURKEY, UNITED STATES	Some member states consider as rivals or adversaries: IRAN, TURKEY, ISRAEL

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
Some member states consider as rivals or adversaries: IRAN, TURKEY, ISRAEL	Active armed opponents of member states include: ISIS, SYRIA Government

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

BAHRAIN

Party Portrait

Bahrain's monarchy has opted to focus on its security needs instead of creating a prosperous and open society for all. Sunni government policy routinely discriminates against its large Shia population. Bahrain feels threatened by Iran and the government views Shia Bahrainis as potential Iranian allies that may try to topple the monarchy at Iran's behest. Bahrain has historically sought an alliance with stronger nations to protect it from Iran. Today, the US acts as a guarantor of Bahrain security, especially in the face of Iran. While ISIS is seen as a threat to Bahrain, it is not treated with the same seriousness as Iran.

Key Interests

- Retain commitment from the US to the region and support to counter Iran
- Protect monarchy from a possible revolution; control Shia mobilization and organization
- Ensure economic troubles will not be exacerbated through a disruption of its oil refineries, economic aid cancelation from the GCC, or Iranian hostility in the Gulf

Sources of Leverage

Energy – Not a major oil producer, but has one of the largest refineries in the world with easy access to Saudi oil
Geographic – Location in the Gulf where most of world's oil is shipped, major powers will attempt to keep the shipping lanes open
Military – US 5th Fleet is stationed in Bahrain. Bahrain could use this as leverage in its relationship with the US. Provides Bahrain with significant security assurances and prestige
Convening Power –Sought to emulate other Gulf nations by hosting a series of international conferences (e.g. Manama Dialogue)

Regional Strategy

Bahrain has sought to deepen its alliance with the US/Britain by allowing increased military presence. The monarchy has continued to rely on the GCC and Saudi Arabia for economic and military support. Bahrain has joined military alliances against ISIS and other possible Iranian proxies (e.g. the Houthis in Yemen). Bahrain views their Shia population as a possible Iranian pawn in an attempt to destabilize the region. Bahrain oppresses and harasses its Shia population in order to negate their ability to challenge the monarchy, with the tacit approval of some its allies.

Powerful Individuals

Al Khalifa Monarchy: Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa (King of Bahrain), Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (heir apparent). Pro-government figures: Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa (Prime Minister), Sheikh 'Abd al-Latif al-Mahmoud (leader of the National Unity Assembly), Ali Ahmed Abdulla (Al-Minbar leader), Salah 'Ali (Al-Minbar Secretary General).
Major Human Rights players: 'Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja, Nabeel Rajab, Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei.
Key opposition/Shia players: Isa Qassim, Ali Salman (Secretary General of the Al Wefaq), Matar Matar (Senior member of Al Wefaq)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Sunni-Shia Reconciliation –Bahrain could protect the rights of Shia Bahrainis, thus bringing them away from Iran and protecting the monarchy in the process
Use American Bases as leverage – US 5th fleet, located in Bahrain, is key to American regional strategy. Bahrain could use this to elicit concessions like deeper regional commitment and softening Saudi control in Bahrain
Convening power to bring in new actors – Invite South Asian nations, whose citizens are a large migrant presence in Bahrain, and Russia and China as actors in combating ISIS and playing a larger role in the region in general in order to inspire new thinking and mitigate secretarian and regional tensions

Internal Conflicts

Struggles with intense sectarianism. The government has aligned with Sunni groups and political parties with links to the Muslim Brotherhood. The government inhibits the work of human rights campaigners and civil society when deemed too closely aligned with the Shia opposition. While several Bahrainis have joined ISIS, Bahrain has not openly addressed the topic. ISIS routinely calls on its

Memberships
GCC, IAEA, Istanbul Cooperation Imitative, League of Arab States, OIC, UN (Member)

Allies
OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government, KUWAIT

Partners
CHINA, HOLY SEE, INDIA, JAPAN, RUSSIA, QATAR, NATO, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Rivals
N/A

Adversaries
IRAN, SYRIA Government, YEMEN Houthis

Active Armed Opponents
ISIS

Proxy
Various rebel groups the GCC supports in Syria, Anti-Houthi forces in Yemen (Bahrain's contribution minimal in both instances)

External Sponsor
SAUDI ARABIA, GCC member countries

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM

CHINA

Party Portrait

China has witnessed a remarkably rapid ascent from developing economy to global superpower. China's interest in the Middle East is primarily linked to, but not limited to, oil. The Middle East is China's main source of oil, and will become an increasingly essential source of oil for China in the future. China also regards the Middle East as an important market for the materials required for its own large-scale infrastructure projects. China sees itself as a neutral broker, maintaining relations with every government in the region. Beijing is deeply skeptical of military interventions, and believes American actions in the region have had a deleterious impact on regional security. China prefers to work with the current governments and to maintain the status quo. It has interests in tackling terrorism's root causes, which it regards as inherently economic in nature. Since Xi Jinping assumed office, he has consolidated power and taken a more aggressive stance internationally. While he has made some minor adjustments in China's Middle East policy, there have yet to be any significant changes.

Key Interests

- Secure supply of oil from the region
- Secure export markets for Chinese goods
- Secure concessions for Middle Eastern natural resources that are essential to China's massive infrastructure and trade route projects

Sources of Leverage

Economic - China is the largest or second largest trading partner of every country in the region. It also is a major arms supplier, including to Algeria, Egypt, Turkey and the UAE.
Military - China boasts the second most well-funded military in the world, and has been working on ways to project its power including the construction of a new naval base in Djibouti
Political - China has a positive reputation in most Middle Eastern countries and generally enjoys positive relations in the region

Regional Strategy

China's strategy is tridimensional in nature, seeking to balance the complex web of relationships in the region without having to choose sides. China's policy, known as the "1+2+3 approach", prioritizes massive regional investment, such as the "one-belt one road," and "the new silk road," as the key to regional stability. It opposes unilateral military intervention, and believes the UN should be the ultimate arbiter of any serious conflict

Powerful Individuals

Chairman Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, Party Secretary of Xinjiang Chen Quanguo, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Special Envoy on the Syrian issue Xie Xiaoyan

Potential Negotiation Moves

Economic Development - Fund economic developments projects in exchange for political cooperation
Provide military assistance - Increase training and materiel support to regional allies, including Egypt and the UAE
Commit military forces - Including to UN peace operations where it is an increasingly dominant actor
Broker Agreement - Use its role as a neutral mediator to broker agreement between conflicting parties

Internal Conflicts

Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan

Memberships	Allies
UN (Security Council)	N/A

Partners	Rivals
DJIBOUTI, IRAN	RUSSIA, UNITED STATES

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
GERMANY, FRANCE, JAPAN, EUROPEAN UNION	DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, ERITREA, IRAN, IRAQ Government, JORDAN, MOROCCO Government, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, TUNISIA, TURKEY

DJIBOUTI

Party Portrait

The Republic of Djibouti, a predominantly Muslim country, historically formed part of French Somaliland before voting to become an independent country in 1977. Djibouti is a semi-presidential republic, dominated by the Somali Issa Dir clan, and has held consistently free and fair elections. Djibouti's strategic location on the Gulf of Aden – close to the world's busiest shipping lanes as well as Yemen, Somalia and Saudi Arabia – has made it a highly attractive location for an array of regional and global powers to set up military bases. Since 2002, Djibouti has hosted Camp Lemonnier, the only American base on the African continent. Saudi Arabia and China are now building their own bases in Djibouti, prompting Japan to expand its own pre-existing military base in the country. Italy also operates a small military base there, crucial to operations to tackle Somali piracy. While not a major military or economic power, Djibouti's strategic position potentially affords it a degree of leverage. Djibouti maintains positive ties with most Middle Eastern countries, but is locked in relatively hostile bilateral relationship with neighboring Eritrea.

Key Interests

- Secure lucrative contracts with foreign powers to lease military and naval bases.
- Ensure domestic security and that Yemen's civil war concludes rapidly and peacefully.
- Continue US military action in the Middle East.

Sources of Leverage

Military - Djibouti will soon host Saudi, Chinese, American and Japanese military bases, playing a vital role in all of these countries' military operations in the Middle East

Regional Strategy

Djibouti's strategy is to maintain positive relations with most Middle Eastern countries, fostering particular close partnerships with the Sunni powers. The country will continue to position itself as an attractive strategic location for military and naval bases, increasing its leverage over regional and global powers and securing rents.

Powerful Individuals

President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh; Prime Minister Adboulkader Kambil Mohamed; Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff General Zakaria Cheikh Ibrahim

Potential Negotiation Moves

Refugee Hosting - Offer to host some of the refugees fleeing Eritrea to Europe, reducing burden on southern member states such as Greece and Italy.
Leverage Concessions - Make foreign powers' continued operation of military bases in Djibouti conditional upon increased development assistance or military funding.
Commit forces to multilateral operations - Voluntarily contribute Djibouti armed forces to United Nations / African Union peace operation in Somalia, securing rents or political concessions.

Internal Conflicts

The Issa clan has dominated the country's politics for decades, both during and after French colonial administration. The Affar continue to feel aggrieved at its lack of political power and relative marginalization from government.

Memberships

ARAB LEAGUE, AU, IAEA, OIC, UN

Allies

SOMALIA Government, YEMEN Government

Partners

CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, JAPAN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Rivals

N/A

Adversaries

N/A

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, JAPAN, UAE, UNITED STATES

Aid Donor

N/A

EGYPT - GOVERNMENT

Party Portrait

Following the upheaval of the 2011 Tahrir Square protests, which led to the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt underwent a tumultuous political transition process. This resulted in the election of the Mohamed Morsi, the leader of the Freedom and Justice Party (the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm) in 2012. Thereafter in 2013, a military coup led to the removal of Morsi from office, and the emergence – and subsequent consolidation of power – of General Abdel Fattah al Sisi as President.

Key Interests

- Reassert full political control, thereby eliminating the Muslim Brotherhood as a major political threat;
- Attract foreign investment and boost economic growth;
- Drive back ISIS-linked groups out of the Sinai Peninsula;
- Restore Egypt's regional leadership role, and
- Maintain strong ties with the United States and the West.
-

Sources of Leverage

Convening Power - The Camp David Accords provide Egypt with significant leverage over the US and Western allies, given its role as an Arab ally and potential broker in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations

Geography - As the largest Arab country with critical geo-strategic importance, Egypt holds sway in persuading international partners that large-scale economic instability or civil unrest cannot be permitted

Political - Historic regional influence allows the country to act as a power broker in bilateral relations and multilateral fora such as the League of Arab States

Regional Strategy

Reestablish its regional leadership role, particularly through regional institutions such as the Arab League, as well as through the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As a result of its regional influence, Egypt seeks to maintain, and increase, its leverage over Western actors who provide substantial military and economic support.

Powerful Individuals

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (President), Sedki Sobhy (Minister of Defense), Mohammed Morsi (former President and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party), Mohammed Badie (Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Strengthen Military Ties - Partner with the United States, Israel and Western states to fight jihadist militant groups in the Sinai

Monitor Muslim Brotherhood - Seek partnership with Israel and Western countries to deepen monitoring and surveillance of Muslim Brotherhood activities

Lead Regional Negotiations - Lead the negotiation of a fair water distribution agreement for the Nile Basin with Israel, Sudan, Nile Basin Countries, as well as international financial institutions and the United Nations

Increase Regional Influence - Gain greater international and regional influence, for example by playing a leading role in negotiating a more sustainable framework for refugees fleeing from conflicts.

Internal Conflicts

The Egyptian government's main internal conflict is with their domestic political rival, the Muslim Brotherhood. Since ousting former President Morsi in a coup in July 2013, President Sisi has aggressively pursued repressive tactics against the group, arresting thousands and labelling the group a "terrorist organization". In addition, the government is facing armed conflict from ISIS-linked factions in the Sinai.

Memberships

ARAB LEAGUE, AU, IAEA, MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, OIC, UN (Security Council – term ends 2017)

Allies

Given the recent political tumult experienced by Egypt, the country does not currently have any stable, extensive relationships with other states which could be classed as a firm alliance.

Partners

CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, ISRAEL, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Rivals

QATAR, IRAN, SUDAN, SYRIA Government, TURKEY

Adversaries

EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood

Active Armed Opponents

ISIS (especially militants based in the Egyptian Sinai and Libya), AQAP, YEMEN Houthis

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IMF, World Bank), SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES, UAE

EGYPT - MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Party Portrait

The Muslim Brotherhood is the most important Islamist organization in Egypt, and arguably across the Middle East. Since its founding in 1928, the group has sought to promote Islamist ideology in Egyptian society. It is an important social and political actor, particularly given its history of providing public services to disadvantaged communities. Its influence peaked with the election of Mohammed Morsi as President in 2012 before being deposed by a military coup in 2013. The group is now considered a terrorist organization, with thousands of members imprisoned.

Key Interests

- Regain status as a legitimate political actor;
- Gain international support against the Egyptian Government's crackdown of opposition groups;
- Achieve the release of its political and ideological leaders;
- Continue to yield influence in society; and
- Inspire demonstrations against the Egyptian Government

Sources of Leverage

Grass-roots Support – Given its history of providing low-income communities with public services, the Brotherhood continues to yield considerable, albeit subdued, political support

Regional Support – As one of the most important Islamist organizations in the region, it continues to have support from political groups in Tunisia, Palestine, Turkey or Qatar, for example.

International Support –The Brotherhood has sought to seek support from Western countries that have voiced reservations about the Egyptian Government's repressive tactics

Regional Strategy

Though there are important ideological factions within the Brotherhood, many leaders wish to maintain its relevance as a social and political group in communities across Egypt, despite many of its leaders and members currently being imprisoned.

Powerful Individuals

Mohammed Morsi (former President and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party), Mohammed Badie (Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Incite Protests – Though it has been pushed underground, the Brotherhood may seek to actively resist by inciting protests against the Egyptian Government

Elicit International Support – In order to pressure the Egyptian Government, the Muslim Brotherhood may seek to conduct public diplomatic efforts in order to gain support from Western and Arab countries for the release of its leaders

Block Egyptian Government's Agenda – Given that it continues to have partners in Qatar, Tunisia (Ennahda), Palestine (Hamas) or Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood may be able to block the Egyptian Government's efforts to assert its influence abroad

Internal Conflicts

There are currently two main factions within the Muslim Brotherhood: (i) those that seek to continue to peacefully advance the organization's social or political goals; and (ii) those that believe that armed struggle against the Egyptian Government is justified and the only way of advancing its mission.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
QATAR, TURKEY, PALESTINE Hamas	UNITED STATES, SAUDI ARABIA, UAE, ISRAEL

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
EGYPT Government	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

ERITREA

Party Portrait

Eritrea is a highly authoritarian country, widely considered to be among the most repressive on the African continent. This has generated an exodus of refugees and asylum seekers, settling not only in neighboring countries but also in Europe. Eritrea has long-standing positive ties with Israel, providing early and enthusiastic recognition of the Jewish State. It has hostile relations with neighboring Djibouti and Somalia, and at various points in recent decades has engaged in armed conflict with both parties. Eritrea has allegedly provided material and financial support to Al Shabab in Somalia.

Key Interests

- Seek new military equipment, expertise and funding to strengthen the government's domestic hold on power
- Leverage military support from foreign powers with greater technical expertise
- Foment insecurity in Somalia through al-Shabab
- Neutralize the small but dogged militias that contest its authority domestically, including the RSADO
- Develop its economy, prioritizing the agricultural sector
- Lift or ease sanctions that the UN Security Council has imposed on the country

Sources of Leverage

Political - Eritrea has frequently agreed to resettle Eritrean migrants in Israel in exchange for military aid, technological and agricultural assistance from Jerusalem. By tightening and loosening migrant controls, it can exert pressure on Israel and on the European Union.

Regional Strategy

Eritrea's limited strategy is composed of fomenting instability in neighboring countries, maintaining the government's ironclad grip on power domestically, and leveraging its partnership with Israel to strengthen its own military and security apparatus.

Powerful Individuals

President Isaias Afewerki rules a highly personalized authoritarian regime where power is centralized.

Potential Negotiation Moves

Adjust Migrant Controls - Tighten - or alternatively loosen - migrant controls to extract concessions from Israel and/or the EU.
Somalia Instability - Continue fomenting instability in Somalia by funding proxy group, al-Shabab

Internal Conflicts

Long-standing but small-scale rebellion of the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO)

Memberships	Allies
AU, IAEA, UN	ISRAEL

Partners	Rivals
SUDAN, UAE	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
DJIBOUTI, SOMALIA Government	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, JAPAN, UAE	N/A

EUROPEAN UNION

Party Portrait

The European Union is a 28-member state international organization based on economic and political integration Economic integration has advanced furthest, with a single market and free movement of peoples. The combined economy of the EU is the second largest in the world, in normal terms. The economic, geographic and political diversity of the EU leads to important differences in perspectives on external issues. The EU's current position towards the Middle East is largely shaped by the issue of asylum seekers. It has caused divisions among EU member states over a common response to this issue and Islamic terrorism. Numerous terror attacks have taken place in EU member states. fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Key Interests

- Return to regional stability
- End conflict in Syria and Iraq, ending the flow of asylum seekers from the region
- Prevent further Islamic terror attacks in EU member states
- Two-state solution to the Middle East Peace process
- Maintain the solidarity and common foreign policy in the EU

Sources of Leverage

Economic – The EU has the capacity to grant access to its market and the provision of development assistance, particularly through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the establishment of sanctions
Convening Power – The EU has the capacity to initiate diplomatic talks. The EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership serves as a forum for regional dialogue.

Regional Strategy

Maintains sanctions against Syria, but divided over military action. Encourages both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to resume bilateral negotiations towards two-state solution. Supports using European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as framework to develop political and economic relations with Israel and the PA. Lifted all nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions and begun gradual high-level engagement with Iran. Concluded refugee deal with Turkey, Turkey will retain refugees from the region in exchange for payments and an upgrade of EU-Turkey relations.

Powerful Individuals

Donald Tusk (President of the European Council); Jean-Claude Juncker (Head of the European Commission); Federica Mogherini (High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy); European Parliament; EU heads of state and government

Potential Negotiation Moves

Maintain Syrian Sanctions - The EU could maintain a sanctions regime against Syria and disburse development aid. Due to its institutional limitations and the internal divisions of its member states, the EU is unlikely to take further actions
Serve as Discussion Forum - The EU can serve as a discussion forum for its member states on their policies towards the Middle East and act as a multiplier for diplomatic initiatives that are consensual among its members (such as renewed initiatives for Syrian peace talks or humanitarian aid)

Internal Conflicts

The EU's institutions and decision-making processes require unanimous decisions for most foreign policy actions. States retain the ability to act individually outside of the EU context. It has been difficult to achieve common agreement on responses to ongoing crises. One of the main divisions is member states' willingness to take in refugees from the region. Member states are also divided over the decision to intervene in the Syrian conflict militarily.

Memberships
Quartet on the Middle East

Allies
TUNISIA, UNITED STATES, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, HOLY SEE, PALESTINE Fatah, MOROCCO Government

Partners
ISRAEL, PALESTINE Civil Society, LEBANON Government, IRAQ State of Law Coalition EGYPT Government, JORDAN, YEMEN Government, DJIBOUTI, SOMALIA Government, SUDAN, SOUTH SUDAN, ALGERIA, MOROCCO Government, EGYPT Government, TURKEY, IRAN, ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Rivals
RUSSIA

Adversaries
SYRIA Government, YEMEN Houthis

Active Armed Opponents
AQAP, ISIS

Proxy
KURDS of Turkey, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria

External Sponsor
Palestine – Civil Society, Syrian Refugees, Sudan

Aid Recipient
TURKEY, SOUTH SUDAN

Aid Donor
N/A

FRANCE

Party Portrait

France is a stable presidential democracy, influential EU member, UN Security Council permanent member, and NATO member. France retains an activist foreign policy independently and within international organizations. Policy often includes the high levels of military spending. The population is very diverse, with the largest European Muslim and Jewish communities. France has struggled to manage internal tensions. Historically supported established regimes, but was a main actor in the bombing campaign against the Libyan government in 2011 and is one of the most outspoken critics of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria. Directly involved in attempts to fight ISIS. Consequently, has been the target of ISIS-led and inspired terrorist attacks, which has fueled anti-immigration rhetoric in the country and has contributed to the rise of the populist far-right National Front party.

Key Interests

- Ensure its own stability and the stability of its neighbors and the EU by eliminating the threat of Islamist terrorism, limiting the influx of refugees, and stabilizing the EU's neighborhood
- Retain role as one of Europe's most important powers
- End Syrian civil war, maintain Turkish stability, and defeat ISIS and AQAP
- Support its large corporations through trade deals with the region: export French-made armaments to the Gulf monarchies and make use of the opportunities arising out of the Iran deal

Sources of Leverage

Convening Power - UN Security Council Permanent Member, so France can sponsor or veto resolutions. EU and NATO membership increase its ability to shape activity of large parts of the Western world

Military - As one of Europe's main military powers with a capacity for force projection, France can participate directly in armed conflict in the region, but will be difficult to increase its levels of participation

Soft Power - France wields soft power through existing close ties and cooperation with many governments in the region, especially given its colonial history in the region

Regional Strategy

France recognizes the impossibility of replacing Assad regime in Syria by military force and prefers to concentrate military efforts on fight against ISIS. France wants to enlist further support from European allies, particularly Germany, to mitigate the responsibilities undertaken by France. Wants to continue cooperation with governments in Northern Africa in fight against Islamist groups and to stem influx of migrants to Europe, by redirecting EU funding towards stability in the region. Continues to sell armaments to the Gulf states and has increased its trade ties with Iran.

Powerful Individuals

President François Hollande (Socialist party); Prime minister Bernard Cazeneuve; Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault; Permanent Representative to the UN Francois Delattre

Potential Negotiation Moves

International Influence - Due to its military overstretch and ongoing economic crisis, France's main source of leverage remains its influence in international organizations and alliances

EU Military Assistance - France could rely on its EU partners to take over some security and military commitments to liberate some of its assets to increase its military involvement in the region

Alter Sanctions - France could focus on lobbying other EU member states to alter the organization's sanctions regime and to change the disbursement of existing EU funding

Internal Conflicts

French society is extremely divided and the country remains in a state of emergency after a series of Islamist terrorist attacks. This has contributed to a hardening of the country's rhetoric towards Muslims and refugees from the Middle East. Combined with the country's protracted economic crisis, its political system has been severely destabilized by the rise of the populist far-right National Front party.

Memberships
EU, IAEA, NATO, OECD, OSCE, UN (Security Council)

Allies
GERMANY, HOLY SEE, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, TUNISIA

Partners
ALGERIA, INDIA, IRAN, ISRAEL, LEBANON Government, MOROCCO Government, PALESTINE Fatah, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Rivals
RUSSIA

Adversaries
SYRIA Government, SOMALIA al-Shabaab

Active Armed Opponents
AQAP, ISIS

Proxy
SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
MOROCCO Government, EGYPT Government, JORDAN, TUNISIA

Aid Donor
UNITED NATIONS

GERMANY

Party Portrait

Germany is a stable democracy, EU's largest and most economically successful member state and has emerged as its de facto leader in recent years. Given its history, Germany has been reluctant to take up this leadership position or engage in an activist foreign policy. In particular, it is opposed to making extensive use of armed forces. One of Germany's long-standing foreign policy aims is to ensure the security of Israel. Germany houses a large population of foreign origin, with more than 3 million residents of Turkish heritage. Since 2015, Germany has received more than 1 million requests for asylum, most from the Middle East. It has also been the target of Islamist terrorism. Germany views the conflict in the Middle East primarily as a risk to its own security and stability and that of the EU. However, Germany recognizes that its own interests and possibilities for direct influence in the conflict are limited.

Key Interests

- Ensure its own stability and the stability of its neighbors and the EU by eliminating the threat of Islamist terrorism, limiting the influx of refugees, and stabilizing the EU's neighborhood
- End Syrian civil war, maintain Turkish stability, and defeat ISIS and AQAP, while contributing as little militarily as possible
- Maintain and expand lucrative trade ties to countries in the region and make the most out of the economic opportunities arising out of the Iran deal

Sources of Leverage

Convening Power - Germany's membership in the EU and NATO provides it with important means to shape the positions of and efforts of these actors and thus increase its influence.
Economic - As an important economy, de facto leader of the EU, and recognized soft power its open and covert diplomacy can reach and influence most parties involved in the conflict. Also funds refugee relief efforts and technology to equip actors in the region with arms.
Military - Reluctant to use armed forces, but participates in military efforts to tackle Islamists in the region and could increase participation

Regional Strategy

Pushing for diplomatic talks to end the Syrian civil war and exclude Bashar al-Assad from government. It contributes to tackling the threat from Islamist terrorist groups militarily, yet limits its own contribution to indirect measures. While it openly criticizes Turkey for the degradation of civil liberties, it continues to be supportive of the EU-Turkey deal and provides funding for refugee relief efforts. Economically speaking, the country maintains close economic ties to the Gulf states and attempts to capture a large market share in Iran.

Powerful Individuals

Chancellor Angela Merkel (head of the federal government; Christian Democratic Union Party);Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel; Permanent Representative to the UN Harold Braun

Potential Negotiation Moves

Military - Could assume military responsibilities from EU/NATO member states in low-risk scenarios to free their assets to fight ISIS.
Expand Training Programs - Could expand its existing training and equipment programs to militias for Kurds of Iraq and Kurds of Syria.
Refugee Funding - Could provide further funding to incentivize refugees to remain in relatively safe areas in the region.
Alter Sanctions - Could influence the remainder of the EU to alter existing sanctions targeted at actors in the region or unilaterally alter its armaments exports regime to the Gulf monarchies and Israel.

Internal Conflicts

Germany is relatively stable politically and has very few internal divisions. The main governing and opposition parties agree on the broad lines of Germany's policy. Nonetheless, members of the governing coalition have criticized the welcoming attitude towards refugees and opposition groups and the country's Turkey policy after the attempted military coup. There are some societal tensions over the sudden influx of refugees from the Middle East since 2015. This has contributed to the rise of the AfD, a new right-wing populist political party.

Memberships

EU, IAEA, NATO, OECD, OSCE, UN

Allies

FRANCE, HOLY SEE, ISRAEL, TURKEY, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Partners

IRAN

Rivals

RUSSIA

Adversaries

SYRIA Government

Active Armed Opponents

AQAP, ISIS

Proxy

KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

TURKEY, MOROCCO, EGYPT

Aid Donor

UNITED NATIONS

HOLY SEE

Party Portrait

The Holy See is the diplomatic arm of the Pope as the head of the global Catholic Church and the leader of the Vatican city state.. In the Middle East, the Holy See considers itself to have moral responsibility to the mass exodus of Christians fleeing persecution and to address the escalation of violence and conflict. The Catholic Church has opened itself to interfaith dialogue and promoted nonviolent conflict resolution. The Holy See has a wide informant network due to the community of Christians, Catholic NGOs, educational institutions, priests and religious communities across the Middle East. They also use their global diplomatic ties with world powers such as the US, European Nations, and the United Nations to advance their priorities. The Holy See will generally refuse to take one side in a conflict.

Key Interests

- Protect Christians and maintain Christian presence in "the Holy Land"
- Protect Church legal rights and property
- Defend human rights, international law, and self-determination
- Promote regional peace and understanding through non-violent conflict resolution, dialogue, and diplomacy

Sources of Leverage

Convening Power - As it has no military or economic arm, it can effectively leverage its moral authority as a convening power.
Soft Power – Can communicate with governments all over the world via its ecclesiastical structure. Widespread local parochial networks give it strong local legitimacy. It sees no country as an enemy and is willing to maintain all possible channels of communication.
Political – Diplomatic relations with 177 countries including all Middle Eastern countries except Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Regional Strategy

The Holy See seeks to communicate with all parties to stop the violence in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Under Pope Francis, the Holy See has made assertive moves to avoid further stagnation of these conflicts. They have conducted the following moves: developed a theological (and closed-door political) relationship with the Ayatollahs in Iran; mended a relationship with the Maronite Church in Lebanon of which the new Lebanese president is a member; continued diplomatic relations with Syria's Assad while simultaneously calling on him to honor humanitarian norms; established diplomatic ties with the State of Palestine; engaged in ongoing negotiations with Israel while recognizing its right to statehood and security. The Holy See intends to continue to use methods of dialogue, diplomacy, and non-violent conflict resolution to pursue its interests in the Middle East.

Powerful Individuals

Pope Francis (Sovereign of Vatican City State), Cardinal Pietro Parolin (Holy See Secretary of State), Bishop Paul Richard Gallagher (Holy See Secretary for Relations with States), Cardinal Mario Zenari (Holy See Ambassador to Syria), Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi (Leader of Maronite Catholic Church)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Use relationship with Iran to advocate for the continuity of diplomatic peace and nuclear disarmament talks between Iran and US Republican leadership under President Trump.
Work within the Iran/Russia/Lebanon Axis to put pressure on President Assad's response to Syrian rebels.
Use ongoing negotiations and diplomatic relationships with Israel to promote the two-state solution with Palestine. Play a track II role between the Palestinians and the US Trump Administration.

Internal Conflicts

The Catholic Church in the Middle East has seven Arabic speaking rites. The Maronite rite is centered in Lebanon and has its own Patriarch. These relationships are sensitive to history and culture. During the Lebanese civil war, Maronite factions fought for Christian power against perceived Muslim exclusion of Christians. There are many other Christian denominations in the Middle East, and their common Christian roots do not guarantee homogeneity or agreement.

Memberships

IAEA, OSCE, UN (Non-Member Observer)

Allies

FRANCE, GERMANY, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES

Partners

BAHRAIN, EGYPT Government, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAN, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KUWAIT, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, QATAR, RUSSIA, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Rivals

ALGERIA, OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA, SYRIA Government, YEMEN Government

Adversaries

ISIS

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Party Portrait

As global challenges including civil wars, climate change, and forced displacement increase, states are less able to address the growing need with the resources they have. Humanitarian organizations have mobilized to address these challenges across the globe through access, assistance, and protection. These organizations maintain neutrality and impartiality and serve populations in need through independent and humane means, including negotiation and mediation. This table represents a broad range of UN organizations and international non-governmental organizations.

Key Interests

- Alleviate suffering and protect populations from harm through coordinated assistance efforts
- Promote human rights, economic growth, sustainable development, and adherence to international law
- Maintain organizational flexibility and autonomy as much as possible
- Ensure sustained, safe access to populations in need

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power – can credibly act as mediators in certain cases
Economic – Relationships with donors provide financial resources for use as leverage
Convening Power – Drawing on their neutrality, may be able to bring other parties to negotiations, particularly concerning cease fires, access to resources and aid, and other humanitarian concerns
Political – Can mobilize political support, though must be consistent with principles of neutrality and impartiality
Technology – Can provide technological assistance, needed resources, new models of partnering with local communities

Regional Strategy

Organizations coordinate with one another, local organizations, local government, and donors. Humanitarian actors use the cluster system to prepare, mobilize, offer assistance and protection, and coordinate efforts across sectors and regions, ensuring that mobilization is swift, targeted, and efficient. Humanitarian actors often negotiate with governments and armed groups for cease-fires and access to populations in need.

Powerful Individuals

Stephen O'Brien (Under-Secretary General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, UNOCHA), Filippo Grandi (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Act as Mediator - Mediate as neutral party for humanitarian corridors and cease-fire agreements;
Restructure System - Restructure cluster system and inter-organizational coordination to better meet pressing needs in cross-cutting issue areas;
Threaten Cessation - Threaten to cease all aid if certain conditions are not met (i.e. cease fire);

Internal Conflicts

In many cases, humanitarian organizations compete with one another for funding and support, which can hinder collaboration, coordination, and innovation. Organizations disagree on the extent to which one should compromise on neutrality to provide aid and on the best strategies for implementing aid programs. Organizations include but are not limited to: CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Doctors Without Borders, International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Mercy Corps, Oxfam International, Save the Children, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, UNRWA, World Food Program, World Health Organization, World Vision.

Memberships

N/A -- the label of 'Humanitarian Actors' is too broad to allow for categorizations of memberships. Some organizations listed above are organizations within the UN system.

Allies

CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, JAPAN, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

Partners

ALGERIA, ARAB LEAGUE, BAHRAIN, DJIBOUTI, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of TURKEY, LEBANON Government, LIBYA Government of National Accord, MOROCCO Government, OMAN, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, TURKEY

Rivals

IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, PALESTINE Hamas, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, RUSSIA, SOMALIA Government, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis

Adversaries

AQAP, ISIS

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

IRAQ State of Law Coalition, JORDAN, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, LIBYA Government of National Accord, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, TURKEY, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis

Aid Donor

CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, HOLY SEE, JAPAN, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

INDIA

Party Portrait

India's foreign policy continues to be dogged by a lingering "third worldism" and "anti-Western framework", in addition to conflict narratives shaped during the British colonial period and the Cold War. At the same time, with robust economic growth, military modernization, and rapprochement with the US, India increasingly sees itself rising to great-power status. Both India's past and present identity, however, seem to justify and suggest that a strategy of international restraint will endure. India's Middle Eastern policy, consistent with this broad global stance, can be characterized as "reactive and incremental", despite the country's substantial and ever-growing interests in the region along economic and security fronts.

Key Interests

- Seek new military equipment, expertise and funding to strengthen the government's domestic hold on power
- Secure energy supplies, including crude oil and natural gas
- Increase export markets for Indian goods and access to imports
- Ensure continued ability for Indian migrants in the Middle East to send remittances home
- Build alliances with Middle Eastern countries to balance Pakistan, including with Saudi Arabia
- Prevent Saudi Arabia from funding Sunni extremist groups in Pakistan

Sources of Leverage

Economic - India is a major trading partner for many Middle Eastern countries.
Military - India has consistently contributed forces to UN peace operations in the Middle East since the 1950s.

Regional Strategy

India tries to maintain a strategic balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran, between the US and Iran, and between the Israelis and the Arab Palestinians. India no longer attempts to take sides in inter-Arab disputes but instead developed relations with each country in a bilateral and separate fashion. In practice, however, it has favored one side over another. For instance, it still enjoys stronger relations with Iran over Saudi Arabia as the latter allegedly supports Sunni extremist groups and has strong ties with Pakistan. India maintains its position for anti-interventionism and non-coercive measures. For instance, Congress Party-led government strongly opposed NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya against Gaddafi by arguing that Libyan repression was an internal affair, and sided closely to Russian and Chinese positions.

Powerful Individuals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval

Potential Negotiation Moves

Play Active Role - Assume more active role in regional multilateral organizations
Act as Mediator - Engage "good offices" in regional disputes, mediating dialogue and peace processes as a neutral broker

Internal Conflicts

Hindu-Muslim ethnic divisions continue to divide the country, particularly in the wake of the nomination of a controversial Hindu nationalist BJP candidate as First Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Kashmir stokes tension with Pakistan.

Memberships	Allies
IAEA, UN	N/A

Partners	Rivals
FRANCE, IRAN, ISRAEL, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES	CHINA, RUSSIA

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
EUROPEAN UNION, JAPAN, UNITED STATES	N/A

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Party Portrait

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) play a critical role in providing development and financial support, as well as technical assistance, to countries across the Middle East and North Africa. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Islamic Development Bank, African Development Bank, European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are among the most important IFIs operating in the region.

Key Interests

- Contribute to stabilizing the region;
- Support economic development, social inclusion, and poverty alleviation efforts; and
- Support the recovery and reconstruction of the region, particularly for those countries impacted by conflict or forced displacement

Sources of Leverage

Financial Support – IFIs are some of the most important international lenders, providing critical development aid and economic assistance programs to developing countries

Political Support – Given their international clout, IFIs can extend political support to a country's economic policies or poverty alleviation programs

Convening Power –The broad membership and international influence of IFIs allow them to convene a wide range of parties in efforts to mobilize funding, develop partnerships, or raise awareness

Regional Strategy

Though each IFI adopts independent strategies, broadly they share the goal of fostering economic development and social inclusion. In recent years, given rising levels of conflict, IFIs have also sought to play a more active role in promoting peace and stability across the region.

Powerful Individuals

Jim Yong Kim (President, World Bank), Christine Lagarde (Managing Director, IMF), Bandar Hajjar (President, Islamic Development Bank), Akinwumi Adesina (President, African Development Bank), Werner Hoyer (President, European Investment Bank), Suma Chakrabarti (President, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Increase Financial Support – IFIs can support stability across the region by increasing their development and financial assistance, and can particularly play a key role in transition countries such as Tunisia

Mobilize Funds for Reconstruction and Forced Displacement – Given the scale of conflicts across the region, IFIs can play a critical role in mobilizing the vast amounts needed to support countries impacted by refugee crises, as well as post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya

Focus on Conflict Prevention – Increasingly, IFIs may focus on supporting conflict prevention programs, for example by promoting citizen engagement, targeting aid to disadvantaged groups, or addressing long-standing social and economic grievances

Internal Conflicts

N/A

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
UNITED NATIONS, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, ARAB LEAGUE, EUROPEAN UNION	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
EGYPT Government, TUNISIA, JORDAN, MOROCCO Government, LEBANON Government, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, PALESTINE Fatah, YEMEN Government	N/A

IRAN

Party Portrait

Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a theocratic system of government. Iran's largest ethnicity (Persian) comprises two-thirds of the population, the largest religion (Shia Islam) is close to 90% of the population, and the largest language (Persian) is spoken by half of the population. Only 3% of Iran's population are immigrants, which reinforces the strength of the country's shared history, culture, and identity. Iran has been designated by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism for its support of Hezbollah in Lebanon and remains subject to US, UN, and EU economic sanctions.

Key Interests

- Counter Sunni power in Middle East
- Limit American/Western Influence in the region
- Reduce Israel's influence in the region
- Improve economy including expanding oil exports
- Defeat ISIS
- Support Palestinian cause and its militant proxies against Israel
- Increase spread of political Islam in the region
- Maintain internal security including threat from Balochistan Province

Sources of Leverage

Military - Two-pronged ownership over its clandestine nuclear program and purse strings for regional militias. Able to use it as a strong bargaining chip to achieve better economic and political outcomes, or to incite fear
Economic – Burgeoning economy, potential to become massive global exporter and consumer
Energy - Impressive oil reserves and refusal to kowtow to GCC requests has created significant economic tension, while simultaneously pumping critical funds into the Iranian economy.

Regional Strategy

Given the Islamic Republic's history of isolationism and pervasive Persian-Shia identity, Iran's external conflicts are characterized by both strong adherences to current positions and weak international relations. Iran has attempted to build regional coalitions along ethnic and religious lines, but the hardline nature of political leadership has hampered partnerships with neighbors and the West.

Powerful Individuals

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani, Speaker of Parliament Ali Larijani, Chief Justice Sadeq Larijani, Chairman of the Guardian Council Ahmad Jannati

Potential Negotiation Moves

Normalize US/EU Relations – By continuing to abide by the Iran Nuclear Deal and increasing ties with the West, Iran can continue to access European markets including exporting its oil
Play Russia and US Rivalry – Iran could exacerbate the American/Russian rivalry by playing each great power off the other.
Use Assad Regime Support as Bargaining Chip – Iran could negotiate with the West, using a relinquishing of their support for Syria to gain concessions

Internal Conflicts

Some political modernization has occurred in the past decade, particularly under the more moderate leadership of Presidents Khatami and Hassan Rouhani. Now, even though relations with the US are not yet thawed despite the nuclear agreement, and conservative Muslim clerics continue to view the US as an aggressor, much of Iran's population is ready to move toward a position of partnership with the West. The Republic Right represent the most West-leaning views, and has helped with recent progressive outcomes such as the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Memberships

IAEA, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies

PALESTINE Hamas, LEBANON Hezbollah, SYRIA Government, LEBANON Government, YEMEN Houthis, KUWAIT, OMAN, Russia, IRAQ al-Ahrar Sadrist Party, IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council, IRAQ Sadrist Movement,

Partners

RUSSIA, EGYPT Government, JORDAN, EUROPEAN UNION, GERMANY, CHINA, JAPAN, INDIA, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, FRANCE, HOLY SEE, TUNISIA, QATAR, OMAN, ARAB LEAGUE, INDIA, KUWAIT, SOMALIA al-Shabaab

Rivals

SAUDI ARABIA, YEMEN Government, JORDAN, SUDAN, SOUTH SUDAN, EGYPT Government, NATO, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMERITES

Adversaries

SAUDI ARABIA, BAHRAIN, ISRAEL, ISIS, SOMALIA Government, LEBANON Government, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, SYRIA Jabhat Fatah a-Sham, UNITED STATES, LEBANON Government, GCC, UNITED NATIONS

Active Armed Opponents

KURDS of Iran, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, AQAP

Proxy

YEMEN Houthis, Syria Government, KURDS of Iran, PALESTINE Hamas, IRAQ State of Law Coalition

External Sponsor

RUSSIA

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A

IRAQ SADRIST MOVEMENT

Party Portrait

The Sadrist movement, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, is an Iraqi Islamist national movement supported by Iraqi Shia. The philosophy of the movement centers on religious sharia laws, traditional tribal customs, and anti-American Iraqi nationalism. After the US removed Saddam Hussein from power, al-Sadr's movement became more public, turning a poor suburb of Baghdad where his followers lived into "Sadr City." In 2010, the Sadrist movement became a part of the Iraqi National Alliance, running for parliamentary election with a platform of expelling the United States from Iraq.

Key Interests

- Maintain Shia power in Baghdad
- Increase Iranian influence in Baghdad
- Reduce US and Saudi influence in Iraq
- Establish sharia law in Iraq

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power – The Sadrist movement maintains religious authority and support from Iraqi's majority Shias
Economic - The movement enjoys support (financial and ideological) from Iran
Political - The Ahrar party currently holds 34 seats in the Council of Representatives.

Regional Strategy

The Sadrist movement's main strategy centers on appealing to Iraqi Shias who felt marginalized and victimized by Saddam Hussein and subsequent international interference. The movement protests the Abadi government because of its ties to US influence in Iraq.

Powerful Individuals

Muqtada al-Sadr (leader of movement)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Improve Relations with Iran – to increase Shia political power and block coalition building
Block Abdai - Continue divisive rhetoric, protest, and actions that render Abdai ineffective and block attempts to subsume religious identity beneath a more holistic Iraqi nationalism
Build Coalition - Create coalition with other groups around shared interests and leave National Alliance

Internal Conflicts

Internal differences hinge on the extent to which the movement should forge deeper ties with Iran or build cross-sect coalition within Iraq. Members of the movement support different groups in Syria and disagree about the best strategy there.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
IRAQ Supreme Islamic Council	HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, KURDS of Iraq, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, SAUDI ARABIA

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
UNITED STATES	ISIS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	IRAN

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

IRAQ SECULAR NATIONALIST PARTIES

Party Portrait

The Secular Nationalist parties of Iraq (including the Wataniyya party and the Iraqiyoon party) currently hold approximately 15 percent of the seats in the Council of Representatives. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, they were part of the Iraqiyya coalition. Their main constituencies are regionally-based, particularly in the Sunni regions of Nanawa and the Anbar, and their stated goals are to create a united Iraq based on Iraqi nationalism, not ethno-sectarian considerations.

Key Interests

- Balance against the powerful Shia block in the Baghdadi government
- Support Iraqi nationalism as a basis for good governance
- Reduce influence of Iran in Baghdad
- Foster relationships with other regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia

Sources of Leverage

Political – Iraqi nationalist parties currently hold approximately 15 percent of the seats in the Council of Representatives

Soft Power- High profile members have relationships with foreign governments (United States, Saudi Arabia) and use diplomacy/soft power to leverage interests domestically

Regional Strategy

The party leverages its position within parliament to legitimize coalition's goals and employs key players to help ameliorate sectarian divisions in Iraq and reduce Tehran's influence in Iraq.

Powerful Individuals

Osama al-Naijafi (former Speaker of the Parliament), Ayad Allawi (former Interim Prime Minister, member of al Wifaq, and Wataniyya)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Reconfigure Government - Reconfigure Iraqi government in order to (i) end governance based on confessional identities and (ii) empower mixed coalitions (which include Sunni, Shia, Kurdish and independent parties) to rule instead of singular, ethno-sectarian parties.

Build Coalitions - Build coalitions with various international powers (including Saudi Arabia and United States) to balance against Iran, maintain Western interest and investment in Iraq, and promote cooperation.

Internal Conflicts

Failure to consolidate the Wataniyya government allowed Maliki to retain power for his second term – this caused internal division and controversy in the coalitions.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, KURDS of Iraq, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED STATES	IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, IRAQ Sadrist Movement

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
IRAN	ISIS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	UNITED STATES, TURKEY

IRAQ STATE OF LAW COALITION

Party Portrait

The State of Law Coalition was formed in 2009 by Nouri al-Maliki, then Prime Minister of Iraq. The coalition was originally formed to empower its (primarily Shia) members -- including the Islamic Dawa Party -- in the 2009 Iraqi governorate elections. In 2010, the coalition incorporated a few additional parties and ran in the Iraqi parliamentary elections, winning a majority of seats. The coalition also ran in the 2013 governorate elections, winning fewer seats than in 2009. Haider al-Abadi, who assumed office in September 2014, is now the Prime Minister of Iraq.

Key Interests

- Dismantle government quota system in favor of a "governing majority" that favors the parliamentary majority (State of Law)
- Consolidate Dawa Party and other participating parties' power
- Maliki: Seek revenge against Sunni minority in Iraq and dismantle Sunni power, particularly within the security sector
- Abadi: Increase coexistence measures with Sunnis and Kurds

Sources of Leverage

Political – The Coalition currently holds 94/325 seats of Parliament and the current Prime Minister of Iraq is a member of a participating party (The Dawa Party). The former Prime Minister of Iraq is the current leader of The Dawa Party. The Dawa Party is credible for its historic opposition to Saddam Hussein
Economic - The oil industry provides 90% of government revenue, though low oil prices in recent years have caused economic volatility
Geographic - With ISIS fighting in Iraqi territory, the Iraqi government can leverage its position to gain assistance from others

Regional Strategy

The coalition's strategy includes using its position within parliament to achieve its interests, and leveraging sectarian tensions to consolidate power and justify increasing executive authority. Under Abadi, strategy includes reforms to stabilize the country and decrease corruption.

Powerful Individuals

Haider al-Abadi (Prime Minister of Iraq, Dawa Party), Nouri al-Maliki (Former Prime Minister, Dawa Party), Kamal Saadi (Leader, State of Law Coalition), Ali al-Sistani (spiritual leader)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Reconfigure Government - Reconfigure Iraqi government to (i) end governance based on confessional identities and (ii) empower mixed coalitions (which include Sunni, Shia, Kurdish and independent parties) to rule instead of singular, ethno-sectarian parties.
Connect with Kurds - Increase ties to Erbil and benefit from the Kurds' networks, military strategy, and oil exportation capacities.
Empower Women - Move past sectarian division, create stronger ties with the international community, and become a regional leader in support of human rights.
Ally with Russia, Iran - Forge deeper ties with Russia and Iran to increase power against ISIS.
Russia vs. US - Play Russia and US against one another in contest to fight ISIS from Iraqi territory, access oil market, etc.

Internal Conflicts

Current tensions exist between Dawa Party elites that want to keep quota system in government and retain Abadi and those that do not. Both Sunni and Shia politicians have sought to remove Abadi from power in the past. Abadi has criticized Maliki's divisive governing, resulting in tensions between the two.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, IAEA, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies
N/A

Partners
EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, HOLY SEE, IRAN, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, RUSSIA, UNITED STATES

Rivals
IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council, ISRAEL, KURDS of Iraq, KUWAIT, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, SAUDI ARABIA, SUDAN, SYRIA Government

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
ISIS

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IRAN, RUSSIA, UNITED STATES

IRAQ SUPREME ISLAMIC COUNCIL

Party Portrait

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (SIIC) began in the 1980s in Iran, under the name Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). This party represents Shia Islamist political party, and The SIIC's ideology supports Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran's thinking that the Islamic Government should and must be controlled by Islamic scholars (ulema).

Key Interests

- Increase Shia power in Baghdad
- Promote religious conservatism and clericalism in Iraq
- De-centralize Iraqi government and create Shia zone in the south

Sources of Leverage

Political – The SIIC currently has 29 seats in the Council of Representatives and has the support of Iran and many of Iraq's Shias
Geography - The SIIC largely controls the major city of Basra
Soft Power - Rampant sectarianism, and the efficacy of the Kurdish autonomous zone, lend credence to the argument that a separate Shia zone could be established in the south of Iraq, with Basra as its capital

Regional Strategy

The SIIC maintains a strategy of increasing Iranian support to impose clericalism on Iraq. In addition, the party also aims to increase SIIC presence in the executive branch of Baghdadi government.

Powerful Individuals

Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim (former party leader, d. 2003), Abdul Aziz al-Hakim (former party leader, d. 2009), Ammar al-Hakim (current leader)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Establish Shia Zone - Leverage sectarianism and support of Iran to establish Shia zone in south of Iraq with Basra at the helm;
Strength Iran Ties - Leverage this zone to stabilize Iraq's Shias, implement clericism, and promote stronger political and economic relations with Iran.

Internal Conflicts

Previously linked with the Badr Brigade (formerly the militant wing of SIIC), with which SIIC now cooperates in the Parliament but is no longer explicitly linked.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
IRAQ Sadrist Movement	HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, KURDS of Iraq

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
UNITED STATES	ISIS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	IRAN

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

ISIS

Party Portrait

ISIS is a violent extremist organization that has claimed statehood by capturing large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria. A successor to al-Qaeda in Iraq and proclaiming itself a caliphate, it catapulted onto the global stage with military victories in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, the group has been characterized by its particular brutality, and the pledges of allegiance it has received from jihadist groups across the world, from Nigeria to the Philippines. Battles against Iraqi, US, Syrian, Russian and Turkish forces, among others, continue across Iraq and Syria.

Key Interests

- Uphold the caliphate, and continuing to spread across the Middle East and Africa through allegiances with other jihadist groups;
- Conquer, maintain, and regain territory, particularly throughout Syria and Iraq; and
- Destabilize states across the MENA region and the West through terror attacks and the establishment of franchises.

Sources of Leverage

Military – By building on the lessons al-Qaeda learned during the Iraqi insurgency and building a sophisticated military campaign.

Financial – Their revenue comes from cash looted from major cities, oil and gas black markets, kidnapping and ransoms, taxes within their territory, and an unspecified amount of donations.

Manpower - ISIS can be broken up into key groups: (i) its leadership; (ii) foreign fighters; (iii) Syrian and Iraqi fighters; and (iv) populations under its control.

Intelligence - Drawing on former Ba'athist leaders' experience in Saddam Hussein's military and intelligence agencies, ISIS' success is rooted in its ability to quell internal dissent and coerce local leaders to put up minimal resistance.

Propaganda - Invoke messages of brutality, mercy, victimhood, and belonging through professional-quality propaganda efforts.

Regional Strategy

Focus on territorial conquest using foreign fighters in Syria and Sunni tribesmen in Iraq; utilize suicide and car bombings to destabilize regional enemies; leverage its extensive recruitment networks across Europe, North Africa, and Asia to bring in additional foreign fighters; and inspire both cells of trained attackers and lone wolf attacks to terrorize states across the West and the Middle East and North Africa.

Powerful Individuals

"Caliph Ibrahim" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi continues to provide the strategic leadership of ISIS; many of their military commanders in Syria and Iraq are former Ba'athist officials; though deceased, Hajji Bakr was key in building the intelligence apparatus and managing the alliance between Ba'athists and violent extremist elements; though deceased, Abu al-Amri managed brigades of foreign fighters and developed their online presence as a Syrian fighter

Potential Negotiation Moves

Negotiate with Assad - Continue side negotiations with the Assad regime – or elements close to the regime – to exchange oil and natural gas for electricity, or with regards to ransoms.

Economic/Political Negotiations - Though ISIS has demonstrated a limited willingness to negotiate for its economic interests (i.e. with regards to oil), it has to date shown no instance of making any political concessions through negotiation.

Internal Conflicts

ISIS is a factionalized alliance between violent extremists, former Ba'athist military and intelligence officials of Saddam Hussein's regime, Sunni Iraqi tribal leaders, local Syrian and Iraqi fighters, and foreign fighters. Overall, ISIS' previous grouping of fighters by country or language of origin has strengthened rivalries between the different factions, and as they have lost territory, disputes over the allocation of resources and goals have emerged.

Memberships

ISIS does not recognize any authority besides its own. Therefore, it does not participate in established governance mechanisms or organizations, nor does it adhere to international resolutions or norms.

Allies

The Islamic State in Libya, The Islamic State in Sinai (formerly Ansar Bait al-Maqdis), Boko Haram, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Abu Sayyaf

Partners

N/A

Rivals

Al-Qaeda, SYRIA Jebhat Fatah al-Sham

Adversaries

N/A

Active Armed Opponents

SYRIA Government, SYRIA Ahrar al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, KURDS OF IRAQ, TURKEY, USA, RUSSIA, International Coalition against the Islamic State,

Proxy

ISIS presumably receive funding from donors, some of which may be in the Gulf.

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A

ISRAEL

Party Portrait

Israel was established in 1948 as the national homeland for the Jewish people. Following the 1967 war, Israel annexed the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem and began civil and military administration of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Israel withdrew from Area A of the West Bank in 1993 following the Oslo Accords, and from Gaza in 2005. Attempts to negotiate a final status agreement have failed since then. As a small country, the only democracy in an unstable region, a Jewish nation surrounded by Arab and Muslim states, Israel believes it must maintain impressive deterrence capabilities and military power.

Key Interests

- Weaken Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis and radical Salafi groups, strengthen moderate Sunni states, weaken Russia's support of Syria, prevent Iran nuclear capabilities, weaken Iran's economic/military support to Hezbollah, strengthen Jordan
- Revive Israel-Palestinian negotiations, promote refugee regional solution with minimal political cost
- Achieve recognition by Arab states, weaken boycott attempts, recovering international reputation, maintain effective diplomacy, maintain access to water, natural resources

Sources of Leverage

Military – Possesses substantial military power with offensive and defensive capabilities and military, security industry. Nuclear-armed.
Technology – 1 of 6 global cyber powers, increases diplomatic leverage
Natural Resources – Preferential access to aquifers in West Bank
Economic – Export-oriented state, limited natural resources and small market. Economic strength mainly from science/tech sectors, innovative capabilities and startup industry
Political – Strong alliance with the US despite its international reputation deteriorating in recent years

Regional Strategy

Help stabilize Jordanian and Egyptian regimes with parallel support from Saudi Arabia, coordinate with Russia on effects/spillover of Syrian war to Israeli territory, renew/expand relations with Turkey, and improve coordination with US administration. Cultural, political, and humanitarian "hasbara" (public relations) to portray Israel in a positive light in international conversations and delegitimize detractors. It presses for a more favorable and permanent nuclear deal with Iran while maintaining the status quo in relation to Palestinians and continuing to build within/expand settlements.

Powerful Individuals

Benjamin Netanyahu (Prime Minister), Avigdor Liberman (Defense Minister), Naftali Bennett (Education Minister), Yair Lapid (Leader of Yesh Atid Party), Yitzak Herzog (Head of opposition and leader of the Zionist Union), Leaders of the Settlers

Potential Negotiation Moves

Deepen US Relationship - Build relationship with new US administration while continuing to build settlements and secure borders
New Regional Coalition - Build coalition or create bilateral agreements with countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey for increased regional legitimacy
Control Resources - Leverage control of PA tax funds and control of movement within and out of the West Bank as bargaining chip
Integrate "outside-in" and "inside-out" - Aim to create a triangular structure of concessions and profits between Israel, the PA and moderate Sunni Arab states.
Internal moves - Change coalition government and consolidate fragmented Israeli society.

Internal Conflicts

Majority of Israeli public supports the "Two State Solution." Right-wing groups support annexation of Palestinian territories, while some left-wing groups support a "One State" or binational solution. Center-left public believes the Israeli national interest is to act urgently towards a peace agreement and/or disengagement, through negotiations or unilateral measures; center-right groups counter that Israel should maintain the status quo until circumstances change. Right wing advocates for tough military actions to defeat terror, left wing calls for diplomatic/political measures to achieve peaceful resolution. The political structure produces fragile coalition governments with excessive power to small political groups. Religious-secular divide: extreme right is orthodox and rejects the separation of religion and state; central and left wing groups hold more secular liberal views.

Memberships
IAEA, MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, OECD, UN

Allies
GERMANY, NATO, UNITED STATES

Partners
EGYPT Government, ERITREA, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, HOLY SEE, INDIA, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, RUSSIA, SOUTH SUDAN, TURKEY, UNITED KINGDOM

Rivals
PALESTINE Fatah, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED NATIONS

Adversaries
AQAP, ARAB LEAGUE, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, IRAN, ISIS, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Hamas, SUDAN, SYRIA Government, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, SOUTH SUDAN

Aid Donor
UNITED STATES

JAPAN

Party Portrait

Japan's current identity and security narratives were largely shaped during the post-World War II era. Its defeat to the US and the nuclear bombing in its territory continue to represent a national trauma, which resulted in public revulsion at militarism. Japan has thus evolved into an economic and a non-military great power. Its main interest lies in promoting an international system governed by economic interdependence and stable international institutions. The US-Japan alliance, which is rooted in a military agreement by which US provides a security umbrella in the volatile regional security of East Asia, makes Japan somewhat dependent on the US. Japan sees itself as politically distant from East Asia and geopolitically more closely aligned to the US. However, several factors have pushed Japan to incrementally transition from being an almost exclusively economic power to assume greater military capacity. First, Japan has faced stagnation in its economic growth since the 1990s. It has also faced an increasingly challenging security environment with China's increasingly bellicose behavior and North Korea's nuclear development.

Key Interests

- Maintain a good relationship with the GCC due to energy considerations
- Establish a foothold in Iran and Iraq
- Balance partnership with the US in developing new relationships with US adversaries in the region
- Prevent US from adopting measures that are considered by regional actors to be hostile or antagonizing
- Limit Chinese involvement in the Middle East & North Africa

Sources of Leverage

Economic - One of the big purchasers of the region's resources and growing economic interdependence with the GCC countries through mutually beneficial energy cooperation and legal frameworks. In addition, since the 1970s, Japan has become one of the top donors to the region, leveraging increasing soft power through consistent support and development assistance.
Military - Despite limits imposed on Japan's offensive activities by Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Japan has nevertheless slowly expanded its military capacity in the region.

Regional Strategy

In order to secure energy resources, Japan tries to develop good relations with the Middle Eastern countries. With this objective, the Japanese government is attempting to build a more multi-layered relationship that includes politics, security, and culture. The Japanese government is actively involved in securing resources abroad by funding Japanese companies and has been promoting a number of infrastructure projects and joint investments in the GCC countries. Due to the dilemma it faces between the US and the Middle Eastern countries, Japan promotes diplomatic neutrality in the region's conflicts by balancing between the two. While Japan has more often closely aligned with the US in its Middle East strategy, it also has sought to maintain a policy that stands apart from the US to preserve its neutral stance. Japan also puts emphasis on non-coercive measures, humanitarian support, and economic development in its approach to Middle East conflicts and peace process.

Powerful Individuals

Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (President of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); Normalist); Relatively weak leaders of opposition party including Renho Murata of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Potential Negotiation Moves

Increase foreign direct investment (FDI) - In Middle East
Facilitate peace processes and reconciliation dialogues in the region
Support negotiated ceasefire in Syria conflict
Separate itself from US-led efforts to promote democracy and human rights, and perceived initiatives to "impose" Western values on the Middle East.

Internal Conflicts

Within Japan, four ideological groups exist with regards to Japan's involvement and the role of the JSDF in international conflicts, which directly affect Japan's Middle East policy: Pacifists (opposing all involvement in overseas conflicts), Mercantilists (prioritize economy over defense), Normalists (support deployment of troops overseas and normalization of JSDF), Nationalists (strong support of remilitazation).

Memberships
IAEA, OECD, UN (Security Council -- term ends 2017)

Allies
UNITED STATES

Partners
BAHRAIN, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, IRAN, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON Government, OMAN, QATAR, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UAE, YEMEN Government, GCC, IRAN

Rivals
CHINA

Adversaries
ISIS

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
ALGERIA, EGYPT Government, IRAQ Government, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, LIBYA GNA, MOROCCO Government, PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY, SYRIA Government, TUNISIA, YEMEN Government

JORDAN

Party Portrait

The Jordanian monarchy maintains a robust authoritarian grip, undergirded by dependence on Western institutions and the United States for aid. Although there have been serious attempts at reform within Jordan over the past few decades, the reluctance of the monarchy to relinquish control and the manipulation of the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front have hindered these efforts. Western sponsorship has made this possible and encouraged the monarchy's unpopular cooperation with Israel, against the desires of the Jordanian-Palestinian majority. Further liberalization or destabilization of the state could incentivize King Abdullah II to act with the sole intent of preserving the monarchy, even if doing so would counter Western allegiances.

Key Interests

- Internally, sustain power through maintaining economic stability, promoting social cohesion, and national identity
- Maintain economic and security support from outside powers
- Promote the stability of other authoritarian regimes in ME
- Delegitimize democratic reforms (esp. Muslim-Brotherhood-led)
- End refugee crisis within Jordan's borders and beyond
- Stabilize environmental, food, water and economic resources

Sources of Leverage

Geography – Stability within Jordan is lynchpin for stability in Israel-Palestine, broader ME. Jordan is a buffer state for regional neighbors
Military - Well-funded military that acquired much of its material from American military sales, with highly capable intelligence
Soft Power – Broad regional amicability as a moderate state
Economic – High quality higher education facilities and healthcare despite other economic difficulties
Political – Allied with Western powers offers both economic and political leverage

Regional Strategy

Aims to maintain amicable connections with any actor who could hold leverage over them and to maintain a neutral stance unless asked by allies to cooperate in a multilateral effort. Goal is to sustain Jordanian monarchy at any cost. Aims to support Western efforts in Syria and Libya, and Saudi strategy in the Gulf while not alienating Iranian allies (Iraq or Lebanon). Focus diplomatic efforts on solution to Israel-Palestine conflict that allows the stability of the Jordanian monarchy. Appealing to the US and international bodies for political, military, and economic assistance.

Powerful Individuals

King Abdullah II (reigning monarch); Queen Rania (Palestinian wife of Abdullah), Hussein bin Abdullah II (heir to the throne)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Democratize - Initiate internal democratic reforms to form stronger alliances, or to demand more forcefully a Palestinian state
Repress reform - Repress reform efforts more harshly;
Exit - Threaten to exit partnerships with the US, Saudi Arabia, and Israel if interests are not met, particularly around economic support;
Russia - Align with the Russian-sponsored Assad regime against American-sponsored rebel groups in Syria if shifting realities on the ground reflect a lasting government presence on the Jordanian border.

Internal Conflicts

Conflict exists between "ethnic Jordanian," or "Jordo-Jordanian" citizens and Palestinian Jordanians; Palestinian Jordanians are underrepresented and disadvantaged by Hashemite monarchy's preference towards Jordo-Jordanians. Allegiance to Western states, while tolerated by most citizens, provokes anger in subsets of the population, specifically for participation in Jordanian-Israeli peace process and cooperation in U.S. invasion of Iraq and Syrian war. A divide exists between Islamist, anti-government parties led by the Islamic Action Front and the loyalist parties backed by the monarchy. It is illegal to criticize the monarchy, so the scope of public disagreement is limited. Conflicts also exist between Syrian, Iraqi, and Sudanese refugees and Jordanians, and between foreign workers and Jordanian nationals. Strong economic divisions separate wealthy elite from rural and urban poor.

Memberships
IAEA, ARAB LEAGUE, MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, OIC, UN

Allies
MOROCCO Government, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government

Partners
EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, PALESTINE Fatah, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, ISRAEL, JAPAN, LEBANON Government, NATO, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, QATAR, RUSSIA, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Rivals
PALESTINE Hamas, LEBANON Hezbollah, IRAN, KUWAIT, PALESTINE Civil Society, SYRIA Government

Adversaries
AQAP, YEMEN Houthis

Active Armed Opponents
ISIS

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, NATO, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

KURDS OF IRAN

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Iran reside in Northwestern Iran. They are the second largest minority in Iran and are estimated to make up 7 percent of the Iranian population. Although they have not endured the same horrors as the Kurds of Syria or Iraq, they have still suffered systematic and cultural oppression. For a brief period, with Soviet support, the Kurds of Iran established an independent republic, Mahabad. This republic was short-lived and quickly crushed by Teheran. After the Iranian revolution, Kurds were severely politically constricted and in turn revolted with Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), leading the fight. The rebellion was quickly crushed. These events give the Kurds of Iran a strong sense of nationalism and victimhood, but also of pragmatism. Teheran is swift to dismantle Kurdish separatists with executions. The Kurds note these repercussions and are seeming less likely to promote pro-Kurdish autonomy political parties than their counterparts in greater Kurdistan. The Kurds of Iran also have a unique aspect to them in that the largest percent of Shia Muslim Kurds live in Iran. This creates an internal dynamic between the Kurds, as the Shiite Kurds to some degree identify with, and some even prefer to live under, the Shia Iranian regime.

Key Interests

- Protect themselves from brutal military incursions by Tehran or other actors. This desired security can come in the form of civil rights guarantees from the state.
- Become adequately represented in the national government. Underrepresentation contributes to Iran issuing legislation that is oppressive of the Iranian Kurdish population.
- Seek the opportunity to host assemblies featuring Kurdish Nationalism to reduce cultural suppression

Sources of Leverage

Military - The PJAK and KDPI are armed and formidable forces for the Iranian government due to their guerilla warfare. They launch terror attacks that in turn kill and disrupt the lives of Iranian citizens.
Political – After an attack from the PJAK or KDPI, Turkish citizens are likely to place pressure on politicians to reform their policies to prevent further attacks.
Soft Power – Utilize the media and human rights watch organizations to further deter Teheran from abusing them. The Kurds across greater Kurdistan can exploit the enmity between their host states to manipulate and mobilize them accordingly, as they have in the past.

Regional Strategy

As for external actors, the Kurds of Iran do not possess a strong regional strategy policy. Their situational vision in Iran keeps them preoccupied with their local reality and Teheran. Internally speaking, the Kurds of Iran's most prominent political parties, the PJAK and the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), are largely exiled and reside in Iraqi Kurdistan. PJAK has ties to the PKK and in certain instances is activated.

Powerful Individuals

Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi and Evindar Renas (leaders of PJAK)
Mustafa Hijri (leader of KDPI)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Use the PJAK and KDPI as leverage by way of deterrent agents through the threat of terroristic activity.
Utilize Iranian politics as a platform to spread awareness- it is speculated that as Iran opens its international relations, it will crack down on internal dissonance.
Partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

Shiite VS Sunni Kurds within Iran and their disproportionate political oppression from Teheran.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria	TURKEY

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
IRAN	IRAN (against PJAK and KDPI)

Proxy	External Sponsor
KURDS of Turkey	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

KURDS OF IRAQ

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Iraq are a distinct ethnic group in Northeastern Iraq. One of the four groups of Kurds, they are predominantly moderate Sunnis, seen as a stable, progressive and Western looking society. They are historically oppressed and manipulated by Iraqi and Iranian leaders. They have narratives of victimhood, fierce soldierhood and honored martyrdom. They seek security and self- autonomy. Their biggest threats are internal corruption, Islamic (Shia and Sunni) extremists and loss of legitimacy when applying for autonomy.

Key Interests

- Gain enough leverage to be able to establish borders and to also acquire international legitimacy so their political and physical state can be established. Requires breaking Iraq's territorial integrity; not supported by the international community.
- Develop petroleum and tourism industry while enhancing civil society and infrastructure.
- Maintain and enhance Western support
- Retain Peshmerga's absolute control over Iraqi Kurdistan.

Sources of Leverage

Energy – The Kurds of Iraq are located atop lucrative petroleum resources. They are developing these resources, and host International Oil Companies such as Exxon Mobile. They are creating strategic ties with Iran and Turkey through petroleum diplomacy.
Military – They maintain an efficient military, the Peshmerga.
Soft power – They project a peace-loving image and maintain public diplomacy policy that portrays them as a stable, progressive, continually Western-backed actor in the region.

Regional Strategy

Through the creation of diplomatic ties based on mutual security and economic interests, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) seeks to increase its eternal legitimacy and leverage against Baghdad. It is particularly working on their regional arrangements with Turkey, Iran and Israel and are developing relations with EU states. Superficially, the KRG is developing relations in line with international order, seeking to use policy paths to autonomy that increase their legitimacy and do not paint them as rogue actors.

Powerful Individuals

Massoud Barzani (President of the KRG; Party leader of the Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP))
Nechervan Barzani (Prime Minister; from the Barzani Tribe)
Muhammad Fuad Masum (President of Iraq; Talbani tribal affiliation; Member of the Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê, or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK))

Potential Negotiation Moves

Advancing petroleum-based, diplomatic ties with Iran - Subject to upcoming Iranian presidential elections.
Assist NATO Interests - KRG may choose to partner more intensely with NATO to continue their Western partnership
Negotiate - With the rise and current dismantling of ISIS, the KRG expanded its territorial administration of security, most notably into oil rich Kirkuk. The KRG may use this in negotiation with Baghdad.
Potentially partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

There is a longstanding feud between the PUK and KDP. This took the shape of a civil war, which was quelled by a peace agreement after intervention by Ankara and negotiations brokered by Washington. The power struggle stems from a differing of social ideology; the KDP, led by the Barzani Tribe, is highly tribal, nationalistic and dynastic in its leadership, while the PUK, led in part by Jalal Talbani is affiliated with socialism and elitism. Within Iraqi Kurdistan, the KRG incorporates the politics of Iraqi Turkmen, Assyrians and other minority groups, such as the Yezidis.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
GERMANY, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, ISRAEL, TURKEY	IRAQ State of Law Coalition

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	ISIS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	GERMANY, NATO, UNITED STATES

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	UNITED STATES

KURDS OF SYRIA

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Syria are a distinct ethnic group in Northern Syria, making up 12% of the total Syrian population. They exist in three main cantons: Afrin Canton, Cizre Canton and the Kobanî Canton. Together they make up the region known as Rojava. These cantons are not contiguous, but the Kurds aspire to join them. In 2016, the Syrian Kurds established Federasyona Bakurê Sûriyê, or the Federation of Northern Syria–Rojava. They have historically been abused, displaced and marginalized by the Syrian regime. Since the 1930s, Arabization was forced upon the Kurds in a systematic manner that suppressed their culture and social and economic mobility. This has created a narrative of self-reliance, distrust of Arabs, martyrdom and resistance. Their economy is currently in shambles due to the Syrian civil war, but they have the potential to establish agricultural and petroleum export industries.

Key Interests

- Protect themselves from brutal military incursions. This security can come in the form of civil rights guarantees from the state.
- Achieve political representation in the national government. They are also not represented in the peace talks underway to restructure Syria. They seek a seat at the table and to be seen as a legitimate party.
- Gain autonomy or federalism – Rojava has already established a federal region that preserves both the territorial integrity of Syria, and the integrity of the autonomous Kurdish region that is already established and self-administering.

Sources of Leverage

Energy – Future potential to establish agricultural and petroleum export industries.
Military – The Yekîneyên Parastina Gel , or the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are armed and formidable forces for the Syrian Government. Moreover, they are able to, at times, garner Western support.
Soft Power – Use of social media and other media outlets, such as documentaries. The West is entranced with the female fighting unity, the Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê, or the Women's Protection unit (YPJ), and the Syrian Kurds have done well capitalizing on their fame. Additionally, the Kurds across greater Kurdistan can exploit the enmity between their host states to manipulate and mobilize them.

Regional Strategy

In their situational vision, the Kurds of Syria hope to quell Ankara's fear that they are a proxy for the PKK and to show the Western world that they are a legitimate actor, capable of administering their own federal region. Additionally, the Syrian Kurds have begun to warm relations with Moscow, as they realize that Russia is increasing its sphere of influence into Syria. For their grand strategy, Rojava will likely move to establish ties to develop its petroleum industry, possibly with the KRG, Turkey and Iran.

Powerful Individuals

Salih Muslim Muhammad (Co-Chairman of the PYD)
Asya Abdullah (Co-Chairwoman of the PYD)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Activate global partners - Like the US, Russia, or the UN, to advocate for them while Turkey tries to pressure the Syrian Kurds out of the Syrian peace talks, which will attempt to restructure Syria.
Leverage potential future oil wealth for a more advantageous negotiating position.
Partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

Syrian Kurds complain that the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat , or the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is monopolizing the political scene and silencing smaller dissenting parties, such as the Kurdish Yekiti Party (Kurdish Union Party).

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, RUSSIA, UNITED STATES	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
SYRIA Government	ISIS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	RUSSIA, UNITED STATES

KURDS OF TURKEY

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Turkey reside in the Southeastern part of the state. They make up an estimated one-quarter of the Turkish population. During the nationalization of Turkey in the 1980s, Kurds were subjected to harsh assimilation tactics, such as forbidding the Kurdish language in schools and proper political representation. Since 1983, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, or Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), has engaged in armed struggle with the Turkish Government. To date, there have intermittent ceasefire agreements, then a vicious cycle of violations, spoilers, resumptions of violence, etc.

Key Interests

- Security – they seek to have the ability to protect themselves from brutal military incursions. This security can come in the form of civil rights guarantees from the state.
- Political representation – the Kurds are not adequately represented in the national government. This, among many factors, contributes to Turkey issuing a legislation that is oppressive of the Turkish Kurdish population.
- Cultural expression – the Kurds of Turkey are severely culturally oppressed. They seek the opportunity to host assemblies featuring Kurdish Nationalism.

Sources of Leverage

Military – The PKK is an armed and formidable force for the Turkish government due to its guerilla warfare. It launches terror attacks that in turn kill and disrupt the lives of Turkish citizens. The citizens then place pressure on politicians to reform their policies to prevent further attacks

Soft Power – Media and human rights reporting groups – the Kurds utilize the media and human rights watch organizations to further deter Turkey from abusing them, due to Turkey's aversion to showing itself as the aggressor in its relationship with its Kurdish population. Further, the Kurds across greater Kurdistan can exploit the enmity between their host states to manipulate and mobilize accordingly.

Regional Strategy

As for external actors, the Kurds of Turkey do not possess a strong regional strategy policy. Their situational vision in Turkey keeps them preoccupied with their local reality and Ankara. Internally speaking, the Kurds of Turkey's most prominent political party, the PKK, has links to political parties in Iraq, Syria, and Iran. These ties are activated in certain advantageous situations. Concerning Europe, the Kurds, to some degree, activate their diaspora community there to advocate to their respective European states on behalf of the Kurds in Turkey and their situation.

Powerful Individuals

Abdullah Öcalan (Founder of the PKK; Jailed by the Turkish Government for the creation of an armed group; Still leads the PKK and due to their ideological founding's similarities, many Kurdish groups across Kurdistan are de facto under his sphere of influence.) Figen Yüksekdağ Şenoğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş (Current co-leaders of the Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP))

Potential Negotiation Moves

Keep pressure and international media attention on Erdogan as he targets what he sees as affiliates or instigators to the failed coup attempt in 2016. Moreover, with Ankara preoccupied by coup purges, ISIS and the Syrian civil war, they have failed to implement satisfactory reforms that were proposed for the Kurds.

Partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

PKK occasionally engages in guerilla tactics against HDP.

Memberships
N/A

Allies
N/A

Partners
KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria

Rivals
TURKEY

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
Turkey (against PKK)

Proxy
Other Kurdish groups that have ties to the PKK, such as the PJAK (political and militant organization in Iran).

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
N/A

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KUWAIT

Party Portrait

Despite its size, Kuwait plays a key role in Arab and Gulf affairs given its geo-strategic importance, alliances, and large amounts of oil reserves. Like its GCC neighbors, it is a monarchy, though it is also the most politically open Gulf state. It was also one of the first Gulf states to industrialize, establish a directly elected parliament, and adopt a liberal constitution. The most critical event that has defined modern Kuwait is undoubtedly the 1990 invasion by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The war led to a more balanced power-distribution system that gave more power to the parliament (National Assembly), arguably becoming the strong legislative body in the GCC. However, this has also led to significant internal political conflicts.

Key Interests

- Maintaining its role as one of the world's largest oil producers. Currently oil revenues comprise a significant portion of government revenue, which is in turn key to continuing its rentier social contract with citizens.
- Diversify its economy and attract investment. Given low oil prices, the country has sought to increase foreign direct investment and diversify to other industries
- Maintaining regional security, given the existential threat they encountered in 1990 during the first Iraq War.

Sources of Leverage

Political - Kuwait's alliance with the United States, as well as with other Western partners affords it a powerful role within the Gulf.
Economic - In addition to its political partnerships with Western powers, Kuwait's large oil reserves provide it with a critical voice in regional fora such as the GCC or OPEC.

Regional Strategy

As a strong ally of the United States in the region, Kuwait seeks to support regional security measures. To this end, it continues to host a large contingent of US troops on its soil. In addition, Kuwait has sought closer political and military relations with Western allies, both bilaterally as well as through multilateral fora in NATO, for example.

Powerful Individuals

Emir Sabah Ahmad al-Sabah, Crown Prince Nawaf Ahmad al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanim, Prime Minister Jaber Mubarak al-Sabah

Potential Negotiation Moves

Support regional stability - By allowing the US to station additional troops that could be deployed in the fight against ISIS, Kuwait could help the US regain power in the region and maintain regional stability.

Internal Conflicts

Tensions between the National Assembly and the Emir persist due to members of parliament fiercely questioning cabinet members, as well as issues relating to the electoral system. This has led the Emir to dissolve parliament on a multitude of occasions since the founding of the state, including various times in the past few years.

Memberships	Allies
ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, IAEA, ISTANBUL COOPERATION INITIATIVE, OIC, OPEC, UN	UAE, BAHRAIN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Partners	Rivals
QATAR, IRAN, UNITED KINGDOM	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, YEMEN Government, PALESTINE Fatah	N/A

LEBANON GOVERNMENT

Party Portrait

Prime Minister Saad Hariri leads his country through continued periods of political turbulence and instability, heavily impacted by conflict in neighboring Syria. Hariri is drawn from the March 14th alliance, one of the two most prominent political alliances in the country – cutting across sectarian lines to include Sunnis, Christians and Druze. These diverse actors, which have traditionally clashed in Lebanon, have united around the shared goal of ending perceived Syrian interference in Lebanon. Despite persistent insecurity, the Lebanese economy continues to grow and diversify, with a dynamic banking and financial sector. Hariri's government is also occupied with challenging the political and security threat of Hezbollah, backed by regional power Iran, both within Lebanon and in neighboring Syria. An influx of refugees into Lebanon has strained inter-communal relations, fractious inter-religious ties, and put pressure on the economy to provide sufficient employment for the population.

Key Interests

- Weaken and disarm Hezbollah
- Strengthen the hold of the Lebanese state
- Strengthen the position of the country's Sunni communities.

Sources of Leverage

Political - Domestic legitimacy and political support from regional and international powers

Regional Strategy

Key representatives from the March 14 alliance have generally supported the Syrian rebellion, considering it a legitimate struggle against Assad's oppression. The Future Movement is believed to have been subtly supporting the Syrian rebels by transporting arms from the Gulf, mostly Saudi Arabia, to the Syrian rebels to overtake Assad regime and cut the "Axis of Resistance" between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah.

Powerful Individuals

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Former President Amine Gemayel

Potential Negotiation Moves

Support Syrian Rebellion - Support the Syrian rebellion in an attempt to oust President Assad and weaken Hezbollah's regional and domestic influence.

Oppose Nuclear Agreement - Oppose Iranian nuclear agreement and the country's attempt to strengthen its nuclear weapon capabilities.

Internal Conflicts

Recent shifts between the two major coalitions appears to have settled along sectarian lines. Hezbollah-backed president, Aoun, was elected as president in Oct 2016 after few surprising political moves that left March 14 coalition weaker than ever. Hariri's initially nominated Frangieh, a nominal member of the opposing March 8 alliance in an attempt to encourage Hezbollah to switch its support toward Frangieh and in so doing weaken the alliance between Hezbollah and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement which forms the cornerstone of the March 8 coalition. However, this strategy failed because Hariri lost his key Christian ally, Samir Geagea (leader of the Lebanese Forces party), who considered the nomination of Frangieh as a betrayal. Consequently, Geagea joined the Free Patriotic Movement within the March 8 coalition and supported Hezbollah's candidate, Aoun. As a result, the three biggest parties of the March 14 alliance are now divided: The Lebanese Forces party was supporting Aoun, the Future Movement was supporting Frangieh, and the Kataeb Party was refusing to support either of them. Believing that a Syrian-friendly president is better than no president at all, Hariri eventually succumbed to Hezbollah's candidate and voted for Aoun.

Memberships	Allies
ARAB LEAGUE, IAEA, OIC, UN	SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Partners	Rivals
EUROPEAN UNION, QATAR, FRANCE	IRAN

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
LEBANON Hezbollah, IRAN, SYRIA Government, ISRAEL	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, JAPAN, KUWAIT, TURKEY, U.A.E., UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES	N/A

LEBANON HEZBOLLAH

Party Portrait

Hezbollah (the "Party of God") sees itself as the legitimate representative of the historically oppressed Shia community in Lebanon and the wider Middle East. Its narrative is woven around the notion of resistance against oppression and injustice. Since inception, the party has looked to Iran for its religious and ideological leadership, financial and military support. Hezbollah's identity has also been defined by its opposition to Israel. It emerged in the backdrop of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon. The 2000 Israeli withdrawal of forces from Southern Lebanon was portrayed as the triumph of the Hezbollah-led resistance movement and further boosted support for the party and its charismatic leader, Nasrallah, within and outside Lebanon. Hezbollah has used the on-going threat of Israeli aggression in its political narrative, thereby justifying being the only political group to retain military capabilities post the end of the civil war. Hezbollah's traditional conflict narratives adapted in light of its direct intervention in the Syrian conflict. Albeit Nasrallah's speeches in relation to the Syrian civil war paint the "US-Israeli axis" as "occupying forces" dividing the region, they have also emphasized the sectarian nature of the conflict by highlighting the destruction of religious shrines in Syria. The threat to Shia and Christian minority populations from Sunni jihadists forms the ideological basis of Hezbollah's fight against ISIS.

Key Interests

- Retain legitimacy as the representative of the historically oppressed Shia communities across the Middle East and conversely, contain the dominance of Sunni political and armed groups.
- Undermine Israel's military and political power in the region; deter Israel's military advances into Lebanon.
- Enhance the power of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis which in turn will guarantee uninterrupted arms supply through Syria and Syrian territory serving as military bases for Hezbollah (including storage of military stockpiles).
- Increase Hezbollah's share of political power, influence and representation within Lebanon's domestic politics.

Sources of Leverage

Political - The Lebanese government formed by Saad Hariri in December 2016 is dominated by pro-Hezbollah factions that control two-thirds of the cabinet.
Military - Hezbollah's military arm, the Islamic Resistance, has military capabilities that are comparable with a medium-sized state army and superior to that of the Lebanese Army.
Convening Powers - Hezbollah exerts ideological influence in the Middle East. In the past (e.g. 2006 war against Israel), it has formed a symbol of pan-Arab resistance to Israel. It also serves as a "bullets plus ballots" model for other militant organizations such as Hamas.

Regional Strategy

Hezbollah's regional strategy involves signaling its willingness and preparedness to respond to Israeli aggression with an escalation to war; build military capabilities to deter Israeli military advances and fight wars in the event of perceived aggression. It also seeks to strengthen regional resistance to Israel by supporting groups such as Hamas. Hezbollah also seeks to provide direct military support to the Assad regime in Syria in order to strengthen the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, which would have been at great risk if a non-Assad regime came into power in Syria. Preservation of a sympathetic Syrian regime also ensures uninterrupted routes for arms supply and access to Syrian territory that can serve as military bases and arsenal for Hezbollah.

Powerful Individuals

Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah Secretary General

Potential Negotiation Moves

Syrian Military Support - Extend direct military support to Assad regime in Syria
Strengthen Axis - Strengthen the Iran - Syria - Hezbollah axis
Fight Sunni jihadist groups in Syria

Internal Conflicts

Hezbollah leads the March 8 alliance of political parties and groups that stand in opposition to the Sunni-led March 14 coalition in Lebanon.

Memberships
N/A

Allies
IRAN

Partners
PALESTINE Hamas, SYRIA Government

Rivals
PALESTINE Fatah

Adversaries
ISRAEL, ISIS, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES, GCC

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
IRAN

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
N/A

LIBYA GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL ACCORD

Party Portrait

Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) is the executive branch of the interim government for Libya established by the December 2015 Libyan Political Agreement. The GNA - and the agreement that led to its foundation - has been endorsed unanimously by the UN Security Council, offering recognition of the GNA as the sole legitimate government of Libya. However, internal divisions between the GNA and the supposed legislative branch - the House of Representatives (HoR) - is a major obstacle to the effective functioning of the Libyan state. These institutions compete for recognition and authority, with the political representation of the GNA a major grievance for the HoR. The GNA, composed of 17 ministers and Prime Minister, is based in Tripoli - but had previously convened in neighboring Tunisia while the Political Agreement was being formulated.

Key Interests

- Consolidate legitimacy by building support within the HoR
- Secure national consensus on the role and powers of the GNA
- Address the country's economic, security and infrastructure issues

Sources of Leverage

Military - neutralize Islamist actors and terror groups that are a source of consternation for various Middle Eastern and Western actors.
Natural resources - Libya possesses vast quantities of oil, with export levels well below pre-war levels.

Regional Strategy

Due to the nature of Libya as a failed state, it has no explicit regional strategy - and has limited capacity for regional projection of power.

Powerful Individuals

Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, Deputy PM Ahmed Maiteeq, Deputy PM Musa al-Koni

Potential Negotiation Moves

Limited potential for negotiation moves on a regional basis, given domestic focus on political conflict.

Internal Conflicts

Significant conflict between the GNA's leadership and the HoR, with former Prime Minister of the GNC Khalifa al-Ghawil, and with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army (LNA).

Memberships	Allies
AU, IAEA, OIC, OPEC, UN	QATAR, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES, FRANCE

Partners	Rivals
ALGERIA, TUNISIA, UAE	LIBYA House of Representatives

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
ISIS	ISIS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
EUROPEAN UNION, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, TURKEY, FRANCE, JAPAN, UAE	N/A

LIBYA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Party Portrait

The House of Representatives (HoR) is Libya's legislature body, responsible for passing legislation and representing the Libyan population. Yet the HoR ignored the November 2014 Supreme Constitutional Court that it should be dissolved while it was surrounded by armed militias, and opposed the later establishment of a rival parliament known as the General National Congress (GNC). The HoR fiercely contests the political representation of the GNA, feeling that its members and parties are not represented. The HoR relocated from the capital, Tripoli, to the provincial city of Tobruk in the far east of Libya. It has consistently voted not to endorse the GNA as a result of this sentiment, despite the efforts of the UN political mission to use its good offices to foster improved ties between the GNA and HoR. The HoR maintains a strong relationship with Khalifa Haftar, head of the HoR-aligned Libyan National Army (LNA).

Key Interests

- Secure international recognition
- Secure power within the executive branch
- Increase economic and management capacities of the HoR's Central Brank
- Increase military capacity and security advances of Marshal Haftar's forces

Sources of Leverage

Military - LNA and Marshal Haftar's popular support and military capacity to engage ISIS.
Political - distancing from political Islam enables relationship-building with external actors concerned about spread of such parties in the region.

Regional Strategy

The HoR has cultivated regional alliances with the likes of France and Russia, developing a particularly strong alliance with the Egyptian Government, which opposes the strengthening of Islamist parties in Libya.

Powerful Individuals

Chairman Aguila Saleh Issa, LNA Marshal Khalifa Haftar

Potential Negotiation Moves

Engage ISIS in intensified military campaign

Internal Conflicts

Competition between HoR to secure leadership roles of Chairman and Vice Chairs in particular, as well as contestations over public legitimacy given limited turnout in 2014 vote to elect HoR.

Memberships	Allies
ARAB LEAGUE	Russia

Partners	Rivals
Algeria, United Kingdom, United States, France	Libya - Government of National Accord

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
ISIS	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	Egypt – Government, UAE

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

MOROCCO POLISARIO FRONT

Party Portrait

The Polisario Front is a military and political indigenous independence group in Western Sahara. The governing body of the Polisario Front, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), is based in Algeria and controls further territory in refugee camps surrounding the Algerian town of Tindouf. They have announced a sovereign claim to the entirety of Western Sahara, but presently control only 15%. Morocco has erected a 2,700 km sand wall to separate their portion of Western Sahara from the Polisario Front-held territory. Morocco alleges that the Polisario Front is backed by Algeria. Algeria denies this claim, but publicly supports Western Sahara's right to self-determination. The question of Algeria's support or lack thereof has foiled peace processes in recent years, with Morocco refusing to participate unless Algeria participates and acknowledges its alleged support of the Polisario Front.

Key Interests

- Expel Morocco from Western Sahara
- Establish a Sahrawi state
- Receive sovereign recognition of Western Sahara as Polisario territory
- Return safely the approximately 90,000 displaced Sahrawi refugees. Most of these refugees reside in the Tindouf refugee camp in Algeria.

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power – The Polisario Front has the support of Algeria and some Spanish solidarity organizations
Political – The UN currently refuses to recognize either Morocco or SADR sovereignty over Western Sahara

Regional Strategy

Expel Morocco from Western Sahara; maintain strong ties with Algeria; court recognition from all sovereign states. The Polisario Front's claim to Western Sahara is currently recognized by 45 countries.

Powerful Individuals

Brahim Ghali (Secretary-General of the Polisario Front and president of SADR

Potential Negotiation Moves

UN Talks - Reinitiate efforts to settle the sovereignty issue through a referendum via the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), with direct UN-mediated talks between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front.
Use Comparative Example - Capitalize on the use of the Western Sahara issue as a comparative example for Israel's refusal to grant Palestinians autonomy over the West Bank. Highlight the potential momentum for recognition which could be sparked over the settlement of this contextually similar situation

Internal Conflicts

In 2004, an opposition group calling itself the Front Polisario Khat al-Shahid announced its separation from the main Polisario faction. The group demands SADR reform and a return to hostilities with Morocco. However, the group has largely been sidelined due to the Polisario's refusal to engage with it, as well as its own internal fractures.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	ALGERIA

Partners	Rivals
LIBYA Government of National Accord, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
MOROCCO Government	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	ALGERIA

MOROCCO GOVERNMENT

Party Portrait

Morocco is dominated by the institution of the monarchy (Makhzan). The Makhzan is the protector and guarantor of Moroccan traditions, society, and state, and though it has ceded some powers to the elected parliamentary government, it is able to exercise control over the members of this government through its dual religious and temporal leadership role and network of business and media interests. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) has been in charge of the elected government since 2011. Public debates about religion, the king, and the nature of the Moroccan state are generally off limits, though these factors compose the center of political machinations.

Key Interests

- Minimize or eliminate the threat of the Polisario Front. To that end, either gain control over Polisario Front/SADR territory, or maintain the area as a neutral buffer zone.
- Become a manufacturing and exporting hub between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. Increase sub-Saharan influence.
- Counter growing ISIS recruitment and influence in Morocco.
- Establish or maintain good relations with neighbors and donor countries.

Sources of Leverage

Geographic – Morocco is located at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. It therefore serves as a bridge to Europe for movement of goods and people, and plays an important role in migration and trade deals.
Military – Morocco operates a robust intelligence bureau, which may be used against terrorist threats.
Political – Morocco also has a strong relationship with the West on security issues and plays host to global summits, giving its diplomats access to world leaders.

Regional Strategy

Morocco recently rejoined the African Union, indicating a desire to increase its influence in sub-Saharan Africa while declining to make progress on the Western Sahara issue. The country also seeks increased security and prosperity, to raise its standing as a destination for international conferences and negotiations as well as building stronger trade and economic ties across Africa, the Arab Gulf, and the West.

Powerful Individuals

Moroccan King Mohammed VI, Abdelilah Benkiran (President of the Government of Morocco and leader of the PJD), Aziz Akhannouch (Secretary General of the National Rally of Independents Party (RNI)), Mohand Laenser (Secretary General of the Popular Movement (MP)), Hamid Chabbat (Secretary General of the Istiqlal Party's (IP))

Potential Negotiation Moves

Seek reconciliation with Algeria on the status of Western Sahara
Combine intelligence forces with Algeria regarding terrorist threats

Internal Conflicts

The monarchy (Makhzan) has near absolute leverage through its control of important government functionaries and royal prerogative guaranteed to it in the Moroccan Constitution, as well as its business and media interests. Although the Makhzan has ceded some power to the parliamentary government, overall it exercises strict control. As a result, political dissent is minimal. Nevertheless, the PJD is generally regarded as the cleanest and most effective political party among a political class struggling for authenticity and efficiency. It seeks increased power through the development of a more representative political system.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, AU, IAEA, MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, OIC, UN

Allies
SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Partners
EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, SUDAN, TUNISIA

Rivals
ALGERIA

Adversaries
AQAP, ISIS, MOROCCO Polisario Front

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
EUROPEAN UNION, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

NATO

Party Portrait

NATO is a political-military alliance founded in 1949 to ensure the collective defense of its 28 trans-Atlantic member states. Since 9/11, Islamic extremism and threats originating in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have become one of NATO's and its member states' primary concerns.

Key Interests

- Stabilize the MENA region in order to eliminate long-standing threat to NATO and its members
- Minimize risk of jihadist terror threats to NATO states

Sources of Leverage

Military - Hard power in the form of military strength, as was seen in its 2011 intervention in Libya

Soft Power - Soft power though military exchanges, training missions, collaboration and political support.

Regional Strategy

Since NATO's intervention in Libya, many key actors have shied away from further pursuing interests in the region, instead preferring a minimal containment strategy. For instance, NATO members' involvement in Syria has been on an individual, ad hoc basis rather than as part of a greater NATO MENA strategy. The bulk of NATO's strategy in the region consists of establishing dialogues with Gulf and Mediterranean states while also pursuing bilateral agreements with individual states throughout region that focus on collaboration, communication, and mutual understanding.

Powerful Individuals

The United States is the most influential member of NATO. Other key actors include France, Germany, the UK, and Turkey. The NATO Secretary-General is Jens Stoltenberg.

Potential Negotiation Moves

Continue Engagement- Continue to pursue engagement with regional actors on shared security interests

Broaden Engagement - Negotiate tailored bilateral deals with key regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Oman, or by seeking to expand participation in its multilateral forums (Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative). In addition, moving forward it may seek to reach out to rivals and build ties with non-partner states.

Deepen Engagement - Offer itself as a "soft-security" provider of maritime engagement, training, consultation, WMD monitoring and intelligence expertise to partners in the region.

Internal Conflicts

There are several internal conflicts affecting NATO policies and strategy in MENA. NATO's southernmost member, Turkey, and other countries affected by the refugee crisis – Greece, Germany, and Italy – have urged NATO to focus on conflict and instability in MENA, while Eastern members have argued for NATO to reinforce its eastern flank against new Russian aggression. More broadly, recently the President of the United States has questioned the value of the alliance, and has sought greater budgetary commitments from other member states.

Memberships

N/A

Allies

N/A

Partners

Mediterranean Dialogue partners: ALGERIA, EGYPT Government, ISRAEL, JORDAN, MOROCCO Government, TUNISIA, MAURITANIA
Istanbul Cooperative Initiative partners: BAHRAIN, QATAR, KUWAIT, UAE; More limited partnership with SAUDI ARABIA and OMAN

Rivals

IRAN

Adversaries

RUSSIA (not in the MENA region, but this adversarial relationship impacts NATO's involvement in the region)

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A

OMAN

Party Portrait

Oman is a small Gulf nation of a little over 4 million people, but one with the potential to play a larger regional role, including as a regional mediator. Sultan Qaboos Bin Said is one of the longest ruling monarchs in the world, having maintained power since 1970. In recent decades, it has embarked on a reform agenda seeking to modernize and develop the country. Furthermore, Oman is also an oil-dependent Gulf state, but its oil production is significantly smaller than its neighbors.

Key Interests

- Furthering its own economic and social development, as well as diversify its economy in areas such as tourism.
- Ensuring regime continuity, which to date has involved modest advances towards increasing popular decision making. However, critically the regime seeks to stifle political opposition and the threat of terrorism.

Sources of Leverage

Political - Oman's continuous relationship with Iran has made it a valuable Gulf Arab ally for Western states who seek a mediator or intermediary to help resolve disputes or pursue shared interests with Iran.

Western partnerships - It's friendly relationships with United Kingdom and the United States make Oman a discreet, yet reliable partner in a volatile region.

Regional Strategy

Oman has historically sought to play the role of regional mediator. Its regional strategy is therefore to participate in track-II diplomatic efforts and not intervene militarily in the region.

Powerful Individuals

Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said, Deputy Prime Minister Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said

Potential Negotiation Moves

Broker rapprochement between West, Gulf and Iran - Given its unique role as a Gulf Arab state, and its partnership with both Western states and Iran, the Sultanate could potentially be a broker or mediator in any regional discussions with the United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. If tensions increase between Gulf states, the United States and Iran, Oman could also help mitigate the challenges and support conflict resolution.

Internal Conflicts

Though a formidable domestic political opposition does not exist at the moment, Oman did face some rising political discontent following the 2011 Arab Spring.

Memberships	Allies
ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, IAEA, OIC, UN	QATAR, BAHRAIN, KUWAIT

Partners	Rivals
SAUDI ARABIA, UAE, UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM, IRAN	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

PALESTINE CIVIL SOCIETY

Party Portrait

Comprised of NGOs and individuals without cohesive political leadership, Palestinian Civil Society is largely dissatisfied with current Palestinian leadership and the negotiations process. These organizations see themselves as developing Palestinian society internally as a means towards ending the occupation and achieving Palestinian civil rights. Some estimates place the number of NGOs in Palestine at over 5,000, mainly funded by international donors and UN organizations. Critics claim that the main interests of these groups are to maintain funding, rather than create change. While a few coalitions exist, there is no unified leadership or coordination structure.

Key Interests

- Achieve peaceful Palestinian society that effectively incorporates citizen voices into representative democratic government
- Maintain thriving Palestinian economy with educational and employment opportunities for all that allows freedom of movement and access to resources
- End the occupation
- Achieve recognition of Right of Return for Palestinian refugees, with some symbolic return and/or reparations
- Attain permanent status of East Jerusalem as Palestinian capital
- For each individual actor: Maintain institutional power and funding

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power - Palestinian Civil Society achieves moral and legal legitimacy for their cause from UN Security Council Resolutions and the Geneva Convention. International solidarity for victimhood, especially from Arab States and European countries, and moral leverage in relation to Israeli actions within the West Bank also increase the soft power of Palestinian civil society organizations. The presence of Palestinian refugee populations spread across the Middle East and the world creates pressure on host governments.
Economic - Growing international support for boycott, divest, and sanctions movement constitutes an economic threat over Israel. In addition, labor constitutes an economic source of leverage, with sixteen percent of Palestinians living in the West Bank working in Israel or in West Bank settlements.

Regional Strategy

Use grassroots activism to mobilize Palestinians around engagement in democratic processes, offer a "voice" to concerns of non-politicians, and affect change within the Palestinian political sphere. Many of these organizations mobilize international support through messaging about the Palestinian cause and raise international funds to sustain local work. According to a 2015 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research poll, 85% of individuals support the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions movement. Many organizations, though not all, separate from 'normalization' (cooperation with Israel and Israeli organizations) to show dissatisfaction with political and social trends in Israel.

Powerful Individuals

Omar Barghouti (Founding member of Palestinian Committee for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), Mustafa Barghouti (co-founder of Palestine Monitor and Palestinian National Initiative), Amjad Shawa (Director of Palestinian NGO Network in Gaza), Sami Khader (Director of Maan Development Center, board member of Palestine NGO Network)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Solidarity Network - Build cross-border Palestinian Solidarity Network with Palestinian refugees around the world, heightening concerns for all host countries
Grassroots Networks - Build grassroots networks within Palestinian society to engage politically, mobilize cohesive opposition, and increase independent civil society systems through re-envisioning funding sources and development practices
Engage nonviolent opposition - To Israel and Palestinian leadership;
Mobilize possible mediation body - Comprised of European Union, Arab League, US, and Russia

Internal Conflicts

Organizations and individuals disagree as to best-case future solutions, levels of appropriate boycott or cooperation with Israel, and strategies of nonviolence vs. violence. Many perceive the negotiations process to serve Israel's needs without true consideration of Palestinian interests, and disagree as to the extent to which Palestinian leadership should attempt to negotiate with Israel. Many individuals and organizations are frustrated with what they see as unrepresentative and elitist Palestinian leadership, with a majority believing that Abbas should step down. Palestinian support for a one-state and two-state solution stood at 36% and 44% respectively, according to a 2017 EU-funded poll.

Memberships

N/A

Allies

N/A

Partners

EUROPEAN UNION, PALESTINE Fatah, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, UNITED NATIONS

Rivals

EGYPT Government, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, PALESTINE Hamas, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES

Adversaries

ISRAEL

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

PALESTINE FATAH

Party Portrait

Founded by Yasser Arafat and other members of the Palestinian diaspora in 1959 and joining the PLO in 1967, Fatah currently leads the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank. Despite its initially violent start, since 1988 Fatah has denounced terror as a strategy and been recognized as a legitimate political party by Israel and the US. The Palestinian Authority took control over Gaza and West Bank Areas A and B following the 1993 Oslo Accords, though Hamas has controlled Gaza since 2007. Militant groups such as the al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade conducted violent acts during the second intifada; these groups share membership with Fatah, though Fatah does not officially recognize them.

Key Interests

- Achieve a viable, stable, and independent Palestinian state with full sovereignty, recognition, and freedom of movement, with East Jerusalem as its capital
- Maintain access and achieve full control over West Bank natural resources and state finances
- Achieve return of Fatah-affiliated political prisoners and recognition of the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees, with some symbolic return and/or reparations
- Maintain Fatah control over PA

Sources of Leverage

Political - Fatah receives recognition as Palestinian leadership and can leverage the perceived lack of other moderate political groups to threaten more hard-line approaches if they are not in power. Political cooperation with Israel is also a source of leverage for Fatah
Soft Power - Fatah appeals to moral and legal legitimacy from UN Security Council Resolutions and international humanitarian law
Convening Power - Fatah may be able to convene talks between Israel, other countries in the region, and a Palestinian unity government including Hamas

Regional Strategy

Fatah recognizes Israel and coordinates with the Israeli government, including on security and border control in the West Bank. Fatah maintains a strategy of working with Israel and the US on potential tradeoffs and issues that could comprise two-state solution. In addition, Fatah has gained political power through appeals to the United Nations and other international bodies for recognition through observer status and for resolutions declaring the settlements and sieges on Gaza illegal. Fatah also appeals to Western Countries for support for a negotiated settlement with Israel and financial support for Palestinians, and has at times worked with Hamas representatives to create a unified Palestinian government as a way to move forward with peace talks.

Powerful Individuals

Mahmoud Abbas (President of PA, Fatah Party Leader), Rami Hamdallah (Palestinian Prime Minister), Yasser Abed Rabbo (former PLO Secretary-General), Saeb Erakat (Member of Palestinian Parliament, negotiator and spokesperson), Hanan Ashrawi (Leader of Third Way Party & former legislator), Marwan Barghouti (imprisoned Fatah member)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Deal with Internal Conflicts - Address internal Palestinian conflicts between Hamas, Fatah, and other parties to create unity government;
Build Arab Support - Build support for the Arab Peace Initiative among Arab Nations and internationally;
Seek Recognition as a State – Seek recognition as a state from other states and as a full member in international fora;
Build Cross-border Palestinian Solidarity Network – with Palestinian refugees, heightening concerns for all host countries

Internal Conflicts

There is an ideological and political divide between Fatah and Hamas and divisions within each about how much to coordinate with the other and with Israel. There are levels of perceived legitimacy of Fatah within Palestinian Civil Society, based on collaboration with Israel, poor governance, and perceived economic mismanagement. Divisions between older members (led by Abbas) and younger members (led by jailed activist Marwan Barghouti) center around corruption.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, OIC, UN (Non-Member Observer)

Allies
N/A

Partners
EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, JORDAN, PALESTINE Civil Society, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, TUNISIA, TURKEY, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

Rivals
EGYPT Government, ISRAEL, PALESTINE Hamas, LEBANON Hezbollah, LEBANON Government, QATAR, SYRIA Government

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
EUROPEAN UNION, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED STATES

PALESTINE HAMAS

Party Portrait

Hamas is a fundamentalist Sunni political party with both a social service wing (Dawah) and a militant wing (Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades). The group, founded after the first Intifada in 1987, seeks the complete liberation of Palestine, and has been designated a terrorist group by Israel and the US. Hamas won the Palestinian elections in 2006, but did not take control due to sanctions by the Quartet. In 2007, Hamas took control over the Gaza Strip. Attempts for reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas have been made since 2006, but none have lasted. The group does not formally recognize Israel or engage in negotiations, though it has informally and indirectly negotiated with Israeli officials and recently softened anti-Israel language in its charter. The military wing of Hamas intermittently launches rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip and Israel has launched several military campaigns into Gaza in the past ten years. The Gaza Strip is currently in a state of humanitarian crisis.

Key Interests

- Achieve Palestinian liberation in all of historic Palestine
- Achieve recognition and implementation of Right of Return for Palestinian refugees
- Create Islamic governance over the West Bank and Gaza

Sources of Leverage

Political - UN Security Council Resolutions, both past and present, against Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza, connections to other Islamist groups and Diaspora Palestinians, currently holds one Israeli citizen in prison and has the bodies of two Israeli soldiers
Economic – Support from Qatar, Iran, Turkey, independent donors
Soft Power - Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel and claim to Palestinian land is a source of leverage in relation to its Palestinian constituents and Israel itself. The group's claims against Israel offer it moral legitimacy as a Palestinian representative group in some circles and constitute a threat for the Israeli public
Military - The armed wing, Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, maintains guerilla military operations (rocket launching) from the Gaza Strip

Regional Strategy

Hamas provides social services and employment to Palestinians in the Gaza strip to enable their control and garner support from constituents. To do so, the party maintains tunnels under the Gaza blockade to have continued access to resources. The party refuses to recognize Israel or engage in negotiations and maintains strong deterrent actions against Palestinians seen to be too close to 'normalizing' relations with Israel. Hamas also seeks to mobilize ideological and economic support from political Islamists around the Arab World.

Powerful Individuals

Yahya Sinwar (Leader of Hamas as of February 2017), Khaled Meshaal (Previous Leader of Hamas), Ismail Haniyeh (Senior Hamas Member)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Coalition - Build coalition with other Islamist parties in the region;
Reconcile - With Fatah and create unity government;
Increase social services wing - Garner Palestinian support;
Call for third intifada – A new concentrated movement of nonviolent resistance and violent opposition against Israel;
Increase rocket launches - Against Israel or, alternatively, end all attacks to increase political legitimacy;
Revise Hamas charter – To garner international community support;
Denounce ties with Muslim Brotherhood – to Partner with Egypt and call for regional security agreement.

Internal Conflicts

There is conflict within Hamas as to the levels of terrorism or negotiations to engage in, and the political and military wings have had a divisive relationship due to this question. Hamas factions within Gaza, the West Bank, Israeli prisons, and the Diaspora all have different views on what stance to take in relation to Israel.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	N/A

Partners	Rivals
EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, HOLY SEE, IRAN, LEBANON Hezbollah, QATAR, TURKEY	EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, ISIS, JORDAN, PALESTINE Civil Society, PALESTINE Fatah, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES,

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
ISRAEL, UNITED STATES	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	Individuals and organizations in QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN, and SYRIA Government, and HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

QATAR

Party Portrait

Qatar is a country of 1.9 million people, of which only one-eighth are Qatari citizens. Despite its relatively small size, though, it is the world's leading exporter of liquefied natural gas and the richest in terms of GDP per capita. Like its Gulf neighbors it is a monarchy, and has been ruled since the 19th century by the Al-Thani family. Qatar is most concerned with maintaining its security and stability, particularly given the volatility of the region. It has sought to create a more proactive role as a mediating power in the Middle East and North Africa, leveraging its significant economic strength as well as its soft power.

Key Interests

- Be viewed as a powerful state in the region, a player on the international scene, and an ally of the West. To this end, it has increasingly been involved, to varying degrees, in conflicts across the region.
- Be perceived as a power broker in the Middle East, and particularly to supplant Saudi Arabian influence in the region.

Sources of Leverage

Political - It has allied itself with the West and specifically the United States, serving as a mediator in certain situations, and housing the US Central Command forward headquarters.
Economic – Its economic power allows Qatar to exert significant political influence across the region, either through aid or military support.
Soft Power - Al-Jazeera is a government-backed news outlet based in Doha and is considered the Arab world's most influential media organization, with a huge following in Arab communities.

Regional Strategy

Though it has played a mediating role in various conflicts, it has also gone beyond this in terms of funding or providing weapons to groups. Moreover, it often deviates from the GCC "party line", choosing instead to establish an independent foreign policy. Ultimately, Qatar seeks to establish relations with a wide array of actors in an effort to exert as much influence as possible in regional affairs.

Powerful Individuals

Emir: Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani; Designated Successor: Abdullah bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (the current Emir's half-brother); Prime Minister and Minister of the Ministry of Interior: Abdallah bin Nasir bin Khalifa al-Thani; Former Emir: Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (Tamim bin Hamad's father); Mother of Emir: Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al-Missned; Director General of Al-Jazeera: Dr. Mostefa Souag

Potential Negotiation Moves

Regional power broker - Qatar can act as a mediator in key conflicts across the region, must notably in Syria and Yemen.
Increase support to Syrian opposition groups - Alternatively, Qatar may also wish to play a more active role in the Syrian conflict, increasing financial and armed support to rebel groups.

Internal Conflicts

Qatar is mostly ethnically and religiously homogenous and has not suffered through some of the ethnic or sectarian struggles that have burdened so many countries in the region. It is one of the wealthiest rentier states, and though political freedoms are limited, there have not been any significant disputes between citizens and the state. However, with migrants representing a majority of the population, the government has faced increased international pressure to provide greater labor rights to these groups.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, IAEA, ISTANBUL COOPERATION INITIATIVE, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies
N/A

Partners
PALESTINE Hamas, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, IRAN, TURKEY, UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM

Rivals
SAUDI ARABIA, BAHRAIN, UAE, EGYPT Government

Adversaries
SYRIA Government

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, YEMEN Government

Aid Donor
N/A

RUSSIA

Party Portrait

Russia's engagement in the Middle East has deep historic roots. For more than two hundred years the primary goal of Russia's foreign policy was to drive the Ottoman Empire out from the Balkans and Back Sea region. Persia was divided into the Russian and British zones of influence. Russia's entry into the World War One was mainly motivated by its claims for Constantinople and the Turkish Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The USSR continued active involvement in the political developments of the Middle East, soon leading to tense contention with the United States. Today, Moscow's official position is the continued premise of Russia's exclusively important role in regulating the Middle Eastern conflicts. Moscow is engaged in a variety of interaction around the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a permanent UN Security Council and Middle East Quartet member, Russia is insisting on the inclusive and collegial nature of its policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moscow supported Assad in the wake of the Arab Spring, but the formal rationale behind Russia's military presence in Syria is fighting terrorists. In December 2016, Russia announced that the peace agreement in Syria had been reached through the help of the Russia-Turkey-Iran trio of mediators.

Key Interests

- Restrain/block Islamic extremism as a matter of national security
- Stop revolutionary changes of regimes (primarily those where Moscow sees the influence of outside powers)
- Secure limited military presence in ME
- Expand presence in the local markets of weaponry, nuclear energy, oil and gas, good, etc.
- Obtain a degree of control over world oil prices
- Attract foreign investments in Russia
- Restore international reputation

Sources of Leverage

Political - Consolidated political elite and centralized power; deep penetration of the Russian state and private companies in the economies of the Middle East;
Soft Power- Public and cultural diplomacy; reputation (especially after the success of the Syrian peace process initiation)
Military - Hard power (military and intelligence)
Convening Power – UNSC permanent membership
Energy – Oil and gas

Regional Strategy

Russia is involved in fighting terrorists through a variety of levers - from space intelligence through cultural diplomacy, - to prevent the infiltration of extremism in Russia and neighboring CIS republics. Supports secular regimes, particularly Assad's government. Holds open and secret negotiations of bilateral and multilateral format, leaving room for potential negotiation.

Powerful Individuals

Vladimir Putin (President), Sergey Lavrov (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Sergey Shoygu (Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation since 2012), Mikhail Bogdanov (Special Representative of the President for the Middle East and Africa), Valery Gerasimov (Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and Deputy Defense Minister), Igor Konashenkov (Head of Department of Information of the Ministry of Defense), and Anatoliy Antonov (the Deputy Foreign Minister supervising the questions of politic-military realm and nuclear weapons).

Potential Negotiation Moves

Mediation - Engage more parties into the initially trilateral mediation alliance for the Syrian peace process (like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, and Jordan)
US – Russia Relations - Test the waters with Trump administration to potentially 'reset' the relations with the U.S.
Syria - Advocate for an internal separation of Syria with an eventual formation of a federative form of government with the precedence of Alawites

Internal Conflicts

Islamic extremists operating in the territory of Russia (mainly North Caucasus and Volga region).

Memberships
CIS, IAEA, OIC (Observer), OSCE, Quartet on the Middle East, UN (Security Council)

Allies
SYRIA Government, IRAN, Palestine Fatah, ARAB LEAGUE, LIBYA House of Representatives, YEMEN Houthis, KURDS of Syria

Partners
TURKEY, PALESTINE Fatah, ISRAEL, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, JORDAN, QATAR, UAE, SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT Government, BAHRAIN, JAPAN, HOLY SEE, EGYPT Government, PALESTINE Hamas

Rivals
UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION, CHINA, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, UNITED KINGDOM, GERMANY, INDIA

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
ISIS, SYRIA Jabhat Fatah a-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

Proxy
SYRIA Government, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, KURDS of Syria

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
PALESTINE Fatah, JORDAN, LEBANON, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN

Aid Donor
N/A

SAUDI ARABIA

Party Portrait

Saudi Arabia has consistently presented itself as a regional leader of the Arab world in the Middle East. It derives this identity narrative from its control over the cities of Mekkah and Al-Madina, while also legitimizing its influence through its vast economy fueled by oil revenues. It's Islamic/Arab leadership narrative has propelled the nation to serve a proactive and regional coordinative role in regional conflicts, especially in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The threat perception that has tended to capture the Saudi conflict narrative has shifted from a focus on the Palestine-Israeli conflict to a concern with Iranian political ascendency in the region, and its impact on Saudi's domestic politics and regional role.

Key Interests

- Maintaining the economic and political stability of the country, particularly given the number of domestic terror attacks by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliated individuals/groups that have been reported over the years
- Ensuring a powerful role in Middle Eastern political decision making processes. The nation wishes to maintain its prominence as the political, economic and religious powerhouse of the region, which has been challenged by Iran.

Sources of Leverage

Religion – Saudi Arabia is home to the two holiest cities of Islam, providing the Al-Saud family with both domestic and regional legitimacy.

Natural Resources – Revenue from oil exports allows the nation to create a loyal citizenry through an expansive welfare based social contract. Its economic strength provides an important tool to foster partnerships across the region and globally.

Political - The Saudi government has relied heavily on its relationship with the United States, which has primarily revolved around shared interests regarding regional security, oil and defense cooperation.

Regional Strategy

Continue to leverage its economic might through "checkbook diplomacy", whereby it provides financial incentives and aid packages to regional political actors in order to form a network of support across the Middle East and North Africa. Funds rebel/opposition groups in Syria against Bashar Al-Assad. Quell the Houthi rebellion in Yemen and counter threats that may emanate from, or are supported by, Iran.

Powerful Individuals

King Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince Muhammed bin Nayef, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

Potential Negotiation Moves

Broker Agreement - Seek to play a key role in brokering agreements to cease hostilities in Syria or Yemen

Strengthen Western Relationship - Strengthen relationship with the US around shared interests in the region, particularly the threat of increased Iranian influence

Work with Israel - Build strategic partnership with Israel with regards to intelligence sharing and containment of Iran

Internal Conflicts

There are contestations for influence with the royal family between the Saudi civil service, religious establishment and the military establishment. Among the ruling elite, the quest for royal succession between the princes and their factions primarily plays out in the form of tribal rivalries, but also manifests itself on the lines of ideological variances or differences in constituencies and support structures of princes.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, IAEA, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies
BAHRAIN, OMAN, KUWAIT, UAE, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government

Partners
IRAQ State of Law Coalition, TURKEY, EGYPT Government

Rivals
IRAN, QATAR

Adversaries
LEBANON Hezbollah, SYRIA Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood

Active Armed Opponents
YEMEN Houthis, ISIS, AQAP

Proxy
SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
EGYPT Government, PALESTINE Fatah, YEMEN Government

Aid Donor
N/A

SOMALIA AL-SHABAAB

Party Portrait

.Al-Shabaab is one of the most potent armed groups and terrorist organizations in the Horn of Africa, with an estimated 9,000 combatants (including foreign nationals) fighting largely within the territory of Somalia. The target of counterinsurgency operations led by the United Nations, African Union and Federal Government of Somalia, al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat to regional security. Al-Shabaab has fought to secure territory within Somalia and to expand and deepen its ties with Al-Qaeda. Evidence suggests that weapons from both Iran and Yemen have found their way to the hands of Al-Shabaab fighters within Somalia. Many of Al-Shaabab's combatants are reportedly focused on local grievancess, rather than waging global jihad against the "enemies of Islam."

Key Interests

- Increasing financial and military capacities;
- Controlling territory in Somalia;
- Acts of terror against countries / nationals of countries deploying troops to peace operations in Somalia

Sources of Leverage

Military – Threat of terrorist attack throughout the Horn of Africa and large swathes of East Africa.

Regional Strategy

Al-Shabaab has sought to cultivate partnerships with state and non-state entities that have the potential to provide military and financial support for its operations. While Somalia has aligned itself with Saudi Arabia, Al-Shabaab is alleged to have pursued ties with Tehran. And with civil war waging in Yemen, Al-Shabaab has profited from increased small arms proliferation just across the Gulf of Aden. Al-Shabaab prioritizes ties with Al-Qaeda.

Powerful Individuals

Ahmed Omar assumed the self-appointed role of "Emir" of Al-Shabaab in September 2014, following the death of his predecessor Ahmed Abdi Godane in a US airstrike that same month.

Potential Negotiation Moves

Potential to threaten terrorist attacks not only against Western and African targets within Somalia, but potentially also in neighboring states such as Eritrea and Djibouti. Al-Shabaab may also seek partnerships with ISIS, and to develop more overt partnerships with countries including Iran.

Internal Conflicts

Al-Shabaab has countless internal factions and divisions, with many disputing the extent to which it represents a single unitary actor. Each regional unit's recruits are likely driven by highly localized grievances, undermining the extent to which a single jihadist ideology can motivate the entire organization.

Memberships	Allies
N/A	AQAP

Partners	Rivals
IRAN	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
FRANCE, RUSSIA, CHINA, INDIA, JAPAN, YEMEN Government, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM	SOMALIA – GOVERNMENT, UNITED NATIONS

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
N/A	N/A

SOMALIA GOVERNMENT

Party Portrait

Somalia has been mired in internal conflict for more than 15 years, with limited central government control in that time. Free and fair elections in early 2017 and a peaceful transition of power are a positive sign. But the continued threat of Al-Shabab and frequent terror attacks in the capital, Mogadishu, suggest the country will continue to face significant challenges in the future. Somalia's government is dependent on external partners such as the African Union, Kenya and the UN to maintain internal security, and has formed productive alliances with Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. It has a hostile relationship with Iran.

Key Interests

- Provide domestic security and neutralize al-Shabab
- Build the capacity of its armed forces, leveraging overseas military assistance
- Build and strengthen the economy and reduce vulnerability to famine

Sources of Leverage

Political - Somalia remains a major source of migrants and refugees to Europe and Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen

Regional Strategy

Somalia has sought to capitalize upon Saudi Arabia – Iran rivalry in Africa by partnering with Riyadh in exchange for military and economic assistance. Mogadishu has cut off ties with Tehran in order to consolidate its status as a firm Sunni ally, accusing Iran of support for Islamic groups in Somalia such as al-Shabab.

Powerful Individuals

President Mohamed Adbullahi Mohamed; Prime Minister Omar Abdirad Ali Sharmarke

Potential Negotiation Moves

Limited options for negotiation moves beyond its own borders, given restricted economic, military and geopolitical capacity. Somalia is largely focused on neutralizing the threat posed by al-Shabab and, to a lesser degree, by international piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

Internal Conflicts

Al Shabab continue to pose a major threat to the security of Somali citizens, government assets and resources in Mogadishu and beyond, and to critical infrastructure. Somali "pirates" have the potential to disrupt trade through the Gulf of Aden.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, AU, OIC, UN

Allies
DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA

Partners
EUROPEAN UNION, JAPAN, UAE, UNITED STATES, TURKEY, CHINA

Rivals
N/A

Adversaries
ERITREA, IRAN

Active Armed Opponents
SOMALIA Al-Shabaab

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION, TURKEY, JAPAN, CHINA, FRANCE, UNITED KINGDON, RUSSIA, KUWAIT, UAE

SOUTH SUDAN

Party Portrait

South Sudan's regional perspective differs from Sudan's due to its non-Muslim political regime. South Sudan has a very weak economic, social and strategic position in the region. South Sudan declared independence from Sudan in 2011. Thus far, South Sudanese statehood has been characterized by instability, violence, and humanitarian need. The civil war between the government of Salva Kiir and opposition forces has displaced 3.6 million citizens as IDPs and refugees. The violence has also resulted in a humanitarian crisis, as 4.8 million are threatened with extreme hunger, and famine has begun to affect certain areas. Due to the severity of the violence, farmers in the agricultural-based society are largely unable to plant crops. Widespread attacks on aid workers and convoys make it difficult to reach vulnerable populations. The conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives, but the presence of a UN intervention of 15,000 troops has frequently drawn the ire of the president, who desires to avoid Western influence in the country.

For the past two years, the UN has fallen below its funding goals for South Sudan. In 2015, the UN only met 62 % of its $1.6 billion goal for the 4.6 million people affected. For 2016, only 88% of the more modest goal of $1.29 billion was funded. The resulting gap in resources leaves vulnerable populations in South Sudan more susceptible to starvation and disease.

Key Interests

- Strengthen the economy by making strong ties with major regional countries that are financially sound, such as Israel, which supports South Sudan with ammunition and financial aid.
- Resolve internal political problems with minimal assistance from outside actors like the UN, whom the South Sudanese government views with suspicion.

Sources of Leverage

Energy – South Sudan is oil rich
Natural resources – South Sudan shares many of the same resources as Sudan, such as mineral resources

Regional Strategy

Since independence, South Sudan has been plagued by severe political strife resulting in civil war, widespread drought and hunger. The government has failed to control the various insurgent groups, and has a contentious relationship with neighboring Sudan. South Sudan also faces the threat of infiltration by terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Therefore, South Sudan's regional strategy is to counter terrorism by securing its borders and collaborating with its neighbors on military and intelligence strategy. South Sudan also desires to fix its internal fractures, bring home refugees from surrounding areas, and develop its natural resource extraction to bring profit to the failing economy.

Powerful Individuals

Salva Kiir (chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation movement, SPLM, and commander in chief of the armed forces), Pagan Amum Okech (senior leader in the military and active political wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, SPLA), Dr Riek Machar Teny (senior member of the SPLA and leader of SPLM/A rival faction), James Wani Igga (National Assembly Speaker and current SPLM vice chairman), Dr Lam Akol (senior member of SPLA)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Convince China to mediate internal disputes - With India and Malaysia, China is one of South Sudan's three major oil investors; however, conflict threatens China's investments in both South Sudan and Sudan. China has the necessary leverage, resources, and interest to attract parties to the table.
Appeal to neighboring states for assistance in ending the conflict - Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda have an interest in ending the conflict as their borders have been besieged with South Sudanese refugees.

Internal Conflicts

After gaining independence from Sudan, South Sudan has fallen into a civil war between the government of Kiir and its opposition. In addition, internal conflict by internally displaced people has been a cause for concern for the government and public alike.

Memberships
AU, UN

Allies
EGYPT Government, INDIA

Partners
CHINA, EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INDIA, ISRAEL, PALESTINE Fatah, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES

Rivals
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAN, LIBYA Government of National Accord, SAUDI ARABIA, SUDAN

Adversaries
SUDAN

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
AU, EUROPEAN UNION, ISRAEL, UNITED STATES, UNITED NATIONS

SUDAN

Party Portrait

Sudan's Arabic and Muslim identity has a palpable effect on the country's foreign relations, and its desire to maintain strong ties with its neighboring countries in the region. In particular, Sudan's shattered economy leads it to seek close and cordial relations with other Arabic and predominantly Muslim neighbors rich in natural resources and economy, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Sudan sees Middle Eastern problems as its own. As such, the country tries to take a fully-fledged role in Middle Eastern conflicts. Sudan sees the Middle East as a source of power, derived from a common Arabic and Muslim identity. However, Sudan's main motivation is to develop strong ties with Arabic countries, regardless of their stance on different issues. Sudan desires to maintain positive relations with such diverse allies as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and now Israel. In contrast, South Sudan has a different stance owing to a non-Muslim regime in the country.

Key Interests

- Combat terrorism, particularly from the threat of al-Qaeda and ISIS
- Secure its borders from the South Sudanese conflict
- Support self-determination of rebel groups against corrupt governments
- Sustain strong ties with Middle East allies and partners, and obtain financial aid

Sources of Leverage

Energy – Sudan is oil rich
Natural Resources – Sudan possesses abundant natural resources, including oil, water, arable land, and mineral resources.
Soft Power – Sudan received global news coverage regarding its afflicted Darfur region, which brought increased attention and financial and humanitarian aid.
Technology – Sudan has 1/3 of Sudan/South Sudan's combined oil resources, but Sudan retains the infrastructure needed to export the oil

Regional Strategy

Sudan is interested in supporting Arabic and predominantly Muslim countries. Additionally, Sudan has adopted strategies against ISIS and al-Qaeda, opposing the operations of these non-state actors by securing Sudan's boundaries. Sudan opposes the hegemony of non-Muslim states like Israel and Shiite states like Iran and Iraq in order to maintain Sunni hegemony in the Middle East. However, to support self-determination in Arab Spring countries, Sudan intends to continue supplying rebels such as those in Libya and Yemen with aid, including weapons and military assistance.

Powerful Individuals

Omar al-Bashir (President), Bakri Hassan Saleh (Prime Minister), Hassabu Mohamed Abdelrahman (Second Vice President)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Offer to host dialogues with South Sudanese rebel leaders - South Sudan's rebel groups have struggled to articulate their demands and purpose. Sudan's leaders could initiate conversations with the rebel leaders, could lead to a comprehensive overall peace agreement.
Convince China to intervene in South Sudan - Chinese investments in Sudanese oil refineries and a planned nuclear reactor are threatened by instability in South Sudan. China has the necessary leverage, resources, and interest to attract parties to the table. May cause tension with the United States. The South Sudanese civil war has been rife with human rights abuses.

Internal Conflicts

Sudan is largely recognized to be an authoritarian state devoid of free and fair elections. In the 2010 presidential elections, the candidate from the main opposition party withdrew from the race, and pro-democracy activists reported government intimidation.

Memberships

ARAB LEAGUE, AU, IAEA, OIC, UN

Allies

EGYPT Government, INDIA

Partners

EUROPEAN UNION, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, PALESTINE Fatah, SAUDI ARABIA

Rivals

IRAN, ISRAEL, LIBYA Government of National Accord, UNITED STATES

Adversaries

SOUTH SUDAN

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

AU, EUROPEAN UNION, OIC, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES

SYRIA GOVERNMENT

Party Portrait

Since its ascent to power in 1963, the ruling Ba'ath Party has sought to forge a national identity based on a Syrian nationalism that, while incorporating elements of pan-Arab ideology, is rooted in the invocation of a specifically Syrian heritage. The government has simultaneously marshalled the Syrian region's Arab-Islamic, pre-Islamic, and post-Ottoman past to craft this identity. Despite the regime's desire for an ideologically-unified state, much of the population has not fully accepted the identity propagated by state officials. In particular, many Syrian Sunnis—the country's religious majority—view the government as a vehicle for the interests and aspirations of Alawites and other religious minorities at their own expense. The Syrian military, which is predominantly staffed in its upper levels by Alawites, has remained fiercely loyal to the regime. This religious divide has contributed to the increasingly sectarian nature of the civil war. The Syrian government, headed by President Bashar al-Assad, controls large sections of central and western Syria—but seeks to assert sovereignty over all of Syria's pre-conflict territory.

Key Interests

- Reassert government sovereignty over as much of its pre-war territory as possible
- Maintain full Syrian territory with no rival groups wielding political or territorial authority within Syrian borders
- Ensure that Sunni groups do not usurp power and thus pose a risk to the safety and prosperity of Alawites and other religious minorities

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power- Increasing prominence of hard-line Islamist groups in the Syrian opposition means the regime can claim to be a necessary bulwark against jihadi terrorism. International powers, particularly in the west, will be less willing to seek the removal of Assad from power.
Military - Has support from Russia and Iran, which greatly enhances military capabilities, also constrains military and political choices.
Geography - The government coalition currently controls most strategically-important areas of Syria, including the major cities, which places it in a strong bargaining position.

Regional Strategy

Maintain military action in an ongoing, large-scale, civil conflict with a range of groups to regain control of Syria. Align with Russia, invite it to deploy its military within the country in service of the regime's goals, and build coalition with Iran, Hezbollah, other non-Syrian Shi'ite volunteers to increase military power. Engages in military operations despite internationally-agreed ceasefire agreements, expresses willingness to engage with opposition armed groups in (indirect) bilateral and potentially even multilateral negotiations, with the precondition that Assad remain in power.

Powerful Individuals

President Bashar al-Assad (President, son of Hafez al-Assad, the former long-time President), Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani (commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Negotiate - Engage in political negotiations on the condition that the process preserves its control over the country. More likely to engage in talks when it is in a position of military pre-eminence on the ground in Syria; views negotiations as a way of cementing its territorial gains. It is possible that Assad may be forced to make greater concessions in negotiations if losing militarily.
Gain American Support - Seek to gain the tacit support of America by emphasizing anti-ISIS focus, thus buttressing the government against international pressure

Internal Conflicts

Government presents itself as the legitimate, sovereign authority, assailed by an opposition backed by foreign forces. However, Assad regime increasingly presents itself in sectarian terms as protector of Alawites. Forces comprise military largely controlled by Alawite officers, Shi'ite auxiliaries from Iran, Hezbollah and other countries and groups. These groups are vital to their military capacity. Syrian armed forces, whose commanders are bound to the regime by their shared religion, are likely to defend the government to the end. There are signs that some Alawite Syrians seek to distance themselves from Assad and downplay the sectarian aspects of the civil war.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE (Suspended), IAEA, OIC, UN

Allies
YEMEN Houthis

Partners
LEBANON Hezbollah

Rivals
EGYPT Government, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, JORDAN, PALESTINE Fatah,

Adversaries
BAHRAIN, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, GERMANY, ISRAEL, KURDS of Syria, LEBANON Government, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES

Active Armed Opponents
ISIS, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
RUSSIA, IRAN

Aid Recipient
UNITED NATIONS

Aid Donor
N/A

SYRIA JABHAT FATEH AL-SHAM

Party Portrait

Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, is a radical Islamist salafi-jihadist group operating in Syria, particularly in Idlib province. It is an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq (now known as ISIS), and, until recently, was the Syrian affiliate of the global al-Qaeda organization. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham aspires to forge an Islamic emirate and, eventually, a caliphate governed under sharia law. The group has also pursued a policy of presenting itself as Syrian, rather than global jihadi, movement, with the specific goal of leading the Syrian revolution and overthrowing the Assad regime.

Key Interests

- Create an Islamic state in Syria, governed under sharia law
- Destroy Western influence in the Middle East
- For some members: Wage a global jihad against western interests – including carrying out attacks in North America. Such aspirations have been absent from its rhetoric but, considering its close ties to al-Qaeda and transnational Islamic terrorism, it is likely that this goal has not been jettisoned.

Sources of Leverage

Military - The group maintains 5,000 - 10,000 fighters and military capabilities in the war against the Assad regime
Geography - Jabhat Fateh al-Sham controls areas in the North-West of Syria in and around Idlib province
Political - Although its ideology and links to al-Qaeda will continue to make it unacceptable to Western powers, Gulf nations and Turkey may begin to view the group as the only one capable of thwarting an outright regime victory, and thus as a potential proxy.

Regional Strategy

Jabhat Fateh al-Sham has worked to become a dominant player in the Syrian opposition, with a primary strategy of gaining control of large tracts of territory from the Syrian government and winning the support of the Sunni Syrian populace in the areas its governs. The group cooperates militarily with other opposition groups, both moderates and radicals, and uses moderate public rhetoric to appear more acceptable to Syrians. It recently changed its name to distance from al-Qaeda and attempt to appeal to a broader range of partners. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham maintains opposition to participation in internationally-negotiated peace-talks.

Powerful Individuals

Abu Muhammad al-Julani (emir), Abdul Mohsen Abdullah Ibrahim al-Sharikh (senior strategist), Sami al-Oreidi (senior religious figure and second in command)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Continue to Oppose Political Negotiations - Negotiation moves are constrained both by its own hostility towards international efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Syrian conflict, and by international players' refusal to engage with the terrorist group. Furthermore, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's support amongst the Syrian populace has generally benefitted from ongoing conflict, which binds civilians more closely to an armed group that can protect it militarily (but is less capable of protecting it politically in times of peace).
Build Coalition - Build negotiated political coalition among other opposition groups to gain power and create vision for negotiations with Assad regime.

Internal Conflicts

Jabhat Fateh al-Sham comprises both foreign and Syrian fighters. While both are committed to the same salafi-jihadist cause, it is likely that some more pragmatic Syrian fighters will be more amenable to limiting the group's medium-term aims to establishing an Islamic state in Syria than foreign jihadists, who harbor a more global vision. However, the more 'moderate' faction of the group is small and an ideological minority. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham is now formally separated from al-Qaeda, but is part of battlefield alliances with a shifting array of other opposition groups.

Memberships
N/A

Allies
N/A

Partners
AQAP

Rivals
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

Adversaries
LEBANON Hezbollah, IRAN, UNITED STATES

Active Armed Opponents
ISIS, RUSSIA, SYRIA Government

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
Individuals in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey.

SYRIA OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS

Party Portrait

Other than ISIS and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the Syrian opposition comprises a broad array of often-competing groups that operate within an unofficial system of fluid and regionally-specific battlefield alliances. They range in ideology from relatively secular democrats, to Kurdish nationalists, to hardline Sunni radicals. Many of the groups comprise communities that previously suffered from the uneven and crony-capitalist economic policies of the Assad regime. The decentralization of the network of groups known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) means it holds relatively little clout; more powerful is the Southern Front coalition (some of whose members are FSA-affiliated), and the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham group. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab-Christian coalition, are also fighting the regime.

Key Interests

- Remove the Assad regime from power. In light of their disadvantageous battlefield position, many groups may be recalibrating their goals seeking instead to remove Assad from power while leaving the regime largely intact and/or to achieve a stake in a post-conflict government
- Establish new government system: Create new, democratic government (for some groups), establish Islamic state based on sharia law (for others), underlying objectives can differ even within groups

Sources of Leverage

Political - Moderate opposition factions hold little political leverage due to their relative weakness on the battlefield and dependence on stronger, more hard-line groups in military endeavours. The strongest opposition elements on the ground are the radical Islamist Ahrar al-Sham and Kurdish-Arab-Christian SDF coalition. SDF can rely on foreign backing as the major opposition force combatting ISIS.
Military - Some groups, such as Ahrar al-Sham, can leverage military strength and territorial control to gain international support.
Soft Power - Groups seek external support on the basis that they are the only credible groups within Syria that have a chance of rolling back the regime's gains and defeating ISIS to become a moderate governing body in Syria.

Regional Strategy

These groups have generally been willing to engage in bilateral and multilateral peace-talks, although the future of Bashar al-Assad as President has proved a sticking-point in the past. With their decline in battlefield fortunes, opposition groups may decide to pursue a negotiated end to the conflict while they still have some military and political power to bargain with, or to seek expanded aid from external sources. Some have also sought military and financial aid from foreign powers. Also foreseeable is a combination of both strategies whereby opposition groups seek increased military hardware and funds from abroad to underpin military efforts to reach a point of stalemate (the outright defeat of Assad being unlikely) in which negotiations would be in both parties' interests.

Powerful Individuals

Ali al-Omar (leader of Ahrar al-Sham), Riad Hijab (head of the High Negotiations Committee)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Negotiate - Pursue a policy of engaging in political negotiations, possibly at the same time as seeking increased foreign support to achieve territorial gains, put Syrian government forces under pressure
Regime Change - Improve military position generated increased support to increase the opposition's ability to press for regime change and inclusion in a new government during political negotiations.
Moderate Rhetoric - Attempt to moderate rhetoric of hard-line groups in order to attract backing from western states.

Internal Conflicts

The non-ISIS/Jabhat Fateh al-Sham opposition suffers from a lack of overall cohesion and a divide between foreign-based political groups and domestic military groups. The foreign-based Syrian National Coalition enjoys little support amongst Syrians in Syria, while the High Negotiations Committee, a Saudi-backed bloc of both political and military entities created to engage in peace talks, does not include several major groups on the ground in Syria. The 'moderate' network of Free Syrian Army-affiliated militias is militarily weak, lacks a broad national command. Stronger factions include the SDF, based in the primarily-Kurdish north of the country, and Islamists including Ahrar al-Sham.

Memberships
N/A

Allies
N/A

Partners
KURDS of Syria, ISIS (nb: some groups in this category partner with ISIS, while others are actively fighting ISIS), JORDAN, UNITED STATES (certain groups only)

Rivals
HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham

Adversaries
LEBANON Hezbollah

Active Armed Opponents
SYRIA Government, RUSSIA, IRAN, ISIS (certain groups only)

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED STATES (certain groups only)

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
KUWAIT

TUNISIA

Party Portrait

Tunisia is currently governed by a coalition government of the Islamist party, Ennahda, and Nidaa Tounes, a diverse grouping of secularists, leftists, former regime members, traditional elites and oligarchs. Though working in a coalition, these parties, disagree on many issues, particularly in the lower bureaucratic levels. Outside of politics, the Tunisia General Labor Union (UGTT) is a powerful force with a large and diffuse membership.

Key Interests

- Ennahda: Remain a central player in Tunisian politics. Do not allow itself to be isolated.
- Niddaa Tounes: Maintain its position as a counterbalance to Ennahda in influencing national reforms and important political decisions.
- UGTT: Continue to push for political reforms that benefit its members and do not allow the national government to be delegitimized or to become deadlocked.

Sources of Leverage

Political - Capitalize on Tunisia's status as the success story of the Arabic Spring to convince donor countries to invest in its development and faltering economy. This status also makes it a desirable partner and recipient of Western security and economic assistance.

Regional Strategy

Tunisia's primary regional strategy is to build security and economic development partnerships to stave off insecurity and extremism next door in Libya. Additionally, Tunisia seeks to stem the flow of young Tunisians joining ISIS, as Tunisia is its largest contributor of foreign fighters.

Powerful Individuals

Rachid Ghannouchi (leader of Ennahda), Beji Caid Essebsi (leader of Nidaa Tounes), Houcine Abbassi (leader of the UGTT)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Restart Western Sahara peace talks – Mediate peace talks between Morocco and Polisario Front/Algeria on the subject of Western Sahara. Direct attention and assistance from Western powers to the conflict using Tunisia's status as the success story of the Arab Spring.

Internal Conflicts

Tunisia's internal political structure is still in many ways transitioning out of authoritarian rule. The main struggles exist between the Islamist and secular parties, and between progress in coastal and regional development. Corruption and police abuse are also still major concerns.

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, AU, IAEA, MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, OIC, UN

Allies
EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, TURKEY, UNITED STATES

Partners
ALGERIA, IRAN, LEBANON Government, MOROCCO Government, NATO, PALESTINE Fatah, SAUDI ARABIA

Rivals
LIBYA Government of National Accord

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
AQAP, ISIS

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
N/A

Aid Donor
EUROPEAN UNION, KUWAIT, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UNITED STATES

TURKEY

Party Portrait

Kemalism and the common Muslim identity have been the pivotal points around which the Turkish State and society have revolved during the last century. Turkey has remained non-interventionist as long as states are politically stable and turns interventionist when states go through political transition. A large part of this interventionism stems from its threat perception of Kurdish separatism, which in turn has its roots in Kemalist. The transnational political networks of PKK in Syria and Iraq are seen as a direct threat to territorial integrity. Post WWI events also have likely had a lasting impact on Turkey's policy formulation. At the end of the war, the allied powers signed the Treaty of Sevres, dividing the Anatolian region. Turks launched an armed struggle to drive out the foreigners and scrap the treaty of Sevres. After several years of struggle, Turks did succeed, but the legacy of Sevres continues in resistance to imperialist policies.

Key Interests

- Extend area of influence to Syria, Iraq, and beyond
- Have supportive Syrian government that can limit autonomy of YPG (considered a franchise of PKK). Establish buffer zone in Syria close to Turkish border to create bulwark between Kurd populations in Turkey and Syria
- Push back ISIS through direct military intervention in Syria
- Strengthen KRG in northern Iraq
- Take part in any military offensive launched against ISIS in Mosul.

Sources of Leverage

Soft Power - The greatest source of leverage to Turkey are its historical ties with Arabs, which make it easier to forge relationships. This is reflected in the way Turkey was readily accepted by the Arab countries under AKP, despite the fact that it had turned its back on the region after WWI.

Geography- Turkey's geo-strategic location allows it to influence decisions in Middle East.

Economic/ Military - Turkey has an advantage in the region in aggregate economic, military and geo-strategic strengths

Regional Strategy

Turkey is using its own military alongside Arab militias in Syria against ISIS and YPG. It was also supporting Jabhat al Fatah al Sham to fight Syrian government forces. Currently, its strategy is to keep northern Syria under its influence. Turkey is using its ties with Russia to limit the influence of YPG. In Iraq, it has established a mutually beneficial, economic relationship with the KRG. It also supports Turkmen and Sunni Arabs in northern Iraq.

Powerful Individuals

President Recep Tayyep Erdogan (AKP), Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly Ismail Kahraman

Potential Negotiation Moves

Syrian Solution - In the short term, agree to the proposal that would keep Assad in power during the transition period in Syria, with the caveat that Assad will be replaced eventually. Aim for a loose federal structure in Syria with areas of influence of different countries.

Balance Powers - Keep a balance in its relations with the US and Russia to have more flexibility in its decisions in the region.

Ceasefire with Kurds - Negotiate a ceasefire with Abdullah Ocalan in order to focus exclusively on ISIS.

Internal Conflicts

The conflict between the Turkish State and the PKK is the most prominent cleavage in the Turkish society. The PKK engaged in a devastating guerilla war with the Turkish State during the 1990s, resulting in deaths of over 40,000 people. Between 2013-2015, a ceasefire was enforced after an understanding was reached between PKK and Turkish government. But in June 2015, Erdogan's reluctance to extend military support to Syrian Kurds in Kobane against the Islamic State forces in Syria led to the truce breaking down. 2015-16 was one of the deadliest years in the history of Turkey's PKK conflict. The impact of Kemalist policies were limited to urban centers, while rural Anatolia remained aloof of these policies and conservative. A number of recent attacks in Turkish cities were claimed by the PKK.

Memberships

IAEA, NATO, OIC, OECD, OSCE, UN

Allies

UNITED STATES, TUNISIA, GERMANY, PALESTINE Hamas

Partners

SAUDI ARABIA, ISRAEL, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood, LIBYA Government of National Accord, KURDS of Iraq, JAPAN, JORDAN, PALESTINE Fatah, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, IRAN, UNITED STATES, HOLY SEE, TUNISIA, QATAR, EUROPEAN UNION, RUSSIA, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, SOMALIA Government

Rivals

IRAN, EGYPT Government, KURDS of Iran

Adversaries

N/A

Active Armed Opponents

ISIS, KURDS of Turkey, SYRIA Government

Proxy

SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

External Sponsor

PALESTINE Fatah

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Party Portrait

The UAE, while a small state, is a key regional player as a result of its economic strength, particularly in oil, finance, tourism, shipping. Furthermore, it has gained political strength in recent years as a result of its increased role in regional affairs, ranging from intervention in Libya to intervention in Yemen. Though its regional and global ambitions are increasing, its main interests lie in strengthening economic growth in the long term, continuing its modernization and diversification agenda, and ensuring the continuity of the current regime.

Key Interests

- For the most part, the UAE acts primarily on its economic interests. To this end, the country aims to paint itself as the cosmopolitan business capital of the GCC and the Arab world.
- Critically, it also focuses on regime stability, and maintaining a stable federative relationship among the various emirates

Sources of Leverage

Economic - Its economic might and role as an investment and business hub in the Arab world are a significant source of soft power.
Political – Regime stability, particularly given a region characterized by conflict and instability, is a strong source of leverage.
Convening Power - The UAE's strong partnerships with key GCC allies, as well as Western states (including hosting a French military base), contributes to being seen as a responsible actor in the region that can be counted on to support key regional initiatives (including military missions).

Regional Strategy

Its regional strategy is largely anchored in strengthening its economic position as a hub for investment in the MENA region. Recently though it has assumed a greater regional leadership role, participating in air strikes in Libya in 2011, and most recently in Yemen.

Powerful Individuals

President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Prime Minister Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Potential Negotiation Moves

Strengthen ties with GCC allies - The UAE may further strengthen its ties with Saudi Arabia and other GCC partners, therefore fortifying the GCC as an economic and political bloc, and increasingly as a military alliance.
Consolidating ties with Western partners - Strengthening ties with the United States and European partners are key interests in order to maintain external legitimacy and financial/military support.

Internal Conflicts

Perceived threat of political dissenters and in particular Muslim Brotherhood factions, terrorist threats (often related to perceived political dissenters)

Memberships
ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, IAEA, ISTANBUL COOPERATION INITIATIVE, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies
SAUDI ARABIA, BAHRAIN, KUWAIT

Partners
OMAN, UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM, FRANCE

Rivals
IRAN, QATAR

Adversaries
N/A

Active Armed Opponents
N/A

Proxy
N/A

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
EGYPT Government, YEMEN Government

Aid Donor
N/A

UNITED KINGDOM

Party Portrait

The United Kingdom is third most populous state in the EU and the second largest economy. The UK voted to leave the EU in June 2016. As a result, the UK remains primarily focused on negotiations of future economic and political relationships with the EU. The UK has been an active player in world politics. In addition to membership in NATO and permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the UK wields influence through longstanding cultural and political relationships, with the experience of centuries of diplomacy and crisis management. Actors in the Middle East remain skeptical of the UK as an impartial actor, given the UK's history of imperialism and intervention. Domestic conflict over the course of the UK overshadows the UK's interest in the Middle Eastern conflicts. With terms for the UK's exit from the EU far from settled, Brexit has widened cleavages in the major political parties.

Key Interests

- Ensure its own stability and the stability of its neighbors and the EU by eliminating the threat of Islamist terrorism, limiting the impact of refugees
- Retain role as one of Europe's most important powers post-Brexit
- End Syrian Civil War
- Defeat ISIS
- Aid Middle East Peace Process
- Strengthen global trade through economic ties and investment

Sources of Leverage

Convening Power - Although the UK is losing global influence by leaving the EU, it maintains a strong influence through its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, its membership in NATO
Economic- Increasing economic investment in the region, and is a large UK is also a bilateral donor of development and humanitarian aid
Military - Founding member of the Global Coalition to counter ISIS, and second biggest contributor to the military campaign. Provides close air support and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activity as well as a military training mission in both Syria and Iraq.

Regional Strategy

The UK's approach to the Middle East is limited by domestic concerns, especially in the wake of the uncertainty surrounding the UK's exit from the EU. Any potential moves are considered first by their impact on security and commercial interests, and then from a desire to define a new role in international politics and to strengthen international institutions. The UK seeks an end to the Syrian civil war, to concentrate military efforts on the fight against ISIS.

Powerful Individuals

Prime Minster Theresa May (Tory Party); Jeremy Corbyn (opposition Labor Party leader); Nigel Farage (leader of the nationalistic right-wing UK Independence Party); First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon

Potential Negotiation Moves

Syrian Settlement – Support Syrian-led political settlement based on a transition away from the Assad regime.
Military Involvement - Constrained by reliance on outside support, domestic challenges, and the demands of international law.
Soft Power - Will likely remain one of the leading development actors in the region.
Two State Solution - Remains committed to a negotiated two state solution, by binding practical, concrete improvements on the ground to de-escalate the conflict and drive forward political progress.

Internal Conflicts

Domestic political leaders remain split on the UK's international role. Prime Minister May has called for further engaging with the region, while opposition Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for UK withdrawal from NATO and opposes all military intervention unless explicitly approved by the UN. Nigel Farage, leader of the nationalistic right-wing Independence Group has gained international recognition. It remains unclear if a post-Brexit UK will turn to isolationism, international irrelevance, or seek to demonstrate that it is still a force in the world.

Memberships
EU (anticipated departure by 2019), IAEA, NATO, OECD, OSCE, UN (Security Council)

Allies
UNITED STATES, FRANCE, GERMANY, BAHRAIN, LIBYA Government of National Accord, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, JORDAN

Partners
ISRAEL, INDIA, LIBYA House of Representatives, SOUTH SUDAN, KUWAIT, OMAN, QATAR, SOUTH SUDAN, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Rivals
RUSSIA

Adversaries
SYRIA Government

Active Armed Opponents
AQAP, ISIS

Proxy
KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
JORDAN

Aid Donor
N/A

UNITED NATIONS

Party Portrait

The two most significant actors in the UN are the Secretary-General and the Security Council. The new Secretary-General largely views strife in the Middle East as a failure of the international community to effectively lead the region and a lack of international capacity to prevent and/or solve violent conflicts there. He therefore seeks a proactive leadership role in the region to promote peace and stability. The Security Council, however, views conflict in the Middle East as disparately as the countries that compose it.

Key Interests

The key interests of the UN are as varied as its member states. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' primary interest is alleviating the humanitarian refugee crisis in the Middle East. Within the Security Council and other organs of the UN, there is no consensus on key interests (such as the Syrian conflict) outside of the nominal ideological interest of preserving international peace and security.

Sources of Leverage

Political - The Secretary-Generals' primary source of leverage is his influence and high visibility within his position. In addition, he has the ability to rearrange, restructure, and refocus the agencies that make up the Secretariat.

Military/Economic/Convening Power - The Security Council has more tools available, including military action (peacekeeping operations), economic sanctions, and legally binding resolutions.

Regional Strategy

Secretary-General Guterres' regional strategy is squarely aimed at achieving great power consensus and participation in conflict management. His overarching goal is to address the refugee challenge and, then, to develop and improve the regional capacity to prevent and solve the violent conflicts that lead to large-scale displacement. Within the Security Council, there is no clear regional strategy, and division on key regional conflicts has been the norm in recent years.

Powerful Individuals

The most visible unitary actor is Secretary-General Guterres, the chief administrative officer of the UN Secretariat and spokesperson for the UN. Within the Security Council, the permanent five members (P5) – China, France, Russia, UK, and US – are undoubtedly the most powerful states due to their veto power over Security Council resolutions.

Potential Negotiation Moves

The Secretary-General may:
Pressure Great Powers - Use public pressure against great powers or obstructionist states to encourage productive conflict resolution
Restructure agencies to focus on certain conflicts or regional challenges such as forced displacement
Shuttle Diplomacy - Vigorously engage in shuttle diplomacy to mitigate or end conflicts
The Security Council may:
Sponsor Political Resolution - Seek to sponsor a political resolution to the Syrian conflict through the Geneva talks or similar fora that is acceptable to all P5 members

Internal Conflicts

Due to the sprawling bureaucracy of the UN and the diversity of interests and positions within each committee and each member state, the UN can often appear to send disparate and, often, conflicting signals on the various issues it discusses. Given the structure of the different committees – the Security Council, which can be bogged down by the threat of a P5 veto versus the more-open General Assembly, which passes resolutions with 50 percent plus one vote – certain organs offer smaller states the opportunity to play an "activist" role and "get ahead" of the UNSC or other committees.

Memberships	Allies
Quartet on the Middle East	N/A

Partners	Rivals
N/A	N/A

Adversaries	Active Armed Opponents
N/A	N/A

Proxy	External Sponsor
N/A	N/A

Aid Recipient	Aid Donor
SYRIA Government, PALESTINE Fatah, LEBANON Government, JORDAN, SUDAN, SOUTH SUDAN, EGYPT Government	UNITED STATES, JAPAN, GERMANY, UNITED KINGDOM, FRANCE

UNITED STATES

Party Portrait

Since World War II, the U.S. has been a significant stakeholder in the Middle East. From WWII to the end of the Cold War, the US parried the USSR's moves under a strategy of "offshore balancing," primarily relying on partners in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, to pursue US interests as allies and clients. In this balance, each major power ordered its priorities in the region based on the other's movements. Later, from the end of the Cold War to the mid-2000s, the US reigned undisputed as the most influential power in the Middle East. However, US power has begun to wane in the past decade. US popular fatigue from military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, in concert with uncertainty born of the 2008 financial crisis, have encouraged US allies like Turkey and Israel toward warmer relations with Russia. Although the US still exerts the largest influence in the region, in recent years Russia and China have stepped up to more aggressively pursue their own interests.

Key Interests

- Promote national security/counterterrorism by degrading and deterring terrorist groups through intelligence sharing/coalitions
- Maintain balance of power/regional alliance; do not allow Russia or China to obtain dominance in the Middle East
- Enhance energy security for substantial imports of oil
- Partner with Israel to protect security and democracy in the region. Support peace between Israel and Palestinian Territories
- Encourage human rights and democracy, especially in the face of Russian and Chinese ascendance in the region

Sources of Leverage

Energy - Despite lessening dependence on Middle East oil, the US maintains access to significant energy resources in the region
Military – The US boasts the most powerful military in the world, allocating hundreds of billions of dollars more budget than its closest competitor, China.
Convening Power – Funds peace negotiations and uses its considerable motivating power to bring warring parties to peace talks
Soft Power – Exercises public diplomacy, private diplomacy and persuasion tactics, as well as exporting culture through popular music, movies, fashion, etc
Economic – Since the 1950s, the US has sent about $170 billion in financial assistance to countries in the Middle East; Israel alone received another $62bn
Political – The US holds partnerships and alliances with powerful local stakeholders, like Israel and Saudi Arabia, and coalitions in Syria and elsewhere
Technological – The US has the most advanced technology in the world, to be used destructively (drone strikes) or peacefully (technology transfers).

Regional Strategy

Still exerts wide influence through soft and hard power. Strong interest in maintaining energy security, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, promoting human rights and democracy, and partnering with regional allies to combat terrorism. Lessening energy dependence by lowering consumption and developing domestic resources. New US administration's negative view toward the Iranian nuclear agreement may threaten its implementation. A new strategy has been for the US' allies to bear more of the brunt of maintaining stability in the Middle East.

Powerful Individuals

Donald Trump (President), Steve Bannon (Chief Strategist), Reince Priebus (Chief of Staff), Gen. James Mattis (Secretary of Defense), Gen. Joseph Dunford (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff), Rex Tillerson (Secretary of State), Dan Coats (Director of National Intelligence), Earle Litzenberger (Acting Permanent Representative to NATO), Nikki Haley (Ambassador to the UN)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Pursue collaboration over confrontation - US can choose to engage positively with China and Russia, and pool resources over shared interests like political stability and energy security.
Organize joint efforts around universal concerns - If US could organize efforts toward finding solutions for scarce water resources, it would benefit from the critical mass of resources and publicity

Internal Conflicts

When characterizing Democrat and Republican political parties, it is important to note that many smaller factions within the parties have differing views on U.S. interests. Nonetheless, in terms of broad strokes, the Republican party tends more toward hawkishness and hard power, while the Democratic party tends toward dovishness and soft power.

Memberships
IAEA, NATO, Quartet on the Middle East, OECD, OSCE, UN (Security Council)

Allies
BAHRAIN, EGYPT Government, EUROPEAN UNION, GERMANY, ISRAEL, JAPAN, JORDAN, KUWAIT, MOROCCO Government, TUNISIA, TURKEY, UNITED KINGDOM

Partners
ALGERIA, ARAB LEAGUE, DJIBOUTI, HOLY SEE, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, INDIA, INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IRAQ Secular Nationalists, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Turkey, KUWAIT, LIBYA Government of National Accord, LIBYA House of Representatives, OPEC, PALESTINE Fatah, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, SOMALIA Government, SOUTH SUDAN, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups,

Rivals
CHINA, RUSSIA, SUDAN

Adversaries
IRAN, IRAQ Islamic Supreme Council, IRAQ Sadrist Movement, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Hamas, SOMALIA Al Shabaab, SYRIA Government, SYRIA Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, YEMEN Houthis

Active Armed Opponents
AQAP, ISIS

Proxy
LEBANON Government, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria

External Sponsor
N/A

Aid Recipient
ALGERIA, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAQ Secular Nationalist Parties, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KURDS of Iraq, KURDS of Syria, LEBANON Government, MOROCCO Government, PALESTINE Civil Society, SOUTH SUDAN, SUDAN, TUNISIA

Aid Donor
N/A

YEMEN GOVERNMENT

Party Portrait

Yemen's ongoing civil war limits the ability of President Hadi's administration to govern. Having fled to Riyadh, Hadi has now returned to Yemen but is limited to the second city of Aden, unable to operate out of the capital Sana'a. Yemen is a major source country of refugees in the Middle East, with many millions of IDPs within the country's borders. Hadi's government faces significant challenges in meeting the immense humanitarian needs of his people, with insecurity limiting the ability of international development agencies to access vulnerable populations in need. Hadi has depended on the military intervention of a coalition of Arab states, led by ally Saudi Arabia, to counter the threat of the Shia Houthi rebels - and to challenge their control of Sana'a. The Yemeni government has also depended to a significant degree on Western powers - and in particular the US Government - to counter the threat posed by AQAP.

Key Interests

- End civil war in the country.
- Disarm and neutralize the Houthis and AQAP.
- Revitalize the economy and export industries.

Sources of Leverage

Political – Yemen's ability to secure its borders and potentially decrease the volume of people leaving the country is a potential source of leverage for engagement with other Middle Eastern and European states.

Regional Strategy

Yemen's capacity to influence wider events in the Middle East is significantly constrained, given its preoccupation with the crisis at home. However, maintaining its alliance with Saudi Arabia is a critical priority for Hadi's government - particularly given Riyadh's ability to mobilize other Arab states to take military action against the Houthis.

Powerful Individuals

President Abdrabbuh Mansur Madi; Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr

Potential Negotiation Moves

Leverage the knowledge of Yemen's military, defense and intelligence communities on AQAP and the Houthis' locations in engaging with external powers intent on neutralizing these groups' threat.

Internal Conflicts

The Yemeni government is engaged in a civil war involving the Houthis, also seeking to neutralize AQAP.

Memberships

ARAB LEAGUE, IAEA,OIC, UN

Allies

DJIBOUTI, ERITREA, INDIA, SOMALIA Government, EGYPT Government, MOROCCO Government, JORDAN, SUDAN, KUWAIT, UAE, QATAR, BAHRAIN, TURKEY, CHINA

Partners

UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION, FRANCE, UNITED KINGDOM, INDIA

Rivals

IRAN, ERITREA

Adversaries

ISRAEL

Active Armed Opponents

AQAP, YEMEN Houthis

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

SAUDI ARABIA

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

UAE, UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION, JAPAN, TURKEY, RUSSIA, KUWAIT

YEMEN HOUTHIS

Party Portrait

The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, are a Zaydi-Shi'ite organization currently engaged in a loose coalition with Yemen's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Having mobilized a broad coalition of religious parties, leftists and rebels, uniting in a radical anti-establishment movement, the Houthis are a potent political and military force. While the Houthis' capacities have been damaged by Saudi-led airstrikes, they retain control of Yemen's capital city of Sana'a. Their capacities are buttressed by extensive financial and material support from Iran, the Houthis' main external sponsor.

Key Interests

- Establish new, independent state in northeast of Yemen
- Restore the Zaydi Imamate and rule over Yemen
- Return of former President Saleh
- Continue flow of weapons and resources from Tehran
- Defeat AQAP
- Ensure dominance of Shia groups

Sources of Leverage

Military - The Houthis have the potential to threaten the Yemeni government and its allies with violence. This could also include stoking Sunni - Shia tensions.

Regional Strategy

The Houthis' regional strategy has consisted of recruiting allies to provide political, military and financial support to the rebellion. Most importantly, this includes Iran, a natural ally to this Shia political-religious movement. The Houthis have also built alliances with Hezbollah, Russia and Syria. Furthermore, they have also engaged former President Saleh in a coalition, given his widespread popularity amongst many Yemenis and the armed forces. The precise ultimate objective of this strategy, however, remains unclear - and different factions of the Houthis may articulate different objectives.

Powerful Individuals

Abdul-Malik al-Houthi (leader), Yahia al-Houthi (brother of leader)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Secure more direct engagement from Iran, escalating tensions from a proxy war between Tehran and Riyadh to direct conflict between the parties drawing in much of the Sunni and Shia alliances in the region.

Internal Conflicts

The Houthis are engaged in a civil war with the Yemeni Government, while also fighting to weaken AQAP.

Memberships

N/A

Allies

SYRIA Government, RUSSIA, LEBANON Hezbollah, IRAN

Partners

N/A

Rivals

N/A

Adversaries

SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES, UNITED NATIONS, EUROPEAN UNION, ISREAL, EGYPT Government, MOROCCO Government, JORDAN, SUDAN, KUWAIT, UAE, QATAR, BAHRAIN

Active Armed Opponents

AQAP, YEMEN Government, ISIS

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A

PART FOUR

STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENTS

I. Algeria: Restructuring Behind the Curtain of Pouvoir

Written by: Eli Stiefel
Edited by: Margaret Snyder

I. Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions[1]

After gaining independence from France in 1962, Algeria witnessed increased Arabization and conflict, particularly in its eleven-year-long civil war. Presently, the Algerian state is plagued by domestic rivalries among the Army General Staff, the Presidency, and the recently dismantled spy agency, the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS). This split is further complicated by internal clan and factional conflicts within the groups. These groups compose the shadowy business, intelligence, military, and political forces controlling the nation. They act behind the scenes in pursuit of their own various interests, either through the elected government or around it.

Pouvoir, or "power," in Algeria, refers to the shadowy business, intelligence, military, and political forces really in control of the nation who act from behind the scenes for their own interests, often through the elected government or around it. In any negotiation with Algeria, two essential factors must be understood: first, the economic context within which these forces and the country operate and second, the governmental and extra-governmental power structure itself. Both of these elements will be discussed in brief before analysis of how the central actors present in the country interact within these parameters.

Economic Context of the State:

Algeria is one of the largest natural gas producers and among the top three oil producers in Africa, as well as the second largest external supplier of natural gas to Europe.[2] The country is often described as resistant to change and guilty of only adopting surface level reforms to its state-run oil and gas industry.[3] Throughout Algerian history, economic reforms in times of crisis triggered by lower oil prices have been met with violence and instability that threatened the state system. As a result, the government has been cautious and incremental in its movements toward reform in all arenas.[4]

Today, revenue from hydrocarbons fund 60% of government spending and account for 90% of total export revenue. Historically, the government has distributed this wealth across the society with a focus on social spending and the aim of helping to maintain stability by creating a sense of fairness. As a result, an expectation for subsidies on food, free health care, free education, government jobs and other handouts has become commonplace. This fundamentally connects the energy industry and the revenue it generates to social stability in Algeria. This connection is starkly evident in the events of mid-1986, when the oil price per barrel dropped suddenly from ~$30/barrel to $10/barrel. This precipitated a drop in the country's revenue, from approximately $14 billion early in the decade, to $7 billion by 1986.[5] As a consequence, the Algerian government was forced to cut social welfare spending, in particular, food subsidies, causing social and economic crisis. The onset of this financial crisis triggered protests and demonstrations and in 1988 hundreds were killed in these events.

To deal with this social and economic crisis, the government put forward measures to open up and liberalize the economy and political system. However, opening the economy exacerbated some of the economic issues due to lack of competition, high unemployment, and fewer price controls. In 1989 discussions began about a process of constitutional reform and political liberalization, including the creation of political parties and the holding of open and free elections. From 1990-91 a coalition of political Islam groups won the local and the first round of the parliamentary elections. This was a stunning defeat for the traditional state powers. Some of these parties called for imposing sharia law on society, though the state had opted for a more secular society post-independence. The military nullified the election results sweeping the politicians who had sanctioned the reforms and the election from power as well as deferring the election itself. The winning party, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was banned and civil war began, ultimately taking 150,000 to 200,000 lives and lasting until 2002. This violent period and its beginning with the basic reforms to the national oil and gas industry are not forgotten today in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, as Algerians look at their neighbor Libya, or further afield to Egypt and see the difficulties that change has brought.

Two factors brought this period of violence to an end. First was President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's election in 1999 on a platform of national reconciliation and consensus building in both society and the political system. Second, and more important, was the welcome increase in oil prices and oil production allowing for a revival of state spending on the welfare subsidies that helped stabilize society. In 2011, with unrest breaking out across the region, Algeria was in a

position to increase this spending and weather the storm. A massive $286 billion spending program[6] on infrastructure and housing subsidies, and the raising of public wages across sectors, including in the security services and military, as well as increased spending to meet security concerns on its borders, kept the situation from erupting into chaos once again. With oil prices slumping, this remedy cannot continue indefinitely however.

Due to lower oil prices Algeria is again faced with cost cutting decisions in a climate of political and security uncertainty. In 2016, Algeria faced the lowest growth since 1997 at 1.4% and government revenue has again halved due to declining prices and output of maturing fields as well as growing domestic consumption. The budget deficit, at 6.2% in 2014, reached 11.5% in 2016. Past levels of spending cannot be maintained. Cuts to overall spending have already hit 9% in the new budget, mostly through cuts to transportation infrastructure and to ongoing projects. Gas prices, value added taxes, and import duties on some products have also gone up. In tandem, construction of refining capacity has been scaled back and foreign reserves have been drawn down to fill budget holes and maintain subsidies. Luckily, Algeria previously built up foreign reserves, as of 2013 possessing some $200 billion, but these have now sunk close to $120 billion and the oil stabilization fund, extra money set aside for social spending, has dropped to $32 billion in the last few years, about half of what it was in the past. Clearly, the situation is untenable in the long term without significant reform and there is a broad acceptance of this fact among many Algerians and foreign observers.[7] The big question then is how to navigate such big changes through a political power structure split between the competing factional interests within the presidency, Army General Staff, and what remains of the military intelligence service (DRS), and whether such changes will alter the power structure itself.

Deep Roots of the Power Structure:

Algeria's long colonial history plays a key role in understanding its national psyche and interactions with Morocco, Tunisia, and other possible negotiation partners. Familiarity and sensitivity to this history are needed to understand its role in any negotiation. From 1830 to 1962, Algeria was controlled by France. During this period, Algeria had the status of an "overseas province," meaning it was effectively a part of France. This was in contrast to the colonial status of Tunisia and protectorate status of Morocco and was likely a cause for Algeria's particularly bloody national liberation struggle. This struggle, and the experiences of those who took part in it, continue to shape politics in Algeria today as the aged members of the revolutionary generation still cling to positions of influence, and a power structure born of necessity during the war. In particular, the "need to foster cooperation and solidarity in the face of a more powerful enemy, engendered an enduring sense of national identity and political purpose…[while] in addition, it created a tendency to justify political control from above as necessary to combat "enemies" of the state, whether external or internal in origin."[8]

Since its earliest conception, the state of Algeria has had a bifurcated personality between the civil and military wings of the National Liberation Front (FLN). In a meeting in 1956, a rule imposing the supremacy of the civil, as opposed to the military, dimensions of the party was agreed upon to limit the already evident tensions between the two simultaneous Algerian nationalist wings, at that time divided between the leadership in exile and the partisans of Ahmed Ben Bella.[9] With the end of the war for independence in 1962, the FLN was "absorbed into the army in the form of a populist ideology which preserved the FLN's role symbolically; the army thereby came to embody [the entire] historical heritage of the FLN,"[10] while standing behind the office of the presidency who was left in official control of the country.

The conceit of equilibrium between the army and the presidency, was ruptured in the 1990s as an internal enemy emerged in the form of the coalition of Islamist parties behind the victorious Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the army coup to nullify the elections results, and the subsequent civil war. This conflict gave the military leaders, notably those of the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), the military intelligence service, in particular its head, Mohamed "Tewfik" Mediène, and members of the Army General Staff, defacto leadership, and immense influence, as it was their job to prosecute the war and ensure the stability and continuity of the country.[11] Upon his election in 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika was motivated to shift this balance of power back toward civilian control, though how much he was immediately able to do this is uncertain.[12]

The power structure in Algeria today has changed somewhat from this situation. Though it is certainly still characterized as "a cabal of shadowy figures within the state's military-industrial complex, operating at times cooperatively and at other times conflictually…as the final arbiter[s] of national policymaking and selections to high office,"[13] this power dynamic seems to have moved, for now, in the president's favor. In response to either the 2013 terrorist attack on the In Amenas gas plant, a reassessment of interests and alliances, or some combination of the two, the powerful DRS has been dismantled. Its various organs have been dissolved or shifted under the responsibility of branches of the Army General Staff, which has theoretical accountability to the Office of the President, though in practice it has historically been this body that selects the person who actually fills the office of "president." Even the head of the DRS, Mohamed "Tewfik" Mediène, "the world's longest incumbent head of a country's intelligence services,"[14] and a central powerbroker, was retired in 2015.

There is strong disagreement among sources as to whether this restructuring of the DRS was primarily the prerogative of the president and his close advisors,[15] whether it is ultimately still the Army General Staff in charge behind the scenes who sanctioned this restructuring to consolidate their own power,[16] or some combination of the two along shared lines of interest and temporary clan alignment. What is clear however, is that the primary actors left standing in a public capacity are President Bouteflika, surrounded by a core group of close advisors in his ill-health, including his brother Said Bouteflika, and General Ahmed Gaïd-Salah, the Army Chief of Staff and Deputy Defense Minister.

As there are not clearly "official" party-actors vying for power and influence in the country, further analysis shall focus on the likely motivating factors for the internal elements of this network of elite competition, notably on those of the close circle of President

Bouteflika, General Gaïd-Salah and the Army General Staff, and the potential for recently deposed elements, like Mohamed "Tewfik" Mediène and the DRS, to serve as spoilers. The first two groups are essential to any domestic or international negotiation, and the third, despite being officially dismantled, remains a potent network that could undermine any proposed agreements.

II. Sources of Leverage

Algeria seeks to maintain its military dominance of North Africa, and to strengthen military and intelligence cooperation with Western powers while seeking non-threatening economic innovations. To that end, the Algerian military boasts the largest defense budget in Africa; at $13 billion USD, it is over twice the size of its Egyptian counterpart. Algeria also possesses robust military power projection capabilities and widely acknowledged counterterrorism experience. Diplomatically, Algeria aims to become more engaged in the region, and avoid being isolated for its strong support of self-determination and national sovereignty in the case of Western Sahara. Algeria desires to settle the Western Sahara dispute in favor of the self-determination of the indigenous Polisario Front.

III. Internal Conflicts

Algerian politics are complicated by the strong internal conflicts among the Army General Staff, the Presidency, and the former DRS. The former DRS is still able to manipulate extremist groups, civil society, and media; it is unknown whether the erstwhile agency retains influence in the government.

 Actors in the Drama:

The Army General Staff:
        One fundamental interest drives the Army General Staff— its need to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. In order to do this, the Army General Staff must maintain its role as the central pillar in the Algerian power structure. These tiered interests are embodied in the revolutionary ideals it inherited as successor to the FLN and National Liberation Army (ALN) soldiers of the independence struggle against France, which reify a unified and strong Algeria in which the army serves as the protector and guarantor. After independence, the ALN envisioned a state that would serve the people of Algeria, one not controlled by the bourgeoisie who would use state capital to their advantage. In service to this design, the army traditionally designates the president, suggests ministers, filters candidates for legislative and municipal elections and surveils functionaries in different ministries. The Army General Staff has not directly occupied itself with this task, but instead created a "political police" service to do the job (the DRS), while it plays something akin to the role of the "Velayat el Fakih" in Iran, the difference being that while in Iran there is a single "supreme guide," in Algeria there are many generals exercising power behind the scenes.[17] This power stems again from the historically legitimate role of the military as originator, during the independence struggle, and protector of the state. Most elite members of the military typically view themselves as the closest to this "historical legitimacy, and believe that they are uniquely placed to set the ideal standards of nationalist behaviour and policy."[18] As a consequence, they take the strong position that the emergence of competitive political parties is "useless and harmful for civic harmony," as all Algeria requires "is competent administration, the legitimacy for which"[19] comes from the Army. Any increases in power by other actors or reforms that might affect this historical identity and role are seen as a threat.
        Where the current Chief of the General Staff and Deputy Defense Minister Ahmed Gaïd-Salah stands on this is uncertain. As a member of the armed forces, he came up through a system built on this worldview, however, sources differ on his relationship with the army and the Bouteflika faction. He has been called a "loyal zealot of Bouteflika"[20] and "the only member of the military chiefs who can be certain of Bouteflika's confidence,"[21] which are not altogether congruent statements, one implying actual loyalty, the other merely that he has Bouteflika's confidence, what he might do with that is unknown. Equally, others have surmised that he, or a faction within the armed forces acting with or without him, may be the new power behind the throne.[22] Retired general Hocine Benhadid called him weak and without obedience from the heads of the military regions,[23] the important leaders of Algerian forces in the six military commands of the country. A former minister says of General Gaïd-Salah, that he "owes [President Bouteflika] everything, beginning with his post,"[24] which would seem to support the premise of his loyalty, and potentially signal the coming to fruition of Lahouari Addi's Machiavellian view of Algerian politics[25].

Bouteflika & the Presidency: Transition?
        The interests of the presidency are and have been for some time the interests of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Though at age 79 and rarely seen in public since a stroke in April 2013, it is not clear how decisive he remains. However, the publicly communicated actions and aims of his office and allies do still seem to largely adhere to the position he has long advocated, an independent and authoritative role for the presidency. Much like the Army General Staff, Bouteflika's interests seem to extend from those of the Algerian war for independence (in which he fought) – a sovereign and strong Algeria with a government that represents the Algerian people, in reaction to the French Colonial Administration, which decidedly did not. Yet, Bouteflika as a sharp diplomat and worldly leader (he served as Foreign Minister under presidents Ben Bella and Boumedienne) is also aware that the current system is not working efficiently. Whether or not he still seeks to change the order of things is not clear, nor is it clear whether those surrounding him have any intentions of doing this. They may instead seek to use his name and their association with him to assume power themselves in any possible

succession struggle, or at the least, negotiate a situation in which they are immune from prosecution by the next regime.

A series of names has been suggested as likely replacements when Bouteflika leaves power. Though any succession period is likely to be an uncertain one, as expectations of a constitutional amendment introducing a vice president, and thus anointed successor, were not met in the recently introduced new text.[26] Said Bouteflika, the president's brother and advisor, has at times been suggested as a possible successor. More recently, Ali Haddad, a businessman and owner of a major construction business, several media outlets and a football club has been suggested.[27] Both could face potential resistance from members of the Army General Staff, as well as the remnants of the DRS, who are particularly resistant to the idea of Said Bouteflika assuming power.[28] The current Prime Minister, Abdelmalek Sellal, is another name put forward.[29] Whatever the verdict when the time comes, the apparent uncertainty at the top, combined with the frustrations in Algerian society at being left only to approve pre-made decisions in elections, spells trouble for this group, and means the presidency will be an uncertain negotiating partner.

General Mediéne & the DRS:

Understanding the current political climate among those names publically acknowledged as members of the political class is important, but there is also a deeper, yet unofficial state structure at work, that of the extra-legal, non-institutionalized forces commonly associated with Algeria's former military intelligence services, the DRS and its legendary chief Mohamed "Tewfik" Mediène. It is widely recognized that "the bipolarization of the regime is not recognized in the official discourse because the legitimate power of the army is neither institutionalized, nor constitutional,"[30] however within this non-institutionalized structure is a yet deeper element. There is an idea that the military and the intelligence service that it generated during the war of independence cannot be dismantled by any one person, president or otherwise, because it existed prior to the state. Further, it is posited that individuals like Mohamed Mediène are only a guardian or step in the current manifestation of this entity that is essential to the life of Algeria.[31] While this cannot be proven, the sentiment is well taken. Those like Mediène who can tap into this network have significant power and are unlikely to disappear from the scene unwillingly.

Due to the secrecy of his work, there are few photos even of Mediène, and it cannot be certain what his specific goals and interests might be. He does, however, seem to have a strong loyalty to fellow DRS officers and great pride in the work of the DRS since the beginning of the Algerian Civil war. This is evidenced by his first ever public letter in support of General Hassan, a former DRS general in charge of anti-terror operations, in particular the operation at the In Amenas gas plant that resulted in the deaths of foreign hostages.[32] This loyalty to friends and particularly pride in the DRS should not be dismissed as a possible threat to reforms as Mediène may seek to protect this legacy or even return to power given favorable circumstances. Mediène and those like him in the DRS and military see themselves as the rightful guardians of the state system, and reforms to the political process that might alter this system or diminish their power become threats.

Interestingly, beyond its connections to violent extremist groups such as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) investigated by such scholars as Jeremy Keenan,[33] the DRS also has connections and influence in national media outlets and civil society groups.[34] It has been alleged in the past that the DRS has used such levers to destabilize domestic reforms,[35] and it could easily do the same during any international negotiations. Beyond slowing reforms and damaging government credibility, these accusations can have drastic economic effects, particularly in light of the government's desire to attract increased foreign investment. Uncertain, poorly managed, and possibly corrupt partners in an already unstable and remote area are not strong contenders for such contracts. The possibility for Mediène or others from the former DRS to act as spoilers should not be ignored.

IV. Potential Negotiation Moves

Algeria's most powerful negotiation move would be to come to the table for Western Sahara peace talks, in response to Morocco's allegation of its use of the Polisario Front as a proxy against Morocco's claims of the territory. Since Morocco refuses to come to the table without Algeria's participation, this would be a positive step toward settling the conflict. However, Algeria's internal fractures may impede Algeria's ability to engage in negotiations.

II. AQAP: Salafi Spoiler; The Middle East Strategy of Al-Qaeda

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Introduction

With size estimates at around 4,000 fighters, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) punches far above its weight in terms of geopolitical influence. It is seen as a top priority for U.S. counterterrorism officials and a destabilizing force in Yemen, a country already wracked with governance issues. It threatens powerful regimes like the Saudi royal family and Sultanate of Oman. In many ways, it has become the face of Al Qaeda (AQ) since the death of founder Osama Bin Laden in 2011 and the dismantling of AQ in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Yet at the same time, it remains a strongly Yemeni outfit, dedicated to the parochialism of Yemen as much as it is to global jihad.

To AQAP's benefit, Yemen has all but collapsed as a functioning state and now provides fertile ground for AQAP operations and even governance. It is a tremendous opportunity that AQAP has leveraged into territorial control and greater financial resources. That said, the group is not without challenges to its power. ISIS has emerged as a peer competitor both in Yemen and for the leadership of global Sunni jihad. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia (among others) are able to disrupt the organization when they invest the necessary resources such as military strikes or intelligence operations. In 2015, AQAP expanded its control over large areas of Yemen, including the port of Mukallah, and it saw some reversals of fortune in 2016 that threaten the group's long-term survival in Yemen. While overall the group is more powerful than it has been in years, AQAP must take decisive action not to lose these gains - as has happened before - and make sure the group has long-term longevity.

AQAP will try to do everything in its power to disrupt the current Middle East powers and competing regional actors, be they in Yemen, the region, or around the globe. Both from a legitimacy and identity perspective, AQAP benefits from selectively taking on the system of power. It will look to further its agenda where it can and prevent losses in critical areas like funding and recruitment. AQAP is a remarkably adaptable actor, one that learns from its mistakes well and expect it to continue to do so.

I. Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

The story of Al Qaeda, and by extension Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), is just as controversial and contested as the group itself. This paper will try to incorporate sources from varied authors and viewpoints, but also acknowledges the western-centric and security-oriented nature of most Al Qaeda scholarship in English.

Al Qaeda's identity grew from four key sources: a decades-long Islamist rejection and anger on Western colonialism, the Afghan resistance against the Soviets in the 1980s, and the vision of a wealthy Saudi construction heir, and the growth of Wahhabism in the Islamic world. Al Qaeda the formal organization was founded by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam in 1988 but its ideological routes go back to at least to the 1940s and, as the organization would argue, back to the foundations of Islam. Rohan Guaratna explains the confluence of these factors well in his paper "Al Qaeda's Ideology."

"Shortly before the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, Azzam and bin Laden decided to form a new vanguard group— al-Qaeda al-Sulbah (The Solid Base). This concept is commonly attributed to the Egyptian theorist Sayyid Qutb. He envisaged a revolutionary Muslim vanguard that would overturn un-Islamic regimes in the Middle East and establish Islamic rule. The concept draws on the stories told about the early Muslim generation who received education and guidance from the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) in the house of Arqam Bin Abi Arqam"[1]

It is important to note that Guarantna cites Middle East regimes (regimes that rule over majority Muslim populations) as the first and most important target for Al Qaeda. Though much of its last 15 years have been defined by Al Qaeda's struggle against the West, it is and has always will be focused first on securing a place in the Islamic and specially the Arab world.

The concept of offensive, outward jihad is, as described, nothing new in the Muslim consciousness. Jihad, the Arabic word for struggle, is a central tenet of Islam, indicating a believer's internal and external struggle against a lack in faith and ignorance in the teachings of Muhammed (pbuh). The concept of jihad, like other aspects of the Islamic tradition, has been interpreted in a number of ways throughout the 1400 years of Islam's existence.[2] A small minority, such as bin Laden and Azzam, interpreted this as an external, violent struggle against the 'jahiliyya', or the 'nonbelievers'.

Just the same, a small minority like Al Qaeda have taken the larger counter- globalization, counter-imperialist in the Islamic world and adapted it to an extreme, revolutionary ideology aimed at religious purity. In a move that gives the group more ideological cohesion than previous Middle Eastern and Islamist terror groups such as Hamas or Hezbollah, Al Qaeda married the idea of violent jihad against apostates and Western influence (an idea emanating from the Muslim Brotherhood and other anti-Western Arab leaders) with the religious purity of the Wahhabist movement.[3] Wahhabism is a sect of Sunni Islam centered on a fundamentalism and a return to practices from the time of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). It is the official sect of Saudi Arabia and, most importantly, has grown in influence throughout the rise of Saudi Arabia in the 20th century. Many cite Saudi Arabia's attempts to spread Wahhabism at home

and abroad as a key reason for Al Qaeda's existence.[4] What is important about Al Qaeda's use of Wahhabism is that, until the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), it made them a unique entity. They were never limited by the regional and ethnic considerations of other violent organizations in the Muslim world.

AQAP:

AQAP's identity and conflict perception is wrapped up in the story of Al Qaeda overall. Osama bin Laden identified strongly with his Yemeni heritage. Bin Laden believed that Yemen would be the perfect location for Al Qaeda given its poor central government, vast tracks of mountainous territory, grievances of the population with traditional Middle East regimes, and an abundance of weapons in the hands of the local population.[5] Yet, it has some important differences in its identity.

The first and most important point is that AQAP is a marriage between Saudi and Yemeni identity. Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia was a long-struggling branch of the organization. Though its aims were perhaps the most in line with Al Qaeda's goal of a truly Wahhabi, Western-free state in the Middle East (given Saudi Arabia's control of Mecca and Medina), the authoritarian nature of Saudi Arabia crushed the organization's infrastructure by 2009.[6] While AQ in Saudi Arabia successfully conducted some attacks (the Khobar Towers attack the most famous of them), it never operated comfortably. Saudi Arabia's intensive surveillance state and ruthless counterterrorism tactics made sure AQ could never find solid footing in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Al Qaeda in Yemen had struggled to attract recruits and, importantly, funding since coming into prominence with the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000. So when the organizations merged in 2009, it was seen largely as a marriage of the Saudi resources and fervor with Yemen's conducive environment.

While the Saudi branch's motivations and actions are much more in tune with the traditional view of Al Qaeda (a transnational terror group oriented toward defeating Western influence and reclaiming Muslim nations), the Yemeni branch is far more localized in identity and motivations. Given Yemen's fructuous political situation, Al Qaeda there aims to fill the space of southern Sunni grievance against the government of President Abh Rabbuh Mansour Hadi and Sunni fears of a Houthi-dominated government under previous president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Moreover, Al Qaeda plays on the anti-American sentiment in Yemen (one of the highest disapproval ratings for the US[7]) and the US alliances with Israel as well as Saudi Arabia.

The question remains, what is the identity of AQAP? In some parts, it is an southern Yemen insurgency against the relative wealth and power of the northern part of the country; this division seems to have not been addressed since the unification of Yemen in 1990 and offered an opening for a group like AQAP to advocate a different form of governance. At the same time, it has the transnational elements of Al Qaeda central. It has tried to attack the U.S. and other Western states numerous times[8] and sought to undermine other Middle Eastern regimes.

While there is a strong theological basis for AQ, issues of survival dominate how a group like AQAP apply that theology. In the case of AQAP, they chose the identity of religiously guided rebels against the system. Identity of terrorist groups like AQAP is shifting and case specific by the crisis nature under which these groups operate; with the exception of other violent extremist Wahhabi groups (Boko Haram, other branches of Al Qaeda, Jabhat al Fatah in Syria, etc), no other international actors legitimate their existence. This, in a perverse way, empowers AQAP. They stand as rebels against the system, religiously-minded revolutionaries fighting inadequate government and Western encroachment in the most ardent fashion. By marrying the heady idealism of global jihad and the local grievances of Yemenis, AQAP has formed a fertile and coherent identity in chaotic Yemen. Moreover, it has set a model for other al Qaeda affiliates trying to establish footholds in conflict zones.

II. Sources of Leverage

For a non-state entity, AQAP boasts a surprising diversity of resources. Most of these result from its location in Yemen, and are directly related to Yemen's current political distress. Politically, AQAP has taken clear advantage of the Yemeni Civil War, and has used the government's distraction to take control over large swaths of isolated and underdeveloped territory. The Yemeni government's poor central governance also contributes to this situation, as the country's political infrastructure is insufficient and unable to provide services for much of the population.[9]

Furthermore, the government's lack of support to its rural populations contributes to AQAP's accumulation of soft power. In the absence of government services, AQAP capitalizes on and encourages the grievances of the local Yemeni populations with the Yemeni government and other Middle East regimes. In particular, Saudi Arabia's coalition forces have indiscriminately bombed large numbers of civilians in the Kingdom's fight against Houthi rebel forces. As Saudi Arabia is AQAP's enemy, it is in their interest to nurture the Yemeni people's hostility against them.[10]

Additionally, AQAP has military leverage, as it has been able to integrate into local groups, making it difficult for them to be attacked without harming civilians. The local Yemeni population is heavily armed, which AQAP can use to its advantage, particularly with the assistance of its local allegiances. Finally, Yemen's mountainous territory presents a steep and rocky challenge for military intervention. Such geographic leverage was noted by Bin Laden when choosing the location in which to found Al Qaeda. Bin Laden realized the harsh terrain would be difficult to navigate for troops unfamiliar with the landscape, thus allowing AQAP an advantage.[11]

III. Internal Conflicts

AQAP is a hierarchical organization with clear delineations between where each member stands in regards to the others.[12]

This is particularly true with mid-level leadership who oversee most of the day-to-day operations in different geographic regions. Commands flow out of the top to foot soldiers through a bureaucratic, multilayer process. AQAP is also broken down into specialties, with a distinct military, administrative/political, and media wing that all oversee their own fiefdoms. Besides its hierarchical nature, AQAP is an extremely resilient organization to leadership loss. Throughout the group, positions have training and education in place that ensure quick, competent replacements for any slain or captured leaders. Another defining element of AQAP's structure is how much they rely on local militia and tribal leaders to partner and govern with them.[13] The resiliency, hierarchy, and alliance structure that are all characteristic of AQAP give the organization longevity despite its small size and constant threats.

The main military and governance wing (while not the same, they have much more crossover than any modern state military would) break down as follows. The Military Committee of AQAP (or as they would refer to themselves, Ansar al Sharia) communicates directives to governorate commanders. The Military Committee is thought to be made up of top leaders who, threatened by US strike abilities, remain hidden and constantly moving. There are at least 13 governorate commanders (out of 21 provinces in Yemen) and these men oversee the militants in that area as well as the operations of the district commanders. District commanders will not only oversee militants in a certain area but critical infrastructure and administrative issues like public sanitation, electricity, and sharia courts. Underneath these commanders are a whole range of other leaders, many overseeing a key area or group of issues related to governance or military operations.

There are two distinguishing factors that make AQAP an effective group and keep rivalries to a minimum. Foremost, AQAP builds a system of "next man up" in which mentored leaders quickly replace their superiors when the latter is eliminated. Considering how many mid-level commanders have been killed or captured in AQAP,[14] there is ample opportunity for young recruits to rise through the ranks. And given the structure of the organization, along with its small size, there are opportunities for low-level leadership. The movement and constant change is a great incentive to remain loyal to the group and likely quells internal dissent.

Adding to the sense of loyalty and structure, AQAP trains its fighters and leaders extensively on leadership strategy and military tactics as well as methods of effective governance in Yemen.[15] These classes range from philosophy to rural and urban warfare tactics to military strategy. In a way, AQAP molds its future leaders in these trainings and demonstrates how important their collective institutional memory is. New recruits with little knowledge and little education in the ways of jihad owe the senior leadership for this expertise. In layman's terms, you don't bite the hand that feeds. Young recruits would abandon or rebel against that knowledge at great cost.

As much as AQAP needs an effective military and political branch, it, like all political organizations, has a public relations element. These individuals not only help it recruit new members, foreign and Yemeni, but also convince the Yemeni public that AQAP governance is a desirable alternative to Houthi control or Hadi reinstallation. Most famously, AQAP has published Inspire Magazine, an English-language jihadi publication meant to radicalize and inspire those in the West, since 2010. The brainchild of the late Anwar Al Awlaki, the magazine and Awlaki's English lectures hoped to inspire more attacks on the West like Nidal Hassan's Fort Hood attack and later on the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Still, as with many other elements of AQAP, media has a wing more devoted to internal Yemeni politics and a Middle Eastern audience. Al Ather is the Arabic language media arm. Recently, AQAP adapted their tactics from the typical AQ release of highly choreographed videos and speeches to more of a rapid release of propaganda.[16] This was in response to the impressive media arm of ISIS. Unlike ISIS, however, AQAP de-emphasizes brutality and instead plays up its social services and respect for the Yemeni population.

Leadership and Participants

The leadership of AQAP is the element of the organization most shrouded in mystery. The current head of AQAP appears to be Qassim al-Rimi, who survived the US's Navy Seal raid targeting him in February 2017.[17] Due to the deadly rate by which the US has killed AQAP leaders, they rarely operate in the open and mostly serve to give directives from the shadows. Most of the senior leadership is Yemeni, with some notable exceptions including bombmaker Ibrahim Al Asiri, and that dynamic continues through the ranks. Some of the earlier generation (particularly founder Nasir al-Wahayshi) had spent time in prison and had fought in Afghanistan under Bin Laden. In fact, it was a jail break in 2006 which freed Al Wahayshi among 22 others that reignited AQ in Yemen. Some, including killed deputy Said Al Shihri and Othman Ahmed Othman Al Omairah were Guantanamo prisoners.

These personal experiences reverberate down the ranks and AQAP has found good recruiting grounds within prisons. Just as the education discussed above creates a sense of loyalty, so does recruiting from prisons.[18] When the rest of society had abandoned someone, AQAP was there to provide them purpose. This strategy is not limited to prisons and the idea of empowerment of disenfranchised individuals is one of the constants in AQAP recruiting, both in the West and in Yemen.

One possible fissure in AQAP is perhaps at the center of its dual identity as a global terrorist organization and Yemeni insurgency: the divide between mainly Saudi foreigners in the organization and the majority of leaders who are Yemeni. There is no evidence that this dynamic has heretofore caused discord within the group (again, acknowledging that AQAP is an incredibly opaque organization). However, there is evidence that AQAP has in the past shirked orders from AQ central, specifically the directive from AQ central not to establish Islamic governance.[19]

Funding:

The other organizational element of AQAP besides a hierarchal, resilient organization and loyal recruits taken from the disenfranchised is funding based in criminality and hidden patrons. Foreign and Yemeni patrons have been a large part of sustaining AQAPs operations.[20] These individuals usually are taken with either the ideological components of AQ or unwitting accomplices in

charity scams organized by AQ sympathizers.[21] AQAP's geographic placement (Yemen shares a long, ungovernable border with Saudi Arabia) make transfers of funds from typical patrons in the Gulf all the easier.

Outside this direct support, AQAP sustains itself with robbery, kidnapping, and smuggling. AQAP has shown a willingness and ability to kidnap individuals in certain areas of the country at will. Previously, these individuals were foreigners from the West of Gulf countries.[22] However, as the situation in Yemen has worsened, AQAP has turned to robbery and oil smuggling (particularly when they controlled the port of Mukullah for a year) for funds.[23] The group even taxed citizens in territories they have controlled. A reality few like to acknowledge in Yemen is that many have enabled this criminal network. Different sides in the conflict, desperate for fuel, have accepted smuggled oil. European countries have given the group millions in ransom payments. These different criminal schemes have given the group millions of dollars. While the US others has tried to clamp down on these funding schemes, it seems AQAP has set up a resilient network that keeps the group funded and armed in all seasons, particularly in the chaos of 2017 Yemen.

IV. External Conflicts

This paper separates AQAP's external conflicts into the existential and the adversarial. While AQAP has little love for the 'heretical' Shia regime in Iran, as they do not pose the same existential threat as the Saudi or American government. The variation in how AQAP views its foes is sometimes hard to parse out (as it is with many fundamentalist revolutionary groups). Taken on face value, the whole world that does not support a Muslim caliphate and sharia law are enemies of AQAP, but we know from practice that not all 'heretics' are made even. While AQAP does have allies, the defining element of their external relationships is hostility.

There are two enemies that will be perpetually at the top of the AQAP's list for both their existential threat and ideological opposition to AQAP: the United States government and the Saudi monarchy. The United States has been the chief enemy of Al Qaeda since Osama Bin Laden's "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," a reference to the staging of US troops in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. Since that document in 1996, Al Qaeda central and many (if not all) of its affiliates have viewed the US as the primary enemy.

In many ways, it is because of what the U.S. represents that make it the perfect enemy for Al Qaeda.[24] The US is the Judeo-Christian superpower, the strongest ally of Israel, and the main external contributor to 'apostate' regimes in the Middle East. Moreover, the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia from 1991 until 2003 created the sense of occupation from which Al Qaeda could frame its resistance. From a purely strategic sense, American influence in the Middle East is one of the biggest obstacles to the establishment of 'truly Islamic' states in the Muslim world.

While the U.S. does not have the same record of military bases and interference in Yemen as elsewhere like Saudi Arabia, there is still a palpable American presence. For years the U.S. has kept troops in Djibouti and Aden and supported long-time president and strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh, making Yemen fertile ground for the AQ conflict narrative. Moreover, the harsh tactics that the U.S. has used against AQAP (namely drone strikes and violent clandestine operations) have made this conflict a reality. In response, AQAP has been the most active planner of attacks against the US in recent times, with three well-developed plots foiled in 2009, 2010, and 2012.[25] Since then, the US has only increased efforts to destroy AQAP.

Saudi Arabia presents the other major threat to AQAP's existence. Many AQAP plots, including two of the three mentioned above, were foiled by Saudi intelligence.[26] The Saudi monarchy has every reason to fight AQAP. Everyone in the royal family will remember when Islamic insurgents seized the Grand Mosque in 1979 for two weeks on the claim that the monarchy must be overthrow to purify Islam. And it will remember every AQ attempt to disrupt stability in the Kingdom (the Khobar tower attacks in 1996 and the Al-Khobar massacre in 2004 among the most famous). While Iran is Saudi Arabia's greatest geopolitical foe, AQ stands as the greatest threat to Saudi's internal stability and legitimacy.

From the perspective of AQAP, the fights with Saudi and America present both challenges and promise. The peril is in the massive power of both enemies. Saudi Arabia has the financial resources and intelligence apparatus to devastate AQAP (a large reason that the Saudi branch of AQ merged into Yemen was the Saudi campaign to eradicate AQ in the Kingdom). Moreover, Saudi Arabia, as guardians of the two holy cities and arguably leading Muslim nation, has the ability to delegitimize the ideology of AQ. Meanwhile, the US poses a different risk. Saudi Arabia is by no means militarily weak, but the reach of U.S. military power is incomparable. The U.S. has shown itself willing and able to pursue AQ affiliates around the world. Debates about effectiveness aside, US drone strikes have killed numerous AQ central and AQAP leaders.[27] As recently as 2015, AQAP lost leader Nasir Al-Wuhayshi to a US drone strike. The US has continued to apply diplomatic pressure on Hadi-led Yemeni forces and Gulf states intervening on their behalf in the civil war to focus some of the their resources on AQAP. It's clear that AQAP is the top U.S. priority in Yemen and that the American government will continue to strike at the group as long as AQAP operates in Yemen.

While Saudi Arabia and the US present the biggest threat to AQAP, they also are the best enemies. As touched upon in the identity section, AQ and AQAP run on a conflict ideology. By attacking AQAP, the US gives the group legitimacy as an enemy and adds to local Yemeni grievances with each drone strike. In a similar fashion, AQAP can present Saudi Arabia's fight against AQ as evidence of western influence in the Kingdom. Of course, per the AQ narrative, Saudi follows the directives of the US and others; Islam is being sold out for petro-dollars. AQAP operatives would point to the long history of private citizens in Saudi that finance them as evidence of the Saud family's betrayal and to tacit Saudi acceptance of their presence in Yemen.[28] In short, AQAP's global legitimacy (any appeal outside of a very narrow Yemeni concept) is reliant on fighting the US and Saudi Arabian royal family.

But AQAP's external enemies and rivals are not limited to America and the Kingdom. As an international terrorist organization crosses with Yemeni insurgent elements, AQAP was not designed to attract many international friends. Western nations like those in the

EU are just as despised as the U.S. if less feared due to the European's more limited reach.[29] Other Arab states are seen as apostates under Western puppet dictators. Egypt holds a special place as an enemy due to both the Sisi regime's continued oppression of Islamists and Egypt's long history of interference in Yemen.[30] Iran is undoubtedly an enemy of AQAP; the terrorist organization has launched numerous attacks on Iranian officials in Yemen and perceives Iran as the true power behind the Houthi movement.[31]

In the view of AQ and AQAP, other GCC states, perhaps with the exception of the occasionally defiant state of Qatar, are extensions of the Saudis. The UAE, given its active role in Operation Decisive Storm, the Saudi-led operation to reinstall the Hadi government, makes them a large threat and enemy to AQAP. In fact, it was UAE soldiers that really pushed AQAP out of their de-facto capital of Mukallah. Just like Saudi, the governments serve as a threat but contacts within Gulf states are also through private citizens who sometimes have financial ties to AQAPs operations (criminal and jihadi).

Oman is an interesting case and poses a unique threat to AQAP. Given its religious composition (a majority of Omanis belong to the minority Ibadi sect that fundamentalists consider heretical), Oman is set up to be an enemy. And given the Sultanate's large land border with Yemen, it has both history and modern interest in Yemen's stability. As explained, "Modern history heavily influences the Omani perspective on Yemen's crisis. Officials in Muscat have not forgotten the Dhofar Rebellion, a South Yemen-sponsored Marxist insurgency that destabilized southern Oman before Qaboos defeated the rebels early on in his reign."[32] Oman offers a unique threat to AQAP's position as the Sultan has proven to be a great intermediary between the Saudis and Iran. What that means is that if there is a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Yemen, Oman will likely have a hand in it. As a group that profits immensely off of the current chaos of Yemen, AQAP could have no more disastrous outcome than a stable peace.

Within Yemen, the situation is on the surface just as hostile. But beneath the surface, different actors tolerate AQAP to varying levels. First you have the large coalition controlling half the country right now, the Houthi movement. AQAP has repeatedly attacked Houthi-controlled areas and railed against the Shia rebels. Yet, AQAP influence is weakest in Houthi-controlled areas and it has chosen to target government forces, particularly in the de-facto capital of Aden, more often.[33] AQAP found fertile ground in the years following the 2011 transition from President Saleh to President Hadi and it makes sense that they would continue to target the latter's government. President Hadi's forces (along with Saudi and Emirati troops in Yemen) have proven to be the main adversaries when it comes to holding land. Still, Hadi and the Saudi-led intervention have treated this conflict as a side project. From the perspective of the Hadi-led government and the Houthi, AQAP is an enemy but not *the* enemy.

When the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), otherwise known as the Islamic State (IS), first appeared as a prominent player in the civil war, AQAP expressed their support for the group.[34] This quickly changed, however, when IS tried to expand to Yemen following the outbreak of civil war. While the group rarely have open hostilities (ISIS is too small of a force in Yemen for that), the two cannot be seen as anything other than rivals. They are competing for the mantel of Sunni Salafist jihadi leadership and in many ways that has seen AQAP steal a lot of ISIS's playbook from Syria/Iraq.[35] As the chaos of the Yemeni civil war continues, AQAP will certainly seek to quash any ISIS presence in Yemen and avoid the mistakes of Jabhat al Nusra in Syria.[36]

AQAP, though an adversary for many, does have a few allies in the world. Mostly they are other AQ affiliates and Salafi jihadi groups.[37] The most notorious of the other AQ affiliates, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Al Shabaab in Somalia, and the newly formed Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), all have expressed support for AQAP.[38] From an organizational standpoint, these groups do not offer much in terms of resources or logistical support to AQAP. This is in part because AQAP is among the most skilled group in terms of bomb making and fighting.[39] Still, this interaction has the effect of presenting a global jihadi front and thus adding a sense of legitimacy to AQAP.

The last set of relationships important to AQAP is a set of relationships best described as external private citizen relationships. As touched on in the earlier section on internal structure, AQAP obtains most of its funding from illegal activities such as smuggling, kidnappings, and trafficking in arms or drugs. Still, a large percentage of their funds have always come from external patronage.[40] As leaked State Department memos indicate, these supporters are mostly private citizens in GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. Using charities and other organizations as fronts, AQAP has received large sums of money that fund their operations both in Yemen and abroad.

In addition to courting and obtaining support from Gulf donors, AQAP cultivates relationships with Muslims all over the world as a method to recruitment and enhanced capabilities. Aforementioned foreign fighters and agents are just one component. While the organization has maintained an active media wing, most famously under American-born cleric Anwar Al Awlaki, its main recruitment method has been personal relationships.[41] For example, the perpetrators of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015 and the 2013 attempted Christmas day bombing had personal ties established from time in Yemen and other jihadi relationships. AQAP seems likely to continue to cultivate these personal ties.

If there is one defining feature of AQAP's external relationships, it is antagonism. This is not to say that AQAP and AQ don't have sympathizers scattered throughout the globe or that all enemies are equal. However, AQAP does not fit into the accepted international order and its relationships reflect that. Thus AQAP's existence is one of perpetual existential struggle against a whole system designed to crush it. That do-or-die mentality translates through their goals.
Goals:

For a group with such fiery rhetoric, AQAP is not an easy target of analysis. What to take seriously as goals and what to simply ignore as chest thumping is the difficulty understanding a small and opaque group. From a number of perspectives, AQAP benefited from the onset of the current Yemeni civil war that started in 2015.[42] Now there is some debate as to whether their rapid expansion (described in the internal relationships section) will end up hurting them more than it initially helped, but there can be no doubt that they benefit from chaos.[43] Moreover, the perceived sectarian threat of the Houthi movement on Sunni areas provides fertile recruiting for

being able to direct their resources against them.

As much as is possible, AQAP will hope and work toward keeping the war between the Houthis and the Hadi coalition as a stalemate. In truth, AQAP would even benefit in an uptick in fortunes for the Houthis as to drain resources from Hadi forces in the southeast. In the coming months and as the war seems to stagnate, AQAP will try to do everything in its power to continue that reality.

Relatedly, AQAP will try to continue its growth in size and funding. Having quadrupled in size since 2014[44], AQAP will want to extend this period of growth and build on it for a more sustainable future. This goal has both a foreign and domestic element to it. As with other AQ affiliates, foreign fighters and leaders bring skills that others cannot. American-born Anwar Al Awlaki brought an ability to communicate with Western recruits. Saudi-born Ibrahim Al Asiri brings his immense technical abilities and clever bomb design to the group. Still, as discussed above, foreigners are a limited component of an organization that is largely Yemeni in nature. So, it seems likely that AQAP will aim to cultivate and solidify its network in Yemen with the hope of gaining (or regaining) a number of tribal leaders in the southwest. The secondary goal will be to bring on foreigners when possible.

These two broad goals feed into a larger goal and one that has defined AQ since the rise of ISIS. In Yemen and perhaps in other locations, AQAP must seek to win back the narrative of the global jihad from ISIS. Since its meteoric rise in 2013, ISIS has dominated the global Sunni jihadi narrative. In practical terms, this has meant recruitment of foreign fighters and resources that might otherwise be directed to AQ affiliates. As AQ 'most dangerous branch,' AQAP is a leader in the global Sunni jihadi movement and would do well to take back much of the momentum that has gone ISIS's way.

There are two layers to the this larger narrative approach. First, AQAP would need to clear the nascent branch of ISIS out of Yemen. It undermines AQAP's legitimacy and weakens any sense of leadership in Yemen that they might have. In a larger approach, they must keep themselves relevant in the worldwide audience. Attacks by ISIS member in Paris and Brussels, along with numerous 'lone wolf' attacks in which a radicalized individual pledged allegiance to ISIS, have given the group huge notoriety. It should be a near-term goal for AQAP to get more attacks on Western nations or more pledges of allegiance from lone wolves.

AQAP must also have tactical, on-the-ground goals for its base in Yemen. If 2015 was a great success for the group, 2016 has seen the pendulum swing the other way as it has lost territory and buy-in from locals. If AQAP is wise to this trend, 2017 and future years should be centered around solidifying and expanding on existing ties in a way that does not produce the same backlash as the group experienced in 2016. Unlike some of the other goals listed, AQAP does not need a new playbook to accomplish it. In a strong difference from ISIS in Iraq, AQAP has employed a tactical retreat strategy in Yemen whenever it controlled territory.[45] In fact, when it was expelled from Mukallah, "AQAP then issued a statement saying its fighters retreated from the city in order to protect the civilian population. This message demonstrated how AQAP, and al Qaeda in general, wants to increase its popular appeal in Yemen and elsewhere."[46]

In all likelihood, AQAP will look to defend it's territory and personal networks critical to funding (smuggling rings, hostage-taking locations, etc) first and foremost. Control of actual municipalities- in partnership with local tribesmen - will be of a second priority but still critical. AQAP militants need locations where they can hide and operate without fear of constant attack by Hadi forces or US drones. And as more of a tertiary priority, AQAP should want to reclaim Mukallah when politically expedient. The reasoning behind this order is, as discussed in the internal structure section, AQAP is not as dependent on holding territory as a group like ISIS. The latter bases its legitimacy around it while AQAP sees it as a temporary benefit from chaos. As quoted above, AQAP retreated from Mukallah to keep the city and its allies there intact. Why do that if you don't plan on coming back relatively soon?

On the ground in Yemen, AQAP seems to value patience and resilience over rapid expansion. It will have applied the lessons of 2016, too, and learned more about the exact points in which other actors (such as Saudi Arabia) make it a priority. Last time it was only when AQAP threatened the economic lifelines of Aden that Saudi Arabia and the UAE brought down enough pressure to force the burgeoning caliphate from their capital in Mukallah. AQAP will push territorial control up only up to the point where it feels certain the Hadi government will not react to counter it. Moreover, as has been seen with ISIS, territorial control and formal governance can make a group vulnerable to conventional military power. AQAP has proven to be a group that learns from others (and their own) mistakes. Do not expect them to make the same mistake of territorial overreach twice.

V. Potential Negotiation Moves

In order to advance its strategic and tactical goals, AQAP might take the following negotiation steps. It is important to remember that while the group has power and influence, its playbook is far more limited and far different that a state. The chief aim of these moves would be to keep up the chaos in Yemen, regain the global jihadi narrative from ISIS, reestablish relationships with allies in Yemen, and insulate the group from attacks by the US and the Saudi-led coalition. These moves may feed into one or more of the previously stated goals, but all would lead to positive outcomes for AQAP.

AQAP's strongest negotiation move would be the one which destabilizes its enemy governments while strengthening its influence and network. To that end, AQAP would best reach its goals by reconciling with ISIS to form a combined or closely affiliated Salafist terrorist organization. This move would likely require ISIS to first be weakened by Western forces, but this turn of events is probable, as the Trump administration has taken concrete steps to develop and implement a quick-moving anti-ISIS strategy.[47] By working with ISIS toward their shared goal, AQAP could increase its scope and resources for carrying out its destructive ends.

Since AQAP and ISIS are currently at odds with each other, this move would require a shift in mindset. This option will likely be weighed against the benefit AQAP could accrue from watching ISIS be destroyed, as AQAP would no longer have a rival for the mantle of predominant Salafist group. Alternatively, if AQAP decides to remain at odds with ISIS, it may consider a direct attack on ISIS' Yemeni

affiliate. ISIS has not caught on in Yemen in the same way that it did in Syria, but that doesn't mean AQAP should leave the group to its own devices.[48] Instead, AQAP may choose to eliminate ISIS in Yemen for good. By killing ISIS members and threatening the rest, AQAP would eliminate local competition and prove their power to possible local allies.

The best way to do so is to provide a different, more persuasive form of the movement. AQAP media has already shown this with concerted media campaign playing up their social services such as clean water and food supplies.[49] It would be foolish to compete with ISIS in the form of brutality and try to copy their admittedly successful model in Syria. Instead, it should do more in media to distinguish themselves and work with the local population as partners, not conquerors. This would mean only striking military/government targets in Yemen and avoiding the slaughter of civilians.

A second strategic move AQAP may consider is more anti-negotiation than pro-negotiation: to maintain dominance over its acquired territory, AQAP may do everything it can to scuttle any peace negotiations to end the Yemeni civil war. Oman has proven most likely to broker a peace between the sides. AQAP could try to push Oman away from involvement by destabilizing the country, particularly the Dhofar region which once gave Muscat so many problems. Given the sultanate's sensitivities to rebellion in the southwest of Oman, the Sultan could turn away from Yemen and turn internally. This could involve weapons smuggling and forming connections with Omani dissidents across the vast border between the two countries. Alternatively (and perhaps at a lower cost), AQAP could scuttle Oman's participation by killing the diplomats involved in the negotiations. If Oman's envoy to Yemen is killed, few in Oman's government would be eager to replace him and everyday Omanis could question the cost of meddling in Yemen's internal politics. As with many moves, this one has the potential for backlash, but given AQAP's history of revival and survival, that is a risk they should be willing to take.

Another negotiation move that would further their goals is a general (and extremely secretive) truce with the Houthi movement. The war in Yemen has ground to a deadly stalemate and this suits AQAP well. Still, the ability of Hadi and Saudi forces to fight them in 2016 shows that AQAP benefits when the Houthis have the upperhand and Hadi forces are busy holding the line. Not only is the group's sectarian rhetoric bolstered by Houthi successes, but it's an opportunity for AQAP to reacquire lost territory. AQAP could communicate with the Houthis suspected patrons, Iran, and form an alliance of convenience. This wouldn't be the first time AQ formed an alliance and AQAP could easily break it off without any near-term consequences (as stated previously, the Houthis are least powerful in AQAP zones of operation).

While avoiding civilian-oriented attacks in Yemen, particularly on fellow Sunnis, AQAP would be well served by looking to launch more attacks abroad. Keeping their names on the front pages draws attention, resources, and foreign recruits to their cause. For example, AQAP suddenly jumped back into Western consciousness (and global jihadi consciousness) after the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks perpetrated by the Kouachi brothers. As it was later discovered, AQAP had given the jihadis $20,000 for weapons and explosives.[50] AQAP's attack on the West was only eclipsed when ISIS launched an even bloodier, deadlier attack in Paris later that year. As ISIS continues to lose territory and face an existential threat to its base of operations in Syria and Iraq, AQAP should try to launch a spectacular attack on a Western target, especially if it can hit a target of great symbolic values (a monument, person, or place). If AQAP has any active contacts in Europe or the US, it should try to rush out an attack as soon as possible in the next year.

AQAP lost extensive territory in 2016 because local tribesmen turned against them; however, the group will may reverse its fortune if it dedicates its efforts in the future toward winning back this demographic. AQAP leadership can, as it has done before, learn from its mistakes and strategize how to avoid them. Once it has circulated those lessons, it must establish the foundation for AQAP control wherever the Yemeni government has a weak territorial hold.

Conclusions:

There are four key takeaways on AQAP as negotiating actor: 1) the group is highly adaptable and can re-emerge despite concerted efforts by adversaries to eliminate it; 2) it thrives off of chaos and sectarian fears in Yemen; 3) it is at both times a global terrorist group and a local insurgency/militia and these dual identities actually enhance the organization; 4) it can hurt much larger actors in Yemen and abroad which inflates the group's influence. All revolve around the group's constant struggle for existence and ability to bounce back after numerous 'defeats.' Part of this has to do with the complexity of what it stands for and who is involved. Despite its small size and lack of recognition on the global world order, the group presents an interesting negotiation stance and one that will continue to confound its adversaries.

Unlike many large states and even larger political movements, AQAP is much more able and much more willing to change. And this applies not only in strategy and tactics but allies and funding sources. Due to their precarious position, AQAP can take a number of positions that allow for its continued existence. A casual observer might point to its Salafi ideology and public statements to characterize AQAP as medieval fundamentalists, but the reality is that their ideology and identity are simply ways by which to create a cohesive, revolutionary group. Its ideology provides meaning to their self-interested actions. Why else would the group recruit so heavily in prisons, places rife with grievance and existential issues? Other negotiators would be careful to underestimate the degree to which AQAP will contort its rhetoric to satisfy this existential need.

Other negotiators might be careful, also, to play into AQAP's narrative (one its most powerful elements as an actor) in Yemen and abroad. US drone strikes have done much to bolster the group's reputation, even when degrading it logistically. Saudi Arabia's prosecution of the war in Yemen, a strategy based around sectarian fears, actually enhances AQAP. Even ISIS, which operates in the same sphere as AQAP, has enhanced AQAP's reputation as advocates for the local community with the former's brutal tactics. Adversaries must be prepared for specific moves and actions directed at AQAP to backfire or be adapted by the group into an asset. And they must be conscious that AQAP will find any opportunity to use the situation in Yemen to its benefit.

Most of the world sees AQAP as a fringe element, a group of radicals so far outside of the norm that they commit heinous acts of violence. But the reality is far more complex, far less static. AQAP is a small but rising power in Yemen and one that presents a massive asymmetric threat to Western nations. Depending on the steps taken by its adversaries and by the organization itself, AQAP will either grow in this power or be pushed back underground. But, given the group's history, full eradication or incorporation into a larger entity seems unlikely, particularly in the near future. Its existence is resistance, resistance to the American-led global order, resistance to the typical powers in Yemen, and resistance to Saudi Arabia's grip on the region. And that, is perhaps, its greatest power as a negotiator and actor in the Middle East.

III. Arab League: Revitalizing Regional Cooperation

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Introduction

The League of Arab States (LAS), or Arab League, was founded in 1945 with the vision of bringing together both Arab-majority and Arabic-speaking states "on matters of common interest."[1] The LAS Charter declares its purpose as "strengthening…relations between the member-states;" coordinating their policies; "safeguard[ing] their independence and sovereignty;" developing close cooperation on "economic and financial affairs…communications…cultural affairs…judgments and extradition of criminals…social affairs…health affairs;" and working with international bodies to "guarantee security and peace and regulate economic and social relations."[2] Today, there are 22 member states in the LAS (including Palestine and currently suspended member Syria). While the LAS does engage on international relations issues, each member of the LAS is still responsible for conducting its own foreign policy. Thus, this paper will feature an in-depth discussion of the interests, threat perceptions, partnerships, and potential negotiation moves of the LAS as an organization, rather than of the individual member states.

Identity, Threat Perception, and Role

The LAS is an organization focused on building cooperation between Arab states, defending their sovereignty, and working with international bodies on issues of economics, peace, and security."[3] The LAS Charter places a premium on state sovereignty by prohibiting "any action calculated to change established systems of government" and making unenforceable any LAS decision against a state's independence or sovereignty. Further, any decision of the LAS Council that is not unanimous is "binding only upon those states which have accepted them."[4]

When mixed with regional tensions and rivalries, this rule of unanimity has often made the LAS "a cross between the forces of fiction and futility"[5] that is unable to manage inter-state rivalries and open conflicts among members.[6] After decades of "the total inability of the Arab world to address the years of bombings and assassinations"[7] and several failed intervention efforts in Syria, Iraq, Oman, Yemen, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Palestine,[8] the "Arab public has grown wary of what is perceived to be an incompetent and ineffective LAS.[9] In the midst of the Arab Spring, the Secretary General of the LAS recognized these sentiments, commenting that the League is "impotent in the face of any crisis which strikes Arab states and threatens their people."[10]

Since the turn of the millennium, however, the LAS has begun a reinvention of sorts. After some members signed onto the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the League ratified a commitment to international human rights law in 2008.[11] Soon thereafter, the LAS played a key role in ending Lebanon's presidential crisis.[12] The Arab Spring presented the LAS further opportunities to "engineer change" and reform itself.[13] While it continues to deal with problems of legitimacy, leverage, credibility, and unity, the League is "more relevant to regional geopolitics than it has been in years."[14] One prominent example of its more proactive foreign policy was its support for a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force in Libya in 2011.

Security Threats and Causes of Conflict

Intra-League Threats

For some LAS members, the greatest security threats come from inside the LAS itself, to include interstate wars, civil wars, and the rise of non-state actors.[15] As the late Muammar Qaddafi stated at one LAS Summit: "We hate each other…we are our own enemy… we share nothing beyond these halls…we are enemies of one another."[16] In addition to the Sunni/Shi'a fault lines, many of the smaller Gulf states view regional hegemons as a key source of conflict. Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait brought into sharp focus the threat of larger regional powers such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia against the smaller, more vulnerable Gulf states.[17]

Even within the states themselves, domestic challenges and power struggles represent a serious perceived security threat to regimes and leaders throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.[18] At their root, Arab leaders view the "revolution in media and communication, a rise of Islamist social and political movements," and "new norms and popular expectations regarding participation in public life" as the causes of recent domestic conflicts.[19] These factors of "domestic unrest and societal pressures for reform" then threaten the ruling elites and existing power structures.[20] Even more worrisome to the ruling elite, these internal rifts also offer an excuse to foreign "protectors" to intervene and advance their own regional agendas.[21] In these ways, the non-interventionist and state-centric bent of the LAS Charter is designed to guard against some of the largest security threats in the region: domestic politics and uprisings.[22] As previously mentioned, though, the LAS did take a strong stance in the domestic affairs of one of its member states when it publicly sought a resolution authorizing the use of force against Qaddafi's regime in Libya. In addition, the LAS also suspended Syria's membership given its brutal crackdown on its own citizens

While extremist, non-state actors are a key driver of instability in the region, the League has been notably reticent to address that threat.[23] Although the LAS has occasionally made collective calls to action against ISIS – without endorsing air strikes or concrete military action[24] – and passed watered-down resolutions agreeing to "take urgent measures to combat extremists,"[25] the League has

largely resisted actively addressing the issue of terrorism. "The lack of reaction from the Arab and wider Muslim world"[26] in response to terrorist attacks indicates that League members are more focused on preventing the power vacuums that lead to non-state actors than on addressing the rise of the non-state actors themselves.

External Threats

Historically, the LAS has perceived two primary external existential threats: Israel and Iran. For decades, "Israel has served as the binding glue for pan-Arab movements."[27] After years of exclusion, boycotting, and hostile policies towards Israel, Arab public opinion is still "quite hostile to normalization of ties with Israel" due to an Arab belief that Israelis are a fundamental "threat to their survival."[28] As recently as 2009, 48 percent of Arab citizens viewed Israel as the greatest threat to the Arab world;[29] in 2015, 85 percent of the Arab public remained "consistently opposed" to "diplomatic recognition of Israel."[30] Even for authoritarian leaders, this "important 'cognitive fact'" of anti-Israel public sentiment is still a crucial factor "with which Arab leaders have had to deal."[31]

Prior to the Arab Spring, the only other *cause celebre* for security cooperation in the LAS was Iranian power in the region and Iranian "influence and interference in Arab politics."[32] Where anti-Zionism was a unifying factor among Arabs, Iranian influence often exacerbated domestic or regional unrest and divided the League into proxies of Saudi Arabia or Iran or, more broadly, along Sunni and Shi'a fault lines.[33] Despite some LAS members' better relations with Iran, 62 percent of Arabs view Iran's policies in the MENA negatively.[34] This perception contributed to the LAS's decision to create a 40,000-strong joint military force intended to, in part, counter Iran's growing influence across the region.[35]

In addition to these perceived regional threats, 65 percent of Arabs in 2015 view US foreign policy towards the Arab world as negative[36] and 18 percent of Arabs in 2009 perceive the US to be the "greatest threat to the Arab world" – second only to Israel.[37] Historically, Arab leaders shared these concerns due to the US alliance with Israel. However, the US-led effort to liberate Kuwait in 1991 proved to Arab leaders that – despite public opinion – an interdependent relationship with the US could be beneficial during a crisis.[38]

Renewed Role of the LAS

The Arab Spring has brought about an opportunity for the LAS to play a larger, more assertive role in the region, as seen by the League's "uncharacteristically decisive" actions against Libya and Syria.[39] Recently, the LAS has taken on active roles as a conflict mediator, crisis manager, and international intermediary. It is clear that the LAS now wants to play a more "meaningful political role that responds to the sentiments and values of the Arab people."[40]

Internal Conflicts and External Behaviors

In 1965, Malcolm Kerr described ongoing tensions in the Arab world as an "Arab Cold War."[41] While the divisions and sides are different now, Kerr's title still accurately describes the region. Throughout its history, the LAS has often been paralyzed by significant divisions, to include Soviet and Western-aligned members during the Cold War and the "traditional monarchies" (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Jordan) versus "revolutionary states" (i.e. Iraq and Nasser's Egypt)[42] versus "moderate" states (i.e. most Gulf states).[43] The major ideological differences among its members led to failures to coordinate military, foreign, or economic policies[44] and often resulted in a perception of the LAS as nothing more than a "glorified debating society."[45]

As previously mentioned, one of the largest dividers in the MENA is the Sunni/Shi'a split.[46] While this issue does not neatly describe every internal conflict in the region, it does shed light on many of the ongoing proxy wars and power struggles within the LAS. Member states such as Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen often find themselves at the center of proxy fights between Iran-backed Shiite elements and Saudi-supported Sunni factions.[47] Even the ongoing conflict in Syria is framed not as a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism; instead, "the GCC states leading calls for international pressure to oust Assad…aim…to topple a largely Alawi (and hence, in their view, Shi'a) regime allied with Iran."[48] These alliances and conflicted ideologies often lead to fractured and non-unanimous LAS behaviors towards Iran and prevent the LAS from developing a coherent, collective stance on ties with Iran.

Personal conflicts and ties also play a part in determining League actions that may seem incoherent or inconsistent. Some efforts, such as toppling Qaddafi, have been tied to deep personal conflicts between LAS leaders.[49] Other League initiatives are due to close ties between members, such as Saudi Arabia's support of Palestine[50] and Qatar's championing of the Lebanon crisis.[51] Despite suspending Libya, sanctioning Western action against Qaddafi, and recognizing the opposition in Syria, no condemnation was issued and no similar actions were taken against Bahrain or Yemen[52] during their respective upheaval, human rights abuses, and crises.[53]

External Relationships

International Ties

The historical inability to foster regional cooperation and manage conflicts have led the UN, US, and other major international actors to perceive the LAS "as a second-tier actor" incapable of overseeing the region.[54] While the LAS has been gaining in prominence after actions in Libya and Syria, it is still restricted in its capacity for action given the constraints imposed by its own member states.[55] Nonetheless, the LAS has sought to establish ties with other regional organizations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations,[56] and the European Union – the latter of which the LAS has regular ministerial summits[57] and has issued joint statements condemning terrorism, atrocities in Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[58]

Individual States

Generally speaking, the Arab League does not coordinate or conduct foreign relations on behalf of its members outside of crisis management and conflict mediation. As such, key relationships between LAS members and outside actors should be studied on an individual level. The only formalized bilateral relations in the LAS are those of the four observer states: Brazil, Eritrea, India, and Venezuela.[59] One regional relation of note is Pakistan, who has ties throughout the region, including "probably one of the closest relationships in the world between any two countries" with Saudi Arabia.[60] Turkey also has ties with several LAS members and the LAS itself,[61] but "high cultural and nationalist obstacles"[62] combined with its ongoing struggle against the Kurds and involvement in Iraq have led to major tensions between Turkey and the LAS.[63] As previously discussed, Iran represents a partner for some and a rival for other LAS members.[64] Despite anti-US public sentiment, unease with Iran has pushed many LAS members into closer relations with the US,[65] however, these ties remain on an individual, bilateral basis rather than as a formalized LAS-US partnership. As expected, hostility towards Israel remains the "lowest common denominator" of unity in the LAS.[66] However, with Egypt[67] and Jordan notably leading the way, most Arab states have reluctantly accepted the importance of even informal relations with Israel as a key stepping stone en-route to an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord.[68]

Past Negotiating Efforts

Iraq

Initially, the LAS was "divided in its reaction" to Saddam Hussein's 1991 invasion of Kuwait.[69] Though the LAS failed in attempts to mediate the war,[70] it did join UN embargoes against Iraq and, at Saudi Arabia's urging, ultimately supported the US-led military campaign to evict Hussein from Kuwait.[71] In 2003, the LAS displayed more "despair" than resolve in response to the US invasion of Iraq.[72] What post-invasion mediation efforts the League did attempt were an "ill-prepared and largely symbolic attempt to show the League's activism" in the region.[73]

Arab Peace Initiative

In 2002, Saudi Arabia led the LAS's first diplomatic foray into solving the Arab-Israeli conflict since the "three No's" of the 1967 Khartoum Resolution.[74] This effort, the Arab Peace Initiative (API), called for Israeli withdrawal from its occupied territories, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and diplomatic recognition of Israel.[75] The API was unanimously endorsed by all LAS members,[76] but Israeli leaders declared the API – issued the day after the "Passover massacre"[77] – a "non-starter."[78] Despite numerous attempts to return to the API, adoption of the plan has to date not been seriously discussed by either Israel or the international community.[79]

Lebanon

In 2006, the LAS waded into the Lebanon-Israel conflict. Outside of League declarations and attempts to influence UN Resolutions and shape international pressure towards Israel, the LAS did not significantly contribute to the outcome.[80]

After numerous failures in the MENA and years of impotence in the face of Lebanon's ongoing violence, 2008 marked a change for the Arab League.[81] Led by Qatar, the LAS brokered an agreement between combatants that broke the "political deadlock and intermittent violence in Lebanon."[82] For the first time in nearly 20 years, the League was the primary factor in ending a crisis.[83] Thanks to LAS efforts, Lebanon elected a president, created a unity government with minority representation, and largely returned to the status quo; never before had the League's "contribution to regional security been so effective or indeed so vital."[84]

Libya

Led by Qatar and the UAE, the League suspended Libya's membership in early 2011 to "protest against the violence" on civilians.[85] Using the same logic as with Iraq in 1991, the LAS referred the Libya issue to the UN, leading to the Security Council authorizing a NATO operation against Qaddafi's regime.[86] In support of the NATO operation, Qatar joined airstrikes, provided weapons and special operations assistance, and provided non-military financial aid.[87] The League's ability to successfully respond to and manage the Libya crisis by reaching consensus on a no-fly zone, approaching the UN, and giving legitimacy to the NATO intervention marked another success for the LAS.[88]

Syria

As instability and human rights violations spread to Syria, the LAS was faced with another intra-League challenge. While the "level of intensity was still low" in Syria, LAS took on an active role in mediating that conflict. This "reconciliatory approach" continued even as the UN Security Council was unable to get a condemnatory resolution past Russian and Chinese vetoes.[89]

During an emergency meeting, LAS members surprised the world by coming together and presenting a "united front in their views towards Syria."[90] Spurred on by the Secretary General, the League dispatched a mediation mission to convince Bashar al-Assad to stop violence, accept an LAS monitoring mission, and begin a monitored dialogue with opposition forces.[91] When Assad refused, the League suspended Syria's membership and imposed sanctions against it – the first time the LAS ever approved sanctions against a member.[92] The monitoring mission eventually deployed but quickly broke down due to lack of training and equipment and "disunity among member states regarding to its mission [sic] and mandate."[93] Eventually, the UN joined a League-led monitoring mission to Syria in late 2012[94] and the LAS made the unprecedented decision to give Syria's seat to its opposition party in March of 2013.[95]

Although the League was largely replaced and overshadowed by the UN,[96] the Arab world viewed the actions in Syria as a

"major step forward" for the LAS.[97] The "active and interventionist role" the League has played in both Libya and Syria, indicates that a "change in the League's traditional status-quo oriented policies" may be on the horizon.[98]

Leverage

After several failed efforts to become a defense-oriented organization, the only leverage options available to the LAS revolve around soft power – and those, too, are limited.[99] In the past, the League's use of soft power sticks – suspensions and sanctions – were unable to be used as "leverage to convince the parties of a resolution."[100] Instead, the League's greatest source of leverage is in soft power carrots. Ultimately, the greatest way the LAS can gain legitimacy in the MENA region, as well as globally, is by demonstrating a willingness to tackle the most important issues and exhibiting a unified stance – as they did in the case of Syria, for example. Western powers likely want to cooperate with the LAS in order to gain legitimacy in the region, but they need a strong and unified partner.

The next best source of leverage for the LAS is simply diplomacy grounded in its credibility and legitimacy as the only pan-Arab organization. In a negotiation, its best tool is simply the bully pulpit as the representative of the Arab world that can be used to coax or coerce parties, legitimize or de-legitimize international intervention, demand accountability of international actors, and, generally, act as a moral and authoritative voice in the MENA region. Recent successes in Lebanon, Libya, and Syria show that the League is more ready and able to handle its own crises. While these interventions reflect "the hardheaded, geopolitical calculations" more than "attentiveness to the public mood" or the "Tahrir spirit",[101] these interventions can nonetheless be used to reassert the League's legitimacy as both the face and the will of the Arab world.[102]

Potential Negotiation Moves

Pre-Conflict Moves

Emboldened by the last decade of varying successes, the LAS could seek to intervene earlier in potential regional or intra-state conflicts and conduct mediation efforts before any conflicts erupt into outright war.[103] If mediation efforts are unsuccessful, the LAS could choose to emphasize its proactivity by issuing calls to action for regional and international partners – likely the UN .[104] While this action would have been unfathomable in the past, the League is gradually demonstrating a shift away from its customary non-interventionist status quo.[105] Continuing this trend, it is foreseeable to see the League position itself as the arbiter of choice for MENA conflicts. In addition to expanding its mediation efforts, it may attempt to get involved in any external (UN, NATO, or bilateral) missions to the region to better influence the outcome of any negotiations.

Conflict Moves

In the event that League mediation efforts fall apart or show no progress, the League will likely refer the conflict to the UN Security Council. These referrals could request or recommend further mediation efforts, ceasefires, or outright military intervention either from League members or from outside actors under a UN mandate. By emphasizing acceptance of the UN as the primary and only legitimate international body, the League will maximize its leverage over international actors and their MENA-related discussions. Further, by engaging regional and international players on the League's terms instead of standing idly by as external powers meddle in their affairs, this option will effectively render non-UN sanctioned efforts to intervene illegitimate.

Another potentially valuable – but much less likely – option is that the LAS could capitalize on member states' relations with neighbors like Turkey and Iran. Through Kuwait, Oman, or Qatar, the League could seek to influence Iran and "ensure a gradual disengagement of Hezbollah", for example.[106] While this is risky and unlikely given the intra-League factionalism and rivalries, such engagement could further build the LAS's credibility as the legitimate regional mediator, and better position the League to respond to future crises.

Post-Conflict Moves

After a conflict ends, the League could assert itself as the guarantor of a resolution deal. It could use its bully pulpit to demand public accountability and follow-through on international pledges of humanitarian aid for victims or sanctions against aggressors. The LAS could also spearhead post-war planning in the MENA region. The League could rally support for and seek to lead a Marshall Plan in Syria by securing international donors and overseeing the plan's implementation.[107] These actions would have far-reaching impacts on the credibility and legitimacy of the LAS in future mediation efforts and could eventually become a source of leverage for future League initiatives.

IV. Bahrain: "No Sunni, No Shi'i,Just Bahraini"

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Introduction

When anyone looks at a map of the Middle East, it is tempting to overlook Bahrain. At first glance, its small size and modest military and economic power could lead anyone to conclude that Bahrain does not have much to offer the region. While its small size is a reality that cannot be ignored, Bahrain is capable of influencing the region and helping to confront some of the problems that inspire terrorism. In every sense, Bahrain is a below the line player. However, Bahrain has the capacity to cross that line and make a big impact. To do this, Bahrain must be willing to change years of thinking and policy and take risks.

Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat perceptions

Because of its size and the strategic location, Bahrain has historically been overshadowed by larger regional players. Sandwiched between two historic rivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran, Bahrain's identity, conflict narratives, and threat perceptions have been influenced greatly by the neighborhood it resides in. The following section will break down these three categories in terms of what they mean for Bahrain.

Identity

The Bahraini national identity is a relatively new phenomenon.[1] There was no great struggle for independence or baptism by fire to formulate a national consciousness. Independence from Great Britain in the 1970s came relatively easy. Bahrain did not experience a sweeping anti-colonial movement that other nations in the region went through. As a result, identity in Bahrain relies primarily on religion and tribal affiliations. However, there are growing cleavages that have become more pronounced in recently.

Tribal affiliations and religion has defined Bahrain's identity since 1602, the year the Al Khalifa tribe invaded and conquered Bahrain from Persia. Those forces are still in play today. The Al Khalifa monarchy clearly favors those associated with the Al Khalifa tribe, both domestically; through government policy, and internationally, by aligning themselves with regional monarchies that can trace their lineage to similar Arab tribes.

Religion is an even more salient identity, arguably. There is a clear Sunni-Shia divide within Bahrain that permeates society. The Sunni monarchy has ruled over a majority Shia population since the establishment of the monarchy in 1602. Current and historical government policies have favored Sunnis. For example, the government denies Shia Muslims basic political rights and access to economic opportunities. Shia Muslims are constantly harassed and prevented from practicing their religion. Leading members of the Shia community, like Isa Qassim, the spiritual leader for most Bahraini Shia, are jailed, denied legal rights, and consistently harassed. Meanwhile, the monarchy lavishes its Sunni citizens with the very things it denies to Shia citizens.

When Bahrain was first conquered, the Al Khalifa tribe essentially destroyed the fabric of Shia thought in Bahrain by killing clergy and destroying Shia religious institutions.[2] Centuries later, the monarchy, by practice and law, has further solidified religion as a major identity marker. With the survival of the regime tied so intimately with a distinct interpretation of Islam coupled with the reality that a large portion of citizens adhere to a different and perhaps antagonistic version of Islam, it is unsurprising that religion acts as a major identifier.

The Sunni identity influences Bahrain's foreign policy. The monarchy has aligned itself chiefly with Sunni Arab monarchies as a way to both bolster its domestic stability and to hedge against a resurgent Shia Iran. Through organizations like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Bahrain has sought to play a role in coordinating and with and supporting other Sunni states. This association has mostly benefited Bahrain's government while also cementing the religious, Sunni dimension of Bahrain's identity. The other members of the GCC and Saudi Arabia have a stake in keeping Shia populations throughout the region politically weak.

Finally, ethnicity and race influence identity in Bahrain. The country is home to thousands of migrant workers from South Asia. According to some estimates, these migrants represent nearly 50% of the current population, if not an outright majority.[3] However, the government does not grant many political rights to migrant workers since they are not citizens. Furthermore, most migrants are relegated to working low skilled jobs like construction.

Although Bahrain has needed foreign labor in the past, the massive influx of low-skilled workers is unprecedented in Bahrain's history. Society appears to treat these workers as a distinct alien group. While many may actually be Sunni Muslims, they are not Arab. In Bahrain, the Arabs are the politically-dominant group. Even Shia Arabs, while denied many rights, still enjoy citizenship and receive certain privileges that are commonly denied to migrant workers. However, the government does use Sunni migrants to boost overall Sunni support for the monarchy as a way to counter Shia pressure.[4]

While there may be other factors of identity at play, this analysis suggests that the religious component is the primary identifier. Tribal affiliations, ethnic backgrounds, and class all have a role, but they are influence by the Sunni-Shia divide.

Conflict Narratives

Bahrain has been relatively spared from violence and wars in recent history, with the exception of the GCC sanctioned invasion in 2011. Even a Shia insurgency during 1994-1999 was relatively tame compared to similar campaigns in the region. However, one should not assume then that there is not a conflict narrative within Bahrain. The country is still intimately involved with regional conflicts. The chief conflict narrative revolves around religion and the way Sunni and Shia Islam define conflict.

Historically, Sunni and Shia Islam have differed greatly on conflict definition and when is it appropriate to engage in conflict. The initial Islamic jurisprudence on conflict, in both Sunni or Shia Islam, has gone through various changes over time and does not necessarily reflect current, mainstream arguments and thinking. It is important to understand where the divergence starts. The monarchy relies on its Sunni identity to define policies in the region and the majority of Bahrainis, by virtue of being Shia Muslims, reject many Sunni arguments. For these reasons, understanding the cleavages will clarify where these two groups overlap and where there is division.

While the point of this paper is not a rehashing of the history of Islam, some basic background is helpful. Fundamentally speaking, the divide between Sunnis and Shias stemmed from a discussion over who should rule over the Muslim world. One side, which would become Shia Muslims, argued that the leader should be someone from Prophet Muhammad's family. Because blood relations of the Prophet are considered more pure and closer to God, they called for his cousin Ali. The other side, which would become Sunni Muslims, believed that the eventual successor to Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr, was the appropriate person to lead the community since his appointment was essentially made through a consultation, or shura, of current Muslims. Despite attempts to mollify disagreements between the two camps, both sides fought each other through bitter civil wars and assassinations. Over time, each side's identity hardened. The Sunni side grew to be the dominant force in Islam, with Shia Muslims forced to live as minorities in many areas, facing various forms of oppression and violence.

Since Shia Muslims are constantly under threat of violence, various Shia scholars and clergy argue that, it is permitted to practice their faith in silence and in private. Furthermore, it is appropriate for followers to deny they are Shia in the face of oppression or persecution, according to some Shia jurists. This is called *taqiyya*. Shia Muslims still believe that the true leaders of the Muslim world or of any Muslim leader must have a direct line to Prophet Muhammad's family. Ideally, these people would be the Imams, individuals who are granted the authority to lead by God. In their absence, people who have studied Shia Islam intimately are better suited to rule than others. Conceptually speaking, this thinking is inherently revolutionary since it advocates to its followers that those who are not religiously qualified to rule lack the mandate to do so. This leas Shia Muslims to view Sunni monarchies, in many ways inheritors of Abu Bakr's legacy, as governments or regimes unworthy of allegiance.

The Sunni response to the turmoil over battles of succession was to develop the quietist argument. This argument posits that Muslims should follow the ruler who is most capable of maintaining stability and providing for the people, religious piety or knowledge notwithstanding.[5] People should not feel compelled to overthrow leaders if they do not adhere to specific religious doctrines. Furthermore, participating in campaigns to overthrow governments or leaders who have fulfilled the basic requirements to rule is prohibited. While rulers may not be perfect religious models and may not implement Islamic law flawlessly, they can still be the legitimate authority worthy of allegiance.

These dynamics playout in Bahrain since the monarchy has a stake in supporting the quietist approach to governance. Meanwhile, the monarchy and other Sunni states are incentivized to view Shia Muslims within their borders as a fifth column. They view Shia Muslims as potentially disloyal because these governments believe Shiism says that the regimes in power are illegitimate. Furthermore, certain Sunni groups, like ISIS, reject the quietist argument. These groups believe that religious piety and knowledge must be precursors to rule and those who do not follow these guidelines are unfit to rule.[6] In many ways, these groups overlap with traditional Shia arguments, but they reject the Shia view that only the Imams and those who can interpret the wills of the Imams are fit to rule. The governing authorities in Bahrain, therefore, must fight against Shia arguments of legitimacy and must defend itself from radical Sunni groups who believe the government is not religious enough.

While one could argue that some Shia Muslims in Bahrain have adopted taqiyya as a method of avoiding conflict, the history of Shia protests in Bahrain, (especially the 2011 protests) would suggest that Shia Muslims are becoming more confident in defending their rights. However, it is incorrect to characterize mainstream Shia thought in Bahrain as one that is geared towards overthrowing the monarchy. The brand of Shia Islam practiced in Bahrain is very different from its Iranian counterpart.[7] It tends to be more open to working within the current system. However, it does not deny that the most qualified person to rule is still either the Imam or those who can accurately legislate God's law.[8] There is a space within Bahrain's Shia community to work with and submit to the government, but there remains a strong justification for action against the government if it oversteps it bounds.

Threat Perceptions

The greatest threat to Bahrain, from the monarchy's perspective, is Iran. While ISIS does pose a security threat, it pales in comparison to the government's fear of a resurgent Iran. The perception that the U.S. is withdrawing from the region and creating space for Iran to increase its influence has only added to this fear. Further, with the aforementioned religious divisions in society, the Bahraini government appears to treat the Shia population as possible collaborators with Iran. This perception has guided Bahrain's foreign policy, their choice of allies, a choice in policy.

Bahraini fears of Iran stem from the establishment of the Al Khalifa monarchy on the island. Ever since the monarchy seized Bahrain from Persian control, there has been a fear that Iran would seek to take Bahrain back or, at the very least, bring it back into its orbit. Such fears are perpetuated when news agencies in Iran publish statements about how Iran still considers Bahrain a part of its

historic territory and wants it to return to Iran. Such events usually elicit protests in Bahrain.[9]

The latest iteration of Iranian fears stem from the successful Iranian Revolution. The Shah's relatively friendly regime was overthrown by a Shia theocracy that sought to export its brand of political Shia Islam across the region in 1979, a decade after Bahrain's independence. Given the previous tense relationship between the ruling Sunnis and the Shia, this new development was interpreted as an existential threat. Bahrain, therefore, continued its policy of allying itself with a stronger power for protection and containment of Iranian power. During the 1800s, this power was Great Britain, but after independence in 1971, Bahrain has generally pursued a policy of closer ties with the U.S. followed by further integration with its Sunni neighbors and fellow monarchies.

Notable manifestations of Bahrain's closes ties with the U.S. include the stationing of the American Fifth Fleet and the admission of Bahrain into the GCC. Both address two historic weaknesses Bahrain feels when faced with Iran: the lack of a military power and the need for economic development. The military presence provides security assurances despite angry retorts from Iran. Furthermore, Bahrain is protected by America's nuclear umbrella, especially important if Iran develops nuclear weapons.[10] The GCC provides economic support, allowing the Bahraini welfare state to continue to satisfy constituents. The GCC also disincentives Bahrain from pursuing economic ties with Iran. Bahrain is bound even closer with the Sunni Arab monarchies.

Nevertheless, there are signs of fraying in the traditional guarantors of Bahraini security. The recent nuclear deal with Iran may indicate the U.S. is interested in engaging with Iran, although President Trump's campaign rhetoric has rejected the deal. Questions of American military commitment due to recent fiscal issues have increased uncertainty as to whether the U.S. will continue to defend Bahrain and will be aggressive enough to counter Iran. The GCC is also experiencing strain as it struggles to determine a modern strategy, unsure of where it should deploy its military and economic power.[11]

The fear of Bahraini Shia instigating a coup at the behest of Iranian officials has driven much of the Bahraini government's domestic policy. The monarchy observed what happened to the Iraqi Sunnis with much apprehension and adopted the emerging Shia Crescent language used by Jordanian King Abdullah to view Shia Muslims as tools of Iranian expansionism.[12] The favoritism shown to Sunnis and discrimination to Shia Muslims is a manifestation to this fear. The constant government harassment, however, only grows resentment within the Shia community, helping to spur the 2011 protests. The monarchy seemingly wants the Shia population to be content enough not to demand regime change but oppressed enough to deny Iran the opportunity to use them as a conduit to encourage instability or to challenge the monarchy. These two forces are clearly in conflict with each other. As long as the divide between Sunnis and Shias remains as salient as it is in Bahrain, the government will continue to view Shia as a potential threat due to Iranian influence, regardless of how credible that threat is. When terrorist attacks do occur, like the recent car bombing in Manama or the killings of police officers in Shia neighborhoods, the government is quick to blame Iran for supplying weapons and explosives to Shia dissents, regardless of limited supporting evidence.[13]

While the Iran threat looms large in the minds of some Bahrainis, they also consider ISIS to be a threat, albeit a lesser one. ISIS has not carried out attacks in Bahrain, despite threatening the country several times. ISIS has called on Sunni Bahrainis to kill Shia Bahrainis, and some Bahrainis have traveled to join to ISIS, including people with links to the ruling family and security forces.[14] Since ISIS continues to call for attacks to occur, the government is increasingly concerned with homegrown terrorism. However, the government may be too embarrassed to address this problem openly, given the defections of some Bahraini security forces to ISIS. The lack of a direct and specific threat seems to put the government in a state of complacency. Bahrain provides support financially, letting other nations carry the burden of fighting ISIS. From the perspective of the government, allowing America to station a battle fleet in its territory is proof enough that Bahrain is doing its part against ISIS.[15] Bahrain does not belittle the threat of ISIS, but it is clear that it does not treat it with the same seriousness as Iran.

Sources of Leverage

It is easy to dismiss or undervalue Bahrain's leverage because of its size. Most nations in the region leverage their economic wealth, religious authority, diplomatic power, or military strength. While Bahrain does have elements of the aforementioned sources, on a one-to-one basis, Bahrain cannot match others in the region. To put it bluntly, other countries have more of everything compared to Bahrain. However, Bahrain possesses significant leverage if utilized properly. There are four main sources of leverage that are unique to Bahrain and not easily replicable elsewhere: geography, refineries, American military presence, and convening power.

Because Bahrain is an island situated in the Persian Gulf, it will always be strategically important. Going back decades, regional powers like Iran and Great Britain have used Bahrain's location as a way to project force and to control the Gulf. Similarly, American policy focuses on ensuring that the Gulf remains open for naval traffic, especially for the transportation of oil to the global market.[16] With aggressive actions taken by Iran in the Persian Gulf (like harassing naval vessels or detaining sailors from various countries) Bahrain's location is a key staging area for American forces to defend the Gulf. Furthermore, the causeway connecting Bahrain to the Arabian Peninsula allows for easy access to and from the mainland. The American Fifth Fleet's stationing in Bahrain merely underscores how important Bahrain is in American military geographic strategy.

Although previously a major source of oil, Bahrain has moved away from oil extraction into oil processing due to a price decrease in global oil prices and the growing lack of domestic oil supply. Today, Bahrain has one of the largest oil refineries in the world - the Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco) refinery. The refinery is capable of producing 267,000 barrels per day, with expansion plans to increase to 360,000.[17] Barrels transit directly out of Bahrain, cutting down on transportation costs. The ease of transport is particularly helpful for Saudi Arabia since it is able to extract the oil and ship it directly to the refinery. Bahrain is a key component in the regional oil production system, any disruption or expansion to its facilities will dramatically affect global supply. This provides Bahrain with

substantial economic leverage, despite its relatively small economy and lack of major oil reserves.

Unsurprisingly, Bahrain's military is small. Recent figures place the total size of active military personnel at around 15,000 people, making it the 99th largest military in the world and one of the smallest in the region.[18] To supplement its military, Bahrain has allowed American and British forces to station their forces in Bahrain, with the American forces provide the largest presence of foreign troops. The monarchy, requested American troops to leave in the early 1970s but requested their return after regional threats become more pronounced. The American and British presence in Bahrain stems from many of the same security fears that the Bahraini government has in the region - namely countering Iran. While other nations also have American bases, like Qatar, Bahrain's influence and importance is disproportionate to its size because of the major battle fleet stationed within its borders. Bahrain can use its role as a major component in the American military strategy as a way to elicit concessions from the U.S. or to push for advocating its interests. The same possibility exists with the British, although the British military presence is significantly smaller. As long as foreign powers use Bahrain as a military staging ground, Bahrain can try to leverage that relationship.

Finally, Bahrain possesses some convening power. Qatar or the UAE arguably have greater power in convening regional summits or initiatives, but Bahrain is attempting to follow their example. Bahrain's Manama Dialogue, a government backed annual summit designed to bring policymakers from around the world together to discuss the most pertinent regional and global issues, is a way for Bahrain to establish prestige and credibility. Playing the role as convener allows Bahrain to present itself as a serious diplomatic and cultural player, potentially turning Bahrain into a key deal broker like Oman during the Iran nuclear deal. The government is eager to build upon the success of the Manama Dialogue and grow Bahrain's reputation accordingly.

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

As mentioned previously, Bahrain faces intense internal conflicts. The most salient internal conflict in Bahrain is around religion. Sectarian religious conflict colors almost all dimensions of Bahrain. The Arab Spring and Iran nuclear deal accentuated this division. The government of Bahrain treats its Shia Arab compatriots as a security threat because the government believes they are pawns of Iran and Iran's attempts to expand its power.

Anti-Shia discrimination is a matter of policy in Bahrain. In almost all aspects of society, Sunni Arabs have greater economic opportunities and political rights, especially those who are members of the Al Khalifa ruling tribe. The discrimination has translated into much of the economic wealth being held by Sunnis while Shias remain economically deprived and chronically unemployed. Economic disenfranchisement led to growing frustration and resentment within the Shia community, helping to spur the 2011 protests.[19] Furthermore, with Bahrain's economy struggling to diversify and grow, one should expect the economic inequality to continue to undermine the regime. There is not enough wealth in the country to satisfy the monarchy's allies and the poor Shia.[20] To bolster its power base, the government has offered citizenship to various Sunni migrants. Despite not having the deep ties to Bahrain, these newly anointed citizens enjoy more economic and political rights than the Shia.

The government also blocks or disrupts the work of civil society, especially groups seen as close to the opposition. The government routinely jails opponents of the regime and their supporters including religious leaders, doctors, human rights campaigners, and laypeople. The government has intermittently jailed several high profile human rights campaigners, like Nabeel Rajab, to intimidate then and obstruct their work. Groups like the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy are routinely prevented from working in the country with staff members occasionally threatened with legal punishments. However, there are groups based abroad that work towards strengthening Bahrain's civil society or supporting the opposition, like Freedom House or the London-based Bahrain Freedom Movement.

While there have been moves towards greater equality, the consistent fear of Shia takeover has either derailed plans for greater liberalization or turned back years of progress. For example, while the government has held parliamentary elections, the power of the legislature was extremely weakened by the National Action Charter of Bahrain because it gives the King power over all the branches of government. Within the legislature, the monarchy has attempted to co-opt Sunni parties to form a bloc to stop any legislation upsetting the current balance of power and blocking Shia activism both within and outside the legislature.[21] A law passed in 2005 made it illegal for any Bahraini to form a political party or a political association based on class, profession, or religion.[22] As a result, Shia Bahrainis are severely underrepresented in the government. A large part of the public is denied an opportunity to work within the system to air their grievances and advocate for policies.

To add insult to injury, the government has deliberately sought to attack and oppress various leaders within the Shia population. As mentioned earlier, Isa Qassim, the spiritual head of the Shia Arabs, was stripped of his citizenship by the government and removed from the public sphere. The government also arrested another opposition leader after he returned from a trip to Iran on accusations that he was financing terrorism.[23] When the government does try to reach out to the Shia opposition, it often ends in further oppression. In 2013, the government attempted to restart discussions with the Shia opposition to bridge the political divide, but the process was suspended in 2014 when the government arrested one of the opposition leaders involved in the talks for criticizing the government.[24] The government privileges its security concerns over political reconciliation. The result is a muddled policy mixing symbolic overtures and government oppression and harassment.

The government has also skillfully convinced many Sunni groups to remain loyal to the monarchy. Most prominently, the monarchy has successfully cooperated with the Muslim Brotherhood's Bahrain affiliate and with some Salafist groups, like the Al-Asalah Society, to remain loyal to the regime. These groups remain loyal to the government's sectarian policy, with the leader of the Al-Asalah Society going as far as to say he entered politics to prevent the greater "evil" of Sunnis losing power to Shias.[25] In return, Bahrain avoids

labeling them as terrorist groups and provides them with some international cover. For example, Bahrain was one of several countries to recall its ambassador from Qatar in protest to Qatari support for toppling President Morsi of Egypt. The monarchy needs Sunni support in the face of the larger Shia population to survive. The monarchy is willing to work with Salafists and the Brotherhood if it accomplishes that goal, even if their allies view them with suspicion.

The Arab Spring, the Iran Deal, and the rise of ISIS have all affected this dynamic in Bahrain in different ways. The Arab Spring and the Iran Deal have, as mentioned before, underscored the fear that the government should view the Shia population as a security threat. This fear has been reinforced by Bahrain's alliances. Saudi Arabia and the GCC, for the most part, adhere to the same logic. These nations have seen Iran's influence in the region grow without the expected American pushback. The American willingness to pull support from Mubarak only feeds into the fears that the Sunni Arab nations cannot rely on the U.S. to defend their interests. Bahrain has mostly been on the receiving end of this regional fear. When the Arab Spring arrived to Bahrain, the government was overwhelmed by the protests and unable to stop them. They permitted Saudi Arabia and the GCC to occupy the country and put down the protests.

It is clear that the regional players view Bahrain has a battlefield against Iran. Therefore, they share many of the same concerns about the Shia population as the ruling monarchy. It remains an open question, however, if the regional players would accept further liberalization in Bahrain to empower the Shia. Many of Bahrain's allies mimic Bahrain's discrimination against Shia Arabs and could view liberalization as dangerous.

ISIS has also attempted to leverage this internal conflict between Sunni and Shia Bahrainis. ISIS has called on its members and supporters in Bahrain to attack the Shia and join their cause. As a result, Bahrain joined the international coalition fighting ISIS. Although Bahrain sent aircraft to Jordan to assist operations, its overall military contribution has been small compared to other nations. Some Bahraini citizens have left to join ISIS. Many of the techniques Bahrain uses to decapitate Shia activists are used against ISIS sympathizers within Bahrain.[26] Bahrain's biggest concern with ISIS is not just terrorism, but also ISIS's attempt to enflame sectarian tensions into an all-out war. ISIS's anti-Shia ideology is well known. If the Shia Bahrainis, already marginalized by the state, believe Bahrain is not doing enough to protect them from ISIS, their frustrations may boil over once again into 2011 style protests.

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Bahrain is a small nation squeezed between major regional actors. Given its strategic importance, it was inevitable that external forces would play an outsized role in its future to achieve their ends. Today, Bahrain finds itself on the frontlines on the war against ISIS and amidst changing regional dynamics. For Bahrain, the key external conflict is the ongoing battle for influence between Iran and the region. While the fight against ISIS is important, the new political environment created by the Iran deal and the 2011 Saudi invasion occupies Bahrain's international and external policies.

The chief external conflict that defines Bahrain is the growing conflict between Iran and other regional powers, most notably Saudi Arabia and the US. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, hostility towards Iran has been the norm. However, the JCPOA, coupled with the perception that the US is reducing its regional commitment, has only heightened the tension between Iran and its regional rivals. Therefore, most of the significant external relationships are defined by this conflict, including Bahrain's continuing battle against ISIS. Bahrain has adopted and internalized this conflict, influencing Bahrain's relationship with external actors.

As stated before, Bahrain has historically sought to align itself with a larger power. Doing so grants Bahrain greater security and increases its diplomatic heft. Today, that power is the US and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain. The stronger power acts a guarantor of Bahrain's security.

While the relationship between the US and Bahrain is not without bumps, it is clear that Bahrain views it as an extremely important one. For example, during the 2011 protests, Bahrain kicked out several American diplomats for meeting with opposition figures, but still welcomed new US naval warships to Bahrain.[27]

The relationship is not strictly military. Bahrain and the US signed a free trade agreement in 2005 and the US Chamber of Commerce has a US-Bahrain business council designed to increase and deepen business relations. The US has, for the most part, remained absent from directly engaging in Bahraini domestic politics, perhaps because of the diplomatic spat from 2011. Regardless, the deep commitment between the nations is unlikely to weaken. Having withstood the 2011 protests and facing a resurgent Iran, a Trump administration is probably less interested in decreasing US presence in the country. In fact, the government could benefit from a US administration less interested in promoting and defending human rights abroad, shielding Bahrain from blistering public condemnations.

Another key external actor is Saudi Arabia. By supporting the monarchy in 2011, Saudi Arabia has ensured in the near term that Bahrain will remain friendly and a steadfast ally. Moreover, the government frequently points to Saudi Arabia as a reason for delaying reforms since Saudi Arabia is likely to squash any liberalization.[28] Along with the US, Saudi Arabia has historically sought to hedge and contain Iran, viewing the revolutionary Shia Islamic government as an existential threat to the Saudi Arabian Sunni monarchy. The Saudi reaction to the JCPOA has not been positive. Some in Saudi Arabia believe it signifies a potential US rapprochement with Iran or withdrawal from the region, although it is unlikely that President Trump will ease US-Iranian relations.[29] Regardless, Saudi Arabia has leveraged its diplomatic and economic power to counter what it perceives to see as a resurgent, aggressive Iran. Diplomatically speaking, Bahrain has mostly followed Saudi policy towards Iran, like cutting diplomatic ties with Iran when the Saudi embassy was attacked in Tehran in 2016. Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia in its anti-Iran campaign, most notably in supplying troops and support for Saudi Arabia's campaign against the Houthis in Yemen. While Bahrain has suffered some military losses in Yemen, it appears that Bahrain is unlikely to back out of this coalition against Iranian influence.

The next critical actor is the GCC. As stated before, membership in this exclusive club has elevated Bahrain's regional standing and provided Bahrain with tangible benefits. As one of the least prosperous members, Bahrain receives substantial economic aid from the GCC.[30] GCC also provides security since member nations have a stake in ensuring that the ruling monarchies do not fall, as seen by the GCC's 2011 intervention. Like other Sunni nations, the GCC has adopted anti-Iranian posture. GCC nations have participated in several military campaigns designed to counter Iran, including the current war in Yemen. GCC believes that Iran is attempting to destabilize their governments and wants to continue to deepen defense ties within the GCC and with other nations, especially the U.S.[31]

Clearly, Iran looms largely in Bahrain's external conflicts. This conflict dictates which nations to align with and what policies to follow. Despite the upheaval of the Arab Spring and the continuing war with ISIS, Bahrain's response to both is grounded within the overall geopolitical goal of containing Iran. As discussed earlier, after successfully surviving the 2011 protests, the government clapped down on its Shia population, viewing them as possible Iranian agents. Shia leaders were imprisoned, the civil rights of Shia Bahrainis were restricted, and whatever civil society existed, especially in the Shia community, was clamped down on. It is clear that operating in a neighborhood where the consensus is that Iran is a threat has trickled down from Bahrain's foreign policy objectives to its domestic politics. Despite pleas from the US to create a more inclusive society, Bahrain continues to follow the example set by its neighbors to keep a tight leash on its Shia inhabitants. Furthermore, while Bahrain participates in the international coalition against ISIS, even that campaign's primary justification appears to be countering Iran.[32] Bahrain is concerned that ISIS will recruit or inspire Sunni Bahrainis to attack their Shia compatriots, possibly pushing Shia closer to Iran and cause some to try and overthrow the monarchy.[33] Bahrain did declare it was willing to commit troops to Syria, but only after Saudi Arabia did the same. Bahrain treats the fight against ISIS as the battle of the moment, but the greater threat, in Bahrain's eyes, is with Iran.

Bahrain is trapped in an echo chamber. Bahrain has internalized the fear of Iran toppling Sunni monarchies. This fear governs much of its domestic policies and its foreign relations. Presumably, this fixation on Iran is unlikely to change in the future, especially with a relatively anti-Iranian administration entering Washington.

Possible Negotiation Moves

While Bahrain's small military, economic, and diplomatic power may lead one to conclude that Bahrain has few negotiation moves, there are potential moves that will increase Bahrain's overall power and address some of the underlying causes of radicalism in the region if done properly. The moves are as follows: Bahrain could become a leader in Sunni-Shia reconciliation; Bahrain could leverage its relationship with the US, specifically the bases, to gain necessary concessions; Bahrain could increase the number of players in the region by bringing in nations from outside. While many of these moves have reasons or obstacles to why they have not happened, if Bahrain can accomplish them, it will dramatically reshape the region.

The inability of Sunni governments to integrate their Shia citizens is a problem that bedevils the region. While this paper has focused on how Bahrain has treated Shia Muslims, many of the same tactics to disenfranchise and oppress Shia Muslims are practiced regionally. Some states go even further by utilizing more violent tactics. The oppression faced by Shia Muslims has pushed some to embrace extremism, confirming the view in Sunnis' eyes that they are a third column. More repression follows, and the cycle continues unabated.

However, Bahrain has an opportunity to break the cycle and show the region that it is possible to have a Sunni monarchy rule over a large Shia population. The key distinction for Bahrain is that Bahraini Shiism is very different from Iranian Shiism. Most current Bahraini Shias can trace their theological roots to Iraq, where many current religious leaders received their training. The type of Shia Islam taught in Iraq is one that is more open to aspects of Sunni rule than what is taught in Iran.[34] There are clear breaks between the Bahraini Shia religious establishment and the Iranian equivalent. The recently banned Shia Al Wefaq party, the largest opposition party in the country, has taken great pains to argue for an inclusive Bahrain where government and economic opportunities are open to all. In fact, their slogan of "we protect our homeland" suggests a desire to dismantle sectarianism, which has dominated politics, and to protect Bahrain from foreign intervention.[35] Isa Qassim, the most prominent Shia leader, delivered several sermons decrying sectarianism and promoting the idea of an inclusive Bahrain society without revolution. He has argued for bridge building between Sunnis and Shias and even called Sunni Muslims his "brothers."[36] Qassim has declared that the nation "belongs to all its members" regardless of tribal affiliation and the nation does not belong to "one sect and not the other."[37] Qassim, the first among equals in the Shia religious community, was promoting a more open and inclusive society without advocating overthrowing the monarchy. However, Qassim was stripped of his citizenship and essentially placed under house arrest for allegedly conspiring with Iran, instead of being embraced by the government as a key ally.

Shia Bahrainis have developed a theology where they can seemingly accommodate some aspects of Al Khalifa rule, building upon what some have argued is a slow move in Shia Islam towards embracing political dialogue instead of violence.[38] Furthermore, Bahrain can claim a tradition of Shia theological innovation. Before the Al Khalifa clan invaded Bahrain and conquered it, Bahrain was the site of several schools of Shia thought, although most were destroyed. Leading Shia groups are also aware of public opinion and want to disassociate themselves from foreign influence in the public eye. Leaders have publicly distanced themselves from Iran and Hezbollah, with one leader saying "[W]e are independent in our decisions and do not allow anyone to interfere in our internal affairs."[39] While Bahrain has accused many Shia of collaborating with Iran, human rights groups routinely criticize show trials and confessions made under duress.

Although the monarchy makes sectarianism a government policy, there appears to be an opening for Sunni-Shia reconciliation.

The Bahraini Shia have laid the foundation for a Bahrain that is open for all. Such an outcome would elicit strong international support, especially from the US, which has urged the monarchy for years to treat Shia Muslims better. There is an opportunity for Bahrain to become a model for the region. By endorsing a version of Shia Islam that is distinct from Iranian Shiism and inclusive enough to allow for a Sunni government, Bahrain could become an example for other Gulf nations, showing that Shia Muslims are not inherently dangerous. Likewise, it will undercut the sectarianism that fuels many extremist groups like ISIS who thrive on the Sunni-Shia divide as a source of support. Lastly, adopting this approach will make Bahrain safer since ISIS calls for attacks by Bahrainis against Shia Muslims will find a smaller audience. If Sunni Muslims no longer view Shia Muslims as threats to the status quo, then ISIS calls for attacking them will resonate less. Shia Bahrainis have met the monarchy half way. It is up to the monarchy to follow through on its many promises to safeguard the rights of its Shia citizenry and expand opportunity.

To be clear, many Shia groups and leaders, like Al Wefaq and Qassim have mixed records. Al Wefaq's stance on women's rights has raised questions and Qassim has battled the monarchy over codifying family, among other actions in conflict with peaceful, political dialogue. It would be a mistake to view these players as progressive forces. Yet these influential figures have not openly advocated overthrowing the government, despite the treatment they have received in the past. There exists a middle ground for common interests to be addressed and for the two sides to come to terms. Furthermore, during the 2011 protests, many Sunnis joined their Shia compatriots, some wearing buttons declaring "No Sunni, No Shi'i, Just Bahraini."[40] There exists a scenario where sectarianism can be mitigated within Bahraini society, a future that many Sunnis apparently want to embrace. The window of opportunity may be closing. By banning Al Wefaq and stripping senior leadership of citizenship, the government merely widens the gap between the two groups, increasing the cost of an eventual reconciliation.

There are several challenges that prevent reconciliation. First, the fear of Iran may push Bahraini's to stop it. With so many adopting hostile positions towards Iran and continuing with anti-Shia policies, they may want to prevent reconciliation from happening within their own political reasons. Second, Bahrain may struggle to change course since the government's current tactics to protect the monarchy have worked so far. Bureaucratic inertia may continue the oppression. Additionally, there is no guarantee that enough Shias are interested in reconciliation. As the government continues harassment the Shia public may lack the appetite for cooperation without major concessions.

There are also domestic political barriers. The Al-Minbar Islamic Society, a Muslim Brotherhood linked group, has come out strongly against Shia, despite sharing many policy goals with Al Wefaq.[41] The leader the National Unity Assembly, a pro-government group, has declared Shia protests as Iranian "projects" and believes the Shia are trying to avenge the 7th century death of Husayn, the third imam.[42] By pushing the sectarianism angle for so long, the government may face intense pressure from pro-government groups for not being sectarian enough. After being told for years that the Shias are Iranian pawns, it will be tough for some Sunnis to change their thinking. These groups may spoil any move towards reconciliation.

Finally, the monarchy's legitimacy may be threatened by reconciliation. By opening up the government and the economy to Shias, the monarchy loses some of its power. The monarchy may believe this alternative path is too dangerous. Although some research indicates the monarchy can stay in power if it compromises with Shias, there may not risk it.[43]

Bahrain can leverage its relationship with the US to get the US to commit further to the region, weaken Saudi Arabia's hold on Bahrain, and advocate for Bahraini interests. The region believes the US is shifting away, but Bahrain can push the US to commit even more to the region by demanding the US the increase its military presence as a future precondition for keeping bases in Bahrain. Further investment binds the US with Bahrain and signals to the region that the US is committed. This signal alleviates some of the concerns allies have of a power vacuum and may moderate some of their policies. The bases also become increasingly too valuable to lose. As a result, Bahrain's leverage over the US would grow since the base could become, in a way, too big to fail. Bahrain may have an easy time convincing the US to invest more since President Trump views Iran more dangerously than Obama did. Bahrain could use its privileged position with the US as a way to offset Saudi influence and potentially reassert more control. Doing so will provide some flexibility domestically, especially in regards to how to work with Shia Bahrainis.

This tactic also has some problems preventing its use. First, it is unclear what President Trump will want to do with the navy base. Trump has consistently opined that nations should pay for US troop presence. Presumably, Bahrain could be one of those nations, and it is unclear if Bahrain would be willing to pay for the base. A scenario where Bahrain pays for the troops could be another avenue for negotiations. Second, this move assumes that as the US increases its presence in Bahrain, it can act as a buffer between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. However, the US may not want to engage with the Saudis directly to weaken Saudi influence. The US may believe that the status quo is better for American interests. Finally, increasing the troop presence could have adverse domestic and international effects. While the monarchy appears content with the American presence, it is unclear how the Shia will view it. The Shia could see the presence of US troops as tacit American approval of government oppression. The result could be increasing overall discontent and possibly pushing some Shia closer to Iran or to protest.

As the US presence increases, it could make Bahrain a bigger target for ISIS or future terrorist groups. ISIS inspired attacks have occurred in Bahrain, and as more hardware is stationed in Bahrain, terrorist groups like ISIS could call on its followers to attack the base. Bahrain could become too big to ignore.

Finally, a dramatic increase could spur Iran to counter either through its own buildup or through some other aggressive action, both covertly and overtly. By pushing America to investment more into its bases, Bahrain risks turning the Persian Gulf into an even more militarized region. The consequences of an accidental or deliberate military confrontation in this scenario are potentially worse, and Bahrain is a prime target any hypothetical war.

Another move would be to increase the number of actors. Right now, the major players have settled relations with Bahrain

and how to solve many of the regional challenges. By bringing in other nations, Bahrain could spur new thinking and deal-making while also increasing its own stature since Bahrain will be viewed as the convening power. This privileged position could allow Bahrain to act as an above the line player. Most of the nations in the region are already involved in the ISIS conflict and in fighting terrorism in some form or another. Bahrain must look beyond the Arab world and the US. The best place to look may be South Asia since many of the migrant workers in Bahrain come from there. Recent research suggests that the majority of migrants come from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.[44] Not only do these nations want remittances to continue, they are concerned about their citizens' security. The Gulf has experienced a massive influx of migrants from South Asia, a trend likely to continue. Given these ties to the region, Bahrain could use its convening power to bring these nations into the discussion. With the rest of the region locked in a struggle against Iran, bringing in new nations that do not have a role in the conflict could provide a necessary reprieve.

Bahrain could also look to Russia and China. Russia is a dynamic actor in the region because of its Syrian campaign. Moreover, inviting Russia could have domestic support from people who distrust the US. Russia wants to increase its regional presence, as seen by the possible reopening of a Russian base in Egypt.[45] An opportunity to extend Russian influence in the Persian Gulf could be an enticing opportunity. A Trump Administration may even welcome a Russian presence. China, one of the largest, growing economies in the world, has an interest in keeping the oil shipping lanes open. China recently overtook the US as the Middle East's largest net importer of oil.[46] Like Russia, China is looking to play a larger role in the region and China may jump at an opportunity. As with the South Asian countries, bringing these two into discussions could break the tension between Iran and the region. They can also provide military and economic help that South Asian nations cannot.

However, this move also has risks. Expanding the table could upset the current players. Bringing Russia and China into a region that America has traditionally dominated may anger the US. It is not in Bahrain's interests to anger its security guarantor. Russia and China may not possess enough military or economic capacity to play the same role America plays. Therefore, what they can offer the region may not be enough.

South Asian nations may not want to engage either because they fear upsetting the US, are wary of engaging directly with ISIS lest they become a target, or lack domestic support to engage because of Bahrain's record of migrant abuses. On the last point, it is unclear if Bahrain wants to change the way business is done to protect migrants. South Asian countries also lack the economic and military heft that is required to make significant impacts in the region. Finally, there is a danger that by increasing the players, Bahrain only makes the process more confusing and complex. Each nation will bring its own set of interests and prejudices and there is always the risk that a nation will hijack any attempt to solve the ISIS or terrorism issue to serve their own ends. Bahrain may not be strong enough to stop it.

These moves all have their various advantages and disadvantages. They are not politically easy to implement and they all require Bahrain's leadership to take bold, unprecedented actions. They all challenge the status quo. However, if Bahrain wants to really make a difference and solve not just the ISIS problem, but some of the underlying sources of terrorism, it cannot follow the same, tired playbook. Bahrain has an opportunity to make a difference in the region, but doing so will require bold action and risk taking.

Conclusion

Bahrain's monarchy was only able to survive the 2011 protests because of outside intervention. There is no guarantee, however, that Saudi Arabia or another third party would do the same in the future. In the meantime, the relationship between the government and the opposition has not improved. The government continues its policy of oppression and discrimination. The fear of a resurgent Iran among Sunni states will likely cause them to dig in and continue sectarian policy. Bahrain cannot expect to continue with what has worked in the past. The domestic problems that inspired the 2011 protests (and many protests prior) remain unresolved and there is no reason to expect that they will be fixed if the government does not change its behavior. As sectarianism continues to grow, groups like ISIS will have the necessary recruiting material to inspire attacks.

However, none of this is preordained. Bahrain has a unique opportunity. Bahrain can become a laboratory for addressing some of the deep divides that exist in the Middle East, potentially becoming a model for the rest of the region. But in order for this to happen, Bahrain must be willing to take risks and think creatively. If Bahrain is unable to innovate, it will remain simply a pawn in a wider geopolitical game without addressing the underlying problems that have rocked the nation in the past and are endangering the monarchy in the meantime.

V. China, Japan, and India

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China: Investing Financial and Political Capital in the Middle East

China has a five-dimensional approach to the Middle East: oil, trade, arms, politics, and culture. Within this model, oil is by far the most important, although not China's only concern. The Middle East is an important source of raw materials for China's ever-growing economy, and, with new economic initiatives like the "1 belt 1 road" project, it will also be a key trade route through which China connects with the rest of the world.

As China increases its trade links with the Middle East, it has sought more influence there. In doing so, however, China has gone to great lengths to differentiate itself from "American-style" interventionism. China's foreign policy, rooted in the century of humiliation[1], prizes sovereignty over any form of humanitarian intervention.[2] China has trade with all the governments in the Middle East, while avoiding troop deployments (with the exception of military and police contributions to UN Peacekeeping contingents). China hopes to leverage the economic resources of the Middle East, to wield influence in the region, but yet to avoid committing military resources.

I. Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

China, ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has the largest population in the world, the second largest economy, and is the third largest in territorial size.[3] Han Chinese, which make up 92% of PR China's population, also form the vast majority of its ruling elite classes. There are 55 recognized ethnic minorities and, while there are some fractious ethnic divisions such as with the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, even these do not pose a significant threat to the state.[4]

China believes that the unrest in the Middle East is primarily caused by foreign intervention and economic underdevelopment. China's official foreign policy is dictated by the "five principles of peaceful co-existence,"[5] which embraces sovereignty over foreign intervention. Any military intervention must take place under the UN mandate, and only after that country asks for UN assistance.[6] While China recognizes the danger of Islamic extremism in the region, it believes it to be the result of economic issues, rather than being driven by political or social dynamics. As a result, China's policy has been to address the "root causes" of terrorism through massive infrastructure projects. Its "Arab Policy Paper," which outlines China's Middle East policy, has twice as much on economic considerations over security issues.[7] China has been investing in projects throughout the Middle East for years, and with the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (whose founding members include Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Israel), this trend will only continue and intensify.[8]

China has started construction of its first overseas naval base in Djibouti, which is scheduled to open in 2017. China has been careful to downplay any military role, underscoring that this is merely a logistics base. Professor Li Weijian, a professor at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, has said that "the facilities in Djibouti serve to protect China's economic interests in Africa and to help safeguard regional peace," and has denied it will be used for China to project its military power abroad. This base is an important part of securing China's "New Silk Road," and creates the potential for China to take a more active military role in the region.[9] China's biggest concern is the disruption of energy exports from the Middle East. In 2012, China warned Qatar that it viewed the Strait of Hormuz as a "vital interest," and would take any steps necessary to ensure its safety.

While it is unclear the role history has played in the development of China's policy, it has been a major part of its rhetoric. In discussing China's planned "New Silk Road," it uses every opportunity to refer to the historical connections between China and the Middle East.[10] During Xi Jinping's first visit to the Middle East in January 2016, he visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, all of which Xi stressed, are, like China, ancient civilizations.[11] The CCP views China historically as a great power, and plans to reclaim China's rightful place in the world.

More recently, China's policy has been shaped by what is sees as an unfair system and an aggressive West. It fears American intervention, and so is opposed to military intervention in any form (in a rare exception, it did vote for UN military force in Afghanistan, but only as part of a deal with the US).[12] China believes the current system is stacked against it, and is engaged in a zero-sum game. Because of this, China has been reluctant to play by America's rules. Instead of the "free market," China has secured its oil resources through bilateral agreements that secure oil at fixed prices.[13] In general China is distrustful of West, creating a narrative of Western oppression of China since the first Opium War.

The recent terrorist attacks in Beijing and Yunnan, and the ongoing violence in Xinjiang, have played a relatively small role in influencing Chinese policy towards terrorism. Domestically, it has engaged in heavy handed tactics in Xinjiang, such as banning fasting and requiring Muslim shop owners to sell alcohol.[14] China also points to the "double standard" of Western nations, linking the Paris attacks to Xinjiang dissidents, and expressing frustration of criticism of China's approach to Xinjiang.[15] Despite recent ISIS attempts to recruit in Xinjiang, with Beijing estimating that over 300 Uighurs have joined ISIS, the evidence suggests that this figure is likely to be exaggerated. ISIS does not pose a significant threat to China at this time.[16]

Since Xi Jinping assumed leadership of the CCP in 2012, there has been a significant divergence in Chinese policy. While China

has largely been governed by consensus for the last 30 years, Xi Jinping has consolidated power among his faction. The full extent of this has yet to be seen, but it does remove many of the restrictions past Chinese leaders have had.[17]

While China has invested heavily in renewable energies, it still relies on Middle Eastern oil and gas. By 2025, China's oil imports are expected to more than double relative to 2013 volumes, reaching 12.8 million barrels a day.[18] Oil and gas from the Middle East will continue to be a crucial part of China's economic health.

II. Sources of Leverage

China's main source of leverage in the Middle East is its financial resources. As outlined in its Arab Policy paper, China has been pursuing the "1+2+3" policy, which has: "energy cooperation as the core, infrastructure construction and trade and investment facilitation as the two wings, and three high and new tech fields of nuclear energy, space satellite and new energy as the three breakthroughs."[19] China has invested in a series of high profile massive infrastructure projects across the Middle East, from high speed rail lines in Saudi Arabia to ports in Iran. China is also one of the few countries actively building nuclear plants, making it a very attractive partner for Middle Eastern countries looking to diversify their energy sources.[20]

On the diplomatic front, China is a member of the UN Security Council. China has also sought to act as a neutral mediator, a role that can no longer be filled by the United States or Russia. Recently China has tried to use the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to improve relations between Pakistan and Iran. After the raid of the Saudi embassy in Tehran, China's Deputy Foreign Minister flew to Tehran and Riyadh to try and mediate between the two nations. Since the two no longer have direct diplomatic contact, China can potentially play an important role as a mediator. [21] China has also promised increased military aid to several countries in the region, but this support has not yet materialized.[22]

Chinese weapons sales in the Middle East have been significant since the 1980s, and have only increased in the decades since.[23] In 2014, China was responsible for "54 per cent of Pakistani arms imports and 82 per cent of Bangladeshi imports."[24] From 2009-2013 China was the 4th largest arms exporter in the world (6%), behind Germany and ahead of France.[25]

Primarily, China has sought to keep the political status quo and opposes any form of military intervention, to the point of vetoing several UN resolutions on Libya, and later Syria. While China sought to demonstrate its opposition to American hegemony through these votes, Beijing lost political capital in the Middle East as a result and its popular reputation suffered. Because China has simply supported the status quo and existing governments, including authoritarian regimes, its initial response to the Arab Spring was confused and harshly criticized by those in the region favoring democratic transitions.[26]

China has pursued a tridimensional approach towards diplomacy in the Middle East, balancing interests between competing sides. One of the most important is the "Chinese, Iranian, and Saudi Arabian dimension." In the 1980s, China provided Iran with much needed weaponry. Today, China provides Iran with technology and engineering experience in exchange for Iranian gas and minerals. It has also brought Iran to the negotiating table for the P5+1 talks, but has been careful not to provide so much aid as to alienate Saudi Arabia.[27]

China has also been trying to expand its soft power. China has worked to attract students from the Middle East to study in China, opened Confucius Institutes across the Middle East to consolidate China's soft power standing in the region, and even created a multi-billion dollar Islamic amusement park in Yinchuan, China.[28] Government and private actors are aligned, and the three main Chinese oil corporation operating in the Middle East are state owned enterprise (SOEs).[29]

III. Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

While there are many different factions within the CCP, the Party has been extraordinarily successful in presenting a unified front to the world, with a mostly consistent policy towards the Middle-East. Some CCP leaders want China to continue to play a more restrained role, but at present there is no significant challenge to Xi Jinping's leadership. It remains to be seen how effective Xi Jinping's consolidation of power among the military and party will be. There have been some calls for his resignation from within the party, however those responsible were quickly punished.[30]

Since Deng Xiaoping took power in the late 70s, China has consistently followed a public policy of "peaceful development," although Xi Jinping's recent actions in the South China Sea have challenged this.[31] Xi Jinping is China's most powerful leader in over 20 years; it remains unclear how and if he will seek to change and reform China's governing structures.

IV. External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Following the Arab Spring in Syria, China feared domestic revolution within its own borders and struggled to develop a coherent response to the popular uprisings across the Middle East. China's initial policy was to veto any UN action regarding Syria, and to engage exclusively with the Assad government. Recently, China has since started meeting with Syrian opposition leaders, and dispatched a "Special Envoy on the Syrian issue." While these relatively minor steps are unlikely to yield any major change in the conflict dynamics on the ground, it is evidence that China is beginning to take a more proactive diplomatic role in the Middle East.[32] China has managed to maintain a positive reputation in the Middle East. More than half of Arabs surveyed in a 2016 Pew Center poll support Chinese actions in the Middle East, while less than 1/3 feel the same about American actions.[33] China has attempted to maintain good relations with every country in the Middle East, but that has become increasingly difficult. Following the Iran Deal, China has moved closer to Iran, even trying to bring it into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Saudi Arabia has opposed this, forcing China to take steps to reassure Saudi Arabia.[34]

While China opposes most US actions in the Middle East, it is also reliant on the US to do the "heavy lifting" in the region. China cooperates with fellow UNSC P5 member Russia in resolutions pertaining to the Middle East, often voting with Russia on the Security Council.

China wants a stable multipolar system where it is at the negotiating table, but in which it is not required to commit the military resources that America and Russia have. And while China is frequently criticized by the West for its own human rights violations, many Middle Eastern governments have come to see the "Chinese model" as a viable alternative to Western-style government, with Beijing offering "no strings attached" support and refusing to make economic development assistance in the Middle East conditional upon improving human rights records.[35]

V. Potential Negotiation Moves

China does not desire to replace the United States in its historical role in the Middle East, but remains nonetheless concerned with mounting US disengagement with the region and is willing to take a more active role to secure its interests. China's preferred source of negotiating leverage is economic in nature, utilizing financial incentives. While China's role in past regional negotiation attempts has been limited, it has started to play a role as a neutral mediator in select contexts. In meeting with Syrian opposition leaders and increasing its contributions to UN peacekeeping forces, China is clearly considering a wider range of non-economic options to increase its influence in the region. By maintaining communications with all parties, and significant economic relations with most, China is in a unique position of influence.[36]

One of China's greatest strengths is its positive image in the region, and ability to deal with virtually every party. If China were to increase its military capacities in the region, such a stance would undermine its status as a neutral arbitrator. While it is not impossible that China will pursue a more aggressive, unilateral military policy in the Middle East in the years and decades to come, this remains a highly unlikely prospect.

Japan: Expanding Security and Economic Interests

Japan is typically regarded as having had limited interest and influence in the Middle East, beyond its economic and energy considerations. The region tends to be considered as having little strategic or core national security consequences for Japan. This paper, however, considers Japan's growing engagement and widening interests in the Middle East, and the potential for Tokyo to assume a more multidimensional role in the region.

I. Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perception

Japan's Identity

Japan's current identity and security narratives were largely shaped during the post-World War II era. Its defeat to the US and the nuclear bombing in its territory remain as a national trauma, which resulted in public revulsion at militarism. Japan has thus, evolved into an economic and a non-military great power. However, Japan has been incrementally departing from a pure economic power to a more traditional military power.

Japan's Interests Regarding the Middle East

• **Economic interest and energy security:** Japan is one of the most energy-resource dependent countries among developed economies. More than 80% of its crude oil imports come from the Middle East; Japan is heavily reliant on the Persian Gulf's liquefied natural gas and the level of dependency has only increased after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.[37] Japan has thus expressed strong interest in maintaining a good relationship with Middle Eastern countries. Japan has observed the volatile political situation in the Middle East with concern, putting its energy supplies at risk. Therefore, it has come to view stability and peace in the region as a

necessary condition for its domestic energy security and economic performance.

- **US alliance and East Asian regional security:** US hegemony is seen as largely serving its own interests by providing a security umbrella in East Asia, where Japan's primary security concern lies. Japan's limited military capabilities, while situated in a volatile regional security with a rising China, makes it vulnerable to US demands, including on providing assistance to US efforts in the Middle East.[38]

- **Re-militarization:** Japan's anti-militarist norms after World War II have been institutionalized in the constitution and have constrained Japan's military approaches to security.[39] However, some Japanese conservative elites are increasingly cherishing the idea to expand the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF), seeing it as an opportunity to reduce Japan's vulnerability in East Asia and also to increase Japan's international standing. The Middle East is seen as a place where they can test the boundaries of their military ambitions.

Japan's Position towards the Middle East
- **Promoting good trade and economic relations with the Middle East countries**
  - As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan states, Japan's relations with the Middle East countries have been mainly centered on resources and energy.[40] Since his second inauguration in 2012, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has visited the Middle East over six times with the stated objective of strengthening Japan's economic and business relationships with the Middle East countries.[41] Japan recognized the importance of establishing direct ties with Middle East oil-producing states during the oil crisis in the 1970s when the Arab states took control of the oil fields and the US failed to guarantee oil supplies.[42] Despite efforts to diversify oil import sources, Middle East imports still remain the greatest share in its total crude oil imports and the Japanese government is actively involved in securing resources abroad.[43]
  - Under Japan's New National Energy Strategy in 2006 and the Strategic Energy Plan in 2010, the government committed itself to secure physical upstream assets to support Japan's energy security.[44] This involved expanding the financing capabilities of Japan Oil, Gas, Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC), a governmental organization that financially supports Japanese companies' overseas oil investments.[45] The Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and Nippon Export Insurance Agency (NEXI) also expanded financial support and arranged insurance risk reduction for Japanese companies investing in GCC countries.[46] In addition, recognizing the steady economic development, increasing consumer market, and growing opportunities for investment, Japan has been promoting a number of infrastructure projects in the region.[47]

- **Upholding diplomatic neutrality in Middle East conflicts**
  - Since Japan is not a major political stakeholder in the Middle East and is geographically distant, Japan pursues diplomatic neutrality in the region's various political disputes and armed conflicts. For example, Japan is a supporter of a two-state solution whereby Israeli and Palestinian states and societies coexist harmoniously.
  - At the same time, Japan's dependence on the Middle East oil-producing states for energy security and the US for military security has resulted in a critical dilemma. Japan's strategy to politically balance Middle Eastern countries and the US came to the forefront in the 1990s, when US foreign policy in the Middle East grew particularly contentious in the eyes of many governments and populations in the region.
  - While Japan has more often closely aligned with the US in its Middle East strategy, it has also sought to maintain a visible "distance" from American actions in the region to preserve its neutral stance, preserve bilateral ties with Middle Eastern countries, and to avoid incidents such as the Iraq War from tarnishing Japan's reputation on the international stage. When the U.S. attempted to isolate Iran after the 1979 Revolution, Japan nevertheless sought to maintain good ties with Tehran despite American complaints. Tokyo even attempted to mediate talks between American and Iran in the 1980s.[48]

II. Sources of Leverage

The principal source of leverage that Japan holds in the Middle East is its soft power, through its consistent emphasis on economic development and non-coercive engagement. Japan, overall, has been able to establish a benign image through its economic partnership, financial aid, and humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in the Middle East. And with its soft power, despite limited political and military leverage, Japan has been able to promote projects that facilitate the peace process in the region.

- **Economic Resources**
  - Japan's economic leverage in the Middle East has increased over the years, not only because it is one of the most significant purchasers of resources but also through growing economic interdependence with the GCC countries. One example of mutually beneficial energy cooperation involves Saudi Aramco, which began to use facilities in Japan as a base for its business in Asia with the proviso that, in a state of emergency, Japan has access to the inventory at the facilities.[49] Furthermore, Japan has established legal frameworks with its Middle East partners, such as Economic Partnership Agreements and Free Trade Agreements.[50] Strengthening interdependence through these mechanisms, Japan is now considered as "one of the most influential economic actors in the Persian Gulf — something that is unlikely to change in the near or medium term.[51]"

- **Military Resources**
  - As Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution prohibits the Japanese military from engaging in offensive activities, the role of Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF) has been limited to humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in the Middle East.[54] Japan has, on numerous occasions, turned down a US request to send its troops. In cases when it did support military intervention, Japanese troops often only engaged towards the end of the war after lengthy debates.
  - Japan, however, is slowly expanding its military capacity in the region. While Japanese civilian personnel were deployed throughout the 1990s in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, after the 9/11 terror attack, the JSDF began to participate in non-UN peacekeeping operations in US-led military attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq.[55] In addition, during this time, Japan also amended the 1992 Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations to facilitate JSDF participation in a wider range of activities, such as monitoring of disarmament of local forces and expanding the use of weapons by the JSDF.[56]
  - In 2011, in accordance with the international anti-piracy effort, Japan established an anti-piracy base in Djibouti and seeks to use it for UN peacekeeping activity, as well as for emergencies and counterterrorist activities.[57] In 2015, Abe's government overcame domestic opposition and passed legislation allowing Japanese forces to use minimal force in overseas combat, for the first time since 1945.[58] These changes are, indeed, indicative of Japan's increasing use of hard power on the world stage, including in the Middle East.

III. Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

The Internal Conflict Surrounding Japan's Involvement in Middle East Conflict
    The most relevant internal struggle in regards to Japan's Middle East policy centers around Japan's military involvement overseas. Scholars have identified four ideological groups that represent divergent perspectives on the interpretation of Article 9 of the constitution and the role of the JSDF in international disputes, which directly affect Japan's Middle East policy.[59]

1) The **Pacifists** adhere to the strict interpretation of Article 9 and claim that the JSDF are unconstitutional. Pacifists are opposed to any type of Japanese involvement in international conflicts.[60]
2) The **Mercantilists** emphasize economic development over defense spending. They have less coherent or unanimous reading of Article 9. While mercantilists tend to view the JSDF as legitimate, they believe that the JSDF's role must be limited to non-combat activities under the UN.[61]
3) The **Normalists** are interested in seeing the gradual normalization of the military for national defense purposes and also agree to the deployment of the JSDF to maintain international peace and security.[62]
4) The **Nationalists** are on the far right and strongly urge Japan to remilitarize and possess its own nuclear capabilities. They support the revision of Article 9 to promote remilitarization of Japan.[63]

    External parties often overlook these domestic political cleavages within Japanese politics. The members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which is the ruling and predominant party in Japan, tend to be nationalists while the members of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) are oftentimes pacifists. The mercantilists and normalists, on the other hand, consist of members of both the LDP and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Factional affiliation (habatsu), rather than party lines, divides the mercantilists and the normalists.[64] The mercantilists primarily consist of members of the LDP's Kōchikai faction and three factions of the DPJ (Riberaru no kai [Liberal Group], Kuni no katachi kenkyū kai [Research Group on the Form of a Nation], and Shin-seikyoku kondan kai [New Political Situation Consultation Group]).[65] Normalists largely consist of members of the LDP's Machimura faction [Seiwa Policy Research Group] and Asō faction, and DPJ's Isshinkai faction [Ozawa Group] and Seiken Kōtai o jitsugen suru kai faction [Group Aiming at Realizing Government Change].[66]
    The fact that scholars, interest groups, and the public are also divided among these four ideological groups complicates matters even further.[67] As far as public opinion is concerned, the general public continues to show strong support for Article 9; most Japanese view war and maintaining a military as incurring excessive financial cost. But since the 1990s, even the public has shifted away from a non-tolerance stance towards the JSDF.[68]
    Since the end of the Cold War, normalists have become the most influential political force. The three most recent prime ministers including Koizumi and Abe are also normalists.[69] Led by these normalist leaders, however, there is a new generation of Japanese elites with ambitions to overcome the increased security imbalance in East Asia through remilitarization. These elites strategically began to exploit US pressures on Japan for military burden-sharing in the Middle East to advance their agenda.[70]

IV. External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

External Alliance: The US
    Japan's alliance with the US has been one of the dominant factors determining Japan's foreign policy decisions. The alliance was forged by the end of the war, alongside the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, a military agreement by which US forces would remain on Japanese territory to provide its security needs.[71] The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, revised in 1960, grants the US the access to military bases in Japan in exchange for US defense of Japan in the event of war.[72] The alliance has endured geopolitical transitions

and strengthened with the rise of China.[73] As some argue, Japan sees itself as politically distant from East Asia and geopolitically more closely aligned to the US.[74]

Apart from East Asia, the Middle East is a region where the resilience of US-Japan alliance has been tested the most. The US has often asked Japan's military assistance in the region. Yet, Japan's reservations in sending troops for combat-purposes while mainly supporting the US with economic aid were not well-received by its ally. During the 1991 US-led military operation in Iraq, Japan contributed $13 billion and other non-military support. Yet, this was considered "too little, too late" in Washington.[75] US Secretary of State James Baker criticized Tokyo as "a free-rider…reluctant to act as a responsible stakeholder.[76]"

Such criticism led to the passing of the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992, which enabled and strengthened Japan's engagement in UN-peacekeeping missions.[77] According to the interview with the officer of the JSDF, the dilemma Japan faces in its alliance with the US is that while Japan fears being entangled in any external war the US requests it to be involved as an ally, it equally fears that the US will not come to its rescue in the event of an attack. In some cases, Japan has even voluntarily contributed to military activities in the region in order to prove its commitment to the US. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks Prime Minister Koizumi was quick to deploy the JSDF to the US-led War on Terror despite significant domestic objection. Remarkably, it was the Japanese diplomats who lobbied the UN Security Council member states for a resolution authorizing an attack and thus, sought to facilitate a war. This was clearly an unprecedented departure from its anti-militarist norms and its usual posture of neutrality in Middle East conflicts.

External Rivalry: China

Despite growing economic interdependence, Sino-Japanese relations are marked by competition and this rivalry is recently being extended to the Middle East. For one, there is rising competition over access to energy supplies that is gradually turning into "a potential source of conflict.[78]" For instance, the Japanese-Iranian agreement to develop the major Azadegan oil field was seen as Japan's response to China's increasing oil concessions in the Middle East.[79] Since the early 2000s, Beijing and Tokyo are also fighting 'a sales war' for Middle East markets and infrastructure projects there.[80]

The most controversial issue that lies at the heart of Sino-Japanese rivalry in the Middle East is Japan's military activity there. Japan's military involvements in the region followed by legislative reforms were perceived as a direct threat to Chinese national security.[81] Indeed, the very reason behind Japan's remilitarization efforts and stronger assistance to the US engagement in the Middle East is China's accelerated military buildup.[82] When Japan passed the 2009 Anti-piracy Law, a Xinhua article alleged that Japan was exploiting Middle East conflicts to loosen its constraints on the use of force.[83] Furthermore, Japan's plan to enlarge its anti-piracy base in Djibouti and its participation in collective self-defense missions was received by the Chinese "as an actual break of the status quo.[84]"

China has often attempted to stir domestic Japanese opposition by accusing Prime Minister Abe of misleading Japan, and by warning the Japanese public that Abe's "military ambitions" could leave Japan "embroiled in war.[85]" China's official press agency, Xinhua, has even suggested that the 2015 execution of Japanese citizens by ISIS was due to Japan's increasing engagement in international counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East.[86] As some of China's quasi-military activity in the region is a direct response to Japanese involvement there, the Middle East could be a place where Sino-Japanese rivalry will continue to be observed, even expanding to military and political arenas. [87]

V. Potential Negotiation Moves

Japan, despite its growing interest and expanding economic and military activities in the region, has not been a dominant stakeholder in Middle East negotiations. This is mainly because Japan has been considered lacking traditional political resources and the country itself avoids being involved in the region's political muddle. However, Japan could nevertheless play a crucial role in the region's stabilization and development.

Strengthening Japan's soft power campaigns

Japan's utilization of soft power to improve the prospects for stability in the Middle East makes Japan a potentially influential stakeholder in the region's peace process. Japan has a history of rebuilding itself after a destructive war and becoming a major economic power. From this experience and through its distinctive national security culture, Japan has advocated non-coercive measures and economic development as solutions to Middle East conflicts. For reconstruction efforts and as part of its anti-terrorism strategies, in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, the Japanese government has consistently provided financial aid to promote social integration by encouraging economic growth and enhancing security capability.[88] The long-term commitment Japan has shown in investing in fragile states in the Middle East affords it influence in forming coalitions amongst the international community to support the region's sustainable development.

With regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Japan initiated a project called the Corridor of Peace and Prosperity in 2006, which includes Japanese teachers working in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and the establishment of the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park to support and catalyze the Palestinian private sector.[89] Furthermore, Japan's position as a third party makes it an ideal facilitator of forums or dialogues on reconciliation that involves a diverse array of parties. For instance, Japan offered a series of seminars on the topic of national reconciliation in which representatives belonging to different sects in Iraq were provided ideas for achieving reconciliation and reconstruction in Iraq.[90] Such initiatives can be most effectively carried out by a third party and therefore, Japan's unique strategies of promoting reconciliation between sectarian and ethnic groups must be recognized and further strengthened.

Mediating between Middle Eastern stakeholders as a third party

Japan, being a neutral party and with little historical baggage in the Middle East is in a promising position to mediate Middle East negotiations.[91] Japan can play an important role in mediating dialogue and conflict resolution in Syria, for example, convening the warring parties as a neutral and independent arbiter. This can include broader regional engagement, drawing upon Tokyo's strong ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

<u>**India: Making Friends on All Sides in the Middle East**</u>

Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

<u>*Identity: Between the Old and the New*</u>
Many scholars and journalists take note of a lingering "third worldism" and "anti-Western framework" in Indian foreign policy and conflict narratives shaped during the colonial period and the Cold War.[92] At the same time, India increasingly regards itself as rising to great power status, fueled by its sustained economic growth, military modernization, and rapprochement with the U.S. This has led to extensive discussions about changes in foreign policy, particularly concerning India's departure from strategic restraint.[93] Both India's identity of the old and the new, however, seem to justify and suggest that the strategy of restraint will endure. India's Middle East policy,[94] along this line, is largely characterized as "reactiveness and incrementalism," despite India's substantial and growing interests in the region, both in economic and security concerns.[95]

<u>*India's Interests in the Middle East*</u>
- ***Economic and Energy Interests***
  - Instability in the Middle East is a concern to India primarily due to economic and energy considerations. Middle Eastern countries have been important trading partners for India over multiple centuries. Today, even excluding oil, the region accounts for approximately one-sixth of India's total foreign trade.[96] India has been actively involved investing in various Middle Eastern countries' energy sectors.[97] In addition, inward remittances from migrant workers play an important role in India's economy.[98]
  - Due to a rapid increase in India's energy demands following rapid post-1980s economic growth, one of India's central foreign policy goals in the Middle East has been to secure long-term supply agreements for crude oil and natural gas. Indian oil companies have been actively engaged in oil-exploration activities in Egypt, Iran, and Syria, and India holds a decades-long natural gas contract with Qatar.[99] India has opted for energy cooperation with Iran, even when this behavior brings about American discontent. India's need to ensure hydrocarbon supplies was the drive behind the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, which the US has strongly opposed.[100] Furthermore, government subsidies to both public-sector domestic oil companies and consumer oil products take up over a tenth of the budget, which makes India vulnerable to shifts in energy price.[101] Considering that Indian grand strategy is heavily centered on economic growth, securing energy supplies in the Middle East is of great importance in India's national interest.
  - As demonstrated by the case of India's engagement in Iran, New Delhi has not shied away from taking an opposing stand from Western countries in maintaining its energy security in the Middle East. Economic interests, however, "cut in multiple directions" and sometimes force India to stand with the US.[102]

- ***The US Factor***
  - With improving bilateral ties between India and the U.S. over past decades, the Indian government pays increasing heed to America's perspectives in its strategic foreign policy calculations. The 1991 Gulf War offers one example of these constraints. Facing a balance of payments crisis which forced India to seek assistance from the IMF, India decided not to antagonize the U.S. by opposing the intervention for fear that it would not receive the financial assistance it had requested. India also complied with American demands and curtailed imports of Iranian oil in 2014, despite its history of trade and engagement with Tehran. [103] India therefore carefully weighs the U.S. stance on a given foreign policy issue in the Middle East before elaborating its own position.

- ***National Security Concerns and the Pakistani Factor***
  - India's national security concerns towards the Middle East largely involve terrorism and Pakistan. Despite the growing ambiguity regarding the significance of the Pakistani factor in shaping India's Middle East policy, Pakistan's relations with Middle Eastern countries has often influenced India's own relations with the region, especially with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Indeed, India's close ties to Iran reflect the counterpoint to Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia.
  - From the 1960s, Pakistan has maintained an extensive military presence in Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan's relationship with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members has only intensified since the Arab Spring.[104] India has been particularly skeptical about Saudi Arabia funding Sunni extremist groups, especially in Pakistan and elsewhere. Along with growing concern over Islamic extremism reaching Indian shores, reports by police officers in Muslim-majority states including Jammu and Kashmir that Saudi-funded mosques were a major contributor to radicalization and warnings from India's Intelligence Bureau of Saudi Arabian preachers giving extremist sermons across India have been more than alarming.[105] Although India has pursued counterterrorism cooperation with Saudi Arabia, it has been rarely satisfied as Saudi authorities have repeatedly noted that "they wouldn't necessarily act against Pakistan nationals wanted for terrorist acts in India.[106]" Therefore, despite strains in its relationship with Iran in recent decades, India continues to see Iran as a natural ally while its distrust for Saudi Arabia persists.
  - Furthermore, India's strategic partnership with Israel is centered on arms sales. Despite being supportive of Arabs in Palestine, India's defense relationship with Israel continues to flourish in recent decades.[107] Israel's antagonism towards

Pakistan may be one of the factors that strengthened bilateral relations between India and Israel.[108]

India's Position in the Middle East: Strategy of Balance and Strategic Restraint

Based on these interests, India employs a strategy of balance, mainly between Saudi Arabia and Iran; the US and Iran, and between the Israelis and Palestinians. Despite the fact that India has favored one side or another in practice, it focuses on and has succeeded in maintaining "the appearance of a fine balance, and thereby preserve a freedom of manoeuvre.[109]" India no longer attempts to take sides in inter-Arab disputes, especially due to its previous failed "proxy" policies and economic development at home. One strategy that India pursues to maintain a delicate balanced engagement with the Middle East is by developing relations with each country in a bilateral and separate fashion.

One of the most distinct attributes of India's foreign policy is "its reticence to use force as an instrument of policy.[110]" Indian policymakers interpret Middle East conflicts through a particular lens, shaped by India's own colonial experience. India tends to view American and Saudi Arabian policies as the main cause of instability in the Middle East. In particular, there is a shared view that extremism and transnational Islamist terrorism are due to "direct or indirect western intervention, not western absence.[111]" Clearly, India's approach to the region from the Cold War to the present is one of anti-interventionism, largely shared by India's political elite.

In the Middle East, India's opposition to foreign military intervention has been noted on numerous occasions. In 1991, as the government attempted to discreetly allow the US to access refueling facilities in India during the US-led coalition's war to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, the plan could not further develop due to massive domestic opposition and accusations that the government was abandoning its commitment to non-aligned policy and of making India a tool of the US.[112] Two decades later, the Congress Party-led Indian government also strongly opposed NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya against Gaddafi. It argued that Libyan repression was an internal affair, and sided closely with Russian and Chinese positions on the airstrikes.[113]

II. Sources of Leverage

Diplomatic influence

India is hesitant to use its potential political leverage in the Middle East due to its preference for strategic restraint. This policy of restraint has sometimes played in favor of India, allowing it to play the role of neutral mediator on several occasions.[114] Two examples illustrate the negative ramifications for India of failing to fully leverage this diplomatic influence. In the early 2000s, Syria, the Palestinian Authority, and even Israel all welcomed India's active intervention in the Middle East Peace Process. Yet, apart from sending a special envoy between 2005 and 2009, India failed to engage in a more meaningful fashion.[115] Indeed, there are two factors that keep India from becoming a more active stakeholder in the region.

Firstly, Indian officials note that these invitations made by Middle Eastern countries for India to play an active role in their regional politics often turn out to be "little more than diplomatic niceties.[116]" At the same time, however, India also sees advantage in being distant from the political and security morass of the region when it has more to lose as an emerging global power. As an illustrative example, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, India wants to be seen as "supportive from a distance, associated with the success rather than the failure of the process.[117]"

Economic Strength

India also has economic leverage in the Middle East, but has made sparing use of this negotiating capital. India has become an attractive trade partner for countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar that have been exploring various investment opportunities in India.[118] However, its economic power is not effectively translated into political influence. For instance, India did not take the opportunity to act as a buffer between Iran and the US by offering Delhi as a venue for talks between the two countries even when, as a major economic and trading partner to both countries, it had the capacity and stature to do so.[119]

Military Resources

With its expanding economy, India's defense capability has improved dramatically over the past decades. Especially since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, India's rearmament and the 1998 nuclear tests suggest a shift in Indian strategic culture.[120] Furthermore, India has been a pioneer in contributing forces to UN peace operations in the Middle East since the 1950s.[121] However, such increased engagement does not necessarily signify a wholesale departure from strategic restraint. India's current rearmament efforts clearly lack strategic planning and "the effective use of force have failed to proceed.[122]" Strategic restraint seems to be a dangerous option when it comes to India's military resources, which remains fragmented and uncoordinated.

III. Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

As previously mentioned, India views the Middle East through three prisms: The Saudi-Iran rivalry, the US-Iran relationship, and the Israel-Palestine conflict. India's policy towards these nations has been a balancing act that is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. The main internal conflict in India is the rivalry between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which took power in 2014, and the Indian National Congress (INC). The BJP represents a "Pan-Indian, ethnocultural nationalism" while the INC has a "secular, anti-imperialist" outlook.[123]" While the BJP manifesto on foreign policy is critical of certain INC policies, and pushes for India to play more of

a leadership role, there are no major differences between them.[124]

There is also the strong pull of previous policy. In 1991 a deal to allow US planes to refuel in India during the Gulf War was scuttled due to popular protest. The 2005 and 2008 civil-nuclear initiative with the United States led to a vote of no confidence in the presiding government. While it is possible this issue was only being used for political purposes, it still shows the political danger of deviating from decades of established policy towards the US, and the rest of the world.[125]

Political decision making in India is focused around the Prime Minister, accompanied by an informal consulting process which "results in slow but sure decision making." While the creation of foreign policy has historically been the sole prerogative of the Prime Minister, the recent creation of a national security council has started to formalize the process.[126] While the constitution does grant the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of parliament, a role in the creation of foreign policy, "the influence of parliament in foreign policy making is marginal.[127]" The committee on external affairs primarily acts as a "link between the parliament and the cabinet."[128]

IV. External Conflicts and Networks of Relationships

There have been changes in recent Indian foreign policy, such as improved relations with America and Israel. However, these changes are not as significant as some make them out to be.[129] India's foreign policy agenda in the Middle East continues to be defined by its traditional policy of restraint and non-intervention. India is a democracy that the INC has dominated for much of its history. The previous government was an INC-led coalition government which was in power for 10 years before BJP took over in 2014. While the full ramifications of that election have yet to be seen, there have been minimal resulting changes in India's engagement in the Middle East and broader foreign policy.

Throughout the Cold war, India was a leader of the "third-world" of non-aligned states. India still prizes its independence, but has moved closer to the US. Despite this, India and Iran continue to have close economic ties that are expanding since the Iran nuclear deal.

In November Iran finally passed Saudi Arabia to become India's largest supplier of oil.[130] In May India and Iran finalized a deal for India to invest in Chabahar port in Iran. This allows Indian goods to bypass Pakistan, and presents Indian investment as an alternative to Chinese funds.[131] While there may be increased competition between China and India (as well as resentment due to Chinese investment into Pakistan), both countries are wary of foreign intervention, in the Middle East and elsewhere. Despite only officially recognizing Israel in 1992, relations between the two have flourished, with Israel being India's second-largest arms supplier in 2014.[132]

Since the end of the Cold War, India has replaced its realist/independent foreign policy with one based on multilateralism. Since the 1990's India has joined, and sought a leadership role, in several international organizations, becoming increasingly connected to the world economy. While India wants a stable Middle East, it believes military intervention is the root cause of many of the region's problems, and won't take an American-interventionist approach.[133] At the same time, the Middle East is vital to India's prosperity, and so India will likely continue to take steps to increase its influence in the region.

V. Negotiation Moves

India can take a more active role in negotiation efforts in the Middle East, through both official and unofficial channels, while continuing its multilateral approach to foreign affairs. Officially, India can become more involved in regional negotiation efforts, like the P5+1, and Syria. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, India is one of the few countries viewed positively by both sides, and can act as a neutral mediator in a way that America is unable to.

Like China, India can increase its soft power in the region by funding developmental projects, facilitating education and cultural exchanges, and, if India can successfully develop its domestic arms industry, an arms supplier. India has a strong civil society that can engage in track II diplomacy without risking India's reputation.

While India has the potential to use its military more aggressively in the region, it would go against decades of Indian policy, and would severely damage India's reputation, which is one of its greatest assets.

VI. Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, al-Shabab

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Djibouti: Strategic Gateway to the Middle East

Introduction

Djibouti has come to assume an essential role in many countries' Middle Eastern engagement, hosting military and naval facilities for an array of global and regional powers that provide critical access across the Gulf of Aden and beyond. This analysis will explore the country's own self-identity, how it perceives threats, and its own supporting role in other countries' foreign policy towards the Middle East region. It will explore Djibouti's sources of leverage, largely anchored in military and logistic considerations and the country's opportune strategic location. We explore the regional strategy that Djibouti has adopted to maintain positive relations with most Middle Eastern countries, prioritizing bilateral ties with the region's Sunni powers such as Saudi Arabia. The chapter examines Djibouti's external relationships: its allies, partners, rivals and adversaries. We proceed to consider potential negotiation moves that Djibouti might consider making in the future, leveraging concessions from the countries operating bases in Djibouti; committing forces to multilateral peace operations in the Horn of Africa or Middle East; or in offering to host some of the refugees fleeing neighboring Eritrea into Europe in exchange for concessions from the EU.

Identity & History

The Republic of Djibouti, a predominantly Muslim country, historically formed part of French Somaliland before voting to become an independent country in 1977. Djibouti straddles the Gulf of Aden, Somaliland, Ethiopia and Eritrea, spanning approximately 23,000 square kilometers[1]. Its population is estimated to have risen to around 800,000 people in total in 2016[2]. France's presence in Djibouti endured for over a century, beginning in 1862. The region was known as the 'Territoire français des Afars et des Issas' for the final decade under French administration, after Djibouti voted against joining the newly-independent Somali Republic and elected instead to remain with France.

Despite Djibouti's relatively recent formation as an independent sovereign state, a national identity has been "rapidly consolidated.[3]" The population can be broadly divided into two ethno-linguistic groups: the Somali and the Afar. Both groups predominantly "follow Islam and are nomadic pastoralists[4]", a traditional lifestyle necessary to survive amidst Djibouti's harshest, most arid terrains. French and Arabic are Djibouti's official languages, with "sizable Yemeni and Somali diasporas[5]" living and working in the country. Tensions have escalated between Somali and Afar communities in previous decades, and neither group's language is officially designated a national language partly in order to mitigate the potential for violent contestation of legitimacy.

The 1990s represented a decade of deep instability and recurrent violence for Djibouti. In 1992, fighting erupted between the government, then led by the Somali-dominated People's Progress Assembly party, and the Afar Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD). While FRUD's political leadership signed a political deal with the Djibouti government in 1994 that yielded power-sharing in the Cabinet between Somali and Afar, FRUD's "most radical faction continued to fight until 2000[6]" when a peace agreement ended the civil war.

The 2000s witnessed the re-emergence of more authoritarian governance in Djibouti. President Guelleh, first elected in 1999, stood unopposed in 2005 to win a second term in office. A coup d'état attempt several years earlier was "brutally crushed[7]", and the sacked police chief allegedly responsible was charged and imprisoned. As the NATO intervention in Afghanistan was launched in 2001, a raft of countries including the U.S. and Germany began to increase their use of Djibouti territory to install military and naval bases, to facilitate their military engagement in the Afghan theater and beyond. In 2010, Guelleh pushed Parliament to amend the constitution and allowed him to run for a third term in office. He went on to win the controversial 2011 elections which were boycotted by the country's fragmented opposition parties.

In June 2008, "years of escalating tensions[8]" between Djibouti and Eritrea over the disputed Ras Doumeira border area finally culminated in armed violence in which a score of Djiboutian soldiers died. The international community firmly sided with Djibouti in the dispute, condemning Eritrean aggression and stepping up sanctions against Eritrea for allegedly funding and arming militant opponents of Somalia's government.

Even by this stage, Djibouti had "firmly established itself as an ally of influential world powers[9]" by facilitating their military access to the Middle East and Horn of Africa – partly explaining these powers' decision to back Djibouti in its dispute with Eritrea. By 2011, Djibouti had begun its regular contributions to multilateral peace operations in fragile neighboring countries including Somalia, and had further opened up its ports and territory to use by international powers – from the U.S. to China, and from Saudi Arabia to Japan. The international community, in turn, largely turned a blind eye to President Guelleh's highly controversial electoral victory in April 2016, in which he won an unprecedented – and unconstitutional – fourth term of office. Human rights groups have accused Guelleh's government of "intimidating political opposition and civil society groups, violently disrupting protests, and peaceful marches,[10]" charges that Djibouti has vociferously disputed.

Threat Perception & Role

Djibouti is a comparative island of stability within a deeply destabilized region. Yemen, facing protracted civil conflict and the presence of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates, is a short distance from Djibouti across the Gulf of Aden. Djibouti shares a border with Somalia, albeit with the more peaceful Somaliland territory which considers itself to be independent of Mogadishu's rule, but where nevertheless acts of terrorism have been committed by groups including al-Shabab. Eritrea also straddles Djibouti's northern frontier, "a totalitarian country[11]" which has violently disputed the border area. Given Djibouti's strategic location, and its important role providing access and territory for international actors' militaries and naval fleets, President Guelleh's government is concerned about the potential spillover effects of these various conflicts upon Djibouti's stability.

Perversely, Djibouti also has a stake in continued instability in the broader Middle East, although in countries farther from its own borders where Djibouti is less directly menaced by potentially destabilizing spillover effects. While Djibouti does not have the clout to effectively influence these dynamics, the country certainly benefits from international powers' use of its territory for military bases – and the need for the existence and expansion of these bases is only greater when there is armed violence in the greater region. Given Djibouti's close strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia, such interests in continued instability and foreign military intervention likely dovetail most directly in those regions and countries where Riyadh is accused of supporting one or several parties to conflict.

The volatile neighborhood in which Djibouti is situated has generated mass population movement and displacement, creating one of the primary threats lambasted in Djibouti's domestic political discourse: immigration and refugees. Beginning as early as 2003, Guelleh's government began to "detain and expel immigrants en masse.[12]" Djibouti has become a critical transit and destination point for migrants and refugees fleeing conflict in Yemen and Somalia, and for those fleeing a highly authoritarian and repressive government in Eritrea. Various migrants from other eastern and central African countries have also migrated to Djibouti, in search of security and economic opportunity.

These various groups of migrants have "faced discrimination when attempting to integrate into Djibouti's society and economy[13]", and have been "widely blamed for economic ills[14]" in the country and youth unemployment. President Guelleh's government is aware of this social dynamic, and is eager to control and reduce the flow of migrants and refugees entering Djibouti. Similarly, Djibouti is once again 'useful' to Western powers – particularly to those countries situated in the southern reaches of the European Union, where most Syrian refugees make their first point of entry into Europe – in limiting the northerly flow of migrants and refugees. Migrants and refugees are therefore a critical perceived threat to the Djibouti government, while also potentially representing a source of diplomatic leverage over countries of the European Union.

To a limited degree, President Guelleh fears domestic unrest and the potential for protests to turn violent, or for a coup d'état to unseat him. Keeping the country's military on side is a key priority, and is addressing successive droughts and the looming prospect of famine that have the potential to spark popular discontent with Djibouti's political leadership.

Sources of leverage

Djibouti has relatively limited foreign policy leverage in the Middle East itself; its capacity to project power in the Horn of Africa, North Africa and the wider Middle East is constrained. Nevertheless, for a country of less than one million people, it has a remarkable degree of potential leverage over influential international stakeholders. To a significant extent, this results from the presence of Saudi, Chinese, American, French and Japanese military bases in Djibouti. As instability worsens in neighboring Yemen, the more crucial these powers' facilities in Djibouti become. As will be explored in the following 'Potential Negotiations Moves' section of this chapter, this gives President Guelleh potential leverage by which to extract concessions. The extent of this leverage should not be exaggerated, however. These countries all operate multiple facilities in the region and are not entirely dependent on Djibouti for this access. Djibouti also benefits financially and politically from their presence.

A further important source of leverage for Djibouti is its capacity to absorb, integrate or expel migrants and refugees from surrounding countries. With the European Union particularly eager to stem the flow of refugees from Syria, and the surprising volume of refugees fleeing Eritrea seeking safety in southern Europe, Djibouti has the potential to absorb some of these flows in exchange for concessions – in a similar fashion to Turkey's agreement to restrict Syrians' migration through the country in exchange for such concessions. Djibouti's capacity to affect population movements from central and eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf (particularly Yemen) offers it a source of leverage.

Internal Conflicts

Elite-level political competition in Djibouti can be broadly characterized by the divide between the Issa and Afar clans, but not should not be simplified to the extent that this is the only source of inter-elite cleavage. It is also worth underscoring that to recognize the existence of political competition between the Issa and Afar is not to make a primordialist argument that these ethnic groups are destined to clash, or that their contemporary political differences are inevitable or ancient feuds. The Issa have nevertheless "dominated Djiboutian politics for many decades, both during and after French colonial administration.[15]" President Guelleh, his senior advisors, and the most influential members of his Cabinet are Issa. Both ethno-linguistic groups are also present in neighboring Ethiopia and Eritrea, and conflict between the groups in Ethiopia and Somalia in particular has intensified inter-ethnic political competition and volatility in Djibouti in recent decades.

The Afar underwent "rapid politicization after Djibouti's independence", and at various times in the country's history have resorted to violence to claim political authority, assert their legitimacy, and challenge perceived Issa dominance. But as this chapter has already demonstrated, the Afar are not a unitary group. The FRUD's political leadership accepted a power-sharing deal in the early 2000s, but the most extreme FRUD elements refused to lay down their arms until later that decade. These tensions persist among Afar elites within Djibouti today, who "continue to feel marginalized[16]" under President Guelleh's four-term presidency.

Guelleh's government has been able to stifle most political competition and prevent vociferous contestation of his four terms in office. The main opposition coalition, the Union for National Salvation (USN), remains divided; at the last election, both Mohamed Daoud Chehem and Omar Elmi Khaireh laid competing claims to lead the party and failed to recognize each other's legitimacy as leader. The UNS mustered only seven per cent of the vote, while other opposition parties boycotted the election and refused to legitimize Guelleh's ultimately successful contestation of a fourth term. By sentencing ally-come-rival Abdourahman Boreh to 15 years in prison on "trumped up charges[17]", Guelleh has been able to marginalize a further potential political challenger and strengthen his grip on power.

External relationships

Consistent with its objective to maintain positive relationships with countries in the region, Djibouti is a member of numerous multilateral institutions including the Arab League, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and African Union. It leverages its membership of these institutions to strengthen its relationships with regional actors and build its own political legitimacy. Djibouti's most important diplomatic relationship-building is exercised on a bilateral basis, however. It has developed strong alliances with the Yemeni and Somali governments recognized by the international community, sharply rebuking Iranian influence and support for proxy groups and allies in both countries.

Djibouti has expertly forged partnerships with global powers seeking to build military, naval and logistical infrastructure within its borders and along its coast – including with international actors which are competing rivals. President Guelleh has successfully brokered partnerships with China, Japan, the United States and Saudia Arabia – among other countries – to establish facilities in the country. This is an important source of revenue, leverage, and legitimacy for Djibouti, and helps President Guelleh to prevent international condemnation of his efforts to alter the constitution and prolong his stay in office.

Eritrea is Djibouti's most important adversary in the region. The two countries clashed militarily a number of years ago over the disputed territory on their respective shared border, but armed hostilities have largely been evaded since. Djibouti's Issa leaders fear collaboration and cooperation between Afar in Eritrea's southern provinces and Afar communities in Djibouti's neighboring northeastern regions; Djiboutian political elites remain alert to this potential threat.

Potential negotiation moves

One negotiation move Djibouti might consider would be to absorb a much greater share of the migrants and refugees passing through its borders, particularly from those fleeing conflict in Somalia and Yemen. President Guelleh might use this as a tactic to extract concessions from southern European states such as Italy, Greece, and their European allies. This might include advocating before the European Union's leadership to leverage greater development assistance to stave off successive years of famine and drought in Djibouti.

Similarly, President Guelleh might threaten to expel a greater proportion of those migrants and refugees unless certain conditions are granted from those partners. Given the degree of political importance afforded to this issue within Europe at presence, and the agreement that Turkey was able to secure in exchange for reducing the number of Syrian refugees passing through the country towards Europe, there is evidence to suggest that this may be a promising strategy for Djibouti. Given negative domestic sentiments towards immigrants in Djibouti, the former may be a particularly high-risk strategy for President Guelleh.

President Guelleh may also threaten to close foreign powers' military bases in the country unless certain conditions or concessions are provided. From the United States to China, and from Japan to Saudi Arabia, there may be potential to either secure political support for President Guelleh if he were to attempt a fifth term in office, or to leverage greater development assistance from any of these parties. All of these actors already provide development financing to Djibouti.

Djibouti has already committed military personnel to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia, AMISOM. Djibouti may consider contributing a greater number of its civilian and military personnel to peace operations – in Lebanon and Yemen, for example – to generate further revenue, begin to have a greater influence on regional security dynamics, and secure greater international goodwill.

Conclusion

For a small country nestled on the coast above the Horn of Africa, Djibouti wields a disproportionate amount of leverage over various global and regional actors' access to the Middle East. For the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the Asian powers of China and Japan, Djibouti is a critical gateway to the wider region, essential to their logistical operations to engage militarily in Yemen and to contribute to regional peace operations. Through hosting these powers' military bases within its territory, President Guelleh has gained the tacit support of influential actors on the world stage. Djibouti's capacity to absorb refugees and migrants from Yemen, Somalia, eastern and central

Africa also gives it influence with southern European states. While President Guelleh fears the spillover effects of chronic insecurity in Somalia, civil war in Yemen, and a totalitarian regime in neighboring Eritrea, these conflicts justify foreign powers' continued operation of military bases in Djibouti and provides a critical source of revenue and tacit political support for Djibouti and its political leadership.

Eritrea: A Thorn in the Horn of Africa

Introduction

Eritrea is a totalitarian country that has been described as "Africa's North Korea.[18]" The exodus of migrants and refugees fleeing President Isaias Afwerki and his government's extreme repression is "unrivalled for a country not facing an active civil war.[19]" Heavily-sanctioned by Western nations including the U.S. and E.U., Eritrea has been accused of fomenting destabilization and supporting terrorism in Somalia. Nevertheless, Eritrea has long-standing ties with Israel, providing early and enthusiastic recognition of the Jewish State, and has forged partnerships with Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, helping to circumnavigate the West's efforts to isolate Afwerki's government. Eritrea has minimal power to affect political or security dynamics in the Middle East beyond its immediate sphere of influence but is able to leverage vital support from Israel to maintain and consolidate Afwerki's rule.

Identity & History

The territorial configuration of the state we today have come to know as Eritrea was forged through colonialism and war. Italian colonialists first acquired this territory in 1890, announcing it would be known as 'Italian Eritrea', before subsequently integrating it into Italian East Africa as the 'Eritrea Governorate' in 1936. Eritrea's subjugation to Italian rule ended in 1941 when British troops assumed control of the area and established a military administration. When Britain proposed to divide Eritrea up among Sudan and Ethiopia, Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie moved to annex the entire territory in 1953.

Elements of Eritrean society "soon grew restive[20]" under Ethiopian rule, clamoring to secede. In 1958, Eritrean students, professionals and academics came together to form the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM), which would go on to lead an armed struggle for independence. 1962 saw the start of a 30-year war between the ELM and Selassie's forces which only ended in 1991 with the expulsion of Ethiopian troops. A 1993 self-determination referendum administered by the United Nations saw Eritreans vote overwhelmingly for independence. It soon gained international recognition as an independent, sovereign state.

These halcyon days of optimism for an open and liberal Eritrea were short-lived. The EPLF, the political successor of the ELM which was led by Isaias Afwerki, rapidly seized power. Afwerki and his colleagues quickly established a "one-party state and banned all subsequent political activity[21]" in a jarring and sudden shift to authoritarianism. Since Eritrea's 1993 independence referendum, there have been no elections or democratic plebiscites in the country whatsoever. In the decades since, Afwerki has further consolidated his power base and rule; further clamped down on human rights; and prevented the emergence of any political contenders.

The collective national Eritrean identity that political entrepreneurs in the Afwerki regime have attempted to instill is grounded in the country's bloody history of liberation, celebrating the glorious martyrs who gave their life in battle to rid Eritrea of Selassie's rule. The government has sought to portray foreign governments as "intent on undermining Eritrea's economic and political stability[22]", relishing its pariah status in the eyes of Western governments.

Threat Perception & Role

Eritrea's foremost national security concern relates to the integrity of its borders. The undemarcated border with Ethiopia resulted in a bloody war from 1998 to 2000 to claim the territory, in which almost 150,000 people lost their lives[23]. Tensions persist today between Asmara and Addis Ababa on where the border line should be, and there is continued potential for armed conflict. Similarly, Eritrea disputes Djiboutian control of the Ras Doumeira and Doumeira Islands, and there is always "latent potential for violence[24]" over this territorial dispute. Yemen also has a stake in whether Djibouti or Eritrea controls the Doumeira Islands, given its proximate location just across the Gulf of Aden, although the civil war in Yemen has left the country's leaders with more immediate concerns than the Doumeira Islands.

In 1995, Eritrea also engaged in armed conflict with Yemen over its control of the Hanish Islands, one of the largest islands in the stretch of ocean dividing the countries. Eritrea defeated the Yemenis, allegedly with "military and financial support from the Israeli government[25]", with Jerusalem relishing the opportunity to undermine a regional actor that did not recognize Israel. A 1998 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling established that the territory was Yemeni leading the Eritreans to withdraw, but the incident established that Eritrea has the desire and – with Israeli support – the military capacity to unexpectedly annex territory in its surrounding neighborhood.

Similar to many other authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, President Afwerki is threatened by any potential challenge to his regime – either from political rivals, non-state armed groups, or a coup d'état from within the military. Given Afwerki's "ironclad control of domestic affairs[26]" within Eritrea, a public uprising appears to be an extremely unlikely prospect in the short to medium term. Eritrea has seen an "exodus of asylum seekers and refugees fleeing the country[27]" to surrounding countries and to Europe in recent years; perhaps the main political threats to Afwerki will come from the overseas diaspora, which operates largely beyond the scope of the

authoritarian reach of his regime. Afwerki is a septuagenarian and will soon have to develop succession plans. However, authoritarian leaders in other countries in the region have clung on to power beyond the age of 90, such as Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. Implementing a smooth succession plan will one day be an issue of concern for Afwerki, but is also not a major threat to his survival in the short-term.

Eritrea's most important ally and benefactor is Israel. Its biggest rival and historic adversary is Ethiopia. Yet Israel also enjoys an "excellent bilateral relationship[28]" with Ethiopia, straddling an awkward middle ground between Asmara and Addis Ababa. Without Israeli military and financial support, Eritrea would be significantly more isolated in the region and world. If the pendulum of Israeli diplomacy swings towards Ethiopia and away from Eritrea – not implausible, given Ethiopia's comparatively greater levels of economic development, trade opportunities, and political influence in the region – this would represent a deeply troubling development for Afwerki and his government.

Sources of Leverage

Eritrea has limited political, economic, or military leverage. Its history of unexpected annexation campaigns in the Doumeira Islands and on Hanish demonstrate that Eritrea can be a volatile spoiler in the region. Its major military losses in the 1998 – 2000 war with Ethiopia also shows that Afwerki is not loss-averse in military campaigns, and willing to incur many tens of thousands of deaths to ensure Eritrea's continued territorial integrity. This history of bellicose adventurism is in some ways a source of leverage for President Afwerki, who is able to signal a credible threat in this regard – despite Eritrea's relatively limited military capacity.

Eritrea has also been accused of providing funding and military support to al-Shabab rebels in Somalia. With al-Shabab a designated terrorist group, considered by Western powers to be a "jihadist terrorist group[29]", Eritrea has potential leverage in so far as it can influence al-Shabab's actions. While Afwerki certainly does not have the influence over al-Shabab to convince them to lay down their arms, and Eritrea's alleged assistance is not a truly essential lifeline to al-Shabab, Afwerki can nevertheless make it somewhat harder for this Somalian terror group to access small arms. Given the proliferation of these weapons in neighboring Yemen, however, al-Shabab would be unlikely to struggle to access the weapons and munitions they need in the event that Eritrea cut off its support.

Israel has proved largely unwilling to integrate Eritrean migrants into their society, refusing to grant refugee status to more than 99% of Eritrean arrivals[30]. While the UN Refugee Convention prevents Israel from sending Eritreans back to their home country due to the threats they would face from Afwerki's government, Eritrea can exercise leverage over Israel by tightening or loosening its controls on those escaping. Most Eritreans escape via Sudan and ultimately through the Sinai desert to Israel, and the extent to which Eritreans police this border and monitor illicit flows of people across the border gives them some leverage over Israel. This can be leveraged in exchange for military aid, technological and agricultural assistance from Jerusalem. Given the large volume of Eritreans fleeing the country for the European Union, arriving in countries such as Italy and Greece with many then heading northwest to countries such as the UK, Eritrea also has leverage to extract increased development assistance from the European Union with regards to its migration and border controls.

Internal Conflicts

There are relatively few internal conflicts within Eritrea's borders, thanks in part to the highly repressive nature of President Afwerki's rule and zero-tolerance policy on dissent and political opposition. Vocal criticism of the government can result in "torture and imprisonment[31]", and Afwerki has successfully cultivated a climate of fear in which conflicts or disagreements with his rule are seldom voiced.

Most of Eritrea's "internal conflicts" occur beyond its borders. Eritrean diaspora communities are restive, politically active, and largely vociferously opposed to President Afwerki. As generations of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers have integrated into societies around the world and built an economic base, their voices and capacity to disrupt Afwerki will continue to grow – for example, broadcasting dissident content remotely via radio or satellite into Eritrea.

The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) is based in Ethiopia but is an Eritrean political and armed insurgent group, a member of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance seeking to overthrow Afwerki and his regime. RSADO launch occasional attacks on Eritrean military facilities, seize weapons and supplies, and claim to execute national intelligence officials, posing a thorn in the side of the government. However, neither RSADO nor any other insurgent group "poses an existential threat[32]" to Afwerki or his government.

External Relationships

Eritrea's most important ally is Israel, a critical provider of military aid that keeps Afwerki's government safe from the likes of RSADO and internal challengers. Israel's support is also critical to Eritrea's ability to signal a credible threat that it will launch military campaigns to annex territories controlled by Djibouti and Yemen in surrounding areas. Israel's close relationship with Ethiopia makes Eritrea uncomfortable, but Asmara's dependence on support from Jerusalem leaves it unable to influence this dynamic. Israel also provides important technological and agricultural support to the Eritrean government, to offset the threat of famine in the country – caused by a "combination of seasonal droughts and ineffective authoritarian government.[33]"

Eritrea has a long-standing partnership with Sudan, and has also developed positive bilateral ties with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has provided financial assistance to Eritrea to develop its infrastructure, particularly its "roads, electricity, and hydroelectric projects.[34]" This support extends over multiple decades since Eritrea's independence, but has decreased in size since the early 1990s when regional powers hoped that a less belligerent regime would take control in Asmara.

Eritrea's main rival and perceived historical oppressor is Ethiopia. The bloody 30-year battle for Eritrea's independence lives on in Eritrea's national social and political consciousness; the devastating 1998 – 2000 war over the border area has also cemented a "legacy of mistrust and animosity.[35]" Tensions persist between the countries today. Despite no longer being active armed opponents, the prospect of armed conflict or strategic miscalculation between Eritrea and Ethiopia is still a threat to regional peace.

Eritrea also has hostile relationships with Djibouti, Somalia and, to a lesser degree in the contemporary context, Yemen. This stems from historical border disputes with Djibouti and Yemen, and is linked to Eritrea's support for al-Shabab in Somalia. The Federal Government of Somalia in Mogadishu has sharply rebuked Eritrea's role in fomenting instability in Somalia, with international sanctions on Asmara apparently having had little impact on the Afwerki regime's ability or proclivity to send small arms to jihadists in the Somali theater.

Potential Negotiation Moves

With only limited political, economic, and military leverage, Eritrea's possible negotiation moves are somewhat limited. As previously mentioned in this report, Eritrea's capacity to reduce or prevent the flow of asylum seekers and refugees fleeing its own borders gives it leverage over Israel and some European countries. By relaxing or tightening its border controls to the north, Eritrea may be able to secure greater economic or military support from Israel, and greater development assistance from the European Union.

With increased military might, Eritrea has more potential negotiation moves in launching a new offensive to claim the Doumeira Islands, the Hanish Islands, or a greater share of the border area with Ethiopia. Such moves would have limited geopolitical consequences for the Middle East, but could pull the Horn of Africa into further conflict. Eritrea could also increase its supply of arms and munitions to al-Shabab, and further undermine the security situation in Somalia. To the extent that Asmara can influence the behavior of al-Shabab commanders in Somalia, Eritrea may be able to position itself as a partner to Western governments interested in stability in Somalia – although given the totalitarian country's pariah status on the world stage, such open collaboration appears to be rather unlikely.

Conclusion

Eritrea can be best characterized as a thorn in the Horn of Africa. A major source of undesirable refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and Israel, it has been able to secure the military and economic support necessary to prop up its totalitarian regime. Partnerships in the Gulf have buttressed this support. Eritrea continues to undermine security in Somalia, and to dispute borders all around it in the Horn of Africa. As one of the most totalitarian regimes in the world, and Afwerki's record of decades of crimes against humanity and egregious human rights violations, diplomatic engagement and partnership with Eritrea throws up political and ethical challenges surrounding "negotiating with the devil."

Somalia: The Most Failed State?

Introduction

Somalia is one of the most volatile, poorest, and fragile states in the world. After more than a decade without an effectively functioning government, the Federal Government of Somalia and democratically-elected President provide grounds for optimism for the country's future. Yet despite the immense financial and technical assistance of Western, African and Middle Eastern partners, Somalia nevertheless remains mired in a bloody war with al-Shabab: one of the region's "most potent and well-armed terrorist groups.[36]" The proliferation of small arms in, and exodus of refugees from, Yemen as civil war continues there has also complicated stabilization efforts in Somalia. Aside from Al-Shabab, Eritrea and Iran, however, the Federal Government has few adversaries and maintains overwhelmingly positive relations with regional and global powers.

Identity & History

Parts of what are today considered part of Somalia came under British and Italian colonial control in the early 20th century, before merging to form the United Republic of Somalia in 1960. Somalia's first-ever President, Aden Abdullah Osman Daar, embarked on a project of forging a singular "Somali" identity and uniting the region's northern ethnic "Somalis" and southern minority groups. Within years, Somalia had developed "acrimonious relationships with its neighbors[37]", violently challenging its established borders with Kenya and Ethiopia in 1963 and 1964 respectively. The optimism sparked by the free and fair elections of 1967 in which incumbent President Daar lost to newcomer Abdi Rashid Ali Shermake, was to be short-lived however. Just two years later, in 1969, the military staged a coup resulting in the assassination of President Shermake and the installation of Mohamed Siad Barre, who would go on to rule the country

for over twenty years.

Domestic discontent with Barre's rule grew steadily in Somalia, with "southern tribes feeling excluded from the government, which was filled with leaders from Barre's own Marehan clan.[38]" When Barre was violently ousted in 1991, a violent power struggle between different Somali clan warlords emerged, leading to a bloody civil war that continued for over a decade without a strong central government in Mogadishu. The 2000s witnessed a rapid intensification of violence, with assassination attempts made on the President of Somalia's fragile fledgling government; the deployment of a series of international peace operations seeking to stabilize Somalia; and the emergence of the ICU and al-Shabab terrorist groups, seeking to impose sharia law on the country and challenge foreign military intervention. Al-Shabab steadily "increased in influence over the course of the 2000s[39]", eventually seizing the southern port of Kismayo after dislodging its rival armed group, Hizbul-Islam.

2010 heralded a new wave of renewed optimism for the future after Somalia's first parliament in more than two decades launched in Mogadishu, and a series of important strategic locations were re-captured by government forces – supported by an African Union peacekeeping mission, AMSOM – from al-Shabab. 2012 witnessed Somalia's first presidential election since 1967, with the victory of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and increasing financial support and development assistance from international donors and governments. At this time, Somalia's government began to offer basic public services to the domestic population after decades of limited to nonexistent central governing authority in the country. Nevertheless, these services are not uniformly available; are not routinely available; and great swathes of Somalia are untouched even by these efforts.

The Somalian people witnessed immense suffering through these decades of armed conflict and ineffective governance. Somalia continues to have one of the lowest rankings in the Human Development Index[40]; to be the "most corrupt and least transparent country in the world[41]"; and to face enormous obstacles to the promotion of socioeconomic development. The entrenched poverty in the country may have facilitated recruitment for non-state armed groups, and "contributed to the proliferation of the Somali piracy phenomenon[42]" in the Gulf of Aden. Much of the country remains in a perilous security state – despite the election of Mohammed Abdullahi Mohamed as President in early 2017 - and armed conflict and violence are very much part of the Somali national consciousness after decades of war.

Threat Perception & Role

The single greatest threat facing the Federal Government of Somalia is continued insecurity and violence within its own borders. Neutralization of al-Shabab is the stated priority of President Mohamed's government, and is also that of Somalia's international partners, donors, and the UN and African Union peace operations stationed there. Al-Shabab does not pose an existential threat to the government but has the "potential to launch major terrorist attacks at any moment[43]" on critical government infrastructure and institutions, both in Mogadishu and beyond. This persistent threat limits foreign investment in Somalia and, in turn, social and economic development.

The intensification of civil war in Yemen is also of concern to Somalia's government, given the two countries' proximity across the Gulf of Aden. The spillover effects of the Yemeni conflict upon Somalia may include the ever-increasing proliferation of small arms[44], aiding non-state Somali armed groups such as al-Shabab, and increased migrant and refugee flows into Somalia. These migrant flows also include Somalian nationals, who had fled civil war in Somalia in the 1990s and 2000s, now returning to their native country to flee violence in their adopted homeland of Yemen. Substantial increases in "population growth through human displacement[45]" has the potential to strain already limited public services offered to the Somali people by the Federal Government.

Somalia's central government is also concerned about its various provinces and regions "seeking greater autonomy or even secession.[46]" Somaliland is the region with the greatest degree of autonomy today, seeking but not receiving international recognition as an independent sovereign state. The restive autonomous regions of Puntland and Galmudug also provide cause for concern for President Mohamed, as his government seeks to champion a unified federal Somalian state and unified Somali identity.

Sources of leverage

As a fragile and impoverished state, Somalia has extremely limited leverage over regional or global politics. Somalia continues to be the "source of enormous volumes of refugees and asylum seekers in search of protection and safety in African, Middle Eastern, and European countries.[47]" With a weak state security apparatus, Somalia has only limited capacity to control its own population movements. Yet, similarly to Djibouti and Eritrea, it may exercise some leverage over destination countries concerned about the "migrant crisis" in relaxing or tightening controls on population movement. Somalia has significantly less capacity to implement this than Djibouti or Eritrea, however.

The capacity of Somalia's security apparatus to neutralize the threat of al-Shabab and Somali piracy attacks in the Gulf of Aden also gives it scope to potentially extract concessions from concerned parties. The Federal Government of Somalia may invoke the magnitude of the threat posed by this dynamic to extract international development assistance, particularly focused on security sector reform to build the offensive capacities of a Somali navy force or the Somali military. For President Mohamed's government, this international security sector reform assistance may prove useful in pursuing an array of other policy objectives. This presents a somewhat contradictory set of incentives: the drive to provide security and stability to Somalia, but the reality that the greater the magnitude of these security threats are, the more development assistance and security sector reform support the Somali government may be able to marshal.

Internal Conflicts

The continued presence of armed militia within Somalia continues to present the single greatest and most concerning internal conflict in the country. While, as described in the following section, the motivations and grievances driving combatants' enrolment in al-Shabab may "vary drastically by region[48]", and al-Shabab may be less of a unified actor than is commonly portrayed in the media, clashes between the Federal Government of Somalia – backed up by the AU and UN – and al-Shabab is the most significant internal conflict within Somalia. The Government also battles to control territory historically controlled by a gamut of other, smaller non-state armed groups contesting Mogadishu's legitimate governing authority.

Somaliland's clamor to secede from Somalia and Mogadishu is another form of internal conflict, albeit a nonviolent one. Somaliland "lacks the international recognition to formally secede[49]" as an independent sovereign nation – despite efforts to hire lobbyists to secure that recognition[50] - and Mogadishu has granted a substantial degree of autonomy to the province. Nevertheless, the Federal Government of Somalia remains fervently opposed to Somaliland breaking away from Somalia – and would also strongly reject Puntland and Galmudug's claims to breakaway, if their mainstream political leaders were ever to stake such a claim.

Political elites have vociferously contested President Mohamed's rule, passing a motion of no confidence against him in August 2016, "citing incompetence and calling for his impeachment.[51]" Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari controversially dropped the motion a month later, outraging the political opposition, who were informed that "their differences with the president could instead be resolved through negotiations.[52]" The government in Mogadishu also struggles in its relationships with newly formed subnational and provincial administrations in Puntland, Jubbaland, South West State, and Central Regions State.

External relationships

The Federal Government of Somalia enjoys largely excellent relationships with key regional and global powers. Somalia is a member of the Arab League, African Union, and Organization for Islamic Cooperation. It is a firm ally of the Djiboutian Government, the Egyptian Government, Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, President Mohamed's government has received financial support and diplomatic backing from powers such as the United States, European Union, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. London has hosted a number of consultative forums of international donors and diplomatic actors to "pledge and coordinate international assistance for stabilization and prosperity in Somalia.[53]" It has proved a willing and able partner to international powers' efforts to address piracy; to tackle al-Shabab; and to host a number of the refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflict in Yemen.

The Federal Government has challenging relationships with actors accused of funding and supporting al-Shabab, such as Eritrea and al-Qaeda. While Iran is also "accused providing backing to al-Shabab's predecessor the ICU[54], Somalia's stated opposition to Tehran is likely linked to its important partnership with Saudi Arabia – and the fact that most Somali citizens are Sunni. Mogadishu severed diplomatic ties with Iran in early 2016, and ordered all Iran-affiliated organizations, such as the Iranian Red Crescent, to leave the country within 72 hours.[55]

Potential negotiation moves

Constrained by the combination of state fragility and ongoing armed violence, the Federal Government of Somalia has extremely limited capacity to influence events beyond its own borders – and even within swathes of its own sovereign jurisdiction. As discussed above, Somalia's security forces have the potential to help alleviate foreign powers' concerns about Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the presence of al-Shabab. Somalia may use these threats – and increase or decrease its relative prioritization of these concerns – to extract concessions from international powers, particularly in the form of development assistance or technical and financial support for security sector reform. Nevertheless, Somalian security sector actors have only limited capacity to tackle these issues and remain heavily dependent on the support of African Union and United Nations peacekeepers to do so.

Somalia may seek to re-open diplomatic ties with Iran, to curtail the potential risk of Tehran once again providing financial or military support to a Somalian armed group. However, Somalia likely gains more from its alliance with the Middle East's Sunni powers, including Saudi Arabia. To embrace Iran may have negative repercussions for the volume of assistance that Sunni-majority Gulf states provide to the Federal Government in Mogadishu. President Mohamed and his government may also seek to either reconcile its differences with Eritrea, or to further escalate rising tensions between the two countries over Eritrea's alleged support to al-Shabab.

Conclusion

Somalia faces one of the most challenging humanitarian and security situations on the planet; it inspired the term "failed state." It is a major source of migrants and refugees bound for Europe and the Middle East, and continues to host an array of violent extremist groups such as al-Shabab with the capacity to conduct terror attacks in the Horn of Africa. President Mohamed's government is largely preoccupied with addressing these challenges, not to mention the piracy crisis in the Gulf of Aden that appears to be worsening once again in early 2017. The Federal Government of Somalia lacks the capacity to meaningfully impact events beyond its borders, let alone in the wider Middle East, and has limited leverage and scope to negotiate. Nevertheless, this fragile state may seek to build bridges with its adversaries Iran and Eritrea, or may seek to further escalate tensions. It may meaningfully seek to address al-Shabab and piracy, or merely use these dynamics as tool to leverage increased development assistance and support for security sector reform.

Al-Shabab: Balancing Middle Eastern Terrorist Sponsors

Introduction

Al-Shabab is one of the most potent violent extremist groups in Africa, if not the most potent. With up to 9,000 active combatants[56], al-Shabab has the capability to conduct terror attacks across the region. Targeting key Somalian government institutions, infrastructure, and neighboring countries contributing to the AU peacekeeping mission in Somalia, the group has demonstrated itself to be a "significant spoiler to the Horn of Africa's regional stability.[57]" The group's leadership face a constant battle to drive unity among al-Shabab's different factions, and to provide common purpose in the face of the divergent motivations and grievances that drive young Somalians and others to enroll. Violence is the foundational basis of al-Shabab's capacity to influence regional dynamics; by threatening the use of violence to influence the actions of the Federal Government of Somalia or its regional partners with a military presence in Somalia. Al-Shabab has also demonstrated itself capable of building its own partnerships with state and non-state actors alike, including Eritrea and al-Qaeda.

Identity & History

Al-Shabab, meaning "the youth" in Arabic, is a radical offshoot splinter group of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a group that attempted to form an Islamist administration in Somalia in the late 1990s and early 2000s and which controlled Mogadishu up until late 2006. The youth military branch of the ICU that later became al-Shabab considered their leaders' efforts to implement Islamist rule in Somalia as "too moderate[58]", insisting on a more radical interpretation and harsher enforcement of Islamic law in the country.

Al-Shabab regrouped in December 2006 after Ethiopian troops drove the ICU out of Mogadishu, and soon began to "expand its recruitment of young men and women from across Somalia[59]"; from neighboring countries such as Kenya, with robust recruitment networks in the port city of Mombasa in particular; and from societies all around the world, leveraging digital communications networks to reach overseas audiences. Directed by Aden Hashi Ayro, al-Shabab conducted "brutal attacks that drew condemnation from local and international communities… including multiple killings of international aid workers… and the use of violent retaliation against employees of Somalia's Federal Government.[60]"

Al-Shabab soon began to shift towards al-Qaeda, and has since "intensified its use of suicide attacks and targeted civilian populations[61]" to meet its political objectives of ousting the government from Mogadishu, and to rid Somalia of perceived foreign imperialist presence. With the deployment of Kenyan and Ugandan soldiers to Somalia as part of AMISOM, an African Union peacekeeping operation, al-Shabab has also conducted terror attacks within Kenya – for example, targeting a shopping mall and school in Nairobi – to attempt to undermine Kenyans' support for their troops to be stationed in neighboring Somalia. Such attacks have led to "further stigmatization of Somalian migrants in Kenyan society[62]", and facilitated recruitment for al-Shabab of marginalized young immigrants in Nairobi and Mombasa to cross the border north and join in their terrorist activities.

While these objectives – challenging the authority of the government in Mogadishu, ridding Somalia of the presence of foreign troops, and furthering a common global jihadist agenda – may represent the priorities of al-Shabab's core leadership, this may not offer a "comprehensive explanation of all the factors driving combatants' enrolment[63]" in the group's ranks. A lack of economic opportunities, dissatisfaction with local ruling elites, and a wide variety of other factors drive al-Shabab's recruits; not all are violent ideologues, or are driven exclusively by a rejection of Mogadishu's authority.

Relatively little is known about Ahmad Umar, al-Shabab's leader since the 2014 killing of Ahmed Abdi Godane in a U.S. airstrike. However, it is believed that Umar "prefers continued alliance with al-Qaeda[64]" and will continue to eschew the Islamic State's overtures to join its own ranks. In the event that al-Qaeda substantially drops its material support to al-Shabab in the future, however, there may be the potential for Umar to lead al-Shabab into a formal alliance with ISIS.

Threat Perception & Role

Al-Shabab faces a number of critical threats. The African Union and United Nations have deployed peacekeeping operations with the explicit mandate of neutralizing it, supporting troops of the Federal Government of Somalia, with billions of dollars and tens of thousands of peacekeepers invested in the fighting. The Ugandan and Kenyan governments have proven "willing to suffer troop casualties in the pursuit of al-Shabab[65]", in a dynamic that is relatively rare for troop contributing countries to multilateral peacekeeping missions. The U.S. has launched airstrikes and covert operations within Somalia that have "successfully neutralized al-Shabab's leaders[66]"; President Trump appears to support "an intensification in American military activities in Somalia[67]", explicitly targeting al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab is also "dependent on external actors for financial support[68]" to continue its operations, particularly from al-Qaeda, and those actors' ability to circumnavigate international sanctions on small arms and weaponry applied to Somalia. As discussed, Islamic State stands ready to fill the gap if al-Shabab's leaders decide to switch allegiance. Nevertheless, al-Shabab's extensive dependence on these external actors necessitates ""continued diplomacy and relationship-building in the Middle East[69]" to gain support it requires to

carry out its operations against the Somali government and foreign troops.

Efforts to disrupt al-Shabab's recruitment networks have not yet posed a significant threat to the group's operations. Despite the best efforts of platforms such as Twitter to block recruitment and propaganda accounts used by al-Shabab, the group has the ability to "constantly spawn new accounts to continue to share the group's materials and recruit online.[70]" Similarly, efforts to prevent violent extremism in targeted communities in Kenya, particularly in Mombasa, "do not appear to have prevented al-Shabab from effectively recruiting combatants[71]" from the region.

Sources of leverage

Al-Shabab's leverage is grounded almost entirely in its capacity to use, or threaten the use of, violence. Through suicide attacks targeting civilian populations, government infrastructure, and foreign nationals – including venues frequented by international aid workers and peacekeepers – al-Shabab seeks to extract leverage through fear. The group seeks to leverage this fear to push foreign peacekeepers out of the country, and ultimately to drive President Mohamed's government from power – and to relinquish territory that al-Shabab would like to control and govern.

Al-Shabab's links to piracy in al-Shabab may also offer the group a form of leverage, in so far as the group can curb the behaviors of pirates in the Gulf of Aden. Private sector actors from countless Middle Eastern regional and global powers "depend on safe access through the Gulf to deliver their goods and conduct business[72]", and have limited confidence in the Federal Government of Somalia to provide that safe access. Al-Shabab is "alleged to have collaborated with the pirates[73]"; in territory that it controls, al-Shabab may seek to privately extract concessions from those foreign powers if it is able to mitigate, reduce or prevent piracy in the Gulf. However, the extent to which al-Shabab has the capacity or desire to reduce piracy is highly questionable; this is a hypothetical source of leverage that it may wield.

Given Iran's previous financing of the ICU, there may be scope for potential arms and funding for al-Shabab to come from Tehran. Some analysts have alleged that support is already forthcoming[74], although there is limited evidence to suggest this has taken place since 2006. In so far as Iran – al-Shabab collaboration is possible in the future, however, one potential threat may be closer ties between the Federal Government of Somalia and Iran. Somalia has currently broken off diplomatic relations with Iran, as described in the previous chapter. This status quo benefits al-Shabab, and makes it more likely to receive support from Tehran. A diplomatic rapprochement between Somalia and Iran might threaten al-Shabab's future capacity to secure funding and arms from Iran.

Internal Conflicts

Al-Shabab has been beset from internal conflicts, with much of the groups "top leadership purged as a result of infighting in 2013.[75]" In June 2013, combatants loyal to the then-leader Ahmed Godane killed Ibrahim al-Afghani and his colleague Maa'lim Hashi. Al-Afghani had earned Godane's scorn by arguing that Godane himself had "violated the Qur'an in violently targeting critical voices within the group[76]"; al-Afghani faced a similar end in voicing these criticisms of Godane's leadership. Godane allegedly also "ordered the death of well-known American jihadist, Omar Hammami[77]", in September 2013. Hammami had previously uploaded a video online criticizing al-Shabab's weak leadership and ineffective military strategy, which he came to direct personally at then-leader Godane. The political leadership of al-Shabab has therefore long been wary of threats from other elites, engaging in a campaign of targeted assassinations to ward off potential leadership challenges.

In 2011, al-Shabab underwent major internal reform to "decentralize authority and grant more command-and-control leadership to its provincial and clan-based leaders.[78]" While this has prevented the group from splintering, it has led to a less unified single goal or objective motivating the group's operations; has weakened the extent to which ideology drives al-Shabab's rank-and-file; and led to the rise of potential challengers controlling different geographies of al-Shabab.

External relationships

In 2008, al-Shabab first began to develop its relationship with al-Qaeda. After Ayro was killed in an American missile strike, al-Shabab's new leader Ahmed Abdi Godane drove a new strategy to align more closely with al-Qaeda, and "explicitly began emphasizing the struggle in Somalia as part of a global jihad.[79]" The group subsequently began to adopt both al-Qaeda's ideology and tactics, targeting civilians through suicide attacks on a much more frequent basis. Al-Shabab has since leveraged its partnership with al-Qaeda to "secure financial resources and attract foreign fighters to enroll in its ranks.[80]" Al-Qaeda has also supported overseas training for al-Shabab's fighters as part of its own training camps.

Al-Shabab has collected a wide array of adversaries including France, Russia, China, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the United States, the UK, and the European Union. It remains engaged in armed conflict against AU troops from Uganda and Kenya, and has also faced airstrikes from the U.S. military. Al-Shabab remains a close ally of Al-Qaeda, and Iran remains a partner – even if direct military and financial support akin to Tehran's support to the ICU has not yet been forthcoming.

Al-Shabab enjoys an uneasy relationship with Somalian pirates. In many cases, al-Shabab controls the territory from where the pirates conduct their operations into the Gulf of Aden. There are reports that al-Shabab has regulated their operations, "imposing taxes on pirates and informally collecting revenue[81]" to fund their terrorist operations. In other geographies, there is evidence that the two groups have enjoyed a more collaborative relationship. In reality, this dynamic demonstrates that al-Shabab is not a unitary actor – it

has different objectives and priorities in different geographies – and that there is no single, unitary actor convening all those individuals engaged in piracy in the Gulf of Aden, either.

Potential negotiation moves

Terrorist attacks from the basis for most of al-Shabab's potential negotiation moves away from the table, with few parties willing to engage them in dialogue or negotiations as things stand. Al-Shabab may conduct attacks within Somalia, Kenya, or Uganda to target those governments engaged in military operations against it. It might conduct attacks on foreign military bases – particularly American facilities in nearby Djibouti, as well as French bases there. Djibouti presents a potential opportunity for al-Shabab to target American military officials in response for an apparent surge in American airstrikes and covert operations under President Trump's administration.

Al-Shabab may also seek to more actively reach out to Tehran, to leverage greater financial and military support for its operations from Iran. In the changing kaleidoscope of Middle Eastern alliances, it may also calculate that a shift from al-Qaeda to ISIS would be strategically beneficial to al-Shabab. Given ISIS's links to terrorist groups in other regions of Africa such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and its established presence in neighboring countries, al-Shabab might have much to gain from sending its combatants to ISIS training camps and benefit from ISIS' vast financial resources. Such a move – or threatening such a move – may allow al-Shabab to extract certain concessions, although few state and non-state actors would consider entering into formal negotiations with the group.

Conclusion

Al-Shabab's influence, leverage, and negotiation moves are grounded in violent means. With only 9,000 combatants, the group has the capacity to wage terror in countries as disparate as Somalia, Uganda, and Kenya – and with limited resources, to recruit fighters from across Somalia and across the world. While their tactics have resulted in many deaths, they are yet to come close to succeeding in their core objectives. The Federal Government of Somalia, although embattled, is making progress in cementing its authority from Mogadishu. Despite losses on the battlefield, neither Kenya nor Uganda appear likely to withdraw their troops – and the U.S. Government is stepping up its aerial campaign and drone strikes against al-Shabab's leaders. Al-Shabab continues to ally with al-Qaeda and resist the urges of ISIS to join with it in partnership; al-Shabab has also not been able to leverage the financial or military support that its predecessor, the ICU, received from Iran. While al-Shabab does not have significant influence to shape events in the Middle East, it can be a powerful and violent spoiler of peace and stabilization in the Horn of Africa and beyond into Yemen and surrounding countries.

VII. Egypt: Post-Revolutionary Decline or Authoritarian Resurgence?

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Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Since the overthrow of Egypt's monarchy in 1952 and Gamal Abdel Nasser's Presidency from 1956, Egypt has been subjected to "strongman" rule. Today, this formula for statehood and statecraft continues to frame the way that Egyptian politics and policy functions. There is a "deep state" involving a dominant military and its own political economy, which is perceived to be the gatekeeper holding together the Egyptian state. At present, military interests align closely with those of the Presidency, Egypt's wider security apparatus (including the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, hereafter "SCAF"), and the Judiciary. There was a major shift in these relations during the Presidency of Mohamed Morsi (30 June 2012 - 3 July 2013), when the Judiciary and the Military were largely at loggerheads with the President, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Freedom and Justice Party – the Brotherhood's political party during Egypt's brief democratic experiment.

Egypt's historic importance and its population of almost 100 million present an illusion of its continuing geopolitical leadership in the region, which has waned in the past decades in part due to the economic and political rise of the Gulf states. However, despite the domestic upheaval Egypt has faced, its historical geopolitical influence, the size of its population, and its ability to act as a peace broker in the region mean that there is certainly the potential for a reassertion of regional influence down the line.

This paper focuses in particular on the role that Egypt can have in brokering an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. However, it is reiterated that the main difficulties that Egypt faces in brokering this deal relate to its limitations in the domestic sphere. In the case of Israel and several other regional political issues, "enmities" have been sustained and encouraged in Egypt's public consciousness that do not hold for Egypt's governing classes. To this end, while military and state-level relations with Israel are arguably closer than ever, anti-Israeli sentiment, stemming from the 1967 and 1973 wars, as well as support for the Palestinian cause, can be seen in state-run and privately-owned media.

Egypt can often be perceived as a united party in the Middle East, in the sense that there is a largely unified government that functions through a complex alliance of the Military, the Judiciary, the SCAF, and the Presidency. However, within the Egyptian state there is a considerable degree of fragmentation: internal interests and positions are largely fragmented. The main actors that stand against the current government are the Muslim Brotherhood and certain secular civil society groups, as well as Islamist extremists.

This section explains the considerable differences within these groups interests. The main focus is on the military, as the driver holding the Egyptian state together, and the Muslim Brotherhood, as the main opposition actor throughout the history of the modern Egyptian state. This section analyzes the specific identities, conflict narratives, and threat perceptions of the major parties able to affect negotiation attempts in the region.

SCAF

The SCAF's identity begins with the Free Officers' Movement, a secret group of military officers that seized power from King Farouk's monarchy and involvement by the British government in Egyptian national affairs in 1952. This group of officers ruled Egypt as a junta until establishing a Presidency, constitution, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in 1954. This opened the way for the rise of the "Officers' Republic," where a network of officers penetrated all levels of the government bureaucracy and, later on, the economy.[1] Comprised of senior officers from all branches of the military, this group's identity can be seen as one of the linchpins to the founding of the modern Egyptian state, and is affiliated with all but one of Egypt's Presidents (Mohamed Morsi, elected after the January 25th revolution and ousted by a military coup).

Over the years, the Egyptian military was active in several conflicts: in 1956 during the Suez Crisis; between 1964 and 1967 during the Yemeni Civil War; and between 1967 and 1974 where the SCAF completely planned and controlled Egypt's military policy towards Israel. Though Sadat had decreased the SCAF's influence during his tenure, the landmark 1979 peace treaty with Israel helped the military regain much of its economic and political influence. Two years later after the assassination of President Sadat, the SCAF began to regain relevance throughout Mubarak's reign and maintained a large presence in business, bureaucracy and the public sector of Egypt.[2]

Ultimately, the SCAF sees itself the only actor in Egypt that possesses the necessary experience, maturity and wisdom to protect the country from domestic and external threats.[3] The Muslim Brotherhood is the most serious threat to military control of Egypt, and likewise the military is the highest hurdle preventing the Brotherhood from seizing political power.[4]

Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is the most important Islamist organization in Egypt, and arguably across the Middle East. Since its founding in 1928, the group has sought to promote political Islamist ideology in Egyptian society. It is an important social and political actor, particularly given its history of providing public services to disadvantaged communities. Its influence peaked with the election of Mohammed Morsi as President in 2012 before being deposed by a military coup in 2013. The group is now considered a terrorist organization, with thousands of members imprisoned.

The Muslim Brotherhood believes that the military illegally seized power from Morsi and the party in the July 3, 2013 coup. Members see the seizure of power as part of a coordinated attempt by anti-Islamists and the military to usurp the will of the majority of the country who supported the Brotherhood in free and fair elections. Due to the group's labelling as a terrorist organization, as well as its history of oppression dating back to its founding, the Muslim Brotherhood currently sees itself as closed into a corner, with extremely limited leverage in influencing the current political-military establishment.

In the short-term, further crackdown by government forces may lead to an increasingly militarized response by either the Brotherhood or other Islamist factions within Egypt. The extent and impact of the Brotherhood's response will depend on how well it can coordinate through its underground networks, and its financial and other support from external supporters.

In the long-term, a more existential difficulty for the Muslim Brotherhood is whether its pan-Islamist philosophies can be integrated within the established nation-state order. Its flirtation with democracy in Egypt through 2012-2013 proved to be its undoing. Sharia law's integration into the judicial system is a non-negotiable position for the Brotherhood in any negotiation where it sits at the table. The Muslim Brotherhood's status in Egyptian society may plausibly remain outside institutions of governance, but for it to be at the negotiation table, it must be recognized as a legitimate political, religious and social entity in the region. The Egyptian state's and other countries' ongoing hostility to the Brotherhood makes this recognition of legal status unlikely.

Sources of leverage

SCAF

The Egyptian military can count on their dominance over the domestic political sphere, as well as their prominent external relations, as their primary sources of leverage. Within Egypt, the armed forces have control over the economy, bureaucracy, and the legal system. They are one of the top military forces in the region. They also maintain their strong relations with regional powers – such as GCC states and Israel – as well as global powers. To this end, the Egyptian military receives USD 1.5 billion annually from the United States.[5] Importantly, it also wields an international reputation for mediating in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood's main source of leverage is its ability to garner popular support in Egypt, especially in conservative sectors of the population and parts of the country. However, since the crackdown on the Brotherhood in Egypt by government forces, the character and force of the organization has changed considerably.

The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt cannot at present influence "at the table" negotiations, given that it is currently an illegal organization in Egypt and much of the Middle East. However, the Brotherhood's ability to leverage popular support means that its status effectively limits the possibility for future democratization or significant popular participation in Egypt. The Brotherhood therefore has a de facto role in political transitions in Egypt, especially when it comes to reaffirming Islamic law within proposed constitutional changes.

The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt's role on the domestic stage must also be understood as part of regional conflict dynamics. The Brotherhood plays a significant role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite suggestions that its relationship with Hamas may have become more distant since Sisi's ascendancy.[6] The Brotherhood's place in these regional negotiations therefore largely relates to helping support Hamas in its currently marginalized position. This is in itself part of the Muslim Brotherhood's "identity narrative" because of the oppression that the Brotherhood itself faces in much of the Arab world. If the tables were turned, and the Palestinian cause were no longer a defining part of Muslim Brotherhood's regional identity, this could significantly change the Brotherhood's self-positioning in the region.

A leading Middle East political scientist wrote in December 2016 that "the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood no longer has a strong overt presence in society or an elaborate public network of social services. Its organization now faces internal opposition. The nonviolence it espoused is being questioned by its own members. Its dispersed leadership is less able to exercise control. And the Brotherhood can no longer contest elections."[7] Whilst the current political situation sees a Muslim Brotherhood with considerably weaker influence in society, the ability for the organization to reorganize and redefine itself should not be underestimated. Thus, the ability of the organization, or at least the values of its (former) members, to block negotiations – including in the crucial case of Palestine – continues in spite of the Brotherhood's current suppression.

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

Whereas during the Mubarak Presidency, a single strongman was able to direct public policy, since the Revolution there has been a realignment in authority: there are now multiple strongmen, operating in strong institutions, that hold the Egyptian state together.[8] Commentators write of a "deep state" that operates as a separate state within the actual Egyptian nation-state, consisting of the General Intelligence Directorate, the Military, and the Ministry of the Interior.[9] Importantly, though, power balances are difficult to measure, and the military balance of power and internal functioning are notoriously opaque.

We therefore offer an analysis of the main actors dealing with the areas of security, economics, the rule of law, and foreign affairs. These are the President and his Cabinet, the SCAF, Homeland Security (Amn al-Dowla), the General Intelligence Directorate (Mukhabarat), Central Security Forces, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the Police. Thereafter, we consider the "behind the table" actors: the Judiciary, religious organizations, the business community, political parties, and the diffuse "Arab street".

Presidency and Cabinet

President Sisi's cementing of power in Egypt has centered around the twin strategy of securing economic growth for Egypt and ensuring state stability.[10] This has come at a significant cost, and his reforms and repression of liberties will continue to be a difficult pill for the Egyptian populace to swallow. In August 2016, Sisi secured a USD 12 billion IMF loan,[11] following a series of significant public management reforms, including the imposition of a value-added tax, and the floating of the Egyptian pound – which halved its value against the dollar. The loan has also spiked inflation, which hit almost 20 percent by November 2016. The ongoing strain that these reforms cause for Egyptian citizens must be placed in the context of the security environment that the military and police sustain. Popular dissent is sniffed out by the security services, and the mobilization of opposition groups is quelled pre-emptively.[12]

Sisi uses an anti-terror campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda and ISIS to justify the state's strategy of suppression. Whilst the latter two organizations can arguably be contained over the short to medium-term, given the Muslim Brotherhood's historic and pervasive place in Egyptian society, it is clear that the Brotherhood has a more secure footing in the future of Egypt. Given this reality, Sisi's approach to the Brotherhood is part of "statecraft" that sustains a "ruling pact" with the Egyptian people: Much like his predecessors, Sisi presents the Brotherhood as a terror threat which must be quelled before political transition towards democracy can be achieved. In light of how unfeasible Sisi's goals to eradicate the Brotherhood are, it is fair to say that this is an internal conflict in Egypt which will be an enduring cleavage until there is regime change.

SCAF

Due to the SCAF's rising privilege throughout the Mubarak years and recent prominence in Egyptian politics following the 2011 revolution, as the group conflates its own well-being with the country's well-being, it clings further to its elite status including secret budgets, immunity from prosecution, economic privileges, and its own court system.[13]

Despite the rise in economic favors, at the end of the Mubarak years, the SCAF had become anxious of the President's favoring, and investing in, the Interior Ministry and the Police. Police salaries increased six-fold while the militaries had only doubled, and senior police officials began to amass similar wealth and perks as the military. Furthermore, the Interior Ministry was twice the size of the military. Many interpreted the rising power of the police force as Mubarak's way of ensuring power and the presidency could be transferred to his son, Gamal Mubarak, who would be the first non-military leader of Egypt and whose preference towards neoliberal economic policies would threaten the military's economic empire.[14]

Therefore, when January 2011 hit, many military interests aligned with the protesters, and the SCAF took advantage of the opportunity to nullify a possible Gamal Mubarak reign, block neoliberal policies, investigate corruption of Mubarak's crony capitalists, and solidify their own power. However, beyond toppling Mubarak, those interests diverged. Therefore, those groups who continued to protest after Mubarak's fall were perceived by the military as threats aiming to weaken the unity of the nation.

Ministry of Defense

The current Minister of Defense, who also holds the roles of Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and Chairman of SCAF, is Sedki Sobhi.[15] Given the close relationship between Sisi and Sobhi, military and presidential interests are now more tightly intertwined than they arguably ever have been in Egypt. This makes it more difficult to see how Sisi might be "sacrificed" by the military in any power struggle, unless there were also to be a significant shift in internal military authority structures simultaneously. In addition, since 2011, the Ministry of Defense has taken a more primary role, especially in strategic areas such as around the Suez Canal and Egypt's border zones.[16]

Ministry of Interior and the Police

Egypt's Ministry of the Interior (MOI) is responsible for the national police forces, Central Security Forces, and Homeland Security. MOI employs around two million employees, outnumbering active-duty military troops by three-to-one and accounting for around one-fifth of all central government employees.[17] Attempts to reform the MOI since the Revolution have been largely unsuccessful. Due to continued abuses by MOI officers, Western governments have a strained relationship with the MOI. As the UK-based consultancy, Oxford Analytica, summarizes:

> *Western governments are wary of providing MOI with enhanced intelligence capabilities and training because of its continued abuses against peaceful activists, journalists and civil society organizations. For example, the US State Department rarely works with Egypt's MOI because the latter will not fulfil requirements under the Leahy Law that ensures those receiving US training are untainted by human rights violations. US policymakers have been more willing to provide the Egyptian military and border guards with technical training.[18]*

The current Minister of the Interior, Magdy Abdel Gaffar, has been in office since March 2015.[19] Though he has called for bureaucratic reform, analysts suggest that changes to the MOI and security services are superficial, and do little to correct the long-term dominance of the MOI and its history of civilian abuse.[20]

Homeland Security (El Amn El Watani)

Egypt's Homeland Security was previously named Amin el-Dowla (State Security Investigations Sector [SSIS]) prior to the Revolution. As of 2009, it was a body with 400,000 officers. SSIS was a was an unpopular organization with the Egyptian population, given

its brutal abuse of civilians and legal impunity. Discontent at the organization was a primary target for revolutionaries. For example, in March 2011, the Amin el-Dowla offices were stormed by protestors in Cairo, Alexandria, and other cities to prevent the organization destroying evidence of its use of torture and other illegal security measures.[21] Though el-Amin el-Watani is a new organization, most Egyptians view it as a reconstitution of the former organization following Morsi's ouster and continue to refer to it as "Amin el-Dowla".[22]

General Intelligence Service (Mokhabarat)

The General Intelligence Service is Egypt's security and intelligence agency, responsible for providing both domestic and foreign intelligence. Since 2014, the Director has been Khaled Fawzy.[23] Former Director, the late Omar Suleiman, became a primary actor in discussions with Palestinians after Israel's Prime Minister Sharon's decision to disengage from Gaza in 2004. Suleiman took the helm in the training of Palestinian security forces, and had close contact with the United States and Israel in this process.[24]

Judiciary

The Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) has played a highly politicized and active role in Egyptian politics since the Revolution. The SCC acts within a certain balance of power with the military and the Presidency, and is of course limited in terms of its ability to control their actions. Though the SCC sees the "deep state" as the protectors of the country, all domestic and foreign policy decisions are subject to considerable judicial review.

A recent article by Nathan Brown looks at the role of the SCC and how it might consolidate its authority and operate with the government as Sisi himself tries to solidify his control.[25] Dissenting opinions are not published, and neither is the vote split made public, so judicial processes are opaque. However, the SCC has the potential to act as a spoiler over government actions, including for example electoral processes.

In addition, the Supreme Administrative Court of Egypt, also referred to as the State Council, also has considerable "spoiler potential" for governmental activities both domestically and in the foreign policy arena.[26] On January 16, 2017, it threw out a government appeal over the legitimacy of handing over the Red Sea Islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. This will likely be the cause of a further impasse in relations between Cairo and Riyadh moving forward.[27]

Egyptian Parliament

Sisi's government uses the Parliament as a façade to reflect the inclusion of diverse voices in the political process. It would reflect badly on government policy if a bloc or party decided to boycott the next election, or if a significant number of parliamentarians resigned from their positions. In this light, as Nathan Brown summarizes, the Parliament has been "born broken," in the sense that its role has been constitutionally positioned in a way that it cannot challenge military or police authority.[28]

Though, the 567-person strong body of representatives has exceptionally limited political influence, in certain ways it can act as a barometer of support for or opposition towards presidential and military action. For example, in 2016, when passing a law which aims to ease the strict procedures for building Churches,[29] this caused significant dissent for the Nour Party's Salafist electorate.[30] Likewise, a law which increased the penalties for those who practice Female Genital Mutilation on girls was seen to create a rift between certain religious groups in Parliament and a coalition of "secular" parliamentarians and the government.[31]

Religious Organizations

Muslim Brotherhood: The Muslim Brotherhood is seeing significant challenges to its existing internal power structures. The outcome of these changes will shape the Brotherhood's domestic and regional strategy. Its powerful youth wing may end up dominating the less radical older leaders. At present, many senior figures are imprisoned or in exile, including Supreme Guide Mohammed el-Badi'e (sentenced to death) and his Deputy, Khairat el-Shater. Mahmoud Ezzat – who is suspected to be based in Turkey – is the Acting Supreme Guide, and therefore holds the most senior office in the wider network of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Elections were held in February 2015, in which 65 percent of the leadership were replaced, with 90 percent of new leaders from the younger generation. Young members increasingly hold sway, with the older leadership in exile or in jail. Though internal dynamics are under-reported and too fast-moving to judge new leadership dynamics, it seems that younger leaders hold considerable potential in lurching the Brotherhood down a more radical path.[32] These youth leaders, along with militant theologians, therefore hold considerable "spoiler" potential in any potential negotiation settlements, especially as Egypt's present administration undertakes a crackdown on Brotherhood activities. Furthermore, since the rise in Muslim Brotherhood youths who have shown support for ISIS activities[33] – a phenomenon which has been capitalized on by Sisi's campaign to delegitimize the MB as a political force[34] – Egypt is facing a radicalizing domestic Islamist population. Moves by the Egyptian Government deemed counter to Muslim Brotherhood goals are therefore likely to stoke the fire of discontent amongst the Brotherhood's more radical members, tipping the balance against those who outright object to the use of violence.

Hizb al-Nour and the Da'wa: Hizb al-Nour is the political party of the Salafi group called *al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya* ("the Salafi Call", or "Da'wa"). The party's supporters are largely ultraconservatives, adopting a strict and literal understanding of Islamic texts and Shariah. Whilst Da'wa was founded in Alexandria in the 1970s, the political arm, Hizb al-Nour, was founded in June 2011. It is a young political organization, but it became the second-largest political party in Egypt in the 2012 Parliamentary elections, attracting 25 percent of the vote.[35] Despite today holding just twelve Parliamentary seats in a largely powerless Parliament, it remains an important political

actor in the region.

The Da'wa emerged as an organization opposing Muslim Brotherhood values in the 1970s, sustaining a fractious relationship which continues to this day. Whereas Salafis view politics as heresy and a place where Islamic values are corrupted, the Brotherhood has traditionally seen politics as the essential avenue for change. Accordingly, prior to the 2011 Revolution, Salafis did not participated in elections: their role was solely religious and educational. This historic distance from politics continues to frame the Da'wa's identity and its relationships with other actors, both domestic and regional.

In particular, the Da'wa has never been a leading voice of revolution, and so is generally considered the most benign Islamist force by the Egyptian military and governing classes. Since Salafism's growth in Egypt since the 2000s, the government has accommodated the Da'wa. As Stéphane Lacroix writes:

"From 2006 onward, the government gave broadcasting licenses to Salafi channels, starting with Qanat al-Nas and later Qanat al-Rahma. Again, the government saw them as politically useful, because it assumed they drove conservative Muslims away from the politicized discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadi groups. By the end of the decade, those channels had become among the most widely watched in Egypt."[36]

Repeatedly, the Da'wa has shown itself to be remarkably apolitical, and yet it also finds itself with a significant place in the political geography of Egypt. This political position has always been fraught with tension, and prior to 2011, the Da'wa Sheikhs lived in perennial fear of a government crackdown. After largely denouncing the January 25, 2011 revolution as *fitna* (chaos, sedition), Hizb al-Nour was created in order that the Salafis have a place in defining Egypt in the post-Mubarak era. Whilst the Nour Party agrees with many of the Muslim Brotherhood's aims, including the integration of Shariah in the Constitution (as was affirmed in the Nour-Muslim Brotherhood alliance to produce the December 2012 Constitution), they showed themselves incapable of governing as a productive coalition in Parliament. For example, when Morsi replaced members of the Ministry of Religious Affairs with Brotherhood loyalists, and proposed the creation of a preachers' syndicate, the Da'wa saw these acts as Brotherhood attempts to wrestle the reigns of Egypt's religious sphere from the Da'wa Sheikhs.

The Da'wa therefore formed a coalition with those opposed to Morsi's premiership to prevent MB domination of the religious sphere. Its leaders were largely supportive of the July 3, 2013 coup, as this would mean they could reassert control of the religious sphere, over which Sisi and the military had only incidental interest.

Its pragmatic, reactionary approach to politics means that the Sisi regime tolerates the Da'wa and the Nour Party's role in society. This is a double-edged sword, however. Its support of the military coup has led to criticism from Salafis in other parts of the Muslim world, in particular Saudi Arabia.[37] This fractures the regional cohesion of the Salafis, but there is still clear ideological and financial penetration in the Da'wa from the Saudis.[38]

In the most recent elections, the Nour Party had a dismal showing. Yet its importance as a political actor continues. As Lacroix highlights, "A Hizb al-Nour decision to withdraw from politics would be seen by the regime and public opinion as a disavowal of the current political system".[39] It is therefore "strong-armed" into continuing its political presence despite being a largely apolitical party.

However, this hyper-pragmatism comes at a cost, and is arguably allowing more opportunity for radicalization. In the 2015 Parliamentary elections, Hizb al-Nour had to work with the electoral law which required that there be a percentage of Christian candidates in party lists. The Nour Party accepted this, with Sheikhs using the *al masalih wa-l-mafasid* principle (benefits and harms), but faced condemnations from Salafis abroad, including in Saudi Arabia. Their exceptional pragmatism was probably a cause of their poor electoral showing, along with the view that the party's alliance with Sisi's regime is profane. Recent legislation in the Egyptian Parliament is also being seen as contrary to Salafism, including a law on building churches and increasing penalties for female genital mutilation (FGM).[40] However, if the Nour Party were to withdraw from Parliament, or boycott the next municipal elections, this could undermine the legitimacy of the current regime.

This creates a difficult situation. In continuing activities under the Nour Party, Salafis must compromise religious beliefs by participating in a largely secular and politically castrated Parliament, which could alienate its base of support, including those vulnerable to radicalization. If they were to withdraw, the Salafis risk a backlash from the regime, which currently represses and illegalizes many other Islamist groups, whilst also losing any political influence they currently have. Losing political influence and being repressed could also lead to radicalization of its members, as has been seen with the Muslim Brotherhood members who have been forced underground. This would mean that the Da'wa would lose what has to date been a pillar of its recent collaboration with government, namely its fierce opposition to terrorism, and ability to penetrate and influence fringe communities in the Sinai region. Given the historically intransigent relations between the Brotherhood and the Da'wa, it is unlikely that an alliance could be formed between these groups to oppose regime activities, particularly those that try to undermine the Islamization of society.

The future of the Al-Nour Party therefore depends on how far its activities are constrained by the Sisi regime, more than its ability to garner popular support. The Sisi regime, along with the Judiciary, could effectively sideline the Nour Party. For example, in November 2014, a lawsuit was filed which called for the party to be banned because the 2014 constitution prohibits religious parties.[41] The party again barely survived 2015, after 1.25 million signatures were collected by the "No to Religious Parties" campaign.[42] Ironically, the future of the Da'wa may be better positioned to survive by means of a political self-annihilation.

However, the Da'wa, despite its extremely conservative stance on social issues, is also a highly pragmatic actor, something that extends into the foreign policy realm. As Khalil al-Anani writes, "It calls for enhancing Egypt's regional role and upholding international agreements and treaties...calls for good relations with foreign governments and nations based on mutual respect and peaceful

coexistence". On Egypt's relationship with Israel, "party leaders have stated on different occasions their respect for--and commitment to [the peace treaty]."[43] The Nour Party therefore has greater political access and a less obvious spoiler potential in negotiation attempts than other Islamist actors in Egypt.

Al-Azhar: Al-Azhar is the most renowned and authoritative mosque-university in the world today. It is a champion of Sunni Islam and trains professors, teachers and preachers who have authority throughout the Muslim world. Its most famous alumnus is the Qatari-based Muslim Brotherhood leader, Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Al-Azhar's role in Egyptian politics is complex, because whilst it usually tries to present itself as "above politics," it has nonetheless had a primary role in political transitions in recent years. Ahmed el-Tayeb, the current grand sheikh of al-Azhar, appeared with Sisi on July 3, 2013, in a clear sign of its support of the military coup. This move has set it up in clear opposition to the MB of Egypt, part of al-Azhar's longer-term distancing from Islamic activists.

Given its prominence, Al-Azhar stands in a prime position to educate Muslims in far-to-reach areas which are relatively more at threat to extremist forms of Islam. Since March 2014, al-Azhar has collaborated with Egypt's Ministry of Religious Affairs to place all of Egypt's mosques under the control of the state. Imams have to be al-Azhar graduates, or require a *tarkhis* (license) to preach after taking additional exams. Friday sermons in Egypt's mosques now need to be standardized, and are sent in advance by the Ministry of Religious Endowments.

Given its current relationship with the Sisi regime, and al-Azhar's wariness about engaging in political issues, the organization will likely not be a vehicle for political change in Egypt. However, as Ahmed Morsy and Nathan Brown have written, "for Egyptians of a wide variety of stripes, al-Azhar represents the true and best face of Islam as it is understood and practiced in Egypt".[44] Al-Azhar is the source of significant friction with other players in Egypt, most notably the Da'wa and the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet it may also provide an important peace-building role by engaging with radicalizing Egyptians in a country that otherwise has a dearth of civil society presence, partly owing to Sisi's crackdown on these organizations. Al-Azhar also has significant penetration in the wider Middle East, with a large network of prestigious imams and scholars who are alumni of al-Azhar. Thus, al-Azhar is a "behind-the-table" actor (and "at the table" actor on some internal negotiation issues), whose moderate teaching of Islam and authority in the Muslim world should be put into focus in a time when Egypt's main Islamist political actors no longer hold meaningful sway in Egyptian politics and policy.

Coptic Church and Christians: Coptic Christians are Egypt's largest minority group, accounting for about 10 percent of the total population. Along with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Copts are currently the most marginalized group in the country. They are subject to attacks from ISIS extremists and Muslims, and face significant constraints in their activities, for example in the perennial difficulty that they have in building churches. Like other religious organizations, the Copts have a clamoring youth movement whose membership stands increasingly at odds with its leadership.

Throughout the Revolution, the Copts had to tread a fine line with political authorities and popular movements. As remains the case today, the Copts' relations with other religious and civic groups was highly inflammatory, and thus small fluxes in power could put Christians across the country in a dangerous situation. So, whilst the Coptic Church encouraged its members not to join the protests against Mubarak (a call ignored by some), the Church had to change tack after the Revolution, subsequently praising the revolutionaries for their political participation, and the army for its guardianship of the State.

Pope Tawadros II was one of the figures present at meetings convened by the military which decided to topple Morsi in the 2013 coup. Tawadros personally encouraged Sisi to run for President. This caused significant animosity in the months following the coup and during the dispersal of protesters in Cairo, with at least forty-two churches attacked in August 2013.

Attacks against Copts are also being perpetuated by ISIS. In December 2016, the Islamic State Group was responsible for an attack on a Coptic Church in Cairo which killed twenty-five people.[45] The Group has claimed that these attacks will be continued in its "war against polytheism." Given that violent discrimination against Copts is rife throughout Egypt, ISIS's tactics are exceptionally divisive, but also difficult for Sisi to respond to in a way that could alienate conservative parts of Egyptian society, where anti-Copt sentiment is pervasive.

Scholar Georges Fahmy has criticized the Church's own tactics as it responds to the violence and discrimination it faces.[46] In particular, the Church, in a strategy dating back from the Mubarak era, tries to establish sole authority over its constituents, preventing Copts from integrating into other parts of civil and political society. The Church relies on often behind-closed-doors track II diplomacy with the state, and when these fall foul, affected Copts find it difficult to seek redress through the courts and other state institutions, owing to these extra-judicial arrangements between Church authorities and the state. As an institution, the Church, through Pope Tawadros II, tries to unify its political voice, in doing so disallowing the cross-fertilization of political ideas and action into other areas of Egyptian civil society.

Civil Society

Egypt's current opportunities for democratic participation are extremely limited, as the repression of opposition civic activity is all but total. Expressions of discontent against the regime face brutal crackdown. This clampdown on civil society activity makes any prospect of awakening participatory processes of change in Egypt exceptionally difficult. The revolutionary spirit that captured the imagination of the nation in 2012 is difficult to rekindle due to the fears of repeating the bloody civil conflict. The state's current activities indicate they will respond violently to any opposition momentum. Most recently, the Egyptian government has imposed travel bans on three human rights activists, and the Parliament has approved legislation which brings all the funding of non-governmental organizations under state control.

Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds have noted the exceptionally weak penetration of civil society in Egypt *vis-à-vis* Tunisia, arguing that this relative lack of cohesion and role in Egypt accounts for the failed democratic transition:

Table 5.3. Self-Reported Rates of (Present or Past) Organizational Membership in Tunisia and Egypt Compared (2013)

Type of Organization	Tunisia	Egypt
Church or religious	1.2	0.8
Sport or recreational	5.5	0.3
Artistic, musical, or educational	3.9	0.3
Labor Union	1.9	0.3
Political party	1.7	1.3
Environmental	0.8	0.3
Professional association	1.8	0.4
Humanitarian or charitable	1.0	0.5
Consumer	0.4	N/A
Self-help, mutual aid	0.4	0.3
Other	0.1	N/A

Source: World Values Survey 6th Wave.

Figure 1: Table from Jason Brownlee, Tarek E. Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Whilst civil society, especially in the form it took in the pre-Sisi era, is currently weak in Egypt, it is still important to consider it as an "actor", for several reasons. Most importantly, it was a series of "civil society" actors and their coordination that ignited revolution, and which proved important in the lead-up to the coup that would put Sisi in power.

Major Civil Society Activity in Egypt since 2005					
Movement/ Group	Stated Purpose	Means of Mobilization	Source(s) of Funding	Key Events and Impacts	Current Status
Kefaya Movement for Change		Mass social media and Protests	Unknown, but likely multiple sources	Active from 2004; opened the door to opposition against regime	Not active
April 6 Movement	Originally objection to wages in government-owned textile manufacturer in Mahalla.	Social media especially from youth	Training from Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies (Serbia)	Founded 2008. Called for and mobilized January - February 2011 uprising.	Splintered after Mubarak's fall. Still active; activities officially banned, but new strategy developed in 2015 and co-founded released from jail in January 2017.
We Are Khaled Said	Protest against police brutality and injustice under the Mubarak regime.	We Are Khaled Said Facebook page	Largely unfunded protest	The Facebook page catalyzed the January 25 protests (on National Police Day).	Not active
Tamarod Movement	Anti-Morsi campaign	Online petition	Largely unfunded protest, but likely involvement from UAE and Saudi Arabia.	June 30 protests, which precipitated the military coup.	Not active
Rabaa Square Protests	Muslim Brotherhood protests against military coup	Protests in Raba Square roundabout area	Largely unfunded, perhaps with Qatari backing	August 6 military crackdown, with c.1,000 protesters killed. Created countrywide instability.	Not active; Muslim Brotherhood forced underground

Importantly, and contrary to what we may assume, under Sisi's regime there are more protests on average than there were in the last decade of Mubarak's rule. In fact, as a recent article by Amy Austen Holmes and Hussein Baoumi shows, "there are approximately five times as many protests taking place on average under Sisi as there were from 2008 to 2010 under Mubarak."[47] It is clear, therefore, that despite the protest law passed by the interim President Adley Mansour, Egyptian citizens are still able to express their discontent *en masse*, though many groups have been banned and permitted protests are often less cohesive and smaller in scale.

Journalists: The role of journalism in shaping the post-Mubarak era cannot be underestimated. As Marc Lynch writes, in the lead up to the 2013 military coup, "Every event or political gambit would be filtered through dozens of highly partisan new media outlets, creating two virtually irreconcilable narratives about Egyptian politics."[48] Egypt's media today is one of the least free in the world, as a review of the 2016 Freedom House report on Freedom of the Press in Egypt shows us.[49] Though the media is far from free in Egypt, journalists and news outlets are part of a complex environment and set of relationships. To this end, there is room for protest and critique of the government, despite the heavy-handedness that these actions often precipitate by the government.

Business Community: Egypt's business community has been hit by Egypt's stuttering economy. In particular, inflation has soared since the floating of the Egyptian pound;[50] a value-added tax has been introduced;[51] tourist numbers have plummeted since Metrojet Flight 9268 was downed;[52] and the bungled Suez Canal expansion has cast doubt on the viability of the government's business strategy.[53] It is useful to analyze the current business environment in the context of its changing influence and make-up since the Mubarak years.

During the Mubarak era, a small group of "crony capitalists" were leading Egyptian businessmen, and also held prominent positions in the National Democratic Party. A lot of these figures were arrested, exiled, or dispossessed of their assets during Mubarak's ousting, and continue to be marginalized figures in Egypt's business and political environment.

However, as the scholar Amr Adly writes, big business played an important role alongside the military and civil society in precipitating Morsi's fall from power some twelve months later. Adly writes: "Some played an indirect role, abstaining from investing in the economy following Morsi's rise to power. Others were more direct, using the media they owned and controlled against the Brotherhood regime."[54] Above all, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood failed to cultivate productive business relationships in their year in power, and the business classes formed part of the coalition that supported the coup and Sisi's subsequent rise to power.

The main development since the coup has been the military's increased role in the political economy, which has had several effects. The huge increase in money flowing in from the Gulf has largely been pumped through the state, and more specifically through military contracts facilitated through the National Service Projects Organization. Despite select businesses benefiting from this arrangement, there are concerns about businesses confidence in the rule of law and fair access to the market.[55]

The "Arab Street"

Popular Mobilization: The mobilization of citizens around the Arab Spring and the subsequent military coup have not been seen again since Sisi's rise to power. Whilst, as stated above, protests continue, these do not gain anywhere near the kind of traction or numbers. However, there are clearly limits to what the "Arab street" is willing to accept in terms of day-to-day grievances and hardship. The military's intervention to import baby formula in October 2016 following a protest involving poor mothers carrying their babies is one sure sign that Sisi is concerned about how the effects of poverty may incite popular dissent.[56]

Likewise, a lack of wheat is a potential trigger point for popular unrest for the world's biggest wheat importer. In 2016, a confused government policy over the fungus, ergot, effectively took Egypt off the international market and sent ripples through the entire industry.[57] Wheat consumption in Egypt is three times the average of developing countries, and the stability of its imports and subsidies has implications both for Egypt's geopolitical relationships and its internal stability. Food insecurity is therefore a real threat for Egypt's regime, and the use of the military a sign of Sisi's desperation in keeping markets functioning and the population fed.

Women: The treatment and place of women in Egyptian society is highly variable. Women currently hold a significant 89 seats in Egypt's 596-member Parliament.[58] Many women, especially those outside the main cities, live in highly patriarchal and conservative communities, but this is certainly far from being the only reality that women face.[59]
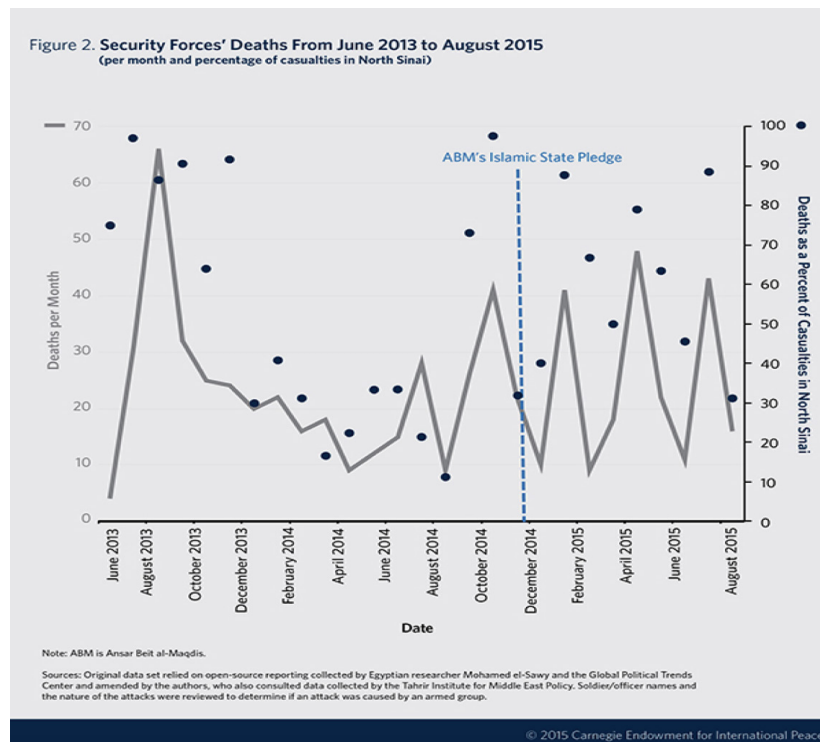
There have been significant changes to the way that religious organization operates in Egypt since the 1990s. This, along with women's now significant place in Egypt's Parliament, means that more up-to-date analysis is required as to understand how women might mobilize social change in Egypt. For example, the women's mosque movement, organized under the Da'wa's Islamic Revival, has transformed Egyptian society since the 1970s: "This includes changes in styles of dress and speech, standards regarding what is deemed proper entertainment for adults and children, patterns of financial and household management, the provision of care for the poor, and the terms by which public debate is conducted."[60] In addition, it is important to note that sexual assaults by the security forces in Egypt is a primary call to arms for radicalized Islamists.

Since the Revolution, changes in leadership have opened up different kinds of possibilities for political action, and different realities of repression, for Egyptian women.[61] The aforementioned example of poor women protesting with their babies demonstrates that women's mobilization can affect government policy. It is therefore possible that women's political activity could instigate future socio-political change in Egypt.

Labor Organizations: Labor unions played a role in both the ousting of Mubarak, and in the ushering in of military rule under Sisi.[62] They were also an instrumental voice in the growing opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, with around 400 strikes taking place daily in Egypt between February and March 2013.[63] Despite this, they have faced ongoing repression and severe restrictions since the authoritarian-style military government came to power.[64] In April 2015, the Supreme Administrative Court outlawed workers' rights to strike, and a new Civil Service Law faced considerable opposition from the government's approximately six million workers.[65] The ongoing repression of labor rights, together with spiraling inflation and economic woes, could combine together to catalyze more significant popular dissent within Egypt's working classes.

Armed non-state actors

A significant cause of Egypt's current terrorism threat stems from Islamist's desire for revenge against the groups that helped oust Morsi, and who were responsible for the bloody crackdown that followed, most notably the massacre that took place in Rabaa Square. Egypt currently faces an ongoing security threat from three main terrorist groups:

ISIS Sinai affiliate, Ansr Beit al-Maqdis

Figure 2. **Security Forces' Deaths From June 2013 to August 2015** (per month and percentage of casualties in North Sinai)

Note: ABM is Ansar Beit al-Maqdis.

Sources: Original data set relied on open-source reporting collected by Egyptian researcher Mohamed el-Sawy and the Global Political Trends Center and amended by the authors, who also consulted data collected by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. Soldier/officer names and the nature of the attacks were reviewed to determine if an attack was caused by an armed group.

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Formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), and active since 2011, this group pledged allegiance to ISIS in November 2014. ABM is based in the Sinai, and the figure below shows the escalatory nature of the threat. Many of the group's recruits have come from the Egyptian mainland, and they have attempted to recruit the "revolutionaries" who faced the full force of the Egyptian military during the Morsi ousting and subsequent protests. ABM has been responsible for some high-profile attacks, including in March 2014, when fourteen militants battled with security forces in the village of Arab Sharkas, Qalubiya, just a fifteen-minute drive from Cairo's borders. Figure 4 shows security forces deaths between June 2013 and August 2015, and provides percentages showing the scale of the problem in Northern Sinai.

It is reported that there are tunnels between the villages on the Egyptian border which lead to Gaza. Through the tunnels, ABM operatives and the Gazans exchange goods, supplies, and arms.[66] It is also clear that ABM receives funding through complex, cross-border transactions with other ISIS affiliates.

Mainland Salafi Groups Affiliated to al-Qaeda : There are also Egypt mainland-based Salafi jihadists who tend to be supporters of or affiliated with al-Qaeda. Some of these jihadists were affiliated with the ABM in the Northern Sinai before the group saw a split, with ABM affiliates breaking into two factions. The group that affiliated with al-Qaeda is headed up by Hesham Ashmawy, who now runs the terrorist group known as al-Murabitun, which according to recent reports uses access channels across the desert between Eastern Libya and Egypt.[67]

Another group known as Ajnad Misr, which is a supporter of but has not officially pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda, was responsible for particularly lethal attacks in 2014. It is speculated that this group is based in the Giza area.[68] The group claims to seek retribution for the events at Rabaa Square and for sexual assaults against Islamist women. It has an established online presence. Though the group has faced significant setbacks in terms of declining resources and strikes against a number of high-profile militants, it has continued to carry out attacks.[69]

Non-Jihadi Violent Groups: A hybridized form of a terror group, which seem to be birthed as offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, but who also maintain Salafi connections, has occurred in the case of the Revolutionary Punishment group. Revolutionary Punishment announced its existence in January 2015 to coincide with the fourth anniversary of the 2011 revolution. Awad and Hashem discuss the evolution of this group, and history and geographies of its attacks, in depth.[70]

Egypt's Terrorist Threat: A Summary: Overall, there are three acute threats that Egypt faces as it responds to the ongoing terrorist situation across the country. First, there is considerable potential for Egyptian-born radicals returning from places such as Syria and Libya to continue with extremist violence in their home country. These individuals could also proselytize and help spread

extremism in return, bringing with them expertise gained in conflict abroad. Second, the ongoing crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood by government forces plays into the hands of terrorist groups, who will accept these disillusioned Islamists with open arms. Third, evidence suggests that the military has taken an exceptionally heavy-handed approach to countering the extremist threat in the Sinai region. Such acts of aggression against an already socioeconomically disadvantaged, remote region risk communities in the Sinai backing terrorist groups through providing shelter and other support.

External conflicts and network of relationships

The foreign policy issues in which Egypt can be a primary actor are:
1. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
2. Countering the threat of the Islamic State Group; and
3. Suppressing the regional activities of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The foreign policy issues that Egypt can provide some or limited influence over are:
4. The counter-insurgency in Yemen;
5. Countering the threat of the Islamic State Group in Libya;
6. Iranian influence in the region;
7. The war in Syria and the associated influx of refugees; and
8. The dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

The first part of this section considers the nature of the external conflicts and networks of relationships that Egypt as a primary actor faces. It looks at what might be the geopolitical aims of Egypt in each case, as well as the influence of third-party actors that limit or help define the nature of this conflict or relationship. The second part of this section identifies the nature of Egypt's influence over these "second-tier" foreign policy issues. It looks at the reasons why these issues might be considered "second-tier," and the influence of third-party actors helping to define or limit Egypt's involvement.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The U.S.-Egypt-Israel Camp David Accords, signed in 1978, have placed Egypt as a primary actor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for nearly forty years. Egypt has often acted as a chief mediator between Israel and Palestine, most recently during Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" in Gaza (2014). Analysts perceive that Israeli-Egyptian relations between the two governments are at an all-time high.[71] Relations during the Muslim Brotherhood's ascendency were strained, most notably when the Israeli Embassy was stormed in Egypt in September 2011. However, under President Sisi, rapprochement has been the norm: the anti-terror activities in the Sinai have seen unprecedented military coordination between Egyptian and Israeli forces;[72] the Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem rather than Tel Aviv; and the Egyptian Ambassador to Israel, Hazem Khairat, participated in the sixteenth Herzilya Conference in Israel (2016).

There are opportunities for further coordination which would help develop Israeli-Egyptian relations. Hamas is now a common problem for both governments, for example. In particular, despite being linked to the Muslim Brotherhood network, Hamas is not designated a terrorist organization by Egypt since June 2015, when an appeals court overturned the government's decision to categorize it as one.[73] This apparently inconsistent approach to the Muslim Brotherhood is part of Sisi's delicate balancing act: he and his administration aim not be seen to undercut Palestinian claims to nationhood, even if closer ties with Israel would be mutually beneficial for Israeli and Egyptian foreign policy.

Countering the threat of ISIS

ISIS-linked groups in the Sinai – such as ABM – are Egypt's most internally disruptive active armed opponent. ABM's activities in the Sinai undermine internal relations between Egypt's Copts and majority Muslim population, as well as within the Muslim community. Furthermore, it perpetuates a climate of fear for the whole population, causes economic disruption in target areas, and prevents economic development in the Sinai region. Importantly, the threat from ISIS is also employed by the government as a scare tactic through the current regime's coupling of this threat with that of the Muslim Brotherhood. This phenomenon in turn causes tension for Egypt's relationship with states which are traditionally more supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly Qatar and Turkey.

The threat from ISIS, and Islamist extremists more generally, is simultaneously a source of collaboration for Egypt and other regional actors. This is particularly the case with the United States, the United Kingdom, the EU and its member states, Iraq, and other actors with strong counterinsurgency and military capabilities who are involved in the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Suppressing the regional activities of the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is active across the MENA region.[74] Since Morsi's ousting, Egypt has collaborated with the UAE and Saudi Arabia in particular in trying to quell Brotherhood activities in the wider region. Egypt is well-placed to coordinate further suppression of the Brotherhood with other actors who also consider the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization: Bahrain, Syria, and Russia.

However, this suppression is likely to meet with substantial resistance, both domestically and from other actors. Given the clear popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt evidenced in the 2012 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, whilst the Brotherhood is declared a terrorist organization, suppressing the MB would likely have to go hand-in-hand with even more undermining of human rights and freedoms of the whole population. Additionally, coordinated suppression of other regional groups, such as Hamas, would likely fuel popular dissent in Egypt. Coordinated anti-Muslim Brotherhood activities (e.g., rooting out underground meetings and funding networks) would likely receive support of the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Counter-insurgency in Yemen

Egypt is part of the Saudi-led coalition against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen (Operation Decisive Storm). Egypt's contribution to the counter-insurgency has been limited relative to other coalition partners, perhaps owing to its ongoing military operations in the Sinai as well as its failed intervention in Yemen in the 1960s under Nasser.[75] There are trigger events which would almost certainly mean that Egypt would become increasingly involved in the conflict. Testament to this, in 2015, when the Houthi rebels took control of Sanaa, the head of Egypt's Suez Canal Authority said that Egypt was "ready to respond" should the strategically important Bab al-Mandab close.[76] This crossing is not just of vital economic importance for Egypt's economy: the Suez Canal is also a national symbol whose closing the Egyptian government would not tolerate.[77]

Egypt sending ground forces would likely be a last resort. As Yezid Sayigh argues, it is questionable to what extent Egypt could even afford this kind of involvement without funding from other backers.[78] That said, if Bab al-Mandab were taken, this would probably precipitate Egypt's more entrenched involvement, given Egypt's naval capabilities, and the potential for the Bab al-Mandab-Hodeidah crossing being used by the Houthis to ship arms to Sudan via Djibouti.

Countering the threat of ISIS in Libya

The desert between Eastern Libya and desert is known to be an area through which al-Qaeda and ISIS-backed operatives transport money, goods and arms. In 2015, Egypt conducted air strikes on ISIS facilities after twenty-one Egyptian Copts who were migrant workers in Libya were kidnapped and then executed by ISIS.[79] Egypt tried to form a coalition of support for further intervention in Libya, however despite meetings with Jordan and Saudi Arabia's Kings, Western actors were not supportive of this further involvement.[80]

Egypt would find it difficult to commit more military resources to combating ISIS on its western border with Libya. In fact, after the limited air strikes against ISIS targets, it is likely that this hindered its capacities in the Western Sinai. In addition to the air strikes, Egypt has to consider the security situation on the mainland and the Sinai, as there is a serious threat of counter-attacks from terrorist organizations in response to Egypt's own attacks.[81]

Egypt is undoubtedly predisposed to playing up its role in fighting ISIS in Libya. The West's lack of appetite for further strikes here means that Egypt has been more active, which may lead to a less condemnatory Western response over the military's human rights and democratic abuses.

Iranian influence in the region

Egypt has traditionally had the weakest relationship with Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and only recently did both countries open embassies in the respective countries.[82] However, there have recently been signs of a tentative rapprochement in Iranian-Egyptian relations.[83] Most notably, Sisi has signaled his growing pro-Assad stance in Syria, in a dramatic reversal of Morsi's position in the early years of the Syrian Civil War.[84] In October 2016, Iran reportedly lobbied for Egypt to be at the negotiating table in talks on Syria. Relations with anti-Assad backers, in particular Saudi Arabia, have soured since Egypt has begun supporting Russia and Iran in UN votes.[85]

Analysts note that Egypt does not see Iran as a direct nuclear threat, and there is small chance that Egypt will seek to develop its own nuclear capabilities.[86] Thus, whilst the relationship has been acrimonious historically, this would not prevent Egypt's developing closer diplomatic ties with Iran.

However, unless there is a more substantial reversal of relations between the "Western-backed" regional actors (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan) and Egypt, it is unlikely that Sisi and his government will warm towards Russia and Iran much more considerably. Egypt relies on considerable financial and other kinds of aid from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which was already put in jeopardy after Egypt's support of Russia at the UN over Syria. Some analysts have suggested that the "Sisi doctrine" is to back nation-states as against opposition forces. More likely, Egypt's changing stance towards Iran shows Egypt's need to keep its options open in an uncertain diplomatic environment (partly due to Donald Trump's success in the U.S. Presidential elections). It is too weak to go it alone, and so it will "test the waters" and not openly undermine any regional powers unless its hand is forced.

The war in Syria and the associated influx of refugees

It is also important to recognize Egypt's role in the refugee crisis in the region. UNHCR had registered 178,723 "persons of concern" in Egypt as of January 2016.[87] By October 31, 2016, 115,204 Syrian "persons of concern" were registered by UNHCR in Egypt.[88] Egypt's assistant foreign minister said that Egypt spends USD 300 million a year on the crisis, and has signaled that the financial and other support that Turkey has received from the EU for taking in migrants increases Egypt's responsibilities, without any funding being provided from the EU.[89] Importantly, after Libya, Egypt is the second-largest departure point for refugees.[90]

Egypt's policy on Syrian refugees has changed dramatically since 2013, before which Syrians in Egypt essentially enjoyed the same benefits as Egyptian nationals.[91] Since 2013, when visa restrictions were imposed, Syrians arriving in Egypt without a visa

have been put in detention centers. Those arriving by air are sent back to their country of transit (usually Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey). Additionally, more Syrians have been trying to cross the sea to reach Europe.

Given the 'success' that the EU-Turkey deal has had in stemming the influx of refugees into Europe, it is possible that the deal will serve as a useful model to extend to other states. To this end, Egypt could potentially be a candidate for such a deal in the future, and it is likely that Sisi would be willing to cooperate if it comes with sufficient financial and political support.[92]

The dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Egypt is currently in a dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, an Ethiopian dam on a tributary of the Blue Nile, and near the Sudanese-Ethiopian border. Whilst Ethiopia is keen to stress that the dam can organize water flow year-round, avoiding floods and water loss,[93] Egypt is concerned about the impact it will have on its water supplies from the Nile, as well as the profits that Ethiopia will derive from selling energy from the hydroelectric project.[94] In October, Ethiopia accused parts of the Egyptian establishment for funding anti-government protests, which has caused the government to issue a six-month state of emergency.[95] In context, Sudan is also a party to the negotiations over the Renaissance Dam; and Israel is reportedly a key "behind-the-table" actor.[96] It should also be noted that there is a long-standing border dispute with Sudan over the Hala'ib Triangle area of the Egyptian-Sudanese border.[97] It has been reported that this border issue has prevented Sudan and Egypt from collaborating at the negotiation table with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.[98]

Potential negotiation moves

Egypt has been an active partner in certain regional dialogues and negotiations. This section will highlight potential negotiation moves regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, countering the Muslim Brotherhood and the threat of violent extremism, as well as its larger regional role:

1. Negotiation moves enabling monitoring and surveillance of Muslim Brotherhood activities, with key negotiation partners being Egypt, the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Hamas.
2. Negotiation moves enabling a fair water distribution agreement for the Nile Basin countries, with key negotiation partners being Israel, Sudan, the World Bank, and the UN, in addition to the Nile Basin countries.
3. Negotiation moves which aim to bring a more sustainable framework for refugees fleeing from regional conflicts, most notably Syria. The key negotiation partners would be the EU, the United Kingdom, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Sudan, and the UNHCR.
4. Negotiation moves which aim to reduce the frequency and scale of proxy wars being fought between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Aside from these two countries, key negotiation actors are the United States, Russia, the EU, the United Kingdom, Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah, and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Egypt's negotiation moves for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

As outlined above, Egypt is currently trying to process the ramifications of the Trump administration for diplomacy in the region. Evidence so far suggests that given Sisi's strong relationship with Trump, the Egyptian Government is positive about the outcome of the U.S. Presidential elections.[99] The main aim of Sisi will be to ensure that there is a continuity in the military aid package that has been given to Egypt by the United States since the signing of the Camp David Accords.

However, given that Egypt's last diplomatic attempts at the UN were unsuccessful, Sisi will be cautious in entrenching Egypt further in the role of negotiator in the Israeli-Palestinian agreement. The U.S. will likely need to guide Egypt "behind the table" to a large extent, which the "restart" in bilateral relations under Trump will make easier to facilitate. Sisi's main fear will be aggravating other regional actors, and his own population, neither of whom will look kindly upon greater camaraderie between Cairo and Tel Aviv. The U.S. moving its embassy to Jerusalem would likely do harm to Cairo's ability to leverage peace negotiations, because a move like this is a "red line" for many parties in Egypt. Instead, focusing around reenergizing the two-state solution "camp" is Egypt's best bet for being a more active contributor to this seemingly intractable issue.

There is almost certainly more room for military collaboration between Israel and Egypt, given their common concern over Sinai-based terrorists. Counter-extremism cooperation is likely to fit well with Trump's foreign policy, which has focused around anti-ISIS platform.

Egypt's openness to acting as the primary diplomatic partner could be assisted through increased aid and development from the U.S. and other Western powers, especially if the latter actors play down criticism of Sisi's administration's track record on human rights abuses.

Cairo-Tel Aviv relationships could also be developed through more interdependency over water rights issues in the Nile Basin, especially since Israel has been able to develop track II dialogue with Egypt's neighbors to the south. However, Israel should present itself as an ally of Egypt with mutual concerns, rather than the primary economic partner of the Nile Basin.[100] Focusing multilateral relations around future concerns like regional lack of water access owing to climate change could detoxify Israel's role in MENA diplomacy. In fact, putting these countries around the table as *Nile Basin* actors, rather than *MENA* actors, could refocus diplomatic debates more generally.

Countering the threat of violent extremism

As has been discussed, there is ample room for cooperation between Israel and Egyptian given their mutual focus on countering

violent extremism in the region. The EU and the U.S. are the most important external backers, who can help to develop the two countries' capacities to coordinate on this urgent issue. Israeli intelligence is likely already shared with Cairo, however, encouraging codependence in intelligence sharing is an important avenue for increasing the countries' reliance on one another.

The factors holding Egypt back in developing this relationship are similar to those that problematize Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement more generally. However, the difference with intelligence sharing and similar initiatives is that decision-making is largely in the hands of the military, Egypt's most powerful actor, which has the support of the people and ability to manage the public narrative.

Clearly, countering violent extremism will aggravate relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. This exposes the need for Sisi to disaggregate the issues at stake surrounding the Muslim Brotherhood and those of ISIS. This will be a difficult task, given the largely intractable nature of the standoff between the current administration and the Muslim Brotherhood. The hard work could be done by "behind the table" actors such as al-Azhar imams, who can provide Sisi with a more nuanced picture of current Muslim Brotherhood activities.

This issue is also necessarily regional: cross-border transfers of arms and money fueling extremism can only be stopped through multilateral coordination. The U.S., NATO, the EU, the UK, and agencies such as Interpol can provide (further) training and resources to Egypt. Support from these actors can be tied to other issues, like recalibrating Egypt's counterterrorism policies, or engaging more positively with Israel over various diplomatic ventures.

Monitoring and Surveilling the Muslim Brotherhood

Given the Muslim Brotherhood's current activities are of concern to most regional actors, as well as world powers, providing more sophisticated methods of monitoring and surveillance would be in the interests of a range of actors. Support on this from Western powers could be tied to reducing the Egyptian governments' abuses towards members of the Brotherhood, which may further exacerbate domestic tensions.

Enabling a fair water distribution agreement for the Nile Basin countries

In the longer-term, water access and issues associated with climate change and land management will likely become only more urgent in coming years. This can be a key source of collaboration for Egypt with other regional actors – such as Israel and Sudan – if the issue is coordinated effectively by third-party actors like the World Bank before these issues reach a crisis point.[101]

Creating a sustainable framework for refugees fleeing from regional conflicts

There is an opportunity for Egypt to gain a funding agreement from the EU if it offers to be a partner in helping Europe stem the refugee crisis. Clearly, the reasons for refugee flows from Egypt are due to underlying structural problems with Egypt's economy, rampant youth unemployment being one of them. Egypt can try to tie development money from the EU if it agrees to a deal similar to that which Turkey has made with the EU. There are glaring problems with Egypt's current refugee policy, and agencies like the UNHCR will need to work with Egypt to bridge these gaps.

Egypt's support for President Assad needs to be factored in. Refugee flows from Syria to Egypt are significant, and will likely continue as long as the civil war rages. The sustenance of the current regime is probably not a red line for Sisi, but almost all cards are stacked against regime change in terms of the balance of power with other regional actors. The glaring exception to this is Saudi Arabia, which will not take kindly to moves by Egypt seen as "pro-Assad." However, a refugee deal between the EU and Egypt does not necessitate Egypt's further entrenchment in the Syrian crisis per se. Egypt's trump card here is its ability to voice that the region may further destabilize unless it receives significant support from the EU (and, to a lesser extent, the U.S.) to support its ability to feed and house Egypt's swelling refugee population.

Mitigating the outbreak of regional proxy wars

The rift between Egypt and the Gulf countries is likely to develop as long as Sisi continues to flirt with Iran and Russia.[102] Egypt needs Saudi Arabia and the UAE's financial support: these countries have consistently helped Egypt through crisis after crisis since Morsi's ousting. Yet Saudi Arabia's halting of 700,000 tons of petroleum products sent to Egypt per month, and the failure of Sisi's government to facilitate the transfer of the Red Sea islands, are a sign of poor relations to come.

The United States has a part to play to salve these wounds, but a lot impinges on the approach that President Trump takes towards Iran in the coming months. Certainly, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have too many mutual interests to cut ties, with the obvious example of "mutual gains" being the stability of Yemen (closure of the Bab al-Mandab-Hodeidah crossing, and terrorist transfers to Sudan, would send the entire region into turmoil, and upset global trade flows).

VIII. Europe and the EU: Internal Divisions, External Shocks

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Identity, conflict narratives, threat perception

The European Union is an international organization based on economic and political integration between 28 member states. It is unique among regional integration schemes in the degree to which many legislative and executive competencies have been delegated exclusively to the EU's institutions. This allows for the possibility of majority voting against the wishes of some of its member states in many policy areas. Integration has advanced furthest in the economic realm. The EU provides freedom to business across national borders in a single market and allows its population of over 500 million to circulate and settle essentially unrestricted in all its member states. Combining the economies of the different member states, the EU's economy is one of the largest in the world, trailing only that of the United States. Initially founded in the aftermath of World War II, the project is often credited with eliminating war between its member states. For this achievement, it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, given that "for over six decades [the EU] contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe".[1]

In recent years the European Union has come to be increasingly threatened by its incapacity to deal with the fallout of the 2008 global economic crisis and subsequent Eurozone crisis (the group of EU member states that use a common currency), disparities between its member states, concerns over the transparency of EU decision-making, Islamist terrorism, and the rise of populist political parties.[2] This cumulated in the United Kingdom's vote by popular referendum to leave the European Union in June 2016. As one of its largest member states, this decision will have many ramifications. The process for leaving the union, initiated in the spring of 2017, will occupy European decision-makers for at least two years, and will significantly alter the balance and shape of the European Union in ways that are hard to predict at present.

Given the diversity of the EU's member states along economic, geographic and political lines, the perspectives on external issues and the ways in which they affect them differ. For example, the EU was divided over the 2003 Iraq were. Some EU member states supported the US-led intervention, while others radically opposed it.[3] Similarly, a divergence of what ought to be done in the 2011 Libyan crisis led to the EU playing a limited role in it, despite relatively more unification on the issue.[4]

Currently, the issue of asylum seekers divides the union. Asylum seekers have arrived in a few EU member states in very large numbers (e.g. Germany or Italy) while Eastern member states received very few.[5] EU member states have been very divided over a common response to this issue, favoring national interest over a workable solution for the EU.[6] The EU has tried to externalize the management of its migration policies[7] and it has concluded a contentious refugee deal with Turkey under which Turkey promised to retain refugees from the region in exchange for transfer payments and an upgrade in EU-Turkey relations.[8]

A second element of concern framing the EU's current perspective towards the Middle East is the issue of Islamist terrorism. Numerous terrorist attacks have occurred on EU soil in recent years, and more than 5,000 EU citizens have joined ISIS in Syria or Iraq.[9] Member states reached a preliminary consensus on the Syrian civil war, arguing that Bashar al-Assad needed to leave the Syrian government.[10] This occurred despite earlier EU cooperation with the Assad regime, including on trade matters. Nonetheless, the EU was then quick to put in place sanctions against Syria in line with other international actors. This included prohibition on the use of armaments and dual use items and the freezing of assets.[11]

Nonetheless, the EU is divided over military action in Syria, and only some EU member states partake in the international coalition against ISIS despite the triggering of the organization's mutual assistance clause after the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.[12]

Despite these differences, the EU has been able to define some guidelines for its policy towards the Middle East in its recent foreign policy strategy document in June 2016. Accordingly, the document states that it will aim to cooperate with Maghreb and North African countries on a number of practical matters, including the fight against terrorism, the management of migration, and the establishment of dialogue formats for on-going regional conflicts. Additionally, it will continue to cooperate with Turkey, including negotiations for eventual accession to the EU, continue its cooperation programs with the Gulf Cooperation Council and open up to Iran in several steps.[13] The latter is particularly relevant as the EU participated as an actor in the Iran talks and there are tremendous business opportunities for the EU in the country.[14]

Sources of leverage

The EU's sources of leverage depend two factors: one, its capacity to act under powers that have been delegated to the organization by its member states; two, the capacity of its member states to act independently as largely sovereign states. In the latter context, it is mainly the EU's larger member states that can maintain a voice and position of their own on the international stage. The influence of smaller member states is increased through action in the context of the European Union.

Two of the EU's main sources of leverage are the capacity to grant access to the EU market and the development assistance that the organization provides. The EU has aimed to combine both in its policy towards the region via its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). While the ENP aims to disburse important amounts of funding in the region, the instability of many governments and actors in the

region has made it difficult for the EU to distribute funds in the wake of the Arab spring.[15] Nonetheless, the EU has allocated an additional €500 million in response to the Syrian crisis and €1,800 million to tackle illegal migration from Africa.[16]

Other aspects of the EU's policy towards the Middle East have changed very little due to internal EU divisions on whether to promote democracy in the region or to prioritize short-term stability.[17] The refugee deal with Turkey mentioned above is an example of this.

One of the main foreign policy tools of the EU is the possibility for establishing sanctions. The EU was remarkably quick to establish an initial set of sanctions against Syria once the civil war had broken out, despite a requirement for member state unanimity on the issue. While the EU's sanctions against Syria have varied over time,[18] they include export bans for armaments and related goods that can be used for repressive purposes, import bans on certain kinds of Syrian exports, and the restriction of trade with the country overall. Primarily, there was a blanket ban on such trade with Syria. The sanctions were later modified to distinguish between the Syrian government and certain opposition groups.[19] In addition, certain sanctions were imposed against members of the Syrian regime, such as freezing assets and introducing travel bans for members of Assad's government.

There are also various sanctions in place on other countries in the region including Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and a set of sanctions targeted at terrorist organizations.[20] While some of these target the countries' governments directly, others are aimed at groups or entities operating within them. The leaders of some EU states proposed additional sanctions on Russia after the autumn Aleppo 2016 bombings. The EU failed to reach unanimity on this issue.[21]

The EU also has the capacity to initiate diplomatic talks given the combined importance of its member states. The EU maintains a de facto foreign ministry headed by the High Representative for the EU's Foreign Policy Federica Mogherini in the European External Action Service. For instance, the EU was represented at the Iran nuclear talks in addition to some of its most relevant member states. Through its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) the EU can also serve as the anchor for small- to medium-scale military and civilian operations staffed by personnel seconded from its member states. Nonetheless, the institutional setup makes it difficult to utilize this policy fully.

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The EU's political system is very dense, incredibly complex and hard to decipher from an outside perspective. Despite attempts to streamline foreign policy action with the Treaty of Lisbon, the reforms have had the opposite effect in practice.[22] Its many internal checks and balances and possibilities to veto or block decisions make it a relatively inert political actor. There are several formal European Union actors that have an influence over its stance towards the Middle East. Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council (the regular assembly of EU heads of state and government) is responsible for leading high-level meetings and fostering compromise on the most important issues facing the EU. Jean-Claude Juncker, the head of the European Commission, disposes of important powers in the EU's legislative processes and administering its budget. The European Parliament is separate from those of the EU's member states. Its role it is to approve and influence legislation of the European Union. Even though its role in foreign affairs is more limited than that of other actors, it can still act as a powerful voice in the EU's public discourse.

The EU High Representative for its Foreign and Security policy, currently held by Federica Mogherini, also disposes of a de facto foreign minister with an attached diplomatic service, the European External Action Service. Magherini is perhaps the most visible face of the European Union when it comes to the daily practice of the EU's foreign policy. Nonetheless, the EU's 28 member states each also have their own foreign ministries and conduct foreign policies that are partially separate from that of the European Union. In consequence, when it comes to important decisions it is critical that EU heads of state and government take the lead and act as the face of European Union foreign policy.

Most EU action in the Middle East requires unanimous decision-making among the EU's 28 member states per EU decision-making processes. Furthermore, decisions then need to be initiated by the European Commission and require a vote in the European Parliament, rendering decision-making even more complex. For example, the initiation of EU-led civilian or military missions under the CSDP requires unanimity at first to formally launch an operation. It is then up to individual member states to make personnel and equipment available under differing national provisions which sometimes require a vote in the national parliament.

Consequently, the possibility for the EU to take action in the Middle East is heavily dependent on the positions of its composite member states - all of which retain the ability to act individually outside of the EU context. The positions of three of the EU's largest member states (France, Germany, and the UK – for now) are discussed in the following sections. It is relevant to note that the crucial relationship between France and Germany for EU matters has been strained over a mutual belief that the other has not shown enough solidarity over refugee and security measures respectively.[23]

One of the main dividing lines over the EU's Middle East policy is individual member states' willingness to take in refugees from the region. While Germany and Sweden were initially very welcoming, Denmark and the entirety of Central and Eastern Europe did not want to become host states.[24]

Similarly, member states disagreed on whether to intervene in the Syrian conflict militarily, with states such as Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the UK participating in coalition-led airstrikes from the outset and others abstaining from direct and sometimes even indirect participation.[25] Initially, EU member states were even divided on whether to impose sanctions on Assad's regime.[26] Most recently, EU internal divisions over the conflict can be seen in the EU's inability to impose further sanctions on Russia.[27]

External conflicts and network of relationships

The EU maintains some forms of economic and technical relationship with most states in the region. This is due to its European Neighborhood Policy and aid programs to the region. These are defined by Association Agreements and 'Action Plans' with actors such as Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. Additionally, the 'Union for the Mediterranean' and regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council provide institutionalized forums for political dialogue and policy initiatives.[28]

The EU's attempts to externalize the management of migration have meant that it now maintains closer ties with Morocco and Turkey, despite the fact that the power balance has shifted in their favor over migratory issues.[29] The best example of such modified ties is the EU's refugee deal with Turkey, which makes the EU heavily dependent on cooperation from Turkey and which, in turn, could result in the EU's agreement to provide €8 million in funding and important political concessions.[30]

Nonetheless, the EU's relations with the region remain mostly an aggregate of the sum of its member states positions, and it is thus more relevant to consider the positions of its most relevant member states as is done in later sections.

Potential negotiation moves

In practice, there is very little that the EU can do. This is due to its institutional limitations and the internal divisions of its member states".[31]

While it has a robust sanctions regime in place against Syria, any modification of the existing sanctions require unanimity among the EU's 28 member states. The case of the failed sanctions over Russia's intervention in Aleppo demonstrates how difficult it is to reach a consensual position. Decision-making requirements are relatively less strict for the disbursement of development aid under the EU's decision-making rules, but problems of disbursement capacity will likely remain acute.

The EU could theoretically serve as a host for military or civilian operations of various kinds in the region, but its current internal divisions and primary occupation with issues such as the management of its migration policy and the exit of the UK from the organization make this scenario unlikely.

EU's main role is thus likely going to be that of a discussion forum for its member states on their policies towards the Middle East. It could then act as a multiplier for diplomatic initiatives that are consensual among its members, such as renewed initiatives for Syrian peace talks or international donor conferences on Syria. Furthermore, the EU has stressed its interest in serving as a mediator for renewed talks between Israel and the Palestinian authority, providing talks with practical and financial support.[32]

France: Economic Crisis, Force Projection, and a History of Colonialism

Identity, conflict narratives, threat perception

France is one of the major economies of the European Union and one of its largest member states, with a population of over 66 million. Together with Germany, it has been a driver of European integration and holds considerable global influence through its seat in the United Nations Security Council. Consequently, France has maintained a military that is capable of force projection outside of Europe and at 1.78% has the sixth highest defense expenditures of all NATO states as a percentage of GDP.[33]

France has been directly impacted by the conflict in the Middle East in numerous ways, particularly through terrorist attacks on its soil by Islamist groups. Recent notable attacks include the January 2015 attacks on the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, the subsequent attack on a Jewish supermarket, the November 2015 attacks on numerous sites in Paris, including the Bataclan concert hall, and the July 2016 attack on national day celebrations in the city of Nice. These attacks led former French president François Hollande to declare "war" on terrorism.[34] In consequence, the country has come to be more active in the Middle East conflict. Thus, the domestic and international fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups is a priority for France.[35] The country has also been one of the most outspoken critics of Bashar al-Assad's government.[36]

While France has not taken in nearly as many refugees as neighboring Germany, the country is nonetheless home to a large population of first, second and third generation migrants, particularly from Northern Africa.[37] This is partly the result of France's long history of colonialism which saw large parts of Africa and Lebanon and Syria belong to its colonial empire at certain points in time. While the country defines itself as upholding universal republican values, such as human rights and the separation of church and state, political rhetoric against foreigners and Muslims has hardened in France in recent years.[38]

Aside from terrorism, recent public discourse in France has been dominated by France's economic crisis which has caused the country's economy to stagnate and unemployment rise to about 10%. This has led to an imbalance compared to Germany, its most significant partner in the EU and neighbor. Germany's economy is stable and growing. Politically speaking, this contributed to former French President François Hollande's approval ratings tumbling to 4%[39] and his decision not to seek reelection. In parallel, the far right populist party Front National under leader Marine Le Pen saw a popular support surge and Le Pen reached the second round of the country's 2017 presidential elections, but eventually lost to President Macron.

France has also maintained close ties to most countries in the Middle East, despite its colonial past. It supported the pre-Arab-spring regimes in countries like Tunisia and Libya before radically altering its position.[40] Unlike other European countries, like Germany,

the country also has a rich history of making use of its armed forces abroad. Together with the United Kingdom, France led the military campaign against Libya. Since 2012 it has also been the driving force against Islamist insurgents first in Northern Mali, and then in the Sahel region.[41]

Sources of leverage

As one of two European countries with a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, France holds significant diplomatic clout and can advance or veto legally binding international initiatives to resolve the Middle East conflict. Its membership in both NATO and the European Union further increase its voice on the world stage and provide it with an additional toolset to advance its interests. France's large diplomatic network in the Middle East and the close ties to many of the countries which were formerly part of its colonial empire (such as Morocco and Tunisia) further increase the country's understanding of and clout in the region.

In the realm of diplomacy, France was a party to the negotiations for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran's nuclear program and it has recently undertaken unsuccessful bilateral attempts to renew the Israel-Palestine peace process.[42] France also recently increased its diplomatic ties to the states in the Persian Gulf,[43] where France maintains branches of some of its cultural and higher education institutions, serves as a major provider of armaments, and maintains a military presence.

Together with the United Kingdom, France is the major military power of the European Union, maintains a nuclear deterrent and operates an aircraft carrier. Furthermore, the country has two permanent military bases in Abu Dhabi and Djibouti, with further troops permanently based in Northern Africa.[44] Unlike the militaries of other European states, France's policy of regular military deployments also means that its armed forces are well-trained and have recent combat experience.

Nonetheless, France's military is heavily overstretched due to its various ongoing international and domestic security operations. One of the main factors in this is Operation Sentinelle, a domestic policing operation first deployed after the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo and reinforced after the November 2015 attacks. The operation has deployed more than 10,000 troops and is unsustainable in the medium-term.[45] Aside from personnel constraints, the country's military is also underfunded and important parts of France's equipment are coming to an end of their programmed lifespan.[46] The limitation of France's military forces could be seen during the 2011 NATO Libya intervention, when the air force ran out of ammunitions necessary to continue the bombing campaign.[47]

Despite these limitations, France has been one of the most active Western countries in the fight against ISIS. It has participated in bombing campaigns and provided aerial reconnaissance to the broad coalition against ISIS since 2014.[48] Such efforts were further reinforced after each subsequent terrorist attack on French soil. Additionally, the country has made use of its special forces to directly fight jihadists in Syria, Iraq and Libya[49] and continues its security cooperation against jihadists in the Sahel region.[50]

To increase its domestic and international fight against terrorism, France used its leverage with the EU to use a mutual assistance clause under the organization's treaties. After the November 2015 terrorist attacks, the country was the first to invoke the clause under article 42.7 of the EU treaty. This led to a larger involvement of other European Union countries in some of France's ongoing military operations and enabled the country to freely own military assets for the fight against ISIS.[51]

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

French society today is deeply divided as a result of the country's on-going economic crisis and the numerous terrorist attacks that have occurred on its soil. In consequence, the Hollande government was very unpopular and the established political system was being challenged by the populist extreme right wing party Front National in the recent election.

Domestically, the government has aimed to counter the threat of terrorism through numerous repressive measures. They put the country under a state of emergency after the November 2015 terrorist attacks, increased police powers, and limited civil liberties.[52] While the government also discussed some harsher measures, including the possibility to revoke French citizenship, efforts have ultimately failed and only divided the government further.

The terrorist attacks have also led to a further hardening of the rhetoric against Muslims as most political parties feel that France's way of dealing with diversity in society has failed. Despite an official prohibition on the gathering of data on religious affiliation under the country's constitution, it is estimated that the country is home to the largest Jewish population in Europe and the largest Muslim population, which is estimated at 7-9% and growing.[53] The constitutionally mandated absence of policies meant to facilitate and foster integration has contributed to portions of 2nd and 3rd generation migrants having no or very few job perspectives, which is made worse by the country's high unemployment rate. Ethnic and religious tensions have thus become more widespread in France. Furthermore, among France's Jewish community a feeling of insecurity has contributed to a steady rise of Jewish emigration from France since 2012.[54]

Despite these internal political tensions, France's foreign policy remains largely unchallenged. A political tradition gives the country's president important executive prerogatives.[55] There is a wide-spread political consensus that French foreign policy ought to be activist and make use of all capacities available. The only true challenge arose from the Front National's contender for presidency, Marine Le Pen, who heavily criticized the country's Syria and Russia policy. For instance, she has blamed the rise of ISIS on France's and the EU's hardline stance against Assad's government in Syria and wanted to cooperate more closely with Russian and Syrian government attempts to fight ISIS and rebel groups.[56] Le Pen lost the election by a wide margin.

External conflicts and network of relationships

France has been one of the most outspoken critics of the Assad regime in Syria and has supported moderate rebel groups from early on.[57] Nonetheless, the country has also recognized from the beginning that concentrating on toppling Assad could prove counterproductive, with an increase in the threat posed by ISIS.[58] Thus, tackling the threat posed by ISIS has come to be the country's priority and France has concentrated its military efforts against ISIS on Iraqi soil.[59] While ties to Iran are somewhat difficult given the country's role in the Syrian civil war, France is mainly interested in improving ties over economic concerns.

The country continues to maintain good relations with most governments in the region, particularly those in Northern Africa given its security cooperation with them to fight Islamists in the region.[60] Nonetheless, the country has not yet reestablished ties as close as those that it maintained with regimes that were replaced since the Arab spring.

France's crucial working relationship with Germany has been somewhat strained due to differing positions over the EU's ongoing crisis.[61] Externally speaking, France's ties to Russia have worsened significantly since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict and the repeatedly failed Franco-German attempts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine.

Potential negotiation moves

France's main lever for influence in the Middle East conflict will remain its diplomatic position and its existing military presence in the region. It will be the only EU member state that holds a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council after the UK leaves the organization. Consequently, the country can influence the formulation on legally binding resolutions to resolve the conflict and will operate as the EU's de facto voice in this context. France has attempted to influence developments in the region through bilateral diplomatic channels in the past, such as attempting to relaunch the Israel-Palestine peace process, but its recent failure in this context makes this unlikely. The country convened another Middle East Peace Conference in January 2017.[62]

While France's military participation in the coalition against ISIS and its security cooperation with Northern African countries remains a main source for France's influence in the region, its military overstretch makes an intensification of its role unlikely. It remains a possibility that the country is able to convince EU allies to take over some of its military responsibilities elsewhere so as to liberate military capacities for its activity in the region.

Similarly, while the country is an important donor of development and EU funding in the region, its protracted economic crisis gives it little room to increase its role through monetary means. France is also an important provider of armaments to the region and the Gulf monarchies in particular, but economic considerations make any kind of increase in exports unlikely.

France's strongest card to influence policy in the region remains its membership of NATO and of the EU. It is in this context that it can influence sanctions policy and EU development funding towards the region, as well as convince EU allies to step up their efforts in the region.

Germany: Quiet Leader, Reluctant Fighter

Identity, conflict narratives, threat perception

Germany is the European Union's largest member state, with a population of over 80 million, and the largest economy, the success of which depends heavily on international trade. While the country's size and position would make it a natural leader in international politics, its history has contributed to it being more reluctant to have an active foreign policy akin to that of France or the United Kingdom. Given the traumas of World War II and a lengthy division of the country, it has been particularly reluctant to make use of its armed forces abroad and has been a champion of European Union integration.

Though not a direct party or directly affected by the ongoing instability in the Middle East, Germany has nonetheless been vocal in its stance towards the crises affecting the region. In 2003 it was a prominent opponent of the US-led invasion of Iraq. They have also been supportive of the developments of the Arab Spring, although it has not come to be actively involved in attempts to topple Muammar Gaddafi's government in Libya unlike France and the United Kingdom. As a non-permanent member, Germany even abstained from the United Nations Security Council resolution which enabled the airstrikes against the regime.[63] Concerning Syria, Germany has been vocal in blaming the Syrian government for unleashing the civil war, and has repeatedly called for Bashar al-Assad to step aside. Nonetheless, Germany's government has not excluded direct talks with the Syrian government to resolve the conflict.[64]

Given its history, Germany has been a close ally of Israel and has even defined serving as the guarantor of the security of the state of Israel as one of its core national interests.[65] In doing so, it has also been a strong supporter of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. It has thus supported EU activity in this realm and criticized Israel when necessary, but has always stopped short of supporting moves that would see Palestine being recognized as an independent country before a settlement between the parties had been reached.[66] The country was also one of the EU member states that were strongly supportive of, and independently represented at, the talks for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran's nuclear program. This is closely related to important German economic interests in the country.[67]

While traditionally not a country of large-scale immigration, Germany hosts nearly 3 million residents of Turkish heritage.[68] The country has been heavily affected by recent migration movements. Between January 2015 and October 2016 more than 1.1 million

requests for asylum were filed, with over half in 2016 from countries in the Middle East.[69] At first the country struggled to manage this influx in an organized manner. By now attention has turned away from providing for immediate accommodation and necessities to determining legal status and asylum. Consequently, the management of migration from the Middle East has come to be a political priority for Germany. While the numbers of asylum seekers from Turkey itself after the coup attempt are still relatively limited, there has nonetheless been a significant uptick,[70] and these cases are highly sensitive politically due to the EU's refugee deal with the country.

While Germany has so far been affected less by ISIS or ISIS-inspired attacks than France, the December 2016 Berlin Christmas market attack confirmed the country's officials' belief that it remains a top target. A number of other small-scale incidents and foiled attack attempts have demonstrated the risk to the country.[71] This issue is directly linked to the influx of refugees. Authorities fear that ISIS operatives may have entered the country in disguise, or some refugees may simply be vulnerable to ISIS' rhetoric. It is also believed that a sizeable number of German citizens have joined ISIS locally and it is feared that they could organize or commit terrorist acts on German soil.[72]

Sources of leverage

While Germany is an important (regional) power in its own right, the country's leverage is considerably increased due to its membership in NATO and de facto leadership of the European Union. In both contexts decisions having to do with foreign, security and defense policy require Germany's consent and it is here that Germany can help shape decisions taken by a large portion of the Western world. Germany is also a member of the G8 and G20 formats.

Germany is also an independent, diplomatic actor that maintains contact with most parties in the Middle East and can thus serve as an intermediary between opposing factions. For instance, in the past Germany could broker deals on prisoner exchanges between Hezbollah and Israel.[73] It is also regarded more neutral than other Western countries due to it not having participated in the 2003 Iraq invasion. Its diplomatic stance gave it a seat at the negotiation table for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran's nuclear program.

In addition to its contributions to EU development funding, the country remains an important bilateral donor of development aid to the region. While its programs in Syria have been halted since 2011 (in line with EU policy), Germany maintains projects in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq or Yemen.[74] It also directly funds projects for those affected by the Syria crisis. It has spent close to 1.5 billion euros since 2015, making it the third largest donor overall.

Germany is the EU's 3rd largest military power by military personnel and spending.[75] However, the country is generally reluctant to make active use of its armed forces given its history. The careful consideration of German military involvement is ensured by a requirement for parliamentary consent ahead of German military operations abroad. Nonetheless, it has come to be directly involved in the conflict militarily through the intermediaries of its NATO and European Union membership. This involvement is indicative of a change in the country's attitude towards military engagement abroad as the international legal basis for its military involvement in the conflicts in the Middle East is weaker than the standard that the country has traditionally applied.[76]

The country participated in a NATO-led operation until early 2016 to protect Turkey's territory and airspace from missile launches in Northern Syria through the provision of a Patriot surface-to-air missile system.[77] Since then, the country has taken part in the international 'Inherent Resolve' operation in Syria through the provision of aerial and naval reconnaissance, aerial refueling and the naval protection of France's aircraft carrier in the operational theatre.[78] Germany is also directly involved in anti-ISIS operations in Iraq, providing material, including armaments and military training to both the Central Government and that of the Kurdish autonomous areas in Erbil. Germany has also been active in relieving France of some of its commitments in Mali by taking the lead of the European Union training mission (EUTM) from mid-2015 to mid-2016. In the context of the refugee crisis the country also participates in NATO-led naval reconnaissance operates in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean to monitor human smuggling operations.

Germany is also an important armaments exporter to the Middle East. These exports go to countries deemed largely unproblematic by the Germany government and public, such as Israel, Kuwait and Qatar, but also include Saudi Arabia.[79] In addition to these direct exports, the country also maintains long-standing and close military and armaments cooperation with Israel.[80] Germany's intelligence agencies are also considered to have a particularly dense and effective network in the Middle East. Its main intelligence agency, the Federal Intelligence Agency (BND in German) upholds contacts to most intelligence agencies in the region, including those of the Syrian government.[81]

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The country's government and most of the established political class is largely aligned in their views on the conflicts in the Middle East. However, the government's reaction to the refugee crisis of 2015 has caused some discord between the governing parties, with more conservative forces pushing for a more restrictive course. The country's parliamentary opposition, in turn, has criticized the government over its cooperation with Turkey despite the developments in the country after the failed military coup of July 2016.

The government's relatively welcoming attitude towards asylum-seekers has nonetheless fueled support for the populist right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is now represented in 10 of 16 state legislatures, and is currently projected to be able to enter Germany's national parliament in the upcoming election in the fall of 2017. In addition to wanting to close the country's borders for asylum seekers, the party advocates for closer cooperation with the Russian and Syrian governments in the fight against ISIS.[82]

On a societal level, the sizeable population of Turkish origin in Germany also needs to be considered. While not a direct factor

in political considerations, there are numerous demonstrations supporting the Turkish government or the Kurdish cause on a regular basis.[83] Lastly, the influx of large numbers of asylum seekers since the summer of 2015 has proven to be an immediate challenge for authorities and the cohesion of society alike. Concerns as to their accommodation and integration have eased somewhat with better administrative procedures and a reduction in current migration levels, but there has nonetheless been a record number of hate crimes against migrants since then.[84]

External conflicts and network of relationships

Overall, Germany's behavior in the Middle East and its network of relationships has remained relatively stable over time. Its NATO and European Union membership provide the anchor for most of its international activity. Its international stance is defined both by the Atlanticism of its dominating political classes and a very close cooperation with France. While this set-up has remained constant for a long period, it is feared that Britain's decision to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump in the United States could upset the balance of Germany's international position. Consequently, one of the primary goals of the country is to ensure the continued existence and cohesion of the European Union and NATO.[85] While it is largely regarded in these contexts as a dependable ally, it has been criticized for not doing enough internationally given its economic and political relevance.

While its position towards the Middle East has remained constant over time, emphasizing that the regions' governments need to respect the human rights of its inhabitants, Germany's ambitions have changed somewhat recently given the influx of migrants from the Middle East into its territory. As the champion of the migration deal with Turkey the country has had to take an ambivalent stance towards the country in the aftermath of the attempted military coup.[86]

Russia's relations with the country also need to be considered, given Russia's direct involvement in Syria's civil war. So far the relationship have been dominated by concerns relating to the civil war in Eastern Ukraine and Russia's occupation of Crimea. While Germany has been a champion of EU sanctions against the country,[87] it has also led diplomatic attempts with France to negotiate a settlement between Russia and the Ukrainian government.

Potential negotiation moves

While its membership in the European Union and NATO provide the country with increased leverage, these also limit the country's ability for autonomous action. First and foremost, German negotiation activity is likely going to consist in shaping decisions taken within the EU and NATO. Its stance within the European Union is heavily influenced by its desire to ensure its continued existence and a close cooperation with France now that the United Kingdom has taken the decision to leave the bloc. In contrast, German activity within NATO is shaped by the country's Atlanticist tendencies combined with its continued reluctance to make active use of its (under-funded and relatively ill-equipped) armed forces.[88]

German negotiation moves involving military involvement in the region are constrained by the fact that its military is already overstretched, that any change of military activity requires a parliamentary mandate, and that the German population has reservations against military adventurism. If anything, relatively small adjustments to its existing activity appear most likely. Germany could take over military responsibilities from countries like France in relatively low-risk scenarios so as to free up French resources to fight ISIS. It could also further increase its training programs for Kurdish militia and the shipments of armaments provided to them.

Germany has a lot of room to maneuver in the realm of soft power, be it diplomatic moves or the disbursement of development aid. Given the country's concerns over migration flows, a substantial increase in its funding for people who have been displaced within the Middle East would be a way to discourage further migration to the country. In the context of the EU it could drive a process that would alter existing sanctions.

Considering the Iranian nuclear agreement, the economic importance of Germany provides it with the capacity to adjust its economic opening to Iran in line with progress on the conditions of the deal itself. Similarly, the country's military exports to the region and the aid to Israel provide it with the direct ability to influence decision-making in the countries concerned.

The United Kingdom: Global Ambition, Domestic Cleavages

Identity, conflict narratives, threat perception

The United Kingdom is currently the European Union's third largest state in terms of population, with over 65,000,000 inhabitants,[89] and second largest economy.[90] However, the UK voted to leave the EU in a popular referendum on 23 June 2016, referred to as "Brexit". As a result, the UK remains primarily focused on negotiations of future economic and political relationships with the EU, which may continue until 2019. The UK has been an active player in world politics, first through its empire, then as a founding member of the rules-based international order,[91] which it remains committed to upholding.[92] In addition to membership in NATO and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the UK wields global influence through longstanding cultural and political relationships, with the experience of centuries of diplomacy and crisis management.

While not a direct party in the ongoing instability in the Middle East, the UK has security, trade, and historical interests in the region. Historically the UK has been involved in the Middle East in ways that have shaped the ongoing conflicts. British involvement in

in the region has been driven by trade, and these motivations are unlikely to change, as foreign trade and finance will continue to serve as key sources of wealth in a post-Brexit world.[93]

The vital national interests of the UK include protecting the people, territory, economic security, infrastructure, and way of life of the UK,[94] against threats from terrorism, decay of international institution, financial crises, and resource insecurity. The UK seeks to project global influence, invest in alliances and development, and build resilience and stability overseas.[95] The current instability and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East pose indirect threats to the interests of the UK in terms of regional stability and the international order. Additionally, with major attacks in European cities in 2016, the threat of an ISIS attack on European targets remains high.[96] This is a concern for the UK since approximately 800 British nationals have travelled to Syria since the beginning of the conflict and half have returned to the UK.[97]

Sources of Leverage

The UK's leverage is based on its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, its membership in NATO, and its economic investment in the region. Although the UK is losing global influence by leaving the EU, the influence of the UK will remain strong in diplomatic and defense matters through NATO and the UN Security Council.[98]

Brexit may be an opportunity for the UK to strengthen or forge new economic ties and trading relationships,[99] as the economic future with the EU remains uncertain. The Middle East and North Africa region remains important for trade and investment, receiving $18 billion worth of British exports in 2014.[100] In addition, the Suez Canal continues to be important for the UK, as the bridge to emerging markets in Asia.[101] Trade between the UK and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stood at £30 billion in 2015, set to increase with new trade agreement,[102] and over £3 billion of investment in defense spending over the next decade.[103] Additionally, the UK imports 40% of its oil[104] and has significantly increased gas imports from the Gulf.[105]

The UK is also a bilateral donor of development and humanitarian aid. It is committed to meeting the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNI on development.[106] In response to the Syria crisis, the UK has committed £2.3 billion since 2012 to humanitarian aid in Syria and refugees in the region, as well as allocated £46 million to support local capacity and build stability in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.[107]

The UK military remains one of Europe's strongest, with a nuclear force, formidable intelligence service, and strong ties to the US and NATO. The UK is a founding member of the Global Coalition to counter ISIL (ISIS) formed in 2014, and is the second biggest contributor after the US to the military campaign.[108] The UK provides close air support and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activity as well as a military training mission in both Syria and Iraq,[109] and has contributed over 800 troops, and conducted over 300 strikes in Iraq.[110]

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

Conflict over the course of the UK far overshadows the UK's interest in the Middle Eastern conflicts. With terms for the UK's exit from the EU far from settled, British domestic and international politics remain uncertain,[111] and the outcome has widened cleavages in the major political parties, between old versus young, and soured relationships with Scotland, Northern Ireland, and London.[112] While Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron had called for the referendum to quiet turmoil within his party, the immediate fallout included his resignation, and the appointment of Tory Theresa May to the position of Prime Minister.[113]

Domestic political leaders remain split between opposing versions of the UK's international role. Prime Minister May has called for further engaging with the region,[114] while opposition Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for UK withdrawal from NATO and opposes all military intervention unless explicitly approved by the UN.[115] Nigel Farage, the leader of the nationalistic right-wing UK Independence Group has gained international recognition and was the first foreign political leader to meet with US President Elect Donald Trump.[116] The conflict between the parties could constrain the Prime Minister's ability to deploy military options, as there is a new constitutional convention that Parliament can block the executive's decision to go to war. After the precedents set by Parliament debating and voting over actions in Iraq, Libya and Syria, the last of which took place in August 2013, a new parliamentary prerogative has developed which may limit the UK's ability to leverage its hard power.[117] Parliament will now "expect the right to vote on proposals to deploy the armed forces overseas, and that the legitimacy of military action will depend on the government winning such a vote."[118] With contentious domestic politics and deep cleavages between parties, it remains unclear if a post-Brexit UK will turn to isolationism, or seek to demonstrate that it is still a force in the world, and double down on its ties to the region, thus investing in its ability to influence events.[119]

External conflicts and network of relationships

The UK has long standing cultural affinities and relationships with many countries in the Middle East, yet may be hesitant to intervene after international and domestic backlashes against, the outcome of the intervention in Libya, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Actors in the Middle East remain skeptical of the UK as an impartial actor, given the UK's history of imperialism and intervention.

The UK played a dominate role in the Middle East for much of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Through protectorates, mandates, and treaties, the British Empire controlled or influenced modern-day Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Israel, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Jordan, and the UAE. The British Empire sought markets for trade, control of petroleum

industries, and control of global trade routes, especially the route to India through the Suez Canal. The UK played a role determining the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after WWI, including issuing the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. In the face of ongoing conflict, the UK relinquished the mandate for Palestine in 1947 to the UN, and has continued to support a negotiated two-state solution.[120]

Relations between the British Empire and Iran date back to the 1590s, however Iranians distrust the UK for its long-term monopoly of the petroleum industry, and political interventions, most notably their role in coups in 1921 and 1953. The UK withdrew from Iran in 1971, then cut off diplomatic ties after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, resuming diplomatic relations in 2014. With the US, France, China, Russia and Germany, the UK participated in the P5+1 negotiations, which led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.[121] The UK has stated its intent to support the continued implementation of the deal, even in the face of potential US opposition.[122]

After WWI, the UK united three disparate ethnic and religious regions of the Ottoman Empire into the mandate of Iraq, which created conditions for future unrest. The UK maintained a military presence in Iraq from 1930 until the founding of the Republic of Iraq in 1958. With US leadership, the UK then participated in the Gulf War of 1990, and played a key role in the lead up to 2003 invasion of Iraq,[123] as well as participating in the resulting military operation as part of the "Coalition of the willing". The UK remains engaged in Iraq, as part of the global coalition to defeat ISIL.[124]

The UK's interest in Afghanistan stemmed from protecting India from Russian influence in the 19th century. In total, UK has been involved in four major conflicts, the conquest of Afghanistan in the First Anglo-Afghan War 1839–42, followed by wars in 1878–81 and 1919, and participated in the ongoing conflict from 2001-15. After 9/11, the UK joined the US in launching Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, and continued to participated in the UN and NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) through 13 years of conflict against a Taliban insurgency and unrest. The UK officially commemorated the end of its role in the Afghan war in March 2015,[125] having suffered 453 military and civilian casualties over the course of the conflict.[126]

In a recent negative example of interventions actions in the region, the U.K. and France carried out airstrikes in Libya in 2011 that led to the downfall of dictator Muammar Gadhafi in support of the Arab Spring movement, but the ensuing power vacuum led to political and economic collapse, inter-tribal warfare, a humanitarian and migrant crisis and the growth of Islamic State in North Africa[127], and heavy criticism domestically and internationally.

Potential negotiation moves

The UK's approach to the Middle East will be limited by domestic concerns, especially in the wake of the uncertain surrounding the UK's exit from the EU. Any potential moves will be considered first by their impact on security and commercial interests, and then from a desire to define a new role in international politics, and to strengthen international institutions to preserve UK influence. Thus, any UK negotiation action will take place through its roles in NATO and the UN Security Council.

In Syria, the UK supports a Syrian-led political settlement based on a transition away from the Assad regime, beginning with a cessation of hostilities.[128] UK negotiation moves regarding its military involvement in the region are constrained by its reliance on outside support for military operations,[129] the domestic challenges of parliamentary prerogative, and the demands of international law. The UK still faces questions about the legality of its earlier interventions in the Middle East, and will not commit to further action in Syria if the international legal basis for action is not present through invitation or UN Security Council authorization.[130]

The UK is more likely to utilize negotiation moves through soft power, as the UK will likely remain one of the leading development actors in the region, and is committed to working through the UN Security Council to sanction actors which violation international law.[131]

In the conflict between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the UK remains committed to a negotiated two state solution,[132] by binding practical, concrete improvements on the ground to de-escalate the conflict and drive forward political progress.[133] The UK's moves will continue in the vein of the December 2016 UN resolution condemning Israel for violating international law with its policy of building settlements on occupied Palestinian territory.[134]

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IX. Holy See

**THE OLDEST DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION:
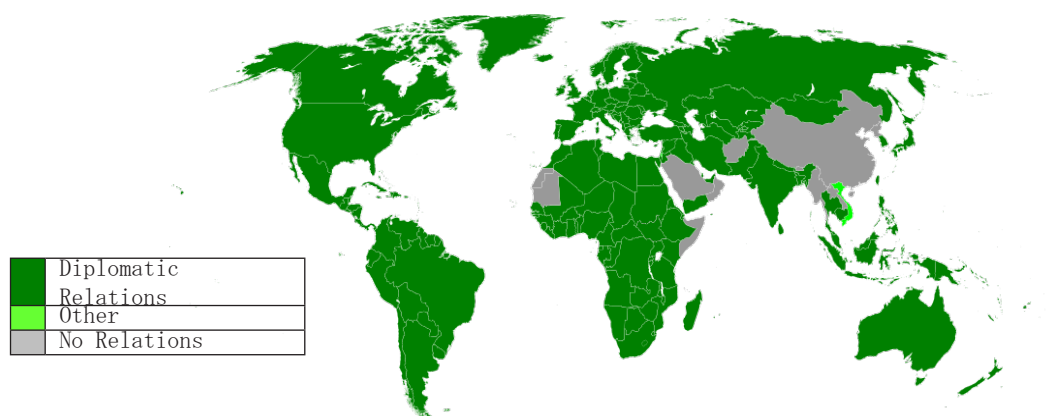HOLY SEE DIPLOMACY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST**

*"The Holy See believes that peace processes do not depend solely on formal negotiations, no matter how indispensable these may be. **As a cradle of great civilizations and the birthplace of the three main monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Middle East has the cultural, intellectual and religious resources that make it a fertile ground for civil society and track II diplomacy, including faith-based "informal diplomacy", to play their role in promoting the values of encounter and mutual acceptance**, thereby equipping all citizens to become active protagonists in peacemaking and peacebuilding in the region."[1]*

-Archbishop Bernardito Auza
Holy See Permanent Observer to the United Nations July 12, 2016, UN Security Council

Considered the oldest diplomatic corps in the world, the Holy See's role in global affairs and diplomacy is arguably larger today than it has ever been since its first diplomatic envoy in the 1500's. In the past century, the Holy See has developed diplomatic relationships with 177 countries, close to 100 of these developed under Pope John Paul II between 1978 and 2005. These relationships recognize the formal, and yet ambiguous status, of the Pope as both the spiritual and temporal leader of the world's one billion Catholics. The Pope is both the head of the Holy See and the monarch of the Vatican. The diplomatic authority of the Holy See is not, as is commonly mistaken, dependent on the sovereign nature of Vatican City. The territorial aspects of the Holy See's power were an evolution until codified in the 1929 Lateran Treaty with Italy which granted the Church territorial sovereignty in the form of Vatican City State.[2] This offered the Church authority via Westphalian political norms; however, the Holy See, as the official diplomatic envoy of the Pope, is not dependent on this territory. The legal status of the Holy See and Vatican are an ongoing point of contention in international law with some considering this as an "atypical status in international relations"[3] while others argue the Vatican and the Holy See do not qualify for statehood or their current diplomacy status.[4] This debate is outside the scope of this paper but important to understand as a lens by which analysts commonly view the actions of the Holy See.

Unlike other corps, the diplomats of the Holy See are Catholic priests who have been trained at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome. They are subsequently stationed throughout the world at the equivalent of Holy See Embassies, called Apostolic Nunciatures. Here they act as both the papal representative to the host government and a papal link to the Catholic churches of the host country. The diplomats report to the Holy See's overarching administrative body, the Secretariat of State, which is located in Vatican City. In addition to their state bilateral relations, the Holy See has held permanent observer status at the United Nations since 1964.

[5]

The Holy See has diplomatic relations with all but two states in the Middle East, Oman and Saudi Arabia.[6] Its current diplomatic relationships in the Middle East are: Bahrain (2000), Iran (1954), Iraq (1966), Israel (1993), Jordan (1994), Kuwait (1969), Lebanon (1947), Qatar (2002), Syria (1946), Turkey (1868), UAE (2007), Yemen (1998) and Palestine (2016). The Holy See has had relations with Palestine since before 1948 and, as a proponent of the two state solution, recognized Palestine as a state in 2013 in lieu of UN formalization. The Holy See completed their diplomatic treaty with the State of Palestine in 2015, taking effect in 2016.

Identity, Conflict Narratives & Threat Perceptions

Over the past 1700 years the Catholic Church has held twenty-one different councils in which the Pope has gathered Catholic Bishops, Patriarchs, heads of religious orders and other relevant theologians to discuss articles of the Catholic faith and define the church's response to current challenges and cultural changes.[7] The first council, "Council of Nicea," was held in modern day Turkey in the year 325. It produced the codification of Christian belief and defined the course of the young Christian church. The twenty councils since have each played a similar role for the Catholic Church: refine the faith and define the Church's reaction to cultural and political changes around them. The most recent council of the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), likewise played such a role. From 1962-1965, thousands of Bishops, theologians, observers, religious, and lay people gathered in Rome to address the Church's role and response to a post WWII world. Vatican II brought numerous changes to the Church, most notably an opening up to ecumenism and interfaith relationships. Vatican II demarcated the Church's mission to engage with the contemporary world, a world which had recently been ripped apart by wars and was facing massive upheaval in the rejection of colonization, the push for democracy, and the pluralization of religious practice.

Through the documents of Vatican II, the Church opened the door for interreligious dialogue and affirmed its diplomatic mission for the future. *Mater in Magistra* (1971), *Pacem in Terris* (1963) and Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) are a few of the relevant documents that defined the aims of Vatican diplomacy to be the "preservation of the faith" and "the fostering of peace with the consolidation of Justice, and the Church's aim to act as a moral guide on issues of social justice, hunger, and the arms race."[8]

In the Middle East, the realm of faith and politics are interlinked. While Judaism and Islam are both "religion and nationalism,"[9] Christianity represents only a faith of civilians within these nations. As Vatican II opened the Catholic Church to interreligious dialogue, the Holy See concurrently expanded the scope of its diplomatic efforts. *Nostra Aetate: The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (1965), a document from Vatican II, set a new tone through the following statements on how Catholics should view Judaism and Islam:

(1) "…in her [the Church's] rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."

(2) "The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems…Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom."[10]

The first statement (1) on Christian-Jewish relations was a watershed moment in the warming of its relationship with Judaism, a definitive move to purge anti-Semitism from the Church, and the beginning of formalizing its relationship with Israel. The following statement (2) on Islam also struck a conciliar tone but it recognized the long conflictual history between Christians and Muslims in the region. For a Church which had committed itself at Vatican II to the principles of interreligious understanding and co-existence, it sought to use all avenues of diplomacy to respond to the concrete struggles of Christians in the Middle East. Indeed, diplomacy became the preferred tool to defend the existence of the Church in the Middle East and promote respect of international law where each person had equal rights and freedom of conscience. As such, the Holy See has three main priorities that influence its role and decision making in the Middle East:

1) The Protection of Christians & Maintaining a Christian Presence in "the Holy Land"
2) The Protection of Church Rights & Property
3) The Promotion of Peace

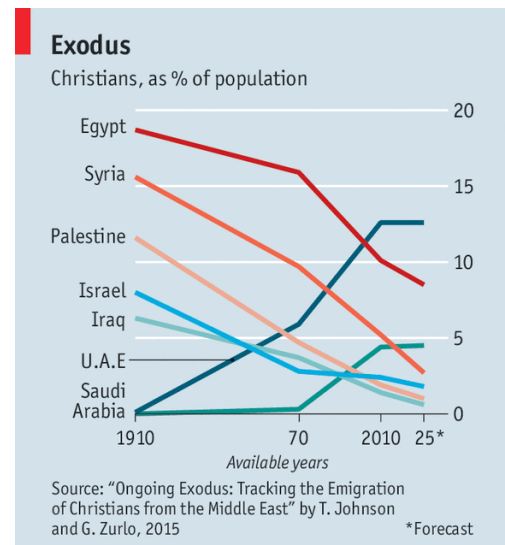*The Protection of Christians & Maintaining a Christian Presence in "the Holy Land"*

The protection of Christians in the Middle East, a longstanding minority population, is the Holy See's first and foremost priority in this region.[11] All actions revolve around this priority and it is a part of every decision made by the Holy See in the Middle East. During the Ottoman Empire, coexistence with the Muslim majority was enabled by their common 'Arab' ethnicity. "The Holy See accepted centuries ago that the continuation of the Christian presence in the Middle East depends on acceptance and recognition of its minority condition and on a search for forms of coexistence with the Muslim and, in Israel, the Jewish majority."[12] While these forms of co-existence have changed with the times, "the Holy See feels that it is much more realistic to think of a modernization that starts out from the principles of the Arab-Muslim culture and is able to combine them with respect for democracy: in all countries where the Christian community cannot but aspire to the role of a minority, given its small numbers, this model (of which Jordan is considered a good example) seems preferable."[13]

"The Holy See has been uneasy for [many] years about the exodus of indigenous Christians. The fear is that the Holy Land will become a museum, with no "living stones" of continuity with the Christian past."[14] To encourage local Christians to persist, the Holy See supports numerous educational and social services across the region.[15] Their allies in this are the Catholic religious communities, local dioceses, and Catholic INGOs such as Catholic Relief Services, CARTIAS and Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA). While focused on providing the support needed to keep Christians in the area, these services have been offered for all residents with a firm commitment to religious coexistence. The Holy See was adamant about such coexistence as seen during the Lebanese civil where they insisted the Maronite Church of Lebanon not create a mini-Christian state.[16] Likewise today, the Holy See is lobbying to keep Christians

in Syria effectively preventing an Islamic state.[17]

A unique feature of the Holy See's commitment to keeping Christians in the Middle East is its refusal to evacuate their own diplomatic missions. The Nuncios (Holy See Ambassadors) are required to stay at their post and remain with their people even during war. The Nuncio in Baghdad during the 2003 US Invasion did not evacuate, nor has the Nuncio in Syria. As one Vatican official was quoted saying, "The Pope leaves his representatives to suffer with the people of the country to which they are accredited."[18] The Holy See is on the ground, well connected through the local Christian network, and can speak from the authority their consistent presence provides.

The Holy See's concern about the "annihilation"[19] of Christians in the Middle East has been well documented by the UN and other human rights observers.[20] This chart (left)[21] from 2015 shows the expected exodus of Christians from the regions' hot spots. The only increase of Christians, seen in UAE and Saudi Arabia, is due to the foreign workers from the heavily Christian Asian Pacific countries.[22] As long time Vatican correspondent John Allen said at a Q&A session with the Council of Foreign Relations when asked about Pope Francis' priorities in the Middle East, "[Pope Francis takes] the survival of Christianity in the Middle East extraordinarily seriously, because after all this is the land of Christ… And I think Pope Francis quite honestly does not want to be the pope on whose watch the Christian presence in the Middle East is extinguished."[23] For a state with few citizens, the persecution of Christians anywhere in the world is the Holy See's most serious security threat. Additionally, as Christians continue to flee the Middle East this greatly lessens their influence on society and the Holy See's claim in the negotiations.

Exodus

Christians, as % of population

Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Iraq, U.A.E, Saudi Arabia

1910 — 70 — 2010 — 25*

Available years

Source: "Ongoing Exodus: Tracking the Emigration of Christians from the Middle East" by T. Johnson and G. Zurlo, 2015

*Forecast

Economist.com

The Protection of Church Rights & Property

The protection of Church rights and property in the Holy Land, particularly in Jerusalem, goes hand in hand with the protection of Christians as these properties protect the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Christian faith and are often local protection points for Christian minority communities. This concern applies to all Church properties as well as those owned by Christian religious communities. It becomes most controversial in the Church's advocacy for shared religious access to the holy places of the Abrahamic religions, particularly in Jerusalem.

The Holy See's diplomatic relationship with Israel is heavily dependent on this priority of protecting Church property and access to holy places. In 1993, the Holy See signed the "Fundamental Agreement" with Israel dealing with the property rights and taxes of the Church which prepared the way for full diplomatic relations the following year. This document is a "commingling of theological and diplomatic issues"[24] as the Holy See negotiated its recognition of Israel in exchange for maintaining protection of their property, allowance for pilgrims, and certain tax standards which were "status quo" policies from the Ottoman era. Not all issues were resolved, however, and there remains outstanding the legal status of the Church's economic and land rights in Israel. Although numerous iterations have been negotiated over the past 23 years to confirm in positive law the Church's rights in Israel, they have not been ratified by Israel's legislative body, the Knesset. This tension is important to understand when viewing all Holy See moves in the region. Recognition of the state of Israel is linked to the Holy See's priorities of protecting Christians, protecting its property and access to the Holy sites, and promoting peace in the region. Likewise, these priorities are seen in a parallel set of treaties with the Palestine Liberation Organization which culminated, against the wishes of the Israelis, in full recognition of Palestine's Statehood in January 2016. This recognition comes as Israel has repeatedly stalled the ratification of their 1993 accord with the Holy See in the Israeli Knesset and thus left the resolution of the Church's legal personhood within Israel in limbo.[25]

The Holy See's agreement with the Palestinian State secures the rights of the Catholic Church in Palestinian territories, including the safeguard of holy sites for all major religions, in exchange for their support of a two state solution[26] of which the Holy See has long supported.[27] This move is a direct push back against Israel's lagged resolution of Church rights and reluctance towards a viable two state solution as perceived from Benjamin Netanyahu claim that no Palestinian State would be established on his watch.[28]

While Church property in Israel and Palestine is especially important due to the high concentration of holy sites in this area, in the rest of the Middle East the priority of property is most often the protection of Churches, schools, hospitals and compounds associated with Catholic diocese and religious groups.

Promotion of Peace

"To the Catholic, true peace is not just the absence of war- as it hardly can be for anyone - unless it is a just peace: a peace that permeates all of society. It requires a just distribution of goods, a just civil life where human rights are respected, and the honest investigation of crimes and atrocities that may have been perpetrated during conflicts. Despite - or indeed because of - its great antiquity, Catholic social teachings remain remarkably relevant to the problems of the modern world."[29]

-Dr. Janne Haaland Matlary, University of Oslo

"Throughout her history the Church has always been committed, both as an institution and through her faithful, to the promotion of justice and peace. We have the responsibility to continue along this path, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ…It will be slow and gradual work, as is in the nature of leaven, but it will certainly be a work that will give a new sense to the course of humanity."
-Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Holy See Secretary of State, 27 October 2004.

Because the Holy See regards itself as both a temporal and spiritual agent, its internal narrative prioritizes a pursuit of peace and justice. In the Middle East this is no different. The Holy See's third priority is to activity promote just resolution of conflict and peace. This is an active priority for the Church and one that makes it an ally to those seeking diplomatic and negotiated peace treaties.

This priority is at the root of the Holy See's modern agenda, much of which is conducted behind the scenes as second track diplomacy. The Holy See has played a crucial role in many peace negotiations: Burundi,[30] Argentina & Chile,[31] Sri Lanka[32] and most recently in Cuba & the US (2015),[33] DRC (2016),[34] Venezuela (2016),[35] and Columbia (2016).[36] Pope Francis has emphasized this call for peace at every opportunity since the beginning of his papacy. This includes in his personnel appointments. In 2016, Pope Francis promoted his Ambassador to Syria, Italian Archbishop Mario Zenari, to the level of Cardinal. A telling break in Holy See protocol[37] as Cardinals are tasked with electing the next Pope. Indeed, Cardinal Zenari sees his promotion as a reflection of Syria's priority to the Holy See beyond the administration of the current Pope. The Holy See has maintained diplomatic relations with Syria consistently during the civil war and by elevating "his ambassador [to Syria] to the dignity of cardinal, (the pope) is giving additional value to this presence and to the diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the crisis."[38] Cardinal Zenari has made strong statements about stopping the Syrian civil war and has maintained a fierce rejection of armed intervention calling it a "miracle" when the 2013 American intervention over Assad's use of chemical weapons was halted.[39] Francis has also insisted on a non-violent resolution to the Syrian civil war and, in December 2016 at the height of the government's siege on Aleppo, sent Cardinal Zenari to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to publically plea for humanitarian corridors.[40] This is consistent with the ethos of Catholic support for non-violence, one that was similarly seen in Pope John Paul II's vocal opposition to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.[41]

II. Sources of Leverage

Unlike other state actors, the Holy See has no economic or military means to leverage,[42] but must instead rely on its convening power and the moral prestige of the pope, as well as the political and communal relationships it has built. The Holy See "is a unique transnational actor [which] develops its diplomacy at the macro level – that is, policy is formulated from a global perspective and reflects the universal character of the Church."[43] In today's world, a primary source of its authority is the adherents to Christianity that recognize the Pope's spiritual authority. The fewer Christians in the Middle East, the smaller the population they claim to represent and the less weight the Holy See will have in future negotiations. Authority and recognition of the Holy See's credentials comes not only from Christians but also from those familiar with the role of the Pope. This includes the large network of graduates from Catholic institutions in the Middle East such as the high schools run by religious and Catholic NGOs[44] as well as university education like Bethlehem University which was a joint establishment between the Vatican and the De La Salle Christian Brothers in the Palestinian' West Bank.

The Holy See's insistence to stay on the ground with the remaining Christians establishes their credentials as a consistent and knowledgeable party, and increases their soft power in the region. Not only does the Nuncio keep permanent residence but he is in daily contact with local priests, religious, and other leaders. As an Economist article reported, "[a] former papal envoy to a war-torn nation tells with pride how the American embassy would send a diplomat each morning to ask him about the war zones, knowing the pope's man would have been fully briefed by local nuns."[45] This strength in consistent and persistent personnel who are connected and well briefed is the key to the Holy See's effectiveness and "unparalleled levels of local knowledge."[46] The Holy See's information flow comes from all corners of each Nuncio's country, traveling via the hierarchy of priest and bishops. This information is a "source about local conditions, seen from the point of view of the inhabitants themselves and not from official presentations."[47] Additionally, priests are unmarried men and expected to be fully devoted to their work in country. This is particularly true for those assigned to the Middle East who feel the pressure and intensity of their position's responsibility for the three priorities: protecting Christians, insuring Church rights and property, and promoting peace.

Third, the Holy See exerts a certain kind of political power through its diplomatic relations with the majority of Middle East nations. Unlike most diplomatic corps, the Holy See is made of men of different ethnicities and nationalities from all across the world. The Holy See has the flexibility of sending its diplomats back to their national homeland or to troubled counties where their nationality/ethnicity can play a strategic third party role. These personnel decisions are seen in the 2016 appointment of Italian Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa as the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, which includes Israel, Palestine and Jordan. While this is not a role of the Holy See diplomatic corps, it does overlap with the prerogatives of the Vatican Apostolic Nuncio to Israel and is an example of the creative leveraging possible due to the unique character of the Holy See's multi-ethnic personnel. Vatican correspondent John Allen reports that in the last thirty years the position was held by ethnic Arabs due to the Vatican's preference for local churches to be led by priests from the respective culture. First was Palestinian Michele Sabbah (1987 – 2008) and second was Jordanian Fouad Twal (2008-2016.) It was assumed this Arab leadership would continue but Allen argues that appointing a non-Arab, and one that is close to Israeli culture, at this point in time could be a diplomatic masterstroke on the part of Pope Francis. "In the zero/sum political game of the Middle East, in which a friend of Israel often is automatically seen as an enemy of Palestine and the Arab cause, Pizzaballa [is] suspect in the eyes of some Arab clergy, and something of an arresting choice to lead a patriarchate whose membership is overwhelmingly Arab…For the past thirty years, when many Israelis looked at Sabbah or Twal, no matter what they said or did, it was hard not to regard

them at some gut level as the enemy - figures who represent peoples and points of view hostile to Israeli interests… Pizzaballa not only doesn't carry the same baggage, but he's seen as a friend of both Judaism and Israel - someone who knows Jewish tradition almost as well as the most learned rabbis, and whose long experience of living in Israeli society has given him an insider's grasp of its dynamics." This 2016 appointment comes alongside the Holy See's establishment of diplomatic ties with the State of Palestine. For a Church seen as sympathetic to the Palestinians, personnel changeups friendly to the Israelis can open new negotiation avenues.[48] There is also hope this appointment can address the increasing violence against Christians by Jewish extremists seeking to drive minorities from the country.[49]

As mentioned earlier, the Holy See has diplomatic relations with every state in the Middle East except Saudi Arabia and Oman although there have been high level talks with both including a 2007 visit of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah to the Vatican. The Holy See has demonstrated a willingness to talk with all states regardless of creed or ideology and would be willing to have diplomatic relationship with these two remaining countries once their legal systems provide for freedom of conscience and citizens can legally choose to be Christian. The current Secretary of State and former Nuncio to Venezuela, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, has been a leading voice of the church in maintaining all possible channels of communications. This is at the core of the Vatican's effort to be a neutral party in negotiating peace deals. In the last month (December 2016), such communication was seen in Columbia, Lebanon, Venezuela, Taiwan/China and, most dramatically, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the Church brokered the December 2016 deal between political rivals for a democratic transition.[50] The Holy See has the flexibility to be effective in these negotiations because they are not restrained by the traditional political motivations and influencers of economics and military. Instead, the priorities dictating decisions in the Middle East are the ones articulated previously: protection of Christians, rights for the Church and its property, and peace.

Catholics in the world

% of Catholic population

Region	Population	Percentage
Latin America	483 million	41.3%
Europe	277m	23.7%
Africa	177m	15.2%
Asia	137m	11.7%
North America	85m	7.3%
Oceania	9m	0.8%

Source: World Christian Database

With its ecclesiastical and lay network across the Middle East and its formal diplomatic relationships, the Holy See often plays a role in interstate mediations. Its greatest power and leverage in the Middle East, however, lies in its global citizenry (chart)[51] and political network. The HolySee and the Papal office set the tone and agenda for the Church's advocacy, lobbying, and general education around the world through its global ecclesiastical structure. This network crosses state lines and sovereignty and lends credibility to the Holy See's knowledge of transnational matters. This plays a powerful role in countries like the US and Great Britain where the local bishops' conferences maintain advocacy arms and ensure the Church is "always heard, even if it is not fully heeded."[52] The US Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) located in Washington, DC has one such component to their work. From their office they issue official communications for US Catholics as well as lobby and advocate in the US Legislature for global priorities and needs of the Church.[53] This ability to work directly with the US Legislature communicates the priorities of the Holy See and of the Catholic Church to the United States, a key negotiator and actor in the Middle East. This is not to say the USCCB has the full influence of the Holy See, rather it is another channel for promoting the priorities of the Holy See as this paper will demonstrate later in the example of Iran.

The Holy See's Permanent Observer Mission at the UN also plays a part in elevating its concerns as well as participating in negotiations although it is a non-voting member. The Holy See at the UN is highly vocal on issue of humanitarian access, preferential treatment of the poor, and protection of the family.[54] Although its conservative view of marriage, sexuality, and reproductive rights do at times make it an ally of Middle Eastern Muslim nations, these relationships can be simultaneously contentious over the protection of Christians and Church property in the said countries. Additionally, these views align far more in regards to the primacy of the nuclear family and sex education than to specifics within reproductive rights such as abortion or contraceptives.

Once again, due to the religious and political roles of the Pope, the Holy See has the flexibility to act in either capacity or both at once. For example, this flexibility has allowed the Church to work directly with Iranian Ayatollahs through the USCCB in a solely spiritual capacity, create diplomatic relations with Palestine under a political auspice, and negotiate the Lebanese civil war at times switching roles depending on the evolving and complicated relationship with the Maronite Catholic Church.[55]

III. Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

In the Middle East there are seven Arabic speaking Catholic rites who are in 'full communion' with Rome, meaning they recognize the Pope and adhere to the core tenets of Catholicism although differ liturgically and hierarchically. They are the: Maronite, Melkite Greek, Coptic Catholic (distinct from majority Copts under the Egyptian patriarch), Catholic Syrians, Armenians, and Chaldeans.[56]

The majority of Middle Eastern Catholics are in Lebanon and are a part of the Maronite Eastern Rite Church. They are led by their own Patriarch who is elected by Maronite bishops across the region. He too appoints his own bishops for the Maronite Church although "their appointments must be rubber-stamped by the Pope, as a show of deference to his spiritual authority."[57]

In a patriarchal and family driven society, the mixed loyalties of the Christian factions in Lebanon are generational and complex.[58] The Holy See has long given these Lebanese factions a degree of autonomy yet the Holy See is one of the few international actors who has long standing relationships with all of them. These relationships became contentious, however, during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Following Vatican II, "Rome [had come] to consider Lebanon 'a model of what could be throughout the Middle East and, indeed, in other areas where different religious and cultural groups share the same geography.' Lebanon was to be of "prime importance to the Holy See, and therefore a cause of considerable consternation when coexistence turned to conflict."[59] The Holy See's vision for Lebanon and Christians in the region clashed with the Maronite rejection of what they insisted was a threatening Muslim power grab. They vetoed "any idea of pacific existence in an Islamic state like the *dhimmis* living in Arab countries (Copts in Egypt, Assyrians in Iraq, etc.)" and many believed "Christian dominance was necessary to preserve their religious and cultural liberties."[60] Bashir Gemayel, the Lebanese President-elect who was assassinated in 1982, is reported to have said candidly, "the Vatican should understand that Christians in Lebanon are not guinea pigs for the Christian–Islamic dialogue in the world."[61]

Tension with the Maronites lessened significantly with the end of the Civil War but it was not until the election of the most recent Patriarch in 2011, Bechara Boutros al-Rahi, that a significant warming of relations took place. Together with Pope Francis, Patriarch al-Rahi has a focus on uniting the quickly diminishing Christian populations in the region. Much like the aggressiveness of Francis' diplomacy, Patriarch al-Rahi has taken historic actions that indicate the Church will no longer accept the stagnation of the regional conflicts which has brought increasing danger to the Christian minority. On May 24, 2014, al-Rahi became the first Lebanese Patriarch to enter Israel when he accompanied Pope France on a three-day tour of the Holy Land. Although Lebanon is still formally at war with Israel, he was able to do this by traveling on a Vatican passport,[62] a dramatic move by the Vatican whose visa restrictions were only lifted by Israel in 2012.[63] Al-Rahi insisted, however, that his visit was purely religious, an effort to reach out to Maronite and minority Christians in Israel. Indeed, "Al-Rahi's policies could reflect a wider Christian awakening in the Middle East where religious identity and solidarity now take priority over nationalism and Palestinian solidarity. In this context, al-Rahi's visit to Israel is preceded by his equally controversial visit to war-torn Syria in February 2013. Al-Rahi has branded both visits as part of an effort to demonstrate Christian solidarity across the region."[64]

In dealing with internal disagreements within the Catholic hierarchy, it is important to understand institutionally that, "the Pope is unlikely to dismiss a bishop the way a CEO might sack an employee, because a bishop remains a bishop, even if sacked, and a 'rogue' bishop is a terrifying prospect for the church, as he can ordain priests and start his own schismatic Church" thus "there is a delicate balancing act of authority within the Church, and why it is hard to pin down exactly where that authority lies when international policy is formed and enacted."[65]

However, the leniency with which bishops are treated and the diplomatic agenda of the day is often aligned with the personality of the current Papal administration. "A very cautious Vatican policy in the 1940s and 50s, for example, was in part the result of Pope Pius XII's generally cautious nature, as well as his abiding fear of leftism. John Paul II's philo-Semitism clearly has had its effects on the "tilt" of Vatican policy in the Middle East, especially in the decision to recognize the State of Israel. Conversely, the adversarial relationship between Netanyahu and Vatican leaders, including the pope, served as a brake on Israeli/Vatican relations during this Prime Minister's entire tenure (1996-1999)."[66] It remains to be seen how this relationship will fare with Pope Francis' aggressive, almost urgent, brand of diplomacy which has seen the Holy See's diplomatic agreement with the State of Palestinian, direct communication with Syria's President Assad, and recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

"Vatican watchers say the confluence of the pope's personality, his Jesuit background and the geopolitical situation all combine to explain his assertiveness."[67] The Jesuits, a large religious branch of the Catholic church, stress prayer and action. Francis appears to feel called to wade into the frozen conflicts of the Middle East, the long simmering tensions which are the largest threat to the three priorities of the Holy See: protection of Christians, protecting the rights and property of the Church, and establishing peace.

IV. External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

The Holy See has two types of external relationships: internal & diplomatic. Under the spiritual role the Holy See fulfills for the Church, its diplomats first establish "internal" relationships with the peoples and nations where they are assigned and are tasked 'to serve' pastorally. In theory, this role "provides the Holy See diplomatic service with a level of internal involvement in the life of the societies and countries unparalleled in virtually any state foreign service."[68] The Church has thus developed an extensive network consisting of not only local Catholic parishes but also with the local Catholic religious communities such as the Dominicans Sisters in Iraq or the Christian Brothers in Palestine. Its next layer of internal relationships is with the other Christian denominations. Although persecution has created collaboration in the recent years, relationships with other Christian groups, particularly the Greek Orthodox,[69] has at times been contentious. Holy sites in Jerusalem are the most common hot spots for these Christian rivalries and fist fights have been known to break out between monks who guard shines holy to the Christian faith.[70]

The Holy See has external relations next with the Catholic educational, social and humanitarian services, most often run by International NGOs. Due to their Catholic mission, these services must be given to all, regardless of religion, and thus these INGOs play a large role in connecting the wider community to the Church and expanding the Church's sphere of influence. Catholic belief also considers these services to be of "witness" and "in action" of the Church and are not to contain proselyting elements. Proselytizing

is discouraged in the Catholic Church.[71] Groups like Catholic Relief Services, CARITAS, and CNEWA are funded by Catholics around the world and also partners of the US Government and the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance. These organizations are the service arm of the Holy See, particularly CNEWA which is the papal agency for humanitarian support.

As mentioned, Vatican II played a formative role in opening the Church and the Holy See to interreligious dialogue and collaboration. Former Secretary Relations with States, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, has argued the rapid rate of established diplomatic relations with Muslim states after decolonization is proof that the "Popes had nothing against Islam" and they are "convinced that it was possible for believers to live in peace and to work together for the common good of their societies."[72] The Holy See has been a prolific promoter of inter-religious dialogue in the Middle East where they see dialogue as one avenue to protect the Christian minority and a necessity for peace. The major exception to this is in reference to the Islamic State (IS). In comparison to the Syrian Civil War where the Pope has continually called for non-violence resolution, the Pope has called for action, presumably including armed action, to stop the advance of IS which has committed self-proclaimed genocide against Christians and other minorities.[73] In a 2014 press conference, Pope Francis said, "Where there is an unjust aggression, I can only say that it is licit to stop the unjust aggressor. I underscore the verb 'stop.' I don't say 'to bomb' or 'make war,' (but) 'stop it.'"[74]

The fight against IS is deeply connected to the Holy See's view of the Assad regime which was reflected in a quote by Aleppo's Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop Jean-Clément: "For the time being, if Assad goes now, there is fear that everything may collapse and there will be something terrible everywhere in the country."[75] The Holy See views both Russia and Iran as crucial actors to resolving the civil war and securing the Christianity's survival in the Middle East. "The Holy See's ties with Russia are stronger than ever and Rome and Tehran's 30 years of quiet engagement has deepened over the last two years to the point that Vatican experts refer to a "Shiite option" when discussing papal diplomacy. Today, Iranians can even read Saint Augustine's Confessions and the Catechism of the Catholic Church in Farsi—the product of a 12-year translation effort by Iranian scholars."[76]

Iran and the Holy See have been on a successful diplomatic track over the past two decades since Iran sponsored its first discussion with the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1995 with a commitment to regular meetings.[77] In 2005, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami attended Pope John Paul II's funeral in Rome, an "unprecedented sign of respect."[78] In 2014, Iran's ambassador to the Holy See called Pope Francis "a virtuous figure…brimming with morality and modesty, and the Iranian people expect him to resist oppressors and the powerful, with divine help, just like Jesus Christ."[79] This flattering statement, made at the height of the US-Iran nuclear program negotiations, reflect Iran's hope for their relationship with the Holy See who they view as a communication channel to the West. Theologically, some argue that "Shiite Islam resembles Christianity in a number of ways, in practice if not in dogma. In Iran, religious authority is far more centralized than in Sunni-majority countries: The Supreme Leader is elected from the Assembly of Experts, comprised of some 80 Ayatollahs popularly elected from 30 districts to serve eight-year terms. The system is analogous to the Orthodox and Catholic systems of selecting patriarchs and popes. Shiite imams, like Catholic priests, are considered recipients of divine grace. Many Christians and Shiites also share a devotion to a female spiritual figure, Mary, mother of Jesus, who plays a similar role to Fatima (known as al-Zahra, the Shining One), the favorite daughter of the Prophet Muhammad."[80]

This warming relationship made it possible for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to take a historic trip to Iran in April 2014 to meet with The Supreme Council of the Seminary Teachers of Qom, the preeminent center of religious scholarship in Iran and connected to the Supreme Leader. Together the Bishops and Ayatollahs issued a joint statement against nuclear weapons saying, "Shia Islam opposes and forbids the production, stockpiling, use and threat to use weapons of mass destruction. Catholicism is also working for a world without weapons of mass destruction and calls on all nations to rid themselves of these indiscriminate weapons."[81] Under the direction of the Holy See, the USCCB was very involved in lobbying the US legislature[82] to approve the US-Iran deal and have continued their theological exchange with the Ayatollahs, meeting with them in Rome in June 2016. This 2016 visit had originally been planned for Washington DC but the Ayatollahs were not granted visas to enter the United States.

The Holy See's calls for a non-violent resolution to the Syrian civil war have created an odd alliance with the once anti-religion and hence anti-Catholic Russia.[83] Russia backs the Assad regime and, in 2013, was in agreement with the Holy See that the US should not retaliate against Assad. Additionally, Vladimir Putin has been fostering an Orthodox nationalism via the Russian Orthodox Church[84] and together they claim Russia's backing of Assad's regime in Syria is in part to protect Christians who the West is seen to have abandoned in favor of a non-interventionist agenda.[85] The Russian Orthodox and Holy See have had a famously strained relationship which was recently been put aside for the sake of protecting the Middle East's heavily persecuted minorities. After nearly 1,000 years since their split, Pope Francis and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill become the first Catholic Pope and Russian Patriarch to meet and embrace. This took place in Cuba in February 2016. At this meeting the two leaders appealed to the world to protect the assault of Christians in the Middle East, especially in Syria.[86]

The Church is very familiar with being in uncomfortable position with regimes in the Middle East. Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Bashar al-Assad in Syria have all bartered "protection" for Christians in return for support or at the very least acquiescence.[87] This is another reason why the Holy See's relationship with the Syrian government is so complicated and controversial. The Holy See has condemned Assad's abuse of power, including the recent bombing of Aleppo,[88] yet it was Christians that have helped keep Assad in power under a narrative of survival. For many, IS' arrival has validated Assad's narrative that without him Christians will be expelled from the country, as they were from IS territory, killed in a genocide, or their rights as full citizens will be stripped under Sharia law.

In a brazen attempt to continue this narrative, the Syrian State News Agency published a photo of Holy See Ambassador to Syria Cardinal Zenari's visit to President Bashar al-Assad in December 2016. They reported the letter Zenari presented from Pope Francis expressed support and sympathy for the Syrian State.[89] Although not common for the Vatican to release Papal correspondence,

the Vatican clarified the next day that this letter was calling on Assad "to ensure that international humanitarian law is fully respected with regard to the protection of the civilians and access to humanitarian aid".[90] The Holy See is keeping communication channels open with Assad and, while Assad tries to frame this as support, the Vatican made an uncharacteristic clarification about this relationship. The Holy See is known for its veil of secrecy and wiliness to be misunderstood by outside observers for the sake of the mission at hand. This clarification by the Vatican on the contents of the letter can be understood as a firm rebuke of Assad's siege of Aleppo and disproportionate military response.

Finally, a wild card in the Holy See's diplomacy in the Middle East may be Turkey. In 2015, Pope Francis received sharp criticism from Ankara for calling the mass murder of Armenians by Ottoman-Turks a century ago, "genocide." The Turks pulled their Ambassador from Rome for 10 months until the Vatican was able to repair the relationship.[91] However, six months after Turkish Ambassador was reinstated, the Pope again called the Armenian slaughter a "genocide" when he visited the country in June 2016. This word had been left out of the Pope's official comments but, when giving the speech to Armenia's political and religious leaders, he deliberately added it back in, saying, "Sadly that tragedy, that genocide, was the first of the deplorable series of catastrophes of the past century, made possible by twisted racial, ideological or religious aims that darkened the minds of the tormentors even to the point of planning the annihilation of entire peoples."[92] This statement received a standing ovation and the Pope continued by calling for the unity of all Christians to stop religious exploitation like that of the Islamic extremist attacks on Middle Eastern Christians. The Pope's dramatic words showed support for the martyred Armenian Christians and a refusal to back down from naming genocide, even under pressure. The Pope has criticized the West for its slow response to the current persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East, an undertone present in his Armenian statement.[93] This row between the Pope and Turkey seems to have taken a backseat in light of the coup attempt in July 2016, a month following these comments. It remains to be seen how this tension will be resolved in the future.

V. Potential Negotiation Moves

In today's Middle East, the Holy See is using its international influence to push an agenda of dialogue and co-existence with the intention of peace.[94] As stated in its 1993 fundamental agreement with Israel, it "is solemnly committed to remaining a stranger to all merely temporal conflicts, which principle applies specifically to disputed territories and unsettled borders." With no military or economic national interest, the Holy See is in a "unique position to act ethically and consistently in world politics."[95] Additionally, "by refusing to take sides in a conflict the Pope preserves the ability to act as a go-between and mediator. The Holy See can then use clandestine diplomacy to explore both parties' positions and formulate possible compromises." From its internal narrative, the Pope is "not a foreign policymaker or a statesman. He is a pastor and not a politician, despite all the political consequences."[96] The Holy See both holds up moral values and calls consistently on all parties to mind them. Additionally, Pope Francis' papacy has displayed an increasing refusal to wait for intractable conflicts or to mind diplomatic protocol.

Although the Holy See's relationship with Iran is mainly theological, they have opened channels of communication across the Iranian religious leadership for the intention of peace building. Iran knows the Catholic Church is a communications channel to the West, demonstrated by the USCCB's lobby to the US Legislature during the US-Iranian nuclear deal. Likewise, the US Government has acknowledged this channel as seen in 2015 when the White House asked Pope Francis to help negotiate a release of prisoners from Iran.[97] In light of this, one wonders if the State departments' refusal to grant visas to the USCCB's Ayatollah guests in Summer 2016 was a missed opportunity to strengthen this unofficial communications channel and display goodwill.

The USCCB and the Holy See have great hope in their relationship with Iran and this will be communicated to the new Trump Administration. With a Republican House, Senate, and Presidency notoriously opposed to the Iranian Nuclear Deal, yet favorable to religious institutions, Pope Francis may play a significant role in promoting US peace with Iran.[98] In particular, President Trump indicated a desire for increased collaboration between the US and the Holy See in his May 2017 trip to the Vatican and the Middle East.[99] A Vatican official has confirmed that, "Iran is an integral part of the…negotiation that can lead to peace or, at least, the immediate cessation of violence in the Middle East…in particular, with regard to Syria."[100] In line with this hope for Iran's role is a Syrian peace deal, the Pope has appointed Syrian Bishop Sarkis Davidian to serve in Iran's Armenian Catholic community, an ally of Assad. These are bold moves in a region where alliance with the US was once considered the smartest move. Francis is warming up the Holy See's partners, opening conversation, and refusing to be boxed by traditional diplomatic norms as was seen in the 'genocide' conflict with Turkey. In many ways, the Holy See has refused to let the "pie" be limited. A striking contrast to the traditional axis of power in the region. The Holy See, instead, is developed a pattern of 'cooperating where possible' while still holding aloft human rights and the common good.

With a significant number of Catholics and Christians in the US Republican Leadership, it would not be surprising to see the Holy See leverage the spiritual capital of the Pope to promote its demand for peace. Former Pope John Paul II issued a similar call for peace 13 years ago condemning the US invasion in Iraq. Although unheeded, his words encouraged protests around the world and an uncomfortable debate within the US Catholic Church. Likewise, the Holy See's odd relationship with Russia, also a member of the Iran, Syria, Lebanon axis, holds noticeable similarly to President Elect Trump's regional sympathies. The Holy See could use this axis as a means to put pressure on President Assad's response to the Syrian rebels and perhaps on President Trump to honor the Iranian Nuclear deal and promote further peace negotiations in the region.

The priorities of how and why the Holy See acts are clear but its diplomatic strength lies in facilitating back room, clandestine conversation between parties. Furthermore, while the Holy See has temporal responsibilities, it also has spiritual ones. This is a hard concept for secular analysts to grasp but one that is critical to fully understanding the Holy See's potential in the Middle East. Take the

ongoing recapture of Mosel from IS in Iraq. The Holy See has consistently maintained a presence in Iraq through the 2003 invasion to present and has a front row understanding of the conflict. For a Church used to compromising with dictators to keep Christians safe and with an internal narrative of justice and mercy, the Holy See could be a party prime to work with IS deflectors and/or be a part of negotiating surrenders. The Holy See has positioned itself to take on these intractable elements of conflict not only to promote peace but also due to their religious conviction. As this paper hopefully demonstrates, the Holy See may be a fringe player internationally but one with high stakes in the Middle East, namely the existence of Christianity and regional peace.

Finally, the Holy See is a firm and clear supporter of the two state solution for Israel and Palestine. The Holy See has recognized the State of Palestine consistent with this policy. They also have an amicable diplomatic relationship with Israel and have made clear statements on the right of Israel to statehood and security. However, there are currently negotiations outstanding on the Church's economic rights in Israel which have yet to be agreed upon and ratified by the Knesset. This is a sensitive nexus of a negotiation outstanding with an increasingly tense situation between Israel and Palestine. One may infer from Palestinian President Abbas' visit to the Vatican on January 14, 2017 (the day of this paper's submission) that the Holy See is involved in these talks and, much like their relationship with the Ayatollahs in Iran, is being viewed as a track II channel to the US. It has been reported that Abbas talked with the Pope about US President Elect Trump's plans to transfer the US embassy to Jerusalem. Abbas suggested this move could remove the US from the negotiation table and the PLO would consider revoking recognition of Israel.[101] These statements made to the Pope are a serious threat two state solution which the Holy See believes is the most sustainable path to peace. Although the last 25 years of peace talks have failed to come to fruition, it remains to be seen if the Holy See's increased urgency and priority of the Middle East, as laid out in this paper, will be able to broker a deal or, at the very least, facilitate a best alternative to a negotiated agreement. Abbas' visit in many ways is a symbolic representation of the Holy See's mission in the Middle East, not to choose sides but to be a negotiator for peace and keep all channels of communication open where others cannot.

X. Iran: Pride, Divisions, and Persian Legacy

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I. Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been a bit of an enigma. The home of the earliest human civilizations, the birthplace of the legendary Persian Empire, the site of a major CIA-sponsored coup, the host to the world-changing Islamic Revolution, and now the topic of heated global political discourse: Iran has more history, tragedy, grievance, and opportunity than most of its neighbors, and arguably most modern countries worldwide. These cultural and political milestones have largely shaped Iran's modern identity, and have also provided conceptual guidance for Iran's continued path toward regional influence and global respect. This section outlines the underpinnings of Iran's current national and political identity, Iranian perspectives and public opinions on internal and external conflict, and Iranian perceptions of regional and global threats to stability and community progress.

Iran's modern identity and behavior is heavily rooted in the country's Persian history. As the descendants of some of the most powerful leaders ever documented, and also of some of the most prolific and influential artists, philosophers, merchants, and scientists, modern Iranians have much to be proud of. The highly concentrated culture and relative ethno-linguistic homogeneity of the country has yielded a modern history of self-reliance and a preference for regionalism.[1] In this context, Iran has defined its flavor of "regionalism" as a focus on the Muslim world at the highest level, the Shia community at the next, and the Persian-speaking shared-history neighbors at the most specific.[2] The latter has had a particular influence on Iran's approach to foreign engagement and defense; the country is much more likely to invite Tajikistan and the Hazara populations of Pakistan and Afghanistan into the club than its much more distant Sunni Arab neighbors in the Gulf. Iran has almost adopted a moral imperative that requires the country to guard its broader network of Persian siblings.[3] However, Iran's resulting attitude towards its Arab competition is much less about the Persian versus Arab dynamic than it is a consequence of the ethnological map of the region.[4]

The past forty years have also shaped Iran's internal and external identity and regional positioning through several globally relevant events. One of the most significant modern national symbols is the Iran-Iraq war, also known as the "sacred Defense era". Collective memory of this massively violent conflict is still quite raw in Iran; streets throughout the country are lined with images of fallen soldiers, a display that ensures that citizens continue to reflect on the struggles of their ever-changing country. The only positive byproducts of the war were self-discovery and brief global integration. However, the end of the war – which only barely preceded the US Operation Desert Storm in Iraq – also reinforced Iran's sensitivity to being dominated by other powers and distrust of the hegemonic intent of international institutions. The country returned to a focus on self-reliance for the sake of national security, with exception of renewed relations with the Soviet Union, who was providing arms.

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent power vacuum in the region put the spotlight on Iran. Iran lost a powerful foreign partner, and most of the newly independent CIS nations did not see a relationship with Iran as a priority. However, the collapse suddenly rendered Iran the physical, geographical, and political dominant in the region. Iran took advantage of this new influence to build relationships with other countries, including Russia and China, seeking to balance the US's influence and regain some international support through participation in non-political organizations like the Non-Aligned Movement and OPEC. However, in the years following, Iran saw more alienation than respect due to its fierce refusal to kowtow to global norms. This remained the case until more recent political developments.

If Iran's internal identity, as well as the identity Iran promotes in the broader Persian-speaking world, is one of pride, accomplishment, community, and history defined by the country's impressive Persian legacy, then the country's identity beyond its borders has been significantly shaped by its relationships with the United States and some powerful neighbors. The longitude of Iran's current identity has been limited by the pendulum that has swung from being a pro-West, progressive, secular state under the US-backed Shah toward becoming an anti-West, conservative, Islam-governed country after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, during which diplomatic ties with the US were officially severed. Some modernization has occurred in the past decade, particularly under the more liberal leadership of Presidents Khatami and Hassan Rouhani. Now, even though relations are not yet thawed despite the nuclear agreement, and conservative Muslim clerics continue to view the US as an aggressor, much of Iran's population is ready to swing the pendulum back toward a position of partnership with the West.[5] In fact, global respect might hinge on Iran's willingness to compromise with the West. As Maaike Warnaar writes, "The main constraint to the Iranian regime's international legitimacy is its hostile relationship with the United States."[6] Indeed, the country's behavior during the 2015 nuclear negotiations was often likened to that of a petulant child.

The tumult of the last few decades combined with the rise of Sunni powers, both state and trans-state, in the region have resulted in Iran turning inward rather than engaging in true multilateral regionalism. Likewise, Iran's earlier attempts to export its Islam-centered, anti-West revolution to neighbors was largely met with silence, and while many some powers have expressed interest in regionalist partnerships, few have successfully promoted a collaborative agenda that engages Iran and Turkey. There are simply too many religious, ethnic, linguistic, and ideological cleavages, mixed with resource dependency and political instability, to prioritize a regionalist system.[7] An outsider might actually interpret Iran's approach as on the binary: either there is a full suite of strong and allied relationships in the Muslim World, or Iran participates in none. This attitude is both the privilege and the pitfall of a country so uniquely

cultivated by history, language, and leadership.

Iran's perception of the rest of the Middle East influences, but does not seem to fully drive the country's behavior. Iran's concern for Sunni Arab domination triggers seemingly knee-jerk decisions (like rejecting OPEC price floors and supporting Bahraini militias against Saudi military control). However, these could also have been motivated by Iran's economic desperation and desire to protect its Shia brethren. Similarly, Iran's attempts to avoid engagement in the humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq might be caused by dispassion in the specific issues at hand, but it could also be sourced by a fear of embroilment and a return to the painful Iran-Iraq war context.

That said, the two trans-state issues that are currently top of mind – ISIS and the Israel-Palestine conflict – have received the attention of Iran. Regarding ISIS, Iran was one of the first neighbors to pledge military support to the Iraqi government during the early spread of the group, back in 2014.[8] Regarding the Israel-Palestine issue, Iran's leadership has notoriously denied the existence of Israel and the events of the Holocaust. Iran has continued to support the Palestinian cause and its militant proxies, despite the fact that the population is Sunni. In both of these cases, Iran was likely behaving (perhaps overreacting) out of its national desire to defend "real" Islam and support subjugated Muslims. It would be difficult to argue, however, that this alone was a sufficient motive; Iran is also clearly vested in its desire to maintain internal security and remain staunch in its rejection of Western behavior.

II. Sources of Leverage

Iran has arguably earned its international reputation as a difficult diplomacy partner and a potential economic and military threat. The country managed to storm the American Embassy and terrify hostages, continually publicly rejects the State of Israel, regularly insults Western culture and leadership, has access to massive oil reserves, and is suspected to have developed the foundations for a nuclear weapon. Because these factors can all strike the nerves of both neighbors and the global world, they can be considered to be leverage for Iran.

Iran's main sources of power in the region fall into three general categories, which will be elaborated upon below: security leverage, economic leverage, and political leverage. Furthermore, Iran's power is overwhelmingly derived of (and demonstrated as) hard influence; the country has not yet managed to foster the dynamics of a negotiations-friendly, appeals-focused, soft-power approach. Iran also has historically only responded to hard power. These preferences, however, exist primarily because of the headstrong and decisive religious and political leadership. It is difficult to imagine that the population would *not* favor a transition to soft power, especially as Iran becomes more desperate for economic and security relief. However, for now, the population is cut off from foreign resources, fed censored media, and fearful of ever being labeled an "enemy."

Security Leverage

Iran's largest source of leverage is its two-pronged ownership over its clandestine nuclear program and purse strings for regional militias. While few doubt that Iran is capable of developing a functional nuclear weapon, less are sure about Iran's exact intention in doing so, or even if the program is little more than an effort to demonstrate steadfastness. The mystery only increases the power of the nuclear leverage. Iran is able to use it as a strong bargaining chip to achieve better economic and political outcomes or to incite fear and the bifurcation between the "us" and "them" in the region. Nearly all international negotiations touch on the nuclear context.

Iran, as the single largest benefactor to Hezbollah, also wields a lot of influence in the direction of the Israel-Lebanon conflict. Without Iran's financial, moral, and military support, Hezbollah would likely fizzle.

Iran also has a very strong and capable military, which has grown even more intense and ordered following the Iran-Iraq war, it must be taken seriously in any military-focused discussion, including those discussions of the Syrian Civil War.

Economic Leverage

The second strongest source of leverage for Iran is its burgeoning economy. Long closed off from international consumption and investment, Iran has overwhelming potential. In addition to its impressive oil reserves, Iran has a productive and efficient sustenance economy that can easily be converted into further production or expansion. Iran's oil production, and refusal to kowtow to GCC requests, has already created significant economic tension, while simultaneously pumping critical funds into the Iranian economy. Iran has the potential to become a massive global exporter and consumer, and might be able to manipulate trade negotiations to serve national interests.[9] The sanctions and political isolationism of the past several decades have resulted in a global marketplace that neither knows nor anticipates the full strength of a restored Iranian economy.

Political Leverage

Iran's weakest source of leverage is its political reach, both because of its inward-facing policies and as its clouded image abroad. As a consequence of its isolationism, Iran has failed to establish deep relationships, and so – in addition to a lack of soft power competence – the country has few partnerships to laud. Likewise, after the Iranian Revolution and Iran's subsequent adoption of an (at least outwardly) anti-West and Sunni-skeptical position, few major potential partners remain not insulted and fewer still can confidently evaluate and assess Iran's actual policy goals and direction. Iran's credibility is therefore limited, and the country has no real political clout or capital with which to negotiate. The only real source of political leverage is in Iran's tight control of its borders, enabling the government to prevent certain individuals from leaving and/or entering, and providing a wide berth of opportunity for detention and potential collateral for prisoner swaps. Iran's support for the Syrian government might be seen as a somewhat valuable political asset,

but the country is unlikely to offer it up entirely as a bargaining chip.

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Like any country, Iran is a mosaic of differing religious, political, and cultural views and experiences. The largest ethnicity (Persian) comprises two-thirds of the population, the largest religion (Shia Islam) is close to 90% of the population, and the largest language (Persian) is spoken by half of the population.[10] Only 3% of Iran's population is immigrants), which helps reinforce the strength of the country's shared history, culture, and identity. Because of this common interest in the success of the state, internal factions much more naturally fit on a spectrum rather than in separate, discrete directions.

Political Power

Iran is a well-known anomaly in its approach to political administration. Iran is a true theocracy, but with educated and progressive contingents, as well as a checkered past of Western partnerships and culture and diaspora engagement. The Islamic Republic presents a complex system with both immense power and cracks in the foundation. As discussed in prior sections, a notable feature of Iranian power is a ubiquitous support for Iranian history, culture, and relevance that also encompasses myriad social, economic, ethnic, and religious predilections. Not surprisingly, this diversity wrapped in unity has catalyzed the ascendance of a series of charismatic and persuasive leaders who have cut the country's path forward, though not always in the same direction. This extant power vacuum means that Iran's current state of belligerence or conciliation is largely driven by who holds the reins, with the Ayatollah at the nadir of control. As scholar Maaike Waarnar writes, "In a political system that unites different factions, all of which are loyal to the Islamic Republic, but which differ in opinion as to what its policies should be, a powerful, balancing leader proves effective in securing stability and continuity."[11] Historically, this power and balance of come in the form of conservative, system-oriented leadership.

However, the President is hardly the true leader of the country. The Supreme Leader, who theoretically responds to a broader set of religious players, holds the strings to most political (and, therefore, cultural, social, and economic) guardians. Figure 1 showcases some of these critical players, who typically blockade, rather than buttress, democratic reforms. As Figure 1 implies, nearly all official power flows back to the Supreme Leader, often through triangulatory bodies. An omitted, but highly important, additional group are Iran's political parties. Estimated to be hundreds in number, they are highly fractured and often clandestine (opposition parties were frequently banned following the Islamic Revolution). Politicians typically associate instead with either Left or Right leaning coalitions.

Figure 1: Iran's Major Political Players

Party	Official Role	Power Implications
Supreme Leader	Head of State and highest-ranking political and religious leader. Technically appointed by the Assembly of Experts, which is selected by the Guardian Council, whose members are selected by the Supreme Leader. Responsible for statements and final decisions on the economy, war, and social principles. Current (and second) Supreme Leader is Ayatollah Ali Khameini.	Exceptionally powerful; appoints heads of political divisions, the army, and the judiciary, and controls a circular chain of authority that nominally checks power but in actuality is subservient. Publically adored but strong undercurrent of opposition among Iranians both within and beyond borders.
President	Head of government in Iran and the highest-ranking elected official, serving no more than two consecutive four-year terms. Reports to the Supreme Leader but carries out executive responsibilities. Candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council. Current President is Hassan Rouhani.	Strong public power as the figurehead of internal and foreign policy, but with no actual final power over matters of state. Typically holds most soft power internally as a representative of the people than externally as a representative of the Islamic Republic.
Parliament / Majlis / Islamic Consultative Assembly	Legislative body with 290 overwhelmingly Muslim representatives; candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council. Oversees development and ratification of legislation, international treaties, and national budget. Candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council. Current Speaker is Ali Larijani.	Limited political power, primarily manifested in ability to dismiss cabinet ministers. Can propose some new laws.

Figure 1: Iran's Major Political Players

Party	Official Role	Power Implications
Assembly of Experts	An 88-member body of Islamic theologians responsible for electing and overseeing the Supreme Leader. Elected by direct public vote and approved by the Guardian Council. Current Speaker is Ahmad Jannati.	Mostly symbolic power, as the Assembly is managed by the Supreme Leader himself via the Guardian Council. Rarely contradicts the statements made by the Supreme Leader.
Guardian Council	A 12-member council, half of whom are appointed by the Supreme Leader and half by the Head of Judicial Power. Members are experts in Islamic law and/or different, specific areas of law. Interprets the Constitution, manages consistency of Islam and the Constitution, and enforces Islamic values. Also manages electoral affairs. Current Chairman is cleric Ahmad Jannati.	Immense power provided by ability to evaluate and eliminate political parties and candidates; typically endorses military candidates. Essentially an extension of the Supreme Leader's power, as the Head of Judicial Power is also appointed by the Supreme Leader. Considered to be a chief inhibitor of democratic evolution.
Expediency Discernment Council	An assembly with 39 seats originally established to resolve conflicts between the Guardian Council and the Majlis; members are chosen by the Supreme Leader. Under current leadership, has relatively progressive economic positions and a desire to avoid conflict with the USA / West. Current Chairman is Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.	Largest source of power is in unofficial role as advisor to the Supreme Leader, who has granted more authority to the assembly in recent years, allowing for some supervisory power over several government branches.
Revolutionary Guards	A 125,000 member-strong branch of the Armed Forces also known as the Pasdaran, established following the Islamic Revolution, with the goal of protecting the Iranian Islamic system. Expanded under Ahmadinejad administration. Has had limited engagement in the Syrian and Lebanese civil wars. Current Commander is Mohammed Ali Jafari.	Holds significant sway in political, cultural, social, and economic profiles of Iran. Strong public presence. Has been characterized as a terrorist unit due to support for foreign extremist groups. Has ability to silence opposition.
Military / Armed Forces of the Republic of Iran	A tripartite system with over 545,000 active personnel across the Army, Revolutionary Guards, and Law Enforcement Force. Historically supported by foreign arms trade. Current chief of Staff is Mohammad Bagheri.	Has been characterized as the most powerful military in the Middle East. Strong intelligence coordination and obvious power over execution of any nuclear capability.

Political Divisions

The simplest way to categorize Iran's internal groups is into quadrants (see Figure 2). While this is a religious-political framework, it includes (or can be adjusted to include) implications for ethnic and economic divisions, which are closely tied to religious and political parallels. In Figure 2, which was originally developed by Harvard's Payam Mohseni,[12] we see two spectra, one representing the political position and one representing the religious position. The upper-right quadrant represents traditional religious leaders and merchants who believe in a firmly Islamic state. The lower-right quadrant, with a broader social justice and anticapitalistic focus, comprises lower-class citizens, war veterans, and the Revolutionary Guards. The lower-left quadrant includes those who are open to rapprochement with the West and support pro-liberal government and economic policies, including secular-focused students and the urban middle class. Finally, the upper-left quadrant prioritizes modernization and China-style growth and includes Western-thinking capitalists, merchants, and technocrats. Mohseni's framework will provide the structure for the political-religious evaluation of in-state actors, expanded to include economic and ethnic considerations.

The Theocratic Right

This group is easily identifiable as the "religious core" of the Islamic Republic. It was these leaders – many educated in Qom or with ties to the Society of Qom Seminary Teachers – who established the Islamic Republic, and these leaders who continue to push for a truly Islamic state. The most obvious advocate, at least in public performance, is the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. A more accessible representative is Ali Larijani, the current leader of the Parliament of Iran and the former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, the military division responsible for promoting enforcing Islamic law. Larijani was recently known as a strong rival of former President Ahmadinejad in both substance and style. Other important names in this category include: Mohsen Rezaee, also a rival of Ahmadinejad and current secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council, which is effectively a proxy for the Supreme Leader's authority; Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf, the current Mayor of Tehran; and Hashemi Bahramani, the former fourth president of Iran and the

current the chairman of the Expedience Discernment Council. The relevant political party is the Islamic Coalition Party. For stakeholders in this category, the goal is sober and pragmatic leadership that supports Islamic goals without radicalism or sensationalism.[13] This is a somewhat counterintuitive ideology given the often scathing or unrealistic remarks made by the Supreme Leader, but on-the-ground leaders must navigate the system with diplomacy and tact. This group is likely open to negotiations with the West, particularly to support Iran's economy, but is steadfast on its expectations of what the Iranian state ought to look like and what it means to be Muslim.

The Theocratic Left

The populist Theocratic Left looks like a liberal party, sounds like a more radical Theocratic Right, and behaves like a conservative splinter movement appealing to the oft-overlooked lower-income socio-economic tiers and disenfranchised populations. The most notable representative of this group, former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has demonstrated most of the shock tactics that underscores the "pro-Iranian" attitude of this group: the insults at the West; the denial of the Holocaust; the disparagement of more secular policies. In many ways, the Theocratic Left embraces the ideals of the Islamic revolution insofar as they strike real change. Realistically, however, members of this group often discredit Iran's diplomacy and attract scrutiny, distrust, and even pity from neighbors and foreigners, whether intended or not.

Another key name in this category is Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, the former chairman of Parliament and the first non-cleric to hold the role. Ahmadinejad's major alliance, the now-defunct Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran, also known as Abadgaran, was also a key player in the development of an Iranian "neocon" movement that sought to restore the "original revolutionary spirt at the battlefields of the Sacred Defence"[14], or the Iran-Iraq war.

The Theocratic Left are socialists in the equality-unity mindset, but are anything but reformist; their values dictate a goal of a return to a conservative, inward-focused, Islamic social support-promoting population. Other key players in this contingent include war and policy veterans who have fought hard for their nation, lower-class and poor populations who seek to end Western-inspired capitalist stratification, and The Revolutionary Guards, or Pasdaran, a branch of the Armed Forces operating with the goal of protecting Iran's Islamic system. Ahmadinejad was actually a strong advocate of an extended and more influential role for the Pasdaran, and the country saw a notable return to socialist nationalism in the early years of the new millennium.
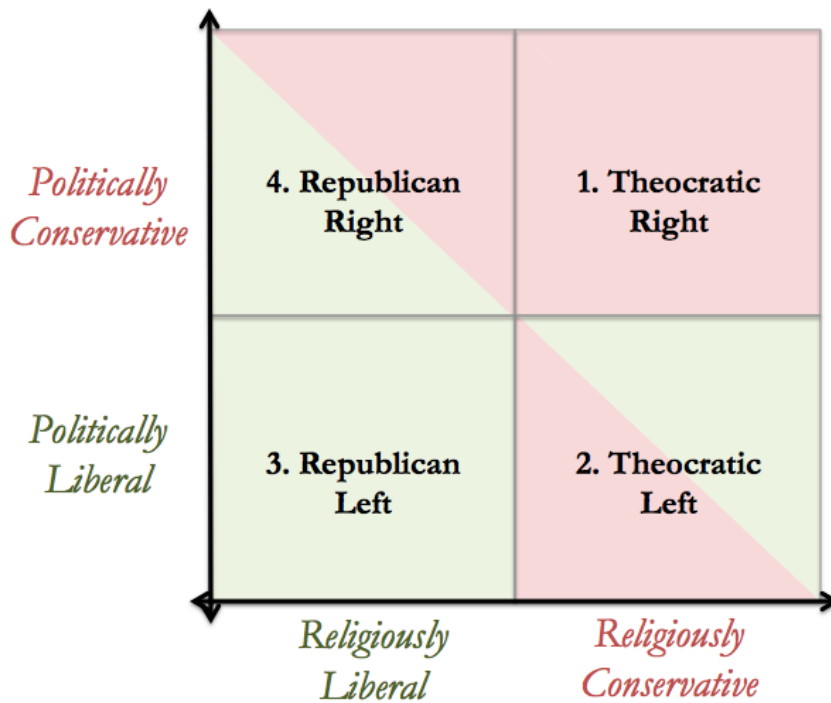
The Republican Left

The Republican Left group is the furthest-left group that mainstream Iranian political divisions represent. Representatives of this faction support economic and political modernization and liberalization and the rejuvenation of "the middle class". Likewise, this group tends toward supporting "China-style" growth, driven by swift industrialization, specialization, and exportation. Understandably, these goals remain modest in dimension for the time-being, but present a strong under-current that paves the way for international business investment. This group includes former Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, who served in office from 1997-2005, and former Iranian Prime Minister (1981-1989) and Presidential candidate (2009) Mir-Hossein Mussavi.

These reformist politicians represent different taxonomical ideologies. Khatami is a Shia theologian affiliated with the Association of Combatant Clerics political party, whose modern incarnation promotes the curtailment of clerical power but still does not endorse a completely secular system.[15] Mussavi, and ethnic Azerbaijani and active player in the Iranian Revolution, now represents the "Green Movement", which directly opposed the Ahmadinejad administration. The common thread is a desire for a populist, ideas-driven government that can inculcate a more prolific economy, for which thawed foreign relations and cross-class collaboration are essential. The Iranian diaspora, locally educated younger population, urban middle and working classes, and middle-class minorities typically support these political views.

The Republican Right

The fourth and final primary contingent represent the most West-leaning views, and has helped push the country to recent progressive outcomes such as the 2015 nuclear agreement. The most obvious supporters are the Western-educated population and the merchant class, for whom capitalism presents the brightest path forward. This group is economically distinct from the Republican Left in its support for Darwinian economics; rather than a peoples' economy built off of mutual capability and vocational development, the Republican Rights believes in massive privatization and foreign investment that would allow Iran to make use of its high education rates to develop a complex export profile. Likewise, this group endorses the formalization of the large informal economy, which currently accounts for nearly 50% of employment.[16] Former President (1989-1997) and Presidential candidate (2013) Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, also a deeply embedded character in Iranian politics, is the most public face of this view. He is also a very outspoken opponent of Iran's political isolationism, quipping – after a series of nuclear tests directed at blocking current president Rouhani's abroad – that Iran should focus on negotiations rather than missiles (using Twitter, no less).[17] The Republican Right, then, is the country's most likely contingent for foreign engagement.

Figure 2: Iran's Internal Divisions, as developed by Payam Mohseni

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Iran has an interesting foreign policy and external relations profile. Given the Islamic Republic's history of isolationism and pervasive Persian-Shia identity, the country's external conflicts are characterized by both strong adherences to current positions and weak international relations. As discussed in previous sections, the country has attempted to build regional coalitions along ethnic and religious lines, but the hardline nature of political leadership has hampered genuine improvement of partnerships with both neighbors and the West. Iran's involvement in the current Middle East conflict has been muted, both because the country has been focused on its nuclear negotiations and because its zero-tolerance approach to ISIS goes largely undocumented in Western media. However, Iran's role is slowly becoming more public and more forceful, particularly as it seeks to counterbalance the dominance of Western actors in Syria and to downplay its concessions to the United States.

Relationships with State Actors

Shia States

Iran's closest allies are, without a doubt, those with whom the country shares history, ethnicity, or religion. The so-called "Shia Crescent", the diverse territory that includes Syria, Lebanon, parts of Iraq, Bahrain, and parts of Yemen, has both benefited from Iranian military and economic support and suffered from the backlash of Iranian partnerships through sanctions and marginalization. Lebanon is Iran's strongest and most valuable partner in the region.[18] In addition to supporting Hezbollah, Iran has offered the Lebanese Army military aid in the event of a funding cut from Western countries driven by the Iran relationship.

Historically, the Iran-Syria relationship was driven more by protection against perceived mutual threats than by a Shiite-specific platform. The two countries have maintained close ties since the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war, both strongly opposing Saddam Hussein's rule and the United States-Israel relationship. Iran is now one of the major supporters of the Assad administration in the Syrian Civil War, and has invested significant financial and political capital.

Iran has also sponsored military and militia efforts in other partner countries, including the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Shia minority population in Bahrain. Again, Iran's investments seem born more of strategic and security preference rather than a strict promotion of Shia elitism.

Arab Gulf Countries

The Gulf states, excluding the aforementioned pockets of Iran beneficiaries, are perhaps Iran's strongest opponents. Indeed, the Gulf Cooperation Council was originally established to counterbalance Iran's presence, particularly after Iraq's collapse and the resulting

regional power vacuum.[19] The two parties are now engaged in an oil price war, one the Gulf countries always feared would result from lifted sanctions.[20] Meanwhile, Iran's faceoff with Saudi Arabia during the Bahraini Arab Spring was a proxy power struggle between the two countries. This was just one of many such proxy conflicts between the two countries, representing what some scholars call a "new cold war", particularly as the United States stakes alignment with Saudi Arabia and Russia increasingly backs Iran.[21] A few analysts have even gone so far as to suggest that the Saudi Arabia-Iran faceoff is more of a "tug-of-war" over the United States, with both sides baiting the U.S. into military partnership in the Syrian war and coaxing economic commitments.[22] That said, the GCC endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal, and likely hope that it will empower moderate Iranian politicians and "make Iran a more responsible regional actor."[23] Furthermore, Iran and Kuwait have maintained an unusually close relationship (for a Sunni country and a U.S. ally), fueled in part by Kuwait's peril at the hands of Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. Iran and Oman also maintain tight relations driven in part by a large-scale energy collaboration.

Other Arab States

Iran's stagnant progress with Egypt is balanced by a stronger influence in Iraq. As a large recipient of United States aid, and with relatively positive relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel, Egypt faces significant pressure to pace its approach to a renewed friendship with Iran. Historically, however, relations have been lukewarm and weakened by things like former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's open invitation to the exiled Shah of Iran and an Iranian street named after Sadat's assassin. Jordan has been slowly rebuilding its economic ties with Iran after a complete cut during the Iran-Iraq war. Iran strongly supports the Palestinian cause, articulating support for a one-state goal.

Other Neighbor States

Iran has struggled to build a successful reputation within (and partnerships with) Central Asia and the Caspian Region, but sees potential in Afghanistan. Iran has failed to build a coalition around a Persian core in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, particularly since the fall of the Soviet Union. Likewise, the country's attempts to eschew United States influence and presence has not found support in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, who rely on the security afforded by the U.S. military presence in the region. In contrast, Iran has maintained strong ties with the people of Afghanistan (if not always the government), especially during the challenges and conflicts in recent decades. Iran has welcomed millions of refugees, particularly Hazara and other Dari-speaking people, and has also contributed to reconstruction, though possibly driven by the ulterior motive of keeping Sunni neighbors away.

Israel

Iran does not recognize the state of Israel, instead claiming it to be "Palestine under occupation". Today's meme of Iranian vitriol and reciprocal Israeli acrimony is actually not a pattern of history. Prior to the Islamic Revolution, the two countries had a fairly close – or at least complementary – relationship, driven largely by the counterbalancing goal so typical of the region. However, after the revolution, Iran's perceived rationality, particularly toward those entities not directly in line with the renewed national goals, plummeted, instigating the tit-for-tat situation that persists. Despite the obviously toxic rhetoric promulgated on both sides, and the frightening reality of a potentially nuclear Middle East, some argue that Iran is actually less of a threat to Israel than the Palestinian cause, which has weathered decades and finds far more sympathy internationally.[24]

Russia and Europe

Iran and Russia have a long and complex history, with both countries commanding strong histories of regional leadership and dominance. Currently, the two countries are strong partners, balancing trade relationships (particularly critical for sanctions-ridden Iran) with security collaboration, both in terms of arms provision and support for the Assad administration in Syria. Russia likely sees its alignment with Iran as critical to balance Western influence. Iran and Turkey share even more overlapping history, resulting in modern ethnic and linguistic similarities. The country's strong trade and diplomatic relations, somewhat surprising given Turkey's efforts to stay palatable to Europe.

The United States

It goes without saying that the Iran-US relationship is complex and colored by the swinging pendulum of history. Both countries undoubtedly pursue some selfish purposes in the region – economic, security, political – and some conflict is created more by competition than by genuine incongruence of ideals. Occasionally, as we have seen with the nuclear negotiations, this competition actually requires collaboration. Iran depends on the United States for its economic growth, and the United States depends on Iran to help prove the power of U.S. diplomacy. However, without formal diplomatic relations and with 87% of Americans expressing a negative view of Iran, sensationalist rhetoric continues to help drive a wedge between mutual perceptions and mutual goals. [25] Under President George W. Bush, who overlapped with President Ahmadinejad in Iran, relations grew more strained over topics like Iran's enrichment of uranium and the U.S. involvement in the Middle East. President Obama and President Rouhani have warmed the partnership, but incoming U.S. President Donald Trump has an unpredictable, hardline view on Iran.

Relationships with Non-State Actors

Multilateral Organizations
Iran is a favorite pariah of multilateral organization - the United Nations (UN) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in particular. The pet topic is, of course, Iran's nuclear program. In the last decade, the UN Security Council issued over ten resolutions involving sanctions against and nuclear operations within Iran. After the introduction Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the "nuclear agreement" in 2015, however, the UN became responsible for a resolution that documented Iran's responsibilities. This marked a step toward a more welcoming relationship, although there is still some suspicion over the extent to which the UN, Israel, and the United States will seek to purposely identify small infractions.[26] In the same event, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano spoke favorably of the shift, noting in his official statement: "Relations between Iran and the IAEA now enter a new phase."[27]

Kurdish Population
Iran has close to five million ethnic Kurds, the majority of whom are Sunni Muslim, living along the borders with Turkey and Iraq. As in many other countries, the government and the Kurdish population have long been in conflict. The Sunni Kurds had not been supported by the Shah's regime, but after the Islamic revolution imposed a strong Shia leadership, Kurdish nationalism found itself face-to-face with a strong military response from Tehran. This fueled further Kurdish nationalism, although the conciliatory attempts of the Khatami administration in the late 1990s temporarily diffused some tension.
Today, however, Kurds continue to be targeted; in the past two decades, several prominent Kurdish activists have been detained and/or executed, against condemnation from international rights organizations.[28] At the same time, there's some speculation that Iran is promoting – both in policy and in public relations – a partnership with the Kurds, possibly to curry favor while ISIS attacks Kurdish populations in Iraq and Syria, and possibly to counterbalance the efforts of Turkey, a notably hardline country on Kurdish affairs. Israeli scholar Michael Tanchum writes, "Ankara's offensive against the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party] is an invitation to Iran to bring about a strategic nightmare for Turkey worse than the one [Turkish President] Erdogan sought to prevent."[29] Regardless, Sunni Kurdish militias are still active, fueled, and a strong regional influence.

Terrorist Organizations
Iran has no shortage of terrorist affiliations, at least as classified by Western entities, but these include both groups that Iran supports and those with whom Iran continues to approach with an iron fist. Some groups that have already been discussed include Hezbollah, also considered to be Iran's "protégé", and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Another notable group is Jundallah, also known as the People's Resistance Movement of Iran, which is based out of the Pakistani region of Balochistan and aims to defend the Sunni population in Iran. Jundallah is estimated to have injured or killed over 400 Iranian citizens in the last 15 years, and is also rumored to have links to al-Qaeda. The United States has also marked Jundallah as a terrorist organization. In terms of ISIS, Iran has strongly condemned the organization – which has anti-Shia ideologies – from the beginning, with a particular warning issued to the organization to never approach the Iran-Iraq border.[30]

| XI. Iraq: Finding Peace Again in Dar as-Salam | **Written by:** Elayne Stecher
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The city of Baghdad was established in the 8th century by Abbasid Caliph al Mansour as the capital of one of the greatest imperial powers of its time: the Islamic Empire. The city, a glittering triumph in the heart of Mesopotamia, known as dar assalam (the abode of peace), would be violated throughout history: sacked by the Mongols (1258 C.E.); burned by Tamarlane (1401); neglected by Ottoman and Persian Empires for centuries; occupied by the British (1917); crowned as the capital of the Kingdom of Iraq (1921), only to be exploited for decades by Western imperial powers; invaded in the Anglo-Iraqi War (1941); bathed in the blood of the monarchical family in the name of republicanism (1958); dominated by the Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein (1979); forced to witness years of war, with Iran, with the Kurds, with Kuwait, with the United States of America, between Sunnis and Shias; starved by United Nations sanctions (1990s); humiliated by "oil for food" programs (1996); accused of housing weapons of mass destruction (2002) and subsequently invaded by the United States and United Kingdom (2003); finally, abandoned by U.S. forces (2011), politically divided, and diseased by the Islamic State (2013 – Present). Geography, geopolitics and greed have turned Iraq into a battleground for most of its modern history, so the question remains: how do you restore peace to a country that is so frequently at war, with the world and itself?

Section I: Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

`Iraq's contemporary identity is a conglomeration of competing spheres of influence, domestic political maneuverings, and international interference. Regional hegemons and Iraqi leaders benefit from exacerbating (and in some instances, instigating) ethnic and sectarian divisions in Iraqi society, while international powers use orientalist narratives to justify (i) violations of Iraqi state sovereignty, (ii) the failure of the Iraqi nation-building/democratization project post-2003, and (iii) increasingly damaging nonintervention policies vis-à-vis the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (hereafter ISIS). The most pernicious narratives are grounded in a presumed lack of Iraqi identity, a self-sustaining myth that depends on a number of erroneous preconceptions: the "artificiality" of the state,[1] the historic and unchanging nature of violence in the country that is "rooted in conflicts that date back millennia,"[2] and the "inevitability" of Iraq's breakup into confessional sub-states.[3] Yet these narratives threaten the future stability of Iraq, as they can lead to the conclusion that Baghdad is doomed to division, backwardness, and empowerment of extremist voices, particularly that of ISIS.

When discussing the current divisions within the Iraqi state, most international commentators ground their discussion in the impact of imperialism and arbitrary borders (i.e. "Churchill's hiccup") on Iraq's disparate tribes. While it is important to understand the impact of interventionism throughout Iraq's history, it is equally essential to avoid crediting the Western world with the creation of Iraq. As a concept, 'Iraq' far pre-dates the country's 1921 establishment. "Both medieval Arab society and pre-modern Iran, officials and travelers used the term 'Iraq' to describe the Fertile Crescent; there was a sense that there was a unit called Iraq. The term was also used in nineteenth-century Ottoman-Iranian diplomatic correspondence. Iraq is not merely the result of melding together three Ottoman provinces."[4] The city of Baghdad has existed since 764 AD, and the Fertile Crescent, of which modern-day Iraq is primarily composed, is considered the cradle of civilization. Iraq had deep roots (and even a name) long before the Western powers mandated a kingdom along the Tigris and Euphrates.

For as long as Iraq has existed, its population has been a mix of religiously, ethnically and racially diverse groups – a fact that has challenged the Westphalian notion of states as the dominion of homogenous nations. Although the central Iraqi government does not perform an official census, the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States estimates (as of July 2016) that Kurds make up 15-20 percent of the population, and an estimated 5.2 million Iraqis live in what is locally referred to as "Iraqi Kurdistan" – a contentious term for the territorial foothold of a people that spans Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq and impacts the territoriality of all four states. Arab Iraqis make up 75-80 percent of the population, with the remainder consisting of Turkomans and Assyrians (~5 percent). An estimated 60-65 percent of Iraqis identify as Shi'a, 35-37 percent as Sunni, and the rest among various other denominations, including Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews.[5] The presence of the Islamic State in Iraq has affected the country's demographics, but new data is not currently available.

The heterogeneity of Iraqi society has presented a unique challenge to the central government, which has long struggled to be tolerant of competing spheres of identity in Iraq. As in other countries in the Middle East, Iraqi leaders historically have used pan-Arabism as a building block for contemporary Iraqi identity – a tactic most notably adopted by the Arab Socialist Ba'athist party in Egypt in the hopes of creating a pan-Arab republic in Egypt and the Levant. Although Iraq engaged with the United Arab Republic (as it was called) in 1958,[6] and even adopted a red, white, and black banded flag that denoted pan-Arabism, the experiment was predicated on the faulty assumption that Iraq was, in fact, an Arab nation.[7] In an attempt to homogenize the population, the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein denied Iraqi Kurds their heritage, language, and citizenship, and waged war against them. This history contributes to the present perceived threat from both sides, as Arab Iraqis fear revenge-seeking behaviors from the Kurds, while the Kurds fear a resurgence of the scapegoating and violence perpetrated against them for decades by Arab leaders in Iraq.

The ethnic divisions in Iraqi society were exacerbated by foreign interventions and propaganda. The U.S.-led military operations in Iraq (in 1991 and 2003 respectively) were seen as essential to the "liberation" of Iraqi Kurds: "The Kurdish safe haven [in Northern Iraq] was supposed to serve Washington's Iraq containment strategy, a launching pad for the harassment of Saddam Hussein. But there was an unintended consequence: one of the most successful nation-building projects in American history."[8] The U.S. presence in Iraq laid the groundwork for the modern Iraqi Kurdistan, a semi-autonomous state in northern Iraq with its own system of government (the Kurdish Regional Government, or KRG) and military force (the Peshmerga), ultimately beholden to the central government in Baghdad but growing in its autonomy.

The Kurdish liberation by foreign powers may have prevented true reconciliation between Baghdad and the Kurds by circumventing internal discussion of grievances, failing to incentivize coalition-building and re-integration of Iraqi Kurds into the state, and creating a line between the Western-oriented Iraqi Kurds and the rest of Iraq. As a result, Erbil (the capital of the KRG) and Baghdad essentially operate as two different entities, despite political barriers to Kurdish political autonomy; despite ratifying a constitution that precludes the Kurds from having relationships with other governments independent from Baghdad, the KRG has sought political and economic alliances with neighboring states, such as Turkey. The Baghdadi government failed to provide the Kurds with an agreed-upon percentage (17%) of the central budget in 2014 and 2015,[9] which has encumbered the Iraqi Kurds' attempts to develop infrastructure and grow in many sectors, including agricultural production.[10] This may be an intentional move by Baghdad to discourage Kurdish autonomy, which is regionally unfavorable: the "Kurdish question" of statehood transcends Iraq's borders, as "Greater Kurdistan" would challenge the sovereignty of the Iraqi, Syrian, Turkish and Iranian states. (For more on this, see section on the Kurds.)

It is important to distinguish Arab/Kurdish conflict from violence that falls along confessional lines, as there is actually little overlap between the two within Iraq. Despite the fact that most Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims, their religion has carried little weight in their sense of self, which is particularly important to the shape of government: in the confessional style government (discussed later in this section), Iraqi Kurds are considered distinct from Iraqi Sunnis. For the Kurds, "[Kurdish] nationalism has generally overshadowed currents of religious fundamentalism – after all, their oppressors, the Arabs, the Persians, and the Turks, have always been Muslim as well."[11] This has contributed to a strong sense of Kurdish identity in the north, as opposed to Islamic identity, or Iraqi identity, and a pointed pivoting away from Baghdad and toward the Western world by Erbil.

While ethnic divisions have shaped modern-day Iraq, the country was not always so visibly divided by identity politics. Historically, Baghdad was a well-integrated city with few confessional conflicts: in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Sunni and Shia Iraqis lived in mixed communities in Baghdad, intermarried and generally felt "less concern" about the religious affiliations of their neighbors.[12] Even the secular Ba'athist party was less concerned with Sunni/Shia divisions, and more intent upon subsuming Islamic identity as a whole beneath Iraqi nationalism: "Saddam co-opted Islamic discourse when it suited him politically, beginning in the 1980s (to maintain legitimacy in the wake of the Iranian revolution) and particularly toward the end of his reign in response to a potential U.S. invasion. But throughout, he was ruthless against all Islamist organizations, regardless of whether their movements were peaceful or violent, Sunni or Shia."[13] While Saddam Hussein did utilize sectarian divisions to consolidate his power, the Ba'athist regime was far more concerned with subverting religion beneath the state apparatus than with starting protracted, intra-Islamic conflict. Thus, while religion has always been important to Iraqi identity, religious differences need not be the reason that a cohesive Iraq cannot exist.

However, it was almost impossible for the international community to conceptualize a Middle East that was not predicated on either a Sunni or Shia identity: "For the quarter century between the Iranian revolution in 1979 and September 11, 2001, the United States saw the Middle East…through the eyes of the authoritarian Sunni elites in Islamabad, Amman, Cairo and Riyadh."[14] This fact, coupled with the relatively new geopolitical significance of Iran and the rise of the insurgent group Hezbollah in Lebanon, created a dichotomy in the American narrative that divided Islam between the "good" Sunni allies and the other (Shia) Islamic extremists. These reductionist narratives drove U.S. policy in the Middle East, precluded a strong American stance against the war crimes of the Saddam regime until 2001, and created a self-fulfilling prophecy for the future of Iraq. In assuming that (violent) societal divisions in Iraq were historic, unchanging, and inevitable, the U.S. failed to properly prevent stratification along religious and ethnic lines during the reformation of the Iraqi government, post-Saddam. As early as one year after the ratification of the new Iraqi constitution, international analysts had identified a fundamental problem with the new, U.S.-backed republic: "Not only has the United States failed to bring a functional democracy to Iraq, neither U.S. forces nor the U.S.-backed Iraqi government in Baghdad have been able to provide the Iraqi people with basic security. This has led many ordinary citizens to turn to extremist sectarian groups for protection."[15]

Although the 2005 Iraqi constitution highlighted in its preamble a commitment to end the discrimination and violence—"… so we sought hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder to create our new Iraq, the Iraq of the future free from sectarianism, racism, locality complex, discrimination and exclusion"[16]—these societal splits were solidified into political realities within the government.[17] "The Iraqi political system […] aspires to 'consensual democracy' via the representation of ethnic identities in the country, and a process of building up political and electoral organizations on the basis of ethnic or confessional affiliation—a process for political and sectarian self-identification imposed upon citizens."[18] This idea came primarily from the shape of the Iraqi Governing Council, an interim government council shaped and empowered by the United States. The Council was composed of 13 Shias, five Sunnis, five Kurds, one Turkmen, and one Assyrian Christian, and effectively "institutionalized the idea that the government should be broken up proportionally" along ethno-sectarian lines.[19] The idea of quotas was also present in the 90s, when anti-Saddam groups met in Vienna and instituted caps on the number of delegates from religious parties, Western-leaning parties, and independents; this system became

more confessional as time went on, with the next conference (the "Salahaddin meeting" of 1992) explicitly mixing religious and ethnic considerations alongside political ones. "The Salahaddin conference showed that the anti-Saddam groups believed they needed quotas to include the wide variety of groups committed to the cause. They were also moving towards having those [quotas] based more upon ethno-sectarian criteria than politics."[20]

However noble the intention of quotas may have been, they ultimately empowered the historically marginalized Shias to exact revenge on Iraq's minority Sunni population. Under the first Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq fell victim to institutionalized bigotry, which reinforced the sectarian conflict narrative and led to mass conflict across Iraq: "With the insistence on applying political sectarianism and communalism [in Iraq], the country witnessed the worst sectarian violence in its history from 2005 to early 2008."[21] These political and societal divisions are particularly relevant to Iraqi state security. The stated strategy of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI, the precursor to ISIS) for defeating the international coalition in Iraq was to (i) isolate U.S. forces, (ii) exacerbate sectarian tensions in Iraq, (iii) disrupt reconstruction efforts and (iv) discourage Iraqi cooperation with the international coalition.[22] Al Qaeda, and later ISIS, capitalized on a divided Iraq, utilizing sectarian divisions and the tendency of the United States to oversimplify identity politics to forward their political agenda. Yet while sectarianism was a useful political tool, in their view it was not supposed to remain the status quo. Osama bin Laden did not want a permanently divided umma, as evidenced by his response to increasing violence against Shia Iraqis: as sectarian tensions began to rise in Iraq, exacerbated by AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's increased targeting of Shias in Iraq, bin Laden condemned AQI's anti-Shia violence: "As early as July 2005, al Qaeda core's leadership sought to convey to Zarqawi the importance of maintaining popular support, both in Iraq as well as globally, through avoidance of divisive attacks (targeting Shiites), minimizing collateral damage (killing of innocent Muslims), and promoting an Iraqi image (elevating the profile of the group's Iraqi membership)."[23] (For more on this, please see the section on ISIS.)

However, after breaking from Al Qaeda, the Islamic State continued to use domestic tensions to justify violence and encourage bandwagoning against the anti-Sunni government in Baghdad: "ISIS' sweep of the so-called Sunni Triangle – an area of central Iraq to the west and north of Baghdad mostly populated by Sunni Muslims" was made possible by the "fragility of the Arab state system and the existence of profound ideological and communal cleavages."[24] The persecution of Sunnis and de-Ba'athification of Iraq post-2003 left many formerly high-ranking officials in the old Iraqi government completely disenfranchised in the new regime, and also subjected to systematic violence and arrests under Maliki.[25] While these policies were met with international condemnation of both the Maliki government and the quota system writ large, there is little consensus as to how to fix the problem: the current Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has suggested the abolition of the "party and sectarian quotas" and a "radical cabinet reshuffle" to include academics and other professionals, but "Abadi has also come under pressure from within his own party which has pushed back against the reshuffle, fearing it could weaken the political patronage networks that have sustained their wealth and influence for more than a decade."[26] Still, the leader of the parliamentary majority State of Law Coalition in Iraq, Kemal al-Saadi, has suggested that the quota system and lack of a political majority party has caused the impasses that characterize the Iraqi government and limit its potential for action, and has also called for reform.[27] Both Maliki and Abadi have blamed the United States for the current divisions in Iraqi society, citing the institutionalization of ethno-sectarian politics as the primary reason for the government's ineffectiveness.

An often neglected third societal division is highlighted by the quota system: gender. Although Iraqi women held a quarter of the seats in the 2010 parliamentary elections, only one woman is in charge of a ministry—the ministry of women's affairs.[28] International interventions, as well as the rise of conservative Islamism in the Middle East, effectively destroyed Iraqi women's standing in society. Under Saddam Hussein's secular Ba'athist party, Iraqi women enjoyed a high standard of living and gender equality. Women could legally (and did actually) own property, vote, and run for political office after the 1970 adoption of the Iraqi Provisional Constitution. The Ba'ath party explicitly encouraged the participation of women in the workforce to promote rapid economic growth in the Republic, "and the government promulgated laws specifically aimed at improving the status of women in the public and—to a more limited extent—the private spheres."[29] The success of Iraq's women became integral to the consolidation of Ba'athist authority and power and the future of Iraq's economy, and even domestic politics. The General Federation of Iraqi Women, an organization established by the Ba'ath party to encourage women's participation in Iraqi governance, played "a significant role in implementing state policy, primarily through its role in running more than 250 rural and urban community centers offering job-training, educational, and other social programs for women and acting as a channel for communication of state propaganda."[30]

Women were "granted equal opportunities in the civil service sector, maternity benefits, and freedom from harassment in the workplace"[31] and the government's hiring of women directly challenged a "traditional reluctance to allow women to work outside of the home."[32] Saddam Hussein himself prioritized education for both men and women so highly that in 1982, Iraq received the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) award for eradicating illiteracy; by 1985, female literacy rates in Iraq were at 87 percent, the highest in the region.[33] In 1976, women constituted "38.5 percent of those in the education profession, 31 percent of the medical profession, 25 percent of lab technicians, 15 percent of accountants and 15 percent of civil servants,"[34] and during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), these numbers continued to grow as women supplanted working-aged men in these professions.

The 1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the international response cost Iraqi women almost all of their social, economic and political gains in Ba'athist Iraq. "Women and girls were disproportionately affected by the economic consequences of the U.N. sanctions, and lacked access to food, health care, and education. These effects were compounded by changes in the law that restricted women's mobility and access to the formal sector in an effort to ensure jobs to men and appease conservative religious and tribal groups."[35]

While the international community plays a significant role in the status quo in Iraq—from the shape of its government to the

subjugation of women—The Arab Spring (2011 – 2015) highlighted the fact that the mobilization of religion and identity politics is not unique to Iraq: "When faced with rising political challenges in early 2011, the Gulf States—Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in particular—mobilized sectarianism in order to suppress domestic calls for reform… Just as President Bashar al-Assad is doing in Syria, this strategy of sectarian polarization was aimed at delegitimizing the opposition, and scaring the minority Sunnis of a possible alternative political system and into total allegiance with the ruling family."[36] This dynamic further exacerbated tensions between the Sunni Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Shia Islamic Republic of Iran, both of which continue to vie for regional hegemony. Their interference in Iraq—with Iran encouraging discontent between Erbil and Baghdad, and Saudi Arabia highlighting the mistreatment of Iraq's Sunni minority and, by some accounts, empowering ISIS—has contributed to the entrenched cycle of violence that has thus far prevented a move toward a cessation of hostilities.

Thus, Iraq has never been a homogenous population and, barring the politically and economically impractical solution of dividing the country along confessional lines, will never be such. However, to suggest that ethnic and religious conflicts are inherent and unchangeable ignores both the history of identity politics in Iraq and the pointed mobilization of these tensions as a political tool. Iraq's self-perception is that of a victim: first, Iraq was brutalized by the Saddam regime (and, in the eyes of most Iraqi Shias, the Sunni minority); then, the international community stripped Iraq of its sovereignty, interfered with Iraq's control of its own natural resources and economy, and empowered religious extremism in the country, resulting in a drastic loss of position for Iraqi women and the empowerment of groups like the Islamic State. While the United States' involvement in Iraq is lauded by Iraqi Kurds, the U.S.'s prolonged involvement in Iraq is widely regarded as the reason for Iraq's current dysfunction by most in Baghdad. There is a consequent sentiment in Iraq that it is someone else's job (the United States, the United Nations) to ameliorate many of Iraq's current political and economic problems.

Some academics frame identity in the Middle East as built only by the presence of a common enemy: "Arab society has tended to define itself less by what it aspires to become than by what it is opposed to: colonialism, Zionism, Western imperialism in its many forms."[37] Today, ISIS serves this function (despite some initial support from Iraqi Sunnis), as it has pulled together Baghdad and Erbil as partners against Islamic extremism, particularly in the recent battle of Mosul. "Yerevan Saeed, an analyst and Research Associate at the Arab Gulf Institute in Washington, believes that the cooperation is 'unprecedented' but… worries more about the post-ISIS situation in Mosul, 'where all the competing forces will seek to harvest the spoils of the battle.'"[38] Thus, any cooperation due to a "common enemy" is perceived to be a short-term solution, that ultimately will not ameliorate the current divisions in Iraqi society.

Still, the idea of the constant presence of enemies and occupiers shapes modern day Iraq: it explains the rampant revenge-seeking, the Kurdish "exceptionalism" in their willingness to put aside historical grievances, and the continued diplomatic schizophrenia that sees Iraq making political and economic bids to many different international organizations and coalitions, often in competition with one another. Iraq feels vulnerable to the whims of the international community, violated by the United States and the United Nations in particular, and resentful of nations like Iran, even as the Baghdadi government continues to use its relationship with Tehran to balance against Sunni regional powers.

Section II: Sources of Leverage

Natural Resources

Historically, Iraq's natural resources have been some of its most effective sources of leverage on the international stage. However, the current low price of oil and the growing call for renewable energy sources threatens the potency of oil on both the political and economic levels. This has been increasingly relevant in Erbil, wherein the Kurdish Regional Government had agreed to export a set amount of oil in exchange for financial support from Baghdad, but is accused of surpassing that amount: "In November, OPEC agreed to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day from January 2017 to support prices. Iraq, OPEC's second largest producer, agreed to reduce output by 200,000 bpd to 4.351 million bpd. 'The [Kurdish] region is exporting more than its share, more than the 17 percent stated in the budget,' [Iraqi Prime Minister] Abadi said."[39] As of 2013, oil exports accounted for 95 percent of Iraq's budget,[40] and falling oil prices have contributed to the rise of corruption and extortion in Iraq.[41] Still, Erbil's oil exporting capacities, and Iraqi oil writ large, continues to be a source of leverage in the short-term, particularly as Iraq creates stronger relationships with countries like China, Russia and Turkey.

Foreign Investments

Iraq has faced challenges in attracting foreign investment, which remains an explicit goal of the federal government since 2006, when the Federal Investment Law was passed. The goal of this law is to increase foreign investments in Iraq by offering certain incentives. Security concerns have discouraged significant Western investment in Iraq, which in turn increased Iraqi cooperation with Iran, Turkey and China.[42] This challenge to American geopolitical interests in the region is important; having realized the difficulty (and perhaps futility) of democratization projects, it seems unlikely that the Western world would have much interest in Iraq if not for the confluence of regional and international interests in the region.

Geopolitical Influence

One of Iraq's greatest sources of leverage is its geopolitical position and continued relevance in global proxy wars and regional power struggles. Too much Iranian influence in Iraq, for example, could unbalance U.S. ally Saudi Arabia and Sunni ascendancy in the

If ISIS or Sunni militants were to seize control of Baghdad, they would threaten the interests of the Kurds, Syria, Iran, Russia, and other countries with foreign investments in Iraq and the Levant. A weak Iraq also threatens the security of the United States and Europe, which have increasingly become targets of radical terrorist organizations. It is in the interest of global security that Iraq remains a cohesive state with a functional government, capable of challenging extremism and balancing regional hegemonic interests, and thus Iraq maintains geopolitical leverage.

In the fight against ISIS, Iraq has also curated relationships with a number of different global powers: The United States and Russia have both sent significant military aid (in the form of finances and weapons) to Baghdad;[43] the United Kingdom, Australia and France have launched attacks against ISIS from Iraq, cooperating with local military forces and supplying everything from humanitarian aid to trainings on how to prevent the entry of foreign fighters.[44] This increases Iraq's capacity to coalition-build as well as block potential negotiation moves. It has further increased Iraq's access to military technologies and military trainings, both of which empower the current State of Law Coalition government and its goals.

The KRG's leverage can be considered in the context of Erbil and Iraq as a whole. Perhaps even more than Iraqi security forces, the Kurdish Peshmerga has been essential in the fight against ISIS, and the United States has cooperated directly with the KRG, supplying military and financial support to the Kurds with the (reported) support of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.[45] Nevertheless, Al Jazeera reports that some in Baghdad have seen this cooperation between the U.S. and KRG as "unconstitutional" and a challenge to Baghdad's authority.[46] The Kurds' embracing of Western norms and values (and pointed subsuming of their Islamic identity) have made them appealing allies for the United States, although Western powers are wary of seeming too supportive of the Kurds' ambitions for statehood, which would threaten the territorial sovereignty of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. The Kurds have established themselves as a nation built by the United States (while this is more or less factually accurate, their adulation of U.S. presidents is also a public relations strategy of differentiating Erbil from Baghdad).

However, Iraqi Kurdistan cannot (and should not) be considered outside of its relationship to Baghdad. Not only are Kurdish bids for statehood currently eschewed by the United States and United Nations, Iraqi Kurds do not currently have the capacity for autonomous production of many goods (particularly in the agricultural sector).[47] Thus, Kurdish independence runs contrary to the interests of Baghdad, regional powers and international authorities. The historical grievances the Kurds have suffered can be seen as a form of leverage, but the Kurds have more to gain as presenting themselves as partners to Iraqi and American interests, for as long as those run parallel to one another in the region. The Kurds, through the KRG and their decade-long position in the presidency of Iraq, also have the power to balance against the current Prime Minister and his party's ambitions. If the Kurds were to extricate themselves from Baghdad completely, it would likely cause a ramping up of sectarian violence, revenge seeking, and corruption in the upper echelons of the Baghdadi government, which already suffers from rampant corruption and nepotism.[48]

Despite the fact that much of Erbil's success has been intrinsically motivated, Baghdad still benefits from the Kurds' economic ventures, increased lines of communication with global powers, and formidable military capacity. By leveraging these assets, particularly the ability of the Peshmerga to buffer against radical extremists in the region, Baghdad has secured military aid from the United States and its allies, and presented a united Iraq (and a functional Erbil-Baghdad relationship) as essential to global security. Baghdad could also look to Erbil when considering security sector reform, and benefit from the Peshmerga's international training and cooperation with other militaries.

The Anti-Imperialism Narrative

Iraq has a strong narrative of being wronged by the international community, particularly the United States. The faulty premise for the original invasion coupled with the withdrawal of American troops and the power vacuum created therein, which empowered sectarian leaders and terrorist organizations alike, all serve to condemn the U.S.' presence and subsequent abandonment of Baghdad. This gives the Iraqi some domestic and diplomatic advantages, as the central government is able to justifiably point to (as well as scapegoat)[49] the U.S. when systems and processes are not working smoothly. This is particularly relevant to the current position of women in Iraq.

The UN-backed sanctions against Iraq, the fall of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent rise of radical Islamism in Iraq had catastrophic consequences for Iraqi women. In a global environment that has come to regard women's rights as human rights, the marginalization of Iraqi women due to foreign sanctions and interventions should have a significant amount of diplomatic, social and economic clout. The narrative of overcoming victimhood, breaking the cycle of revenge, and rising despite international interference has been incredible soft power for Iraq's Kurds – if the rest of the nation could follow this example, Iraq could use its historic grievances as a source of leverage.

Section III: Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Political Parties

Iraq's convoluted politics and network of actors has created a political landscape that is hard to navigate and constantly changing. Because most of its parties derive support from ethnic, sectarian or regional constituencies, Iraq lacks a major party that is fully representative of its heterogeneous population. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, there were several key coalitions which won seats in the Council of Representatives. The secular parties of the National Coalition (Wataniyya) and the Iraqiyoon (literally "Iraqis") won 21 and 28 seats respectively, giving secular nationalist parties around 15 percent of the total seats. While the Iraqiyoon party is relatively

party is relatively new, formed in 2009 by the Sunni moderate Osama al-Najaifi, its stated goals reflect a growing call for more inclusive government, which is not overly influenced by the United States and other regional actors: "Iraq's independence is our aim that we will not compromise; we want to liberate Iraq from occupation and its neighbors' greed."[50] Najaifi, who is also the informal leader of the moderate Sunni al-Habda party, was formerly the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, and thereby the most powerful Sunni politician in Iraq.

The current Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, is a member of the State of Law Coalition, which includes the Dawa Party, of which former PM Nouri al-Maliki is the leader. There is significant tension between Abadi and Maliki, the former of whom has criticized the divisive politics of his predecessor. As a result, "much of the most vocal criticism is actually coming from al-Abadi's own political bloc, the State of Law coalition, and within that coalition, his own political party, the Dawa party. There is a split within the Shiite Muslim-dominated State of Law coalition and it appears to be deepening, with local analysts saying that it's likely to manifest most strongly during 2017's planned provincial elections."[51] On the other side, Abadi is supported by some members of his party who approved of his plans to end corruption and to create a national guard for Iraq that draws on members of various communities and confessional identities.[52] Abadi was also historically supported by MPs from the Sadrist bloc and Sunni Muslims, although both groups have leveled criticisms against him in the past year: "'Everyone is unhappy with al-Abadi but everyone has their own reasons for this,' says senior Sunni Muslim MP, Dhafer al-Ani. 'In our case, al-Abadi didn't facilitate the formation of the National Guard – this would have allowed the Sunni tribes to participate in the fight against the Islamic State and put an end to the chaos that is being caused by the Shiite Muslim militias. Additionally, the government has not properly implemented the general amnesty law that it promised it would when it was formed.'"[53]

Abadi thus has been less divisive than Maliki but is steadily losing favor with many of his constituencies, in part due to the impasse within his own party as well as the continued stagnation of the political process in Iraq due to the lack of a majority party. Despite this, Abadi has curated much friendlier relationships with the United States than Maliki, which has allowed greater cooperation between the U.S. and Baghdad in the fight against ISIS.

Baghdad-Erbil Relationship

Despite the presence of Kurdish parties and a Kurdish President in Baghdad, Iraqi Kurds have limited direct political control in Baghdad, and instead exercise both hard and soft power by balancing against Baghdad in Erbil. Political stalemates between the two seats of power have rendered Iraq practically immobile for years: "To consider but a few: the negotiations over a much-needed Hydrocarbons Law remain deadlocked; the constitutional-reform process is moribund; the Iraqi government's questioning of the legal status of the Kurdistan Army (the Peshmerga) is matched by the KRG's refusal to accept the legitimization of militias (the isnad) proposed by [former] Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki; and an immense swath of territory is claimed by both the KRG and the Iraqi government, including the geopolitically valuable province of Kirkuk. Even fundamental questions concerning the future of Iraq itself, particularly whether it will be truly federal or federal in name only, remain unresolved."[54] This relationship, more than that of Iraq's Sunni and Shia populations, has the potential to make or break Iraqi stability: even at the height of sectarian violence in 2006, the Iraqi government continued to function in a predictable way; however, disagreements between Erbil and Baghdad have effectively brought a significant number of domestic issues to a standstill in Iraq. (For more on this relationship, see section on the Kurds.)

The Low Price of Oil

The current Iraqi budget assumes an oil price of approximately $45/barrel. With oil prices fluctuating, and oil experts warning that the falling price of oil over the past five years is "structural, not cyclical," this not only creates danger of budget deficits – which impact Kurdish/Baghdadi relations, as well as the government's ability to provide basic services and combat ISIS – but encourages rampant corruption.[55]

The Islamic State

The Islamic State's targeting of Iraq's Shias has continued to exacerbate sectarian tensions in the country. In the first four months of 2017, 1,660 civilians were killed in acts of terrorism, violence, and armed conflict.[56] The inability of Baghdad (and its allies) to contain ISIS contributes to a sense of helplessness on the ground, as well as mounting sectarian tensions and anti-Sunni sentiment in primarily Shia and mixed communities.

The presence of ISIS in-country has, to some degree, improved Arab-Kurd relations, in that Baghdad has relied heavily on Erbil and the Peshmerga to act as a buffer against the radical militant organization. The international community has also worked closely with the Kurds (as well as Baghdad), giving the KRG a greater presence in international circles and perhaps more clout when it comes to asserting its ambitions for statehood in the future.

Section IV: External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Saudi Arabia

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has accused Saudi Arabia of interfering in Iraq's elections and stoking ethno-sectarian violence, saying, "Saudi Arabia fears democracy in Iraq."[57] Historically, however, Iraq has kept ties to Saudi Arabia to balance against the regional influence of Iran – although that relationship was strained after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which threatened the House of Saud's

strategic interests in the Persian Gulf. In the subsequent decades, Riyadh supported a policy of containment vis-à-vis Iraq, up until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, when Tehran began making overt bids to influence Baghdad and the Maliki government. In the past decade, the Saudi government has been vocal in support of former Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, who met with King Abdullah in 2010 and promoted a message of inclusionary government that would make inroads with Iraq's Sunni populations. In January 2016, Saudi Arabia reopened its embassy in Baghdad for the first time since 1990 as a show of partnership and good faith with the post-Maliki government.

Iran

Under Maliki, Iraq received "unlimited support from Iran, which enjoys the strongest regional influence in Iraq. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised Maliki's role in Iraq in several meetings between them, which he has never done with Abadi. Sources within the National Alliance, which unites the Shiite forces including Maliki and Abadi, have been reported as saying that Iran is pushing for Maliki to be nominated for prime minister in the elections scheduled for 2018."[58] While Iran still maintains relationships (both political and economic) with Abadi's Baghdad, the Prime Minister's relationships with the Kurds and the United States strain his connection with Tehran; this is further exacerbated by Abadi's move away from Shia ascendancy in Iraq, in favor of embracing a more secular Iraqi nationalism.

The United States

The United States' bilateral relationship with Iraq post-2003, as defined by the Strategic Framework Agreement, were supposed to reflect a shift in the Washington-Baghdadi power dynamic: instead of acting as an occupier, the United States would become a strategic partner in the political, economic, cultural and security sectors of Iraq.[59] However, U.S.-Iraqi relations "have failed to develop into a strong and deep strategic partnership," due to U.S. criticisms of Iraqi governance and sectarian politics,[60] a strong sense of victimhood and abandonment within the Iraqi government, and the U.S.' pointed "pivot" away from its responsibilities in the Middle East.[61]

The Obama Administration aimed to conclude America's "overseas contingency operations,"[62] ending the "longest war in American history"[63] and generally extricate the United States from counterterrorism operations on the ground in the Middle East. However, the United States remains tied to the Republic of Iraq due to (i) concerns over regional stability if Iraq were to devolve further into civil war; (ii) the utility of Iraq/the Iraqi Kurds in combatting ISIS without U.S. boots on the ground; (iii) the geopolitical implications of an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq; (iv) and fears over increased Iranian and/or Saudi Arabian influence in the region.

The persistent U.S. desire for a united Iraq is reflected in a notable silence on the issue of Kurdish independence. Without the support of the United States, it seems unlikely that Kurdish aspirations for independence could easily become reality, as they would require the political (and likely, financial) backing of another regional or world power. Neither Iran nor Syria nor Turkey would risk aligning with Iraqi Kurds and thereby emboldening the ambitions of statehood within their own Kurdish populations. It also seems unlikely that Russia, which is closely aligned with Syria, would throw their weight behind the Kurds, even as a tactic to upset U.S. influence in the region. Saudi Arabia could potentially benefit from an autonomous Kurdistan, if only to destabilize the "Shi'a Crescent," which includes Iran, Iraq, and Syria, but this support would be unprecedented. Thus, as the geopolitical situation currently stands, a move for Kurdish independence in Iraq might endanger key economic relations and potentially aggravate key political partners, neither of which Iraqi Kurds, in their attempts to increase their capacity for statehood and economic independence from Baghdad, can afford right now.

The United States was highly critical of the divisive Maliki government, with one U.S. Senator stating in 2014 that "The Maliki government, candidly, has got to go if [the Iraqi government] want[s] any reconciliation."[64] However much control the United States continues to exercise in Iraq, there was significant pushback against U.S. interference in the Maliki government.[65]

On the other hand, since Abadi's election in 2015 and his subsequent efforts to unite Iraqis in the political and social spheres, the United States has engaged more actively with the Iraqi government than in the recent past, particularly with respect to combatting the Islamic State. "The United States did not support Iraq even after a third of its territory fell into ISIS' hands, but rushed to do so when Maliki stepped down from power. This reluctance was widely interpreted as President Barack Obama's unwillingness to support Iraq under Maliki's rule.

Whether Maliki will succeed in bringing down Abadi and replacing him as prime minister depends on how political affairs are arranged in the post-IS era, which will be affected by many regional and international factors, not least among them the Iraq policy of the next US president."[66] The Trump administration has thus far indicated an unwillingness to commit U.S. resources to rebuilding Iraq.[67]

Turkey

Ankara is an important gateway to Europe, allowing Iraqi oil to flow out and commerce to enter the Middle East from the Western world. For this reason, good relations with Turkey are important to Baghdad. This is reflected in Iraq's stance towards Kurdish autonomy. Indeed, both nations have worked together to suppress Kurdish rebellion in their respective territories, although Iraq recently criticized Ankara's campaigns against the Kurds in both Iraq and Turkey, claiming that Ankara had violated Iraqi state sovereignty. However, new cooperation against the Islamic State seems to have distracted from these tensions for the time being.[68] Baghdad's relationship with Turkey has also helped ease sectarian tensions, as Ankara is cooperative with Erbil (in terms of oil exportation), Iraqi Shia leaders, and Sunni Iraqis.[69]

Egypt

      While Iraq had close ties to Egypt during the Nasser era, the two countries began trading more significantly during the Oil-for-Food program implemented by the United Nations. Today, Egypt is one of Iraq's largest Middle Eastern trading partners, and one of Baghdad's closest Sunni allies.[70]

China

      China-Iraq relations are predicated on energy, as "China's oil imports have skyrocketed over the past decade." In 2006, China imported 1 million tons of oil from Iraq; in January 2015 alone, China imported 3.4 million tons of oil, "making the country Beijing's second-largest oil supplier (behind only Saudi Arabia)… Overall, China imports nearly half of Iraq's total oil production."[71] Despite this, Beijing remained uncommitted in the fight against the Islamic State, despite the organization's threats to Chinese national interests, which seems to suggest a unwillingness of the PRC to commit resources to the wellbeing of Baghdad.

The United Nations

      Historically, the UN has not had a favorable view of Baghdad, and vice versa, particularly after the UN's sanctions against the Saddam Hussein regime.[72] The sanctions crippled the economic capacity of the average Iraqi family, limiting their ability to send their children (particularly girls) to school; by the year 2000, UNESCO reported that Iraq had the lowest adult literacy levels in the region, and less than a quarter of Iraqi women were literate.[73]

      The UN-backed sanctions also directly caused the death of over 1 million Iraqis due to starvation, diarrheal diseases, malnutrition-related diseases, and the breakdown of Iraqi infrastructure, particularly its hospitals. Of these deaths, between 227,000 and 567,000 were children, primarily infants.[74][75] When confronted with this data, the UN offered a controversial "oil for food" program, wherein Iraq would trade its oil for temporary allowances of food; Saddam Hussein refused this violation of state sovereignty. The sanctions were not lifted until the May 2003 ouster of Saddam Hussein, and various aspects (including reparations to Kuwait) are still in place today.[76]

      This legacy has created mistrust and resentment of international bodies within Iraq, particularly due to the lack of representation of Middle Eastern countries on the Security Council (in 2003, only Syria represented the Middle East; in 2017, Egypt will be the only Arab nation).[77] On the other side, the UN has condemned the Baghdadi government for its violence against the Kurds during the Iran-Iraq war,[78] as well as continued violations of human rights and international norms under the Maliki regime.[79]

Section V: Potential Negotiation Moves

      From the Iraqi perspective, Baghdad (via Erbil) is doing the essential work of buffering the Islamic State, a group which would not be in power if not for the egregious violations of international norms committed primarily by the United States. In this narrative, Iraq is a passive participant upon which sectarianism was inflicted by outside powers. While this has a kernel of truth to it, it does ignore the very real divisions in Iraqi society that were exacerbated by first Saddam Hussein and then Nouri al-Maliki's policies. Nevertheless, Iraq is disempowered: it does not see itself in a position to move forward unilaterally in any sector, because of the divisions both within Baghdad and between Baghdad and Erbil. Thus, it is extremely outward-facing, depending on its relationship with regional and international powers to progress in its own domestic goals and capacities. This status quo has highlighted the importance of overcoming ethno-sectarian divisions in the country, which Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has attempted to do through various (fairly unsuccessful) means: his failure is perhaps due, in part, to an unwillingness to learn from the Iraqi Kurds, whose nationalism has allowed them to present a coherent identity and move forward with common goals.

      The biggest barrier to negotiations in Iraq is the lack of a coherent vision for the country. Some political parties, like the Dawa party and the Sadrist movement, want Baghdad to be run by Shia Islamists and are willing to keep the government at a standstill to prevent a loss in station for Iraq's Shias. This is primarily in response to the historic grievances of Iraq's Shias under Saddam Hussein, as well as a resentment of the (pro-Sunni) United States and its regional ally, Saudi Arabia. The Islamic Republic of Iran further supports the Shia ascendancy in Iraq, as this protects its own regional interests and serves as a site for proxy warfare against other regional hegemons. Iraq's Sunnis (and some Shias and independents) are pushing for government that is inclusive but not necessarily confessional, with an eye toward preventing discrimination and violence in the country. Some extreme Sunnis support the Islamic State and its goals of overthrowing the apostate Shia regimes in Baghdad and Tehran – although the actual amount of support that ISIS has in Iraq is hard to measure. Because of these conflicting goals and narratives, it will be impossible to articulate a common set of aspirations for Iraqis until a greater level of stability can be achieved, and conflict resolution (through dialogue, inclusivity, and perhaps reparations) between Iraq's disparate groups has begun.

      In this environment, the most obvious negotiation move in Iraq is to solicit international financial aid to re-form the government, so that it no longer institutionalizes ethnic and sectarian divisions. This can be done in a number of ways, but the precedent would be through coalition building: instead of having parties that fall on ethno-sectarian lines (like the Shia Dawa Party) running in elections, the government should encourage mixed coalitions (like the State of Law Coalition, which includes the Dawa Party as well as independent parties) to run in governorate and parliamentary elections. Supporting secular nationalist coalitions, like the Iraqiyoon, is also another method. The goal of these coalitions would be to interrupt the cycle of sectarian violence and revenge seeking in Iraq, as they would foster cooperation among Iraq's many disparate political groups and lead to increased cooperation and efficacy in all three branches of

government. Ultimately, this would prevent governmental stagnation and make it harder for international powers to justify continued interference in Iraq, as well as quiet criticisms of abuses of power in the executive branch. The United States in particular stands to benefit from a united Iraq, and the United Nations currently depends on the Baghdad/Erbil governments to buffer against extremists in the region; a number of world powers might support a restructuring of Iraq if it increased the country's stability.

Another key negotiation tactic is to continue to prevent the full autonomy of the Iraqi Kurds, in order to benefit from Erbil's good economic relationships with the Western world and oil-exportation capacities. Furthermore, the Baghdadi government could benefit from increased cooperation with Erbil to demonstrate improved ethno-sectarian relations within the Iraqi government, both to the Iraqi people and the international community. This could be achieved through a number of ways: continue to deny the Kurds the finances needed to develop their infrastructure and economy; continue to demand that any relationship with Erbil be curated by Baghdad; emphasize an Iraqi defense strategy that includes both Baghdad and Erbil and seeks to solicit funds from the United Nations/United States to combat the Islamic State by routing any military aid to the Peshmerga through Baghdad. On a regional level, this could also be achieved by increasing ties between Baghdad and Ankara and/or Tehran, both of which actively oppose Kurdish national ambitions.

Furthermore, continuing to encourage economic relationships with countries such as Iran and China bolsters Iraq's economy and keeps Baghdad relevant to powers such as the United States. The Western world will not ignore Iraq if that means the country will foster close relationships with non-Western powers, thereby unbalancing the regional dynamic and potentially inciting increased proxy warfare. This also could afford Iraq the ability to make demands of Western powers, as there is reason to fear that denying Iraq's requests would drive Baghdad further toward Tehran, Beijing, or even Moscow. On the other hand, Abadi also stands to benefit from continued overtures to the West, to balance the influence of Tehran, which would prefer Abadi's predecessor and rival, Nouri al-Maliki, at the helm of the Iraqi government. However, the United States' pivot away from Iraq, as well as President Donald Trump's stated unwillingness to continue to financially support Baghdad, seems to preclude continued American sponsorship of Iraq's democracy experiment.

This leaves Baghdad with a number of choices: Baghdad could continue to depend heavily on Iran, which could potentially balance against the influence of regional hegemon Saudi Arabia, but runs the risk of further alienating Iraq's Sunni Muslims and thus empowering ISIS; Baghdad could make overtures to a different international power, such as China or Russia, for support, but this goes against Abadi's current position aiming to limit Russia's interference in Iraqi domestic politics, and would create another situation in which Iraq is beholden to another country's patronage; Iraq could appeal to international organizations, such as the United Nations, World Bank, or IMF, for support, to prevent any singular nation from exerting undue pressure or influence on Baghdad. [80]

The third option seems the most realistic, considering that most political efforts to unite Iraqis post-2003 have failed, economic development and building civil society may be the key to bridging ethnic and sectarian divides. Iraqi Kurds have been able to engage with Turkey, Iran, China, the United States, and various other countries, all with varied interests in the region, on an economic level. It stands to reason, then, that economic relations can transcend antithetical systems of belief if both parties benefit from the interaction. Thus, building up a backbone of infrastructure in the center of the country as suggested by the World Bank seems like a logical next step for the country.[81] Ideally, employing Iraqis and incentivizing peace would stabilize the country and reduce violence therein, allowing Iraq to further develop its economy. This becomes more pressing when considering the cost of war with ISIS, and the persistent low price of oil: "At a recent meeting with a group of university staff and professors, al-Abadi spoke openly about looming financial problems; in the past he's been more subtle on this issue or downplayed the problem. 'The state's revenues will be IQD40 trillion next year, but the salaries of state employees alone add up to IQD50 trillion.'"[82] This caused a cut in salaries across the board in the name of fighting ISIS – a move that further destabilized Abadi's support in Baghdad.

If Abadi cannot reach across party lines to unite the Dawa MPs who disapprove of him, as well as the Sunnis and independents who have criticized him, there is a chance that Maliki could regain power. This would, almost certainly, result in a complete withdrawal of U.S. support, regional posturing between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and a renewed cycle of sectarian conflict in Iraq, which would empower the Islamic State. In that instance, one of the best things that Abadi could do would be to throw his support behind someone like Ayad Allawi, the former Interim Prime Minister of Iraq (2004-2005), a Shia Muslim and a former Ba'athist who survived a falling out with (and subsequent assassination attempts by) Saddam Hussein.[83] Allawi has the political clout (and identity politics) that would allow him to reach across the aisle.

Once Iraq can move beyond entrenched sectarianism, measures of effective governance should be: the ability to build coalitions; the ability to balance the Iraqi budget; the capacity to bring in foreign investment (without challenging Iraqi state sovereignty); free and fair elections that lead to peaceful transitions of power; productive and equitable international relations; Iraqi membership in international organizations; and increased Iraqi capacity to develop its natural resources, engage in free trade, and expand its markets to include more long-term, sustainable practices, like clean energy (solar or wind power). Furthermore, Iraq will need to re-integrate Iraqi women into its economic and political sectors if it hopes to be a true participant in the global economy. Baghdad could make overtures to international organizations like the United Nations or World Bank to receive support in women's empowerment: not only could this create better relations between Iraq and some of the major global institutions, it could also establish Baghdad as an Islamic feminist nation – which would certainly draw international attention and differentiate Iraq from its regional rivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Feminism is also a non-confessional foundation to build a movement upon. Empowering all Iraqi citizens, including women, in the social, political and economic sectors seems to be the only way to prevent cyclical violence – particularly because Abadi's

in the social, political and economic sectors seems to be the only way to prevent cyclical violence – particularly because Abadi's strategy requires buy-in from all constituencies.[84] Furthermore, the UN has mandated "Women must be allowed to participate fully in peacebuilding and conflict prevention in order to end sexual violence against women as a method of warfare and ensure women's full legal, socio-economic and political rights after the fighting was over."[85] Embracing these international norms would demonstrate that (i) Iraq can be a primarily Islamic nation and still respect civil rights; (ii) that Islamic values do not run contrary to global norms; and that (iii) Iraq can be a regional leader in promoting conflict resolution, respect for human rights, and respect for women's rights. The strong history of women's participation in government until the 1990s can set a precedent for re-emphasized inclusion in Baghdad.

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XII. ISIS: War, Extremism and State Building

Introduction

In 2014 ISIS catapulted onto the global stage with its shocking victories in Iraq and Syria and the sudden pledges of allegiance of jihadist groups from Nigeria to Afghanistan. General Nagata, the U.S. Special Forces commander in charge of training fighters against ISIS, characterized the situation in December 2014: "We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it. We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea."[1] Though ISIS represents a pernicious appeal and a unique approach to gathering support, their interests are not entirely different from a number of other violent extremist groups, made unique by their drive for territorial expansion. This report specifically highlights their key interests and how they constitute their worldview, their sources of leverage and how they protect them, and the internal conflicts that drive their decisions. Can ISIS be negotiated with? Past attempts have yielded little success, but ISIS has demonstrated that over short term economic issues it can be negotiated with. However, in the long term, it will consistently act as a spoiler on other negotiations.

I. Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

Key Interests

ISIS is first and foremost concerned with establishing an Islamic caliphate, because it underpins its other interests by placing it in the apocalyptic prophecies, drawing recruitment, and giving it legitimacy for its actions. ISIS is fundamentally opposed to peace, and its long term strategic interests center on expanding the caliphate to all formerly Muslim lands and ultimately spread a fundamentalist version of Shariah law across the world.[2] They believe that by provoking war between the West and the Islamic world, they place themselves in the apocalyptic prophecies of the Qur'an and have made tactical decisions in reflection of these prophecies, such as capturing the town of Dabiq. However, in addition to these larger aims, ISIS has focused on specific tactical interests such as governing their territory to the semblance of a functioning state, using targeted violence in what amounts to genocide against Shi'a and Yazidis, and using resistance to Shi'a authoritarian regimes in Iraq and Syria to coalesce support for its other aims. ISIS is a unique amalgamation of violent extremist goals and conventional state aims, as its capabilities and tactics vary between governing territory and acts of insurgency, so does the prioritization of its key interests.

Strategic Interest: Upholding the Caliphate

Unlike other violent extremist groups, who placed a caliphate in their long-term interests and have even controlled territory, ISIS has made upholding a caliphate an immediate and vital interest for its symbolic and practical value. With a caliphate declared, ISIS is able to claim the allegiance of all Sunni Muslims by drawing a direct line from the Prophet Muhammad to their movement. There are several requirements before a caliphate can be declared: the caliph must be a descendant of the bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad, the caliph must control territory, and the caliph must completely enforce Islamic law. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-declared caliph and leader of ISIS, claims to be a descendant of the tribe of the prophet Muhammed, the Qurayshis. He controls territory from a large swathe of Northern and Eastern Syria and along the Euphrates into Northern Iraq, including Raqqa, Palmyra, and Mosul. In addition, ISIS holds territory in Libya (with its capital in Sirte), in the Sinai, and in Afghanistan, while groups such as Boko Haram that once held territory in Nigeria have sworn allegiance to them.

As a symbol, the caliphate is a startling innovation for violent extremist groups that strengthens the legitimacy of their cause on an individual level. While Islamist violent extremists such as the Taliban have held land before, they called themselves an "emirate" (The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan). According to medieval Islamic thought, an emirate was only the government of a region, within a state (the empire led by a caliph).[3] The caliphate acts a particularly compelling form of ensuring alliances. According to some interpretations of the Qur'an, pledging allegiance (*baya'a*) makes it all but certain you will achieve salvation—in fact, ISIS's followers believe that a Muslim who has never pledged him or herself to a caliph but still led a pious life can still die a "death of disbelief" for not fully living an Islamic life.[4]

ISIS uses the caliphate to present itself as the highest representation of Muslims on earth. They have adopted a common symbol of Islam as their own: black flags with the *shahada*, the Islamic declaration of faith: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger," written in white, to symbolize the caliphate.[5] In doing so, they attempt to erase any differences between the brutality they practice and mainstream Islam, which both enhances their legitimacy and stokes the fears of non-Muslim populations that all Muslims are after their blood. ISIS's goal is therefore to expand its territory throughout all historically Muslim lands.[6]

The caliphate also serves the practical purpose as a safe haven for gathering resources and training recruits, as well as the weapons development and media planning that enables attacks outside of Iraq and Syria.[7] ISIS has a complex weapons manufacturing system and a supply chain that stretches from the Turkish market to Syria and then to Mosul.[8] Furthermore, they have access to oil fields and black markets in Iraq and Syria, and a population on which to impose taxes.

To maintain the caliphate, ISIS has several tactical interests: internal security of their territory, governance, and projecting a compelling message. Maintaining the security of their terrain involves forcing local populations to submit to ISIS's control, sustaining tight policing and spying, and systematically using brutality through local terrorism and informants to intimidate any internal resistance. They have sustained careful assassination campaigns of all local leaders who might rise up and unite forces against them. They were also easily able to shift military units to quash any internal rebellions before they grew. They have been highly successful in pushing out conventional armies (particularly the Iraqi Armed Forces and the Syrian Armed Forces), especially when those armies were not backed by world powers such as the U.S. and Russia.[9]

ISIS's military dominance originally extended over about 126 key locations in Iraq and Syria; however, throughout 2016 they lost about 56 of those locations. They lost Ramadi in January 2016, a key point between Mosul and Raqqa, and Deir al-Zour and Mosul are currently active battle grounds against Syrian and Iraqi forces, respectively.[10] Loss of territory is not only a symbolic loss, but a practical one. Without the oil fields or populations to tax, ISIS loses major sources of revenue. The loss of territory also transforms ISIS's goals, from governance and territorial defense, to insurgency.[11]

In the end, it matters less what territory ISIS controls, so long as it continues to hold territory. Within Syria and Iraq their holdings are 26,370 square miles (just slightly larger than Sri Lanka). In addition, ISIS holds territory in Libya, the Sinai, and Afghanistan, and top ISIS leaders in Iraq and Syria have been sent to those affiliates to ensure their continuation.[12] At the same time, ISIS has begun fostering affiliates in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the North Caucasus, and Algeria.[13] With any territory in their possession, the caliphate will continue to act as a particularly potent idea in inspiring recruits to combat the corruption of the Iraqi government, the brutality of the Syrian regime, and the inequities of globalized societies.

Strategic Interest: Waging Unilateral War

War serves two purposes for ISIS. First, as ISIS holds a caliphate they subscribe to "offensive jihad," the acquiring of territory in countries ruled by non or 'impious' Muslims to expand the caliphate.[14] Continued success on the battlefield bolsters their prestige among other jihadist groups and induces recruitment. Second, it serves their larger goal of dragging the West into a prolonged conflict in the Middle East. According to *The Management of Savagery*, an al-Qaeda strategy popular under Abu Musa'b al Zarqawi – the founder of the predecessor to ISIS in Iraq – violent extremists ought to draw the U.S. into protracted wars in the Middle East to shatter their illusion of invincibility.[15]

ISIS believes the armies of Islam are in a defensive position, and are therefore entitled to especially violent responses not normally permitted in the Islamic jurisprudence on war. Sheikh Muhammad al-Adnani, spokesperson for ISIS before his death, indicated that Muslims in the lands of infidels (Western countries) should kill them with rocks, poison them, and destroy their crops.[16] ISIS also ascribes to a strategy from *The Management of Savagery* called "paying the price," where they used beheadings and crucifixions to terrorize its enemies to scare them into surrendering. To this end, they have publicly released footage of beheadings of Western hostages and the burning of a Jordanian pilot.[17] This equivocation between offensive jihad and defensive jihad suggests a liberal usage of theology to give ISIS the widest array of options in the use of violence.

What makes ISIS's approach to warfare particularly unique is its insistence on fighting unilaterally. One of ISIS's major disagreements with Jebhat al-Nusra, the one-time al-Qaeda front in Syria, was its decision to embed itself in the Syrian opposition, who might not be so compliant with ISIS's territorial aspirations. ISIS even refused to cooperate in Sharia Councils after battles to distribute aid because they would not submit to any authority other than their own.[18] This position leaves ISIS with few allies not of its own creation, and even when it shares interests with another party in the Middle East, it tends only to cooperate when it cannot accomplish its other aims on its own.

Tactical Interest: Purging Shi'a

ISIS also believes that it has a mission to rid Islam of nonbelievers and apostates, which according to them consists of the 200 million Shi'a around the world.[19] There are direct practical implications of the hate of Shi'ites they instill in their followers. In Iraq, ISIS capitalized on Maliki's authoritarian policies in 2010 that explicitly favored the Shi'a in Iraq. To this end, ISIS developed alliances with 80 Sunni Arab tribes in Iraq who felt victimized by Maliki's sectarian policies, particularly members of the Awakening Movement, and many Sunnis joined ISIS while others put up no resistance as they gained territory in Iraq.[20] A similar disapproval of the U.S.-backed Shi'a government in Baghdad spurred the Ba'athist alliance with the leaders of ISIS.[21] In Syria, ISIS galvanized support by tapping into the near universal horror of Assad's brutality, but swiftly co-opted the conflict from a fight for liberty into an overtly sectarian one against Assad's and the Alawites, who are often perceived to be a sect of Shi'a Islam.

While killing Shi'a fulfills the idea that "the sword of vengeance will fall upon hypocrites before being turned against infidels," as described in one apocalyptic prophecy, it remains a tactical distraction to their other interests and in fact turns away support from other Sunnis.[22] However, the use of genocide in Nazi Germany suggests other motives: by inducing hate of "the other" to such an extent that Muslims are willing to kill other Muslims, ISIS is able to instill complete loyalty and a violent unity of purpose that feeds on their fear. It also allows for the erasure of the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic differences in its fighters and the populations under its control.

Strategic Interest: Overthrowing Infidel Governments

ISIS takes a violent approach to enacting Salafist beliefs, rather than proselytizing or practicing internal purification. Putting them in line with group such as al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, and the Taliban, ISIS holds that governments that do not rule through a strict interpretation of Sharia law are infidels that must be overthrown.[23] This goal has led to calls for "lone wolves," independent cells of ISIS followers outside of Iraq and Syria, to conduct attacks against other governments, including the France, Belgium, the U.S., and the

U.K. It has even led to calls for attacks within self-described "Islamic" nations such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

While al-Qaeda prioritized attacks against a "far enemy" because they viewed the U.S. as the key supporter of corrupt, un-Islamic regimes in the Middle East, ISIS also uses attacks against the "far enemy" in a more tactical sense.[24] Before the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, security services in Switzerland and France arrested jihadists planning attacks as far back as March 2014.[25] ISIS uses attacks in Europe to make up for territorial losses in Iraq and Syria.[26] The Paris attacks in November 2015 did coincide with significant losses in Iraq (particularly Ramadi).[27]   Likewise, the Brussels attacks in March 2016 coincided with continued battles in Iraq.[28] If this theory holds true, it suggests that territorial losses in Iraq more often provoked attacks outside the Middle East than losses in Syria (where the borders were often changing).

ISIS's attacks are evidence of further competition between them al-Qaeda, who have traditionally prioritized such attacks. It is true that after al-Qaeda and ISIS split in 2014, ISIS began conducting more attacks against the West. ISIS seeks to deter further attacks by making the populations of the countries in the Western coalition feel the consequences of their air strikes.

Intelligence officials in Europe estimate between 400 and 600 fighters trained for attacks outside the Middle East.[29] As of December 2015 about 5,000 foreign fighters in ISIS are from Western Europe, and of these 1,700 are from France and 760 from Germany and 760 from the U.K.[30] Many of these foreign fighters are recruited to fight in Syria by ISIS recruitment networks whose stated goal is to spread fear and ultimately implement Sharia law in European countries. One such example is Sharia4Belgium, a network that recruited Jejoen Bontinck to fight for ISIS and aimed to replace the Belgian Parliament with a Shura council, convert, banish, or force all non-Muslims to pay a tax, and stone adulterers and homosexuals. Their indoctrination of new recruits also involves explaining how to overthrow infidel regimes.[31] However, by the time recruits reach Syria the focus is on ISIS's local expansionist aims, rather than complex coups of Western governments.

Within Europe, ISIS has successfully aimed to weaken unity between states and undermine the freedom of movement that draws Europeans together. By increasing security threats, they also hope to induce distrust between the citizens of Europe and their governments, who will be forced to turn to ever more divisive measures of surveillance. An English-language poster from an official ISIS media outlet celebrating the November 2015 Paris attacks specifically mentioned that the results of the attacks were "that the increase in security measures will cost France approximately EUR 600 million and that the sum will be obtained through increased taxes on the people."[32] Within Europe, ISIS wants to feed the Clash of Civilizations worldview, provoking violence and distrust against Muslims so that only then will Muslims living in Europe truly recognize the need for ISIS and turn towards more extremist elements in society. In their own words, their goal is to "destroy the grayzone."[33]

Strategic Interest: Fulfilling Apocalyptic Prophecies

In their long-term vision, ISIS sees itself bringing about the apocalypse as foretold by the Prophet Muhammad. To do so, they must first return the world to the legal environment of the seventh century in the time of the Prophet. They have embraced slavery and crucifixion, acts though permitted in the Qur'an but have embarrassed even their own supporters.[34] Combined with their recourse towards the shock-value of violence, it suggests aims beyond public appeal or deterrence.

The arrival of foreign fighters in IS's troops fulfilled a number of prophecies, including one where 'saved' Muslims fight infidels until the Apocalypse. Al-Qaeda also used apocalyptic imagery (most noticeably when in Afghanistan by filming in Khorasan, a land identified as Afghanistan and Eastern Iran in End of Days prophecies). However, they never expected the Mahdi was imminent, and the upper-class Saudi and Egyptian leadership of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the founding leadership of al-Qaeda, disdained apocalyptic thought in their internal messages. They were especially given to dismissal because in 1979, a group of radicals captured the Ka'ba, Islam's holiest shrine, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia and claimed one of their members was the Mahdi, only to be later killed by Saudi and French special forces.[35]

By contrast, apocalyptic imagery is frequently used in ISIS's videos to mobilize fighters. When Muhammad Emwazi, "Jihadi John," beheaded an American aid worker in 2014, he said, "Here we are, burying the first American Crusader in Dabiq, eagerly awaiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive."[36] Dabiq is also the name of ISIS' English-language propaganda magazine. While ISIS makes few tactical decisions besides the capture of Dabiq in line with prophecies, their obsession with apocalyptic prophecies explain their claims of importance to all Muslims and the unsustainable approach they have taken to unilateral fighting and state building.

The Origins & Growth of ISIS

Origins: ISIS has its roots in the Iraq War, where its current leadership manipulated the chaos to develop tactics of brutality and a fighting force capable of taking on conventional armies. They owe their fundamental approach to Osama Bin Laden's rationale for al-Qaeda. However, for Bin Laden the creation of a caliphate was never a strategic or near-term goal. The structure of al-Qaeda mirrored this understanding, and his organization became a franchise network of disparate cells spread out across the world, planning uncoordinated acts of terrorism. Since ISIS views territorial control as critical to its continued survival, it has built a hierarchical structure to control land and an almost nation-state level of military power.[37]

ISIS can trace its origins to Abu Musa'b al Zarqawi, the vicious leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq during the U.S.-led invasion from 2003 until his killing in 2006.[38] Zarqawi founded al-Qaeda in Iraq, which later morphed into the Islamic State of Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and finally the Islamic State. Born in Zarqa, Jordan as Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al Kalaylah to a poor Bedouin family, Zarqawi had a violent youth as a heavy drinker. He joined a Tablighi Jamaat, a proselytizing Islamic organization aimed at encouraging better Muslims through good deeds. However, through the Tablighi Jamaat he was recruited to fight in Afghanistan in 1989 against the Soviets.

[39]

While in Afghanistan he earned the respect of fellow fighters by participating in some extremely bloody battles in the post-Soviet period. He met Sheikh Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi and together developed highly stringent jihadist Salafi beliefs. After a period spent planning attacks in Afghanistan, he pledged fealty to bin Laden and sparked the insurgency in Iraq in 2004. As leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), he promoted suicide attacks, extreme savagery, and *takfir* (excommunication) against Muslim civilians, resulting in a reprimand from Bin Laden for his excesses. Zarqawi was targeted and killed in a U.S. air strike in 2006, and after his death a coalition of violent extremists called the Mujahideen Shura Council announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq.[40]

Enduring in Iraq: The Islamic State of Iraq had not yet declared a caliphate, but it turned from strictly sectarian violence and started expanding its territorial authority in preparation for one. When former Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki started going after prominent Sunnis and lost the support of Sunni militias across the country, the Islamic State of Iraq took advantage of their disenfranchisement. Appointing Baghdadi as leader, he pulled together an alliance between the Sunni Tribes, highly experienced former Ba'athist military officials, and the remains of the Islamic State of Iraq and began to take control of pockets of territory. Under Baghdadi, suicide attacks escalated in 2011 and the Islamic State of Iraq began a systematic campaign to liberate hundreds of experienced fighters from prisons across the country.[41]

Expanding in Syria: At the start of the Syrian Civil War, the Islamic State of Iraq (still under the nominal control of al-Qaeda) sent Abu Mohammed al Jawlani, a Syrian who had served time in Camp Bucca – a U.S. prison where Baghdadi first developed the alliance with the Ba'athists – to begin the violent extremist group known as Jabhat al-Nusra (now calling itself Jabhat Fateh al-Sham). At the same time, as an excuse to exert greater violence to quash the uprising as well as to delegitimize opposition to his regime, Assad released a number of imprisoned former members of al-Qaeda, who later mobilized Syrians and foreign fighters against the regime.[42]

On April 9, 2013, in a fight over sharing the spoils of war Baghdadi claimed expansion into Syria and renamed his organization the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, alternatively the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or ISIS). However, Jawlani rejected his control and turned to the leader of al-Qaeda, Zawahiri, instead. By February 2014 al-Qaeda officially rejected the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Many of the Syrian jihadists pledged their allegiance to Baghdadi and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant captured Fallujah in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, claiming the latter as its capital. In June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant captured Mosul, the third-largest city in Iraq. Despite their extensive training at the hands of U.S. forces, Iraqi soldiers were unable to regain control of the city. Soon after, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant captured Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's birthplace, and on June 29 made the stunning announcement that they had established a caliphate.[43]

Defending the Caliphate: Baghdadi gave a public sermon at a Mosul mosque as the new "Caliph Ibrahim," renaming itself ISIS. ISIS continued expanding south into Kurdish territory while the *peshmerga*, the Kurdish security forces, retreated. A large number of ethnic and religious minorities inhabited this new territory, and the Yazidis, an ancient religious group viewed as devil-worshippers by ISIS were subjected to religious cleansing. While some escaped thanks to Kurdish efforts (the *peshmerga*, the P.K.K., and the Y.P.G.), others were enslaved.

By November 2014, ISIS had received a *baya'a* (oath of allegiance) from violent extremist groups in Egypt's Sinai (Ansar Bait al-Maqdis took on the name ISIS but continued its separatist battle against the Egyptian government), Libya, Yemen, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia. While they began as small groups, each ISIS-allied group has since acquired territory and pushed their respective countries further into civil war. Boko Haram in Nigeria soon followed. The United States responded with Operation Inherent Resolve in October 2014, building a coalition of regional militaries to conduct air strikes against ISIS while mobilizing Special Operations Forces in Iraq and Syria to work with the Iraqi and Kurdish forces to "degrade, and ultimately destroy" ISIS.[44]

The state of the State: Since 2014, ISIS has lost a lot of territory in both Iraq and Syria. It has conducted major terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Turkey, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and inspired lone wolf attacks as far as the U.S. ISIS retains control of a large swathe of Northern and Eastern Syria, from around Lake Asad near Aleppo in the North through Raqqa and along the Euphrates towards Deir e-Zor, and South to Palmyra and Abu Kamal. U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are moving to take back Raqqa, bringing together the Kurdish YPG, Arab armed groups, and Turkish-backed rebels fighting as the Free Syrian Army. Coalition Air strikes continue towards the South in Ayn Isa and at Palmyra. Meanwhile, ISIS is attacking Homs and repelled a Turkish-led attack at al-Bab, the gateway between Syria and Iraq.[45]

ISIS retains control of a section of Northern Iraq, from certain neighborhoods in Mosul and Tal Afar around the Tigris to the area around Hawija near Iraqi Kurdistan. In Central Iraq, ISIS controls the Euphrates from Qaim to the area around Haditha. The Iraqi Army and Federal Police forces are fighting to retake Mosul since October 2016 with help from the Peshmerga and Iran-backed Shi'a militias re-deployed from Syria.

Though ISIS has been pushed out of Sirte, Libya, it remains active in the Sinai peninsula of Egypt, Yemen, and Afghanistan. In addition, Boko Haram has been pushed out of the state of Borno in Nigeria, leaving it without territory.

<u>Internal Narratives</u>

The Religious Underpinnings of the Caliphate: Certain central narratives keep members of ISIS together as a cohesive force,

and the importance of the caliphate acts a central unifier that keeps fighters of ISIS focused on a simple, uplifting purpose: to build a nation. Allegiance to the caliphate has been a major draw for fighters across the world, who view Baghdadi as the legitimate caliph.[46] Participation in ISIS gives its members a sense of purpose and authority they may have often lacked in their daily lives. They remain an organization "impervious to persuasion."[47] Like any jihadist Salafi violent extremist group, ISIS is held together first and foremost by their interpretation of teachings of the Prophet Muhammed, transformed into law and action. However, their particular ideological leanings are further than jihadist Salafism, a highly conservative variant of Sunni Islam that allows for violence to resist non-Muslim occupiers, internal resistance to impious Muslim regimes, and combat with the Western world.

ISIS sees itself as enacting the early days of Islam again, where Islam was surrounded by nonbelievers, giving legitimacy to a literal reading of the Qu'ran's permission for violence. ISIS has carried out such medieval traditions as a tax on Christians and slavery, which only make sense in the context of early Islam. In addition, with the declaration of the caliphate, a whole new set of laws apply and certain violent activities are permissible while at the same time encouraging the benefits of social welfare such as free housing, food, healthcare, and clothing for everyone.[48]

The ideology preached by ISIS's followers in recruitment networks in Europe focuses on studying the Qur'an "without any distortion or editing or interpretation" in the words of one recruiter. He focused on the validity of hatred in the name of Allah, and therefore inspire followers to both believe their cause is righteous and at the same time increase their violence against other Muslims. However, the recruiters used the depth in their theological knowledge to quote lines from the hadiths or Qur'an to back up their points, turning recent converts away from mainstream Islam towards more extreme views. After convincing new recruits of the validity of their religious interpretation, they transform their worldview into a binary Clash of Civilizations one, painting Islam as fundamentally incompatible with Western democracy and Muslims as locked in a battle against infidels.[49] It is the combination of this worldview and strict Sunni adherence that unites the myriad linguistic, ethnic, and class differences of ISIS.

II. Sources of Leverage

Military

ISIS holds unprecedented military strength for a non-state violent extremist group. Its military acts as both an effective insurgency, a formidable fighting force, and sophisticated network of terrorist cells outside its territory. Where once violent extremists had to flee to remote training camps in Afghanistan to equip fighters, ISIS controls enough territory so as to have a safe haven in close proximity to the battlefield for recruits to train under the eyes of highly-experienced veterans of the Iraqi army and the Iraqi insurgency. In September 2014, the CIA estimated ISIS had approximately 20,000 to 31,500 fighters, which include both terrorist, insurgents, and also an organization resembling a traditional infantry.[50]

ISIS draws heavily on its formerly Ba'athist leaders for tactics, and its traditional infantry is made up primarily of Iraqis. However, tactically they may not be as strong as they seem, since a defector characterized ISIS' months-long battle over Kobani against the Peshmerga as sending thousands – often foreign fighters – needlessly to their deaths. ISIS' leadership has begun re-evaluating how to utilize foreign fighters, instead many to form cells in other countries in order to carry out attacks globally.[51]

Many of the weapons used by ISIS fighters are taken from the Iraqi and Syrian military facilities they seized. In January 2016, they captured the Ayyash Arms Depot in Syria, resulting in about two million rounds of ammunition, 9,000 grenades, and 100 antitank missiles. At the same time, ISIS has developed a complex manufacturing system in Mosul that standardizes production across multiple facilities, with a central authority that sets standards and clear reporting of quality. They manufacture tens of thousands of mortar rounds, rockets, and sophisticated anti-tank guided weapons and improvised explosive devices. It also sets them apart from militias in Iraq and other groups in Syria, who rely on the ad-hoc production of weapons.[52]

These production facilities also require a lengthy supply chain that extends primarily from Turkey to Syria and then to Mosul. Chemicals used in rocket propulsion and explosive devices were derived from one-off bulk sales in the Turkish domestic market, while other chemical supplies signal continuous purchases from Turkey and suggest a high level of infiltration in Turkey.[53] While ISIS has continued using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices in Iraq and suicide bombers, it has also innovated by attaching explosive devices to commercially-available drones.

The combination of territory to train large numbers of fighters in the use of advanced weaponry, highly experienced military leaders with a wide array of experience (some serving in Saddam Hussein's military while others were veteran insurgents of the Iraq conflict), and extensive production abilities for new forms of weaponry provide ISIS with a level of military advantage against opponents such as the Free Syrian Army, the Peshmerga, and even Syrian and Iraqi ground forces. However, their lack of air power leaves them vulnerable to world powers such as the U.S. and Russia.

Financial

ISIS is both highly wealthy for any militia operating in Iraq or rebel group in Syria, and unlike other groups, it is largely self-sustaining. Their main sources of revenue come from oil and gas black market sales, cash looted from major cities, the sale of stolen antiquities, kidnapping and ransoms, taxes within their territory, and an unspecified number of donations. In 2016, ISIS lost 26 percent of revenue from oil and gas, but its control of oil fields and hydroelectric dams still amounts to an estimated USD 23 million a month. Their three largest oil fields are Omar, Tanak, and Al Taim, all located in Syria and producing around 13,500 barrels of oil a day.[54]

Syrian and Iraqi independent traders go directly to oil fields buy crude oil, which have continued to produce despite air strikes. ISIS has leveraged the skills of its fighters as engineers and managers to maintain profits despite the conditions of a conflict zone.

Some take them to ISIS-controlled refineries in Syria, while others sell immediately to buyers in Iraq and Syria, mainly local towns and black markets.[55] The extent to which local Syrians and Iraqis benefit economically from ISIS illustrates the leverage they have over neighboring populations, even rebel and regime controlled ones, who are completely dependent on oil sales for functioning hospitals, electricity, and local transport.

Once ISIS captured Mosul, it plundered the major banks for hundreds of millions of dollars. They also received a sizeable amount of its revenue from internal taxation, looting, sale of antiquities, ransoming Western hostages, and oil smuggling. ISIS gained access to black markets and smugglers to facilitate its deals.[56] Finally, an initial amount of funding came from donations from wealthy individuals in the Gulf states.[57] However, the ability to generate their own revenue gives them a degree of independence from donors, unlike al-Qaeda who was always dependent for funding, and offer competitive salaries to encourage participation in ISIS for everything from engineers to fighters.

Manpower

ISIS can be broken up into key groups: its leadership, foreign fighters, Syrian and Iraqi fighters, and subject populations. While "Caliph Ibrahim," Baghdadi, is the dictatorial leader of ISIS, he rules through a Shura Council with responsibility across multiple domains of military, intelligence, propaganda, and governance. Beneath him, the group is organized under Sheikhs and then Emirs, each of whom control significant portions of the finances and armed brigades. Although seniority is important in ISIS, talented young individuals are also given large responsibility, as exemplified by the deputy of one of the largest foreign fighter brigades, Emir Houssien Elouassaki, a 21-year old who managed daily activities and decided who joined the brigade, the Mujahideen Shura Council.[58] These Emirs control the approximate 20,000 to 31,500 fighters, of whom 12,000 are foreign.[59] Finally, while no accurate statistics currently exist about the subject populations of the territories ISIS controls, pre-conflict data suggests a combined total of 3.7 million people.[60]

Foreign Fighters: Foreign fighters hail from about 86 countries, with about half from Tunisia alone, then Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, and Jordan. Western Europeans makes up about 5,000 fighters, and of these most are from France, the U.K., Germany, and Belgium. After Europeans, fighters from former Soviet Republics make up about 4,700 fighters. There are also fighters from the Balkans, Central Asia, and Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines.[61] There are several recruitment patterns within countries. In Belgium for example, young men interested in Islam were referred by friends to Sharia4Belgium, where they were plied with new interpretations of the Qur'an and hadiths and encouraged to confront their local imams. As they slowly cut themselves off from the Muslim company they previously kept, they took *kunyas*, Arabic nicknames that were used to indicate closeness in jihadi circles and obscure identities.[62]

Each recruitment network is closely linked, with heavy British involvement in the Belgian network from funding to online lectures by Anjem Choudary and Omar Bakri Muhammad and even an exchange program. Later on, they view Anwar al-Awlaki's lectures and footage of jihadists fighting in Afghanistan and Chechnya, normalizing jihad and acts of violence as honorable defenses against corrupt leaders' intent on hurting Muslims. Finally, they stress loyalty to Muslims and disowning infidels. The recruitment networks discourage them from talking to their parents about their new beliefs and activities. Like a youth club, the young men spend time together learning martial arts and sports.[63] They became slowly cut off from friends not associating with their beliefs, isolating themselves in their own echo chamber.

Using this network of recruiters that stretched from Europe to Lebanon, recruits started filtering into Syria as early as 2012. Early recruits joined smaller groups that were incorporated into al-Qaeda and ISIS; later recruits simply joined ISIS over the border in Southern Turkey. ISIS has deep relations with smuggler networks in the mountains that shepherd them over.[64]

Originally ISIS prioritized homogeneity within its *katibas*, military battalions. Katibat al-Awlaki was named for Anwar al-Awlaki and is one of the best equipped, with all communication conducted in English. Likewise, there was a Katiba named for an American jihadi from New Jersey, filled with foreigners.[65] Since 2013 francophone foreign fighters shared housing and fought in the same armed brigades in Syria. According to an ISIS defector, there are 5-10 brigades entirely made up of French fighters. Since most of the French had poor Arabic skills, all battlefield commands were conducted in French.[66] One of them was called Katibat al-Muhajirin (KAM), made up primarily of Belgians, French, Dutch, and German fighters. Their leader, Amru al-Absi, was a member of the Shura council that governs ISIS under Baghdadi and governor of Aleppo.[67] However, ISIS began to fear that the homogeneity gave too much strength to the individual emir of a katiba and has since begun to constitute mixed language and ethnic brigades.[68]

Former foreign fighters form the network of cells in the Europe that coordinate terrorist attacks. Intelligence officials in Europe estimate between 400 and 600 fighters trained by ISIS security for attacks outside the Middle East. Based on arrests and attacks from January 2014 until March 2016, ISIS had a network of cells and inspired attackers that stretched across Europe.[69]

Intelligence

The secret to ISIS's military success in Iraq and Syria is its use of intelligence to coerce local leaders to put up minimal resistance. Drawing on former Ba'athist leaders' experience in Saddam Hussein's intelligence agencies, ISIS's intelligence agencies are organized regionally by security emirs, who supervise deputy emirs for each district. Many of the intelligence services overlap and hold intense rivalries so that they spend as much time keeping an eye on each other as they do spying on enemies. ISIS has four branches of intelligence with specific roles: there is *Amn al-Dakhili*, the interior ministry that maintains security for each city in the caliphate. *Amn al-Askari* is the military intelligence that assesses opponents' capabilities and conducts reconnaissance.

Propaganda

ISIS has cultivated its message so that it strikes a powerful chord in the lives of many different types of followers. Much of the ideological debate fueling recruitment occurs online, on jihadist forums and twitter. They have appealed to disillusioned Syrians longing for freedom in their own country, Sunni Iraqis looking to resist Maliki, disengaged and often formerly imprisoned Sunnis living in Europe, and even women normally secluded in their homes. They use the following key themes for recruitment: (i) brutality, which serves to emphasize their supremacy and deter their opponents; (ii) mercy, which is aimed at subject populations in tandem with brutality—they can either resist and be killed or find clemency by being a part of ISIS; (iii) victimhood, which taps into the same global Sunni violent extremist narrative about a war on Islam, and war, which gives themselves legitimacy as a nation-state and bolstering their message with tales of their success; (iv) belonging to attract new recruits with the idea of brotherhood under a common cause; and (v) utopianism that portrays ISIS in its best light.[70]

Propaganda campaigns serve a larger purpose than simply recruitment—they are actually used to cultivate support for ISIS's actions. ISIS seeds forums and Twitter with hashtags in order to make it appear that their actions reflect those of the entire jihadist community. Their most prominent example was the mass tweet, "We demand Sheikh Al Baghdady declare the caliphate." Although seemingly spontaneous, it was in fact coordinated by ISIS as a trial to gauge popularity for their intentions. ISIS specifically targets different reactions and stages of the recruitment process, with audiences from potential recruits to disseminators, proselytizers, enlisters, and active members. Meanwhile, it realized it could take advantage of the 24-hour news cycle with brutality, obscuring its true nature and blowing it magnificently out of proportion.[71]

ISIS also had highly effective video production, which they used for narrative purposes and to showcase their executions. To keep their media functioning, ISIS uses costly camera equipment and post-production software, with a dedicated media agency to edit and distribute their propaganda across several different languages and social media sites. Compared to Zawahiri's poor oration skills and trend of looking straight at a camera for 45 minute-long videos, ISIS de-emphasized religious arguments in favor of ultraviolence and civil society. Their focus on ultraviolence targeted foreign fighters, mainly angry and alienated young men fascinated by the beheadings. At the same time, their portrayal of a Muslim civil society in ISIS attracted whole families and resulted in the same underlying message: "come to ISIS and be part of something."[72] Importantly, many of their videos focus not just on their victories on the battlefields or executions, but also on their state-building efforts, such as the provision of public services.

Functioning state?

ISIS is constantly seeking to prove its legitimacy as the rightful over all Muslims, so it places a premium on governance. Recruitment for members of ISIS is geared towards the creation of a complete society. This means not simply recruiting fighters but encouraging women and families to move and build a functioning state.[73] Some Syrian citizens supported ISIS's rule during the chaos because they cracked down on the arbitrary laws and abuses of other rebel groups, which were always slow to make decisions and often involved corruption and thievery.[74] ISIS also relies on an educated class to provide essential services as doctors and engineers. Education is also essential, both to indoctrinate the next generation and build a functioning state.[75] ISIS has retrained local teachers to make sure they teach an approved curriculum that limits science, emphasizes Islamic jurisprudence, and weeds out disloyalty among teachers.[76]

To maintain the caliphate, ISIS relies heavily on military and religious leadership for good governance. The military leadership must be able to quickly replace those lost in battle, while the religious leadership must have sufficient academic authority to maintain dominance in theological discussions.[77] The state is organized into *wilayat* (provinces) with local governors that carry a lot of autonomy and extensive bureaucracies that keep an eye on each other. For example, its weapons manufacturing facilities require a central authority to approve weapon requirements, strict reporting, and a number of ways to monitor and evaluate the quality of production. This level of bureaucracy not only simulates a nation-state but actually puts it closer to a nation-state level of capabilities, especially in military-grade equipment.[78] Most of these civil institutions are comprised of foreigners.[79] The Hraytan Zone, near Aleppo, is primarily a French-jihadist controlled area, as is the area close to the Turkish border near Azaz. ISIS has even established these *wilayat* outside of Iraq and Syria in territory they control in Algeria and Libya.[80]

III. Internal Conflicts and Networks of Relationships

Factions

ISIS' leadership appears a successful amalgamation of multiple cultures and backgrounds under a black flag, but it is in fact a factionalized alliance between highly experienced violent extremists, former Ba'athist military and intelligence officials of Saddam Hussein's regime, Sunni Iraqi tribal leaders, local Syrian and Iraqi fighters, and foreign fighters. Overall, ISIS' previous grouping of fighters by country or language of origin has strengthened rivalries between the different factions, and as they lose territory, disputes over the allocation of resources and goals have emerged.

Iraqi and Syrian Jihadists: The core leadership of ISIS were violent extremists who fought with al-Qaeda in Iraq. Some, such as Baghdadi and his deputy and spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, remained in Iraq and were imprisoned. Most were freed in Baghdadi's prison break campaign, which was the beginnings of ISIS' ascent to power in Iraq. Others, such as the governor of Aleppo under ISIS, Amr al-Absi, were released along with hundreds of others by Assad at the outset of the 2011 Arab Spring protests in an amnesty move designed to poison the revolution.[81] They are probably the most influential of the various factions of ISIS because they determine the ideology and the expansionist vision of ISIS. However, while some were veteran fighters of the Iraq insurgency, they

lacked the bureaucratic and military skills that the former Ba'athists brought and also had poor relations with Sunni tribes, whom they had brutalized for too long. Many have been killed by U.S. air strikes, including al-Adnani and al-Absi.

Profile: Abu Bakr al Baghdadi: Abu Bakr al Baghdadi was born Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai in 1971 in a city North of Baghdad, Samarra. He claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad and to have grown up in a devout Salafi family. His eyesight was too poor to join the military, so he studied at the Islamic University of Baghdad for a doctorate in Islamic culture and Sharia law, specifically on medieval recitation of the Qur'an.

Seemingly unremarkable and reserved, after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, Baghdadi co-founded a militia, heading the Sharia committee of the Army of the Sunni People Group and steadily moved towards more violent extremist beliefs. He defended his dissertation at the same time as running the militia, which was a sub-unit of al-Qaeda in Iraq at the time. U.S. Forces detained him at Camp Bucca where he recruited many insurgents to his cause and used a divide and conquer strategy to negotiate between Arab factions and Iraqis within the imprisoned population. With the leadership of what was by that point ISIS in Iraq in shambles after a 2010 airstrike, Baghdadi's experience in leadership and religious authority were a natural fit. He kept his identity hidden and began his expansion plans.[82]

Hajji Bakr, a former colonel in Saddam's army, lobbied heavily for Baghdadi's appointment as commander of the faithful because of his influence as a member of the tribes that supported al-Qaeda.[83] Baghdadi was one of the driving forces behind the split from al-Qaeda because of his interests in Syria. Although reportedly injured in American air strikes, he has continued to issue audio sermons over the internet, such as in November 2016 when he urged his followers not to abandon Mosul.[84] Although he may appear to be manipulated by the various other factions in ISIS, his actions maintaining the coalitions within ISIS and inspiring his followers highlight that his political acumen, religious scholarship, and ancestry from the Prophet are a challenge to replace.

Former Ba'athists: Many of the top leadership of ISIS are former Ba'athists, and bring their formidable military and organizational skills to ISIS's service; however, it is a careful alliance with different interests at stake.[85] The alliance has its origins with Samir Abd Mouhammed al-Khleifawi, known to ISIS as Haji Bakr, who was a colonel in the Iraqi Intelligence Service under Saddam Hussein and imprisoned in Camp Bucca with Baghdadi.[86] Bakr was at the time head of the Islamic State of Iraq's military council, and used his influence to help Baghdadi, who owed his appointment as the head of ISIS in Iraq to Bakr's lobbying of individual members of the Shura Council that elected him leader.[87]

With Bakr as Baghdadi's "prince of shadows" and "private minister," he set about purging members of the Islamic State of Iraq he considered disloyal or incompetent; he replaced them with former officers in Saddam's military and intelligence services.[88] By 2003, Saddam Hussein had begun using religion as a tool for governance, laying the groundwork for his officers to later jump from Ba'athism to Salafism.[89] Most Ba'athists lost their high positions during the de-Ba'athification of the occupation, and brought their experience to bear in the early days of ISIS compared to the relative inexperience of the Islamic State of Iraq. Two of the most senior advisors to Baghdadi, Abu Muslim al-Turkmani and Abu Ayman al-Iraqi, were Ba'athists imprisoned at Camp Bucca.[90] According to a defector, many local Syrian Emirs are followed by an Iraqi deputy who make all the real decisions. It is also Iraqis who plan tactics and battles, but more often send foreign fighters to their deaths than fellow Iraqis.[91]

The defector's account suggests a considerable degree of distrust between foreign fighters and Iraqis, who seemed to be out for their own power rather than religiously motivated. Likewise, former Ba'athists view the Iraqi and Syrian jihadists as taking advantage of many impoverished former officers for their tactical gain.[92] In the end, though Ba'athists have been particularly brutal against Syrian rebel groups, they may align more with Sunni Iraqi tribes to preserve the Sunni enclaves than continue expanding, which will put them in conflict with the Syrian and Iraqi jihadists.[93] Like the jihadists, many of the top Iraqi leadership, including Hajji Bakr, have been killed by air strikes or fighting with rebel groups, but the low-level officers who command the spy circles remain in power and grow more hardened as they fight in the conflict.

Sunni Iraqi Tribes: ISIS has its most strained alliance with the Sunni Iraqi Tribes. During the height of the Iraq insurgency, militias such as Ansar al-Sunna began cooperating with U.S. Forces to push al-Qaeda out of Fallujah. Resistance to Sunni extremist groups began in Fallujah in 2004, and later Qaim, and by 2006 dozens of Sunni tribes pledged themselves to Maliki.[94]

By 2010 the U.S. was beginning to pull out of Iraq and Baghdadi recognized the Islamic State of Iraq needed a new approach to garner support from Sunni tribes. Mirroring U.S. policy to the tribes, Baghdadi gave money and weapons to Sunni tribal leaders, reinforcing their authority gaining the allegiance of the young men. As long as they were more conscious of local religious practice and power than the Americans, they believed they would be successful.[95] Many of the militias are closely intertwined with former Ba'athist leaders, such as the Naqshbandi Army led by Saddam Hussein's former deputy, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, and united by a hatred of perceived Shi'a rule.[96] However, since conquering territory in Iraq, Sunni tribes, including the Naqshbandi Army, have shown a willingness to negotiate with the Iraqi regime to limit Shi'a influence as they begin retaking territory.[97] Tribesmen have particularly taken issue with ISIS' punishment of prisoners such as the Jordanian pilot, Kasasbeh, who was burnt alive.[98] The Sunni Iraqi tribes have a reputation for switching sides depending on who favors their interests, and though aligned closely with former Ba'athist leaders they have a history of disagreement with the brutality of ISIS and its preceding organizations.

Foreign Fighters: Foreign fighters represent a similar faction to the Syrian and Iraqi jihadist leadership, but as relative newcomers to Iraq and Syria they have neither the practical experience of the former Ba'athists and Sunni tribes nor the relationships

with local Iraqis and Syrians to ease tensions. They are also a highly diverse faction that were originally organized by linguistic and ethnic similarities. However, in the case of Katibat al-Battar, a highly strong battalion made up of 750 Libyans, the fighters were more loyal to their emir than Baghdadi. By 2014 Baghdadi therefore chose to disband al-Battar and mix the battalions ethnically and linguistically.

Argument between foreign fighters and Sunni tribesmen over the distribution of funds after battles have spilled over into bloodshed.[99] Likewise, local Syrian and Iraqi fighters complain that foreign fighters are given special privileges not afforded them, such as higher salaries and nicer living accommodations, and recruitment has therefore dropped among local fighters.[100] The increasing losses of top Ba'athist and jihadist leaders mean that foreign fighters are increasingly taking positions of authority in ISIS. The head of *Amn al-Kharij*, the foreign intelligence service, is a Frenchman from Toulouse.[101] However, as foreign fighters have greater prominence in ISIS' leadership, their interests may change from territorial conquest in Iraq and Syria to operations aimed back in their home countries.

Partners

ISIS does not have allies—it has either short-term partners or affiliates under its banner. Unlike al-Qaeda, who was careful to pick its allies so as not to lose popular Muslim support, ISIS has rejected a 'hearts-and-minds' approach and accepted affiliates.[102] Although aligned with ISIS and receiving minimal aid, most of these affiliates galvanize their followers through local grievances and ambitions, and are across the board far weaker militarily than ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

ISIS in Libya: ISIS in Libya began as one small violent extremist group among a number that were attempting to control the small town of Derna; however, it soon made territorial gains and controlled Sirte and Nawfaliya. By 2015, there were an estimated 5,000 ISIS fighters in Libya after senior leaders and fighters from Ansar al-Sharia, the strongest violent extremist organization in Libya that had attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, defected to ISIS in Libya.[103] However, by August 2016 militias aligned with the United Nations-supported Libyan Government of National Accord and U.S. air strikes pushed ISIS out of Sirte. ISIS in Libya will likely turn South to the Sahel, where they have greater freedom of movement but fewer strategically critical targets.[104] The U.S. has since ended its air strike campaign, and much of ISIS in Libya's influence has diminished from its former place as the strongest of the affiliates.

Ansar Bait al-Maqdis: Ansar Bait al-Maqdis is a resistance and violent extremist group in the Sinai peninsula of Egypt. Although they have pledged allegiance to ISIS, they are primarily capitalizing on Islamist sentiment shared with ISIS and instead draw on the local Sinai population's resistance to the government's repressive policies.[105] They remain one of the most formidable ISIS affiliates, posing a significant security threat to the Egyptian government.

Boko Haram: Boko Haram is a violent extremist organization in Nigeria that focuses primarily on a return to fundamentalist teachings in the areas of Borno, Nigeria that they control. In 7 years, they have killed about 15,000 people and displaced at least 2 million.[106] They declared their loyalty to ISIS in 2014, one of the first to emphasize the caliphate's global appeal.[107] However, ISIS's main support to Boko Haram has been media capability, as operationally they remain independent. This independence means that any losses on the part of ISIS in Iraq and Syria does little to impede Boko Haram's activities, and vice versa.[108]

ISIS in Afghanistan: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has been active in Afghanistan and Pakistan since the 2000s, and it became part of ISIS.[109] Since then, it has competed with the Taliban for territory and influence, and has been specifically targeted by U.S. Special Operations Forces.

Abu Sayyaf: Abu Sayyaf are a violent extremist group based in the Philippines that al-Qaeda funded at its inception. It has since pledged itself to ISIS.[110]

The Bashar al-Assad Regime: ISIS has a highly complicated relationship with the Assad regime—they are not allies or affiliates. While they are enemies on the battlefield, they also benefitted from each other's presence in the chaos that is the Syrian war. Many of the foreign fighters that participated in the Iraq insurgency were transported via Bashar al-Assad's regime to fight the U.S. According to the claims of numerous Syrian and Jordanian intelligence officials, when the 2011 Arab Spring peaceful demonstrations began in Damascus, Syrian intelligence services released violent extremists from prison and allowed them to form armed brigades as an excuse to use excessive force in crushing the uprisings.[111] Since ISIS established itself in Syria, it has also exhibited a certain degree of cooperation with the Assad regime, primarily in the sale of oil and natural gas, which amounts to USD 40 million a month for ISIS. The cooperation between Abu Sayyaf, ISIS' head of oil production, and the Assad regime involved giving trucks and pipelines access between regime-controlled land and ISIS territory. In exchange, ISIS buys electricity from Assad and makes a profit off of the exchange through taxes.[112] This demonstrates that while they are waged in a total war at the moment, both sides need each other in some ways. The Syrian government released jihadists in order to justify their narrative that rebels were jihadists, not peaceful or democratic opposition forces. While this worked, Assad now has to face a strong ISIS in Syria that controls large swathes of territory.

IV. External Conflicts and Networks of Relationships

Regional Enemies

Al-Qaeda & Jebhat Fateh al-Sham: ISIS's current rivalry with al-Qaeda stretches across the Middle East, but it is at its most fraught within Syria where they compete for influence over the opposition and recruits. As previously discussed, ISIS has its roots in al-Qaeda, just as Abu Mohammed al Jawlani, the emir of Jebhat al-Nusra, has his roots in ISIS (what was then the Islamic State of Iraq). The conflict between al-Qaeda and ISIS is based on strategic and tactical differences. Jebhat al-Nusra collaborated with rebels where they could, participating in Sharia committees after battles to settle disputes and distribute aid, as well as conducting far fewer attacks against other rebel groups as compared to ISIS. Finally, when Jebhat al-Nusra and ISIS captured oil fields in Eastern Syria, they squabbled over how to share the proceeds. There was also a tribal element to the rivalry when the local tribe on the Syrian-Iraqi border that supported Jebhat al-Nusra, the Shuhailis, were betrayed by a member of a rival tribe who allowed ISIS to capture an oil field. In return, the Shuhailis kicked ISIS out of Syria, and the resulting conflict saw ISIS capture the border territory and the oil fields, pushing Jebhat al-Nusra out of Eastern Syria.[113]

On April 9, 2013, Baghdadi publically claimed Jebhat al-Nusra was part of ISIS. However, Jawlani pledged himself to Zawahiri instead, who sent an experienced Syrian jihadist, Abu Khalid al-Suri, to mediate. When ISIS continued to disobey him, Zawahiri publically disowned ISIS, and in return ISIS bombed Zawahiri's emissary.[114]

The Mujahideen Shura Council was one of the first groups of violent extremists in Syria, and as its leader Amr al-Absi had strong connections to ISIS of Iraq. Since the Mujahideen Shura Council sided with Baghdadi after his split from al-Qaeda, it set the precedent for a number of other Syrian groups to follow. In fact, it even encouraged a number of fighters to defect from Jebhat al-Nusra to ISIS because of their training, salary, and success.[115]

Jebhat al-Nusra has since changed its name to Jebhat Fateh al-Sham and split from al-Qaeda, leaving al-Qaeda much weaker. Should ISIS ever gain the allegiance of al-Qaeda it would become more powerful among violent extremists and threatening to its enemies. However, in 2015 more recruits were continuing to defect form Jebhat al-Nusra to ISIS due to ineffective management.[116] Despite their rivalry, ISIS's success has also been to Jebhat Fateh al-Sham's advantage in Syria because they appear more moderate, allowing greater integration with the Syrian Opposition.

Ahrar al-Sham and Syrian Opposition Groups: At the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, there was intense animosity between Syrian opposition groups and one of the first ISIS-aligned groups to fight in Syria, the "Shura Council of ISIS." The Shura Council of ISIS kidnapped two European journalists, who were later rescued and released by moderate rebels who viewed the Shura Council of ISIS a liability to their cause. By September of 2012 moderate rebels kidnapped and killed the leader of the group, Firas al-Absi. Firas's brother, Amr al-Absi, went on to found the Mujahideen Shura Council, the powerful ISIS brigade that encouraged other groups to side with ISIS instead of Jebhat al-Nusra.[117]

ISIS later bombed a meeting of Ahrar al-Sham and other members of the Islamic Front, who were meeting to discuss a coalition with U.S. supported rebels. ISIS also killed a senior Ahrar al-Sham commander in Aleppo when he demanded that ISIS submit to arbitration. Soon after, other opposition groups joined forces against ISIS, led by Abu Khalid al-Suri, Zawahiri's emissary. ISIS killed him as a signal of their break from al-Qaeda. After al-Suri's death, rebel groups largely stopped attacks on ISIS, leaving them to hold their territory in Syria and Iraq while they concentrated on the Assad regime.[118]

Some conflict continued, including when ISIS captured Dabiq from Sunni rebels and then repelled the Free Syrian Army, and also when the Syrian Martyrs' Brigade killed Hajii Bakr in his home, unbeknownst to them of his importance as the link between Baghdadi and other Ba'athists. According to a defector, ISIS has actively worked since 2014 to infiltrate the Free Syrian Army, training Syrians and providing them with USD 200,000-300,000, enough for the Free Syrian Army to put them in top positions of command.[119]

Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga: ISIS draws much of its support from Sunni tribes due to its success against the Maliki and Abadi governments of Iraq. ISIS pushed the Iraqi Security Forces back when they captured Mosul in June 2014, and the Iraqi Security Forces turned tail and fled.[120] They have also stoked fears of Shi'a militias among Sunni populations as an excuse for their own brutality.

Like the Iraqi Security Forces, ISIS forced the Peshmerga to retreat when they invaded Iraqi Kurdish lands in the summer of 2014. However, the Peshmerga, in cooperation with the Turkish P.K.K. and the Syrian Y.P.G. fought to relieve the Yazidis as they were trapped on Mount Sinjar.[121] The Peshmerga also mounted a successful defense of Kobani in 2014 along the Turkish border and have continued to work with the Iraqi government and the international coalition to combat ISIS.

Enemies in the International Community

International Coalition Against ISIS: Since September 2014, 66 nations have entered into a broad coalition ISIS. The driving philosophy is that countries in the Middle East and North Africa region – especially Iraq – should take responsibility for combatting ISIS, though the US and various European states provide significant military and coordination assistance.[122] To this end, the U.S., Turkey, and Iraqi Armed Forces have provided most of the military support both on the ground with special forces teams, intelligence, and air support. The goals of the coalition are supporting Iraqi military operations and conducting air strikes against ISIS, as well as cutting off financing and flows of foreign fighters. By June of 2016, the coalition had conducted 13,470 air strikes and destroyed 26,374 targets.[123]

The United States of America: At the outset of the Syrian War, the U.S. underestimated ISIS' capabilities. In an interview with the New Yorker in early 2014, President Obama referred to ISIS as al-Qaeda's "jayvee team," describing them as a minor threat.[124] However, by September of that same year ISIS had seized hard-won areas of Iraq and Obama announced Operation Inherent Resolve, a U.S. intervention to "degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy."[125] In partnership with an international coalition comprising the U.K., France, Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and the UAE, they conducted air strikes against ISIS territories. They have also contributed trainers to Iraqi Armed Forces, and Special Operations Forces are highly active in both Iraq and Syria. Finally, under Obama, the administration attempted to train Syrian rebels to fight ISIS and Jebhat al-Nusra; however, these efforts were largely unsuccessful. The Trump administration has indicated its approach to defeating ISIS will be a cornerstone of its national security and foreign policy.

V. Potential Negotiation Moves

Cooperation with External Actors

Although it may seem that ISIS acknowledges no authority on earth higher than itself, it has a consistent record of cooperating for short-term, tactical gains when it has no other choice. ISIS followers interpret Islamic Law to state that peace treaties can last no more than a decade. Accepting anything longer or permanent border means the Caliph is disobeying the Prophet. These peace treaties can be renewed, but cannot apply to all enemies at once; ISIS must conduct jihad once a year or risk becoming sinful as a nation. Likewise recognizing any authority besides their own would be, in their eyes, a form of polytheism and therefore against their interpretation of Islamic Laws, which means no participation in the U.N. or democratic elections. Any decisions by Baghdadi along that front would be immediate grounds for removal and replacement as caliph. This refusal to acknowledge other borders and send ambassadors to other nations severely limits ISIS' ability to negotiate as a state on the international stage, a stance at odds with their quest for the legitimacy of a nation state. In fact, even the Taliban sent envoys to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates.[126]

However, on a tactical level ISIS has demonstrated a more utilitarian approach. ISIS negotiated with the Assad regime to exchange oil and natural gas for electricity, even they are engaged in war with the regime.[127] It has adapted its interests to suit its local factions, such as focusing on Iraqi conquest to appease Sunni tribes and the former Ba'athists rather than the expansion of the caliphate in Syria. It also works closely with criminal networks to smuggle fighters and explosive materials in from Turkey, and make money on the black market.

However, success in these negotiations are often contingent on the religious identity of the negotiators and the issue at stake.[128] A well-respected Salafist violent extremist, Zarqawi's mentor Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, was used as an intermediary to negotiate for the release of Peter Kassig, an American aid worker. However, realizing that successful negotiations might result in a broader rapprochement between ISIS and al-Qaeda, the Jordanian government broke off negotiations and a video of Kassig being beheaded was on the internet the next day.[129] ISIS still prefers a unilateral approach; when there were disputes with other groups that resulted in conflict, ISIS refused to submit to arbitration since no militia could hold a state accountable.[130] In the end, ISIS has demonstrated a willingness to compromise on its values by negotiating for its economic interests, but it has shown no instance of making any political concessions through negotiation.

Vulnerabilities and Points of influence

Loss of terrain makes ISIS vulnerable, and it has been susceptible to concerted campaigns by the Peshmerga and Iraqi Security Forces. Due to the omnipresence of the Iraqi State under Saddam Hussein, Iraqis became quite accustomed to functioning state services. ISIS has particularly struggled to keep hospitals open because they cannot find enough doctors. Failing local governance is a key vulnerability of ISIS, though they can cover up poverty with media reports of prosperity and quash internal dissent with their policing.[131] Furthermore, there are reports of large-scale discontent in territories under ISIS control. Their brutality could thus lead to armed resistance, or a fracturing of the tense alliances that keep ISIS whole.

A point of influence over ISIS are Quietist Salafis, highly devout Sunnis with similar rigidity in their attitudes to Sharia law and women but who believe that Muslims should focus on fastidious personal piety and eschew political aims. However, their strict observance gives them a lot of credibility among the highly religious ISIS fighters as they are not seen to be hypocritical. This credibility creates an opportunity for mediation. They believe that ISIS runs counter to Islam because they will only accept a caliphate established based on a consensus of scholars from Mecca and Medina, and because they have caused dissent within the Islamic World.[132] As ISIS loses terrain and has fewer instances of success, it is conceivable that the unity of factions within ISIS will begin to fracture. Sunni tribes have demonstrated interest in negotiating to protect themselves from Shi'a militias, while Ba'athists' aims remain focused on Iraq. It is the foreign fighters still deeply wedded to the idea of building a caliphate who are increasingly gaining more control of ISIS' decision-making structure, and who may therefore present the biggest obstacles to future negotiations.

Conclusion

ISIS's key interests of war and purging of Shi'a will continue to put it in conflict with its neighbors. ISIS has maintained its dominance because militarily it has developed the financing, production capacity and training of a nation state entity, and it has the foreign network and operations of an intelligence service. Moreover, ISIS controls 26,370 square miles, just slightly larger than Sri Lanka.

Though it has greater military capacity and coherence than some other states in the region, it is also unsustainable given its evident vulnerabilities (military actions against it, declining revenues, governance issues, etc.).

ISIS' strength comes from the hope it instills in building something lasting, which explains why it is challenging to fight or negotiate because its supporters are fighting for a relatable ideal, to build a nation of their own out of the corruption and chaos that characterize some of the nation-states of the region. At the end of the day, ISIS relies on this unity of purpose to keep the jihadists, the former Ba'athists, the local fighters, and the foreign fighters from combatting each other. As the leadership changes and ISIS loses territory, these divisions could grow to tear it apart.

XIII. Israel: In Search of Security for the Jewish Democracy

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Identity, conflict Narratives, Threat Perception

A. Identity and Conflict Narratives

The State of Israel was established in 1948 as the national homeland for the Jewish people and remains a diverse, multifaceted Jewish democracy to this day. Its foundation and contemporary identity are based on religious, biblical and historical justifications, as well as international law, contemporary norms, and political developments. The ethos of David and Goliath, the small against the powerful, is weaved throughout the Jewish collective identity. From biblical times, through life in the Diaspora, to contemporary days, the Jewish – and then the Israeli – story is perceived as the exceptional victory of a small and isolated collective over powerful immense rivals. This ethos is deeply rooted in the Israeli consciousness to this day. Israel's perception of the Middle East and its role in the region is shaped by these narrative and ethos. The nation-state that was built to be a shelter for its people, with many of its people being second and third generations of Holocaust survivors, vowed "never again" to allow innocents to be victimized for their Jewish identity. As a small country, the only democracy in an unstable region, a Jewish nation surrounded by Arab and Muslim states, it must maintain impressive deterrence capabilities and military power. While these factors may comprise an overarching national narrative, it is important to note that Israel is a diverse country with multiple ethnic and religious populations with varying degrees of adherence to different aspects of Israeli identity.

According to religious/biblical arguments, the Land of Israel is the birthplace of the Jewish people and where they first attained statehood. Throughout two thousands years in the Diaspora, the Jewish people continued longing for the return to their land. Although until the late 19th century this was mainly a religious-spiritual aspiration rather than a practical-political movement, the yearning for the reestablishment of a Jewish nation in the ancient homeland was never abandoned. According to this narrative, the establishment of the state of Israel is the national rebirth of the Jewish people in its own land after millennia of forced exile.

Alongside the religious-biblical convictions, historical events of the past few hundred years justify the establishment and existence of the Jewish state. During generations in the Diaspora as a minority, Jews were often persecuted and oppressed by the surrounding communities. A UN Holocaust and United Nations Outreach Program Report on the history of Jews in Europe states that "In the eighteenth century in all of Europe, Jews still did not have the freedom of movement and could settle only in territories where they had received special permission. Many rulers had completely closed their countries to the Jews. Even when admitted, Jews in many States could not buy land or houses. In some cities they had to stay in assigned areas called 'ghettos', which they could only leave during the day. Also, Jews were highly restricted in their occupations."[1] This discrimination was cited as a reason for the political Zionist cause – a need of an independent sovereign nationhood for the Jewish people. The atrocities of the Holocaust were "another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State."[2] Additionally, the Holocaust became the moral justification for the international obligation to the Jewish people, their existence and sovereign aspirations. These justifications aligned with then-rising international norms, mainly the right to self-determination for all people, and the process of decolonization.[3]

The identity of the Israeli state is based on these justifications and the Jewish self-perception of a small minority constantly fighting for its existence. The establishment of the state of Israel was based on the notion that a Jewish sovereign state will provide the protection needed to ensure the existence of the nation.

On 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Partition Plan for Palestine as Resolution 181(II). The Plan called for a partition of Mandatory Palestine to two independent states, Arab and Jewish, with a Special International Regime for the city of Jerusalem[4]. The Jewish leadership in Palestine accepted the Plan, despite its perceived flaws. Arab leaders and governments rejected it, opposing any form of territorial division. On May 14th 1948, the Provisional Government of Israel (the Jewish People's Council) had adopted the Proclamation of Independence, declaring "the establishment of a Jewish state" to be known as "the State of Israel"[5].

Following the adoption of Resolution 181, the ongoing tension and conflict between the Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine erupted into a violent conflict between the two populations. After the termination of the British Mandate and the Israeli Declaration of Independence, the conflict transformed into inter-state conflict between Israel and five Arab states.[6] The war ended officially on July 1949, after Israel signed separate armistices with each of its neighboring Arab states. According to the armistice lines (known as the "Green Line"), Israel occupied territories of about one-third more than was allocated to the Jewish State under the UN Partition Plan.

Since its independence, Israel has been involved in numerous wars fighting against neighboring states for its survival.[7] The Six

Day War of 1967 is perhaps the most notable, as it led to Israel gaining control over large territories, some of them – the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem – densely populated by Palestinians, and annexing the Golan Heights.[8] Since then, Israel preserved its presence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem without formal annexation.

The Oslo Accords of the 1990s were a step towards peace, in which Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization recognized one another and the Palestinian Authority was created to govern the territories. Through the Accords the West Bank was divided into Areas A (full Palestinian control), B (Palestinian civil control, Israeli military control) and C (full Israeli control), an arrangement that remains to this day.[9] Despite the initial progress, and a five-year plan for addressing all areas of conflict, the peace process broke down in the late 1990s and remains in stalemate today.[10]

Israel sees itself as having always sought a peaceful resolution with its neighbors, agreeing to territorial concessions, and constantly being forced to resort to protective acts of violence as a result of regional animosity and Arab refusal to accept its justified existence or to pragmatic cessions. Given the ongoing regional conflict and existential threats to its existence, the Israeli self-perception of a minority in danger has remained. Hundreds of acts of terrorism within Israel's borders make this threat ever more real and devastating.[11] Even after Israel has become a powerful player in the region, with a strong army, relatively stable political and economic institutions, strong allies, and peace agreements with two of its neighboring states, this Israeli narrative is still influencing its behavior and self perception.

In the midst of regional conflict, Israel does not consider itself to be the cause for inter-Arab tensions in the broader Middle East. Rather, it perceives itself to be a tool in the hands of Arab leaders and regimes, used to unite their public against a common enemy and to create inter-Arab alliances aimed to gain regional superiority. These conflicts are understood by Israelis as characteristics of non-democratic regimes fighting to preserve their control over their population, and of regional tensions between different entities competing over regional influence and control. Israel, in this perspective, is only a means to an end. Despite being regionally destabilizing and threatening to Israelis, this framing may provide a potential space for Israeli alliances and possibilities for acceptance in the region.

Israel faces threats in several areas, including security, demographic, and economic threats as well as potential threats to its internal stability and international status. These threats are perceived by the Israeli public in a daily way.

B. Contemporary Threats

Security and Military Threats: Currently, the conventional threat of inter-state war against Israel has diminished greatly, as militaries of its neighboring nations lack abilities, capabilities or interests to attack Israel. Israel maintains relatively stable peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, while Syria is undergoing a bloody civil war and disintegration of its army.

Non-state actors that are engaged in terrorism and Guerilla warfare, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, are a much greater contemporary threat than state actors.[12] Currently, Hezbollah, a Lebanese terrorist group that has attacked northern Israel multiple times, is actively involved in the hostilities in Syria, which minimizes its ability to attack Israel. Hamas, however, launches rockets from the Gaza Strip several kilometers into southern Israel, and has been rumored to be stockpiling highly-explosive short-range rockets as recently as March 2017.[13] A recent attack from an ISIS-affiliated group in the Sinai may signify a new threat to Israel by a non-state actor.[14]

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority – a quasi-state entity – is not employing terrorist acts against Israel but rather coordinates with Israel against terrorist cells and individual acts of violence (which endanger both).[15] There is a constant low-level threat of violence from Palestinians in the West Bank and security there must remain tight to prevent further waves of violence such as the *intifadas* of 1987-93 and 2000-05. Despite the military and security cooperation, however, the Palestinian Authority employs diplomatic and political warfare against Israel, threatening its international reputation and legitimacy (discussed below).

Menacing Iranian nuclear aspirations constitute perhaps the greatest threat to Israeli security at this time. The Iranian government has threatened to turn Jewish communities "to dust" and may soon have the capability to do so.[16] While the nuclear agreement with Iran might provide a respite for Israel in the short-term, it is not protected in the long run, as the danger will resurface in full capacity in a decade.[17] Containing the Iranian nuclear threat is of key importance to Israel.

Demographic Threat: Israel is defined as "Jewish and democratic" state in the Israeli Declaration of Independence and its Basic Laws.[18] Since its early days, the Israeli population included an Arab citizen minority, but the Jewish population maintained its majority (with large waves of immigrations, legislation regarding citizenship policies, etc). For now, the future of the Palestinian Territories and their inhabitants is unclear and subject to a political controversy in Israel. One of the arguments against the annexation of these territories is known as "the demographic threat." According to this argument, the annexation of the territories would lead to a non-Jewish or non-democratic state. Annexation with full civil rights to all inhabitants would lead, in time, to an Arab majority and a Jewish minority. Annexation without full civil rights to the Palestinian population would create a non-democratic regime. Despite this, some say that the potential building and expansion of Jewish settlements in the territories threatens the possibility for future separation into two sovereign states, which would render Israel unable to retain a Jewish majority in a democratic state.

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The issue of the Palestinian refugees is another aspect of the demographic threat in Israel. The Palestinian demand for the return of refugees to Israeli territories would endanger the Jewish democratic nature of the state (not to mention the logistical and spatial impossibilities). This is a core issue in any negotiation attempt between Israel and the PA (and between Israel and Arab countries), and was not agreed upon in past negotiations. Some politicians have suggested exchange in territories with a future Palestinian state, in order to retain a Jewish majority in Israel and an Arab majority in future Palestine, with minimum civil evacuations.

Economic Threat: Several actors in the international sphere have been using economic measures against Israel. In recent years, the BDS movement is attempting to inflict economic pressure on Israel, "to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law."[19] So far it is mainly damaging Israel's international reputation and legitimacy, but has the potential to inflict economic damage to Israel if Israeli international reputation keeps deteriorating.. The EU has also adopted economic measures aiming to pressure Israel to abandon its settlement policy. After the EU moved to label goods made in Israeli settlements, it has been considering new similar proposals regarding banks, loans, and tax-exemptions.[20] As an export-oriented state, the growth of the Israeli economy is highly dependent on international trade. Such economic restrictions have a potential threat on the Israeli economy, its political stability and national resilience.

Threats to International Status: Israel's international reputation and diplomatic reputation has been weakening. This a result of several elements: the Palestinian Authority's diplomatic-political campaign, combined with political stagnation between the two entities and no active attempts to renew negotiations; Israel's purely right-wing coalition government and the legislative measures it has adopted (including the newly enacted "Settlement Law"); and allegations against Israel's disproportionate retaliation to individual terrorist attacks from the West Bank as well as to organized terrorist aggression from the Gaza Strip.[21] In addition, Israel's strong alliance with the US has encountered several obstacles in recent years, mainly due to substantial disagreements regarding the Iranian Deal and the Israeli settlement policy, and differences in political views between the Israeli government and the Obama administration.[22] Many hope that the Trump Administration will change this dynamic and support Israel against attacks to its international reputation.

Internal Social Threats: As will be discussed later, Israel is a fragmented society with growing national, religious and political frictions and diminishing public trust in political institutions, media, the Supreme Court and even the military.[23] Social unrest around the economic burdens of life in Israel, including low salaries and high rents, have been the cause of protests in recent years. This has the potential to cause significant deterioration in Israel's resilience and diminishes its ability to adopt unpopular measures and concessions towards a resolution of its regional conflicts.

Sources of Leverage

Military Power: Israel possesses substantial military power. Israel's military, with both offensive and defensive capabilities, is the strongest in the region and the most technologically advanced.[24] Thus, Israeli deterrence is highly effective.[25] Furthermore, Israel has an important military and security industry, which is a strategically important sector in the Israeli economy. It is one of the world's major exporters of military equipment and knowledge. Three Israeli companies were listed in the global top 50 arms-producing and military service companies in the 2015 SIPRI index,[26] and four were listed in the Defense News magazine's top 100 defense companies list for 2016.[27] Israel is a significant actor in the global arms market (the 8th largest arms exporter in the world as of 2015).[28] In addition to its protective and economic strength, the military provides opportunities for Israel to develop alliances with countries with which it does not maintain diplomatic formal relations.

Nuclear Power: Israel has never officially confirmed nor denied having nuclear capabilities, but according to foreign experts and different intelligence organizations, Israel is a nuclear-armed state. Israel maintains a "nuclear opacity" policy and has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This policy enables Israel to create nuclear deterrence as well as to preserve legitimacy in its efforts to prevent others in the region from acquiring and developing nuclear weapons (particularly Iran).

Cyber Capabilities: Israel is one of the six leading cyber powers on the globe.[29] According to the Israeli Export Institute, around 25 international companies have R&D labs in Israel, and there are more than 300 Israeli companies in the cyber industry with 3.5B$ total exports in 2015 – 5% of the global market.[30] Its cyberspace power enables Israel to cope with the latest cyber challenges and is an important element in its economy and diplomatic leverages. Israel perceives this to be a national security interest. In 2011 the Israeli government established the National Cyber Bureau, which has as its goals the advancing of "Israel's position as a center of information technology development" and "encouraging cooperation between academia, industry and the private sector, government offices and the security community."[31] In addition, the Security Exporting Department in the Israeli Defense Ministry has declared its intention to make special efforts in promoting the Israeli cyber industry in 2017. According to its strategic assessment for 2017, this includes analysis of current and future developments, as many countries around the globe have clear and significant demands in the cyber domain.[32] Cooperation in cyber is powerful leverage for Israel to create strong alliances with different international actors that share mutual interests and to enhance its diplomatic and international connection and prestige.

Economic Leverage: Israel is a state with limited natural resources and has a small market in global terms. It is considered to be an export-oriented state, as exporting is a fundamental growth engine in its economy.[33] Israel's relative economic strength and stability lean on its science and technological sectors, innovative capabilities and the start-up industry. In addition, Israeli research and development on desert-agriculture technologies have broad international applications in many desert areas on the globe. The Israeli water industry is one of the leading in the world, in light of breakthrough technological innovations in desalination, drip irrigation and water security.[34]

A new potential economic leverage has emerged out of recent energy-related developments. Since 2009, several giant natural gas fields were discovered in Israeli territorial water. This opened the possibility of ending Israel's reliance on imported energy resources. Furthermore, the Israeli Government authorized the exporting of up to 40% of the natural gas. This new exporting field has a potential influence on Israel's economy, foreign relations and regional cooperation. Turkey has been recommended as a potential candidate to purchasing Israeli natural gas. Some have suggested Egypt as another, as it used to supply Israel with natural gas, but the repeated bombing of the Sinai pipeline makes this less feasible.

International Reputation and Diplomatic Leverage: International legitimacy is an essential competent in Israel's national interest, especially in times of violent outburst. Since its establishment in 1948, Israel experienced ebb and flow of its foreign relations with its neighboring states, foreign powers, other countries around the globe and international organizations. Today, Israel maintains formal diplomatic relations with about 160 states and international organizations,[35] but heavily leans on its strong alliance with the United States. As discussed above, Israel's international reputation has been deteriorating in recent years, a development that threatens its national security and economic stability.

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Political Structure:

The Israeli governmental system is based on parliamentary democracy. The legislative branch, The Knesset, is composed of 120 members that are elected through party-list proportional representation. The Knesset nominates the Prime Minister and approves the ministerial cabinet, a system that vests executive power in a coalition government. This results in a highly fragmented governmental structure, where small parties gain extensive power relative to their electoral support as they can make or break a coalition. Another result of this fragile governmental structure is the dissolution of many Israeli coalition governments prior to the close of their four-year term (no government has since 1988). The minimum electoral threshold was recently raised to 3.25%, which led some parties to join together in order to overcome the barrier. This legislative measure still failed to create government that is not subject to small parties' pressure and substantial coalition constraints. However, the current Israeli coalition seems to be relatively stable, with the Prime Minister's criminal investigations as the only current threat to his leadership.

Political Divisions:

The main parameters which create the political contentions between Israeli right, left and central political views are primarily national security related: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the demographic threat and the threat of terror. Second priority are economic issues and the relations between state and religion.

The Right Wing: The Israeli right wing calls for defeating terror by military force and holds cautioned attitudes towards any negotiation moves with the Arab World. The Israeli right advocates for minimum territorial concessions in any peace agreement, objects yo settlement evacuations or any kind of partition in Jerusalem. A substantial part of the right supports "Great Israel" (Jewish territorial sovereignty from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan river) and the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, based on religious-ideological beliefs. They advocate for a full annexation of the West Bank with different versions of semi-independent Palestinian cantons, and some call for transfer of the Palestinian population. Other parts of the Israeli right perceive the Israeli presence in the West Bank as a security constraint that has no viable alternative. The Israeli right holds different economic positions, from welfare state to traditional capitalism and free markets. The extreme right is largely modern-orthodox religious and rejects the separation of religion and state.

The Left Wing: The Israeli left wing holds more dovish positions, advocating for territorial concessions as the ultimate measure for resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict while preserving Jewish demographic majority and adhering to democratic values. The left supports diplomatic negotiations as preferable and viable means over military measures and objects Israeli presence in all or most of the West Bank. It supports the evacuation of all or most Jewish settlements in the West Bank, leading to the two-state solution. It perceives this solution as the only viable and necessary measure to regional peace as well as preserving Israel both Jewish and democratic. Radical left groups call for one state solution with democratic equal rights to all the population (Jewish and Arab, in current Israeli territory and in the West Bank). The left tends towards liberal economic views – from welfare state through social-democratic ideology to communism, and supports the separation of state and religion.

The Israeli Political Center: Centrist groups aim to present a political alternative to the traditional political division in Israel between right and left establishments. The Center holds the popular public notion that the Palestinians are not a viable partner for peace, and speaks of a pragmatic understanding of the inherent risks in continuous civil and military presence in the West Bank. They usually oppose any concessions on Israeli sovereignty over "unified" Jerusalem or the evacuation of the big settlement blocks in the West Bank. However, they assert to reduce Israeli presence and governance of Palestinian population.

Major political actors:

PM Netanyahu and the Likud Party: The Likud Party did not publish a political platform in the last elections (2015), but during the campaign called itself the only party that would and could "protect life itself." The campaign was based on the notion that it's "either us or them," either a "strong" Likud party that would protect Israel's national security interests, or the "weak leaders" of the Zionist Union that would compromise security interests in favor of negotiations with the Palestinians. The Likud party won the elections, with its leader – Benjamin Netanyahu – serving as Prime Minister for a third consecutive term, starting in 2009 (with his first term at 1996).

It seems that Netanyahu's political vision for Israel has evolved. On June 2009 Netanyahu delivered a speech at the Bar Ilan University, espousing for the first time the notion of "two states for two peoples" as the solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As part of this vision, Netanyahu demanded the full demilitarization of the proposed Palestinian state, and the Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people.[36] Netanyahu publicly repeated this vision only few times, recently on a CBS interview.[37] Despite this, he has also argued that the establishment of a Palestinian State is a threat to the security of Israel.[38]

Lately, Netanyahu has been calling for regional collaborations with moderate Arab states before any advancement on the Palestinian issue. In his speech at Israel's National Security College on July 2016, Netanyahu outlined his perception of Israel's national strategy. He asserted that the international threat of radical Islamic terrorism promotes cooperation between Israel and moderate Arab states, as Israel's military and innovative capabilities make it a potential favorable ally.[39] By this strategy, Israel could translate these alliances to diplomatic political profits. He argued that while a common perception of the regional situation calls for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to achieve peace and normalization between Israel and the Arab world, an opposite process is possible: that progressing towards normalization between Israel and the Arab world will enable the advancement towards a more sustainable resolution with the Palestinians.[40] He did not explain whether this includes the establishment of a Palestinian state. Some have interpreted his statements to be a withdrawal from the Two States Solution and have speculated that Bibi is deprioritizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at this time.[41]

Whatever Netanyahu's public declarations are, his current right-wing cabinet will not enable him to conduct effective negotiations on the Palestinian issue. Netanyahu's attempts to change the components of the coalition – for example, by negotiating with the Zionist Union's leader – have thus far failed, likely because Bibi preferred not to commit himself to political measures promoting negotiations on the Palestinian issue. Instead, Avigdor Liberman joined the coalition, reinforcing the right-wing disposition of the government.[42] Additionally, some contest that Bibi is heavily influenced by extreme right elements inside his party as well as other member parties of his cabinet (such as Benett). This is considered to be another cause for stagnation on the Palestinian issue and the explanation for adopting controversial legislation (including the "Settlement Law").

Currently, Netanyahu is subject to a number of criminal investigations. These developments have a potential weakening effect on his ability to govern and to lead the coalition, and might end in his resignation.

Avigdor Liberman (Israel Beiteinu Party): Liberman has joined the government as the Defense Minister, responsible for the formal Israeli governing organ in the West Bank. Going into office, Liberman declared he would lead with more pragmatic policies than he argued for as a member of the opposition. Despite this promise, some argue that the measures he adopted while in office reflect an escalation in the Israeli policy regarding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.[43] These measures include a preparation of a military plan aimed to dethrone the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip and enact further limitations on Palestinians' freedom of movement. In response to UN Security Council's Resolution 2334, Liberman ordered the suspension of all non-security-related coordination measures with the Palestinian Authority. This coincides with his persistent view of the PA leadership as non-partner to any negotiation attempts but rather "part of the problem."[44]

HaBayit HaYehudi ("The Jewish Home") party: The Jewish Home Party is a Modern-Orthodox Jewish Zionist political party, identified largely with the Religious Zionist Movement. In the 2013 election, led by Naftali Bennett, the party broadened its constituency by appealing to both religious and secular right-wing Israelis, advocating pro-settlement policy. Although the party has only eight seats in the current parliament, it has a significant impact on governmental policies. Bennett's popularity among the right wing electoral likely effects the Likud's political strategy and Netanyahu's, pushing them to the right.

Bennett and his party advocate for the Jewish people's right to exist on the entire Land of Israel ("greater Israel", including the West Bank and East Jerusalem). The party rejects the "Two State Solution," reasoning that a Palestinian state would be a national security threat to Israel and a base for terrorism. In 2012 Bennett introduced "The Stability Initiative" (or the "Partial Annexation Plan"),

calling for the unilateral annexation of Area C into Israeli territory, with partial Palestinian self-governance in Areas A and B.

The Zionist Union: The Zionist Union is a central-left political alliance between the Labor Party and "Hatnua," established before the 2015 elections, aiming to create a unified political alternative to the Likud party. The Union is an ardent supporter of the Two State Solution and calls for a revival of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. On election day, the party won 24 seats in parliament, making it the second largest party in the Knesset. However, the election results were perceived as disappointing (and relatively surprising). The party became the formal opposition leader of Netanyahu's government, but is not perceived by the public as a viable alternative to the government or a substantial opposition. Herzog, the leader of the party, is considered by the general public, and also by his own constituency, to be politically weak and irrelevant. His attempts to lead the party to join Netanyahu's coalition were harshly criticized.

Central Political Parties: The Israeli political center is represented in the parliament by two main parties: Yesh Atid and Kulano. One is part of the governing coalition: Kulanu's leader holds a senior cabinet position as the Minister of Finance. The other is a member of the opposition: Yesh Atid, led by the former Minister of Finance, Yair Lapid. According to recent polls, Yair Lapid, the leader of Yesh Atid party, is a leading candidate to replace Netanyahu as Prime Minister.

Social divisions:

In addition to divisions between the left and the right, Israeli society has become more polarized on a number of social spectra: between religious and secular groups, Jews and Arabs, and between central metropolitans and the periphery. The solidarity in Israeli society has weakened and the growing polarization has affected its unity, resilience and political system.[45] These developments have a direct weakening effect on any Israeli governmental attempt to initiate constructive measures in the region or to adopt lenient concessions towards regional cooperation.

Israeli Arabs: The Arab citizens in Israel are mostly Arab residents of Mandatory Palestine who stayed in Israeli territory after the 1948 war or returned immediately thereafter. Many have family ties to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza strip, as well as to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In 2016, the Arab Israeli population was estimated at 1,786,000, representing 20.8% of Israel's population.[46] The majority of the Arab population is Muslim, with a Christian and Druze minorities.

There are three main political parties affiliated with the Israeli-Arab population, which all joined a political union in the 2015 election as a result of the raise in the electoral threshold. While some have criticized Arab Knesset Members for advocating for the Palestinians cause and not acting to further Arab-Israeli interests, others have argued that most of their political work does not relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, their legitimacy is constantly being questioned. Regardless of their political platform, their potential influence on Israeli politics is relatively small. Historically, the Arab parties have never joined a governing coalition, and are not considered by many Jewish constituencies as a legitimate partner to such coalitions. However, Arab parties occasionally align with left-wing Jewish parties to promote the formation of a coalition led by the Labor party.

Non-Parliamentary Political Actors and Pressure Groups:

The Settlers & Orthodox: The religious Zionist movement's identity contains both modern-national component as well as religious orthodox component. In Israel's early years, the Orthodox were politically weak and generally excluded from the secular hegemony. After the Six-Day war, the group focused its political agenda on settlements in the new territories, asserting themselves to be "the new pioneers." The group aims to maintain public support and legitimacy for the settlements. Additionally, the group increased its participation and involvement in influential arenas of the Israeli society; members of the group integrated and positioned themselves in the army, the media, politics, and different governmental institutions. Furthermore, the group's public agenda is to "settle in the hearts" of the Israeli public. As a result of these (and other) developments, the group has become a powerful and influential component in Israeli society and politics. It has organized institutions, such as the Yesha Council, an umbrella organization of the Jewish municipal councils in the West Bank that serves as the political arm of the entire Jewish population in the West Bank.[47]

Left-wing NGOs: The experience of left-wing NGOs stands in contrast to the rise in public legitimacy and political power that the settlers gained. In the Israeli civil society there are several left-wing active organizations, advocating for the end of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. In recent years, their public legitimacy has been deteriorated greatly, and they are perceived today by large parts of the public as a Trojan Horse, aiming to undermine Israel's international reputation and legitimacy.

Other Influential Institutions:

The Military and Security Apparatus: The Israeli security apparatus is internally significant and highly influential in several aspects. The security budget is a substantial portion of the national budget. Israel spends more than 6% of its GDP on security.[48] The security

apparatus is an important element in shaping and designing the Israeli foreign policy and diplomacy, and an inherent participant in international initiatives and negotiations. It also an important factor in Israeli global economic ties and participates in implementation of certain internal social policies. Many former high ranked officers and senior security officials occupy political positions after their service, and usually enjoy relatively high popularity.

The Supreme Court and the Judicial Branch: The Israeli judicial branch is independent and judges are nominated by a committee of representative from all three branches of government and the Bar association. The courts, mainly the Supreme Court, are subject to a grave internal political controversy. While left wing circles advocate for preserving the characteristics of the judicial system, right wing circles call for more political involvement in judicial appointments and oppose the courts' judicial activism. This controversy serves a dual goal to the current government's inter-political and international interests. The government often adopts controversial legislations and policies in order to satisfy radical right wing elements in its constituency, knowing that the Supreme Court will strike down the legislations and protect the government from international ramifications. Thus, the government avoids both the implementation of controversial policies and the political price tag of refusing to pass the laws.

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

United States: As a small Jewish country in an Arab-dominated region, Israel had always sought a western powerful patronage that will assure its existence and security. Israel's strong alliance with the United States is a valuable and fundamental element in its national security and deterrence strategy.[49] Throughout the years, Israel had enjoyed bipartisan support, substantial American military and economic aid and international political sponsorship.

Despite years of friendly relations, during Obama's presidency, the relationship between the allies was subject to substantial disagreements and fissures were exposed.[50] These disagreements related mainly to the nuclear agreement with Iran and Netanyahu's speech in Congress, and to the Israeli government's policy on Jewish settlements in the West Bank.[51] Traditionally, the Jewish settlements are seen by the United States, as by Europe, as an obstacle in the political process. The American refusal to veto Security Council's Resolution 2334 denouncing the Israeli legislative initiative called the "Settlement Law" was a blunt reflection of the deterioration in US-Israel relations.

The Trump Administration might mark a possible change in the American-Israeli relationship[52] including a potential restoration of trust between the governments and better coordination on mutual strategic interests.[53] For now, the American response to Netanyahu's declarations on settlements building was relatively vague while the new Administration's opinion on the "Settlement Law" is yet to be heard. Trump's first meeting with Netanyahu in the White House suggested another potential turn in American position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The American President abandoned the consistent American position, in the last two decades, on the "two state solution" and instead declared: "I'm looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both parties like."[54]

Russia: The USSR severed its diplomatic relations with Israel during the Six-Day War, and resumed them only two months before its dissolution in 1991. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Israel's diplomatic relations with its Russian successor became stronger. More than one million citizens of the late USSR, many of them Russian citizens, have immigrated to Israel since the 1990s. This is perceived as a potential cultural bridge to tighten economic and cultural relations between the two countries.

Today, the bilateral relations between Israel and Russia are positive but limited.[55] Russia is neither a leading economic ally to Israel nor a patron, but maintains diplomatic relations and security, economic and cultural ties. In the political-security aspect, Israel's interest in relations and coordination with Russia is of great value. Israel has begun to see more of a strategic interest in relations with Russia due to Russia's involvement in the Syrian war and its coalition with Iran and Hezbollah, as well as the change in the balance of power between Russia and the U.S. in the Middle East.[56] Currently, Russia takes into consideration the Israeli concerns regarding the Syrian war arena, though the two countries adopted different mechanisms for this end.[57] Despite this, future collaboration between the two countries is not certain, and depends on the developments in the Syrian arena as well as on the role the U.S. will take in the Middle East. When Russian interests contradict Israeli interests, this partnership will not be guaranteed.[58] However, Russia could become a power that promotes its proxies and allies in the region towards understandings and cooperation with Israel.[59] Recently, as part of Russia's aspiration to become a stronger influential actor in the Middle East and in the international system as a whole, it initiated efforts to renew the political process between Israel and the Palestinians.[60] So far, this initiative was not successful.

The European Union: Israeli-European relations are characterized by political, economic and scientific cooperation. Israel has signed many bilateral agreements with different European countries, and as of 2003, Israeli-European partnership is maintained through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).[61] The EU is a major trading partner to Israel. Israel is part of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement, under which it enjoys free trade with the Union in industrial products, and several forms of tariff reductions in certain agricultural products.[62] Scientific cooperation between both parties is another significant factor for Israel. Israel is associated to the EU's Framework Program for Research and Technical Development and is a member of the European Science Organization. In both, Israel was the first non-European country to join.[63]

In the political domain, Israeli-European relations are not as positive. Most European states believe that the viable solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict is the "two state solution" and that the Israeli settlement policy is a fundamental obstacle to the peace efforts.[64] As discussed above, the EU has adopted several measures to create economic and diplomatic pressure on Israel.

Egypt: Israel and Egypt have signed a peace accord on 1979. Throughout the years, the relations between the two states were essentially "cold peace," but the recent regional developments have brought increased cooperation between the two neighbors. The expanded cooperation was brought about by the alliance between Wilayat Sinai (ISIS affiliated based in Sinai) and Hamas (an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood) that controls the Gaza strip – a collaboration that has reinforced their respective capabilities. Fighting them is a mutual strategic interest: Egypt perceives Wilayat Sinai as a threat to its stability, while Israel perceives Hamas as a direct threat (with its missile stockpile and its tunnels project), and is concerned about the potential collapse of a friendly neighboring state.[65] The enhanced security cooperation was largely done covertly, but has evidence on the ground; besides intelligence sharing, Israel has carried out drone strikes on Egyptian territory, and has allowed substantial Egyptian force in the peninsula (well beyond the peace accord's agreements).[66] Egypt is acting to destroy tunnels from Sinai to the Gaza strip, used to transfer weapons, and President Sisi acknowledged publicly his communication with his Israeli counterpart.[67]

Jordan: In 1994 Jordan became the second Arab state to sign a peace agreement with Israel. Israeli relations with Jordan developed through a tradition of silent cooperation years earlier, due to their historically aligned strategic interests. The peace treaty resolved several fundamental issues, including the full normalization between the two states, the determination of the international boundary, the distribution of resources (mainly water sources), agreement on security issues (including cooperation in the fight against terror), and increased economic and cultural relations.[68] The treaty also acknowledged Jordan's "special role"[69] in the Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem and the two states' commitment to seek to resolve the refugee issue in multilateral regional agreements. In this way, the treaty reflects the interconnected relations between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians.

The Jordanian government has been experiencing political, security and economical difficulties, which grew stronger in recent years due to the changing regional circumstances, including the flow of Syrian refugees into its borders and the strengthening of the Salafist Jihadi threat within its borders, as well as economic distress and shortage in water and energy resources.[70] Israel has a great interest in keeping Jordan stable. The long Israeli-Jordanian border, with substantial Palestinian populations on both sides, makes Jordanian political disintegration a direct threat to Israel's national security. The importance of Jordanian stability to Israel grew stronger in light of the deep changes in the region and the threat of extremist Islamic actors.[71] Israel now takes part in a broader effort to assist the Jordanian regime, for example, assisting Jordan with its water supply and providing access to seaports for economic use.[72]

Although Israel's support is valuable to the Kingdom, the Jordanian regime must balance between the need to advance its security and economic interests and the need to preserve its internal legitimacy and its relations with Arab allies in the region.[73] Israel could act more freely in assisting Jordan if the Israeli-Palestinian front would shift towards positive progress. Israel has an interest in Jordanian involvement in any political process with the Palestinians as their interests align regarding a Palestinian state between them and both see it as a potential threat to national security.

Saudi Arabia: Although it never had formal diplomatic relations with Israel, the two countries maintain covert relations regarding mutual national security interests. The two states share interests on regional contemporary threats: they both strive to hinder Iran's aspiration to become a nuclear power in the region; they see diminishing Hezbollah's (and other Iranian proxies in the region) capabilities as an essential component in that effort; they share the interest of defeating extremist Sunni organizations including ISIS and al-Qaeda (which present a limited threat to them but a substantial threat to their mutual allies – Egypt and Jordan).[74] As a result of these aligned perspectives, they act for the same regional interests in parallel and complementary efforts: Saudi Arabia arms and funds rebel groups fighting the Iran-Hezbollah-Syria axis, and provides economic support to Jordan; Israel operates to weaken Hezbollah and provides Jordan certain security assistance (mainly in information and training).[75] It is presumed that the two countries maintain wider cooperation covertly. Saudi Arabia led the peace initiative endorsed by the Arab League in 2002, to which Israel never formally responded.

Turkey: During the 1990s, Israel and Turkey enjoyed relatively warm relations based on mutual strategic interest in Syria: Turkey perceived Syria as a threat to its unity by its support to the PKK, while Israel saw in Syria a direct military threat and indirect threat in its support to Hezbollah. The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians in those days enabled Turkey to collaborate with Israel publicly. Israel benefited greatly from its security and military collaboration with Turkey, based on Turkey's geo-political advantages. In addition to military and security cooperation, the economic relations between the two countries flourished – trade between the nations grew tenfold within a decade.[76]

In the next decade, Israel's relationship with Turkey deteriorated, as the Syrian threat diminished in the Turkish perspective, while the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians collapsed. The relations reached their lowest point after the "Marmara" incident in 2010.[77] In 2016 Israel and Turkey signed a normalization agreement, but it is not expected to recreate the high levels of cooperation between the states, as their strategic interests priorities are not aligned – Israel continues to hold firm interest in weakening the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah axis but Turkey priorities other security interests. Israel considers Hamas and other Muslim Brotherhood affiliates as a significant threat while Turkey uses them as means to expand Turkish influence in the region.[78] Despite the booming

economic relations between the countries before the normalization agreement, it is questionable whether these provide enough incentive for political closeness.[79]

Syria: Since the establishment of the State of Israel, Syria has maintained a hostile stance towards it, perceiving Israel as a foreign element in the region and rejecting the Zionist cause. During the Six-Day War, Israel seized control over the Golan Heights, and in 1981 enacted the "Golan Heights Law" applying the Israeli law on the territory (which was rejected in Security Council's Resolution 497).[80] Another important element in the rivalry was control over water sources. In addition, Syria's dependency on the USSR and the Israel's developing relations with the US have transformed the Israeli-Syrian relations to be part of the Cold War between the two superpowers. During the 1990s, a few negotiation attempts were made between the two nations, though none was successful. However, since the 1973 war, the hostile relations have not deteriorated into direct major conventional war between Israel and Syria.

Generally, since the outburst of the civil war in Syria, Israel has maintained a non-intervention policy. It acted only when faced "tangible threats," such as the transfer of arms from Syria to Hezbollah.[81] In the Syrian territories adjacent to Israel, a relative status quo has been maintained for a while, and other than a few spillovers, the border is relatively quiet. Israel's national interest is focused on the aftermath of the Syrian war.[82]

In Israeli point of view, the preferred outcome of the civil war is the establishment of a moderate Sunni regime in Syria. Other scenarios, including stabilization of the Assad regime and the strengthening of the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah axis, or stabilization of a Sunni Islamist political entity bordering Israel, are a threat to Israel's national security.[83]

Iran: The relations between Israel and Iran have been transformed throughout the years. Until the Iranian revolution in 1979, Israel enjoyed warm relations with Iran, including diplomatic, political, economic and military ties. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran severed all formal relations with Israel. Iran adopted an anti-Israel and anti-American position, and became a fundamental security threat to Israel with its support of Hezbollah.

Iran's nuclear project is perceived by Israel as a direct threat to its security and existence, as Iranian leaders have made public threatening declarations towards Israel. Israel has made public and covert, diplomatic and military efforts, to prevent Iran from developing nuclear power. The nuclear agreement between Iran, the P5+1, and the European Union was perceived by the Israeli government as a danger to its national interests. While it has a potential temporary hindering effect on the Iranian development of nuclear power – if maintained and fulfilled – the threat will resurface in a decade. The new administration in the White House marks a potential new opportunity for Israel to achieve new understandings with the United States for the next decade until the agreement will expire.[84]

Non-state actors:

Hezbollah, Hamas, ISIS: The three non-state actors comprising the biggest direct threats to Israel's national security are on three fronts: Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. Hamas, controlling the Gaza Strip, calls for the liberation of all of Palestine from Israeli occupation and for the destruction of the Israeli state. It employs violent methods against the "Zionist occupation," and holds missile stockpiles that threaten large parts of the Israeli population. Hezbollah is a Shia Islamist militant and political group in Lebanon. Its primary objective is to fight against "Israeli Imperialism" and liberate occupied territories (in south Lebanon but also other territories). It has control over different kinds of weapons, among others, missiles and rockets with the ability to reach far into Israeli territory. ISIS threatens Israel through its presence in Syrian territory and the groups affiliated with it in the Gaza Strip and Sinai.[85]

The three organizations have different specific features, capabilities, history and causes. However, they possess common notable characteristics, highly relevant to the their perceived threat in Israeli perspective.[86] Traditionally, the three are terrorist organizations employing guerilla warfare tactics, blending in civil population and using civilians as human shields.[87] However, with time, these actors have gained control over territories and populations and became governing forces over them. This had forced them to develop governing institutions and organize state-like civil services. Their military arm was affected by this transformation, becoming closer in nature to a military apparatus of a quasi-state.[88] This institutionalization has fundamental effects on the Israeli ability to fight them. Seemingly, it enables Israel to apply more conventional power and create effective deterrence.[89] However, some fear that as military actions will weaken these organizations, their political, civil features may weaken and their terrorist characteristics may strengthen once again.[90]

The Palestinian Authority: Since the Oslo Accords, Israel and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority have held several rounds of negotiations but none resulted in fundamental progress towards the resolution of the conflict. In recent years, the stagnation in the process has deepened, while several waves of violence took place. Since 2015, another escalation in violence developed, with the increase in unorganized individual acts of terror carried out by Palestinians against Israelis. The Palestinian Authority (PA) maintains a certain level of coordination with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT).

The gaps between the two parties have led to deadlock, particularly with regard to preconditions to negotiations,

implementation of mutual understandings, and mutual lack of trust.[91] The PA has turned to focus on international diplomatic efforts to further its national cause. In Israeli perspective, the PA does not have the ability or the intention to negotiate and to implement mutual understandings and concessions. The PA is politically weak, has lost much of its public legitimacy and does not have any control over the Hamas regime in Gaza. Therefore, many Israelis believe it could not maintain a valid effective regime as an independent state, which would likely allow radical Islamic forces to gain control.[92]

However, the status quo comes with substantial costs to Israeli interests. Israel continues to suffer from acts of violence, economic damage and degradation in international reputation.[93] Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a direct effect on Israelis' sense of day-to-day safety, and it is the primary issue of internal political controversy.

Negotiation moves:

The recent developments in the Middle East, namely the "Arab Spring," the rise of ISIS and the Iranian nuclear deal, have shifted traditional divisions of power in the region and created new alignments of interests between the different regional actors. For Israel, the changes have created new threats as well as new opportunities for regional cooperation and collaborations. The new emerging threats to Israel's national security are the Iranian effort to develop nuclear capabilities and its aspiration to become a powerful actor in the region with a nuclear agreement that does not preventing it from future potential danger, as well as the rise of ISIS and other radical Islamic elements in the region. However, these threats are shared by other Arab countries in the region, creating new alignments of interests between Israel and moderate Sunni regimes. In light of the American perceived weakness in the region and the new administration's internal focus, these actors have considered warmer relations. Now, more than ever, Israel and moderate Arab countries have greater mutual interests, which opens the door for greater cooperation.

The traditional Israeli notion was that normalization with the Arab states could only be promoted by the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The peace agreement with Jordan reflects this notion, as the Oslo Accords were a significant catalyst to the negotiations between the Hashemite Kingdom and Israel. This was named as the "inside-out approach." Past negotiations with the Palestinians were largely bilateral, without the formal active involvement of regional actors, but with Israeli expectation to be followed by a regional progress.

In light of the new regional developments, a reverse approach has started to gain growing support. This approach, referred to as the "outside-in approach," calls for the initiating of regional negotiations to normalize relations between Israel and moderate Sunni states, which in turn would create more viable conditions to resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians. In the Israeli perspective, past bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians have collapsed mainly due to the Palestinians' lack of will, or ability, to adhere to a peaceful resolution and accept concessions. These unsuccessful negotiations have brought many Israelis to lose faith in the feasibility of a bilateral track to end the conflict with the Palestinians in the near future. In this respect, the regional umbrella can provide additional assurances to a more stable and secure agreement. Furthermore, Sunni moderate states in the region have their own incentive to prevent radical forces from gaining power within the Palestinian population. It should be noted though, that the "outside-in" approach is not completely new. In this respect, the Madrid Conference in 1991 is a good example of partial implementation of the approach.

However, it seems that neither approach is free of obstacles and hurdles, as the regional constraints that shaped the "inside-out" approach are still relevant. This approach was based on an Israeli understanding that regional moderate Arab countries will not be able to normalize their relations with Israel, or publicly collaborate with Israel, when the Palestinian issue is not addressed. Without progress in the Palestinian issue, the moderate Arab regimes will not have public legitimacy to cooperate with Israel. For example, there is a strong parliamentary objection in Jordan to the government's intention to further collaborate with Israel. Meanwhile, "inside-out" attempts have failed, and the stagnation in current situation has brought the two parties to deep and fundamental breach of trust.

Thus, instead of adhering to one of either two supposedly contradicting approaches, Israel might adopt an integrated approach, which incorporates complementary elements from both. For instance, Israel could initiate and promote a joint transportation infrastructure project with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the PA. These infrastructures could benefit all four: Saudi Arabia and Jordan would enjoy convenient access to the Mediterranean Sea through Israeli and Palestinian ports, the Palestinians could enjoy economic development, and Israel could benefit in both economic and security terms. Another example would be an Israeli declaration on suspending settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in return for Saudi financial investments in Israeli economy. In this regard, private actors in the Israeli economy and political sectors could be of great resource to initiate and implement some of the cooperation-inducing measures. The involvement of a fourth party, the United States, would open up diverse additional assurances and incentives for such collaborations.

There are substantial intrinsic constraints on Israel in adopting any measure of cooperative strategy. Shifting Israeli approach towards greater collaboration with Arab states in exchange for concessions in the Palestinian front is hardly practical or viable with the current Israeli government. For a viable shift, the coalition must be changed, replacing the "Jewish Home" party with a left or central party, namely the Zionist Union or Yesh Atid. Such new Israeli leadership must unite the majority of the public on both sides of the aisle

under the understanding that such a change is crucial for Israeli national security and interests.

Yet previous attempts at unilateral Israeli showings of good faith have not ended well. Initiated by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the 2005 Israeli withdrawal of over 8000 Jewish settlers from their homes was seen by Israelis as a peace offering and a chance for Palestinian self-rule.[94] Sharon risked Israeli national cohesion by ordering the religious nationalist settlers out, a contentious move that he thought might lead to a chance of peace. Yet after Israeli settlements and troops were removed, Hamas won parliamentary elections and then after clashes with rival party Fatah seized control of Gaza. Due to this takeover by a designated terrorist group, Israel and the US rescinded promises for increased trade and travel to and from the Strip. Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since then, and both sides say there may be more hostilities in the near future.[95] Now, ten years after the withdrawal, "Many Israelis today believe all they got for their troubles were more rockets," and the Gaza withdrawal experience is further proof for many that the occupation of the West Bank is justified and that Israel "cannot risk giving the Palestinians an independent state."[96] The experience of withdrawal from Gaza informs Israeli considerations of the future of West Bank settlements and of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and constrains the realm of publicly acceptable negotiation moves in this regard.

Thus the consolidation of the fragmented Israeli society is also necessary for external progress. Internally, any territorial cession or even merely a small scale settlement evacuation could lead to a significant civil protest from right wing circles and create a significant threat to an already-divided Israeli society. Such concessions must be accompanied with and followed by major changes in social policies. Furthermore, a true need for transformation in Israeli public opinion should be addressed. In light of common public perceptions of the absence of a reliable Palestinian partner, the Israeli government must convince the public that moderate Arab states can be a "game changer." Here as well, civil society and private actors can pressure the government and initiate a change in public opinion. It should be noted that such civil efforts must be premised in some broad public common denominator; for example, initiatives led by former senior military and security agents who enjoy popularity among the public, women-led movements (such as "the Four Mothers" movement that generated public support in Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon), or others. Moreover, any terror attack on Israeli population during negotiations has the potential of being publicly translated into a weakness in Israeli deterrence, and used as the basis for public protest to withhold all cooperative regional efforts. Therefore, any such violent act from radical Islamic groups should be addressed and retaliated, preferably by coordination between Israel and the PA or other Arab regimes.

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XIV. Jordan: King Abdullah's Balancing Act

Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

The Kingdom of Jordan as we know it today, like much of the greater Ottoman Syria, was conceptualized and created only after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of colonial boundaries. Mark Sykes and Francois Georges-Picot's 1916 division of British and French spheres of influence designated lower Syria and Mesopotamia to British influence. This was finalized with the agreement of San Remo and divided into the nation-states we see today.[1] The existing communities of colonial Jordan were semi-arbitrarily split from the West Bank and Palestine, and from similar mixed and Sunni Arab communities north and West of Baghdad. The provinces of Salt, Karak, and Aljun, defined by their irrelevance to the surrounding states of Iraq, Syria and Palestine, had little in common and little to build on, lacking, as Philip Robins put it, the "raw material of statehood."[2] From 1921 to 1948, Jordan was defined by its proxy colonial ruler, the Hashemite King Abdullah I who had come north from the *Hijaz* in the first World War to claim a stake in the dissolving Ottoman lands.

Founded and funded by British military leadership as a military base and the crossroads of the new Middle Eastern empire, Jordan and its institutions still bear the imprint of imperialism. The Arab Legion, eventually to become the Jordanian army, evolved from the independence-minded *istaqlalist* World War I-era British organization of Arab tribes.[3] Amman, while relatively uninhabited until the *Tanzimat* reforms in the late Ottoman period, was selected as the Jordanian capital in 1928 and expanded from a population of 10,000 in 1930 to 65,000 in 1946.[4] Concepts of nationalism, and nation-based borders, were imposed on the tribes of the region, and evolved throughout the 20th century with the evolution of the Jordanian national narrative from one of colonized rule to one of Arab nationalism and Jordanian-ism.[5]

Throughout this evolution, the Jordanian economy developed a reliance on exploitative Western governments and industries, which enabled Jordanian development while hindering economic independence. This trend began with British "allowances" allotted to Abdullah I, in exchange for the employment of tribal troops in the first World War, and continued with stipends of Western aid throughout the Mandate period. Following formal Jordanian independence in 1946, Britain continued funding the Arab Legion, which, alongside the friendly Iraqi puppet monarchy and British occupation of Palestine, ensured British security in the region.[6] Even after British withdrawal from Palestine and official decolonization of the region, Jordan remained "as beholden as ever to Britain for financial, military and diplomatic support,"[7] and the Western institutions which would replace British influence continued this dependency. American military aid echoes British sponsorship of the Arab Legion, and the Jordanian rentier economy is typically divided along the three major income sources: aid, oil market dependence, and remittances.[8] While significant influence has shifted from state distribution of aid (induced state rentierism) to the private control of inflow of capital (private sector rentierism), dependence on outside states and actors remains significant.[9] This major Western economic influence, as well as the occupation of Palestine and establishment of the state of Israel, have fueled regional anti-Western political movements. The monarchy, as a Western-sponsored foreign imposition on Jordan, occupies a liminal space between the colonizer and the colonized, and since the founding of the state of Jordan has been forced to mediate between the interests of Western sponsors and those of the Jordanian and Palestinian people in order to maintain the stability of the monarchic regime.

This role as mediator was first and most importantly tested by the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel and the Palestinian nakba. The establishment of a non-Arab, non-Muslim state on Jordan's Western border and the expulsion of between 650,000 and 800,000 Palestinians into Jordan initiated a dramatic shift in Jordanian demographics, the beginnings of a Jordanian national character, and an existential Jordanian security issue to this day.[10] While the mélange of migrants from the Hijaz to the Caucuses were never a united people, the first wave of Palestinian refugees in 1948 provided a catalyst for the definition of Jordanian identity. With each influx of Palestinian refugees to Jordan, in 1948 and 1967 from Israel-Palestine, in the 1970s and 1980s from Lebanon, and in 1990 from Kuwait, Jordanian identity has been reformed. Two images of the state emerged, one as pan-Arab and pan-Islamist and thus united against the Zionist West, and as an East-Bank-originating pseudo-ethnic group that granted itself more indigenous authenticity than recent arrivals. These narratives have both been employed by the Jordanian monarchy to unite Jordanians in a central national identity, and have evolved throughout the Jordanian-Israeli peace process to promote the stability of the regime.

Over time, as the Palestinian-Jordanian and Palestinian communities have defined themselves (oft in the context of violent unrest in Israel or the Palestinian territories), Jordo-Jordanians and the Jordanian monarchy have distanced themselves from the Palestinian cause and trended towards supporting the Western-backed Israeli peace process. During the 1967 war Palestinian refugees from the West Bank poured into Jordanian territory. Following this, the events of Black September (in September 1970), sometimes labeled the Jordanian Civil War, provoked Jordanian nativist and monarchic backlash against the Jordanian-Palestinian community and local Palestinian activists. This distancing provided the monarchy the rhetoric with which to abandon Jordanian claims on the West Bank territories, as the state of Jordan did (unconstitutionally) in 1988. Through the subsequent "legitimation of the claim to a

Palestinian State," the monarchy avoided responsibility to arbitrate the rights of the Palestinian people therein. The official Jordanian war with the state of Israel ended in 1994 with the signing of the Oslo Accords, brought about by Western pressure on Jordan specifically following King Hussein's ill-advised, brief support of Iraq in the First Gulf War. Although Jordanians, particularly those of Palestinian origin, supported the consequential decision to back Saddam Hussein in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the decision not to back U.S. troops or allow American use of Jordanian soil resulted in economic and diplomatic consequences so strong as to push Jordan into cooperating with the United States to this day.

Jordan has since maintained an alignment with Western security and policy interests that stems both from past and present economic dependencies and the fragile security of the region. In the Second Gulf War, Jordan was not only aligned with U.S. interests but served as a base for American Patriot missiles, supplied American troops, and actively supported the war effort.[11] In the ongoing War on Terror, Jordan has sent bombers to support the joint coalition air campaign against the Islamic State in Syria, and even reluctantly supported the destabilizing democratization efforts of the Arab Spring in surrounding countries.[12] Since the 1980s liberalization reforms have been employed by the government to sooth Western concerns and integrate into the global community. More recently, King Abdullah II made motions towards internal Jordanian reform in response to Arab Spring-era protests in Jordan. As such, the Jordanian national identity may not be any less Arab and more Western than it was 30 years ago; rather, policy-makers in Jordan (and especially the monarchy) have established that the stability and security of the Jordanian state depend on active alliance with the United States, even at the cost of the traditional Jordanian or monarchic identity or interests.

The Jordanian identity, then, is held together not by the Jordanian history of dependency and Western influence, but rather by monarchic positioning on various social axes along which the Jordanian people fall. This positioning is primarily through the Arab identity, as stated in the proclamation in the Constitution of Jordan as an "independent sovereign Arab State."[13] Arab-ness here as an ethnic or "nation"-based identity is mentioned before Islam or the Arabic language, and is consolidated by the Arab-ness of the Hashemite Kingdom on which Jordanian statehood is founded. This adherence to Arabism is also a relic of the pan-Arab nationalist sentiment sweeping the Arab world in 1952, when the Jordanian constitution was revised and ratified.[14]

This Arab identity was also embodied by the Hashemite monarchs, who claimed legitimacy of Arab leadership due to their tribal roots and cross-border Arabism. Initial squabbles over their respective posts in Iraq, Syria and Jordan between Abdullah I and Faysal gave way to an Iraqi-Jordanian relationship that would last diplomatically through the reign of King Faisal, and remain in the Jordanian national consciousness well into the First Gulf War. Many see the 1990 support of Hussein as a brotherly, identity-based decision,[15] though others view the Jordan-Iraqi relationship as cold, based more on calculated economics rather than family ties.[16] In either situation, the pan-Arab nature of the Hashemite kings strengthened the Arab-ness of Jordan as a whole in defining it in relation to surrounding states.

While Islam is the official state religion and a defining characteristic of the Hashemite claim to the Hijaz, the monarchy has had a tumultuous relationship claiming legitimacy over Islam as the defining factor of the state. The anti-government Islamist parties such as the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood or Islamic Action Front appeal to those interested in more religious and Islamic influence in governance. The monarchy has approached this delicately, as engagement with these groups grants religious legitimacy but also requires appeals to the Palestinian majority in the Jordanian population. The interest of regional monarchies hoping not to be toppled by the Arab-Spring wave of populist Islamism also encourages the regime to do its best in crushing the Muslim Brotherhood, both to save its own skin and to maintain the stability of regional gulf partners. Jordanian parliamentary lists demonstrate a non-Islamist method of incorporating democratic norms into an autocratic government, basing affiliation on tribal connections rather than religious views. This model of non-Islamist constitutional representation may be significant in the Gulf countries which are not democratized, but does not supply a full model, as it still struggles to fully represent constituents and has resulted in civil disorder despite recent reforms.

The monarchy carefully balances the influence of Western aid with the needs of the Jordanian people and the maintenance of the government's power. Due to the significant percentage of Jordanian citizens employed by the government and the international aid that keeps the Jordanian security apparatus and government afloat, it is unsurprising that the Jordanian national narrative is sensitive to the desires of Western powers.[17] Jordan's liberalization efforts have aligned both with uprisings from within the Jordanian people and with the American development aid, but are not necessarily entirely serving the interests of either alone. Similarly, political reforms following the Arab Spring seem to be focused on deflecting Western criticism and deterring riots on the streets of Amman in a world that can now imagine the destruction of previously-seen "robust authoritarian" regimes, in order for the monarchy to maintain control.[18] While new constitutions or election laws may seem to cement the Jordanian national identity, they also may serve to mask or deflect critique from the monarchy's control over the state. A crucial element of this balance is that neither King Hussein, who began economic reforms in 1989, nor King Abdullah II of today, have an intrinsic dedication to democratic ideals. In addition, while American investment and involvement in the region has encouraged Jordanian appeals to U.S. sensibilities, regional sponsors such as Saudi Arabia also have a great effect on Jordanian policy, and are strong supporters of monarchic, authoritarian rule. Thus Jordan maintains the delicate balance.

Perceptions of Jordan's weakness justify positions which may be opposed to interests of the Arab world at large, or even sectors of its own population (most notably the Palestinians.) Choices made due to a desire for stability may have less sticking power

than those made ideologically or popularly, and the monarchy can easily decide that it is in its interest to reverse long-standing policies for immediate political gain. Due to the monarchy's monopoly on foreign policy decision-making, covert activities that may not be publically popular (such as peace agreements with Israel) are possible without inciting immediate reprisal, although there is still an awareness in the Jordanian policy-making elite that it must maintain the loyalty of the people. This balancing act will prove crucial in influencing Jordanian decision-making over time.

Sources of leverage

As an actor sponsored mainly by outsiders, Jordan has become almost an intermediary between larger, more regionally hegemonic powers. In this liminal space, Jordan has effectively caused those actors -- including Saudi Arabia, U.S., Israel, and Iraq -- to depend upon its stability, thus making it indispensable.[19] The Jordanian monarchy, as the key legitimate actor in Jordan's foreign policy, sees Jordanian regime stability and security as the priority of Jordanian foreign policy, and as its main source of leverage, and looks to work with actors in the region in order to promote its own interests. To maintain this leverage, the monarchy must maintain a cycle of aid entering the country. Jordanian policies can then be split into two categories – those which encourage the contribution of aid to the Jordanian state, both by the West and by regional partners, and those which leverage that aid to shape the surrounding security environment.

Over the past two decades, Jordan's branding as an ideal aid recipient has portrayed a narrative of Jordanian liberalization, both in the economic and political zones. Although this rhetoric of liberalization does make Jordan appear to be using aid in a more politically stable and economically efficient way, the execution of liberalizing policies is hindered by the monarchy's needs to maintain regime security above institutional or economic success. Economic liberalization is favored by Jordan's Western supporters as a sign of a strong political economy and the foundation of an economically self-sufficient Jordan. Ethnic divides within private industry, with much of the capital invested in Palestinian-Jordanians, incentivize the government to keep much of Jordan's business in government-owned spheres that employ the monarchy's traditional Jordo-Jordanian backers. Previously state-controlled markets in Jordan have slowly been privatized over the past few decades, and both free-trade zones and "Special Economic Zones" including the port of Aqaba have successfully bolstered local industries.[20] These reforms are cautious, mainly due to the monarchy's awareness that rising prices can spark disorder; for example, attempts at removing government subsidies for crucial food items have resulted more in unrest than in free-market development.[21]

Despite internal ambivalence as to the application of liberal ideals, Jordanian rhetoric abroad has leveraged democratization as a peaceful alternative to the failing states on its borders, and more recently the riots and fragile democracies of the Arab Spring. Immediately following September 11th, Jordan used its two-chamber parliamentary system as proof that it would stand as an ally to the West in the war against terror.[22] Today, as post-Arab Spring governments stumble and collapse in Libya and Syria, Jordanian elections are given credit for their authenticity, despite recent adjustment to the election laws that gives the monarchy greater authority to appoint government officials and cabinet members without oversight.[23]

Jordanian reluctance to place foreign policy in the hands of its people is tied up in the unpopular necessities of much of the monarchy's Western-sponsored deals. Islamist politicians, as well as the Palestinian-Jordanian majority, have been opposed to Jordanian-Israeli peace dealings since the Oslo Accords, and advocate further detachment from Israel and stronger support of Palestinian statehood. These policies have assisted Jordan in acquiring the aid from the United States and European partners that it requires to maintain economic and political stability, and thus the monarchy has avoided popular input on these topics, preferring to concentrate foreign-policy decision-making powers in the hands of the king. Similar safeguards have been enacted to protect the regime's assistance in the Second Gulf War and the fight against ISIS, in which support of Western troops has been unpopular when the wars bring troop deaths and refugees into the Jordanian state. By cooperating with Western sponsor states, the monarchy exchanges losses in popularity for enhanced military capabilities and economic bargaining power, with which it can then bargain for more support or regional allies and maintain stability. While striking peace with Israel was disruptive to internal Jordanian politics, maintaining Israel as an ally enables Jordan to gain better deals on water access and energy cooperation, and reduces the security dilemma of the Jordanian-Israeli border. Thus stability becomes a source of leverage over the Jordanian people in addition to over other actors in the region.

External military aid provides Jordan with more security and the ability to partner with other small states that feel threatened by large regional powers. Military technology and infrastructure acquired with American aid also increase the state's intelligence-gathering abilities, making it an easy and willing partner for those aiming to combat terror in the region.[24]

Despite its benefits, Jordanian cooperation with the West has weakened Jordanian legitimacy as a leader in traditional pan-Arab realms. The Oslo Accords, much like Egypt's Camp David Accords 16 years before them, lost Jordan the legitimacy to advocate for the Palestinian cause as a leader of the Arab World. By quashing the efforts of the Muslim Brotherhood, Jordan has also lost the claim to Islamist leadership in the region.

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The Jordanian government's decision-making can be framed as a balancing of internal and external requirements and pressures on the monarchy, which affect the perceived and real security of the Jordanian state. These internal pressures can be seen within three spheres: economic concerns, concerns of popular opinion, and concerns of the monarchy's reputation. Often, the monarchy is balancing all three of these internal scales, although occasionally two can outweigh the third entirely, especially if the monarchy perceives an existential danger if it fails to solve an oncoming problem. While the monarchy separates foreign policy from populism, monarchic autocracy still relies on the support of its people, and international loyalties are still dependent on local Jordanian stability.[25]

A crucial element of this framework, in order to well understand Jordanian politics and the relationship between state and society, is that popular support is only of interest to the monarchy as it pertains to the stability of the regime. The actors at the table, then, are only responded to based on the amount of trouble they can cause for the state rather than their position in parliament or their cooperation with state actors. When evaluating Jordanian politics for spoiler potential, political groups should only be seen as significant based on the level of mass mobilization they are capable of. The incorporation of a party into parliament allows the monarchy to undermine significant social changes and turn the tide in a pro-government direction.

Although there have been concerns within Jordan that an Islamist group such as the Muslim brotherhood could harness the anger within the streets, cooptations of various popular movements by the government have thus far functioned in maintaining stable political dialogue within Jordan, and enabled the continuation of monarchic control in several disputed policy areas, most notably foreign policy. To a degree, this framework legitimizes the monarchy as representing the people, or at least the people who are loud enough to make a fuss, but slows change in the voicing of popular opinion in what have been monarchic spheres. This places far more power in the hands of political elites and the monarchy than on the populace and thus seems inconsistent with similar movements towards Arab liberalization truly brought about by popular revolution and controlled by populist parties.[26] This system, however, has maintained the monarchy in a political environment in which many "robust authoritarian" governments have lost to their populist alternatives.

To understand the compromises made by the Jordanian monarchy, it is constructive to first examine the various interest groups represented within Jordan, and their individual pulls on foreign policy.

Most publicized, perhaps, is the East Bank-West Bank divide between so-called "Palestinian Jordanians" versus "Ethnic Jordanians," or "Jordo-Jordanians" as they have been labeled in this paper. Labeling these groups as ethnic is controversial, as they were artificially separated by Western borders in 1947 and thus have little difference in ethnicity or culture; a more serious definition today may be that Palestinian Jordanians were once residents of land West of the Jordan River, and relocated from that land to Jordan as of 1948. Even this group, of course, is endlessly divided by differing social situations, mainly concentrating around living situations, which are often determined by date of migration. Recent Jordanian polls label the Palestinian population as only 634,182 living without "national ID numbers," representing 6% of the Jordanian population, but estimates as to the population of originally Palestinian citizens runs above 43%.[27] These Palestinians are often not granted full citizenship rights, and live both in refugee camps and as assimilated members of Jordanian society. As a receiver of refugees from all over the region over the past decades, Jordanian citizens take a different outlook to Palestinians than to other refugee populations or minorities, particularly those who have a state to return to. As the recipient of millions of Iraqi refugees throughout the Iraq war, and over a million Syrian refugees today, Jordanian refugee camps both supply a steady market of humanitarian aid and disrupt local economies. While these more recent refugee crises may be somewhat temporary, Palestinian-Jordanian and Jordo-Jordanian relations represent the manifestation of this resentment toward refugees as it has evolved over seven decades.

Palestinians face discrimination in education and employment, which drives more Palestinian-Jordanians to private industry, despite the large portion of Jordanian GDP spent on government employment. Jordo-Jordanians find the permanent state of Palestinian refugees in Jordan threatening to their nativist interests, despite the fact that many of these refugees have now lived in Jordan for multiple generations and support the Jordanian economy in a way many Jordo-Jordanians do not.[28] This fear of Jordan being taken over by Palestinians leads pro-Jordanian groups to demand a right of return for Palestinian refugees in any Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, in fear of a Western "Jordan is Palestine" solution that cements the status of Palestinians in Jordan as full citizens, and even may send the remaining Palestinians in the West Bank to Jordan.[29] In addition, Palestinian-Jordanians will protest American and Israeli actions that are counter to their interests, causing the monarchy to engage in a delicate balancing act in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis as well. For example, when President Trump stated his intention to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, King Abdullah personally addressed the situation, likely out of fear of Palestinian popular unrest in Jordan.[30]

This division is further enhanced by the urban-rural split within Jordan, which itself is influenced strongly by the status of tribes within rural or traditional communities. Jordanian elections, notably due to the Single Non-Transferable Vote system, have been plagued by tribal- rather than issues-based politics, especially in rural areas.[31] Urbanization and the development of Amman as a center of activity has also disempowered the rural North, East, and South in Jordan, thus inciting response to economic inequality through riots and a resurgence in the anti-government sentiment fueling political Islamist groups.[32]

Tribal politics, in the meanwhile, have been institutionalized by the preference towards East Bank Jordanians in federal hiring processes. *Wasta*, or favorable connections, grants favor to those within a certain tribal or personal circle, thus eroding meritocratic promotions.[33] Although there have been efforts made by the monarchy to reduce the power of personal relationships and enforce instead the "rule of law," they have yet to be proven effective.[34] This identity-based self-promotion extends the divide between Palestinian-Jordaninan and Jordo-Jordanian citizens, and also interplays with the role of Islam in the Jordanian state.

The Arab Spring surfaced a question of religion and representation in the state, with many theorists sure that a new era of Arab statehood was arising, with a democratic framework with both religious and non-religious parties.[35] Although activists protested in Jordan in 2011, the monarchy deployed "defensive democratization," liberalizing measures meant simply to quell unrest rather than enact deep change, thus ensuring the stability of the Jordanian monarchy as similar autocracies fell. The reforms that were requested by activists are those still demanded in the agenda of the anti-government Islamist parties within the Jordanian government, namely, limits on the king's autocratic powers, a fair electoral system, and less corruption.[36] Recent electoral reform campaigns attempted to repair the electoral system by changing the method of counting votes from Single Non-Transferable Voting, which encouraged voting on personal ties rather than party lists due to the unequal distribution of votes. These same reforms, however, shifted further power of appointments to the King, and failed to fulfill anti-corruption demands.

Jordanian Islamist parties deal with internal divisions over the role of Islam in the government, the status of Palestine and ties to Hamas, and the security and longevity of the regime.[37] In addition, as the monarchy has attempted to control the political opening process, it has alienated first the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (JMB), and then their official political-party offshoot, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), moving from a pre-1989 stance of "loyal opposition" to the "hard opposition" that has emerged today. On the "hardest" side of this opposition movement, some Jordanian Islamists prior to and during the Iraq invasion actively supported the activities of extremist leaders such as al-Zarqawi, who was Jordanian, and attended his funeral. Due to extremist attacks on the Jordanian populace, however, support for radical Islamist terror groups has dropped, thus further delegitimizing the extreme wing of the JMB. Similar to the Moroccan PJD, the JMB/IAF has run reformist movements rather than the revolutionary activism seen in other Muslim Brotherhood actors in the region. Still, the IAF's choice to use "non-institutionalized tactics by participating in street protests and boycotting Jordan's parliamentary elections" demonstrates a more radical approach to reform within the monarchy.[38] A rise in the influence and capability of the Brotherhood would require a dramatic shift in mobilization of the general populace or a demographic shift, leading the monarchy to focus its efforts on overall stability rather than on conceding ground to the IAF.

Other agitators for democratic reform and liberalization include the multitude of international, especially Western, representatives in the non-governmental organization community. These secular democratizers envision a "civil democratic movement," but due to their secular bent struggle even more than the IAF to bring the change they'd like to see.[39] Foreign representatives also hold significant sway in the security sector, and both the presence of Western troops in Jordan and Western aid that sponsors military budgets significantly impact the politics of the military population. Like much of government employment, the Jordanian military over-represents Jordo-Jordanians and thus monarchy loyalists, thus further tying the executors of foreign policy to the monarchy's Western-influenced approach. The exclusion of parliament from aid-based defense budget issues and the contribution of an all-volunteer rather than conscription-based military to patronage and exclusion patterns separate any activist movement from the activity of the country's defense interest groups, and the Jordanian Armed Forces thus represent a crucial and powerful section of the pro-government populace.

External conflicts and network of relationships

Jordanian foreign policy is guided by the financial and popular needs of the monarchy aiming to maintain regime stability and engender a less dependent foreign policy. Due to Jordan's lack of natural resources and dependence on allies for greater security in a fragile neighborhood, the monarchy is not capable of projecting power any further than American and Saudi allies would like it to. Instability in the region has been a double-edged sword for the monarchy; while it brings further aid into Jordan due to Jordan's stability, it threatens the internal security of the regime itself. Jordan must then juggle the needs of its own stability while responding to regional instability, hoping that neither threat topples the monarchy.

Israel: Although Jordan had long been aware that it lacked the military capacity to definitively stand up to Israel, half-heartedly attacking during the 1973 War with the expectation of loss, a peace agreement was hindered by the high percentage of Palestinian refugees within the Jordanian state, and Jordan's annexation of the West Bank following the 1948 war. Jordan's journey to a peace agreement with Israel involved the separation of the Jordanian populace from the Palestinian struggle through the collateral damage of Palestinian uprisings in Jordan, beginning with the 1970 Black September civil war and lasting through the First Intifada in 1987, after which King Hussein of Jordan chose to completely relinquish Jordanian claims to the West Bank.

Although the Oslo Accords ended the near-fifty year hostilities between Israel and Jordan, obstacles remain in the way of a Jordan-sponsored agreement that would establish an independent Palestinian state. Jordan's most immediate perceived threat to the stability of its government remains the increased influx of refugees into Jordan, overwhelming the capabilities of both the welfare state and Jordanian social cohesion. This threat is embodied in the "Palestine is Jordan" argument of Zionist West-Bank settlers and

far-right Israeli politicians, whose policies in the West Bank could drive a mass migration of Palestinian refugees into Jordan. The terror that this possibility evokes in the monarchy, who would then become an even smaller minority in their own country, and Palestinian nationalism among Palestinian-Jordanians have driven Jordanian insistence on the inclusion of a Palestinian right of return in any two-state solution.

Overpopulation and resource distribution issues have also driven the wedge of water between Israel and Jordan, both literally on their border and in policy decision-making. Water access has become a security issue for the desert Jordanian state, and while the two states have cooperated on distribution to date, climate change could easily reignite this issue, as both populations grow and little formalized adaptation to climate issues is implemented.[40] Joint projects such as desalination plants near the Red Sea, water-sharing agreements, and the Red Sea to Dead Sea pipeline are recent examples that could become the basis for broader cooperation.[41]

Since the Oslo Accords, normalized trade relations and even joint entrepreneurship has increased, although there is no record of significant change in public opinion of Israel.[42] As the Likud party has maintained power within Israeli politics, the expectation for another Jordanian-Israeli agreement has stalled.

Palestine: Jordanian support of Palestinian issues is yet another careful balance within the monarchy. Palestinians within Jordan have evolved in their opinions of the Palestinian state, and primary identities have shifted depending on how long a citizen has lived in Jordan. The continued existence of Palestinian refugee camps maintain the Palestinian identity as one of loss, with an ultimate goal of return. The socio-economic position of Palestinians, however, considering their dominance in private industry due to their exclusion from government work, has allowed the Palestinian diaspora to be self-sufficient and assimilate into the Jordanian state.

While Jordan held a seat on the United Nations Security Council from 2014-2015 and lobbied repeatedly for a new approach to the Israeli-Palestinian problem, representatives were incapable of breaking the American veto and bringing about a new resolution. Jordan has stood by the most recent December 2016 UNSC agreement for the end of settlement-building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but the lasting power of that resolution is unclear considering the changing administration in the US.[43]

Both Jordanian officials and community leaders are seemingly not opposed to the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which is tied to the most extreme branch of the IAF, yet there is recognition that Hamas is not yet equipped with the legitimacy to shape a new Israeli-Palestinian peace.[44] The issue, however, is emphasized as a problem of "foreign affairs," thus allowing the monarchy to back a populist Islamist group on the other side of the Jordan, while persuading its own populace to respect autocratic rule over populist Islamist democracy.

Syria: The Jordanian and Syrian regimes have been on fragile terms for decades, as the Jordanian peace agreement with Israel was seen as a betrayal of Syrian claims to the Golan Heights.[45] Oddly, the defense market for Western aid creates a Jordanian dependency on mild conflict in the Middle East, meaning that the monarchy is less invested in the peace-creating elements of the Syrian or Iraqi civil wars as they are in the internal politics and economics. Although Jordanian interference in the Syrian civil war has driven down public morale on occasion, such as in the death of the RJAF Pilot Muath Al-Kasasbeh, the military-industrial advantage of the conflict outweighs the cost.[46] Due to this economic dependence, Jordanian investment in the dynamics of the war and in the winner are low – Bashar al-Assad was disliked in Jordan prior to the beginning of the civil war due to his inhuman tactics, but a win for a populist Islamist group could destabilize the monarchy. With no easy horse to back, Jordanian assistance in airstrikes seems more economically than strategically crucial, and the collapse of the Syrian state is more of a human security concern with refugee numbers than one of power projection.

Iraq: Similarly, the monarchy's support for the US invasion of Iraq seems more economically motivated than strategic, as it also provoked an influx of refugees and was highly unpopular with native Jordanians. The political instability in Iraq took a toll on Jordanian private industry, blocking trucking routes from Ma'an to Baghdad, though trade has increased again in recent years. Meanwhile, Jordan has lost its status as a preferred oil trading partner with Iraq, driving up the prices of oil and natural gas since the second Gulf War and provoking public outrage. Iraqi investment in Jordanian private enterprise has brought the industries of the two countries closer together, but inter-governmental relations have suffered as Iraq has swung closer to Iran.[47] Jordan participates with the US-led coalition in the fight against ISIS in Iraq.[48]

Saudi Arabia/Gulf: Through this shift in oil markets, Iraqi dependence on Saudi Arabian and Gulf oil has increased, sparking a reevaluation of Jordanian-Saudi relations. In the evolution of the Jordanian state, previous intentions the Hashemite monarchy may have had on reclaiming the Hijaz from which they fled in the first World War, in contest with the Ibn Saud family, have been replaced by more realist concerns for the security dilemmas of today. The Saudi-Jordanian relationship has been reinforced by external pressure, with the collapsing Syrian state pressing down on Jordan's northern border, the Israel-Palestine inspired turmoil to the west, and internal struggles with Muslim Brotherhood populist Islamist movements.[49] To support Jordan in working towards regional stability, Saudi Arabia invited Jordan into the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2011.[50] While this invitation has been implemented on the level of the GCC's "strategic partnerships" rather than as a full integration, Saudi support for the Hashemite monarchs stays strong, even at the price of substantive aid deals.[51]

In both the Iraqi and Saudi cases, Jordan has attempted to decrease its oil dependency, aware of the insecurity created by

its need for outside energy suppliers. King Abdullah II began exploring Jordan's uranium deposits in 2008 with the Jordanian-French Uranium Mining Company.[52] Jordan has been cooperating with Rosatom, the Russian state-owned nuclear energy company, since 2013, and plans to provide nearly half the country's energy through nuclear generators by 2025.[53] This nuclear development has been energy-focused rather than weaponized, and Jordan has cooperated closely with the International Atomic Energy Authority to ensure reliability in the nuclear development process. This cooperation has also been bolstered by the stand of Saudi Arabia and the smaller gulf countries against Iran, in what has been described as a "new Middle East Cold War," inspired both by sectarianism and the power rivalry between Iran and the Saudi Kingdom.[54] This opposition reached an apex when King Abdullah II accused Iran of creating a "Shi'a Crescent," boxing in Jordan with the arc of Shi'a governments from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, to Lebanon. While the monarchy seems to have retreated from this aggressive stance, it allowed the King to capitalize on the Sunni Islamist energy in Jordan, and similar fears of Shi'a aggression have driven Jordan and the KSA further together.[55]

USA: All of these alliances and relations have, of course, been glued together by American and Western sponsorship of various actors since Jordan submitted to its client-state or proxy-state position in 1990. While the rentier-state status of Jordan in the oil market and remittances is reliant on the region as a whole, the aid market is mainly run either directly through Washington, or through Western-backed international debt systems such as the IMF. American contribution to Iraqi military and intelligence spending, building and training thus facilitates Jordan's role as a U.S. ally militarily in the region, contributing both intelligence military support to Americans in the region.[56] Just as Jordan relies on American assistance, Washington sees the stability of Jordan as a lynchpin in Middle East regional involvement, willing to accept the monarchy in exchange for confidence in the Jordanian security apparatus.[57] Military support is supplemented by extensive foreign military sales, more evidently in the post-Oslo Accords purchase of American F-16s in the *Peace Falcon I* deal, and the more recent acquiring of several UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters.[58]

UN: While Jordan's connection to the United States and to the West have increased its influence within international institutions, it continues to tread carefully on the international stage, aware of its dependence on the United States and need for regional and internal stability.[59] Jordan has held three terms on the United Nations Security Council since 1965, most recently from 2014-2015, and has pushed for various pan-Arab movements, such as peace-making in Yemen, Syria, and Israel-Palestine.[60] Unfortunately, it continues to hold little sway in comparison to permanent members, and even advocated for reform in the security council to halt issues like Israel-Palestine from permanently stalling.[61] In attempting to curry good favor and international recognition, Jordanian troops have served as UN peacekeepers, thus maintaining their position as a neutral, internationalist power. By joining the WTO in 2000 (with American assistance), Jordan served to enhance their international capabilities and decrease, to a degree, reliance on direct aid, bolstering their ability to be dependent on the globe rather than simply the United States.[62] In this balancing act, despite strong American ties, Jordan has also maintained amicable relations with Russia, the EU, and several Eastern states in attempts to stave off any outside threats and maintain international recognition and respect. Most Jordanian universities are part of the Erasmus educational exchange with the EU, a testament to the country's education system and an educational opportunity for Jordanian youth.[63]

Russia: Despite American-Russian aggression over the war in Syria, Jordan and Russia have maintain communications as to the locations of Jordanian and Russian airstrikes and troops. Jordan and Russia have also maintained ties over energy sales and economic interactions, perhaps granting Jordan more peace of mind with the Russian incursion in Syria.

Other Arab States: The relevance of Jordanian relations with Arab states, specifically to the west in North Africa, has decreased as a result of the Arab Spring. The Hashemite monarchy and the Mubarak family were close allies prior to the Egyptian revolution, but the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt provoked fear in the Hashemite kings. Ties are beginning to be rebuilt between King Abdullah and Egyptian President Fatah al-Sisi, with a resolution of "outstanding issues," mainly over economic cooperation.[64] King Abdullah has also continued cooperation with the Moroccan monarchy, including support for Morocco's pseudo-annexed Western Saharan territories.[65] The two countries have cooperated and commiserated in attempts to maintain monarchic and autocratic stability in a region in which Tunisia and Libya have so recently ousted their monarchs. Jordan has maintained bilateral trade with Tunisia and Algeria despite dissimilar regimes.[66] Jordan has participated, if minimally, in the US-backed coalitions to destroy ISIS and restore stability in Libya and Yemen.[67] These policies demonstrate the cautious Jordanian engagement with the region and the world that has brought Jordan to where it is today.

Potential negotiation moves

Internal Reform: By focusing on economic liberalization, Jordan could lower dependence on Western aid, potentially encouraging a more lively civil society that was less ethnically divided or dependent on government jobs. This social cohesion could, in turn, break down the separations between Jordanian and Palestinian. Economic independence and less reliance on regional stakeholder would enable a more strategic, less reactive Jordanian foreign policy.

In addition to economic liberalization, the Jordanian monarchy maintains the option of political liberalization as a method of complying to Western demands and shifting the balance of the region. The monarchy's political reforms, notably since 1989, have allowed the popular voice to be incorporated into public-policy making, but have shielded foreign policy from the hands of Parliament,

and have limited the electoral system to decrease representation. Political liberalization would offering more decisions -- including relations with Israel -- to the vote of the people, in which case Islamist parties would likely gain more of a political voice and decrease Jordanian cooperation with Israel. It is possible that the threat of an unstable Jordan in which the monarchy no longer controls the Palestinian-Jordanian population would prompt Israel to reform policy decisions, but this too is unlikely. Still, Jordanian democratization is unlikely to increase the chance of an Israeli-Palestinian negotiation. At this time, Jordan seems to lack the incentive to destabilize its own populace and region, when it is so desperately clinging to security-based solutions. A significant internally-based negotiated agreement with the West or the United State would require a guarantee of regional and internal stability, neither of which appears to be approaching any time soon.

Palestinian Statehood and Jordanian Stability: King Abdullah believes that a two-state solution could become the basis for a more comprehensive peace deal with Israel and the Arab World. The terms of such an agreement -- particularly the dispute over East Jerusalem -- are far from settled, and the King pointed to Israel's continued settlement building as a key barrier to bringing parties to the table.[68] Without some visible statement of goodwill by Israel towards an agreement, Jordanian leadership of a two-state solution would likely disrupt the delicate balance of interior and exterior pressures that the monarchy upholds. In addition, President Trump's comments opening possibilities for one or two states make it unclear where the US stands under his lead.[69] While this could open up possibilities for Arab leadership of a security or peace agreement, it also might make it more difficult for any country to take the lead if there is a chance of going against US interests. One possible alternative for Jordan would be to threaten to withdraw support for any solution if certain needs are not met.

Continuing Regional Transformation

Externally, Jordan's ability to negotiate seems limited to the range of actions of global (U.S., Russia) and regional (Saudi Arabia, Iran) superpowers within the existing framework of conflicts. If the U.S. were to fall in line with the Russian-sponsored Assad regime, Jordan would likely acquiesce and support said regime despite previous support lent to Sunni rebel groups, even those trained within the kingdom.[70] With the current state of disarray in Syria, Jordan may accept a plan that includes an Assad-run territory in Western Syria, with northern Syria given over to the Kurds and a collective fight against ISIS in the East. Briefly there were even rumors of the Kingdom carving out a section of southern Syria, but these seem to have subsided, and the monarchy has been busy enough with conflicts across the region.[71] At this point, Jordan is not likely to take the lead on any of these regional transformations, but may be in a position to build a broader coalition than many other states, if the incentives aligned for them to do so.

XV. Kurds of Iran: Embattled Autonomy

Written by: Natalie Crone
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Introduction

This paper examines the above five realms in relation to the Kurds of Iran, in context of their overarching identity as a Kurdish people. The Kurds, although a nation of people, are natively located primarily in Kurdistan, a largely contiguous geographic area which lies within the borders of four different states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Respectively, they are known as Syrian Kurdistan, or Rojava, Iraqi Kurdistan, or Basur, Turkish Kurdistan, or Bakur, and Iranian Kurdistan, or Rojhilat[1].

Although these physical divisions were constructed with fiat power stemming from Western states, the physical divisions have created differing patterns of evolution among the Kurds. Thus, after a synopsis of the shared history that shapes the narratives among the Kurds, this paper will then turn a specific focus to the Kurds of Iran. After, the paper will step back from its micro level examination of the internal factions and move to a macro view of the Kurds to distinguish the interactions and dynamics between the four respective groups.

Shared History

The earliest recorded history of the Kurds, or then known as the Kurti, can be found in cuneiform inscriptions from an ancient Assyrian site dating back to 2500 B.C. One inscription detailed an ancient Persian King, Artakhshir-a-Papkan, being opposed by a "Shah a Kurdan", or a Kurdish King[2]. This foreshadows the historical timeline of the Kurds, as they have since yet written a chapter of their history without some form of conflict stemming from a resistance to foreign rule. In 400 B.C., Xenophon of Greece mentions encountering the Kardaukhi (Kurdish) people and regarded them as fierce, skilled and filled with opposition[3].

The Kurds are a highly tribal society, with most tribes absorbing Sunni Islam in the seventh century. In 1182, a Kurdish king, Sultan Salahud-Din Ayubi emerged and with him the golden age of the Kurds. After his decline, the Kurds faced a personal stagnation that was marred by internal squabbles[4]. Occupying forces ranging from the Mongols to the Turks ruled the greater region and all had tense interactions with the Kurdish tribes. Interestingly, the Guran Kurds were forced to face the formidable army of Genghis Khan and, due to their prowess and skill in their mountains, were the first military to deliver a dismantling blow to the Khan army[5]. The legacy of the Kurdish resistance to foreign rule and their aptitude for fierce battles spans all tribes and regions to the present.

In modern times, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the end of World War I in 1920 saw the Kurds ascending with statehood within their grasp. The Treaty of Sevres drafted after the war included within it a claim for Kurdish Statehood. The flame of Kurdish nationalism was blazing.[6] Tragically for the Kurds, this treaty was not ratified, but rather replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, which was absent of any mention of the Kurds. This momentous event established the current Kurdish divisions under the four states emerging from of the Lausanne treaty: Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria[7]. The proceeding sections of this paper will address each geographical section of the Kurds to explore their respective evolutions, narratives and current state of affairs.

The Kurds of Iran

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

The Kurds of Iran mainly reside in the Northwestern region of Iran. They are ethnically unique and have resisted assimilation into Persian/Iranian culture. The Kurds make up the second largest minority group in Iran and are estimated as seven percent of the population[8]. While the Kurds of Iran have been largely spared the horrors of suppressions that the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey have endured, the Iranian regime has openly oppressed Kurdish separatist sentiments, especially those that favor independence. For the Kurds of Iran are not without their struggles against their ruling regimes. The Kurdish language is often barred from educational institutions and the Sunni Kurds of Shia majority, Iran are denied religious freedom of worship and even political representation[9].

The Kurds of Iran have a unique history in that they created the only modern, independent Kurdish republic to date. After the Soviet Union had expanded their grasps in the Middle East, it allowed for the creation of a Kurdish republic. The Iranian Kurds seized their moment, and in 1941 the Republic of Mahabad was unofficially created, and then officially declared in 1946.[10] The Republic instituted local rule and Kurdish nationalism. However, this Kurdish autonomy was short lived, as after political and military support from the Soviets dwindled, many Kurds actually deserted Mahabad. The Iranian military swiftly invaded in 1946, and with little resistance reasserted Iranian control of the territory.

Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the newly created Iranian constitution favored Shiite Muslims and denied a majority of Kurds political representation, as they were Sunni Muslims[11]. This ignited outrage among the Kurds and a rebellion began. Lead by the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), they ensued in a political and military revolt. The revolt was crushed and resulted in 10,000 Kurdish deaths; the most dramatic deaths were of the politicians that would be executed[12]. This event has created a legacy of nationalism within the Iranian Kurdish population, but also of pragmatism. They are now not as active in their nationalistic or separatist pursuits as Iraqi or Turkish Kurds are, and rather, appear to favor a rational actor model for deliberating options for rebellion. Most of

the nationalist momentum and political organizing stems from youth movements and local politics as opposed to national political organizations[13].

Additionally, the Iranian Kurds have a different narrative because the majority of the Shia Kurds that reside in Iranian Kurdistan have asserted that they prefer to be under the rule of Tehran as opposed to strive for independence. This is due to Shia Iran favoring Shiite Muslims and suppressing Sunnis, leading to Sunni Kurds receiving disproportionate oppression[14]. The Kurds of Iran also do not sit upon any natural resources[15], which negatively impacts their ability to negotiate with the regime, as they lack direct leverage. Finally, the Kurds of Iran possess a militant group known as Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK). PJAK has links to the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, or Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK), which is based in Turkey and engages in armed struggle centered around Kurdish nationalism, human rights and martyrdom[16].

II. Sources of leverage

Of all the four geographical regions of Kurdistan, Iranian Kurdistan receives the least notoriety. This is perhaps due to the lack of media coverage and academic censorship in Iran, or perhaps because the Kurds of Iran understand the status quo within Iran and are less inclined to disrupt it. For instance, within Iran, political compliance is rewarded and dissonance and separatism is quickly dismantled and publicly punished[17]. While Kurdish separatists in Turkey are often jailed for their work, in Iran they are executed. Experts note that of all the Kurdish groups, those of Iran have remained largely stagnant comparatively[18]. This may be attributed to not only a lack of leverage concerning economic resources and swift military incursions by the Iranian military, but also to a lack of international attention to prompt Iran to refrain from assault of its Kurdish population[19].

The PJAK, though armed, is underground and largely resides across the Iraqi border in Iraqi Kurdistan on standby. It does not pose significant threats to the regime beyond rogue incitement and military instigation. It mostly operates via deterrence, stating that the regime must respect the local Kurdish governing committees or else it will unleash insurgent activities[20]. To some extent this is respected but, according to some experts, this is subject to change with the opening of Iranian diplomacy and economy[21]. It is speculated that as Iran opens its international relations, it will crack down on internal dissonance. The upcoming Iranian elections should be monitored in relation to any political shifts that allocate more power to local provinces, appeasing the Kurdish population or, conversely, that further consolidate power within the regime and exclude minorities.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The Iranian Kurds have a societal division due to the Shia-Sunni split. While Sunni Kurds align with the KDPI and PJAK ideology and the narrative they espouse, Shia Kurds align more with the Shiite regime of Iran[22]. Kurdish villages are largely, by organic design, either majority Sunni or Shiite, and so when Iranian military crack downs happen, they can come at a disproportionate price with Sunni Kurds being targeted. Moreover, due to the Iranian political laws, Sunni Muslims, though the majority of Kurds in Iran and in greater Kurdistan, are not given political representation[23].

The major political parties of Iranian Kurds are the KDIP, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), Komala, and PJAK. It must be noted that these groups, while they espouse support among Iranian Kurds, they actually operate outside of Iran, such as the PJAK and KDP, which operate from Iraqi KRG territory for a military operations base, or from Europe, such as Komala and KDIP. This is because the political reality on the ground in Iran is heavily constricted. As such, most Kurdish identity and organizing within Iran takes place at the local level and is cultivated in youth movements[24].

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

Historically, the Kurds of Kurdistan were strategic and able to use their respective, ruling state's government's foes to their advantage, enabling them to exploit state rivalries and vulnerabilities to their benefit[25]. For instance, during the Iraq-Iran war, by exploiting the enmity between the two states, Kurds promoted the use of Shiite Iranian power against the Sunni, Saddam Hussein regime, which was brutalizing its own Kurdish population[26]. While this tactic benefited the Kurds to some extent, the host states, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Iraq, have now caught on to this strategic dimension of their Kurdish populations and are not as susceptible to such instigation. For, now, all host states to Kurds fear their separatist nature and do not want to instigate or promote Kurdish progression in foreign states, as the ramifications may inspire their own Kurdish populations[27]. In sum, while the Kurds of Iran could once activate foreign governments in their political struggles in Iran, this reality has now changed and left the Kurds of Iran to their own devices.

V. Potential negotiation moves

With the Kurds of Iraq having made great strides in their quest for autonomy, and with their presently advantageous, developing economic ties with Iran, they present two advantages to Iranian Kurds: 1) Iranian Kurds can use the KRG as a model to showcase the success of federalism to the Iranian regime' 2) the Kurds of Iran can use the KRG to leverage their growing economic relationship with Iran to push for political reforms for the Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan, for the Iraqi KDP and Barzani tribe in general have historical social ties to Iranian Kurds[28]. This implies that, should the Iranian Kurds want to, the relationship between Iraqi and Iranian Kurds could be activated to apply pressure indirectly on the Iranian government for the benefit of the Iranian Kurds[29]. Again, the proposed KRG-Iran petroleum pipeline[30] and the upcoming Iranian presidential election will heavily influence this situation[31] as it will dictate how much leverage the KRG will possess in its relationship with Teheran.

The Kurds of Kurdistan

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Although the Kurds thus far in this article have been segmented based on their geographical divisions, it is imperative they also be analyzed as a unit. Estimates from experts claim that there are thirty million Kurds in Greater Kurdistan[32]. They are the largest nation without a state and their fame is well known around the world; they carry a narrative of nationalism, carry collective memories of victimhood from Arabization and mainly practice a moderate form of Islam[33]. While they do not function as a cohesive unit, they empathize, support and even engage in conflict across their arbitrarily drawn state lines. As a whole, their situational visions include obtaining political, social and economic equality for all Kurds[34]. Their grand vision for greater Kurdistan is an autonomous region that allows Kurds to have self-rule and physical security.[35]

II. Sources of leverage

Greater Kurdistan possesses oil reserves mainly located in Iraq and Syria[36]. It has agricultural development in Iran and Syria[37]. Militarily, armed groups of Kurds, such as those from the PKK, PJAK, Peshmerga and the PYD move regularly across the porous borders of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq[38]. At times the groups aid each other, as seen with the PKK assistance given to Iraqi and Syrian Kurds during the rise of the Islamic State[39]. These resources, while serving as tangible leverage, their greatest leverage comes in the form of public diplomacy.

The Kurds as a whole have a public diplomacy initiative that strives to tell the narrative of the Kurds in hope of garnering public opinion, which can then be translated to political pressure to be utilized for the support of Kurdistan[40]. The initiatives include diaspora activity in European states and the U.S., appealing to aid organizations, such as Amnesty International, to be guardians of Kurdish human rights, and direct engagement of foreign governments, such as KRG President, Barzani meeting U.S. president G.W. Bush[41]. These efforts all have a strong online presence that utilize social media, news outlets and home pages, which allow the Kurds to unimpededly tell their narratives, plights and goals to the international community[42]. The Kurds, to varying degrees, are able to use these public diplomacy efforts to leverage greater, progressive dialogues with their host governments.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The Kurds are highly tribal and have deep social and political divisions within Kurdistan[43]. Interestingly, however, when a prominent Kurd is offering remarks at prominent international events, (s)he often does so on behalf of all of Kurdistan. For instance, when KRG president Barzani had an audience with U.S. president G.W. Bush, he stated; "We in Kurdistan, particularly, and also in Iraq, generally, we highly value the courage and bravery of your leadership...."[44] This signifies a unity among the Kurdish people that goes beyond tribal divisions.

Above all of the main Kurdish political groups, there appears to have been an organizing agent created, the Koma Civakên Kurdistan, or the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK)[45]. Although, experts are leery of the KCK, calling it a terror organization, due to its sponsorship of the PKK and their terrorist activates[46]. On paper, it is used as an umbrella organization for Kurdish parties. Its main tenants focus on Kurdish Nationalism and establishing democratic autonomy for all Kurds[47]. There is also a women's branch called the Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, or the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Movement[48]. While these groups only loosely govern Kurdistan's politics, their symbolism is perhaps more impactful than their actual legitimacy as an organization. The KCK demonstrates that since its creation in 2005, the Kurds are beginning to see past their fragmented recent evolution and understand their strength in numbers and solidarity.

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

The Kurds of Kurdistan are in conflict with all of their respective host states. Currently, the Kurds are able to enter into delegated autonomy agreements with their host states' governments because their situational vison allows them to, striving for security and self-rule[49]. However, they are in direct conflict with the states in the long run because the grand vision of Kurdistan is it as an independent state[50]. This is a political reality that while need not be addressed at present, it will factor into long term regional treatises that involve states with a Kurdish population.

V. Potential negotiation moves

Referring to the situational vision of greater Kurdistan, the most advantageous moves for the Kurds would be to take advantage of opportunities, often catalyzed by the Arab spring, to create power sharing agreements with their respective host states. For instance, in Syria, when the opportunity arose, they established an autonomous region[51]. While this move is not yet codified by Syrian law, it will undoubtedly not be able to be ignored by the reconstructing powers and will likely be incorporated into Syria's final status agreements. Also, international organizations such as the UN and Human Rights Watch are the best legitimate avenues for the Kurds to share their plights and aspirations, while protecting themselves from further persecution. Finally, spoilers, such as terror activists within the PKK, should be discouraged, as they delegitimize the Kurdish efforts.

Written by: Natalie Crone
Edited by: Margaret Snyder

XVI. Kurds of Iraq: Embattled Autonomy

Introduction

This paper examines the above five realms in relation to the Kurds of Iraq, in context of their overarching identity as a Kurdish people. The Kurds, although a nation of people, are natively located primarily in Kurdistan, a largely contiguous geographic area which lies within the borders of four different states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Respectively, they are known as Syrian Kurdistan, or Rojava, Iraqi Kurdistan, or Basur, Turkish Kurdistan, or Bakur, and Iranian Kurdistan, or Rojhilat[1].

Although these physical divisions were constructed with fiat power stemming from Western states, the physical divisions have created differing patterns of evolution among the Kurds. Thus, after a synopsis of the shared history that shapes the narratives among the Kurds, this paper will then turn a specific focus to the Kurds of Iraq. After, the paper will step back from its micro level examination of the internal factions and move to a macro view of the Kurds to distinguish the interactions and dynamics between the four respective groups.

Shared History

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In modern times, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the end of World War I in 1920 saw the Kurds ascending with statehood within their grasp. The Treaty of Sevres drafted after the war included within it a claim for Kurdish Statehood. The flame of Kurdish nationalism was blazing.[6] Tragically for the Kurds, this treaty was not ratified, but rather replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, which was absent of any mention of the Kurds. This momentous event established the current Kurdish divisions under the four states emerging from of the Lausanne treaty: Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria[7]. The proceeding sections of this paper will address each geographical section of the Kurds to explore their respective evolutions, narratives and current state of affairs.

The Kurds of Iraq

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

The Kurds of Iraq reside predominantly in the Northeastern region of Iraq. Historically, Baghdad has abused its Kurdish population. The government's offenses have ranged from brutal forced relocation in 1975 to a systematic, attempted genocide in 1987.[8] During the initial U.S. invasion of Iraq in 1991, the U.S. imposed no fly zone over Northern Iraq, defying the Saddam Hussein regime. This afforded the Kurds a reprieve of sorts and they began to develop independently of Baghdad and greater Iraq. During the subsequent 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Kurdish military, the Peshmerga, aided the U.S. in their efforts leading to Hussein's defeat and Iraqi liberation[9].

Although there has since been a governmental and political restructuring of Iraq, today there is residual, pervasive mistrust stemming from the trauma between the Kurds and Baghdad[10]. Beyond mistrust, the rugged mountainous area that shielded the Kurds from invaders over the years (the Crusaders, Ottomans, Arabs and Persians) allowed the Kurds to remain unassimilated and maintain their own culture, identity and language from greater Iraq, leading to social and political cleavages that further distanced the Kurds from Iraq as a nation[11].

As such, the Kurds are eager to become self-sufficient and, most importantly, independently secure, and have made great strides in becoming so[12]. During the 2003 Iraqi restructuring, the Kurds were granted a federal region known as the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).[13] Ultimately, this created a semi-autonomous region for the Kurds to self-administer all internal relations. The ethos of conflict remains persistent with the Iraqi Kurds, and the KRG's relations with Baghdad are often strained and defiant[14].

II. Sources of leverage

As a source of tangible leverage, the Kurds of Iraq sit upon a bounty of the natural resource petroleum. In 2003, the new

Iraqi constitution stipulated that the KRG would be responsible for its domestic affairs and that Baghdad, the seat of the Iraqi central government, would handle all Iraqi international affairs.[15] The constitution, however, was opaque in its allocation of Iraqi federal and regional powers for international economy, particularly with regards to petroleum trade. Since 2005, the KRG used its oil industry not only for revenue, but also as a kick starter for building its international diplomatic soft power ties beyond its relationship with the U. S., utilizing petroleum diplomacy to its strategic advantage with states such as Israel, Turkey and various European states.[16] This independent action has strained KRG relations with Baghdad, which has in retaliation attempted to penalize foreign oil companies that sign contracts with the KRG through blacklisting practices and the issuing of lawsuits. Moreover, Baghdad denies the KRG its "17 percent of the federal budget" allocation and the KRG does not share revenue from its petroleum sales.[17]

Another tangible resource and source of leverage is the Iraqi Kurd's formidable military force, the Peshmerga. Throughout history, the Kurds have been recorded as being fierce and skilled fighters. It must be noted that this force is independent of the Iraqi security services and are responsible for the territorial integrity and security of KRG. In the ongoing fight against ISIS and other Islamic extremists, the U.S. and other intervening Western states coordinate with the Peshmerga in successful anti-ISIS campaigns[18].

Finally, intangibly, another form of soft power afforded to the Kurds of Iraq are their perceived stability as a political entity and their apparent ties to the West. This takes the shape of an increase in foreign economic investment, positive public diplomacy and Western-funded military aid[19]. As foreign developers, investors and politicians look at the Kurds of Iraq's portfolio, they see a region that is unique from the surrounding Middle East. The Kurds of Iraq appear to reject radical Islam, embrace gender equality and are perceived as democratic - although in reality their bureaucracy is riddled with corruption [20]. The Kurds of Iraq leverage this soft power and projection of stability in creating diplomatic ties and attracting tourism to the region.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The internal divisions of the Iraqi Kurds are dynamic. To understand the reality on the ground of the Iraqi Kurdish political divisions, the founding of them must be recognized. Unlike Western or democratic States, the Kurds have and still maintain the legacy of tribalism; their political parties thereby run deeper than political ideology and are based largely on tribal affiliations[21]. For instance, at the moment, the ruling political party is the Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP, also written as PDK). This political party, which was originally created in Iran, was subsequently established in Iraq due to tribal affinities[22]. The leader of the KDP has historically hailed from the Barzani Tribe, with the current elected president of the KRG being KPD's Massoud Barzani. The main rival political party is the Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê, or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK). There is a type of balance within the KRG as its president hails from the Barzani tribe and the KDP, while the president of Iraq stems from the PUK.

Although the divisive tribal divisions have since been quelled by political processes and parties, prior they had violent engagements. From 1994 – 1998, there was a bloody war fueled by KDP and PUK divisions[23]. The war was abetted by external actors, Turkey and Iran, and exacerbated by the Iraqi, Saddam Hussein backed military[24]. Although alliances and interests during that time were convoluted, a simplistic synopsis follows. Turkey supported (militarily, economically, etc.) the KDP as a means to intervene in the KDP's ties to the PKK, a Turkish Kurdish group entangled in violent clashes with Turkey. Iran similarly aided the PUK, as its leader, Jalal Talabani, had created a military alliance with the Iranian military. When the PUK began to increase its leverage, the KDP used its ties to Baghdad to request formal Iraqi military involvement. This lead to an Iraqi massacre of PUK members. The United States was appalled by such acts and used ground troops to stabilize the situation and later brokered a peace deal between the KDP and PUK[25]. This exemplifies the Kurds ability to 1) have intense infighting and 2) be able to exploit external actors for their respective benefits.

Interestingly, although the PUK and KDP have mended their political ties, their administering of the Peshmerga remains separate. Though Peshmerga units obviously serve the interests of the greater KRG, each units' allegiance and orders are dictated by either the KDP or the PUK, respectively[26]. Although this may seem incongruous, it allows for fast mobilization and the formation of tight knit fighting groups. This is speculated to actually enhance the Peshmerga's overall effectiveness, particularly with regards to their most recent battles against the Islamic State. A final note must be made about the uniqueness of the internal relations of the KRG. Although the ruling KDP and PUK are the political parties elected to power and to represent tribal groups, neither stem from the most populous Kurdish tribes in Iraq. Rather, they represent the leadership from the most organized tribes[27].

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

Externally speaking, one does not have to look far to be able to discuss the Kurds of Iraq's relations. Their most immediate external actor is Baghdad. Their relations with Baghdad are often tense as the two have a history of abuse and defiance, which perpetuates their current squabbles. Baghdad wants to maintain territorial integrity and the KRG uses its aspirations for secession as leverage in bargaining, often threatening to take action if disputes break out[28]. Moreover, as stated earlier, the KRG's direct export of petroleum further strains the KRG-Baghdad relationship. As of 2017, there has been political reconciliation between Erbil and Baghdad. Both have agreed to joint administration of many of the oil fields in Kirkuk – an oil rich territory whose administration has been contested by Baghdad and Erbil[29]. This agreement has held through to the writing of this paper, but as it is known, the Middle East is dynamic and the situation must be revisited before any definitive statements can be made as to the stability of the agreement.

To the North, Turkey has warmed relations considerably with the KRG in the realms of security and economy. Concerning security, the Kurds of Iraq act as a buffer between Turkey and Iran's Shia regime[30]. Since Iraq has a Shia dominant government and military, having ties to the moderate, Sunni KRG reassures Turkey that its borders are protected against Iraq should it fall into Iran's sphere of influence. The KRG is aware of the leverage it has and uses Turkey to ensure that the KRG has a NATO ally on their border, which can provide military air power and additional resources should the need arise[31]. Economically, the KRG's petroleum diplomacy

with Turkey evolved considerably since the formation of the 2014 Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline[32]. The pipeline links the landlocked, Iraqi Kurds directly to Turkeys Ceyhan port and the Mediterranean Sea. The KRG provides Turkey with low priced petroleum which "gives them an alternative to Iranian and Russian energy sources".[33] In 2016, the KRG was Turkey's third largest trading partner and there were 1,500 Turkish companies conducting business in Iraqi Kurdistan.[34]

Although the economic relationship with Turkey is presently fruitful, if the ties between Ankara and Erbil sour, the Kurds of Iraq are left with no direct pipeline to export is lucrative oil in a manner independent of Baghdad. The KRG's engagement with Iran, the Shia actor to the East, could ease its dependence on Turkey by providing an alternate petroleum export partner. In 2015, Tehran and the Kurds of Iraq developed a proposal that would link Iraqi Kurdish oil to Iran's Persian Gulf ports[35]. This proposal has yet to be implemented at the time of this writing, but with the dynamics of the Middle East, this development ought to be referenced before it is quoted for a simulation.

Another external actor that the Kurds of Iraq have developed relations with is Israel. Unlike the Iraqi Kurd's other external relations, their interactions with Israel have remained beneficial for the Kurds. Israel has long since openly supported some form of an independent and autonomous Kurdistan. When the Iraqi Kurdistan needed military advisement in the past, Israel was a willing partner. When the KRG set its sights on developing diplomatic petroleum relations with Israel, they were again met with a willing partner.[36] The first reported Kurdish oil shipment arrived to Israel in 2014 and the relationship has only grown since[37].

Israel is in a unique position for Erbil to utilize, for a benefit of their petroleum diplomacy is that Israel lacks diplomatic relations with Iraq. Therefore, Israel is not subject to the aforementioned consequential lawsuits that Baghdad issues when the KRG bypasses Iraq's State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO) in its oil sales, for those lawsuits are only applicable to states possessing diplomatic ties with Iraq. This allows Israel to act as an outlet for the KRG to use for the re-export of Kurdish oil should they need to bypass its Turkish, or potentially Iranian, partners. (Mawii, 2016).

The KRG has also made great strides diplomatically outside of the Middle East, having created formal diplomatic ties with many states since 2005. It is hosted with representation in fourteen states and hosts thirty-three states' consulates within Iraqi Kurdistan that are distinct from those within Iraq proper in Baghdad (KRG, 2016). The nature of these relations are based on economic development, security, spheres of influence and, in part, shared values. The Kurds of Iraq are able to maintain these relationships because they: 1) project political stability and continuity; 2) continually develop their economy, particularly concerning petroleum; 3) and provide Western states an additional vantage point to inventory the dynamics of the Middle East.

V. Potential negotiation moves

At present, the Kurds of Iraq are in an advantageous position. Externally, they are seen as a stable, progressive, and equipped with a skilled military and economic leverage. Internally, they have their political and tribal divisions, but the KRG's democratic structure has given these dynamics a constructive outlet, political action. The Kurds of Iraq have been able to take advantage of the recent Iran nuclear deal and the resulting opening of the Iranian markets. It is suggested to watch the upcoming Iranian presidential elections to see if the political shift potentially impacts the implementation of KRG-Iranian petroleum diplomacy. As for the Syrian Civil war, the negotiating move that will be present for the Kurds of Iraq will be its service as a proxy for NATO members, particularly the U.S. and Turkey. The KRG shares a border with Syria, which in its reconstruction is thought to be falling into Russia's and Iran's sphere of influence. The U.S. and Turkey will likely engage the Kurds of Iraq to act as a military buffer and de facto proxy against Russian-Iranian influence in Syria. Finally, the rise and falling of The Islamic State (IS) has ironically been beneficial for the Kurds of Iraq. While they have had to expend military resources to maintain their borders and have had to house refugees, they have also been able to acquire control of three additional Iraqi territories, the most notable being, the oil rich Kirkuk. When the Iraqi national military was unable to defend these locations from IS, the Peshmerga took over military administration of the areas[38]. During this expansion, the KRG, while it gains territory and the disputed resources within them, it comes at the cost of strained relations with Baghdad and the Iraqi Assyrian Christians living in those territories. This situation is dynamic and should be updated before any official statement is made.

Moving forward, however, the KRG finds itself in debt. Iraqi Kurdistan's large influx of refugees, its fight against IS and the decrease of global oil prices have left it in a financially precarious situation. These factors combined with internal corruption have left Erbil with over 16 billion in accumulated debt.[39] Plans are assumedly underway to rectify this debt, but it still stains the KRG's economic and diplomatic canvas and presents the International Oil Companies (IOCs) with an opportunity to refuse an increase in petroleum production which would further hurt the KRG economy.[40] Additionally, another possible obstacle is dependency. The KRG replaced its dependency on Baghdad for oil exportation for a dependency on Ankara. As of today, Erbil is completely dependent on the KRG-Ceyhan pipeline, which is controlled by Turkey.[41] This leaves the KRG vulnerable to any volatility in its relationship with Turkey. Another form of dependency that Iraqi Kurdistan must be wary against is that of the curse of being a rentier state. Oil is the KRG's largest revenue source and it must not be overconfident in its success with petroleum diplomacy thus far.[42] Thus, it must starve off the Dutch disease and diversify not only its petroleum export market so that it is not dependent on one exporter, it must also take care to diversify its general economy so it is not dependent on one revenue resource.

The Kurds of Kurdistan

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Although the Kurds thus far in this article have been segmented based on their geographical divisions, it is imperative they also be analyzed as a unit. Estimates from experts claim that there are thirty million Kurds in Greater Kurdistan[43]. They are the largest

nation without a state and their fame is well known around the world; they carry a narrative of nationalism, carry collective memories of victimhood from Arabization and mainly practice a moderate form of Islam[44]. While they do not function as a cohesive unit, they empathize, support and even engage in conflict across their arbitrarily drawn state lines. As a whole, their situational visions include obtaining political, social and economic equality for all Kurds[45]. Their grand vision for greater Kurdistan is an autonomous region that allows Kurds to have self-rule and physical security.[46]

II. Sources of leverage

Greater Kurdistan possesses oil reserves mainly located in Iraq and Syria[47]. It has agricultural development in Iran and Syria[48]. Militarily, armed groups of Kurds, such as those from the PKK, PJAK, Peshmerga and the PYD move regularly across the porous borders of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq[49]. At times the groups aid each other, as seen with the PKK assistance given to Iraqi and Syrian Kurds during the rise of the Islamic State[50]. These resources, while serving as tangible leverage, their greatest leverage comes in the form of public diplomacy.

The Kurds as a whole have a public diplomacy initiative that strives to tell the narrative of the Kurds in hope of garnering public opinion, which can then be translated to political pressure to be utilized for the support of Kurdistan[51]. The initiatives include diaspora activity in European states and the U.S., appealing to aid organizations, such as Amnesty International, to be guardians of Kurdish human rights, and direct engagement of foreign governments, such as KRG President, Barzani meeting U.S. president G.W. Bush[52]. These efforts all have a strong online presence that utilize social media, news outlets and home pages, which allow the Kurds to unimpededly tell their narratives, plights and goals to the international community[53]. The Kurds, to varying degrees, are able to use these public diplomacy efforts to leverage greater, progressive dialogues with their host governments.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The Kurds are highly tribal and have deep social and political divisions within Kurdistan[54]. Interestingly, however, when a prominent Kurd is offering remarks at prominent international events, (s)he often does so on behalf of all of Kurdistan. For instance, when KRG president Barzani had an audience with U.S. president G.W. Bush, he stated; "We in Kurdistan, particularly, and also in Iraq, generally, we highly value the courage and bravery of your leadership...."[55] This signifies a unity among the Kurdish people that goes beyond tribal divisions.

Above all of the main Kurdish political groups, there appears to have been an organizing agent created, the Koma Civakên Kurdistan, or the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK)[56]. Although, experts are leery of the KCK, calling it a terror organization, due to its sponsorship of the PKK and their terrorist activates[57]. On paper, it is used as an umbrella organization for Kurdish parties. Its main tenants focus on Kurdish Nationalism and establishing democratic autonomy for all Kurds[58]. There is also a women's branch called the Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, or the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Movement[59]. While these groups only loosely govern Kurdistan's politics, their symbolism is perhaps more impactful than their actual legitimacy as an organization. The KCK demonstrates that since its creation in 2005, the Kurds are beginning to see past their fragmented recent evolution and understand their strength in numbers and solidarity.

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

The Kurds of Kurdistan are in conflict with all of their respective host states. Currently, the Kurds are able to enter into delegated autonomy agreements with their host states' governments because their situational vison allows them to, striving for security and self-rule[60]. However, they are in direct conflict with the states in the long run because the grand vision of Kurdistan is it as an independent state[61]. This is a political reality that while need not be addressed at present, it will factor into long term regional treatises that involve states with a Kurdish population.

V. Potential negotiation moves

Referring to the situational vision of greater Kurdistan, the most advantageous moves for the Kurds would be to take advantage of opportunities, often catalyzed by the Arab spring, to create power sharing agreements with their respective host states. For instance, in Syria, when the opportunity arose, they established an autonomous region[62]. While this move is not yet codified by Syrian law, it will undoubtedly not be able to be ignored by the reconstructing powers and will likely be incorporated into Syria's final status agreements. Also, international organizations such as the UN and Human Rights Watch are the best legitimate avenues for the Kurds to share their plights and aspirations, while protecting themselves from further persecution. Finally, spoilers, such as terror activists within the PKK, should be discouraged, as they delegitimize the Kurdish efforts.

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XVII. Kurds of Syria: Embattled Autonomy

Introduction

This paper examines the above five realms in relation to the Kurds of Syria, in context of their overarching identity as a Kurdish people. The Kurds, although a nation of people, are natively located primarily in Kurdistan, a largely contiguous geographic area which lies within the borders of four different states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Respectively, they are known as Syrian Kurdistan, or Rojava, Iraqi Kurdistan, or Basur, Turkish Kurdistan, or Bakur, and Iranian Kurdistan, or Rojhilat[1].

Although these physical divisions were constructed with fiat power stemming from Western states, the physical divisions have created differing patterns of evolution among the Kurds. Thus, after a synopsis of the shared history that shapes the narratives among the Kurds, this paper will then turn a specific focus to the Kurds of Syria. After, the paper will step back from its micro level examination of the internal factions and move to a macro view of the Kurds to distinguish the interactions and dynamics between the four respective groups.

Shared History

The earliest recorded history of the Kurds, or then known as the Kurti, can be found in cuneiform inscriptions from an ancient Assyrian site dating back to 2500 B.C. One inscription detailed an ancient Persian King, Artakhshir-a-Papkan, being opposed by a "Shah a Kurdan", or a Kurdish King[2]. This foreshadows the historical timeline of the Kurds, as they have since yet written a chapter of their history without some form of conflict stemming from a resistance to foreign rule. In 400 B.C., Xenophon of Greece mentions encountering the Kardaukhi (Kurdish) people and regarded them as fierce, skilled and filled with opposition[3].

The Kurds are a highly tribal society, with most tribes absorbing Sunni Islam in the seventh century. In 1182, a Kurdish king, Sultan Salahud-Din Ayubi emerged and with him the golden age of the Kurds. After his decline, the Kurds faced a personal stagnation that was marred by internal squabbles[4]. Occupying forces ranging from the Mongols to the Turks ruled the greater region and all had tense interactions with the Kurdish tribes. Interestingly, the Guran Kurds were forced to face the formidable army of Genghis Khan and, due to their prowess and skill in their mountains, were the first military to deliver a dismantling blow to the Khan army[5]. The legacy of the Kurdish resistance to foreign rule and their aptitude for fierce battles spans all tribes and regions to the present.

In modern times, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the end of World War I in 1920 saw the Kurds ascending with statehood within their grasp. The Treaty of Sevres drafted after the war included within it a claim for Kurdish Statehood. The flame of Kurdish nationalism was blazing.[6] Tragically for the Kurds, this treaty was not ratified, but rather replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, which was absent of any mention of the Kurds. This momentous event established the current Kurdish divisions under the four states emerging from of the Lausanne treaty: Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria[7]. The proceeding sections of this paper will address each geographical section of the Kurds to explore their respective evolutions, narratives and current state of affairs.

The Kurds of Syria

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

The Kurds of Syria make up 12 percent of the Syrian population, with some estimates placing the number closer to 17 percent. They reside predominantly in the Northern regions where there are three main cantons with a Kurdish majority, the Afrin Canton, Cizre Canton and the Kobanî Canton. Together they make up the region known as Rojava[8]. In 2011, when the Syrian war began, the Kurdish factions expelled the regime forces and began the task of defending their respective regions from Sunni extremists such as, but not limited to, the Islamic State (ISIS)[9]. In 2016, excluded from Geneva talks and other Syrian ceasefire coalitions, the Syrian Kurds established, Federasyona Bakurê Sûriyê, or the Federation of Northern Syria–Rojava[10]. Interestingly, this entity is based on geographical autonomy, not ethnic, or personal autonomy. Thus, Rojava includes other minority groups within it, such as Turkmen and Assyrians[11]. The Syrian Kurds are noted as having socialist society structures and the cantons are mainly involved in agricultural economics[12].

Historically, the Kurds of Syria have been not only oppressed, but were subjected to Arabization policies. These policies began in the 1930s and have extended to present day. Policies ranged from forced relocations, labor and travel restrictions, educational discrimination, culture and language suppression and denial of political rights[13]. This has lead to deep rifts between the Kurds of Syria and the Syrian regime. The Syrian Arabs are largely suspicious of the Kurds due to their nationalistic aspirations and their perceived lack of loyalty to the Arab regime[14]. Their situational vision is security, making the three cantons contiguous, and if possible, involved in the negotiations underway to reconstruct Syria[15]. Their grand vision, much like the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey, are security and some form of autonomy, stating, "we don't support the partition of Syria. … at the same time, we don't accept centralization," but aspire to "a democratic Syria that protects the autonomy and freedom of every community."[16]

II. Sources of leverage

In terms of tangible hard power, the Kurds of Syria posses a formidable military. The strongest military presence is the military wing of the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, or the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, or the People's Protection Units (YPG) and its all-female unit, *Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê*, or the Women's Protection unit (YPJ)[17]. The other main security groups are the localized Kurdish police forces in the different cantons, the Asayîş or Asayish, and other Kurdish militias, which together with the YPG make up the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)[18]. These forces receive assistance from the U.S. in their fight against ISIS[19]. Conversely, they are frequently subjected to slander, de-legitimization and military air strikes from Turkey, who seeks to undermine them because of the PYD's ties to the PKK, an armed Kurdish National group in Turkey[20].

In terms of soft power, the Kurds of Syria have largely won the hearts and minds of the West. Their female fighters of the YPJ have a reputation for being extremely skilled in combat and are rumored, but not confirmed, to have a deterrent effect against radical Islamic fighters[21]. Hundreds of interviews, clips and documentaries have been made documenting the women, and their adoring fans applaud their efforts[22]. This is thought to provide the Kurds of Syria with a Public Diplomacy tool which they use to communicate their progressive values and applicability to Western values[23].

Rojava has, or, rather had, a flourishing agricultural based economy. It also possesses oil reserves, although these have yet to be developed[24]. Although they require heavy exploration and infrastructure development before they produce revenue for the Kurds of Syria, the petroleum reserves can act as a leverage if Syria is to be reconstructed with federal regions. Analogous to the Kurds of Iraq, the Kurds of Syria could set up revenue sharing with the federal government and politically maneuver a negotiation in their favor[25]. This petroleum also provides an opportunity, albeit a far-fetched one, to create diplomatic ties with Turkey and the KRG of Iraq, using the KRG-Ankara Ceyhan Pipeline to export the Syrian oil[26].

It must be noted that regardless of the leverages that the Syrian Kurds possess, such as the military support from the U.S., they are not weighted enough by the competing actors who seek to shape Syria's future. For instance, during the recent reconstruction talks that Russia hosted as preliminary to the future talks in Geneva, the Kurds were not granted a seat at the table[27]. Likely, they were boxed out because Turkey contested their attendance. It will be prudent to see how this develops for the upcoming talks in Geneva.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

At present the Kurds of Syria are largely self-sufficient in the security administration of the Rojava region. The original governing body of de facto autonomous Rojava was, Desteya Bilind a Kurd, or the Kurdish Supreme Committee[28]. The Kurdish Supreme Committee was highly tribally oriented and dominated by the two largest political agents in PYD and Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê, or Kurdish National Committee (KNC)[29]. The Kurdish Supreme Committee was disbanded and replaced by the Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk, or the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM)[30]. Although TEV-DEM is pluralistic it is dominated by PYD, as they control the largest coalition and military presence of any Kurdish group, the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, or the People's Protection Units (YPG)[31].

Additionally, there are other groups within Rojava that although are not Kurdish, they contribute to the internal policies. There are Assyrians, Turkmen, Arabs and Yezidis that all reside in the declared Rojava region[32]. There were conflicting reports that the YPD was pursuing a policy of "Kurdization" among these groups so that they could create more solid Kurdish majorities[33], creating tensions and condemnation from external actors. Since these reports, Rojava has worked hard to create a new narrative, one of democracy and inclusion, making statements such as:

> Power is as decentralized as possible, rising from village assemblies and communes to the legislative councils and commissions that run the economy, defense, and justice ministries. At all levels, the ethnic and gender balance is zealously asserted. Arabs, Yazidis, and Turkmen participate in the public sphere alongside the Kurdish majority, while the mantra of Rojava as a whole is "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" ("Woman, Life, Freedom")[34].

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

The first actor that the Kurds of Syria are in conflict with is the ruling regime in Syria. The Assad regime has a history of marginalization of the Kurds and failed to implement numerous pieces of legislation that were to grant minorities greater individual autonomy[35]. As such, Rojava is opposed to the Assad regime. The Kurds of Syria are also in direct conflict with ISIS and other radical Islamists, and are continually under siege from their attacks[36].

Outside of Syria, the Kurds of Syria are in conflict with Turkey[37]. Turkey sees the PYD as an offshoot of the PKK. The PKK is in an armed struggle against Turkey, striving for Kurdish nationalism[38]. Turkey has air raided and even sent a ground incursion into Rojava in 2016 under guise that they were targeting ISIS, but it is speculated that in Turkey also targeted the Syrian Kurds[39]. While many PKK members have flowed into Rojava to aid the Syrian Kurds in their military and social quests since the Syrian Civil war began, the Syrian Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) released the statement, "We are a Kurdish, Arabic, Turkmen and Assyrian force from Syria under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces. We affirm that we are not part of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as claimed by some regional countries."[40]

The external policy that the Kurds of Syria appear to be setting for their public diplomacy is one that appears to be inviting. Seen above, they are trying to distance themselves from the negative association of the PKK and present themselves as democratic and progressive, as well as trying to warm relations with the KRG as a possible extension to lighten relations with Turkey. Additionally, they are attempting to appease the international community and support the territorial integrity of Syria, but are firm in their stance of regional autonomy[41]. Finally, they understand the advantage of Western, particularly U.S. support, and have been trying to maintain

their narrative as being an ally in the region, especially in combating Islamic fighters on the ground[42]. That message appears to be working, as both 2016 U.S. presidential nominees made explicit comments of U.S. support for the Kurds.[43]

In the recent anticipation of the impending final incursion into Raqqa to unseat ISIS in Syria, U.S. President Donald Trump retracted the past U.S. policy that it would not arm Syrian Kurds and announced that the U.S. would begin to directly arm the Syrian Democratic Forces, which are mainly PYD forces[44]. This move was made against Turkey's ardent objection. This implies that the U.S. sees the Syrian Kurds as viable partners in the region and is prepared to inject tension into its relations with Ankara to do so. Additionally, the YPG is willing to accept the predicted high levels of casualties for engaging in the fight in exchange for a quid pro quo[45]. Although the Syrian Kurds will sustain heavy loss of life, it allows them a chance to gain leverage in negotiating with Assad for their autonomous region.

V. Potential negotiation moves

The most significant demand of the Kurds of Syria is that in the reconstructing of Syria they be included in final status agreements and in the constitutional restructuring, referring to developing federalized, semi-autonomous regions[46]. This effort is meeting resistance from Turkey as well as from the Assad regime. The Kurds of Syria, while currently diligently focused on their efforts to internally strengthen their infrastructure and security, need to be prepared to apply pressure on the West, especially the U.S. or even perhaps the UN, to help them muscle their way into the upcoming negotiation table in Geneva. The aforementioned quid pro quo will likely come due after the publication of this article and its status regarding the United States's and Assad's pay out should be investigated.

The oil wealth that the Kurds of Syria have the potential to exploit will assuredly be a bargaining chip they can play once Syria resumes order. Rojava must establish 1) dominance over the resource; 2) the authority to administer the exploitation; 3) stability in order to attract International Oil Companies; and most importantly 4) a manner by which to export the petroleum. Exportation ability will come easiest by utilizing KRG pipelines or, more dramatically, to establish a Rojavan corridor to the Mediterranean Sea. Experts estimate that a corridor to the sea will provide the Syrian Kurds the ability to export agricultural products as well as petroleum.[47] Independent access to a port will also give the Kurds of Syria negotiating space to offer the Kurds of Iraq something they desire, increased KRG ability to export petroleum.

The Kurds of Kurdistan

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Although the Kurds thus far in this article have been segmented based on their geographical divisions, it is imperative they also be analyzed as a unit. Estimates from experts claim that there are thirty million Kurds in Greater Kurdistan[48]. They are the largest nation without a state and their fame is well known around the world; they carry a narrative of nationalism, carry collective memories of victimhood from Arabization and mainly practice a moderate form of Islam[49]. While they do not function as a cohesive unit, they empathize, support and even engage in conflict across their arbitrarily drawn state lines. As a whole, their situational visions include obtaining political, social and economic equality for all Kurds[50]. Their grand vision for greater Kurdistan is an autonomous region that allows Kurds to have self-rule and physical security.[51]

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The Kurds as a whole have a public diplomacy initiative that strives to tell the narrative of the Kurds in hope of garnering public opinion, which can then be translated to political pressure to be utilized for the support of Kurdistan[56]. The initiatives include diaspora activity in European states and the U.S., appealing to aid organizations, such as Amnesty International, to be guardians of Kurdish human rights, and direct engagement of foreign governments, such as KRG President, Barzani meeting U.S. president G.W. Bush[57]. These efforts all have a strong online presence that utilize social media, news outlets and home pages, which allow the Kurds to unimpededly tell their narratives, plights and goals to the international community[58]. The Kurds, to varying degrees, are able to use these public diplomacy efforts to leverage greater, progressive dialogues with their host governments.

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its sponsorship of the PKK and their terrorist activates[62]. On paper, it is used as an umbrella organization for Kurdish parties. Its main tenants focus on Kurdish Nationalism and establishing democratic autonomy for all Kurds[63]. There is also a women's branch called the Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, or the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Movement[64]. While these groups only loosely govern Kurdistan's politics, their symbolism is perhaps more impactful than their actual legitimacy as an organization. The KCK demonstrates that since its creation in 2005, the Kurds are beginning to see past their fragmented recent evolution and understand their strength in numbers and solidarity.

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

The Kurds of Kurdistan are in conflict with all of their respective host states. Currently, the Kurds are able to enter into delegated autonomy agreements with their host states' governments because their situational vison allows them to, striving for security and self-rule[65]. However, they are in direct conflict with the states in the long run because the grand vision of Kurdistan is it as an independent state[66]. This is a political reality that while need not be addressed at present, it will factor into long term regional treatises that involve states with a Kurdish population.

V. Potential negotiation moves

Referring to the situational vision of greater Kurdistan, the most advantageous moves for the Kurds would be to take advantage of opportunities, often catalyzed by the Arab spring, to create power sharing agreements with their respective host states. For instance, in Syria, when the opportunity arose, they established an autonomous region[67]. While this move is not yet codified by Syrian law, it will undoubtedly not be able to be ignored by the reconstructing powers and will likely be incorporated into Syria's final status agreements. Also, international organizations such as the UN and Human Rights Watch are the best legitimate avenues for the Kurds to share their plights and aspirations, while protecting themselves from further persecution. Finally, spoilers, such as terror activists within the PKK, should be discouraged, as they delegitimize the Kurdish efforts.

(Endnotes)

Written by: Natalie Crone
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XVIII. Kurds of Turkey: Embattled Autonomy

Introduction

This paper examines the above five realms in relation to the Kurds of Turkey, in context of their overarching identity as a Kurdish people. The Kurds, although a nation of people, are natively located primarily in Kurdistan, a largely contiguous geographic area which lies within the borders of four different states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Respectively, they are known as Syrian Kurdistan, or Rojava, Iraqi Kurdistan, or Basur, Turkish Kurdistan, or Bakur, and Iranian Kurdistan, or Rojhilat[1].

Although these physical divisions were constructed with fiat power stemming from Western states, the physical divisions have created differing patterns of evolution among the Kurds. Thus, after a synopsis of the shared history that shapes the narratives among the Kurds, this paper will then turn a specific focus to the Kurds of Turkey. After, the paper will step back from its micro level examination of the internal factions and move to a macro view of the Kurds to distinguish the interactions and dynamics between the four respective groups.

Shared History

The earliest recorded history of the Kurds, or then known as the Kurti, can be found in cuneiform inscriptions from an ancient Assyrian site dating back to 2500 B.C. One inscription detailed an ancient Persian King, Artakhshir-a-Papkan, being opposed by a "Shah a Kurdan", or a Kurdish King[2]. This foreshadows the historical timeline of the Kurds, as they have since yet written a chapter of their history without some form of conflict stemming from a resistance to foreign rule. In 400 B.C., Xenophon of Greece mentions encountering the Kardaukhi (Kurdish) people and regarded them as fierce, skilled and filled with opposition[3].

The Kurds are a highly tribal society, with most tribes absorbing Sunni Islam in the seventh century. In 1182, a Kurdish king, Sultan Salahud-Din Ayubi emerged and with him the golden age of the Kurds. After his decline, the Kurds faced a personal stagnation that was marred by internal squabbles[4]. Occupying forces ranging from the Mongols to the Turks ruled the greater region and all had tense interactions with the Kurdish tribes. Interestingly, the Guran Kurds were forced to face the formidable army of Genghis Khan and, due to their prowess and skill in their mountains, were the first military to deliver a dismantling blow to the Khan army[5]. The legacy of the Kurdish resistance to foreign rule and their aptitude for fierce battles spans all tribes and regions to the present.

In modern times, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the end of World War I in 1920 saw the Kurds ascending with statehood within their grasp. The Treaty of Sevres drafted after the war included within it a claim for Kurdish Statehood. The flame of Kurdish nationalism was blazing.[6] Tragically for the Kurds, this treaty was not ratified, but rather replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, which was absent of any mention of the Kurds. This momentous event established the current Kurdish divisions under the four states emerging from of the Lausanne treaty: Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria[7]. The proceeding sections of this paper will address each geographical section of the Kurds to explore their respective evolutions, narratives and current state of affairs.

The Kurds of Turkey

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

The Kurds of Turkey make up roughly a quarter of the State's population with estimates ranging between fifteen and twenty-five percent. Mainly located within the mountainous region of Southeastern Turkey, the Kurds have endured persecution, revolt, cultural and social suppression, and political exclusion[8]. During the 1980's, Turkey underwent intense nationalization and inscribed "Everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk"[9]. Minority groups, such as Arabs, Assyrians and Kurds, were forced to assimilate and the Kurds became known as "mountain Turks". This legacy of abuse among the Kurds has driven them to create a collective narrative of resistance, mistrust of outside rule, fierce nationalism and a rejection of becoming Turks.

In 1983, the Kurds of Turkey began open and armed struggle against the Turkish Government. The bans on cultural expressions and the use of the Kurdish language, and increased political marginalization led the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, or Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to launch guerrilla attacks against the state[10]. The PKK also created a social system that praised resistance and extolled martyrs. The goals of the PKK, and often translated as the goals of Turkish Kurdistan, range between total independence and local autonomy, but are centralized around a rejection of Kurdish assimilation[11]. This armed struggle resulted in over a decade long, retaliatory cycle of guerilla attacks to be quickly followed by brutal military incursions and massacres in Kurdish provinces by the Turkish military. A ceasefire was reached in 1999 between Ankara and the PKK, but it was terminated in 2004 with renewed insurgency and continued until 2012[12]. From 2013-present, there has been an ongoing peace process between Ankara and the PKK[13]. The peace process has yet to yield fruit at the time of this writing, but due to its dynamic nature should be updated before an official statement is made.

As it stands today, the relations between Kurds and Turks are tense, as there are deep schisms between the societies, stemming from conflicting collective memories and narratives. The Kurds feel oppressed and marginalized, while Turks feel threatened from the

extreme nature of PKK terror attacks. Erdogan attempts to dismiss Turkey's internal struggle and claims that the Kurdish problem is resolved, further incentivizing the PKK rebellion, as they refuse to accept the status quo[14]. The Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or Peoples Democratic Party (HDP), established in 2012, is a pro-Kurdish and pro-minorities political party that began to increase Kurdish rights through the political process[15]. There was notable progress until Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan suspected, on unfounded claims, that the HDP leadership was involved in the unsuccessful 2016 coup. This resulted in Erdogan imprisoning the HDP leaders and sending military incursions into Southeastern Turkey[16].

II. Sources of leverage

While the Kurds of Turkey have a military presence, the PKK, the speed of news coverage is actually their strongest source of leverage[17]. Turkey was able to systematically deport, suppress and assimilate its other minority groups within Turkey because they did it under the guise of national security as there simply was a lack of outside observers with knowledge of the events to prevent the Turkish atrocities. The technology of today, however, due to its pervasive and instantaneous media effect, effectively prevents Ankara from engaging in similar actions today[18]. When Turkey was looking westward with hope of joining the European Union, it instituted reforms towards its Kurdish population[19]. Dramatically, this ended when Turkey refocused its lens for domestic policies, but the Kurds took note of how vulnerable Turkey is to external pressures. Thus, the Kurds of Turkey have launched public diplomacy initiatives in Europe and the U.S. to make the international community aware of their narrative and plight in Turkey[20]. Human rights watch organizations are also documenting Ankara's Kurdish policies and watching Erdogan's hawkish tendencies[21].

Additionally, unlike the Kurds of Syria and Iraq, the Kurds of Turkey do not possess great reserves of economic leverage. Yet, as aforementioned, their military presence, the PKK, while nominal compared to the Turkish military with only 10,00 fighters[22], its guerilla tactics and terror activities gives them leverage and makes them a formidable security threat for Ankara. They launch terror attacks that in turn kill and disrupt the lives of Turkish citizens. The citizens then place pressure on politicians to reform their policies to prevent further attacks[23]. This means finding a political and practical solution to the Turkish Kurdish question of human rights and oppression.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The most prominent Kurdish personality in Turkey is the father of Turkish Kurdish nationalism, Abdullah Ocalan. Ocalan created the PKK in 1978 and was jailed indefinitely by Ankara in 1999. He still issues statements and directives on behalf of the PKK. Additionally, his imprisonment fuels the martyrdom narrative that is prevalent among the Kurds and simultaneously inspires radical actors to carry out terror attacks that target Turk civilians. The PKK is outlawed in Turkish politics and as a result is seen as a rogue actor, delegitimized from the political process[24].

This is in stark contrast to the other internal Kurdish player, the Peoples Democratic Party, the HDP. The HDP denounces a violent Kurdish struggle and attempts to utilize the political process to win Kurdish and minority rights[25]. While the PKK and HDP do not physically clash, they see past each other in best practices for protecting the Kurdish populations. The HDP might see the PKK as a spoiler agent in Ankara-Kurdish negotiations, while the PKK likely sees the HDP as giving excessive concessions to Ankara for peace with Kurdistan.

Finally, there is nominal internal strife between the diaspora Kurdish-Europeans and the Turkish Kurdish elite and rural populations. Some of the elites are intermarried and assimilated into Turkish society. The rural populations and diaspora communities still strive to maintain the Kurdish national movement, some, at any cost. This creates quite intergenerational and internal societal tensions[26].

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

Elaborated upon earlier, the Kurds of Turkey are in a present conflict with Ankara which centers on the suppression and marginalization of the Kurdish peoples of Turkey. This conflict is armed and results in human rights violations by both sides[27]. Turkey and many leading Western states designate the PKK as a terror organization[28]. After the 2016 coup, Ankara, under the guise of national security, has detained Kurdish leaders, many from the prominent HDP party[29]. It is widely accepted by scholars that Turkey must bridge the discriminatory political economic policies against its Kurdish population and that the PKK must cease its militarized activities for the sides to reach a peace agreement[30].

Because of the porous borders between Turkey, Iraq and Syria, there is movement between the Kurdish populations in that region[31]. This has intensified due to the Syrian civil war and the rise of groups such as the Islamic State (IS). Groups of Turkish Kurds from the PKK move between the three regions smuggling supplies and persons for PKK initiatives[32]. In Iraq, the Kurdish group the Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê, or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), have ties to the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, or the Democratic Union Party (PYD) based in Syria, and both have ties to the PKK[33]. The PYD and PUK distance themselves from the PKK for diplomatic reasons, as they do not want the PKK label of terrorist, and therefore delegitimization, to be transferred to them by association[34]. Still, the Kurds of Turkey send individuals to aid the PYD and PUK militarily when the situations arise[35]. Additionally, the leading Kurdish party in Iraq, Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), who is in a political rivalry with the PUK, has acted as conduit for peace talks between the Kurds of Turkey and Ankara. The KRG's leverage with both parties stems from economic ties with Ankara and general ethnic bonds with the PKK[36]. Moreover, Iraq is Shia majority state and Turkey is a Sunni majority state. Thus, Turkey sees is in their best interests to foster relations with the KRG so that they have a sphere of influence inside of Shia Iraq and against any proxy work of Shia Iran

against any proxy work of Shia Iran

Finally, out of the four geographic groups of Kurds, Turkish, Iranian, Syrian, and Iraqi, the Turkish Kurds have the largest diaspora community living abroad, predominantly in Europe[37]. These Kurds have organized themselves accordingly in hope to garner attention and diplomatic support for the Kurds of Turkey. They organized to help fuel European sympathetic attitudes towards the Kurds in hopes that Ankara will be pressured to institute reforms[38].

V. Potential negotiation moves

On the books are reforms that would allow for Kurdish cultural expression, nationalistic social gatherings and even the Kurdish language to be spoken as a secondary language in schools.[39] Rather aggravatingly, Ankara has yet to institute these reforms as they have been preoccupied by the Syrian civil war, spread of Iranian influence and the rise of groups like IS. This is aggravating to the Kurds of Turkey and they threaten to resume PKK violence if the reforms are not instituted[40]. Moreover, in 2016, Turkey made military ground offensives into Syrian Kurdistan, mainly PYD strong holds, further inflaming Ankara-Kurdish relations[41].

The Kurds of Turkey will do well to maintain their Public Diplomacy efforts within Europe so that their narrative and plight remains present in politicians and activist agendas. Turkey is aware of its NATO member status and the international condemnation that follows when it engages in Kurdish human rights violations. To some extent, it is undoubtedly the media coverage that keeps Ankara at bay, as well as the threat of an increase in PKK attacks on Turkish citizens. Finally, the violent tactics of groups such as the PKK, only serve to delegitimize the Kurdish political elements. They are contrary to the Kurdish grand vision, they should therefore be replaced by increased public diplomacy efforts abroad and by political movements in Turkey.

The Kurds of Kurdistan

I. Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Although the Kurds thus far in this article have been segmented based on their geographical divisions, it is imperative they also be analyzed as a unit. Estimates from experts claim that there are thirty million Kurds in Greater Kurdistan[42]. They are the largest nation without a state and their fame is well known around the world; they carry a narrative of nationalism, carry collective memories of victimhood from Arabization and mainly practice a moderate form of Islam[43]. While they do not function as a cohesive unit, they empathize, support and even engage in conflict across their arbitrarily drawn state lines. As a whole, their situational visions include obtaining political, social and economic equality for all Kurds[44]. Their grand vision for greater Kurdistan is an autonomous region that allows Kurds to have self-rule and physical security.[45]

II. Sources of leverage

Greater Kurdistan possesses oil reserves mainly located in Iraq and Syria[46]. It has agricultural development in Iran and Syria[47]. Militarily, armed groups of Kurds, such as those from the PKK, PJAK, Peshmerga and the PYD move regularly across the porous borders of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq[48]. At times the groups aid each other, as seen with the PKK assistance given to Iraqi and Syrian Kurds during the rise of the Islamic State[49]. These resources, while serving as tangible leverage, their greatest leverage comes in the form of public diplomacy.

The Kurds as a whole have a public diplomacy initiative that strives to tell the narrative of the Kurds in hope of garnering public opinion, which can then be translated to political pressure to be utilized for the support of Kurdistan[50]. The initiatives include diaspora activity in European states and the U.S., appealing to aid organizations, such as Amnesty International, to be guardians of Kurdish human rights, and direct engagement of foreign governments, such as KRG President, Barzani meeting U.S. president G.W. Bush[51]. These efforts all have a strong online presence that utilize social media, news outlets and home pages, which allow the Kurds to unimpededly tell their narratives, plights and goals to the international community[52]. The Kurds, to varying degrees, are able to use these public diplomacy efforts to leverage greater, progressive dialogues with their host governments.

III. Internal conflicts and network of relationships

The Kurds are highly tribal and have deep social and political divisions within Kurdistan[53]. Interestingly, however, when a prominent Kurd is offering remarks at prominent international events, (s)he often does so on behalf of all of Kurdistan. For instance, when KRG president Barzani had an audience with U.S. president G.W. Bush, he stated; "We in Kurdistan, particularly, and also in Iraq, generally, we highly value the courage and bravery of your leadership...."[54] This signifies a unity among the Kurdish people that goes beyond tribal divisions.

Above all of the main Kurdish political groups, there appears to have been an organizing agent created, the Koma Civakên Kurdistan, or the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK)[55]. Although, experts are leery of the KCK, calling it a terror organization, due to its sponsorship of the PKK and their terrorist activates[56]. On paper, it is used as an umbrella organization for Kurdish parties. Its main tenants focus on Kurdish Nationalism and establishing democratic autonomy for all Kurds[57]. There is also a women's branch called the Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, or the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Movement[58]. While these groups only loosely govern Kurdistan's politics, their symbolism is perhaps more impactful than their actual legitimacy as an organization. The KCK demonstrates that since its creation in 2005, the Kurds are beginning to see past their fragmented recent evolution and understand their strength in numbers and solidarity.

IV. External conflicts and network of relationships

      The Kurds of Kurdistan are in conflict with all of their respective host states. Currently, the Kurds are able to enter into delegated autonomy agreements with their host states' governments because their situational vison allows them to, striving for security and self-rule[59]. However, they are in direct conflict with the states in the long run because the grand vision of Kurdistan is it as an independent state[60]. This is a political reality that while need not be addressed at present, it will factor into long term regional treatises that involve states with a Kurdish population.

V. Potential negotiation moves

      Referring to the situational vision of greater Kurdistan, the most advantageous moves for the Kurds would be to take advantage of opportunities, often catalyzed by the Arab spring, to create power sharing agreements with their respective host states. For instance, in Syria, when the opportunity arose, they established an autonomous region[61]. While this move is not yet codified by Syrian law, it will undoubtedly not be able to be ignored by the reconstructing powers and will likely be incorporated into Syria's final status agreements. Also, international organizations such as the UN and Human Rights Watch are the best legitimate avenues for the Kurds to share their plights and aspirations, while protecting themselves from further persecution. Finally, spoilers, such as terror activists within the PKK, should be discouraged, as they delegitimize the Kurdish efforts.

XIX. Kuwait, UAE, and Oman: Regional Power and Influence of the Small Gulf States	*Edited by:* Miguel de Corral **With Input From:** Juliana Kerrest and Namrata Raju

Introduction[1]

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has experienced significant political changes since the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011. Numerous authoritarian regimes have been overthrown, while various countries – including Syria, Yemen and Libya – have been mired in conflicts that have ignited the largest forced displacement crisis since World War II. However, the Gulf oil states – with the notable exception of Bahrain – have been relatively stable and have displayed no major signs of popular unrest. Furthermore, they have aimed to shape the political and economic future of their volatile region. This paper will thus explore the political situation of small Gulf states – in particular Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman – and discuss the impact that these states have on regional conflict dynamics.

Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

Kuwait

Kuwait only achieved independence in 1961, but the al-Sabah family has been in power since 1792.[2] The al-Sabah's were able to consolidate power and protect themselves from tribal challenges by allying themselves with major powers. To this end, they allied themselves first with the Ottomans in the 19th century and thereafter with the United Kingdom in the 20th century.[3] This allowed Kuwait to build a state in an environment characterized by domestic stability. The influence of the United Kingdom was especially important during this statebuilding phase, as their protection allowed Kuwait to develop state bureaucracies without the threat of external interference.[4]

In 1938 oil was found in Kuwait, and by the time it was granted independence, Kuwait had industrialized and developed the oil industry faster than most of its neighbors[5], stimulating the creation of a large middle class.[6] Importantly, though, prior to the discovery of oil, the al-Sabah's ruled in consultation with merchants, who were the key social and economic elite.[7] These factors led Kuwait to adopt a relatively liberal constitution that continues to be in effect to this day. This constitution created a constitutional monarchy, where the Emir would have to share legislative authority with an elected National Assembly; executive authority with the cabinet; and judicial authority with the courts.[8] Furthermore, similar to other Gulf rentier states, the country created generous welfare program for all Kuwaiti citizens (who make up around a third of the population), which includes free education, employment in the public sector, energy subsidies, and a monthly family allowance.[9]

However, the most critical event that has defined modern Kuwait is undoubtedly the 1990 invasion by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. This war caused major destruction and displacement to the point that it took seven years for Kuwait's real GDP to recover to pre-war levels.[10] Perhaps most importantly, though, the swift invasion of the country represented a shock to Kuwait's elites. Following the war, when the royal family reestablished control in March 1991, elites demanded that the al-Sabah family rule through more consultation, or in other words, a more balanced power-distribution system that gave more power to the parliament.[11] Since then, the National Assembly has garnered more power, to the point that it can draft and pass laws, and it has the authority to call ministers into questioning. While the Emir can dissolve parliament, and strike down decrees, the balance of power between the monarch and the elected representatives is much more equitable than in other Gulf monarchies. Though Kuwait cannot be considered a democracy given the power that rests upon the monarch, its greater power sharing is notable in a region largely devoid of democratic institutions.

UAE

Similar to Kuwait, other smaller Gulf sheikhdoms – such as the UAE – were under British protectionist treaties until the latter half of the twentieth century. The current ruling families of these small emirates established their political authority in the eighteenth century. However, as geopolitical affairs threatened their control over their respective sheikhdoms, rulers entered into alliances with the United Kingdom.[12] The protectionist relationship with the United Kingdom continued until 1971 at which point six emirates of what was then called the "Trucial States" – Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Qawain and Fujairah – gained independence and joined together to form the United Arab Emirates.[13]

Like other Gulf states, the UAE is able to sustain the existing social contract due to its natural resource wealth and small local population (around 11 percent of the population).[14] Citizens of the state are both a minority and the elite social group, which receive all the benefits of the social contract.[15] To this end, welfare benefits – including free healthcare, free education, and public sector employment – are given almost exclusively to the citizens so as to placate the one social group rulers must respond to. The rest of the population is made up of foreign workers, who are excluded from the state's patronage system.[16]

In terms of its political structure, the country is a federation led by hereditary monarchies in its seven constituent emirates, and governed by a Supreme Council formed by the seven ruling emirs. Traditionally, the President has been the emir of Abu Dhabi, while the Prime Minister has been the emir of Dubai. In addition, the UAE has a partially elected parliamentary body – the Federal National Council – but the Council has no ability to either draft or vote on legislation.[17]

Oman

Oman is also a monarchical rentier state that has been ruled by the current ruling family since 1749. Oman is an absolute monarchy, and thus while the basic law of the state calls for an independent legislative branch, the existing parliament has no actual legislative power. The country has been ruled by Sultan Qaboos since deposing his father, Sultan Said bin Taimur, in 1970. Upon his arrival to power, Sultan Qaboos introduced various modernization-oriented reforms.[18] While the legitimacy of the Sultan's claim to rule in Oman is largely not contested, Qaboos is in frail health, with no clearly appointed heir-apparent. The centralization of power under the Sultan, coupled with the lack of clarity over his successor, brings about questions regarding the political stability of the country in the long-run.

In terms of Oman's economy, in the last few years the Sultan emphasized the need to push for economic reforms, particularly in light of declining oil prices. The Economist Intelligence Unit predicts the following for the next five years: "The sharp downturn in oil prices will mean the budget and the current account will remain in deficit in 2017-21, and efforts to rein in public spending and diversify the economy will be pushed forward. As a result of ongoing austerity measures, real GDP growth will slow to 1.1 percent in 2017 before gradually picking up to an average of 2.6 percent in 2020-21."[19] That said, it is predicted that the country will remain stable in the near future, though economic diversification is crucial, particularly given the volatility of oil prices.

Furthermore. though it is endowed with smaller oil wealth than most of its GCC neighbors – including Kuwait and the UAE – Oman nonetheless exhibits similar tendencies in terms of a generous welfare-based social contract with citizens. However, this social contract may be challenged by demographic changes that are impacting countries across the region, and Oman in particular: 50 percent of the population is under 25 years of age, and youth unemployment stands at around 50 percent as well.[20]

Sources of Leverage

Kuwait

A large part of Kuwait's leverage to influence regional dynamics rests on its strong alliances with Western partners. Kuwait's alliance with the United States, in particular, affords it a powerful role within the Gulf. Following the invasion of Iraq in 1990, Kuwait sought to cement a strong political and military relationship with the West. To this end, in addition to housing a significant number of US troops on its soil, Kuwait actively participates in partnership programs such as NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

In addition to its political partnerships with Western powers, Kuwait's large oil reserves provide it with a critical voice in regional fora such as the GCC or OPEC. Kuwait produces around 2.8 million barrels of oil per day, making it in the eighth largest oil producer in the world.[21] This significant oil wealth also allows Kuwait to be a source of economic and humanitarian and development assistance for Syria and other conflict zones, thereby contributing to its soft power in the region.

UAE

The UAE has three primary sources of leverage in its engagement with regional and global actors: (i) economic strength; (ii) political stability; and (iii) partnerships and convening power. With regards to its economic strength, the UAE has both abundant oil resources (mainly in Abu Dhabi) and has become an investment hub in the MENA region. The country produces around 3 million barrels of oil per day, making it the seventh largest producer in the world.[22] However, it is also one of the few Gulf states that has managed to diversify its economy away from petroleum. For example, while Kuwait's petroleum exports represent 40 percent of GDP and 89 percent of total exports, petroleum exports in the UAE represents 14 percent of GDP and 16 percent of total exports.[23] Though oil is still a sizeable part of its economy, the country is a successful model of diversification towards other sectors such as financial services, tourism and shipping. Dubai, in particular, represents the modernization of the Emirati economy, and serving as a stable and flourishing business hub in the MENA region.

In addition to its economic soft power, the UAE also serves as a source of political stability in a region characterized by conflict and instability. Regime stability in the various emirates making up the UAE has made the country a strong partner both within the GCC as well as with Western states (including by hosting US and French military bases). Furthermore, it has actively participated in various regional initiatives, including in military missions in Libya and Yemen, for example.

In addition, the UAE has sought to promote itself as a progressive and modern Arab state through its convening power. For example, in 2013 Dubai began hosting the annual World Government Summit, which seeks to bring together world leaders to exchange best practices and innovative approaches on good governance and issues at the forefront to the global policy agenda.

Oman

Oman has historically sought to play the role of regional mediator. To this end, its continuous relationship with Iran has made it a valuable Gulf Arab ally for Western states who seek an intermediary to help resolve disputes or pursue shared interests with Iran. For example, Oman was instrumental in bringing the United States and Iran to the table in 2013, which proved critical to furthering the discussions that led to the Iran nuclear deal. Though most other GCC states actively oppose Iran because they see it as both an economic and ideological threat, Oman's unique position of neutrality enables the Sultanate to mediate between the West, the Gulf states and Iran.[24] Oman's role in the Iran nuclear deal demonstrates the larger point that Oman has the potential to be a critical actor within the MENA region's conflict system. To this end, whether it is related to future disputes with Iran, or perhaps with the conflict in Yemen, Oman's neutral role in the region can be important in bringing warring sides to the negotiating table.

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

As oil-rich states, Kuwait, the UAE and Oman depend on a "no-taxation, no-representation" social contract, where they can buy political acquiescence through a large welfare distribution system.[25] Since early 2011, most Gulf regimes have made large investments in welfare entitlements in order to respond to social unrest and challenges to their legitimacy. While there have been no major political changes in Kuwait, the UAE and Oman, there have been small, yet notable signs of growing unrest despite the mass welfare provisions provided to the population.

The primary reason as to why these regimes have remained stable is due to the establishment of a sophisticated system in which the state can channel welfare entitlements to the elite group of society – in most cases this is comprised of the citizens of the state.[26] Though Kuwait City, Abu Dhabi or Muscat did not witness the large protests that led to regime change in Egypt or Tunisia, for example, the Arab Spring did lead to calls for greater political representation. This is largely due to the fact that as the citizens of the state enter a higher socio-economic position, and more people enter the middle class, calls for greater political participation increase.[27] This, coupled with growing youth unemployment in certain countries may lead to greater domestic pressures. Critically, in the face of rising discontent, rulers in all three states have taken small – yet symbolically important – steps to grant more political liberties to their citizens, though domestic challenges persist in all three countries. It is thus foreseeable that Gulf regimes will have to continue making gradual political reforms, as well as maintaining large welfare investments, in order to continue to rule unchallenged in the long-run.[28]

Kuwait

As previously discussed, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces in 1990 caused elites to pressure the monarchy into establishing a more equitable distribution of power. To this end, in addition to the National Assembly amassing more legislative power, women have been conferred full political rights since 2005, and have formed part of the parliament since 2009.[29] However, despite these reforms, tensions between the National Assembly and the Emir have existed due to members of parliament fiercely questioning cabinet members, and due to electoral districting and voting schemes.[30] This has led the Emir to dissolve parliament on a multitude of occasions since the founding of the state, including numerous times in the past decade.[31] This political conflict is ultimately the result of an ongoing process of renegotiating the power sharing agreement between citizens and the Emir.

UAE

In the UAE calls for political reform began as a result of the Arab Spring. In response to demands for greater freedoms, political rights, and a more representative political system, massive additional welfare provisions have been undertaken in order to continue to buy political acquiescence. For example, the UAE distributed USD 1.5 billion to the poorer Emirates for infrastructure projects.[32] Furthermore, while no major reforms were carried out in terms of political rights, the pool of voters for elections to the Federal National Council expanded from 7000 in 2007 to 225,000 in 2015 (about 23 per cent of Emirati citizens).[33]

In addition, the UAE faces the threat of political Islamist movements – most notably factions of the Muslim Brotherhood. At the onset of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the UAE, Al Islah, advocated for greater legislative power. However, as the Arab Spring took a violent turn with violent extremist groups gaining greater prominence in Syria and Iraq, authorities perceived the Muslim Brotherhood as both a political and security threat, thereby imprisoning numerous members.[34] Importantly, while a vocal Islamist opposition exists, some analysts believe that Islamist security threats are used as a pretext to suppress broader political dissent.[35]

Oman

Following the initial events of the Arab Spring, Oman too experienced calls for political reform. In response to the protests, and in an effort to maintain the country stable, Sultan Qaboos provided more welfare benefits, and offered more power to the legislative branch, the Consultative Council.[36] In addition, the GCC offered USD 10 billion in aid to both Bahrain and Oman in an effort to protect the poorer – and perhaps more vulnerable – members.[37] Overall, though there is no significant domestic political opposition to the ruling regime, the frail health of the Sultan and the uncertainty of his succession, point to future challenges.

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Kuwait

Kuwait has long been a strong US ally in the Gulf, as well as a pivotal regional actor. With regards to the US, ties deepened following the Gulf War. In 1991, Kuwait and the US signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which allows the US to maintain military forces and equipment in Kuwait.[38] This has allowed the US to leverage Kuwait as a base on which to launch various military missions, from its incursions into Iraq following the 2003 invasion, to its current operation against ISIS, Operation Inherent Resolve. Currently, there are 13,500 US troops stationed in Kuwait, over a third of the 35,000 troops the US has stationed in the Gulf region.[39] In addition, Kuwait has been a strong partner within NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) – a security dialogue between NATO and four GCC states. To this end, in January 2017, Kuwait inaugurated the opening of a NATO-ICI Regional Center at a high-level ceremony attended by the NATO Secretary General.[40] Kuwait has also participated in international or regional security initiatives. For example, it supported the GCC's Peninsula Shield Force in Bahrain in 2011, and is currently participating in the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi rebels in Yemen as well as the US-led coalition against ISIS.

In addition to its security partnerships, Kuwait has considerable influence in regional dynamics due to its diplomatic relations with Iran as well as its position as one of the region's top humanitarian donors. While Kuwait has taken a hard line on containing perceived Iranian influence domestically, it also advocates for a foreign policy of engagement with Iran. To this end, in 2014 the Emir of Kuwait visited Iran, and recently, in February 2017, Iranian President Rouhani visited Kuwait.[41] Following the Iran nuclear deal, Kuwait lifted sanctions on Iran in line with the agreement. As a result, moving forward there may be talks regarding expanding economic ties between the two countries, including for example the possibility of Kuwait importing Iranian natural gas.[42]

Furthermore, Kuwait has sought to play a mediating role in various conflicts in the region. For example, in 2008 Kuwait hosted a regional conference – which included the US, Iran and the GCC states – on Iraq's stability.[43] In April 2016, Kuwait hosted United Nation (UN) talks on the conflict in Yemen.[44] Moreover, it has hosted numerous international donor conferences to support the victims and displaced people of the Syrian conflict. With regards to the Syrian conflict, Kuwait has pledged over USD 1 billion in humanitarian aid, primarily through the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and its own development fund, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.[45] It is therefore evident that Kuwait plays an important role in the MENA region, either through its partnerships, convening power, or financial strength.

UAE

The UAE has taken a very proactive foreign policy stance, particularly since the onset of the Arab Spring. In 2011, it participated in the GCC operation to support the Bahraini regime. In addition, along with Qatar, the UAE supported the NATO-led no-fly-zone in Libya.[46] The UAE has also participated in the US-led coalition against ISIS in Syria, as well as in the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis in Yemen.[47] Importantly, the UAE has not only played a role in terms of providing logistical and financial support in these coalitions, but has contributed militarily as well.

In terms of its relation with other regional and global actors, the UAE has a very strong relationship with Western nations. Like Kuwait, the UAE also has a DCA with the US and hosts 5000 US military personnel.[48] In addition, the UAE also hosts a French military base in Abu Dhabi that was inaugurated in 2009.[49] Unlike both Kuwait and Oman, though, the UAE has a strained relationship with Iran. This is attributed to both the perception that Iran is aiming to spread its influence in the GCC states and across the region, as well as a historic dispute with Iran over the sovereignty of islands in the Persian Gulf. Critically, the UAE has also invested heavily in expanding its military outreach to East Africa in Somalia and Eritrea.[50] To this end, it has launched training missions and stationed troops and military equipment abroad in order to both extend its influence regionally and support its military operations in Yemen.

In addition, the UAE has utilized its financial might to influence events in the region. Perhaps most prominently, the Emirates have provided significant support – around USD 20 billion – to the Egyptian government led by President Sisi after the ouster of former President Morsi.[51] This financial assistance – which has been critical for the struggling Egyptian economy – is in large part meant to address the perceived threat of the Muslim Brotherhood's influence both regionally and domestically. In addition to their support to Egypt, the UAE has been playing an active role in supporting reconstruction efforts in the areas liberated from ISIS in Iraq. To this end, along with Germany[52], the UAE has set up a reconstruction fund to which in 2016 it pledged USD 50 million to help rebuild Mosul.[53]

Oman

As previously discussed, Oman enjoys good relations with the West, its GCC neighbors, and Iran. To this end, it was in fact the first Gulf state to host a US military base in 1980, and has supported the US-led coalition against ISIS in Syria.[54] It is also a full member of the GCC, and though it has not participated in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, it did support the Bahraini royal family during the unrest that gripped the country in 2011. However, Oman does have sharp differences with its GCC allies on how to approach Iran. The Sultanate has chosen a strategy of engagement – at the highest levels – as it believes that such an approach is preferable to ideological confrontation or conflict through proxy wars. This relationship has exhibited itself on both the economic and political front. With regards to its economic ties, in 2013 Iran and Oman signed a deal – valued at USD 60 billion over 25 years – to build a pipeline to deliver Iranian liquefied natural gas to Oman.[55] In terms of political ties, in February 2017 Iranian President Rouhani visited Oman, which was followed by a visit by the Kuwaiti Emir to discuss how to further deepen the dialogue between the GCC and Iran.[56] Oman's ability to bring together adversarial parties – such as the US and Iran during the discussions regarding the nuclear deal – demonstrates how critical a role the small Sultanate can play in regional affairs.

Potential negotiation moves

Kuwait

Moving forward, Kuwait can be a pivotal player in promoting regional stability. For example, Kuwait could allow the United States, as well as Western coalition members, to station additional troops to be deployed in the fight against ISIS both in Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, it could also serve as important donor towards the large-scale humanitarian support and reconstruction efforts that will be needed – particularly in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. To this end, Kuwait has the potential to be a crucial security partner for the West, as well as a leading regional actor in post-conflict reconstruction and recovery efforts.

UAE

Similar to Kuwait, the UAE can play an important role in regional conflict dynamics given its strong partnerships with both its GCC allies and Western actors. The UAE may further strengthen its ties with Saudi Arabia and other GCC partners, therefore fortifying

the GCC as an economic and political bloc, and increasingly as a military alliance. This may include increasing its logistical or military support in the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, for example. It may also seek to ramp up its airstrikes against ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. In addition, the UAE has hinted that it would be open to deploying ground troops in the fight against ISIS.[57] While this is unlikely in the near term, it demonstrates that the UAE has the potential to become one of the strongest partners for the West moving forward in terms of managing conflicts in the region.

Oman

Given its unique role as a Gulf Arab state, and its partnership with both Western states and Iran, the Sultanate of Oman could potentially be a broker or mediator in any regional discussions with the United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. If tensions between the Trump administration and Iran increase – particularly regarding enforcement of the nuclear deal – Oman could be a play an important role in hosting talks and trying to maintain the agreement intact. In addition, Oman may play a mediating role in the war in Yemen. To date, Oman has not been a part of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, and has criticized the indiscriminate bombing that has resulted in numerous civilian deaths.[58] To this end, as a GCC state, it may be a credible actor to bring about a peace accord or ceasefire between the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels and the Saudi-backed Hadi government.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Gulf region is vital to the wider MENA region in terms of political, economic and security affairs. For the international community, the Gulf states are key partners in any regional coalition or conflict resolution effort. This has been demonstrated, for example, by the GCC's military operation in Bahrain, the inclusion of Gulf states in the no-fly-zone in Libya, the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, the Gulf states' support to the US-led coalition against ISIS, and mediation efforts between the US and Iran. Therefore, despite their relatively small size, Kuwait, the UAE and Oman have the opportunity to play a critical role in either managing, resolving, mitigating, or addressing the numerous ongoing conflicts of the MENA region.

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XX. Lebanon: Fragility, Fractious Politics, and Resilience

Since Lebanon's formation as an independent state, it has faced a variety of conflicts and crises, resulting from both endogenous and exogenous factors. Due to its demographic diversity, Lebanon follows a consociational democracy with power-sharing rules. It follows a confessional system in which key offices and parliamentary seats are proportionately reserved for representatives from various religious communities. However, this system of consociational government has played a major role in hampering domestic political stability and national reconciliation. "[W]ith the outbreak of the 15-year long civil war in 1975, attention turned to the violent potential embedded within a system confining politicized sectarianism within rigid structures."[1] Additionally, Lebanon's vulnerability to regional political dynamics, coupled with its sectarian nature, makes it prone to instability and hampers the formation of a stable, sovereign and reconciled Lebanon.

Lebanon continues to be highly dependent on Syria. After the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990, "Syria consolidated its control over Lebanese state institutions, particularly the presidency, the judiciary, and the security forces."[2] In 2000, students and journalists vocally opposed the Syrian occupation. These demands soon began to span the Lebanese political and sectarian spectrum as well as gain momentum internationally, specifically from the United States and France. Encouraged by the international support, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri resigned, calling for the withdrawal of Syrian forces and ending Syrian interference. In February 2005, four months after resigning as prime minister, Hariri was killed, along with 22 others, in a massive car-bomb explosion in Beirut.

This act generated earth-shaking changes to the politics of Lebanon. Widespread suspicions of Syrian involvement in Hariri's assassination led to great international pressure for an immediate Syrian withdrawal after nearly three-decades' presence in the country. Massive anti-Syrian demonstrations, which came to be known as the Cedar Revolution, erupted in Beirut and resulted in the formation of a political coalition called March 14. This coalition originally included Sunnis, Christians and Druze. Subsequently, Syrian allies in Lebanon went on pro-Syria demonstrations and formed a Hezbollah-led bloc known as the March 8 coalition.

Today, March 8 and March 14 are the two major political coalitions in Lebanon albeit the political dynamics have shifted in recent years. The coalitions present two contrasting visions for Lebanese politics. March 14 offers a "neo-liberal vision based on respect for basic freedoms and an economy modeled on free market principles."[3] On the other hand, March 8's vision is that of a "religiously-inspired Sparta whereby a totalitarian religious ideology, in this case that of Hezbollah, predominates, supported by Iran."[4]

The recent presidential election in October 2016 changed this political landscape. The leading Christian party in the March 14 coalition defected and joined the Christian party within the March 8 coalition. This resulted in a breakup in the March 14 alliance where the three biggest parties, Future Movement (Sunni), Lebanese Forces (Christian) and Kataab Party (Christian) are now divided. On the other hand, the March 8 alliance headed by Hezbollah, has emerged as the dominant political coalition. As such, the Lebanese political landscape is devolving back along sectarian lines with three distinct sectarian blocs: Sunnis, Shias and Christians. These sectarian cleavages are also reflected in actors' international political alignments.

For the sake of analytical clarity, in this paper we have considered the March 14 alliance (headed by the Saad Hariri's Sunni party) and Hezbollah, the party leading the Shias and allied groups, as distinct actors with divergent identities, narratives, interests and sources of leverage in the Middle East. We recognize that reality can on various occasions defy this categorization, with particular groups (both domestic and international) shifting allegiance from one alliance to the other. However, particularly after the formation of a new government in Lebanon in 2016, this categorization seems to most closely reflect the arrangement of Lebanese political constellations in relation to the various conflicts in the Middle East under consideration, including the civil war in Syria, the Iran nuclear deal, the Israel-Palestine conflict and the fight against the Islamic State (IS).

Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

<u>March 14 Alliance</u>

The March 14 Alliance was formed in 2005, a month after the assassination of the prime minister, Rafik Hariri. It originally included Sunnis led by Saad Hariri (son of Rafik Hariri), Christians led by Samir Geagea and Ameen Gemayel, and Druze led by Walid Junblatt (who later defected to the opposing party). The party was formed as an answer to massive protests, known as the Cedar Revolution, by the Lebanese people following the assassination of the Prime Minister. "As Syria was suspected to have backed the assassination, demonstrations were held in protest of Syria's 29-yearlong occupation of Lebanon."[5]

The alliance is a coalition across sectarian lines bringing together different religious and ethnic groups, which traditionally do not share the same political interests. However, the groups formed an alliance around the shared goals of complete withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and ending the Syrian interference in Lebanon. Additionally, parties of the March 14 alliance continue to ask for state monopoly over the use of force and disarmament of Hezbollah. Moreover, the parties jointly demanded the establishment of an international tribunal to try the suspects of the Hariri assassination in addition to the other political assassinations that have taken place since then.

The main parties constituting the coalition are: Future Movement (led by Saad Hariri, the late PM's son), Lebanese Forces (Christian Maronites party led by Samir Geagea), and Kataeb Party (a Christian Maronite party currently led by Samy Gemayel). The Progressive Socialist Party (a Druze party led by Walid Junblatt) and Free Patriotic Movement led by former Lebanese Army General Michel Aoun were part of March 14 alliance before defecting to the other camp.

March 14 leaders face constant security threats. March 14 opponents (Syria and its allies) used violence and assassination to threaten this alliance and weaken it. "[M]any of the March 14 leaders changed their political stances and left the alliance, others were weakened politically and sometimes lost."[6] Starting in 2005, a series of bombing and assassinations targeted March 14 politicians, especially Christians and Druze, to weaken and repress the alliance. In 2009, Walid Junblatt, Druze leader and Socialist party head and one of the major pillars of March 14 alliance, defected from the alliance to join the pro-Assad and Hezbollah camp after being intimidated by Hezbollah.

The March 14 alliance started as a popular movement which the Lebanese people believed to be led by independent leaders not subject to external powers. The last parliamentary election was held in 2009 which resulted in 71 seats won by March 14 coalition versus 57 seats won by March 8 coalition. However, due to a combination of threats, defections and bad decisions, this alliance has not been able to deliver on its promises and is rapidly losing popularity, both domestically and internationally.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah (the "Party of God") sees itself as the legitimate representative of the historically oppressed Shia community in Lebanon and the wider Middle East. Its narrative, woven around the notion of resistance against oppression, can be traced back to its origins. In response to the historical disenfranchisement of the Shias over several decades, the 1980s saw the rise of a new generation of activists that sought to mobilize the collective identity of the community in religious terms.[7] Hezbollah emerged as a breakaway revolutionary core of the armed/militant party, Amal, which in turn originated in a religious Shia organization, Harakat al-Mahrumin (Movement of the Disinherited) founded by the Iranian cleric, Musa-al-Sadr.[8] The rise of Hezbollah can also be linked with wider regional developments in the Middle East, especially the Iranian revolution in 1979. Hezbollah's original manifesto, released in an 'Open Letter' in 1985, makes it clear that the party saw its religious and ideological leadership in Iran. "We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and faqih (jurist) who fulfills all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini. God save him!"[9]

Along with its pro-Iran/Shia orientation, Hezbollah's identity has almost equally been defined by its opposition to Israel, given its emergence in the backdrop of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon. Through the 80's and 90's, even after the end of the civil war in Lebanon, Hezbollah continued to wage jihad and guerilla warfare against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), winning them local and regional support (cutting across Sunni and Shia communities in Arab countries in the Middle East).[10] Ultimately, the Israeli withdrawal of forces from Southern Lebanon in 2000 was portrayed as the triumph of the Hezbollah-led resistance movement and further boosted support for the party and its charismatic leader, Hassan Nassarallah.[11] Hezbollah has used the on-going threat of Israeli aggression in its political narrative in order to justify being the only political group within Lebanon to retain military capabilities after the end of the civil war and Taif agreement.[12] This was visible in its justification of its 2006 war with Israel, as well as in its protection of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and support for Palestinian groups engaged in armed resistance against Israel, such as Hamas.

Hezbollah's traditional conflict narratives have required adaptation in light of its military engagement in the Syrian conflict. This latest (and most costly) war cannot be justified by citing a direct threat from Israeli aggression. However Nasrallah's speeches paint the "US-Israeli axis" and other western powers as "occupying forces" that are trying to cause a division of the region.[13] Hezbollah and its allies have also emphasized the sectarian (Shia-Sunni) nature of the conflict, for example by using religious shrines in Syria as an emotional rallying call to its supporters.[14] The threat to Shia and Christian minority populations from Sunni jihadists forms the ideological basis of Hezbollah's fight against IS, although in reality this is complicated by the fact that IS is a common target for many of Hezbollah's traditional enemies (most prominently Israel and Saudi Arabia).[15]

Sources of leverage

Lebanon is not big enough to influence regional politics. However, it represents a barometric reading for the entire region. Any leverage that a Lebanese party might enjoy is a result of alignment of interests with major regional or global powers.

March 14 Alliance

March 14, which is anti-Syrian, pro-Western and an opponent of Hezbollah, enjoys legitimacy and support from regional and international powers, mainly the United States and Saudi Arabia. Both countries have an interest in strengthening March 14 alliance to withstand Syrian and Iranian involvement in Lebanon through their Shiite proxy, Hezbollah.

After Rafik Hariri's assassination, massive protests took place in Beirut demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops and an end to the fifteen-year military occupation. The United States supported Lebanese efforts and provided the Lebanese Army with $70 million in annual military assistance, eventually increased to $150 million. The United States also lent diplomatic support to the March 14 coalition in its struggle against Hezbollah and continued Syrian interference.[16]

March 14 won 52% of the last parliamentary elections in 2009. They now hold 46% of the seats after the Druze defection from the alliance. However, Obama's "second-tier priority of supporting local pro-Western moderates has faltered, especially within Lebanon's Sunni community."[17] Hariri's government collapsed in 2011 after Hezbollah and its allies withdrew due to political tensions. Until 2014, Hariri remained in France on a self-imposed exile. This political marginalization, coupled with severe financial problems and increased polarization among Sunnis, resulted in March 14's diluted political power in Lebanon.

Compared to Hezbollah and the March 8 alliance, March 14 alliance is not as strong and is under constant threat. Prime Minister Saad Hariri formed a new unity government in December 2016. However, his government favors factions affiliated with Syria and Iran. "Pro-Hezbollah factions garnered eighteen seats, including three of the four so-called "sovereign ministries."[18] The new government will technically last for six months only and its mandate is to create a new, balanced electoral law and oversee the next parliamentary elections. Hariri made many compromises to form a new government and put an end to the two-year long political gridlock. It will be difficult to pass electoral laws that are in favor of March 14 agenda when Hezbollah and its allies are politically stronger and constitute nearly two-thirds of the cabinet. On the other hand, Hariri's supporters and allies demand a stronger stance against the pro-Iranian and pro-Assad politicians. They have high expectations from Hariri's government mandate to create a balanced electoral law and make sure the elections take place on time. Hariri's political strength will weaken even further if his government fails to craft an electoral law which is acceptable to his supporters and allies, and that guarantees their interests. "Should the trend continue, Lebanon's Sunnis could begin to resemble the divided Christian community, leaving the Hezbollah-led Shiites as the only unified sectarian political bloc."[19]

Hezbollah

Hezbollah enjoys three key sources of leverage that allow it to influence, to varying degrees, the situation in the Middle East. These sources of leverage are interconnected and closely tied to Hezbollah's internal and external network of allies, particularly its relationship with Iran.

First, as described above, Hezbollah has gradually evolved from being a militant group representing the socio-politically marginalized Shia community to become the most dominant political force within Lebanon. For example, the new Lebanese government formed by Saad Hariri in December 2016 is dominated by pro-Hezbollah factions that control two-thirds of the cabinet.[20] Hezbollah's nominee Michel Aoun has also been elected as the President of this government.[21] Its growing political clout is based to a large extent on the legitimacy it has garnered through its extensive provision of health and social services, particularly benefitting the Shia communities in south Lebanon.[22] In many areas where the Lebanese government fails to provide basic amenities to its population, Hezbollah stands out in stark contrast as the sole service-provider through its vast network of local agencies and humanitarian organizations.[23] Hezbollah's ascendancy within Lebanon's political system means that it commands the political leverage to influence Lebanon's positions in relation to the various conflicts in the Middle East. For example, Hezbollah is able to advocate support for the Assad regime in Syria, despite vociferous opposition from various domestic political actors.

Second, Hezbollah's military arm, the Islamic Resistance, has military capabilities that are comparable with a medium-sized state army. In 2010, the US described Hezbollah as "the most technically capable terrorist group in the world."[24] Although Hezbollah does not officially disclose the total size of its armed forces, estimates place the number of Hezbollah's enrolled combatants at 65,000.[25] Hezbollah possesses an arsenal of sophisticated weaponry including heavy artillery, aerial drones, large number of jeeps with recoilless rifles, along with about 120,000 rockets (according to Israeli estimates).[26] Hezbollah's military capabilities have proven to be superior to the Lebanese Armed Forces as evidenced by a number of conflicts from the 2006 war to the latest interventions in Syria.[27] Iran has consistently provided essential funding and arms supplies for the Islamic Resistance. Hezbollah has also enhanced its military capabilities from the experience gained from its combat operations in the 2006 war and Syrian conflict. Since its recent engagement in Syria, Russia is also reportedly reinforcing Hezbollah's military capacities and security apparatus.[28] Hezbollah's formidable military capabilities allow it to engage Lebanon in wars beyond its borders, despite opposition from significant portions of the Lebanese government who prefer to stay out of regional conflicts.

Third, Hezbollah exerts a degree of ideological influence in the Middle East. By forming a symbol of resistance against Israel (as a regional hegemon or "occupier"), Hezbollah has, on several occasions, inspired Arab states - both Sunni and Shia regimes - to stand up to Israel. For instance, during the 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah emerged as a focal point for Arab resistance across the region and even received support from its adversaries such as Saudi Arabia.[29] It also serves as a "bullets plus ballots" model for other militant organizations looking to chart similar paths towards political power. For example, the militant Palestinian party, Hamas, has long looked to Hezbollah for both ideological inspiration and practical support and training.[30] Through Hamas, Hezbollah exerts influence over possible trajectories of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and prospects for a peace process. It is worth noting that Hezbollah's decision to directly intervene in support of the Assad regime in Syria could have adverse implications for its ideological legitimacy, notwithstanding that it has made Hezbollah more powerful. It has caused Sunni groups and regimes across the region to become staunch opponents of the group.[31] It has also forced its traditional allies and clients, such as Hamas, to oppose its stance on the Syrian conflict.[32]

Internal conflicts and network of relationships

<u>March 14 Alliance</u>

March 14 was a coalition that assembled incoherent political groups united by common interests. However, the "movement failed to demonstrate national integration. It appeared as a Sunni-dominated movement with Christian and Druze supporters."[33] Populist Maronite leader Michel Aoun and the Druze leader defected from the coalition and restored ties with Hezbollah, joining the March 8 alliance.

Between May 2014 and October 2016, the Lebanese presidential position was vacant due to political deadlock between March 14 and Hezbollah. Specifically, the rivalry between the two prominent Maronite Christians, Samir Geagea from the Lebanese Forces party within March 14 alliance and General Michel Aoun from the Free Patriotic Movement within March 8 alliance, led to political vacuum and a vacancy in the president's post for more than two years."[45] Sessions to elect a new leader failed due to political infighting that led to a lack of quorum."[34]

Nonetheless, in October 2016, Michel Aoun was elected president after major political concessions. The turning point in Aoun's favor was when Hariri agreed to vote for him to pave the way for his candidacy as the prime minister. However, Hariri's decision to back Aoun's candidacy created an internal rift between the two most prominent leaders of March 14 coalition: Hariri and Geagea. Since the Lebanese constitution states that the president must be a Christian Maronite, Geagea assumed that he will be March 14's and Hariri's nominee.

Hariri's initial strategy was to nominate Frangieh, a nominal member of the opposing March 8 alliance and a friend of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, without consulting his most prominent Christian ally, Geagea. Hariri likely resorted to this controversial nominiation only after coming to the realization that cooperation with March 8 and Hezbollah may be necessary to end Lebanon's political leadership vacuum and governmental paralysis. By initially supporting Frangieh, Hariri sought to encourage Hezbollah to switch its support toward Frangieh, and in so doing weaken the alliance between Hezbollah and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement which forms the cornerstone of the March 8 coalition. However, this strategy failed. Hariri lost his key Christian ally, Samir Geagea (leader of the Lebanese Forces party), who considered the nomination of Frangieh as a betrayal. Consequently, Geagea joined the Free Patriotic Movement within the March 8 coalition and supported Hezbollah's candidate, Aoun, in the presidential election, ending the 25-year-long political confrontation. As a result, "[t]he three biggest parties of the March 14 alliance are now divided: The Lebanese Forces party was supporting Aoun, the Future Movement was supporting Frangieh, and the Kataeb Party was refusing to support either of them." Believing that a Syrian-friendly president is better than no president at all, Hariri eventually succumbed to Hezbollah's candidate and voted for Aoun.

The recent shifting between the two major coalitions appears to have settled along sectarian lines. With the Lebanese Forces

party joining the Free Patriotic Movement, the Christians seem to be united within the March 8 coalition while most Sunnis are represented by the Future Movement and Shias by Hezbollah and Amal. The Lebanese political landscape has recently regressed towards sectarian coalitions - Christians, Sunnis and Shias - creating further sectarian tension.

In addition, rivalry appeared within the Sunni bloc which had previously been united in its loyalty and support for Hariri. The most prominent rival is Ashraf Rifi, former commander of the Internal Security Forces, whose party has surprisingly swept the 2016 municipal elections in Tripoli in northern Lebanon. Some Lebanese see Rifi as a valuable alternative to Hariri.

Hezbollah: Resistance, Politics, and Governance

As stated above, Hezbollah has recently emerged as a veritable kingmaker in Lebanese politics. However, its direct role in the Syrian conflict has presented Hezbollah with additional challenges and opportunities in maintaining the delicate balance of its internal network of political alliances. On the one hand, it has managed to largely sustain support from its base constituency in the Lebanese Shia communities. It has also maintained, and in fact enhanced, its support from the Christian groups. Initially, there was some opposition from the Lebanese Shia community to young lives being sacrificed in the Syrian conflict, while the real enemy ought to be Israel.[35] Bombings in Shia strongholds in Beirut and the Bekaa Valley allowed Hezbollah to silence its critics and cement its case for the need to defend the region's minorities (Shias, Alawites and Christians) against Sunni extremist groups.[36] A July 2015 survey conducted by Hayya Bina, a Lebanese NGO focused on the Shia community, found that 78.7% of Lebanese Shias supported Hezbollah and 79.9% believe that Hezbollah's intervention in Syria makes them more secure.[37] Media agencies controlled by Hezbollah and some Christian groups also highlight its close ties with the Christian community. For example, there was extensive coverage of Hezbollah's warm reception of Pope Benedict during his 2012 visit to Lebanon and the construction work undertaken by Hezbollah's agencies at their own expense to repair churches damaged during the 2006 war. Therefore, the Christians have no reason to withdraw support from Hezbollah, particularly when faced with the increasing threat of Sunni jihadist groups in the Syrian opposition.

On the other hand, Hezbollah's stance in relation to the Syrian conflict has drawn a firm line in the sand along sectarian lines. It has pitted it firmly against Sunni political and militant groups and states within Lebanon and across the region and negated its ability to resurrect an image of pan-Islamic/Arab resistance against Israeli oppression.[38] This makes Hezbollah's political predominance within Lebanon vulnerable to wider regional shifts in the Sunni-Shia power balance.

External conflicts and network of relationships

March 14 Alliance

The March 14 Alliance includes a variety of religious and ethnic groups, which traditionally do not share the same political agenda. However, the groups united in pursuit of their common interest in the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Therefore, the March 14 Alliance is identified with the United States and Saudi Arabian interests, whereas the Hezbollah-led opposition pays allegiance to Syria and Iran.

Given the fact that March 14 Alliance is led by a Sunni leader, and Hezbollah leads its opposition, Saudi Arabia heavily supported and influenced this side. In light of Riyadh's rejection of the Western-Iranian nuclear agreement, "the Saudis may choose to ramp up their support to various Sunni groups fighting Iran's allies and proxies around the region."[39] However, Saudi Arabia's role in supporting this party has been diminishing since 2006 for multiple reasons, further weakening it, while March 8 receives growing financial and military support from Iran.

The reasons for diminishing support of March 14 alliance by Saudi Arabia include:

- The continuing lack of an effective government in Beirut, and the "weak premiership of [Saad Hariri] reflected a serious drawback to Saudi influence in Lebanon. Lebanon had already been sliding slowly but steadily into the camp of Saudi Arabia's arch enemies, namely Iran and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad"[40].
- The growing political strength of Hezbollah, especially during the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel glorified the former and presented Nasrallah as an Arab leader. This posed a challenge to Saudi Arabia which considers itself as the most influential Arab leader and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

- Saudi Arabia's regional priorities are focused on confronting Iran in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. Lebanon appears to have fallen off this list. "Viewed from the Gulf, the kingdom's actions reflect a rational re-evaluation of the diminishing returns on its efforts in Lebanon, frustration with its increasingly impotent Lebanese allies, and strategic priorities which placed the country well below Syria, Yemen and Iraq in a turbulent Middle East."[41]
- "Under the new leadership of Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia seems to have abandoned diplomacy in favor of a hawkish approach to relations with historical Arab allies like Lebanon."[42]

The obvious decline of Saudi Arabia's support of the March 14 Alliance has had significant impact on the party's position. Riyadh cancelled $3 billion in military aid and another $1 billion to the security services, weakening the army, a counter-balance to Hezbollah, leaving the Shi'ite group even stronger, in relative terms. Moreover, Saad Hariri, facing economic hardship and an insurgency within his March 14 party, was in desperate need of a win. Therefore, he made a deal that shocked his supporters, i.e. to elect the Hezbollah-backed president, Aoun, in exchange for his return to the prime minister's office. This deal reflects the growing influence of Iran and Hezbollah evidenced by the election of Michel Aoun—a close ally of Iranian-backed Hezbollah. In effect, Aoun and Hariri now offer a veneer of legitimacy to Hezbollah. Additionally, "Lebanon's traditionally pro-Western but increasingly fractured Sunni bloc stands little chance of preventing further gains by the Hezbollah-Syria-Iran axis."[43]

Hezbollah

Right from its inception, Hezbollah has been closely tied to Iran ideologically, politically and financially. The level of support received from Iran has varied depending on the state of Iran's own economy and priorities and is said to have significantly increased once Iran's resources were freed up by the lifting of sanctions following the nuclear deal with the US and other world powers.[44] With Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian civil war on the side of Bashar al Assad's forces, the "umbilical cord" tying the party to Tehran has only become stronger, with implications for its image and relationships with Arab states in the Middle East.[45]

Hezbollah has shared a complicated relationship with Syria. On the one hand, it retained a close alliance with Syria and enjoyed its support to retain its military forces. On the other hand, Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 created an opportunity for Hezbollah to expand its domestic political legitimacy, which has only grown over time.[46] While the Hezbollah-led Mar 8 coalition favored maintaining a close relationship with Syria, they did not necessarily believe that Syria should play a direct role in determining events in Lebanon's domestic politics. Instead, Syria continued to support Hezbollah's military actions abroad, especially the 2006 war against Israel, and used Hezbollah to maintain a balance of power vis-à-vis Sunni parties whose influence was largely confined to domestic economic affairs.[47] Hezbollah's direct support for the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war has been crucial to the gains made by Assad and is likely to once again shift the balance of power between Syria and Hezbollah in the latter's favor. The participation in the Syrian war has increased Hezbollah's military capabilities and experience, protected its supply of arms and ammunition through land routes via Syria from Iran, given it access to territory that can act as arsenal in strategic locations (particularly if a conflict with Israel were to ensue), and will allow it to gain from any negotiated peace deal that preserves the Assad regime.[48]

However, the Syrian conflict has also proven costly in terms of Hezbollah's regional relationships and image. Until the Syrian civil war, while widely recognized as a proxy of Iran in the region, Hezbollah had retained its own political legitimacy as a party that resisted injustice and Israeli aggression. For example, during the 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah secured the respect and public support of several Arab states across the region, including Saudi Arabia.[49] In the immediate aftermath of the 2006 war, the popularity of Hezbollah and its charismatic leader Nasrallah skyrocketed across the Middle East.[50]

It is instructive to contrast this with the reaction to Hezbollah's engagement in the Syrian conflict. In 2016, member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – supported a long-established US position by declaring Hezbollah to be a "terrorist organization".[51] The reasons for this decision are Hezbollah's military actions against Syrian opposition groups and in support of Houthi militant groups in Yemen. Therefore, Hezbollah's direct engagement in regional conflicts that have little to do with resisting Israel appear to have cemented its image as a part of the Iran-Syria axis and firmly pitted it against the region's Sunni populations.[52]

Hezbollah's direct confrontation with Sunni powers in the region has also complicated its relationship with other militant-political organizations such as Hamas. Hamas has relied upon Hezbollah for ideological and practical support in waging its fight against Israeli oppression. However, it has not been able to support Hezbollah's actions in Syria and Yemen, seen to be bolstering support for oppressive, anti-Sunni regimes and groups. Following the GCC decision to formally categorize Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, Hamas remained silent, neither opposing nor supporting the move. Expectedly, the Palestinian Authority came out in support of the decision. While Hamas has depended on extensive support from Hezbollah, particularly in terms of the supply of military weapons and training, it also receives financial support from several of the GCC states and is increasingly turning towards Saudi Arabia for patronage.[53] Hamas and Hezbollah can be expected to be allies of necessity in the event of heightened conflict

with Israel; however the strain placed on their relationship by the Sunni-Shia split in the region may have consequences for their collective strength vis a vis Israel in the years to come.

Potential negotiation moves

It emerges from the analysis in the foregoing sections that the internal cleavages in Lebanon's politics tend to reflect regional and global balances of power. Undoubtedly, Lebanon is a country that tends to be more at the effect rather than the cause of major power shifts. However, the level of ethnic and religious division within Lebanon mean that it could play a crucial role in either stemming the tide of wider sectarian conflict across the region or as a powder keg, making such conflict even more dangerous. In this section of the chapter, we consider two sources of conflict in the Middle East to demonstrate how March 14 and March 8 have aligned themselves to be on opposite sides of these conflicts; and to explore the role, albeit limited, they can play in determining the trajectories of these conflicts.

Syrian Conflict

The Syrian civil war continues to shape much of Lebanese politics. Regardless of whether Assad is ousted or a settlement is reached in which he remains in power, both scenarios will have significant impact upon Lebanon and its stability. "Backed by various international and domestic patrons, Lebanese sectarian factions dread a loss of their client networks and a weakening of their political strongholds once the victors of the Syrian uprising are determined."[54] Prime Minister Najib Mikati resigned in 2013 due to a political standoff with Hezbollah which dominates the Lebanese politics and does not adhere to Lebanon's policy of disassociation towards the Syrian conflict that was agreed on during the Arab league meeting in Qatar in 2012.

The policy of disassociation has proven to be difficult to implement, and it was dwarfed by sectarian politics. "From 2011 to 2013, the Miqati government in Lebanon endorsed the Syrian government's line of action and voted against any regional initiative seeking to isolate the Syrian regime."[55] Moreover, both alliances, March 8 and March 14, have been proactively trying to influence the conflict next door to their and their external patrons' best interests, with different approaches and varying degrees of success. The Syrian conflict intensified the divide between the March 8 and March 14 coalitions. "Lebanon's divided political class, underscored by the fault lines between the March 8 coalition and March 14 coalition, was a channel through which both Iran and Saudi Arabia supported Assad's regime and the Syrian opposition respectively."[56]

Hezbollah, supported by Iran, has been actively fighting in Syria alongside Assad's forces. Propping up the Assad regime is needed for the survival of Hezbollah which depends on the survival of the "Axis of Resistance" that includes Iran, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah." The collapse of the Axis of Resistance would undermine Iran's hegemony in the region in the face of Saudi Arabia, and would pose an existential threat to Hezbollah due to the fact that it would lose access to its main communication lines from Tehran and Damascus."[57]

March 14 parties have a crucial stake in the ultimate fate of the Assad regime too. Key representatives from the March 14 alliance have generally supported the rebellion, considering it a legitimate struggle against Assad's oppression. The Syrian rebellion provided an opportunity to get rid of Assad's regime, and thus weaken Hezbollah's regional and domestic influence. This in turn would tip the balance of power in favor of the Sunnis, and consequently March 14. "Hariri perhaps hoped for the emergence of a new Syrian government, preferably with a majority of Sunnis, with the same regional and international allegiances as the Future Movement."[58] The Future Movement is believed to have been indirectly supporting the Syrian rebels but on a much smaller scale. Statements were leaked to the press allegedly stating that "the party and its allies played a key role in the transport of arms from the Gulf, mostly Saudi Arabia, to the Syrian rebels through Lebanon and Turkey."[59] If the Syrian rebels are successful in toppling Assad's regime, Hezbollah would be weakened in Lebanon, while March 14 would become stronger, putting an end to the Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon.

The opposite scenario - Assad's military and political victory - would undercut the moderate Sunnis in Lebanon led by Hariri and fuel support for radical factions in the Lebanese Sunni community, who call for the termination of the Syrian regime, and take up the fight against Shia's control over Lebanon. "Sectarian tensions between anti-Assad Sunnis and pro-Assad Alawites in the north of Lebanon also escalated in 2013 and early 2014, with some Sunnis forming jihadist groups affiliated with those in Syria."[60] Areas controlled by Hezbollah with large Shia population have become vulnerable to attacks by foreign jihadists as long as the Syrian conflict continues. Since none of the political parties in Lebanon gain from turning the sectarian tension into a civil war, "different political actors in Lebanon (and their foreign patrons) had two common causes: securing the Lebanese border from the flow of jihadists and controlling sectarian violence in Lebanon."[61] Political compromises were executed such as strengthening the role of the Lebanese Army in northern Lebanon that resulted in a significant reduction in terrorist attacks and sectarian violence in Lebanon.

Iran Nuclear Deal

It was widely assumed in Lebanon that the declaration of a new US-Iranian agreement would ultimately result in an acceptable settlement between March 8 and March 14 alliances to elect a new president. Yet, the recent presidential election was an indication of a rebalance in the regional powers caused by the Syrian crisis and Iran-U.S. nuclear deal in favor of Iran and Hezbollah.

Since the March 14 alliance is highly dependent on Saudi Arabia for political support, its position towards the nuclear deal reflected that of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia rejects the deal since it believes that it further expands Iranian influence in the region at the expense of its own interests. The Al Saud regime is determined to fight this new possibility, as evidenced by its war in Yemen to weaken the Iranian-backed military militia, the Houthis. The lack of support for the Iranian-U.S. nuclear deal may also be shared by the Future Movement of Lebanon which the Saudis have an influence over. "[Future Movement] is the party that is capable of hindering any Lebanese consequences of the US-Iranian agreement, in case the Al Saud rulers decided to do so."[62]

Another reason for the lack of support for the nuclear deal by the March 14 alliance is the Israeli position on such a deal. Israel opposes this deal and believes that lifting sanctions on Iran will strengthen Hezbollah and Hamas. Lifting the sanctions can provide Hezbollah with more Iranian financial and military support, therefore threatening Israel's security. March 14 parties foresee and fear Israeli attempts to challenge a stronger Hezbollah. "[I]t is thought that Netanyahu could obstruct any implications the agreement might have in the Lebanese arena — such as a greater influence for Hezbollah — by launching a military operation or using other violent means."[63]

XXI. Libya: Competing Governments, Power Centers, and Militias

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Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

The civil war unfolding in Libya presents significant challenges for those seeking to negotiate with the country. Partly this is because of the diversity of actors and limitations on the legitimacy of even the most influential groups. Today, three governments are present in the country. The international community recognizes one executive body and one parliament. However, political infighting and a lack of civil-military control undermine this arrangement. Further complicating power relations are militias and jihadist groups with strong ideological and economic incentives to disrupt progress towards stability. Section one will explore the dynamics shaping the contemporary political environment in Libya. Historical analysis will clarify how political groups have evolved into their current form. Militias and jihadist groups will receive individual analysis, identifying the most influential groups today. Here we will focus largely on the relationships and threats between the key actors in Libya. In section three, we will analyze internal divisions within these groups.

Political Groups

A historical overview of Libya is helpful for understanding today's political environment. The Arab Spring was a turning point in Libyan politics. For five decades leading to 2011, Muammar Gadhafi ruled as Libya's strongman. Gadhafi came to power in 1969 by overthrowing King Idris of, what was then, the United Kingdom of Libya. Gadhafi detested King Idris' compliance to host western military bases in Libya in return for economic assistance. During his military service, Gadhafi organized a secret dissident group in the fashion of Nasser's Free Officers Committee. His circle of officers organized a military coup that abolished the monarchy and established the Libyan Arab Republic. Through his leadership of the group, Gadhafi went on to become both head of state of the new republic and commander in chief of the armed forces.

Gadhafi maintained his control over Libya through a strategy of disrupting power relations. Those who threatened his status, including the political opposition, were often jailed. Elite families responsible for administering local regions were divided and coopted. Gadhafi would pit members of elite families against one another for positions of power, or remove traditional figures and replace them with members of rural and less influential tribes. Furthermore, Libya's vast public sector was filled with members of tribes loyal to the government, while bureaucratic institutions themselves were all but removed of any true authority. In effect, Gadhafi created the trappings of a government with all true power concentrated in his hands.

Gadhafi's desire for uncontested control would ultimately play a role in the popular uprising of 2011. Early that year, the government jailed a human rights lawyer advocating on behalf of prisoners allegedly killed by security forces in the Abu Salim prison. Protests in support of the lawyer began in February of that year and were met with government retaliation.[1] As protests spread across Libya, the government's attacks against civilian populations intensified. The UN Security Council responded by adopting Resolution 1973 on March 17th, condemning the government's actions. Increasing instability yielded a subsequent NATO military intervention. By late October, foreign-backed rebels had deposed and killed Gadhafi in the Battle of Sirte.

The environment in Libya following Gadhafi's ouster was extremely volatile. The mechanisms that enabled his rule now came to cripple the country in Gadhafi's absence. Without a central powerful figure, the state bureaucracy had little capacity to resume governance. This coincided with a military opposition comprised of loosely organized coalitions of militias with access to vast amounts of arms stockpiled by the government. A report by the Institute of Peace describes this period as characterized by a "vacuum of government authority, legitimacy, and security."[2]

A transitional government was established to prepare the country for elections and to resume public works. Known as the National Transitional Council, the government operated for ten months between 2011 and 2012. Elections were held in July 2012 amongst an environment riddled with tribal rivalries, militias and jihadists groups growing in power and influence. Nonetheless, elections and the transition of power were successful, and the National General Congress (NGC) was established in Tripoli.

The National Forces Alliance, a coalition of secular and independent groups, won the election. Liberal politician Ali Zeiden led the government as Prime Minister, however once in parliament his coalition was heavily encumbered. The strongest political force to emerge proved to be a coalition of Islamist parties led by the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party. After having been oppressed and imprisoned during the Gadhafi era, Islamist groups were among the first and best to organize during the uprising. The Islamists gained the second largest bloc in the election and sought to establish a government based on shari'a law. Perhaps most notably, the influence of the Islamist bloc was revealed by the government's approval of a controversial bill banning Gadhafi-affiliated politicians from public office for a period of ten years. A number of liberal members were traditional candidates involved in the Gadhafi government; the act was in part directed at weakening opposition to Islamists within the GNC.

Having solidified their influence within the parliament, the position of Islamist groups appeared favorable for a sea change in the governance of Libya. Nonetheless, internal rifts and ideological battles grew among the coalition. Salafi groups criticized the Muslim Brotherhood for abandoning their Islamic principles,[3] and, as tensions took root, political infighting slowed progress of the new government. The public criticized the GNC's political gridlock and ineffectiveness, criticisms that culminated in Zeidan's ouster in March of 2014 following a scandal involving his failure to prevent illegal exports of seized oil resources. A second election was held two months

after Zeidan left office.

The Islamists lost in an unexpected landslide electoral defeat to the Liberal bloc in 2014. However these results were complicated by extremely low voter turnout, outbreaks of violence and closed polling stations.[4] The GNC contested the results and refused to recognize the incoming government. A coalition of armed groups, the "Libya Dawn" coalition, subsequently took control of Tripoli. Shortly afterwards the Islamists parties reaffirmed their control of the GNC and announced the formation of the National Salvation Government (GNS). The newly elected government fled to Tobrouk in eastern Libya where they established the House of Representatives (HoR), a rival legislative body.

The HoR was recognized by the international community as the sole legitimate legislative power in Libya. Nonetheless, this had no impact on the relationship between the GNC and the HoR. In November of that year the Libyan Supreme Court declared the HoR unconstitutional – a ruling that members of the HoR claim was made by judges whose families were threatened by Islamist militias.[5] Despite the challenges to its legitimacy, the HoR continued to operate in Tobrouk. It began at a much weaker position than its rival in Tripoli: it was limited by fewer powers and resources than the GNC and relied on protection from secular militias.[6]

Following 2014 Libya was dragged into factional violence among Islamic groups operating in the west and Liberal groups in the east. Seeking to prevent a complete disintegration of governance, a power sharing arrangement was advocated by the international community. Known as the Libyan Political Agreement (PA), Libyan actors agreed to establish a third body, the Presidential Council (PC) that would form a unity government. The PC would execute the functions of the head of state including command of the Libyan National Army (LNA). The Government of National Accord (GNA) would incorporate members of both the eastern and western assemblies. Executive power was vested in the GNA cabinet while legislative powers remained with the HoR following the 2014 national election. A third body, the High Council of State, was created to include members of the GNC in the legislative process.

It was intended that the GNA be recognized and appointed by the HoR. Fayez al-Sarraj was to be chair of the PC and Prime Minister of Libya. However, this arrangement of the PA lacked genuine consensus among members of both the HoR and GNC. While in the HoR a majority of members supported the GNA, many felt that the international community had imposed the deal on them. Disputes remain over the composition of the PC and control of the Libyan National Army (LNA), which have prevented a quorum to approve the cabinet. Nonetheless, Serraj has continued to appoint a cabinet without their approval.

The unity government established itself in a military base near Tripoli and later made a deal with Tripoli militias to allow the government to move to Tripoli.[7] Significant challenges remain for Sarraj and the unity government. Relationships need to be reconciled with the leadership of the major institutions such as the Central Bank, the HoR and the Libyan National Army. These issues will be explored in detail in section three of this report.

Armed Groups

Militias played an important role in the 2011 uprising. A wave of militarization swept across the country as militias organized to fight against government forces.[8] Following the breakdown of government services, tribal communities further mobilized to provide security and justice services for their members.[9] Armed groups have since proliferated, with various capabilities and regional and tribal allegiances.[10] Estimates typically place the number the number of militias after the uprising in the low hundreds.[11] Some assessments however find that upwards of several hundred were present in single cities alone, such as Misrata.[12]

Contributing to the number of militias was the vast number of arms in Libya that removed barriers to mobilization. MI6 estimated that there were one million tons of weaponry in Libya in the wake of the instability of 2011. This included weapons supplied by foreign sponsors, and Gadhafi's own weapons stock including upwards of 700,000 firearms, most of which were assault rifles.[13] In the aftermath of the uprising, militias and security forces became a large part of the formal economy in Libya. The transitional government employed militias into its national security framework, increasing the number of fighters to 200,000 (representing 11% of the country's workforce).[14]

Today's militias can be understood through the paradigm of east –west rivalry that overlaps with liberal and Islamist groups in Libya. In the east, the most powerful armed group is the LNA led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Haftar was an exiled military leader that returned to Libya to command the LNA under the auspices of the HoR. Haftar is an ardent opponent of the Islamist faction and has been successful at combating jihadist groups in Benghazi and Sirte. His support of the liberal faction however does not extend to the GNA. As is discussed in section three, Haftar views the PA and the GNA as a threat to his status. He has responded with measures to expand his autonomy from the unity government. In the summer of 2016, Haftar seized key exporting terminals in the Oil Crescent from the Petroleum Facilities Guard, a pro-GNA militia. He has sought to influence members of the HoR to prevent the parliament from reaching a quorum to approve the GNA cabinet.

In the west, the most powerful armed groups include Misratan militias and the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Room. Misratan militias are not entirely cohesive in their organization, and may instead be considered a constellation of smaller armed groups.[15] They primarily seek to consolidate their control in the region and to root out IS. [16] Having recently launched successful offensive attacks against IS, these groups may in the future turn their focus to fighting their key rival, the LNA.

The Libyan Revolutionaries Joint Operations Room (LROR) is an umbrella organization for a group of Islamist militias supporting the GNC. The LROR was created by the GNC in 2013 and its groups have been employed by the eastern parliament to provide security in Tripoli and Benghazi.[17] The LROR fought in the Libya Dawn coalition that ousted the government of the HoR from Tripoli in 2014. As such, Haftar and the LNA are key adversaries of the group.

Jihadist Groups

Alongside the proliferation of armed groups, jihadist and criminal organizations also emerged from the 2011 uprising. For decades Libya had been a hub for transnational jihadist activities. These groups maintained their roots in the country even up until the uprising. Jihadists saw the events of 2011 as an "opening to an Islamic state under shari'a, and were keen on ensuring progress in this direction when the revolt was over."[18] Eastern Libya, noted for its religious conservatism, offered a fertile environment for jihadist organizations. Benghazi and Derna in particular became key centers for jihadist activities.

The most influential jihadist group today is the Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council (BRSC). The BRSC is a coalition of jihadists and Islamist militias including Ansar al-Sharia and other smaller revolutionary factions. Ansar al-Sharia (meaning Defenders of Sharia) is an Al-Qaeda affiliate with a presence in south and central/eastern regions of Libya. It has built a recruitment base from activities including preaching and charitable work.[19] Ansar al-Sharia has further built strong ties local communities and integrated itself into southern tribes that derive their livelihoods from the smuggling economy.[20]

The BRSC has fought alongside IS to combat Haftar. However tensions arise over competition for resources and recruiting between the two. IS appeared in Libya in 2014 along with fighters returning from Syria.[21] Their limited stronghold in the city of Sirte was overtaken in 2016 by Misratan militias supported by American air power. There are concerns nonetheless that fleeing IS members will regroup in the south to launch future attacks.[22]

Sources of leverage

Libya's influence in the Middle East has collapsed in the post-Gadhafi era. Whereas the country's vast oil wealth once served to finance Gadhafi's ideological enterprises abroad, factional violence and political discord now combine to prevent Libya from pursuing foreign policy. Despite this hurdle, Libya's potential to wield future leverage in international politics is considerable. The resources for economic and political recovery are still in place – including a young, educated population and large oil reserves. Other states in the region have a stake in ensuring that Libya recovers from instability. The following section of this chapter will explore how Libya plays into the interest of other Middle Eastern states, and assess the areas in which the country may attract international cooperation in the future. Subsequently, the chapter considers another aspect of Libya's relevance to the region: the role of Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Security

Instability in Libya has the potential to spill over into the region. One contributing factor to this risk is the presence of international terrorist organizations using Libya as a regional power center. Both IS and Al-Qaeda are established in the country. In the immediate post war period these groups were able to operate with relative impunity in the absence of a central government authority. Currently, they derive much of their power from the lucrative illicit economies springing from Libya's porous borders.

Libya's southern territories reach the Sahel, a strip of the northern Sahara desert crossing North Africa. The Sahel has been a transit route for smuggling dating back to Roman times, and today armed groups reap massive profits by smuggling goods or people bound for Europe or regional markets. A report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational and Organized Crime estimates that the trans-Sahara trade in illicit goods and migrants is valued at US$43-80 million annually, while the coastal migrant trade in the north is valued at US$255-323 million per year.[23] These funds ultimately serve to strengthen terrorist and criminal groups operating internationally.

Other Arab states have a vested interest in combatting terrorist groups in Libya. In order to prevent a greater threat emerging domestically, countries such as Egypt have played an active role in combatting IS and supporting military operations against Islamist armed groups. In the future, the task of securing Libya's borders may be a channel for further military cooperation beyond Egypt. This will not necessarily equip Libya with leverage in its foreign relations, yet military cooperation and counterterrorism will be a key aspect of the country's affairs with the international community. At a minimum, it will provide a venue for engaging in diplomacy and building relationships with like-minded states.

In the post-conflict period, the resources that once made Libya an influencer in regional politics will again come into play. Libya has access to a vast wealth of energy resources, including the largest proven crude oil reserves in Africa and the continent's fifth largest proven natural gas reserves.[24] Libya will rely on revenue from exports to strengthen public finances and provide a foundation for economic recovery. Previously, Libyan energy exports primarily served European markets, however the energy market could have a hand in bolstering Libyan cooperation with Middle Eastern states in the future. Energy exports may provide the government with source of leverage in the region: either through directly supplying others or providing funds to pursue interests abroad once the country is stabilized.

Internal conflicts, networks of relationships

The first section of this report identified the main players in Libya. These can roughly be grouped into the eastern, Liberal faction including the GNA, HoR and LNA and the western, Islamist faction of the GNS, GNC and a collection of militias supporting these groups. Although these groups belonging to broader coalitions, internal rivalries are a powerful dynamic in determining their actions. These rivalries can have important implications for Libyan politics, such as determining the future of the unity government. The third section of this chapter will look at these internal conflicts in greater detail.

Government of National Accord

The Libyan Political Agreement, signed Skhirat, Morocco in December of 2015, established a power-sharing arrangement that incorporated both the liberal and Islamist factions. Under this arrangement, executive power was vested in the cabinet of the GNA while legislative powers remained with the HoR following the 2014 national election. The Presidency Council was created as a body to execute the functions of the head of state, including command of the Libyan National Army. A third body, the High Council of State, was created to include members of the GNC in the legislative process.

Fayez al-Sarraj was chosen as the chairman of the PC, making him the de-facto Prime Minister of Libya. Sarraj faces a number of obstacles to the success of the GNA. From its inception, the PA was strongly pushed by the international community as a necessary plan for avoiding a complete disintegration of governance. Yet the agreement lacked authentic consensus among policymakers. Many parliamentarians disapproved of aspects of the PA and felt as though it had been imposed on them by the international community. As a result, shortly after the formation of the PC and the cabinet, dissent appeared across the spectrum. Members of the PC boycotted its early meetings and the HoR failed to approve a cabinet. Facing political gridlock, Sarraj moved forward with his cabinet. In early 2016, he established the unity government in a military base near Tripoli, and later moved into government buildings the capital.[25]

Ahead of Sarraj is the difficult task of building the legitimacy of the unity government domestically. His ability to do so rests on reaching a consensus among the leadership of some of the most powerful groups in Libya. Both the Speaker of the House of the HoR, Aguila Saleh, and Field Marshal Haftar do not support the GNA. Known as being a level-headed politician, Sarraj has stated that he is "willing to work with various political forces to ensure stability, security and unity for Libya."[26] Nonetheless, relationships among this group have been hostile. Further examination shows that their core interests are divergent, if not conflicting.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives (HoR) is the internationally recognized parliament based in Tobrouk. The Speaker of the House is independent politician Aguila Saleh, who is supported by a council of deputies including Imhemed Shaib and Ahmed Huma. Saleh is an important figure in the HoR's political gridlock over appointing the GNA cabinet. In his view, the parliament cannot form a quorum on the issue until the cabinet presents itself to the deputies in Tobruk. As of December 2016 the GNA has not done so, perhaps due to security concerns in the area.[27] Saleh's actions have proven to be more than reluctance however. While a majority of the HoR are in favor of the GNA, Saleh has been accused of violating parliamentary procedures in order to prevent the vote from taking place. This has reportedly included actions such as blocking supporters of the unity government from the parliament and proposing a motion of non-confidence while GNA supporters were not present. Saleh's political maneuvering notwithstanding, his dissent nonetheless reflects deep concerns over the GNA that exist across the HoR. Criticisms generally arise over two issues: the composition and size of the PC, and the role of Haftar and the LNA.[28]

Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar

Field Marshal Haftar has been described as the most immediate barrier to the implementation of the GNA.[29] Haftar's opposition to the GNA stems from the terms of the PA putting government military forces under control of the PC. As the commander of the LNA, Haftar commands the country's most powerful military force. In order to secure this position of power, Haftar has made efforts to increase his influence relative to the GNA. For example, in late 2016 he seized control of oil terminals from militias supportive of the GNA and subsequently proceeded to increase exports. The international community also plays a role in bolstering Haftar's position within Libyan politics. Both western and Middle Eastern states have supported or collaborated with Haftar's military campaigns against IS. In their perspective, while Haftar's motives may not be entirely benign, cooperation with the LNA is still a necessary evil in the fight against common enemies.[30]

Haftar has in return pressed international allies to lobby for exemption from the arms embargo against Libya.[31] While advocating for the benefits of a better armed LNA to protect the country from terrorist threats, the move would additionally strengthen Haftar's position politically. Legal access to international arms would increase the LNA's independence from the GNA as well as its threat to opposing Islamist groups in western Libya. Within the near future, it is possible that the LNA will move on from counter-terrorism operations to take control of GNC territory. Once campaigns against IS are completed, or the LNA is equipped with additional armaments, Haftar may take this path.

General National Congress

The GNC is the Islamist parliament based in Tripoli. It supports the National Salvation Government of Libya (GNS) that originated in the 2012 national election. The leadership of the GNS has been disputed among Omar al-Hassi and Khalifa al-Ghawil. Seemingly capricious policy making and internal power struggles reveal how the GNC is burdened by deep internal power struggles. In early 2015, al-Hassi was forced out office by members of the GNC, reportedly over his unfavorable relationships with other members of the parliament.[32] Al-Hassi was replaced by al-Ghawil to lead the GNS, who assumed power initially on a temporary basis yet remains in the position today. In April 2016 dissident members of the GNC announced it was being dissolved and formed into a State Council in accordance with the PA. However the next day, these claims were denounced by other GNC members.[33] Armed groups seized control of the offices of the State Council and reinstated the Ghawil cabinet. In December of 2016 al-Hassi announced the formation of an alternative executive body, the Council of the Revolution, further adding to the Islamist leadership impasse.

Since the first elected government following Gadhafi's ouster, the Islamist faction has illustrated how internal rivalries can restrain the group's influence in national politics. The GNC already suffers from the lack of legitimacy that is awarded to the HoR by

the international community. Divided leadership is another obstacle to pursuing their interests in a manner independent of the PA structures. The future of the GNC will likely require that they incorporate themselves into a unity government of some kind, although not necessarily the PA in its current form. By boycotting the arrangement, the group may be able to sufficiently undermine the GNA over time until they are offered a role of greater influence in the government. Buying time is no guarantee of a better position in the future however. If the HOR and the LNA continue to grow in power, the window of opportunity for Islamism in Libyan politics may be shrinking.

External conflicts, networks of relationships

The second section of this chapter explored some of the linkages between the Libyan civil war and the interests of regional powers. Security and stabilization are undoubtedly major forces driving external support of the Libyan factions. Not yet presented in this paper are the ideological and political factors of external involvement. In this section, we will examine the most powerful regional actors in Libya and their positions regarding the role of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt is the most influential foreign power in the Libyan civil war. Given its proximity to the conflict, and the number of Egyptian nationals present in Libya, preventing spillover and regional destabilization is a core interest for Egypt. In doing so, Egypt takes an active role in combating terrorist groups. The Egyptian army has, for example, conducted airstrikes against IS forces and training facilities. Moreover Egypt has also supported political and armed groups fighting against Islamist militias. Yet navigating the internal divisions of Libya's 'liberal' factions has proved difficult for Egypt.

Egypt's loyalty does not seem to extend beyond the country's immediate interests. Whereas President Al-Sisi stated his support for the GNA in early 2016, Cairo's commitment to the internationally-backed government did not prevent cooperation with Haftar's military campaigns over the summer. By late 2016, Sisi had altogether switched his formal support to Haftar following his seizure of oil facilities. In this instance, Egypt's immediate and long-term interests appear to at odds with another. While supporting the LNA is a path towards combatting terrorism, it also undermines the ability of the GNA to enforce civil military control. A strong central government would be a better means to quell the systemic instability that enables terrorist groups to operate.

A second core interest of Egypt in Libya is the role that the Muslim Brotherhood will play in its future. In 2013, then as Field Marshal, Al-Sisi overthrew the government of Mohamed Morsi, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Sisi subsequently implemented a campaign against political freedoms in Egypt that involved jailing thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters. As Al-Sisi fails to overcome many of the economic challenges that plagued President Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood may be able to capitalize on public discontent over the country's economic management. Preventing the establishment of a strong Muslim Brotherhood organization next door in Libya, is a means for Al-Sisi to mitigate this threat.

Egypt is not the only foreign power to wage a proxy war over the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. The UAE and Russia also seek to weaken the Islamist faction by backing the Tobrouk-based parliament. A rival coalition of Muslim Brotherhood supporters is formed by Qatar, Turkey and Sudan. Contrary to the sponsors of the liberal faction, these states have strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and view its success in Libya as a means to increase their own influence in the region. Both sides support their Libyan allies through a range of resources including arms shipments, intelligence, and funds.

Potential Negotiation Moves

Libya is currently unable to exert influence on broader Middle Eastern politics. The unity government attempts to bring stability to the failed state, which is a foundation towards rebuilding Libya's role in the region. But the GNA has little resources to dedicate towards external while struggling to build legitimacy and power internally. In the future Libya will nonetheless need to engage with the international community to ensure its security and economic recovery. This section of the chapter will identify the areas in which the government will likely engage in diplomacy as well as some potential international partners.

The negotiations that Libya will be part of in the short term will likely pertain to consolidating support for the GNA among Libya's main players. For as long as western powers and the UN continue to support the GNA, a sustained diplomatic effort will be made to reach consensus with dissidents. Gaining the support of the HoR and the LNA is central to the future of the GNA. Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of UNSMIL, has indicated that the terms of the PA - key areas of concern among the HoR - are open to discussion in the future. The zone of possible agreement (ZOPA) for these negotiations will likely involve two issues: 1) new arrangements for the composition of the PC and 2) the role and powers of Haftar in the future.

There is no simple solution to reach a political consensus in Libya. But a coordinated effort by the international community will be necessary for reaching the conflict's resolution. External sponsors are central in determining the parties' best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA). For example, if Haftar continues to receive the support of Egypt, then there is less incentive for the LNA to accept the terms of the PA. This situation captures a dynamic affecting some of Libya's most influential actors: a stalemate arises as each party wants more power than was originally awarded, and prefers to revert to the status quo and hold out for a potentially better arrangement in the future. The support of foreign sponsors makes the cost of boycotting the PA relatively low. By building a consensus among the international community, the government can remove this support system enabling inaction.

Once internal cohesion has been resolved, a second phase of negotiations will likely involve a unified government fostering partnerships with regional actors for investment in the country's reconstruction. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have large construction industries, which will likely seek to enter the Libyan market. Turkish construction companies also had a strong relationship with Libya

under Gadhafi and will see stabilization as an opportunity to renew this relationship. Beyond physical construction, foreign investment in Libya will enter into a new phase as access that was once limited under Gadhafi is opened.

The potential for foreign powers to attain their security interests and pursue economic advantages in Libya will be the drivers of future diplomatic efforts. It will be the objective of the Libyan government to attract foreign investment and markets for energy exports, while not conceding to terms that would undermine its ability to support domestic redevelopment. However, addressing specific negotiation moves is a challenge as current developments still prohibit the government from moving forward with stabilization and development. How the government will engage with regional powers in the future will inevitably be shaped by the resources outlined in section two and the constraints imposed on the government by internal relationships explored throughout this report.

(Endnotes)

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XXII. Morocco: Makhzan in the Mix

Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

Morocco recently rejoined the African Union, indicating a desire to increase its influence in sub-Saharan Africa while declining to make progress on the Western Sahara issue. The country also seeks increased security and prosperity, to raise its standing as a destination for international conferences and negotiations as well as building stronger trade and economic ties across Africa, the Arab Gulf, and the West.

Sources of Leverage

Morocco desires primarily to minimize or eliminate the threat of the Polisario Front. To that end, Morocco has several options: negotiate a peace agreement with the Polisario Front/SADR, gain control over Polisario Front/SADR territory, or maintain the area as a neutral buffer zone, as per the status quo. Morocco also wishes to become a manufacturing and exporting hub between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, increase sub-Saharan influence, counter growing ISIS recruitment and influence in Morocco, and establish or maintain good relations with its neighbors and donor countries.

Morocco has three sources of leverage with which to achieve its goals: geographic, military, and political. In terms of geographic advantage, Morocco is located at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. It therefore serves as a bridge to Europe for movement of goods and people, and plays an important role in migration and trade deals. Militarily, Morocco operates a robust intelligence bureau, which may be used against terrorist threats. Finally, Morocco's political prowess is bolstered by its strong relationship with the West on security issues and its capacity to host global summits, giving Moroccan diplomats access to world leaders.

Internal Conflicts

The monarchy (Makhzan) has near absolute leverage through its control of important government functionaries and royal prerogative guaranteed to it in the Moroccan Constitution, as well as its business and media interests. Although the Makhzan has ceded some power to the parliamentary government, overall it exercises strict control. As a result, political dissent is minimal. Nevertheless, the PJD is generally regarded as the cleanest and most effective political party among a political class struggling for authenticity and efficiency. It seeks increased power through the development of a more representative political system.

In the current Moroccan context, it is most useful to examine two groups of actors. The first can be labeled generally as the institution of the monarchy or the Makhzan and encompasses royal advisors and appointees alongside a collection of political parties variously supported and connected to the palace. The second is political parties that seem to retain some of their own agenda, while being careful not to directly challenge the monarchy so as to be allowed to participate in politics. Currently, this second role is dominated by the Islamist Justice and Development Party, known by its French acronym PJD. Though there are unrecognized political actors and groups, these have largely been kept out of the political mainstream and participation in politics through very successful maneuvering on the part of the Makhzan.

In the most recent elections, ending with record gains for the PJD in the Moroccan Parliament, the division between the PJD and the Makhzan was still starkly evident, especially during the lead-up to the campaign.[1] In the parliamentary elections on October 7th, 2016, over 30 parties competed for 395 seats, though the real contest was seen as between the PJD and the Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), which had vowed to "liberate" Morocco from the Islamists.[2] PAM, though ostensibly a separate entity with its own agenda, was widely recognized as representing the institution of the monarchy in the election. The founder of PAM is now a royal advisor and there has been finger pointing at such figures as the Minster of the Interior (a royal appointee) for alleged assistance to the PAM and anti-PJD bias.[3] Though the PJD was able to increase its seats in the Moroccan Parliament from 107 to 125, winning the largest percentage of the vote, many feel that the Prime Minister[4] has not yet taken advantage of the powers ceded to parliament by the King in post-2011 constitutional changes.[5] With turnout for the election at 43%, reportedly at its worst in the cities where the young and educated are said to have been especially hard to motivate,[6] it seems that much power, in practice if not in writing, still lies with the king and those around him. To understand the basis of this competition for power and the Makhzan's dominance, it is necessary to review the historic depth of the monarchical structure in the country and past evolution of power in Morocco. While the bulk of analysis will focus here, as the writ of the king is still determinative in foreign affairs, attention will turn later to the PJD.

On January 30, 2017, Morocco rejoined the African Union, seemingly seeking to increase regional influence in sub-Saharan Africa, and connect Europe and sub-Saharan Africa as a trade hub.[7] Morocco faces a severe threat from ISIS recruitment.[8] Morocco is a major non-NATO ally (MNNA) of the US.[9]

Actors in the Drama:

<u>Monarchy</u>: the Makhzan and the Moroccan State

The basic structure of power in Morocco today, has deep roots in the history of the country, in some ways going back centuries, but largely determined by activities in the past six decades. Though multiple cosmetic changes are evident since the ascension of King Muhammad VI to the throne in 1999, and since the new 2011 constitution, the roots of the traditional power structure based in the monarchy and extending into the institution of the Makhzan run deep and must be understood in order to grasp the negotiating context of the country.

Before the emergence of Morocco as a modern state, much of the cultural framework for its system of government and the vesting of power in a central institution was already laid. Morocco has a robust tradition of making the linkage of religious offices and those of the state essential to politics and power on both the local and national level. In pre-colonial Morocco, religion and spirituality were used as tools by leaders to legitimize and maintain their own power bases, as well as to undermine those of competitors[10].

The current ruling dynasty in Morocco, the 'Alawi's, emerged in the Tafilalt Oasis in 1666 and have maintained a central power, with varying degrees of regional control, to the present. The prominence and growth of the dynasty's power was in fact due to its tracing descent from the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph and nephew of the Prophet, 'Ali. Legend has it that there was a drought in the oasis and many people were starving. The local leaders of the time sent a message across the empire to the clan of 'Ali, the Hashemites, and asked for someone to come and end the drought. It is said one of his grandsons answered the invitation and made the journey to the oasis. Upon his arrival, the drought ended and the rains returned. He then stayed on to live and raise a family in the area, and that is how the 'Alawi line began. This idea carries a great amount of weight both politically and religiously in terms of establishing the importance of the monarchy.

Another important feature of the Moroccan monarchy's historic role that still carries great weight today and is in part due to this religious heritage is its image as a neutral and respected arbiter of disagreements. This position grew out of a long tradition, which the 'Alawi sultanate came to dominate, of local religious leaders affiliated with saints known as marabouts,[11] serving as neutral adjudicators in local agreements.[12] Today, a similar role for the king is embedded in Morocco's constitutional monarchy style of government.

During the French Protectorate (1912-1956) the position of the monarch was largely that of a figurehead, however, the office was used by the French as a sort of central authority. This increased its relative standing in comparison to the locally based religious leaders with whom it had shared its role as arbiter, and set the monarchy up as a focal point to lead Moroccan resistance to French encroachment on traditions and eventually to lead the nation after French departure. The legitimacy of the locally based religious leaders had been undermined due to their use and attendant association with the French colonial system of rule, and so the only legitimate pillar of Moroccan traditional power left was the monarchy. Though there were some questions about the nature of government post-independence, 90% of Moroccans ultimately supported a monarchy, with power vested in one individual who exercised the laws handed down by God through *shari'a* as the best option[13].

In contrast to King Muhammad V (the king at independence), the emerging post-independence political parties "clamor[ed] for elections when out of power, but [we]re not at all certain they wish[ed] to be controlled by popular choice when in power. Those in power tend[ed] to procrastinate and even to repudiate the electoral process. The tendency to treat elections as an instrument of self-interest rather than an instrument of national interest,"[14] likely had a major impact on the effects of electoral planning in Morocco, as well as in solidifying the Monarchy as the only viable engine for change in the minds of the people. Yet, by the end of the 1960 rural communal elections, "nearly a third of the Moroccan population ha[d] undergone the experience of having a voice in local affairs,"[15] a voice however, protected by the preference of the king. This victory by then King Muhammad V for the institution of the Makhzan was later enshrined into the DNA of the state by his son Hassan II through his passage of a constitution in 1962.

Article 62 of the 1962 Moroccan Constitution effectively gave the king the final say on all bills passed by parliament.[16] Rather than seeing this as an overriding veto, as much of the opposition movement did, Hassan II argued that instead it gave the king the role of arbitrator between the two chambers of parliament.[17] This idea, that the king as Commander of the Faithful existed outside of petty politics and should serve as the guarantor and protector of the constitution, the state religion, and the state itself, was reflected in article 19, which defined the title as such, and further extended in article 23, which declared that "the person of the King shall be inviolable and sacred,"[18] article 26, which gave the king the right to submit referendums directly to national popular vote without going through parliament,[19] and article 28, which allowed the king to deliver messages to parliament and the nation that could not be the subject of debate.[20]

The Moroccan monarchy is in a somewhat different place today than it was under Hassan II. Though the powers accorded to the king in the 2011 constitution are not much changed in practice, the methods by which the monarch imposes his will are more diffuse, as influence and power is also wielded by a network of advisors and allies across the public and private sectors.

The basic fabric holding this party together is relatively unchanged. It is still a strong belief in the central figure of the king (now Mohammad VI) as the embodiment of cohesive Moroccan national identity and tradition stretching back hundreds of years. However, as memory of resistance to colonial rule and escape into a space of independence and self-governance has faded over the generations since 1956, the central role of the king as an important unifying factor against external threats has diminished with his strength instead pitted more against internal threats to the dominance of the Makhzan. The monarchy is generally viewed as the primary governing structure and the only actor that can get anything done in the country. It is also the most reliable distributer of rents extracted from the economy through its many business holdings, though discussion of this fact is suppressed.

Unifying those within the Makhzan are the shared benefits and privileges reaped by its members due to their positions and influence in this structure, as well as a fear (though remote) of what might become of their country should they allow their familiar control to fail. This latter unifier, while sometimes used as a circular argument for itself, is none-the-less a legitimate concern when regarding the chaos engulfing the region.

This Makhzan sees the Middle East as dangerously out of control, and views its role as that of a stabilizing actor with a great deal of expertise to contribute, and therefore an ideal partner for the US and EU. As an Arab state, and a monarchy, it also has strong connections to other similar actors, such as Saudi Arabia in the Gulf, and has been active in conflicts such as the war in Yemen as part of the Saudi coalition.[21] In tune with the traditional role of the Moroccan king as a "neutral arbiter" among his own people and political parties, Morocco seeks to hold this position internationally and regionally as a state actor under the auspices of the monarchy. Examples of this include the recent COP-22 conference in Marrakech, and others commonly held in Rabat, and Casablanca as well, tying these cities into a global cosmopolitan network of cities ranging from Geneva to London, and New York City to Doha. The Makhzan sees Morocco as both an important Islamic center, and a hub of intellectual thought in the Mediterranean and Africa. These perceptions have profound impact on the behavior of the king, who must uphold this pride by continuing to attract international events of consequence to the country, while also projecting the image of a stable, safe, and increasingly prosperous country abroad and to citizens.

In regard to conflicts in the Middle East, the Monarchy is less concerned with the cause of these conflicts than with its own ability to maintain itself through their outcomes. Its true feelings can best be seen in its reactions to the Arab Spring, in particular, the toppling of other long-standing regional leaders due to public unrest. In 2011, in the wake of massive public marches, the king appointed a Consultative Commission for the Revision of the Constitution consisting of 20 members handpicked by the king and his advisors.[22] Though this commission met with a number of political parties, trade unions, and NGOs over the course of its three-months of deliberation, it was widely felt, particularly among the popular February 20th movement, which at one point rallied 100,000 people in the street calling for a boycott of the Constitutional Referendum, that the king had undue influence in this redrafting, as the deliberations themselves were not public, or run by public officials.[23] These actions on the part of the Monarchy seem to point to a strong belief that the collapse of regimes and rise of instability came from poorly managed responses to the demands of the public.

The primary interest of the Monarchy is to maintain its own institutional viability in the face of regional change. As a part of this, the Makhzan has an interest in maintaining Moroccan national stability and that of its immediate neighbors and to be seen as taking an interest in the plight of people who feel left out of economic development.

The position pursued by the Makhzan to insure this is to back the status quo, only allowing those changes absolutely necessary to let out the necessary stress in the system. While it may be that some within this institution do see a legitimate interest in gradually ceding some power to elected officials for the running of the country, this does not appear to be a primary motivating factor in the tweaks made to the constitution or in messaging to the public. It is possible that enough economic development, such as investments in port facilities and related business zones at Tangier-Med,[24] or solar panels[25] and alternative energy sources, combined with focus on becoming a tech hub[26] could reduce public demand for more democratic accountability for a time, but this remains to be seen.

An age old practice of the Monarchy in Morocco has been to preempt the platform of desires from the popular opposition forces with a plan of its own that, while providing nearly identical changes in principle, in practice largely maintains the status quo as the process continues to be driven, and to be seen to be driven, by the king and his advisors, reinforcing the image of his offices as the only force in the country that can get anything done, and thus limiting the public pressure to see his ability to do this reduced in any meaningful way.

The Justice and Development Party (PJD):

The PJD, despite a difficult lead-up to the October 2016 parliamentary election[27] was able to win the largest number of seats, increasing its previous total, and breaking the record for the largest share of seats ever won by a single party in a Moroccan election.[28] Achieving this under pressure from adversaries and after what many regard as a period of governance lacking competence and during which unpopular decisions were made is no small task.[29] Going into the election after struggling to achieve much of their political agenda, and with many regarding their defining interest to be simply retaining power,[30] to come out with such a strong result seems promising and indeed reflects possibilities hinted at by some before the election that a "PJD-led government could provide an opportunity for there to be deeper democratization in the country and to show that reform and stability, despite the discrepancies between them, can go hand in hand."[31] However, since winning the largest number of seats in the election, and thus the right to form a government, the PJD has struggled to pull together a coalition to do so.[32] This may end up hampering its efforts to do more than hold on to power in the short term.

In order for the PJD to enter politics in 1997, it was required to accept the place and power of the monarchy in politics. This means that the public policies of the PJD are constrained by the official position of the Makhzan, and that the party may be unable to push much beyond achieving its original objectives: "to prove that Moroccan Islamists were not a threat to the political system…[and] to prove that Islamists could also be loyal public servants who understood social policies, economic constraints, and the gradual legislative process."[33] If this proves to be the case, it could increase tension evident in the past between internal groups in the PJD, particularly the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR), the active moral and social wing at the heart of the party. No other political parties outside the influence of the Makhzan have yet emerged to contest the PJD's dominance however, so little is likely to change in Morocco's internal politics.

Potential Negotiation Moves

Morocco's most powerful negotiation move would be to seek reconciliation with Algeria and the Polisario Front on the status of Western Sahara. If Algeria and Morocco were to set their differences aside on this matter, they could then combine their considerable intelligence forces regarding terrorist threats in the region, and act more effectively against ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other extremist groups.

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XXIII. NATO: Building a Strong Security Partnership

Introduction

Founded in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created by North American and Western European nations to provide "collective security" to member states from foreign threats – primarily from the Soviet Union.[1] To this end, it is a military alliance that uses political ties to "safeguard the freedom and security" of its 28 members.[2] Although NATO has its own political and military structure, NATO's policies are primarily driven by the interests and goals of its individual member states. This paper will primarily analyze NATO as a decision-making body and vehicle for its member states' goals and policies while only briefly addressing some individual key states.

Identity, Threat Perception, and Role

History

Since its formation, NATO's military alliance has been grounded in the principle of collective security – enshrined in Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty – wherein an attack on one member is considered an attack on all members. This principle was aimed squarely at the USSR until its collapse, at which point the US and the Alliance began to focus on strategic threats to NATO members, for instance preventing or managing conflicts in the Balkans, Afghanistan or Libya.[3] As part of this effort, NATO created the Mediterranean Dialogue in 1994[4], and later on the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative in 2004, to strengthen cooperation and promote values with Middle Eastern partners with the hope that such efforts "could support stability that might in turn alleviate or reduce the intensity of long-standing sources of danger."[5] Initially, NATO's democratic nature caused it to be "perceived with reassurance, rather than as a threat" by regional actors eager to interact with the West as a cooperative partner instead of as an occupying hegemon.[6]

On 9/11, the US triggered the first – and, so far, only – invocation of NATO's collective defense.[7] With this event, Islamic extremism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) became one of primary security issues for Western powers.[8] Despite some disagreement within the Alliance of how to treat these threats – most glaringly, the US's unpopular decision to invade Iraq in 2003 – NATO members still had significant reasons to cooperate in the region, for example to counter the threat of violent extremism.[9]

By the end of the decade, NATO's successes – with "the Euro-Atlantic area…at peace" and a "low" threat against NATO territory[10] – began a shift in priorities. As the Arab Spring spread through the MENA region, and sequestration swept through the American military budget, the US announced its plan to "of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region"[11] while still placing a "premium on US and allied military presence in – and support of – partner nations" in the Middle East.[12] In March 2011, NATO began a six-month mission in Libya, where they carried out air strikes against the forces of former Libyan leader Muammar al Qaddafi. Thereafter, as Syria and Iraq further destabilized and ISIS gained greater prominence, NATO members saw themselves vulnerable to an increasing number of terrorist attacks.

Security Threats

Numerous broad, non-state threats in the region concern NATO. Most visibly, "terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity."[13] Other major threats include the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and "instability or conflict beyond NATO borders," to include "extremism…and trans-national illegal activities such as trafficking in arms, narcotics, and people."[14] There are also specific concerns in the region, such as Iranian missiles and nuclear ambitions, extremism in Pakistan, and the Arab-Israeli conflict that present numerous ongoing challenges to NATO.[15]

In addition to causing increased terrorist activity, instability in the MENA region has led to a major refugee problem[16] for NATO members, most notably Germany, Greece, and Turkey.[17] As the southeastern-most member of the Alliance, Turkey represents NATO's "bulwark against…rising threats" in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Iran, and beyond.[18] Due to its location, Turkey has felt the brunt of instability in the Middle East, in the form of refugees, terrorism, and political instability, more than perhaps any other NATO member.

Causes of Conflict

NATO perceives numerous causes behind these threats and instabilities. At its root, most problems stem from "the extremist ideology…[that] has been influential in the radicalization of Muslim communities."[19] This foundational problem is exacerbated by the "broad failure of secular politics and ideologies in much of the Middle East, and by the radical social and cultural changes"[20] brought about by economic upheaval, globalization, and, most recently, the Arab Spring. Altogether, NATO views the "combination of fluctuating oil revenues, high population growth rates, and a failure to modernize and diversify the overall economy" as constant destabilizing factors in MENA.[21] Despite hopes that the Arab Spring would represent "a new wave of freedom" allowing "people [to break] down the wall of fear,"[22] this wave of uprisings and their aftermath have, instead, only made it more likely that the MENA "will continue to experience chaos, intervention, and counterrevolution for years to come."[23]

Role and Challenges

Although NATO's raison d'etre is as a collective defense alliance, NATO's leadership insists that "the only permanent solution [in the MENA region] will be political, not military."[24] To this end, NATO has emphasized its "civilian crisis management capability"[25] and plans to rapidly deploy civilian specialists as part of a "comprehensive political, civilian and military approach;"[26] however, the bulk of its tangible efforts in the region are, nonetheless, related to security initiatives.[27]

Several long-term structural and more-immediate operational issues prevent NATO from having a more coherent and consistent role in the region. Given the United States' prominent role within NATO, the Alliance is often subject to changes in US foreign policy.[28] For example, the US's recent "growing pressures to reduce its global commitments" have lent a "strategic confusion" to its own foreign policy and, subsequently, to that of NATO.[29] Operationally, Turkey and, at times, the US, France, Greece, and Germany, believe that NATO "has to give full attention" to the MENA region[30] because of a belief that "NATO's future…is in the Greater Middle East."[31] However, as Eastern European members and the US grow increasingly wary of Russian intentions on NATO's eastern flank, they are decidedly less interested in dedicating full attention to the Middle East. Given the challenges facing the US and its foreign policy priorities[32] as well as NATO's structure and principle of consensus-based decision-making,[33] NATO is often unable to articulate a clear role for itself in the MENA region.

Sources of Leverage

Hard Power

Traditionally, NATO has relied primarily upon its hard military power as leverage. The US military – including a "strategic-level nuclear deterrent…large deck aircraft carrier battle forces, upper layer ballistic missile defense interceptor capability, advanced stand-off electronic warfare capability, and large-scale, globally-deployable logistics capabilities"[34] – represents the largest of the Alliance's military hardware. In addition to other countries' militaries and NATO's collective assets – such as ballistic missile defenses and precision-guided munitions[35] – NATO has a 40,000-strong (including sea, air, land, and special forces components)[36] Response Force that is ready to "deploy quickly, wherever needed."[37] This represents a deterrent effect against any potential adversaries while also allowing NATO to "react swiftly and decisively to sudden crises."[38]

Soft Power

Regionally, NATO's soft power leverage is a mixed bag; while some Middle Eastern states grant NATO credibility as an "alliance of democratic states,"[39] the region is, nonetheless, "extremely sensitive to foreign intervention."[40] There are several potential sources of leverage for NATO in the MENA region: legitimacy from its "track record in complying with international law,"[41] past efforts "supporting Muslim populations" in the Balkans and Afghanistan,[42] security and institutional expertise, and military aid resources.[43] In addition, the current institutionalized partnerships with Middle Eastern states – the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative – provide the Alliance with a strong basis to strengthen cooperation in the future. However, there are also numerous obstacles to closer relations: political and "financial constraints" limiting NATO to "very modest funding" for cooperative MENA partners,[44] a damaged "reputation among the Arab public at large,"[45] perceived US control of NATO policy, and, generally, a view of "NATO as a powerful, aggressive alliance committed to promoting the security and political interests of the West."[46]

Internal Conflicts and External Behaviors

Historically, there are diverging opinions within NATO as to what should be the Alliance's strategy, role, scope, and geographical reach.[47] Most European states – notably France and Germany – vehemently opposed the US's unilateral 2003 invasion of Iraq; once done, "it took several years to heal the wounds in NATO."[48] France and Italy's reticence to get involved in the MENA region have limited NATO's role in the region. In 2011, France pressed for a rare NATO mission in Libya, which prompted protests from Germany and Poland and "left the alliance with little political will or appetite to embark on another mission in the region."[49] Since then, France has sought to re-emphasize NATO's role in defending Europe[50] while Turkey has pressed for NATO to lead any operations in the MENA involving Western states.[51] Such internal conflicts and disagreements often result in non-action or in individual NATO members acting unilaterally outside the Alliance's umbrella.

These disagreements within NATO – and within individual Alliance members' own foreign policies – have occasionally led to incoherent NATO policies and contradictory actions. Even though NATO has noted that a military operation in Syria would only worsen the humanitarian situation,[52] the US,[53] UK,[54] France,[55] Germany,[56] and Turkey[57] have, to various extents, been involved in either conducting air strikes, or supporting factions on the ground. These instances of NATO members embarking on non-NATO missions can lead to confusion – even within NATO itself. For instance, Turkey recently expressed concern that NATO is aiding anti-Turkey Kurdish militants, to which NATO responded that "NATO is not present in Syria…Those decisions have been taken by the U.S.-led coalition."

Other internal conflicts include the prioritization and geographical extent of the threats facing NATO. As previously mentioned, while much of NATO views Russia as "the gravest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War,"[58] Turkey is sounding the alarm that Syria "threatens all NATO member states" and that the situation there is creating a "hotbed for terrorist activity" and a refugee crisis that "poses many security threats in the eastern Mediterranean and Europe."[59] Despite some member states urging NATO to focus on the refugee crisis stemming from the south, the Alliance continues to reinforce its eastern flank while avoiding NATO involvement in Syria.[60]

External Relationships

United Nations

As a UN Chapter VIII regional security organization, NATO enjoys international legitimacy. The UN has given a mandate to NATO missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya while NATO has supported UN operations in Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia.[61] When operating under the UN umbrella and within a Security Council mandate, NATO has "maximum political legitimacy for military actions."[62]

African Union

Whereas NATO is a political-military alliance focused on collective security and crisis management, the African Union (AU) "prioritizes comprehensive socio-economic development" while also cooperating on human security and, to a limited extent, peace support operations.[63] Notwithstanding these differences, NATO has "specifically singled out the AU as an important actor" and potential partner for NATO with a relationship founded on cooperative security and international stability.[64] To this end, NATO-AU cooperation is marked by training AU peacekeeping personnel, lending airlift capabilities, and other capacity-building work;[65] however, instead of a steady partnership, cooperation is "ad hoc, specific, fragmented, short-range, lacking in strategic and political direction and beset by a lack of balance in giver-recipient cooperation."[66]

MENA Partnerships: the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

NATO currently has two main vehicles for partnership in the MENA region. Although well-intentioned, these initiatives are beset by a broad approach made even more difficult by the "lack of full consensus…on the identification of security threats."[67]

The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) was created in 1994 with current members Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia[68] to overcome "political obstacles through diplomatic dialogue."[69] In addition to promoting regional stability and security, its goals include achieving "better mutual understanding," and dispelling myths about NATO among MD partners.[70] Along with political meetings and consultations, NATO and the MD have a program of training and collaboration on crisis response, emergency planning, diplomacy, and armed forces as well as potential joint military exercises and military educational exchanges.[71] This relationship is founded on shared security concerns – Iranian missile proliferation, increasing extremism in Libya, and piracy concerns – but is also handicapped by mistrust and the "recalcitrance of Arab countries' leaders to involve NATO in areas that encroach on internal security."[72] Additionally, with Israel alongside Arab states in the MD, NATO-MD cooperation has been "hindered" due to a lurking concern that "NATO is seeking to solve the Arab-Israel conflict"[73] – an impression NATO has been "keen" to avoid in the past.[74] However, it should be noted that having a security partnership that includes both Arab states and Israel is also a strength for NATO in being able to convene the most important actors in the region.

As a "bottom-up approach" to cooperative security through "practical military-to-military ties,"[75] NATO initiated the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in 2004.[76] The ICI currently consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Despite repeated invitations, Saudi Arabia and Oman have avoided full membership, instead choosing to occasionally send observer delegations.[77] As with the MD, the ICI is founded with the intent of combating shared threats. However, cooperation is plagued by a significant "lack of clarity about their intended purpose" as well as disagreement on whether Western interference in the region is a source of security or further instability.[78] Despite the goals of cooperation, "the achievements of the ICI over the last decade have not been very promising" due to the lack of a "unified…vision toward the strategic partnership."[79] While there are opportunities for more NATO-ICI security cooperation,[80] the results of engagement have, so far, been modest.[81]

Bilateral Partnerships

Most of NATO's actual military cooperation takes place under the auspices of bilateral agreements (between the NATO alliance and individual countries).[82] Except for Algeria, all countries in the MD have additional bilateral partnerships with NATO.[83] These arrangements – the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) – are the least-involved and least-demanding of the different levels of NATO partner agreements.[84] Unlike more involved partnerships that entail joint NATO-led operations,[85] these programs focus on "enhancing bilateral political dialogue" and "tailoring the cooperation with NATO according to key national security needs."[86] The customized aspect of these agreements is crucial as it gives "built-in flexibility"[87] to states "traditionally apprehensive of any Western interference in Gulf security affairs."[88] Although ICI members largely prefer bilateral cooperation to structured group initiatives,[89] no ICI states have formalized partnership agreements with NATO.[90] While "a little cooperation is better than no cooperation," critics judge these bilateral ties with Arab countries to be "modest and insufficient" and plagued by "lack of funding."[91]

Potential Negotiation Moves

NATO has several options to increase its influence in the region and promote better cooperation. The most obvious options involve the use or threat of use of NATO firepower. Soft power options, while less instinctual for a military alliance, are more likely to bring about long-term security and stability on NATO's southern flank. Given NATO's limited diplomatic involvement in the region, most soft power bargaining chips include its partnerships, capacity building missions, and the fact that it represents a collective of 28 European and North American states.

Track I Engagement

To increase NATO's influence in future negotiations, NATO may initiate further Head of State engagements either at a bilateral level or in regional fora. Such a concerted effort to attract and engage senior leaders from MENA countries would raise awareness, increase the productivity and policy outcomes of dialogues, give NATO more political credibility, and generally strengthen ties in the region.[92]

Broaden Engagement

Currently, NATO has very limited partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Oman who, together, represent over 70 percent of defense expenditures among Gulf countries.[93] Both countries have been reticent to join the ICI – Oman because of a perceived anti-Iran bent in the ICI and Saudi Arabia because of a resistance to meet on a level playing field with the smaller Gulf kingdoms[94] – but still show interest in working with NATO. The Alliance could seek a "tailored arrangement" with Saudi Arabia outside the framework of the ICI.[95] Such an agreement with a strong political, economic, and security actor in the region may accord NATO more influence and promote cooperation in future engagements,[96] particularly as each state goes through leadership changes.[97] Based on the belief that some cooperation is better than none, NATO may seek to engage regional actors who are hesitant to join the pre-existing dialogue formats through bilateral agreements on individual bases.

Deepen Engagement

Several opportunities exist for NATO to deepen its engagement with its existing – and potential – partners. First, NATO could offer partners increased soft-security support in the form of WMD monitoring, intelligence and surveillance capabilities and expertise, training, consulting,[98] and intelligence and analysis sharing.[99] Numerous opportunities exist for NATO to offer aid and assistance as carrots to willing and cooperative partners.

NATO could also deepen its relationships by engaging with other states' perceptions of their own security threats. Rather than solely focusing on NATO concerns and where MENA interests overlap, NATO could emphasize cooperation with states on the states' own terms. This could mean increased maritime engagement – to include strategic planning, consultation, and training – for states worried about piracy or Iran's increasing access-denial capabilities[100] or inviting regional partners to participate in a dialogue or working group on the political stabilization of Iraq.[101] While such interactions may not directly feed into NATO's shared security interests or preferences, the experiences and good will garnered may produce strong cooperation on issues of mutual concern in the future.

One added benefit of deeper engagement is that lower-level military-to-military ties could withstand political pressures and maintain relationships between states and NATO during potential crises. At times when "reciprocal visits" between NATO and Arab countries "may raise more questions than answers," these training opportunities and military exchanges can act as a "neutral ground for informal meetings."[102] Such a backchannel avenue for communications could help stabilize political ties and maintain NATO's influence in negotiations during times of political or diplomatic instability.

Conclusion

In an age of "significant budgetary pressures,"[103] Alliance members are unable to bolster their funding levels for additional cooperative projects with partners in the region.[104] Some of these options – many of the "soft-security" tools, diplomatic engagement, and emphasizing pre-existing frameworks – could be accomplished with nominal new spending, thus avoiding "difficult debates at the political level."[105] However, to truly be effective, these initiatives would need to be "complemented by measures that would unavoidably have a budgetary impact."[106]

Ultimately, these funding constraints are indicative of a larger political question about the direction, goals, and priorities of NATO engagement in the MENA region. To truly step up engagement efforts in the region would "necessitate a political consensus" among allies that would be difficult to forge.[107] The ensuing debates would have to address the fundamental issue of the "Alliance's willingness to undertake – and actual level of – engagement in the region's security."[108] This political dilemma remains the key theme of NATO's involvement in the MENA – and, in the "current environment of fiscal duress," this dilemma will likely continue to "generate tension over where resources should be channeled."[109]

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XXIV. Palestine: Steadfastness and Resistance Despite Failed Leadership & Loss

Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Shared Identity

Narrative, particularly historical narratives, are a key aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself, with many on all sides having fundamentally different experiences, hearing different narratives, and competing for the power of 'the truth.' Thus to write of - or to read about - a Palestinian identity, particularly as an American or Israeli, is a difficult task, as the writer and reader are themselves situated in the conflict, both through their own experiences and the narratives they have heard previously. Recognizing this difficulty, this chapter attempts to explain Palestinian narratives, experiences, and interests from Palestinians' own points of view.

Palestinian identity is complex: it includes both a shared 'Palestinian' sense of displacement, steadfastness, and yearning for autonomy, yet also a disparate, local, grounded experience based in individual circumstances. Scholars of Palestinian identity write that it, like all other national identities, is 'constructed' from multiple narratives, and is at once born into a struggle with Zionism yet also independent of the Zionist movement.[1] The concept of 'sumud,' steadfastness, underlies many Palestinian narratives, bringing hope to a history of displacement and to a deep-seated fear of continuing loss and abandonment.

Tensions exist in narratives around Palestinian identity and politics as to how the ideals of justice and rights relate to realities on the ground, pragmatism, and compromise, particularly in relation to Israel. A unitary 'Palestinian perspective' with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is elusive; while some support cooperation with Israel towards a final status agreement in two states, others advocate for the goal of a single democratic state, and still others support neither of these options. Fatah, the leading party of the Palestinian Authority (the governing body established during the peace accords of the 1990s), calls for a "Palestinian independent state on the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 with East Jerusalem as its Capital."[2] This is commonly known as the "two-state solution."

It is important to note that even using the name 'Palestine' to refer only to the land based within the 1967 borders, while officially the government narrative, is controversial. For many Palestinians, "Palestine" refers to the historic territory of Palestine (all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea), including what is now internationally recognized as Israel, and the meaning of the term is often context-dependent.[3]

By the end of 2012, the estimated number of Palestinians in the world was 11.6 million, with 1.4 million in Israel (commonly referred to as Israeli Arabs), 4.4 million in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and the remainder in diaspora around the world.[4] The experience of being 'Palestinian' is different for individuals in each of these localities, though there are shared narratives of exile and a quest for liberation in Palestinian communities in historic Palestine and around the world. This chapter will focus primarily on the identity narratives of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under Palestinian Authority (Fatah) and Hamas rule, though it is important to keep other Palestinians around the world in mind (in particular Palestinian/Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinian refugees in the rest of the Middle East) as they are also stakeholders in any final status agreement.

History

The Palestinian narrative of the history of the land--experienced by Palestinians as a history of continued loss and displacement--demonstrate how Palestinians understand their context and identity. The land of historic Palestine was ruled by the Ottomans from 1516 through World War I, after which the British took over administration of the area under the British Mandate.[5] The British backed the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration. Though the document stated that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," Palestinians experienced the Jewish immigration as colonization of their land and a slow process of displacement that has continued through to today.[6]

During the first half of the 20th century, as Jewish immigration intensified, Palestinians were displaced from their land.[7] While at first Palestinians and Jews lived peacefully side-by-side, what Palestinians perceived as a gradual takeover by the Jewish populations sparked anger and unrest. The 1936-39 Arab Revolt included demands to end immigration or land sales to Jews and non-payment of taxes, and was a key moment for the solidification of Palestinian anti-colonial sentiment, narratives, and identity.[8] The revolts of the late 1930s play an important role in a Palestinian narrative of resistance to colonization and occupation, a thread that has continued in the expression of Palestinian consciousness through the narrative of popular uprisings (*intifadas*) of the late 20th century until today.[9]

The *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1947-48 included the forced displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, while 150,000 remained within the borders of the newly declared State of Israel.[10] Palestinians recall massacres of villages, entire towns

expelled, and widespread threats of violence; most fled for what they thought would be a few days, taking only what they could carry.[11] Of all of the wounds in Palestinian history, the Nakba constitutes the deepest: the actual destruction and displacement, the feeling of being abandoned by Arab leaders and the world, the subsequent erasure of their experience, and the unjust loss of home, land, and culture it engendered all carry through Palestinian narratives and identity to this day.[12] Large refugee camps were set up in the West Bank, Gaza, and surrounding countries. Palestinian refugees now live around the world, with particularly large populations in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, where they have been met with varying degrees of acceptance.[13] During this time in exile, the Palestine Liberation Organization was formed to act as a representative of the Palestinian people in the midst of otherwise disorganized leadership. Meanwhile, Jews migrated to the land and lived in Palestinian homes, renamed their villages, built forests over the ruins; Palestinians see this as a deliberate erasure of their presence.[14]

A further 300,000 Palestinians became refugees during the Six-Day War of 1967 in what Palestinians call the *Naksa*, or setback, by which Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and took control of the West Bank, Golan Heights, Gaza, Sinai, and East Jerusalem.[15] Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem continues to this day. The defeat of the Arab states led to the beginning of the official American-Israeli alliance and to the termination of Palestinian hope for support from their Arab neighbors.[16]

After the 1967 war, Israeli citizens began settling in the West Bank with "tacit approval of the Israeli government."[17] Over the years, the numbers of settlers have steadily increased, with around 400,000 in 130 separate settlements in the West Bank and 200,000 in East Jerusalem by the end of 2016.[18] While some are religiously motivated, others moved to the settlements because of the strong financial incentives offered by the Israeli government to settlers. Palestinians see the continued settlement as an Israeli attempt to cripple a potential Palestinian state, claim more natural resources, and generally create 'facts on the ground' to strengthen Israeli positions, all with no real will towards a lasting peace. The settlements are a key issue of contention in a final status agreement.

Resistance to occupation and colonization constitutes an important aspect of Palestinian identity and manifests in many ways -- political, artistic, social, and economic as well as violent -- that are individually determined and societally sustained. The most notable and concentrated resistance to occupation has occurred in the two intifadas, or uprisings, of 1987 - 93 ad 2000 - 05:**[19]** "The first intifada was a largely spontaneous series of Palestinian demonstrations, nonviolent actions (such as mass boycotts and Palestinians refusing to work in Israel), and attacks (using rocks, Molotov cocktails, and occasionally firearms) on Israelis," while the second was far more violent, including "suicide bombings, rocket attacks, and sniper fire."[20] During both, the Israeli military responded with incursions and violence, causing the Palestinian death toll to be far higher than the Israeli one.[21]

Palestinians point to the many UN Resolutions over the years that have condemned what they see as Israeli colonization as evidence of their legitimacy of their claims. UN Resolution 194 (1948) "*Resolves* that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible"[22] Resolution 303 (1949) places Jerusalem under a "permanent international regime,"[23] while Resolution 23246 (1974): "*Reaffirms* the legitimacy of the people's struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle;" and "*Strongly condemns* all Governments which do not recognize the right to self-determination and independence of peoples under colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation, notably the peoples of Africa and the Palestinian people"[24] Security Council Resolutions 242 (calling for "Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in [1967]") and 338 (calling for negotiations toward a "just and durable peace") formed the basis for the Camp David Accords of the late 1970s and for subsequent negotiations based on the two-state solution.[25] These resolutions and others have reinforced a Palestinian feeling of legitimacy of a just case. Despite the multiple resolutions, many Palestinians feel that the UN and its member states have not taken definitive action, which reinforces a Palestinian sense of abandonment by international bodies.

The Oslo Accords of the 1990s were seen by the world as a positive step toward a lasting peace, as they constituted the first mutual recognition between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, the creation of the Palestinian Authority to govern the West Bank and Gaza, and the mutual agreement on a five-year plan to continue final status negotiations.[26] Largely an agreement to continue negotiating, the Accords were supposed to address following issues: "Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements borders, relations, and cooperation with other neighbors on common issues."[27] As part of the Accords, the West Bank was divided into three areas: Area A under full Palestinian control, Area B with Palestinian civil control and Israeli military control, and Area C, in which all settlements are located, with full Israeli control. As of 2013, Area A comprised 18% of the West Bank, Area B 22% and Area C 60%.[28] While these spatial designations remain today, the remainder of the process broke down in the mid-1990s, ending with the second intifada in 2000, and initial expectations were never realized.

While some Palestinians see the Oslo Accords in a positive light, others see them as a major loss, and see the PA as a 'sub-contractor' for the occupation.[29] A series of poor decisions by Palestinian leadership lost Palestinians territory and negotiating power; for example, Edward Said writes that "[The Palestinians] had no detailed maps of their own at Oslo; nor, unbelievably, were there any individuals in the negotiating team familiar enough with the Occupied Territories to contest decisions or to provide alternate plans" to an Israeli negotiating team with "comprehensive geographical knowledge."[30]

Thus the Accords marked the beginning of the people's faltering trust in ruling party Fatah, primarily for what they saw a cowed party accepting the status quo of foreign powers without fighting for what they believed was theirs by right. Many continue to view the Oslo Accords as a failed agreement which has served to further weaken the Palestinian position and territorial claims, largely through continued loss of control over land and the continued construction of illegal settlements. Many Palestinians see this continued land takeover as evidence both that Israel does not truly want a peaceful solution and that their own leaders have failed them in negotiations time and time again. Due to this experience, future negotiations are now viewed with suspicion.

Many also point to the situation in the Gaza Strip as further evidence of the failure of attempted solutions to the conflict. The Gaza Strip is in dire straits after ten years of Israeli military blockade, initiated after Hamas's takeover of power and supported by Egypt to the South. As of mid-2016, the unemployment rate was over 40%, with 47% of households suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity, due to the lack of freedom of movement and constrained trade caused by the Israeli blockade as well as internal mismanagement on the part of Hamas.[31] The Izz a-Din Al-Qassam Brigades and others launch rockets into Southern Israel in response to the blockade and other provocations.[32] Israeli bombardments of Gaza in 2008, 2012, and 2014 have killed thousands, injured tens of thousands, and destroyed countless homes and livelihoods.[33] In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that "The limited access to construction materials and critical equipment since 2007 has delayed the construction, repair and upgrade of homes and infrastructure, needed to address rapid population growth and the devastation caused by recurrent hostilities."[34]

While the conflict with Israel is seen by many as the main cause of the injustice against Palestinian, the struggle has fed on and become part of many other factors that have shaped the wider Middle East and many Palestinians feel let down by the rest of the Arab countries, who they see as using their cause for political gain without truly working on behalf of Palestinians. Palestinian refugees are treated with varying degrees of rights in host countries in the region, from Jordan, where Palestinians have gained nearly-complete citizenship rights, to Lebanon, where Palestinians still live in underserviced refugee camps as second-class residents in a land not their own. Many Palestinian refugees in the Arab World have been twice- and thrice- displaced by other violence in the region and are often not welcomed or offered services in their new sites of displacement as they do not meet the definitions of citizenry to qualify for aid. Their poor treatment is complicated by the fact that normalization of their status would constitute a de facto acceptance of the status quo in Israel/Palestine and loss of momentum behind the Right of Return, neither of which Palestinians desire.[35]

A further salient aspect of the Palestinian narrative is the political disagreement on the extent of cooperation with or boycott of Israel and the 'peace process.' This disagreement has manifest into the division of Palestinian political affairs, with several factions and political parties fighting for control of government, negotiations, and narrative. While these will be discussed in detail in the 'Internal Conflicts' section below, a short introduction to the parties is presented here.

Fatah (a backwards acronym for Harakat Al-Tahrir Al-Watani Al-Filastini, the Movement for the National Liberation of Palestine) is the largest faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the current leader of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Founded in the 1950s, Fatah is the "secular icon of Palestinian nationalism."[36] The party has marketed itself as committed to state-building through the Palestinian Authority in the secular democratic tradition and, since the Oslo Accords, to working with the Israeli government as necessary to forward these aims.[37]

Hamas (an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Resistance Movement) was founded in 1987 during the first Intifada with the stated mission of liberating Palestine through Islamic nationalist resistance and jihad.[38] Hamas was created in part to contrast the secular PLO that was willing to negotiate with Israel, and includes a militant wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Hamas is involved in social work and providing care for those in need, much in the tradition of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.[39] Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Elections in 2006 in an unexpected victory, which led to internal Palestinian fighting, resulting in Hamas taking control over the Gaza Strip and Fatah in control of the West Bank, a split that remains today.[40]

While Fatah and Hamas constitute the main elements of the Palestinian political landscape today, other political parties also exercise measures of influence within the PLO. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) is a party of "pragmatic leftists" with a significant militia and little influence.[41] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist Arab Organization, was founded in 1967 by prominent Christian Palestinian politician George Habash.[42] The PFLP's influence has diminished significantly within the PLO as a result of their repeated boycott of elections and the ambiguity of their platforms. However, they have begun to slowly reestablish influence through Palestinian civil society and remain a port of the PLO's political fabric.[43] PFLP has also split into factions over the years; the most significant of these is the General Command (PFLP-GC). This group, known to be militant nationalists, are most prominent now in the Syrian refugee population, specifically in the Yarmouk refugee camp.[44] The Palestinian National Initiative (PNI), founded during the Second Intifada, is a specifically nonviolent party, while the Palestinian People's Party (PPP) comprises Palestine's socialist movement. However, these latter two parties have limited political influence and are most prominent in grassroots and NGO efforts.[45]

Palestinian Civil Society, including myriad NGOs, professional associations, and social initiatives, also plays a key role in the Palestinian political sphere, given how factionalized the government has become and how little trust it engenders among certain pockets of society. These organizations are largely externally funded and are a growing realm of Palestinian leadership.[46] While there is

not broad agreement among all members of Civil Society on any particular issues, NGOs speak on behalf of groups of Palestinians, ally with external partners, and wield sources of leverage in the political arena, such that any peace process will not be successful without some civil society support.

Sources of Leverage

Fatah:

Political Leverage: Currently, Palestine is recognized by and shares diplomatic and bilateral relations with 137 states.[47] Palestine was granted non-Member Observer State status by the sixty-seventh general assembly of the UN in 2012, despite Israel's objections.[48] While largely symbolic, as Palestine does not constitute a state de facto, this recognition offers access to political bodies and is a marker of legitimacy in global terms, constituting a source of leverage for Fatah.

Cooperation with Israel is a further source of political leverage for Fatah, who stand as the only current representative body of the Palestinian people generally willing to work with Israel on a negotiated agreement. While this does put Fatah at some disadvantage internally, as it loses credibility for this in Palestinian eyes if negotiations turn out unfavorably, the threat of hard-line parties taking over should negotiations go poorly constitutes some small source of leverage for Fatah in relation to Israel. Fatah may have some convening power, but this is diminished by their relatively weak internal support.

Soft Power: As described above, UN resolutions condemning Israeli actions are a source of international leverage, diminishing Israel's reputation in the world, which renders Palestinian parties relatively more powerful in relation to Israel. Most recently, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which passed with only an abstention from the United States, has further condemned the "flagrant violation of international law" that is the continued construction of Israeli settlements on recognized Palestinian land.[49] This and other resolutions from the UN and other international bodies provide leverage for the Palestinian Authority and its international sympathizers to apply pressure and generates some hope for the eventual existence of Palestinian state in the 1967 borders.

Hamas:

Political Leverage: Through recent revisions to the Hamas Charter (dropping its explicit call for Israeli destruction)[50] and by severing ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas will likely gain external support from the broader Arab World, in particular Egypt and Gulf States. Deepening these connections may allow Hamas to build a broader coalition and further increase its political leverage in relation to both Israel and Fatah. It also may constitute a new source of economic leverage if donations to the group increase as a result of this shift.

Soft Power: Hamas' refusal to compromise on recognition of or normalization of relations with Israel has gained it legitimacy in the eyes of Palestinians frustrated with the status quo and failures of Fatah.

Geographic Leverage: The dire situation in Gaza notwithstanding, Hamas' control over the territory constitutes a source of geographic leverage. One notable aspect of this is the tunnels Hamas has built under the barriers restricting Gazan movement, which have become "Gaza's biggest industry."[51] With one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, Gazans see the tunnels as a means of basic survival. The creation and use of the tunnels as a form of resistance gives "heart to Palestinians" and offers the feeling of some advantage, however small.[52]

Military - Hamas' military wing, the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, launches rockets into Southern Israel and stockpiles weapons in the Gaza strip in preparation for future attacks.[53] While most Palestinians do not see these rockets as a true threat to Israeli national security, given the Iron Dome technology, the limited range of rockets, and the vast capabilities of the Israeli army, the perceived threat is menacing to Israelis and engenders some Palestinian pride in resistance.

Civil Society:

Economic / Political Leverage -The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement was launched in 2005 by 170 Palestinian unions, political parties, and NGOs, calling on the international community to "impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era."[54] The Movement's demands include: that Israel end occupation and colonization of Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem; give full equal rights to Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and "respect, protect, and promote" the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees to their homes.[55] A 2015 Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research poll states that "86% [of Palestinians surveyed] support the campaign to boycott Israel and impose sanctions on it and 88% say they have stopped buying Israeli products, such as those manufactured by Tnuva or Strauss."[56]

A RAND Corporation study estimates that the boycott will decrease Israel's GDP by $15 billion below present trends in 2024 due to "reduced international investment and tourism because of perceived instability in the region and from a broader BDS movement in Europe" and in turn will similarly decrease Palestinian GDP by $2.4 billion. Past Arab boycotts have cost Israel anywhere from an estimated $1 - 5 billion dollars per year.[57] The BDS Movement also provides a source of soft power in the damage it has caused to Israeli international reputation, particularly in Europe.

Soft Power: The Palestinian refugees spread across the Middle East are also a potential source of leverage, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan. The number and influence of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon is significant enough that they will influence the support of those governments for any agreement concerning Palestine and may limit the range of what the Arab World will accept.

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

As described above, internal conflicts are a key source of tension in Palestine and hinder any unified voice in relation to Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.[58]

Fatah

As the secular-nationalist party in control of the Palestinian Authority, Fatah is the recognized leader of the Palestinians in external relations. Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, has led the party for the last eleven years.[59] Fatah has focused on several issues as part of its standing platform, including: the situation of Jerusalem, the refugee crisis, Palestinian prisoners in Israel, peace and security, national unity and the importance of building strong institutions for the endurance of a strong society. A common slogan used by party officials is "security and safety for citizens."[60] The Oslo Accords stand as the most significant agreement during Fatah's time in power, and serve to define the image of the party to Palestinians today, as described above. Though initially Fatah was affiliated with terrorist groups, it has cut of all official ties, unlike Hamas. Fatah maintains a delicate balance between pragmatism and idealism, negotiating and compromising with the Israeli government while also retaining enough support from a broad range of Palestinians such that the PA stays in power.

Abbas' March 2017 approval rating stood at 36%, and some see him as responsible for the "deterioration of the political, economic, and social situation."[61] Factions within Fatah would like to see Abbas step down, as they believe his re-elections over the years to be a farce and his position in relation to Israel to be weak.[62] Voices of dissent within the party include Mohammed Dahlan and Marwan Barghouti, who is currently in Israeli prison. In early May, 2017, Palestinians voted in local and municipal elections for the first time since 2012, but the elections were boycotted by all parties except for Fatah.[63]

Hamas

Hamas' hard-line approach to the issue of occupation and its stance against normalizing relations with Israel has made the group attractive not only to a Palestinian population that is increasingly frustrated with the inaction of Fatah and impotence of peace processes, as well as to the significant refugee populations in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.[64] Fatah and Hamas do share several common interests, including ending the occupation, releasing Palestinian prisoners, and the building of strong Palestinian institutions.[65] Hamas also retains a firm stance on the refugee right of return as part of their demands for any peace agreement.[66]

Recently, Hamas has rebranded and re-shuffled its leadership, in a strategy "aimed at appeasing domestic constituencies and establishing some distance between Hamas and the parent movement of the Muslim Brotherhood" to increase domestic support and strengthen ties to Egypt.[67] May 2017 revisions to the Hamas charter include an acceptance of the principle of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, (which some say constitutes a de facto, implied recognition of Israel's existence) and dropping the call for complete destruction of Israel.[68] Despite the election of hard-liner Yahya Sinwar, one of the original founders of the group's military wing, these revisions may indicate that Hamas is signaling some willingness to negotiate.[69] Internally Palestinian opinion is split on Hamas; while the Hamas candidate would win against a Fatah candidate were an election to be held today in Gaza, residents of the Strip are also deeply frustrated with their government (for example, more blame Hamas and Fatah than blame Israel for the electricity shortages in Gaza).[70]

Palestinian Civil Society

Among Palestinians surveyed in March 2017, Only 25% say the Palestinian leadership is doing all it can to end the occupation.[71] Many Palestinians have turned towards Civil Society institutions to further their causes and to support peace and eventual self-rule.[72] Through non-violent action, institution-building, service provision and advocacy, these organizations work towards their goals in extra-governmental ways.[73] As most organizations are dependant on external aid and support, they maintain a delicate balance of donor wishes, international views on the Palestinian issue, and local desires and cultural contexts.[74] The sector is not homogeneous, even in support for the BDS Movement, even though that is perhaps the widest-supported civil society initiative to date. Civil Society organizations are not free from accusations of corruption and failure to achieve tangible results, and are subject to many of the same dynamics faced by Palestinian political parties.[75]

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Palestine's external network of relationships with the wider Middle East and the West have been fraught and uncertain. Given their historical experiences, Palestinians largely feel that they have few true allies among the Arab League, Turkey, the Unites States, and Europe. However, countries who are not actively participating in advancing the Palestinian cause, such as Saudi Arabia and the United

States, do fund Palestinian organizations and government.

Jordan

Jordan's relationship with the Palestinians is largely characterized by Jordan's own careful balancing position, aiming to maintain Israeli and US support while also not offending its own population to the point of large-scale protest. Jordan's demographic concerns stem from the fact that it has had a significant Palestinian refugee population since the major waves of migration in 1948 and 1967; today, approximately 70% of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin.[76]

The particularly complicated relationship between Jordan and Palestine has been defined since the 1950s by Jordan's ultimately unsuccessful, and Palestinian eyes, illegitimate, annexation of the West Bank.[77] The Black September Rebellion of 1970 was a particularly contentious moment of violence between Palestinians in Jordan and the Jordanian government.[78] Today, most Palestinians living in Jordan have Jordanian citizenship and are generally treated as equal, though some discrimination and social exclusion still exists. Despite this, neither Palestinians in Jordan nor Jordanians of Hashemite origin support the "Jordan option" (by which Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank would be transferred to Jordan or Jordan would rule over Palestinian areas of the West Bank), which is sometimes touted by the Israeli right wing.[79]While Jordan is theoretically supportive of the Palestinian cause, it is constrained by its relationships with Israel and the US and thus may not have credibility as a potential mediator or broker of a peace deal in Palestinian eyes.

Lebanon

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have fared far worse than their counterparts in Jordan. Notably, most Palestinian refugees are Sunni Muslims while Lebanese governance is split between Christians, Shi'as, and Sunnis, all of whom are regularly vying for greater influence within the government.[80] The Ta'if Agreement of 1989, which ended Lebanon's civil war, contains a specific clause which states "there shall be…no repatriation [of Palestinians in Lebanon]".[81] This has left the Palestinian refugees of Lebanon in limbo; denied citizenship, recognition, and settlement rights. In recent years, the continuing influx of migrants fleeing Syria's civil war, including twice-displaced Palestinian refugees from Syria, have added to a further humanitarian issue that shows no sign of being dealt with anytime soon.

Syria

Palestinian refugees are a much smaller proportion of the population than their counterparts in Jordan or Lebanon, and enjoy less social integration than in Jordan but better treatment than in Lebanon.[82] The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War has shifted relationships between Palestinians and Syria: Fatah does not have relations with Damascus, but enjoyed popular support in the bigger refugee camps, particularly Yarmouk;[83] Hamas has withdrawn support for the Assad government, evidenced by their removal of their headquarters from Damascus to Doha;[84] There also seem to be some Palestinian elements that still support the Assad regime, particular stemming from the refugee camps in Yarmouk. Overall, refugee camps in Syria have suffered a great deal as a result of the war, being the victims of rebel, government, and ISIS targeting.

Egypt

The relationship between Egypt and Palestine has been frought over the years, complicated by Egypt's peace deal with Israel. While Gamal Nasser's era of Pan-Arabism carried with a beacon of hope for Palestinian statehood, the crushing defeat of 1967 showed that neither Egypt nor the Pan-Arab alliance could be a strong counter to Israel. Since then, the regime of Anwar Sadat saw the re-opening of bilateral relations with Israel. Egyptian attempts to facilitate reconciliation, not only between Israel and Palestine, but also within the Palestinian Authority itself continually have met with failure. Additionally, Egypt's perceived complicity in the destruction of Gaza served to sully their credibility in the eyes of Hamas and Palestinians.[85] After the Arab Spring, a shift seemed possible, with Muslim Brotherhood leadership that was clearly sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.[86] Yet the failure of Mohammed Morsi's government and the following coup that brought General Al-Sisi to power dashed these hopes. A clear bias against the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas by extension once again became the government view in Egypt. Egypt's continuing relationship with Israel and aid in the blockade of the Rafah Crossing into Gaza[87] as well as Hamas' alleged cooperation with extremist groups in the Sinai[88] both diminish trust and reduce the chances that Egypt might assist with a Palestinian-Israeli deal. The recent changes in the Hamas charter may signal a shift in these dynamics and the potential for increasing Egyptian-Palestinian relationships.

ISIS

A March 2017 poll by the Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research shows that "92% [of Palestinians] believe that ISIS does not represent true Islam and 80% support the war against it."**[89]** ISIS is decried by the PA for being a ruthless terrorist organization and their actions are condemned. While it is unclear whether ISIS and Hamas have established any kind of relationship, the ISIS targeting of the Yarmouk refugee in Syria in 2015 has served to earn them the ire of Hamas. At this point, it would be reasonable to believe that no cooperation between ISIS and any part of the Palestinian Authority exists.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah has supported Hamas with military aid in the past and the two share some similar stances towards Israel. Despite this, the relationship is a delicate one, as Hamas is wary of siding only with the Hezbollah-Iran alliance and thus against Saudi Arabia, and seeks to strategically balance its allegiances.[90] Hezbollah was displeased at the recent revisions to Hamas' charter, so the future relationship between the two is unclear.[91] Hezbollah and the PA have many fewer ties. Hezbollah is labelled a major terrorist threat by Israel, and the group's sponsor, Iran, is seen by Israel as a looming threat, both of which factor into Israel's stance toward security in relation to Palestinian statehood.

Turkey

Turkey has shown support to the Palestinian people despite having diplomatic and bilateral relations with Israel; this is most aptly demonstrated in their consistent demand for the lifting of the Israeli blockade which is strangling Gaza's economy.[92] More recently, Turkey sent a delegation to begin repairing the infrastructure of Gaza's power grid as a part of an agreement with Israel.[93] As a result of the Turks' work and advocacy in Gaza, the country is on good terms with Hamas, giving them some leverage to encourage Hamas to sit at the table. Also significant is the leverage that Turkey is able to use with Israel.

The United States

Palestine's, and particularly the PA's, relationship with the Unites States is complex and largely a result of the US's close ties with Israel. The Obama Administration remained fairly firm on their platform of support for Israel despite increasing pressure for the reduction and removal of settlements in the West Bank. The appointment of David Friedman as the Trump Administration's ambassador to Israel disappointed many Palestinians as it was perceived to show implicit support for current Israeli policy: Mr. Friedman is a "right-wing bankruptcy lawyer" who does not consider settlements illegal.[94] The Trump Administration's discussion of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to East Jerusalem indicated to Palestinians that the US would support Israeli claims to the disputed city at the expense of Palestinians. Thus most Palestinians have little faith that the Trump Administration will take their interests into account or will pay more than 'lip service' to Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.[95] Only 9% of Palestinians believe that Trump will actually renew a peace process and "38% believe that the new American administration will aggravate Palestinian-Israeli tensions leading to escalation in popular and violent confrontations due to the expected settlement build-up."[96] It is unclear how the new Administration will affect current aid packages to the PA as well, which some say depend on the PA's maintaining a "subservient relationship" with Israel; changes in aid could have widespread effects on the Palestinian economy.[97]

Israel

The relationship of Israel to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people, is, as has been detailed above, fraught with conflict and misunderstanding, yet also comprised of ongoing collaboration and connection. Not only do Israelis and Palestinians have different interests in terms of geography, economy, security, and a final status agreement, but also the "two sides" have multiple differing narratives of history and entirely different understandings of past and present events.[98] For Palestinians, the Israeli government's pursuit of a "complete land of Israel"[99] has always put into question the sincerity of their will to come to a two-state solution where each state would recognize the sovereign borders of the other. Despite their differences, and the condemnation of some, the Israeli government and the PA have an ongoing collaboration on security issues, sharing of natural resources, and economics in the West Bank. Israel and Hamas have held clandestine negotiations in the past for prisoner swaps and Gaza border issues.

Saudi Arabia

Though not at the public forefront of Israeli-Palestinian peace dealings, Saudi Arabia has quietly worked for peace in the Middle East for many years. The Saudi government drew up the Arab Peace Initiative, which serves as the widely supported, main Arab proposal in the sphere of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at this time.[100] The Saudis have also assisted with internal Palestinian negotiations between Fatah and Hamas on the basis that Palestinian unity is a prerequisite for peace.[101] Saudi Arabia has been a US ally for years, and two of its closest allies in the region, Egypt and Jordan, have peace agreements with Israel. Some have questioned whether Saudi-Palestinian relations are waning in recent years, pointing to Saudi Arabia's halting of aid to the PA in 2016 and Saudi frustration over Palestinian difficulty maintaining a unity government.[102]

International Organizations

Palestine's primary relations with the international organizations consist of receiving funding and ideological support. For the most part, donor organizations follow the Oslo Accords as a basis to aid in the West Bank and Gaza, specifically for humanitarian and economic purposes. The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund (IMF) all have offices in Palestine and provide significant aid packages. In the West Bank and Gaza, the UNRWA provides funding and jobs to the massive refugee populations, providing a potential pathway into partnerships with Palestine's growing civil society sector.[103] The IMF has been primarily involved in boosting the economic sector, though this has been difficult, the waves of conflict in Gaza.[104] The IMF recently released a report stating that declining donor aid, economic decline, and political instability will result in a large "financing gap," and

that the recommended solution to remedy these problems is greater economic collaboration with Israel as well as increases is donor packages from international powers.[105]

Potential Negotiation Moves

As Palestinian leaders consider potential negotiation moves, recent polls show that 47% of Palestinians support the two-state solution while 51% opposes it[106]. When asked, 60% say they believe it is no longer a viable option (including some of those who support it in theory). In terms of strategy, "on the most effective means of building a Palestinian state next to the state of Israel: 34% believe that negotiation is the most effective."[107] When asked what strategies they would support in the absence of peace negotiations, "77% support joining more international organizations, 67% support non-violent popular resistance, 51% support a return to an armed intifada, and 49% support the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority."[108] When asked specifically about the best way for the PA to respond to the continuation of Israeli settlement building, "25% [of Palestinians] think it is the suspension of security coordination with Israel; 22% think it is the submission of a formal complaint to the International Criminal Court; 19% think it is the resumption of armed attacks; 19% think it is a strong international condemnation of Israel, and 14% think it is the organization of popular non-violent protests."[109] Each of these constitutes a potential negotiation move for the Palestinian Authority, though the ramifications of various options would be very different.

Unity Government

In January 2017, representatives from Hamas and Fatah met for three days in Moscow to discuss the creation of a new National Council, a unity government with shared leadership between Fatah, Hamas, and other Palestinian parties, including the Islamic Jihad group, which had been left out of previous such agreements.[110] Many similar initiatives have been undertaken by the parties in recent years and have failed to create a shared governing body. The boycott of the May elections by Hamas and other parties does not bode well for the initiative. When polled, 27% of Palestinians report optimism about the political reconciliation, while 67% say they are pessimistic about the reconciliation.[111] For both Fatah and Hamas, the continuation of efforts to create a viable unity government constitutes one potential negotiation move, while withdrawal from these efforts constitutes yet another.

Regional Coalitions

Building a regional coalition around the Saudi Arab Peace Initiative may be a potential negotiation move for the Palestinians, particularly if they can pre-empt Israeli attempts at a regional anti-Iran coalition. Hamas seems to be signaling availability to partner more with the Egyptian government, which may also make it a more attractive party to Saudi Arabia. Alternatively, Palestinian parties could ally more with Iran and Hezbollah to threaten Israel further, gain strong allies, and escalate tensions.

Non-Violent Resistance, Refusal, and Boycott

The Palestinian Authority could endorse the BDS Movement and refuse to collaborate further with Israel on security, or, in a more drastic move, disband altogether. This may be read by Israelis as further evidence of "not having a partner for peace," but also may indicate to the world the utter frustration the Palestinians feel under the current system. Other forms of non-violent resistance include a hunger strike in May 2017 by over 1000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails with specific demands around incarceration.[112] These and similar actions receive widespread support among Palestinians and gain attention internationally, which may increase Palestinian leverage in a negotiations process.

Violent Resistance

A further negotiation move would be to call for a third intifada and wave of violence against Israel as a whole or a more targeted campaign against Israeli settlements. Palestinian leaders called for a 'day of rage' during US President Trump's recent visit, which led to clashes with Israeli occupation forces.[113]

International Recognition

The PA could also continue to approach international bodies for recognition as a state actor or for conferral of non-member observer status in international fora, which might increase their legitimacy in negotiations or provide a platform for achieving international condemnation of certain Israeli actions. A further move would be for the PA to take Israel to the International Criminal Court for continued settlement building, which might move the negotiations around the issue of settlements.

XXV. Qatar: Regional and Global Ambitions

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Introduction

Despite its relatively small size and a population of 1.9 million people (of which only 1/8 are Qatari citizens) – Qatar is a critical actor in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Like its Gulf neighbors, Qatar is a monarchy, and has been ruled since the 19th century by the Al-Thani family. It was under Ottoman rule from 1871 to 1913, followed by British colonial protectionist rule from 1916 until they gained independence on September 3, 1971.[1] Qatar is a Muslim-majority country and it is one of only two countries in the world that follows the Salafi version of Sunni Islam (the other is Saudi Arabia).

Qatar is the world's leading exporter of liquefied natural gas and the richest country in terms of GDP per capita.[2] The country has undertaken massive investments in infrastructure, education, training, and human capacity development, and over the last few decades has enjoyed "rapid modernization" that has affected all aspects of citizens' lives.[3] In terms of foreign policy, Qatar is most concerned with maintaining its security and stability, particularly given the volatility of the region. It has sought to create a more proactive role as a mediating power in the MENA region, leveraging its significant economic strength as well as its soft power.

Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

It is debatable whether the country should presently be referred to as a constitutional monarchy or absolute monarchy, since a 2003 constitutional reform directed the country to become a constitutional one.[4] Qatar is a hereditary monarchy[5] and has been ruled since 1825 by the al-Thani family. The current Emir, who serves as head of state and head of government, is Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani (b.1980), who took over rule from his father "in a peaceful transfer of power" in June 2013.[6] The voluntary nature of the transition was notable and contrasts with other Gulf countries in the region, where rulers traditionally remain in power until they die. In fact, this "may well be a first in Arab dynastic politics."[7] Though the Emir has five sons from his three wives, his designated successor is currently his half-brother, Abdullah bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (b.1988), who was appointed Deputy Emir in 2014. While Qatar does have a cabinet, legislative branch, and judicial branch, power largely resides with the emir, his heir apparent, and a few senior family members.[8]

The country is held together by a strictly controlled narrative that it has built for itself, and has "been more adept at managing the news than being the object of scrutiny."[9] During the reign of the previous Emir, Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Qatar sought to establish itself as an international player and regional broker, and has successfully become "one of the leading regional actors" in the Middle East over the last two decades: "Qatar has been involved in so many conflicts in the region—mainly as a mediator and provider of humanitarian aid—that it has almost become expected that, whatever the conflict facing the region, the tiny emirate will find a role for itself within it."[10] The country's foremost motivation is maintaining its own security and stability, and given regional instability, rivalries, and "small-state 'security dilemma,'" it has aimed to maintain these through mediation engagement and humanitarian assistance, both roles that allow for positions of neutrality and seek to avoid direct conflict.[11] Qatar has also sought to become enmeshed with international players by seeking out foreign investments, nurturing business development, and building its tourism industry.[12]

Another theme found in Qatar's foreign policy actions is its desire to expand its influence and rival Saudi Arabia as a regional player. Though Saudi Arabia has traditionally played the mediator role in regional conflicts, its neutrality has been increasingly called into question in recent years, and having perceived this "vacuum in Arab international relations," Qatar has sought to fill it, presenting itself as "a viable alternative to Saudi Arabia and a potential new leader in the Middle East."[13] Its attempts to establish itself as an honest broker that has been by the fact that it doesn't have the "historical baggage" that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia bring, having been the "regional heavyweights" during most of the 20th century.[14] Though its foreign policy is highly disputed, Qatar seeks to be an example of how Islamic ideals and modernity can coexist. This stands in stark contrast to their Saudi Arabian neighbor, who they believe to be more militant and "unyielding" in its doctrine.[15]

Sources of Leverage

Qatar has tried to garner leverage by attempting to establish itself as a bridge between the Middle East and the rest of the world, portraying itself as "a recognized 'brand'" and "an international ally of the West" in a part of the world where the West's allies are few and far between.[16] It houses the U.S. Central Command forward headquarters and until 2009, it was the only Gulf state to have trade ties with Israel (it severed ties due to the Gaza offensive).[17] Moves like this have protected it from a lot of the harsh rhetoric that Western partners such as the United States who do not want to isolate a country considered to be "a strategic, even indispensable, ally."[18]

Qatar spent years crafting a "unique niche" for itself, in which it was able to display "regional leadership bordering on outright activism in responding to crises across the Arab world," and this work paid off when the Arab Spring took the world by surprise.[19] In the years prior, Qatar had come to be referred to as "the non-stop mediator," due to its diplomatic mediation and negotiation in Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, and other countries in the Arab world.[20] When the Arab Spring began, Qatar was able to play "an extraordinarily visible

and interventionist role" due to the many unique positions it had come to straddle: it had regional and international legitimacy, and the ability to make and execute policy decisions quickly.[21]

A very important tool of influence for Qatar is Al-Jazeera, the government-backed news organization that has become the Arab world's "most influential media operation" and has an annual budget of USD 650 million. Within a relatively short period of time, Al-Jazeera became "a sociopolitical force that exceeded [Qatar's] political influence."[22] During the Arab Spring, the organization played a very important role as a mainstream global media company, based in a region where much of the press is censored. It played a critical part in covering the uprisings, "drum[ming] up support for popular rebellions across the Arab region," and using "rebel and citizen accounts for its coverage of events," which differed from official state accounts and therefore challenged their well-orchestrated narratives.[23] While media scholars have noted that Al-Jazeera has helped build a "sense of unity among Arab communities," they have also conceded that there is a distinct slant to their reporting.[24] The significance of Al-Jazeera should not be underestimated: prior to it, "citizens of the Arab world had rarely seen candid news and television talk shows that featured officials held accountable for their policies and actions."[25] It is therefore perhaps no surprise that it quickly became the most trusted news source for Middle Eastern communities.[26]

Finally, Qatar's most recent focus has been to "create the soft power the Gulf state needs to punch above its weight and ensure a sympathetic hearing in the international community in times of emergency."[27] Its focus has been to do this through involvement in international sports, and leverage, for example, its 2022 World Cup hosting rights, to strengthen its regional importance and international standing.[28] Qatar has also bid to host the Olympic Games, and though their last bid failed, the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has indicated that he would be open to a new bid from them.[29] In some ways, this latest tact has created more problems than solutions for Qatar, as they have been heavily criticized for the abysmal conditions of those working to build the World Cup stadium and their restrictive labor sponsorship program (also known as the kafala system).[34] Pressure from the international community has pushed them to reform the system, however a recent report by Human Rights Watch alleges that the labor law changes that went into effect in 2016 do not address migrant workers, or the injustices and abuse they routinely face.[30]

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Qatar is unique among most of the GCC states in that – in contrast with countries like Kuwait, Bahrain, or Saudi Arabia – it is "relatively ethnically and religiously homogenous," which has helped to eliminate potential sources of opposition to the ruling al-Thani family.[31] This homogeneity has helped Qatar avoid many of the internal pressures that are experienced by those GCC states that have had to manage with ethnic, religious, and sectarian tensions.[32] The country has also actively pursued state cohesion among its citizenry and since the 1970s has been "crafting a successful national identity" for them.[33]

This has been helped along by Qatar's rentier state status: though the royal family has almost complete control, citizens are disincentivized from pushing back due to their dependency on the state, essentially enabling rulers to buy themselves "a cohesive, stable state" or "the political consent of their people."[34] Rentier states are able to obtain this at a heavy cost, and considering that Qatar is one of the most generous of the rentier states, it creates a constant and significant strain on the government and its finances. Qatari citizens receive government stipends, guaranteed employment in the public sector, free education and training, healthcare, land grants, subsidized housing, and free electricity and water, among other benefits.[35] To this end, this represents a social contract, whereas citizens submit to the leadership of the monarchy (no voting, no representation) in exchange for public services from the government (no taxation).[36]

Another important internal dynamic that must be considered is that, as mentioned previously, the native population only makes up a fraction of the entire Qatari population.[37] In 2012, 94 percent of the national labor force was foreign, and 84 percent of Qatari nationals were working in the public sector, making the state the largest employer of nationals active in the labor market.[38] As "welfare benefits are exceedingly high for nationals," the state has made it very difficult for non-nationals to gain citizenship.[39]

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

One of the main areas of criticism in regards to Qatar is that it "plays both ends with its close alliance with the West and hosting of a major US military base, while at the same time allegedly supporting militant Islamist and jihadist forces."[40] These conflicting stances have led people to describe Qatar's political strategy and foreign policy as incoherent and embodying "the discrepancy between image and actions."[41] Though the state's main motivation when making policy decisions has been to maintain its security and stability, playing both sides has actually become a source of instability and made the Qatari government increasingly susceptible to criticism.[42]

Ultimately, Qatar's flexible foreign policy stances have provided it with "room to maneuver and constantly to re-evaluate its policy decisions in tandem with changing geopolitical realities and its national interests."[43] Qatar has proven to be an asset for the United States, for example, as it managed the prisoner swap for American soldier Bowe Bergdahl and the negotiations to release American writer Peter Theo Curtis.[44] At the same time, however, Qatar has "played a major role in destabilizing nearly every trouble spot in the region and in accelerating the growth of radical and jihadi factions," with Libya, Syria, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip as prime examples of this failure.[45] Qatar spent the last several decades carefully cultivating a certain image, but since 2011 a lot of this has been called into question. The state's actions and reaction to the Arab Spring and Syrian crisis "severely damaged" their reputation and their sponsorship of Sunni Islamist causes in Egypt, Gaza, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia brought criticism that they (along with Turkey) were "stoking sectarian

unrest and promoting extremism."[46]

Role During the Arab Spring

Though Qatar is far from a democratic or politically free society, it nonetheless faced "little if any direct threat" from the Arab Spring, and was the only Gulf country to not view the movement with "trepidation" when it began.[47] The Arab Spring was actually beneficial in that it served to "electrify Qatar's network of political clients."[48] Qatar was able to play a significant role at the beginning of the Arab Spring thanks to the years it had spent cultivating its image as a regional broker: "Initially, it displayed unprecedented regional leadership bordering on outright activism in responding to crises across the Arab world."[49] Over time, the Arab Spring came to epitomize the contradiction in Qatar's foreign policy approach: while it claimed to be an ally of the West and publicly pushed for humanitarian intervention and political settlement in Libya and Yemen, it was also strengthening its ties with Islamist movements in the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood.[50] It is interesting to note that it was at the end of this period, in 2013, that the transfer of power occurred and the current Emir came to the throne.[51]

Islamist Political Movements

In contrast to some of the other GCC states, Qatar has, for the most part, aligned itself with Islamist political movements, taking the long-view approach and believing strongly that political Islam will be "the next big thing that would pay off": "Qatar has sponsored Muslim Brotherhood branches across the Arab world, viewing such factions as vehicles capable of spreading Doha's influence and extending its geopolitical leverage."[52] According to documents revealed through WikiLeaks, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed told U.S. officials that Qatar was "part of the Muslim Brotherhood" and Al-Jazeera has also been described as being pro-Muslim Brotherhood.[53] The country's support of the Brotherhood has been a frequent point of contention between Qatar and the other GCC states, and in March 2014, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain all recalled their ambassadors from Doha in response to Qatar's continued support of the Muslim Brotherhood.[54] By November, the four countries came to an agreement to "turn a new page," and the ambassadors returned, however the countries' alignments on political Islam remain a point of disagreement.[55]

Libya

Qatar's image as "a detached mediator" began to quickly deteriorate as a result of its involvement in the Libyan conflict.[62] Both Qatar and the UAE "played pivotal roles" in Libya by sponsoring (opposing) anti-Qaddafi rebels, and as a result, they "emerged as rivals in this grander geopolitical struggle."[56] In this fight, Qatar found itself aligned with Turkey and Sudan, supporting the Islamist-led government in Tripoli, while the UAE joined with Russia and Egypt to back the UN-recognized Tobruk-based government.[57] Qatar found the Libyan situation a particularly appealing one to get involved with due to the opportunities it would provide to work with Western powers, and hopefully solidify its position as a force in the region.[58] While it was too much of a political risk for the United States or Europe to arm the Libyan rebels, Qatar could do so with relative impunity and without the same fear of political fallout.[59] However, various actors began to object to Qatar's clear preference for Islamist leaders.[60]

Saudi Arabia

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Qatar date back decades and have at times been very heated, to the point in the late 1990s where some feared that the GCC was going to disband due to their internal conflict.[61] Relations have "eased substantially" since King Salman inherited the throne in 2015, in part due to Saudi Arabia's perceived softening of its position against the Muslim Brotherhood, which has resulted from the King's effort to unite the Sunni Arab world against Iran and ISIS.[62]

Syria

One area where Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been able to find common ground is in Syria, where they have worked together, along with Turkey, to back Sunni Islamist rebels against the Assad regime.[63] Qatar lobbied the Arab League for Syria's position to be handed to the government's opposition, and then hosted an embassy for them in Doha.[64] As one article described it: "When it comes to backing Syria's rebels, no one can claim more credit than the gas-rich Gulf state. Whether in terms of armaments or financial support for dissidents, diplomatic maneuvering or lobbying, Qatar has been in the lead, readily disgorging its gas-generated wealth in the pursuit of the downfall of the House of Assad."[65] Their efforts have not proved very promising, however, and the rebel groups they were supporting have now become only a rural insurgency, no longer a substantial threat to the Assad government.[66] Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia have to be careful though, because they do not want to disengage completely from Syria and be seen as having "abandoned their Sunni brethren at a time of regional polarization."[67]

Israel

When it comes to Israel, Qatar has maintained its pattern of trying to straddle the middle-ground and play the role of neutral party. It was the only Gulf state to maintain official relations with Israel, despite the heavy criticism this action drew from neighboring states (though they ended it after the Gaza offensive).[68] Given how contentious this issue is in the Middle East, it's important to examine *why* Qatar chose to pursue diplomatic relations with Israel in the first place. Though economic reasons or a desire to strength U.S.-Qatari relations might drive such a move, neither of these are thought to have been the motivation; rather, it was to differentiate itself from its neighbors and show that it could chart "a distinctly independent route in foreign policy," proving itself to be "a small, wealthy oil state which employs an independent and nuanced foreign policy in order to promote its regional position as well as upgrade its international

profile."[69]

Iran

Qatar's relationship with Iran is another example of the country's careful balancing act. A stable relationship is vital: not only do the two countries share the world's largest gas field, but given Iran's own expansionist goals and visions in the region, Qatar deems it important for their relationship to remain in good standing.[70] It is also true, however, that Iran is involved directly or by proxy with many conflicts in the region, and Qatar's attempt to mediate between non-state actors backed by Iran and their opposition can sometimes put them at odds with Iran. Essentially, "Qatar is attempting to counter Iranian influence in the Middle East generally, and more specifically in the Gulf, while maintaining cordial relations with Iran. … The role of Iran in the region can be seen as a distinct motivation behind Qatar's mediation of conflict in the Middle East."[71]

Potential Negotiation Moves

Qatar is extremely focused on its position in the region and in the international order; they have spent decades nurturing and crafting an image of themselves as an emerging power player, mediator, and the voice of reason in a region of conflict. However, there is a clear duality in this desire, when one considers their public positions and statements, versus their support of political Islamist regimes and jihadist movements. In the end, this can be traced back to the state's foremost concerns of stability and security. Given their size and the general unpredictability of and strife in the region, they are often forced to play a careful balancing game of trying to appease all sides, not wanting to be caught in anyone's crosshairs. The monarchy's support of the Islamist political movement and organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood are said to be for pragmatic reasons, rather than ideological ones, meaning that given the right incentives, their alliance and allegiance could be shifted.[72]

To this end, some of the potential negotiating moves involve: (i) continuing its role as a mediator in key conflicts across the region; and (ii) increasing its support to Syrian opposition groups. With regards to the its role as a regional mediator, Qatar can particularly play an important role in the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts. Given its political leverage and convening power, Qatar may seek to play a prominent role in arranging ceasefire agreements, for example. With regards to the Syrian conflict in particular, Qatar may decide to ramp up their support for rebel groups. This may include providing increased financial and armed support to different factions fighting against the Assad regime. However, given how fractured the opposition movement is within Syria, as well as the potential flow of financing to jihadist groups, such a move may be viewed negatively by Western partners. It would nonetheless demonstrate Qatar's resolve in opposing the Assad regime and taking a more proactive foreign policy across the region.

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XXVI. Russia: Restoring the Reputation of a Global Power

Russia's engagement in the Middle East has deep historic roots. For more than two hundred years the chief goal of Russia's foreign policy was to drive the Ottoman Empire out of the Balkans and Back Sea region. Persia was divided into Russian and British zones of influence. Russia's entry into the World War One was primarily motivated by its claims for Constantinople and the Turkish Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The USSR continued to be actively involved in the political developments of the Middle East, which developed into a tense contention with the USA.

A number of Arabic states, - including Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, South Yemen and Syria, - were zones of the Soviet political influence and became allies of the USSR during the Cold War. During the foundation of Israel and the First Arab-Israeli War, the USSR assertively supported the Zionist movement and the idea of Israeli statehood. On May 14, 1947, the USSR Ambassador to the UN, H.E. Andrey Gromyko, addressed the General Assembly with a speech arguing for the right of the Jewish people to statehood.[1] During the final vote for the UN Partition Plan for Palestine on November 29, 1947, the five Soviet bloc countries (USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Byelorussian SSR and Ukrainian SSR) voted 'in favor'. This secured the two thirds votes necessary for the adoption of Resolution 181 (II) and the consequent establishment of Israeli State. Moreover, the USSR was the first country to officially recognize the State of Israel on May 17, 1948, three days after its establishment.[23] Later, however, the USSR shifted to supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab states antagonizing Israel. This move is exemplar in demonstrating how drastically Russia periodically changes its political course in the Middle East.

Today, Moscow's official position builds around its thesis of Russia's exclusively important role in regulating the Middle Eastern conflicts. On September 8, 2016, the spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova made the following statement:

We are highly concerned by the continuous deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Such a state of affairs inevitably leads to a degradation of local ambiance. We assume that this tendency is fraught with outbreaks of violence and relapse of confrontation. We repeat it regularly. In response to the appeals of Palestinians and Israelis, we confirmed our readiness to organize, possibly in Moscow, a bilateral meeting between the President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas and the Prime-Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu. We are satisfied by how demanded the initiative role of Russia is in the Middle East peace process as well as by the public principal agreement of the leaders of Palestine and Israel to meet with each other in Russia. The important thing now is to choose the right moment. Intensive communication regarding this continues.[4]

The past decade in the Middle East - including the Arab Spring, emergence and rise of ISIS, civil wars in Syria and Yemen, crisis in Libya, the Iran nuclear deal, and the diplomatic conflict with Turkey - has put forth new challenges and new opportunities for Russia. If the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 contained more of an abstract stance on the Middle East peace process, the Concept of 2016 contains many more specifics. For the first time since the Cold War, the Kremlin has taken an active position and firm stance in the Middle East. First of all, it refers to its stance on the Syrian crisis as the following:

Russia stands for a political settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic and the possibility for the people of Syria to determine their future based on the June 30, 2012 Geneva communiqué, statements by the International Syria Support Group and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Russia supports the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a secular, democratic, pluralistic state with all ethnic and religious groups living in peace and security and enjoying equal rights and opportunities.[5]

The new Concept is also much more specific in highlighting Moscow's position toward terrorism and rise of ISIS. Russia sees terrorism as one of the most dangerous realities in today's world, both for the local states (primarily, in the Middle East and North Africa) and the international community. In pointing out the breeding ground of terrorism, the document refers to "systemic flaws of international development" and "external interference", implicitly alluding to external actors from outside the Middle Eastern region:

The ideological values and prescriptions imposed from outside these countries in an attempt to modernize their political systems have exacerbated the negative response of their societies to current challenges. Extremist forces have exploited these trends, using distorted interpretations of religious values to promote violence in pursuit of their goals in the political, interethnic and interreligious rivalry they are engaged in.[6]

Special attention is given to relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Russia confirms its adherence to developing bilateral cooperation in all areas and its commitment to assist in settling the situation around the Iranian nuclear program within the framework of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015 and the IAEA Board of Governors decisions to this effect [7].

In outlining its new policy concept in the Middle East, Moscow stresses the significance of its membership in the UN Security

Council and Middle East Quartet of international mediators. It underlines Russia's intention to continue "making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the Middle East and North Africa"[8], reiterating the importance of external non-interference in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern states and their right to self-determination. Given this, the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict does not seem a foremost priority for Moscow.

Russia sees the Middle East as a tangle of intertwined conflicts, each with its own specificity that requires a peculiar yet consolidated approach. The more complicated the situation, the higher Moscow assesses its role in the settlement process. This vision is driven by an important historical-cultural factor. After the USSR breakdown in 1991, Russia strove to re-establish its national image as a bridge between Europe and Asia. Moscow seeks recognition and appreciation of the West, but clearly does not want to burn bridges with Asia and let it out of its zone of interest.

From this angle, the situation in the Middle East today is an opportune moment for Russia to enhance its international reputation. However, the Middle East conflicts and controversies create substantial threats to Russia. Both these factors - opportunities and threats - shape Moscow's interests and aims.

Fighting terrorism and blocking its spatial expansion is first priority. It is a matter of domestic stability in Russia. A number of republics within the Russian Federation are populated primarily by Muslims - from Chechnya and Dagestan in the North Caucasus to Tatarstan and Bashkiria in the Volga region. 12% of Russia's population is Muslim. Additionally, Muslim migrant workers from Azerbaijan and Central Asia number in the millions, many residing and working in Russia illegally. The popularity of Islam in Russia's traditionally non-Islamic regions has gradually increased as Muslim immigrants settled from the Ural to Far East. Instances of radical Muslims in the North Caucasus pledging allegiance to ISIS have been recorded. Fighting radical Islam and blocking its penetration into Russian territory is a matter of national security for Moscow.[9]

The protection of Russia's military naval base in Tartus is also a key interest. It is Russian only 'Material-Technical Support Point' in the Mediterranean on its way toward the Black Sea bases.[10] Both as a long-term geopolitical consideration of retaining military presence in the Middle East and a short-term necessity within the Syrian campaign, the Tartus base is vital for Moscow.

Cooperation with regional oil-rich powers is another priority for Russia. The holder of one of the world's richest oil and gas deposits, Russia is interested in acquiring a fair level of control over world oil prices. Oil and gas trade revenues compose a large portion of Russia's budget and the main revenue source for a number of key figures in the business realm and political decision-making process.

Russia's policy in the Middle East was greatly influenced by several waves of collective sanctions imposed by Western states. The impact of the sanctions on Russia's actions in Syria is a chicken and egg debate. Regardless, Moscow currently puts a lot of efforts into repairing its international prestige after the sanctions' severe hit, and the Middle East is an opportune platform to accomplish that. Despite all the destructive effects of the sanctions, Russia still has a range of other levers at its disposal to use in the Middle East.

De jure, the Russian Federation today is a semi-presidential republic where the president is the head of state and the prime-minister is the head of government.[11] *De facto*, Russia is a federation with a strong and centralized leadership. The balancing edges between the branches of power are blurred, the president and prime-minister belong to the same political party (United Russia) and power is centralized in a vertical manner.[12] The centralization of power is Russia's main strength. The international community frequently condemns Russia's domestic policies, labeling it "authoritarian" or "dictatorial". The decision-making process normally stays behind the closed doors and the important decisions are usually brought to public *post-factum*.

Moscow habitually bets first on its hard power of any of its sources of resources. The potential of Russia's military might was evident in Syria. Before September 2015, Russia's official involvement in the Syrian conflict was chiefly by means of arms supplies. On September 30, however, Russia formally launched war on ISIS.[13] Moscow's decision came days after Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad's call for help in a letter to Russia's President Vladimir Putin.[14] According to Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement, the airstrikes will continue until "the terrorist organizations, - ISIS, Jabhat an-Nuṣrah, and alike, - are completely defeated".[15]

The offensive was declared against terrorist groups which regularly and rapidly switch from conventionally organized warfare type to irregular and unconventional actions. The core of ISIS is geographically located in Iraq. This is the territory Russia has declared as the target zone of its military operation. The possibility of Baghdad officially requesting Russia's assistance to the Iraqi troops against ISIS in Iraq is minimal.

Upon the first airstrikes in Homs, Syria on September 30, 2015, Moscow's official stance was that the Islamic extremism and terrorism in Syria can be effectively combated only by the Syrians themselves with the support of Russia's Air Forces. Russia asserted that its actions would remain strictly in the air and within certain time limits. The main goal of Russia's troops in Syria, according to the President Vladimir Putin, was to stabilize the legitimate government and create conditions for a political compromise.[16]

Russia has been greatly undermined because of its present economic capacity. After numerous waves of collective Western sanctions, Russia is experiencing the most severe crisis since the 2000s. Further, the military operation in Syria costs Russia $2.5 million a day.[17] Moreover, the Middle East has become a platform for a fruitful economic activity for Russia's both state and non-state actors. Many Russian companies are actively pursuing their own interests in the Middle East. Rosatom has already built a nuclear power plant in Bushehr, and is currently considering several new contracts in Iran.[18] Rosatom also has a number of effective projects in Turkey and Jordan. Russian private oil giant Lukoil is actively operating in Iraq. Gazprom is the key gas supplier of Turkey; a gas pipeline through Turkey's territory is a regular rubric of bilateral Russian-Turkish negotiations. Russia regularly interacts with Qatar, UAE and Iran within the framework of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). As one of the world leaders in oil exports, Russia regularly cooperates with Saudi Arabia and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Russia is the main supplier of grain for Egypt. Millions of Russian tourists annually visit Egypt and Turkey. Finally, Russia has repeatedly expressed interest in developing

technological cooperation with Israel.

A clear asset of Russia is its status of the UN Security Council permanent member. The veto right enables Russia to influence the international agenda in the Middle East. For example, before voting 'in favor' of the UN Security Council Resolution 2328 on December 19, 2016, which allowed the UN to deploy observers to Aleppo,[19] Russia had blocked six similar UN Resolutions on Syria before.

In pursuance of these varied interests, the public and private sectors are strongly interconnected and interdependent. At the highest level, the State of Russia is represented by the president. Despite being a semi-presidential federation, Russia exalts its head of state over the other branches of power. The president has a right to appoint the prime-minister upon the approval of the State Duma (lower house of Russia's Federal Assembly) and a right to dissolve the State Duma.[20] The president is elected for a maximum of two consecutive 6-year terms by a popular vote. He is Russia's Supreme Commander-in-Chief and controls all aspects related to the questions of war and peace. He is also one of the three state officials (along with the Minister of Defense and Chief of the General Staff) controlling the use of the country's nuclear arsenal[21].

Other representatives of Russia in the Middle East among the highest political echelon are the ministerial staff, diplomatic and consular officers. Russia's Foreign Ministry supervises the foreign affairs of the state in accordance with the Constitution, the current Foreign Policy Concept, and other effective legal documents[22]. The Ministry has been headed by Sergey Lavrov since 2004. He is a skilled negotiator with a long career path in international diplomacy. One of Lavrov's signature methods is telephone diplomacy. His telephone conversations with the colleagues worldwide take place on a daily basis.[23]

Other top-ranked officials representing Russia include Vitaly Churkin (Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations since 2006), Sergey Shoygu (Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation since 2012), Mikhail Bogdanov (Special Representative of the President for the Middle East and Africa), Valery Gerasimov (Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and Deputy Defense Minister), Igor Konashenkov (Head of Department of Information of the Ministry of Defense), and Anatoliy Antonov (the Deputy Foreign Minister supervising the questions of politic-military realm and nuclear weapons).

Soldiers represent a special category of actors in Russia. When fulfilling their direct military responsibilities, they are a Russian actor. However, their public statements do not represent Russia's official position. At the same time, they are both accountable to Russia and protected by Russia.

There is also a category of 'Gray Cardinals' among Russia's actors in the Middle East. They are not immediately present on the visible front of actions, but they supply valuable information necessary for the decision-makers and visible actors. These are scholars in Middle Eastern studies. One of the most authoritative figures until recently was Eugeniy Primakov (1929-2015), the head of Foreign Intelligence Service (*rus*. SVR), Foreign Ministry and the Government of the Russian Federation. He is frequently cited by Russian officials in their statements, and his opinions were considered to be of high authority among the decision-making political circles. Present-day scholars include Pavel Gusterin, Andrey Korotaev, and Grigoriy Kosatch. The information provided by diplomats and intelligence services is increasingly important becomes. Particularly, Russia uses data provided by its Space Forces. For example, they use ten satellites to collect terrestrial and radio-electronic intelligence in Syria.[24]

Finally, the population of Russia as an actor is only a minor impellent of Moscow's policies. With 90% rate of popular support for President Vladimir Putin in 2016[25], it is no wonder that people publicly endorse Russia's course in the Middle East. This is due to several reasons. First, there is almost zero public accountability and civil society in Russia. Secondly, the information delivered to the public is extremely one-sided. All free federal TV- and radio- channels are pro-government; some foreign experts see it as a big «propaganda machine". Several media centers representing the politically alternative stances have been shut down. Finally, there is a strong cultural factor behind people's support of the policy in the Middle East, and Syria in particular. After the 1999 war in Dagestan, when the Russian Northern Caucasian republic was invaded by radical Islamists calling for secession and expulsion of all Russians from the Caucasus, the word "Wahhabi" became a synonym of an armed Islamic extremist. Today, Russia's support of Assad's government meets wide popular understanding. There have also been those who chose to join the ISIS. Approximately five to seven thousand people from Russia and CIS fight on the side of ISIS, according to Putin.[26]

Much of Moscow's contemporary relations in the Middle East were inherited after the Soviet Union. By late 1980s, the USSR and USA started out regular bilateral contacts around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The apogee of this interaction was their co-chairmanship of the Madrid Peace Conference on October 30 - November 1, 1991. Though the declared goals were not reached, the Conference became one of the early platforms of multilateral negotiations. The USSR re-activated interaction with Israel in October 1991 after they were cut in 1967.[27]

Today, Moscow is engaged in a variety of interaction formats around the Arab-Israeli conflict discussion. Using its status of a permanent UN Security Council member and a member of the Middle East Quartet, Russia has insisted on the inclusive and collegial nature of its policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Vladimir Putin, in his article "Russia and the changing world," stressed that considering Moscow's close ties with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Russian diplomacy will continue pursuing bilateral and multilateral format of the peace process while coordinating steps with the Arab League.[28]

The Middle East Quartet now plays only a minor role in the peace process. Russia gravitates toward separate platforms of negotiations with Israel and Palestine. When Hamas came to power in 2007, Russia (along with the Quartet) demanded that they recognize Israel. At the same time, the Hamas leadership was invited to visit Moscow for discussions in March 2006. With this move, Moscow attempted to put itself forward as a mediator between Hamas, Fatah, Israel and the Quartet. Russia, on different political levels, regularly expresses its willingness and readiness to organize and facilitate negotiations between Israel and Palestine in Moscow[29]. At the same time, Moscow maintains solidarity with standard international calls for an inclusive dialogue, negotiations and importance of peace process advancement. The spokeswoman of the Foreign Ministry in her statement in September 2016 stated that

Unfortunately, after the failed attempts of mediation by the USA in 2013-2014, the direct dialogue between the parties of the conflict stopped for a long period of time. We are convinced that it is necessary to resume the negotiation process. It is in a factor of normalization of the situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict zone and finding of the compromising outcomes on the international legal basis.[30]

The significance of this statement is twofold. Considering Russia's aspiration to restore the reputation of a global power, the tactics of passive solidarity with active pathetic of the international community in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is likely to change at some point. Moscow sees the conflict as a near-future initiative and platform for playing an exclusive mediation role. Indications of this are contained in the Foreign Policy Concept 2016

Russia will continue making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing threats that emanate from international terrorist groups, consistently promotes political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in regional States while respecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination without outside interference.[31]

While keeping a relative lull in concretizing its government-to-government interactions with Israel and Palestine, Russia actively elaborates the government-to-people and people-to people collaboration with them. It includes cultural exchanges, scientific collaboration, tourism, and religious collaboration.

Russia's relations with Palestine are historically warm. The Palestinian Society of Friendship with Russia was established in 1998, the Society of Russian-Palestinian Friendship in 2001.[32] In 2008 the Russian-Palestinian Business Council was set up.[33] Russia repeatedly assisted PNA with humanitarian aid and direct financial donations (e.g. for the purposes of education and health). Palestinian students annually get 150 quotas to study in Russian higher education institutions.[34] During his visit in Moscow in 2016, Mahmoud Abbas expressed the hope that Moscow will play the central role in the peace process.[35]

There is a large list of bilateral agreements between Russia and Israel, including on health and medical studies (1994); collaboration in culture and education (1994); trade and economic cooperation (1994); tourism (1994); scientific collaboration (1994); cooperation in fight against crime (1997), etc.[36] On March 20, 2008, following Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit in Israel, the two states signed an agreement on mutual visa-free entry for the citizens of Russia and Israel.[37] On December 28, 2008, Israel registered Russia's ownership of the Saint-Sergius compound in Jerusalem, the traditional symbol of the Russian Orthodoxy presence in the Holy Land.[38]

Russia's position - more words less actions - is the most rational one available to Moscow at the moment for protecting its own interests in the region. That would have been the case even if Russia had not been engaged in the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts. Regarding Ukraine, the CIS is a regional entity of primary importance for Russia and it takes an immense portion of the foreign policy expenses anyways. The Syrian conflict has overshadowed all other processes taking place in the Middle East for Russia, including the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Russia acts in coalition with Syria. It is the only Arab country with which Moscow has been in stably friendly relations since 1950s. President Hafez al-Assad's administration supported the USSR in the Cold War. There was a period of estrangement between Russia and Syria in 1990s but relations were not cut. The Syrian civil war took these relations to a new level. Moscow has supported Assad's struggle for retaining power on the wake of the Arab Spring; the formal rationale behind Russia's military presence in Syria is fighting terrorists.[39] According to the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, the airstrikes were to last until the complete destruction of terrorists in Syria.[40]

On December 29, 2016, Russia made a resonant announcement - the peace agreement on Syria between the pro-government forces and opposition had been reached. During the meeting with the Foreign Minister and Minister of Defense the same day, President Putin confirmed that three documents were signed. First, between the Syrian government and the opposition; second, concerning the control of ceasefire implementation; and third, confirming the readiness of the parties to launch peace negotiations.[41]

The anatomy of this agreement is interesting. It has been revealed by Vladimir Putin that for two months prior to the agreement, Russia's Ministry of Defense, through the mediation assistance of Turkey, had been engaged in negotiations with the Syrian political opposition.[42] They control the central and northern parts of Syria, out of Damask's control. During the negotiations, they were represented by the leaders of the seven battalions of the opposition.[43] Simultaneously, Russia held a similar pattern of negotiations with the Syrian government. The Ministry of Defense has launched a telephone line of regular contact with Turkey, which together with Russia acts as a guarantor of the ceasefire regime.[44]

The main breakthrough of these negotiations occurred when the sides finally reached agreement on whom to consider terrorists. According to the agreement, armed groups which continue military actions after the ceasefire will be qualified as terrorist. Fighting against them will continue on par with ISIS and Jabhat an-Nusrah.[45] Defeat of the terrorist forces is an absolute requisite for the stabilization of Syria's political crisis. The conditions of the civil war (no consolidated physical control over Syria's territory and military threat of ISIS) mean an effective regulation of the crisis is nonsense.

The main obstacle for Russia's political-military tactics is that the Middle East is not a consolidated actor with a consistent stance. Many unexpected positional transformations have taken place over the last two decades. It is important to find a common touchpoint for all parties fighting against terrorism. The major obstacle, however, is likely to be the clash of geopolitical and religious considerations. For example, Iran is currently an ally in the coalition of mediators of the ceasefire in Syria. Nevertheless, although

Moscow's and Tehran's aims largely coincide in the Syrian war, they are far from being identical. Iran's agenda is closely tied to regional religious and geopolitical confrontations which Russia tries to avoid.

Terrorist groups also represent a potential domestic threat for Russia. Jaysh al-Islam uploaded a video on YouTube declaring war on the Russian soldiers in Syria. Separately, Jaysh al-Fattah has also stated that they are looking forward to the moment when they will destroy the Russian militants. Fighting radical Islam and blocking its spatial expansion is an interest of primary priority for numerous actors in the Middle East and neighboring geopolitical area. A concrete definition of terrorism will need to be decided by all parties.

For example, Russia officially does not qualify Hamas as a terrorist organization.[46] This means that Moscow can interact with it as a rightful party of the conflict, thus expanding its potential ZOPA both at bilateral and multilateral bargaining tables. The same apples to the Syrian crisis. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, during his visit to London on October 5, 2015, said that Russia does not qualify FSA as terrorists and finds it necessary to establish contacts with them.[47] At the same time, Lavrov labelled them as a "phantom formation" and said that there are no poles of power in Syria but Assad and ISIS.[48]

The war in Syria opens a unique opportunity window for Russia and its antagonist parties (including the US) to create value together. The eventual success of fighting terrorism together will efface any significant concessions necessary to launch the process. Following the peace agreement reached on December 29, 2016, the U.S. imposed a new wave of sanctions on Russia. This was an unexpected move, considering Obama's administration was leaving office in less than three weeks. Despite the regular international unwritten rule of symmetric response in such cases, Russia did not respond in kind.

We regard the recent unfriendly steps taken by the outgoing US administration as provocative and aimed at further weakening the Russia-US relationship. This runs contrary to the fundamental interests of both the Russian and American people. Considering the global security responsibilities of Russia and the United States, this is also damaging to international relations as a whole.[49]

Russia's current BATNA is strong, hence its uncompromising position in the Syrian war. One way to change this could be the abatement of the Western sanctions. The mechanism of sanctions aims at altering the target state's domestic or foreign policy through imposing economic, diplomatic, humanitarian or repetitional pressure on it. On the background of Russian economy's extreme weakening over the past three years, Moscow must remain committed to re-establishing its global power status via alternative paths. This likely means its military potential since its weaponry is a cumulative material asset which is completely self-sustained. The declared aim of fighting terrorism is shared by other actors. Most importantly, by the US. The war in Syria was an opportune platform for Russia to demonstrate the potential of its resources and capacities be it even under the sanctions. Moscow managed to demonstrate not only its possession of a variety of innovative weapons, but also skilled personnel for their exploitation and readiness to use these weapons for the protection of its interests.

Russia also needs Tartus. In a long run, a sterling military base there can secure Russia's autonomy in the Mediterranean. Some specialists suggest Russia should go even further and acquire the military airbase in Latakia.[50] Adherents of this position believe that for the next several years (if not decades) the Middle East will be an arena of complex confrontations to which Russia will inevitably have to react. In terms of the military component of that reaction, it would be odd to abandon the acquired foothold (i.e. Tartus) and to have to create a new one later from scratch. The Latakia air base discourse will, also be important for Russia to claim, but Tartus is clearly an object of strategical importance for Moscow. Geographically, Russia's closest terrestrial military base is located in Armenia (the 102nd military base in Gyumri). Armenia is a landlocked country. A Russian military base with sea access is indispensable in the Middle East and Mediterranean.

It is important to increase the number of guarantor countries, and we therefore want at this stage to invite our Egyptian colleagues to join these agreements. <…> Later, at subsequent stages, we could probably get other key countries with influence on events in Syria involved too, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, and Jordan. Of course, we will invite the UN representative too. This will enable us to secure continuity of this political process, taking into account the framework approved by Security Council Resolution 2254. <…> I agree with the Defense Ministry proposal to scale back our military presence in Syria. We will certainly continue our fight against international terrorism, of course, and will continue to support the legitimate Syrian government in its fight against terrorism.

We will, of course, carry out the agreements we have reached, including on developing our military base in Tartus and the Hmeimim air base.[51]

XXVII. Saudi Arabia: Stability, War, and Statecraft

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Introduction

The history of the modern state of Saudi Arabia precedes the date of its unification and establishment in 1932 by King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, and the struggle of the Al Saud family to reign over the Arabian Peninsula continues to impact the geopolitical dynamics of the Gulf state in the modern Middle East. The importance of Saudi Arabia as an actor in the region is immense: it is home to the two holiest cities in Islam: Mecca and Medina, making it significant for almost 1.4 billion Muslims around the world. Furthermore, the oil wealth the nation has amassed has made it an economic powerhouse in the region. The Al-Saud family have served as the monarchs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for over 80 years. The King, currently Salman bin Abdul Aziz, reigns with absolute power. Cabinet members and top government positions are held by high ranking members of the royal family are closely related to the reigning monarch. The country is governed by the 1992 Basic Law, which underscores the supremacy of Sharia law as the law of the land.[1]

This analysis of Saudi Arabia provides an overview of the most relevant threat perceptions, power dynamics and interaction of internal and external actors that characterize the country's position within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In addition, this analysis includes a discussion on Saudi Arabia's current preoccupation with Iranian influence in neighboring Arab countries, and identifies the primary sources of leverage and influence that have contributed to its foreign policy and regional identity formation.

Sources of Leverage

Islam as Identity and a Political Tool

In the 17th century, political Islam became the way in which Muhammad bin Al-Saud could consolidate his authority over the Arabian Peninsula. With the military assistance of Muhammad Abd-Al Wahhab, founder of the orthodox Hanbali Sunni Islamic movement 'Wahhabism,' ibn Saud outlined the very first conceptions of the Saudi state. Religious moral authority has since provided the Al-Saud family with the legitimacy to rule in the Kingdom as an absolute monarchy under a conception entitled 'Walih Al Ahd', or "rightful leadership",[2] in which the King of Saudi Arabia acts as the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" – a title that is used to solidify the Kingdom's exclusive sovereign claim to Mecca and Medina.[3] As such, the royal family view themselves as protectors of the religion and the Saudi population it serves.

Religious and moral authority has provided the Saudi ruling family the ability to form a narrative of national identity that seeks to present the country at the forefront of Islamic and Arab representation. The narrative follows that so long as "Saudi Arabia is Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and the birthplace of Islam," it therefore exists as the "eminent leader of the wider Muslim world"[4]. Moreover, the narrative displayed by the royal family on the political structure of the Saudi government emphasizes that different forms of government that fall beyond the realm of monarchy and Islam are not appropriate for the Saudi citizenry. As the late King Fahad declared in 1996, "Islam is a comprehensive, flexible and enlightened religion that guarantees the happiness of our people".[5] In the country's socio-economic reform agenda Saudi Vision 2030, Islam is offered as the first pillar of national identity, and Saudi Arabia is described as "the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds".[6]

Oil Wealth, Regional Politics and the Saudi Welfare State

Oil exports of the Saudi Kingdom account for the largest source of the governments revenue, and data derived from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) calculate the crude oil reserves of Saudi Arabia to be at 266,455 million barrels as of 2015.[7] Since the discovery of oil in the Kingdom in 1938, the wealth amassed by Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves has been used to consolidate and develop a loyal Saudi citizenry through an "unwritten social contract"[8], in which Saudi nationals accept the rule of the Al-Saud royal family in return for benefits in the form government subsidies on oil and electricity, and free education and healthcare[9]. For example, the Saudi welfare state has allowed the Kingdom to engage in vast social spending in the field of education, having established the King Abdullah Scholarship Program which has sent over 88,000 Saudi students to complete higher education degrees all over the world, with the United States topping the list as the nation's highest recipient.[10] As author Banafsheh Keynoush writes, "by default, without welfare and Islam, the Saudi identity could cease to exist, which drove successive Saudi rulers to develop a strong welfare state".[11]

The nation's vast oil wealth has also been a primary source for the Saudi royal family's capacity to assert its regional influence and to secure its primary interest: the stability of the Al-Saud royal family and the stability of the Kingdom. Oil wealth has been the key resource in encouraging and maintaining regional loyalty of countries like Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon in a term described by some analysts as "checkbook diplomacy"[12]. For example, after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, Saudi Arabia pledged aid and benefits of up to USD 1.5 billion dollars, and subsequently provided material support to the March 14 alliance group headed by Saad Al Hariri to counter the rising political influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon.[13] The country's financial capacity has allowed its leaders to create a view of Saudi Arabia that embodies strength and leadership, despite its lack of a powerful armed forces. Saudi officials have described their economy as the "economic engine of the region", given the country's representation of "over 20 percent of the combined GDP of

the MENA region.[14]

Saudi Arabia and United States Alliance

Saudi Arabia has endured an alliance with the United States for over seventy years, initiated by President Roosevelt and King Abdul-Aziz's historic meeting on the USS Murphy in 1945.[15] The union was pledged and sustained by the mutual interests of the two nations in the sale and exportation of oil and regional stability in the Middle East. Since then, the U.S has provided Saudi Arabia with legitimacy in the form of international support and military assistance. The relationship between the United States and the Kingdom has been necessary for the Saudi government to balance against external and regional threats given its lacking robust military capabilities. The first military base on Saudi soil was established in 1950, and during the first Gulf war, Saudi Arabia became a critical geostrategic partner in defeating Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.[16] It is important to note that the presence of a foreign, Western country on Arab and Islamic land had been a point of contention for Saudi citizens and its religious establishment, mainly due to Saudi society's negative perception to a Western power using the home of the two holiest sites of Islam as a base to attack Arab and Muslim neighbor: a perception used by Osama bin Laden to undergird his call for global jihad.[17]

The alliance between the two nations has at time proven problematic. Historically, the United States and Saudi Arabia have not developed a cohesive and collective position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The diverging interests came to its apex at the lowest point of Saudi relations during the 1973 oil embargo by the late King Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud. Today, the Saudi's maintain the position that the United States has not sufficiently capitalized Saudi's repeated efforts to bring Arab and Muslim nations of the Middle East to support several Saudi initiatives, the latest of which, the King Abdullah Peace Initiative of 2002 is viewed by Saudi as the "end game of negotiations"[18] in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[19]

Recent factors that have strained the U.S and Saudi alliance include the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, described by Saudi officials as a 'pivot towards Iran'; U.S non-intervention in Syria; and the concern of the United States regarding the rise of Sunni extremist groups, both armed and unarmed in the region that are perceived to be influenced by domestic actors within Saudi Arabia[20]. In a 2016 interview with the magazine *The Atlantic*, President Barack Obama provided insight into the increasingly tense relations of the traditional allies with regards to Middle Eastern regional politics, in which he stated his belief that Saudi Arabia and Iran should "share" the region, and further emphasized his disdain "free riders" – a comment many in Saudi Arabia perceived as directed towards them.[21] In a swift and public response penned in the Saudi English daily newspaper, *Arab News,* Prince Turki Al- Faisal rebuffed Obama's claims and recalled the Saudi's role in helping the United States defeat Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War, as he wrote: "We will continue to hold the American people as our ally and don't forget that when the chips were down, and George Herbert Walker Bush sent American soldiers to repel with our troops Saddam's aggression against Kuwait, soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder with soldiers".[22] Recently, relations between the Kingdom and the U.S. have improved with the Trump administration. To this end, President Trump made Saudi Arabia one of his first foreign policy visits, and signed a new contract worth around USD 110 billion in investments and weapons sales.[23]

Geopolitical Threat Perceptions and Regional Identity

The sources of leverage identified in the previous sections of this analysis have allowed Saudi Arabia to form the identity of a regional force that has earned its role in shaping the political and social landscape of the Middle East. The primary interests for Saudi Arabia has consistently been to "protect the country from foreign domination and/or invasion, and to safeguard the domestic stability of the Al-Saud regime".[24] For Saudi Arabia, its internal and international threat perceptions have simultaneously served as opportunities for the oil-rich country to extend its political influence in the Middle East in defense of such geopolitical interests.

The threat narrative that tended to capture the attention of the Saudi state, both ruling family and citizens alike, focused on the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Saudi Arabia, a state which once again derives its legitimacy from the primacy of its Islamic identity and leader in the Arab world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict strikes directly at the heart of that legitimacy. The politicization of the Palestinian cause by Arab states has been frequent, but for Saudi Arabia, it became an opportunity to become "a dominant regional power", particularly following the death of Nasser and his pan-Arab movement.[25][26] The most recent culmination of Saudis efforts with regards to Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the Arab Peace Initiative, also known as Abdullah Peace Plan of 2002. Introduced in Beirut in 2002 within the context of the Palestinian intifada, the plan was based off previous Saudi initiatives including the Fahad peace plan. The plan of 2002 sought to develop "normal relations" with Israel[27], and reinforce the Saudi leadership in coordinating the collective Arab support of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other Gulf states.

Recent international media reports have claimed the strengthening of bilateral relations between Saudi and Israel on security and economic issues. However, Saudi officials are aware of the need to temper any attempts to establish open communications and rapprochement with the Israeli government, given the potential implications of such a position with the Saudi citizens and religious establishment who have traditionally been opposed to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.[28]

While the Arab-Israeli conflict served as a framework from which the Saudi state could exercise its regional coordinative role, the most critical turning point for the state's foreign policy has been the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It was after the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime that the Iranian political narrative took a decisively antagonistic stance against Saudi Arabia, identifying the Al-Saud regime as a complicit actor in the encouragement of imperialistic Western involvement in the region. The theocratic regime in Iran has since been a source of insecurity for Saudi Arabia, in fear that Iran threatens to export its revolutionary ideology to neighboring countries – including the Shi'ite majority in Bahrain and the Shi'ite minority within the Saudi Kingdom itself. At the onset of the 1979 Revolution, Iranian leaders called for "shared Islamic sovereignty over Mecca and Medina" and continuously sought to utilize the annual Hajj pilgrimage as "not merely a religious duty but an occasion for an "Islamic uprising" to expose the "misdeeds" of the Pro-American

Saudi regime.[29] The ideological battle for rule over the holy cities has come to play in the current dynamics between the two states, as Iran claimed that the Saudi government was directly responsible for the deaths over 400 Iranian pilgrims in the stampede accident that occurred in 2015. [30]

Saudi Arabia has extended its competition with Iran in what many analysts perceive to be proxy conflicts in the region, including in Iraq, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. The Iranian Revolution shifted the political, military and ideological balance in the Middle East to the fore during the 1980s. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein became the "unchallenged leader" [31]of the region, and Saudi Arabia viewed him as a viable force to balance against the newly established Iranian revolutionary government. However, as the United States began to gear up its operations against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia began to ease its reliance on Saddam Hussein, and in fact allied with the U.S. against the Iraqi state in the first Gulf War because it believed an invasion in Kuwait by an aggressive Saddam Hussein would create instability for the Kingdom. It would take the second U.S military operation against Saddam Hussein in 2003 to leave the Saudi regime feeling insecure about Iranian influence once again. The subsequent removal of Saddam Hussein brought forth what authors such as Vali Nasr describe as a "Shiite revival"[32] that allowed Iran to further expand its military, economic and political ties in Iraq and the region, followed by a similar kind of engagement by Saudis to counter the perceived Iranian influence.

The Iranian gains were not limited to Iraq, and in fact over the years, the Saudi government would watch key actors in the Middle East like Gaza, Syria and Lebanon draw closer to Iran's sphere of influence, leaving the country somewhat "thrust, uncomfortably, into a regional leadership role".[33]Almost eight years later, the Saudi regime would have to confront the regional and domestic implications of the wave of popular protests in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt Syria and neighboring Bahrain, known as the Arab Spring. Despite the Saudi state's ability to preempt a similar uprising within its own borders using a USD 127 billion welfare package to citizens[34], Saudi Arabia has since taken a more proactive foreign policy approach in states such as Bahrain, Syria and Yemen in order to maintain or regain the power balance in the region. In response to the protests of the predominantly Shiite population in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies sent approximately 1,000 troops to Bahrain to deter and suppress the uprising – which was perceived to be the result of Iranian interference. The aggressive response by Saudi Arabia was primarily concerned with how the protests could potentially ignite age-old territorial claims of Bahrain by neighboring Iran, and how protests might spill-over into Saudi Arabia's borders – particularly its Eastern Province with a sizeable Shia minority – and destabilize its own political system.[35]

In a similar perception of Iranian threat and interference in a neighboring country, the Saudi regime has also been engaged in a military offensive against Houthi rebels in Yemen that are believed by the Saudi regime to receive military support from the Iranians. In 2015, the Saudi government and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council declared their military and political support to Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had fled Yemen to the Kingdom in March 2015 in order to escape the military advancements of the Houthis.[36]

While attempts have been made by the United Nations and regional Gulf actors like Oman to support a negotiated settlement to the conflict involving Saudi Arabia, Houthi rebels and President Hadi, peace talks between the parties were reported to have been "suspended" in August 2016 with no concrete suggestion to their resumption.[37] Saudi Arabia's interest in the war in Yemen, under the leadership of newly minted Deputy Crown Prince, could be interpreted as initially serving to demonstrate to the international community its potential and impending military leadership in the region.

In Syria, Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries (primarily with the support of Qatar) have opposed the regime of Bashar Al-Assad since the onset of the revolution in 2011. GCC nations have provided military and technical assistance to the various groups that oppose the Bashar Al-Assad regime – often referred to as 'rebel groups' – to defend the will of the Syrian people, but more importantly, to take the lead in countering the long-held Iranian-Syrian alliance that seemed unshakeable prior to the Arab spring[38].

Overall, Saudi's interest in trying to balance against an ever-present Iranian influence in the region is to ensure that such an interference does not destabilize the country's domestic affairs. If the Saudi ruling family believes itself to be, as this analysis illustrates, the purveyor of Arab but more importantly, Sunni-Islamic leadership, then Iranian hard and soft power (in the form of its military, economy and ideology) will consistently prove to be the most contending counter-narrative to the rule of the Saudi monarchy since Gamal Abel Nasser's pan-Arab movement. Therefore, the notion that Saudi and Iran should "share" the region is not a solution which the Saudis can embrace. Given the history and significance of Iranian Revolution of 1979, Saudi Arabia holds the perception that continued Iranian influence across the MENA region will not lead to situation in which the two nations agree to tolerate each other's existence. Rather, the Saudi regime believes it will be a potential end of their legitimacy in their own country. Foreign Minister Adel Jubeir reaffirmed this position in 2016, stating that the "Iranians should just stay away from us".[39] However, the Saudis are not yet convinced that a direct conflict between the two nations is a prospective path for Saudi foreign policy, as Deputy Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman claimed that war between Saudi Arabia and Iran would be considered "the beginning of a major catastrophe in the region".[40]

Internal Threats and Historical Events

The regional dynamics of the four main provinces in the Kingdom are referred to by some authors as an "often ignored issue" [41] that has the potential to destabilize the Saudi state. While the provinces of Al-Hejaz, Al-Najd, Asir and the Eastern provinces were united by the military conquests of the Al-Saud clan, they have each retained some of their respective historical social, cultural and economic traits. The Hejaz region was the only province of the Kingdom that was conquered and ruled by the Ottoman Empire, and is still perceived by the more conservative parts of the Kingdom, such as the Al-Najd province, as "foreign" and a threat to the homogeneity of the Saudi Islamic society. Hejazis, the term used to describe those who hail from the Hejaz region, view those from Al-Najd as "isolated" and "ignorant".[42], and the two regions have had a long running rivalry over business ventures and political influence. Furthermore, The Asir province's historical links to Yemen led to its conquest by Saudi Arabia in 1934 in a military confrontation; a conflict which still

contextualizes the dynamics of the recent Saudi military operation in Yemen.

The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is home to country's Shiite population that makes up 15 percent of its population, and is also the location most of the nation's oil resources, headed by the state company Saudi Aramco.[43] Saudi's Eastern Province has proved to be the most politically volatile region, having experienced numerous uprisings by the Shiite population – perceived to be influenced by Iran – to demand more political and socio-economic rights from the government.[44] In 2016, Saudi Arabian authorities executed a Shiite Saudi cleric by the name of Nimr Al-Nimr under charges of terrorism, after which protests took pace in the Eastern Province city of Qatif condemning the execution. Iranian representatives also expressed their disapproval of the execution; an Iranian foreign ministry representative stated that Saudi Arabia would "pay a high price for the execution".[45]

Domestic terrorism has long been a source of insecurity for the Saudi regime. The 1979 Juhayman incident against the Grand Mosque in Mecca has been noted as the most dramatic internal security threat to occur in Saudi Arabia. In 1979, a Saudi by the name of Juhayman Al-Otabi led a three-week hostage operation with the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and declared the "revival of Islam".[46] In the context of a newly revolutionary Shi'ite Islamic government in Iran, Otabi called for the Muslim world to reject "all western influences", and demanded the Al-Saud family relinquish any claims to their rule of the Kingdom or the Muslim world. With the assistance of the religious establishment, Pakistani troops and French counterterrorism units, the Saudi government was able to end the crisis, but the ramifications of the event would reinforce Saudi commitment to the country's religious establishment after the realization that religious extremists could cause the overthrow of the Saudi royal family.

Domestic terrorism has also directly threatened the members of the Al-Saud family: in 2009, the Crown Prince (then Deputy Minister of Interior) Muhammad Bin Nayef Abdul Aziz escaped an assassination attempt by a Saudi suicide bomber associated with Al-Qaeda. In 1996, 19 citizens of the United States were victims of a terrorist attack by Ahmed-Al-Mughassil, a Saudi Shiite who has recently been captured by Saudi Arabia after hiding under the protection of the Iranian supported militia Hezbollah in Beirut.[47]

Saudi Vision 2030: Between Leadership and Retreat

Saudi Arabia has been able to maneuver its external and internal political decision making within a realm of comfort and stability provided by the strength of its primary natural resource: oil. As the quintessential rentier state, the welfare state of the Kingdom has been able to stave off the implementation of various socioeconomic and political reforms. Reform in Saudi Arabia has mostly revolved on the use of petitions and open letters by local political groups and organizations to the ruling Al-Saud family. Petitions to the ruling family is a tradition of the Saudi state rooted in the Islamic principle of "supplication".[48] The nature of the reforms that were called for in these acts ranged from demands of a constitutional monarchy to a desire for increased regional autonomy and added support for human rights and women's rights. Development programs by the government have also been embodied in "Five-Year" development plans that had very little impact in changing the socio-economic or political dynamics of Saudi Arabia.

However, the narrative of the stable and steadfast Saudi Kingdom has been shifting, and the current discourse on the internal affairs of the Kingdom has been concerned with its economic volatility that stems from the decision of the Saudi government to pursue a market share dominance approach in the global oil market in 2014 to counter the effects of the shale oil gas industry in the United States, and temper the effects of the removal of economic sanctions on Iran upon the development of the Iranian Nuclear Agreement in 2015. The strategy has contributed to a 15 percent drop of the nation's GDP, and analysts have since wondered whether the Saudi government will be able to maintain its domestic social contract as well as its proactive foreign policy given the declining price of oil.[49]

 The "National Transformation Plan", developed under the framework of the "Saudi Vision 2030" has been pioneered by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman in coordination with the global consulting firm McKinsey & Company. The main aim of the initiative is to lay the necessary socio-economic foundations to Saudi Arabia to ween off the "oil addiction" that has driven the development and growth of the country.[50] Oil revenue dependence is hoped to be reduced by the year 2020, and the hopes of the Saudi leadership is to restructure and pivot the economy to develop a more robust private sector. Since its announcement, the Deputy Crown Prince and government institutions have initiated the requirements to begin the reform process, including the development of the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, and a plan to open shares of the state-owned oil company Saudi Aramco. Despite domestic and international skepticism on the implementation of the Vision, the government has since cut public sector wages and bonuses, and lifted national subsidies on gas and electricity, with local policy analysis and journalists referring to these acts as a "sign of the times".[51] The government has also announced a cancellation of development projects valued at around USD 266 billion dollars **[52]**, while also considering the introduction of "non-oil taxes".**[53]**

The implications of implementing Saudi Vision 2030 are important for the country and policy analysts to consider. As the economy transitions away from its dependency on oil revenue, there is a risk that the population engages in a reconsideration of the "unwritten social pact" that has guaranteed their loyalty in the past. As the Deputy Crown Prince commented in an interview with The Economist: "This one thing [in reference to taxes and political representation] is not at all related to the other" and that change in any form would occur "according to our [Saudi] own needs, according to our own pace, and not as a response to any other model."[54]

The transformation plan includes a large push to promote domestic tourism in the Kingdom, and outlines the provisions of creating an elaborate entertainment sector that includes increasing local comedy shows, as well as concerts and cultural events – which may prompt negative reactions from conservative factions of the Kingdom. In an illustrative example of the pivot away from the support base of the religious establishment, the government recently announced the decision to curtail the powers of the religious Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in regards to "chasing, arresting, or interrogating suspects."[55]

Despite the uncertainty that has characterized discussions on Saudis economic future, the seemingly intractable realities of the war in Yemen and Syria have reinforced the countries dedication to military spending, However, as Saudi Arabia takes the helm in trying

to balance its power position in the region against the perceived Iranian threat, it will also need to continue to invest in maintaining domestic stability through the loyalty of its citizens and the religious establishment that has provided Al-Saud family with the unity and legitimacy required to rule for almost a century.

Internal Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Though Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, the Kingdom functions through a network of competing powerful actors nested within a political establishment dominated by the Saudi royal family. While the primary objective for the family has been to secure and maintain its legitimacy and stability, time and again, the ruling clan finds itself bedraggled with divisions over the question of power and how it must be preserved. Ever since the Kingdom's founding in 1932, rivalrous clan-centered factions led by senior princes have sought to gain control of key power centers, aimed at fulfilling their ultimate goal - acquiring the kingship.[56]

These senior princes occupy central roles as principals within the socio-political affairs of Saudi Arabia, and depend on the sub-actors to solidify their control, expand their influence and exert their control, through a policy of "divide, conquer, co-opt" and when necessary, "coerce".[57] While the day-to-day decisions of the state are taken by the senior princes, the execution of state policies is the domain of the Saudi civil service and other agencies. Religious instruction, propagation, monitoring and compliance falls within the mandate of the religious establishment that is allied with the Al-Saud regime. The kingdom's military and intelligence agencies, though significant in the execution of internal and external policies, are under the direct control of the Ministries of Defense and Interior – which are led by senior princes, and as such do not contribute to the decision-making process independently. Each of these groups lobbies for influence not only within the top echelons of power but also within the realm of policymaking. Their competing interests directly impact key groups such as Saudi businesses, Saudi women, Saudi Shiites and expatriate workers.

The Saudi Civil Service

Saudi Arabia's civil service is tasked with steering the country's economy and fulfilling the kingdom's objective of being an industrial power. Led by "non-royal, commoner functionaries and technocrats", the civil service includes "islands of efficiency"[58] such as the Ministry of Finance, monetary agencies such as Capital Markets Authority, and state-owned companies such as Saudi Aramco and the Saudi Arabia Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC).[59] The civil service also manages the Saudi Industrial Development Fund – a robust investment vehicle which finances the kingdom's industrial growth, regulates the capitalization and modernization of local banks and manages Saudi Arabia's proceeds from export of crude oil and chemicals.[60]

As the world's largest oil exporter and leading producer in OPEC, Saudi Arabia's revenues are contingent on the volatility in the global oil market, and as such, the success of the civil service is key to the Al-Saud family's internal stability and longevity. The senior princes largely depend on income flows generated through the export of oil to manage the annual Hajj pilgrimage, and finance public services for the population.[61] The National Transformation Plan envisions a reduction in the dependency on oil revenue, and if achieved, it will prove to be a game-changing accomplishment for the Saudi government.

A major test for the civil service has been the implementation of the Saudization reform – a policy of affirmative action instituted by the government to reduce unemployment faced by Saudi citizens by setting a minimum required percentage of locals in the private sector.[62] Under the *Nitaqat* labor law decreed in 2011, companies are classified into four categories based on the number of Saudis employed as a percentage of their workforce. By instituting such a policy, the government has transferred the burden of providing employment to Saudi citizens onto private sector organizations, with severe consequences for non-compliance. Moreover, it has negatively impacted foreign workers, who now face uncertainties with regard to employment in the Kingdom. This puts the civil service in the unenviable position of deferring to the directives of the ruling elite while trying to placate the Saudi business and mercantile classes. Importantly, though, there have also been challenges to the Saudization policy, most notably that there is a large skills mismatch between the supply of Saudi labor and the demand from the private sector.

The Saudi Religious Establishment

The Saudi religious establishment derives its power and influence through a mutual support pact signed with ibn Saud in 1744 and maintains a near-absolute 'carte blanche' over religious instruction, propagation, monitoring and compliance of its ultraconservative, puritanical strain of Islam – 'Wahhabism'.[63] In return, it confers religious and political legitimacy upon the royal family as righteous leaders in the land of the Two Holy Mosques. This places the religious elite at the forefront of decision-making as influencers, and often pits them against other key organs of the Saudi state.

The 'Wahhabi' establishment has maintained a lasting hostility and apprehension towards Shiite citizens of Saudi Arabia, whom it deems to be 'polytheists' or 'heretics' maligning the "true religion" of Islam.[64] By asserting their control over religious affairs and influencing political decision-making, the religious elite has cast the Shiite as "treacherous and disloyal to the Saudi nation"[65] and has

legitimized discrimination and political marginalization of the Shiite minority, particularly in the oil-rich Eastern Province where most Shiites reside.

The religious establishment is well endowed financially, and has "arguably unrestricted capacity to educate Saudi youth"[66] and propagate its ultraconservative religious outlook through the public education system, Friday sermons at mosques, and through electronic media such as state-owned and private satellite channels, as well as social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Even though the role of the clerical class as the overarching arbiter on religious affairs is well recognized within the Saudi system, historically, its writ over the affairs of the state has been largely contingent upon the personal convictions of the monarch. While the clerics enjoyed the peak of their powers during the reign of King Fahd (in the years after the seizure of the Grand Mosque), their influence had considerably waned during the rule of King Abdullah, who called for greater inclusiveness and dialogue across all sections of Saudi society (including Shiites), as well as greater participation of women in state affairs – issues many religious elites perceive to be incompatible with the ideology of the 'Wahhabi' religious establishment.[67]

Besides the ruling elite, the religious establishment often comes into direct conflict with the civil service, and the latter's modernization project: primarily with regard to employment of Saudi women in the workforce, and redesigning the curriculum of public schools with a greater focus on skill-based education as opposed to religious education.[68] The Saudi Vision 2030 might also have the potential to unsettle the politically and socially privileged "ulema", who have provided the Al-Saud family, in particular the King, with religious authority based on the assurance that they would protect the social institutions and norms that embody strict adherence to orthodox Sunni practices.

The Saudi Military and Intelligence Agencies

With the rise of terror organizations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, the level of internal security threats faced by Saudi Arabia has increased. The Kingdom relies heavily on its military and intelligence gathering capabilities to safeguard its domestic stability and these have increased its import dependency of defense equipment. In 2014, Saudi Arabia overtook India as the world's largest arms importer.[69]

The menace of domestic terrorism has heightened fears of instability in the Kingdom. Between 2015 and 2016 alone, Saudi Arabia was exposed to seven terrorist suicide attacks, one of which occurred in the second holiest city of Islam: Medina. ISIS has also executed attacks in Shia mosques in the region in what some Saudi analysts call "an attempt to create a sectarian drift" within the Kingdom.[70] Saudi Arabian cyberspace is now the most recent victim of attack, as reports in December claim the launch of cyber-attacks on key Saudi institutions such as the Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation.[71]

Saudi Arabia's intelligence services are administered under four major divisions: (i) military intelligence, which falls under the purview of the Minister of Defense; (ii) the General Security Service, the domestic intelligence service agency which reports to the Minister of Interior; (iii) the National Guard Intelligence Directorate, which comprises officers recruited from tribes loyal to the royal family and is under the Ministry of the National Guard; and (iv) the General Intelligence Directorate, an independent security agency focused on tackling cross-border threats to Saudi Arabia: from extremist groups as well as deciphering illicit and underground financing.[72]

Senior Princes

The quest for influence between the princes and their factions primarily plays out in the form of tribal rivalries, but also manifests itself on the lines of ideological variances or differences in constituencies and support structures of princes and the king. So while the current monarch Salman is seen as closer to the conservative establishment, his predecessor King Abdullah was keen to champion modernization and liberalization reforms during his reign.[73]

Perhaps the most important function of the senior princes besides day-to-day administration is to secure the Al-Saud family's and the kingdom's line of succession. Usually the prerogative of the ruling monarch, in 2006, the responsibility of approving the king's successor as well as his crown princes was transferred to the Allegiance Council (Hay'at Al-*Ba'yah)* by then-King Abdullah.[74] The Council, comprised of sons and grandsons of ibn Saud, is tasked with approving the selection and appointment of the king's successors, and subsequently confirming the coronation of the heir apparent (Crown Prince) as king, in the event of the death or abdication of the current monarch.[75] One of the chief reasons for Abdullah's break from tradition was to curtail the influence of the Sudairi faction within the Al-Saud family.

Abdullah's successor and current ruler King Salman effectively used the Council's powers to rubber-stamp the replacement of his half-brother (and Abdullah ally) Muqrin bin Abdulaziz with his nephew and Interior Minister Muhammad bin Nayef as Crown Prince in 2015.[76] In addition, he cemented the long-term dominance of the Sudairi faction over the kingdom by appointing his 29-year old son Mohammad bin Salman as Deputy Crown Prince (second in line to the throne), Minister of Defense and head of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs.[77] Ever since the royal shake-up, the King has ordered major cabinet reshuffles, replacing his key ministers (foreign, oil), while restructuring certain ministries (oil, water, electricity, labor, social affairs, Hajj and Umra).[78]

Though decreed by King Salman, the overhaul of the government is believed to part of the Deputy Crown Prince's plans to

 solidify his power and status[79], at home and abroad, as a worthy claimant to the throne, and possible successor to his father ahead of the Crown Prince. Prince Mohammad bin Salman has particularly focused on being the face of economic reform through the Kingdom's Saudi Vision 2030, as well as of foreign affairs through the conflict in Yemen, in a bid stamp his imprint on the governance and decision-making in the Kingdom. However, bin Nayef enjoys wider support within the Al-Saud family, particularly the older generation of royals, and is viewed as a "counterterrorism czar" with excellent ties with the United States[80]. As such, the elder prince would be unwilling to cede any ground to bin Salman in the contest for the throne.

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Saudi Arabia employs multiple strategies in the MENA region, all aimed at securing its core objective: ensuring the stability of the Saudi royal family and that of the Kingdom. In the regional and geopolitical context, the Kingdom also wishes to be seen as the undisputed leader of the Muslim and Arab worlds. It uses its oil wealth to secure the loyalty of countries such as Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen, while attempting to curb the influence of Iran, which it views as an adversary. It also aims to quell the rise of Shiite movements and proxies such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, as well as prevent Sunni terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda from threatening the Kingdom's stability.

Allies and Partners

Gulf Cooperation Council

As the largest member of the GCC, Saudi Arabia enjoys strong bilateral engagements with Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE, and favorable but tense relationships with Qatar[81] and Oman. GCC members (except Oman) have provided military and technical assistance to the US-led coalition against ISIS in Iraq and against the Bashar Al-Assad regime in Syria, and are part of the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen. In 2011, the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) of the GCC led by Saudi Arabia intervened in Bahrain to quell the civil unrest led by the island nation's Shiite majority population[82].

Though GCC members have their differences with regard to integration and cooperation, they have repeatedly come together to denounce "Iranian interference" in the internal affairs of the region.[83] In the aftermath of the attacks on the Saudi missions in Iran, GCC members downgraded (Kuwait, Qatar, UAE) or severed relations with Iran (Bahrain) in solidarity with Saudi Arabia.[84] The GCC thus provides the Saudi leadership with a geostrategic support base with similar objectives ready to rally around its initiatives.

United States

The Kingdom maintains a longstanding relationship with the United States. It is a credible partner in coalition efforts with the U.S. against ISIS and the Assad regime in Syria, and against the Houthi movement and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen. On the other hand, the driving role of the U.S. in the effort to secure the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, brought about a thaw in relations between the U.S. and the Islamic Republic, much to the indignation of the Kingdom. The passing of "JASTA", the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism bill by the United Sates Congress in 2016 further added a strain to the diplomatic relations between the two nations, as it its passage allows U.S citizens to sue foreign governments believed to be sponsors of supporters of the September 11th terrorist attacks.[85] Recently, however, the Trump Administration has sought to strengthen relations with the Kingdom, signing USD 110 billion worth in investments and armament sales in May 2017.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is an international organization created with the intention of safeguarding Muslim interests and enhance the bonds of fraternity among Muslim nations.[86] Headquartered in Jeddah less than a hundred miles from Mecca, the OIC has been majorly financed and strategically used by Saudi Arabia to project its leadership credentials within the Muslim world, as well as to pivot members towards the Kingdom instead of its key regional rival, Iran.

In 2016, during the 13th Summit of the OIC held in Istanbul, Saudi Arabia was able to introduce and pass three resolutions against Iran, pertaining to: (i) Iranian interference in Saudi affairs; (ii) armed aggression on Saudi missions in the Islamic Republic; and (iii) Iranian "continued support for terrorism" in the Middle East.[87]

External Conflicts

The main external conflict for the Saudis has been the ongoing regional rivalry with Iran, which has manifested itself in different forms, including through the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, where both countries back opposite sides. In addition, the attacks on the

Saudi missions in Tehran and Mashhad in January 2016 following the execution of a Saudi Shiite cleric by the Kingdom, set off a powder keg that led to an official severance of ties between the two neighbors.[88]

Of significance is Tehran's aggressive stance towards Riyadh's custodianship of Islam's two holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, and its repeated criticism of the kingdom's management of the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Citing safety concerns following the death of over 400 of its citizens during a Hajj stampede in 2015, Iran barred its citizens from making the pilgrimage in 2016.[89]

Perhaps the most significant component of the intractable rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a sectarian contest for dominance of the Islamic world and of the wider MENA region. Enshrined within Iran's post-revolutionary state ideology is the concept of "empowerment of the *mosta'zafin* (oppressed) over the *mostakbarin* (oppressors)"[90], which it uses to support and amplify the cause of not only the Shiites, but also of persecuted or subjugated people around the world. While Iran has been unable to challenge Saudi Arabia's clout and position in the Arab world, it has tried to win favor by presenting itself as the leading proponent of Palestinians' right to self-determination and freedom, and as the sole regional power capable of confronting Israel.

Recently, hostilities between Iranians and the Saudis have translocated to the internet, with both countries publicly denouncing and rebutting each other's claims, in the hopes of reaching a wider audience and shaping favorable international opinion. In September 2016, the Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif wrote in *The New York Times*[91], referring to the Saudi brand of "Wahhabism" as the source of terrorism in the world.

"Over the past three decades, Riyadh has spent tens of billions of dollars exporting Wahhabism through thousands of mosques and madrasas across the world. From Asia to Africa, from Europe to the Americas, this theological perversion has wrought havoc. Virtually every terrorist group abusing the name of Islam — from Al Qaeda and its offshoots in Syria to Boko Haram in Nigeria — has been inspired by this death cult."

Just days later, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel-Al Jubeir responded with a counter Op-Ed in *The Wall Street Journal*[92], in which he lambasted Iran's ideology of "Khomeinism" as the fountainhead of terror and extremism.

"Iran is the leading state-sponsor of terrorism, with government officials directly responsible for numerous terrorist attacks since 1979. Iran cannot talk about fighting extremism while its leaders, Quds Force and Revolutionary Guard continue to fund, train, arm and facilitate acts of terrorism. It is this ideology of "Khomeinism"—driven by an appetite for expansion, fueled by anti-Western hatred and motivated by sectarianism—that has energized and empowered extremism. Only by ridding the world of this toxic and radical mind-set can sectarianism be contained, terrorism defeated and calm restored to the region. If Iran is serious about combating extremism, then it should refrain from policies and actions that give rise to extremism."

What is interesting to note however, is that despite the belligerent tone employed by both Ministers, they ended their opinion pieces by outlining their respective terms of engagement with one another. While Zarif opined that "Saudi rulers had to put aside the rhetoric of blame and fear to eliminate the scourge of terrorism and violence", Al-Jubeir said Riyadh would "welcome better relations with Iran" but that Tehran would have to "abandon its subversive and hostile activities and stop its support for terrorism."

It is clear from the above exchanges that Saudi Arabia and Iran are far from any rapprochement. Moreover, the avenues for a comprehensive negotiation between are limited at this time. As the contours of the Middle East and political equations between state and non-state actors continue to evolve in the near future, there is a window of opportunity for Iran and Saudi Arabia to potentially identify common interests and grounds for engagement. However, in the absence of a sustainable dialogue between the two states, neither side is expected to relent, and proxy conflicts will likely escalate in the short term.

Sub-Conflicts

In Yemen, the Kingdom leads a military coalition to restore the government of ousted President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, which has been fighting the Houthi movement – a Yemeni Zaidi Shiite movement – since 2015. Both the Hadi government and its Saudi backers view the Houthis as Iranian proxies seeking to expand the Islamic Republic's influence in Yemen.[93] In 2012, under a GCC-brokered transition plan, Hadi took over as President from strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh to head a fragile, polarized Yemeni state. As political tensions continued to simmer in Yemen for the next few years, the Houthis built an alliance with Saleh's General Peoples' Congress party (GPC), and with military units loyal to the former ruler. In January 2015, the rebels seized the presidential palace in Sana'a, and put Hadi under house arrest, which compelled the president to resign and flee the capital.

The GCC viewed the seizure of the palace as a coup d'état by the Houthis[94]. The president thereafter fled: first to Saudi Arabia, and later to Aden, which he later declared as temporary capital and seat of the Yemeni government.[95] In February 2015, the Houthis announced the dissolution of Yemen's parliament and the formation of a Revolutionary Committee which would govern the country. In

March 2015, on Hadi's request, Saudi Arabia and nine other Arab states (supported by the United States) launched military operations *Decisive Storm*, and subsequently, *Restoring Hope* against the Houthis to reinstate the embattled Hadi government in Sana'a. Iran has been accused, particularly by the Yemeni and Saudi governments, of financing, arming and training the Houthis, and prolonging the conflict in the impoverished country.

In Syria, Saudi Arabia and other GCC states have armed opposition groups fighting the regime of Bashar Al-Assad since the onset of the revolution in 2011. The Kingdom has provided high-grade weapons such as TOW anti-tank missiles[96], as well as technical assistance to the 'rebel' groups fighting the Syrian forces in a bid to inflict a heavy defeat on Assad and diminish Iran's control and influence over Damascus – a relationship alliance that seemed unshakeable prior to the Arab spring.[97] Most recently, Iran has been able to secure Egypt's (the most populous Arab country and a Sunni ally of Saudi Arabia) participation and support of its precarious stand on Syria at the Lausanne talks, much to the chagrin of Riyadh[98], which has provided billions of dollars in critical financial assistance to Cairo, as well political support to the Sisi regime in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup. For the Saudis, losing Cairo's backing may tilt the regional balance unfavorably in favor of Iran, one of Riyadh's greatest concerns

In Lebanon, the Kingdom was one of the major stakeholders responsible for initiating the Taif Agreement (1989) that formally ended the Civil War in that country.[99] Ever since the signing of the treaty, Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in the Sunni-dominated government of late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, in an attempt to extend its sphere of influence over the minnow nation, and to curb the increasing clout of the Hezbollah movement – a proxy of Iran. In recent years, following Hariri's death and the exile of his son Saad (also former Prime Minister), Hezbollah and Iran were able to gain considerable influence in Tripoli – establishing a "state within a state".[100] This situation prompted Saudi Arabia to suspend USD 3 billion aid to the Lebanese military in February 2016.[101]

Potential Negotiation Moves

In previous negotiation events in the MENA region, Saudi Arabia appeared most apt to play the role of regional coordinator, in which its financial and religious clout could invite other regional players to come together on critical issues. The coordinative and mediation role of Saudi Arabia has led to significant negotiated settlements including the Taif Agreement to end the Lebanese Civil War, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Mecca Accord which brought together rivals Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. However, Saudi Arabia's involvement and cooperation in dialogues never seemed to provide enough leverage such that their agreement to a negotiation would add any sense of finality to a settlement. Instead, historically it would typically be the militarily powerful states of Iraq, Syria and Egypt that played a key role in the success of a Middle Eastern peace agreement, especially within the context of the Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflict. Saudi security and political position, and negotiation moves necessarily needed to move in tandem with the more military powerful countries of the Middle East or with its Western ally and security guarantor, the United States. However, Saudi Arabia now faces a Middle Eastern political and security landscape in which it the Kingdom is heavily involved, particularly with regards to the conflicts in Yemen and Syria. To this end, it now has the leverage and regional clout necessary to be an important partner in any negotiations to end the conflicts in either Yemen and Syria, as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As it takes a more proactive role in the military and political conditions of these conflicts, it must also begin to take substantive steps to clarify its various interests in the regional dynamics. This includes actively identifying whether there exists a zone of potential agreement on issues between its adversaries the region, most notably Iran and its proxies or affiliates – Hezbollah and the Houthi movement.

With regards to Iran, there have been no recent direct channels of communication for the Kingdom to confront the issues related to perceived Iranian rivalry and ascendancy, and it has been particularly difficult to establish dialogue between the two nations since the severance of ties in 2016 surrounding the events of the execution of Shi'ite cleric Nimr al Nimr and subsequent attacks on the Saudi embassy in Iran. Furthermore, for Saudi and Iran to engage in a constructive dialogue, it would be important for the Saudis to identify issues and topics that are more concrete than prevailing perceptions of 'rivalry' or 'interference'. A positive development and opportunity, towards cooperation that could help Saudi move past this problem was the recent talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the context of the Hajj and umrah preparations for 2017.[102] Such meetings between the two states could prove to be an important opportunity for Saudi Arabia to begin opening a space for unofficial talks on critical issues of mutual concern in the region, such as for example brokering ceasefires in Yemen or Syria.

Importantly, there is also scope for Saudi Arabia to strengthen its intelligence relationship with Israel moving forward. Given their shared geopolitical interest of containing the spread of Iranian influence across the region, both countries may seek to bolster intelligence sharing. While official talks or public rapprochements may be politically difficult for Saudi Arabia's ruling class, clandestine cooperation regarding curtailing Iranian financial or military support to militias across the region, or with regards to the Iranian nuclear program, may be realistic in the future.

Finally, Saudi Arabia will likely seek to strengthen its ties with the United States under the Trump Administration. President Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017 signals the warming relations between the two countries – a contrast to the more distant and cautious relationship held by former President Obama. This strengthened relationship will be critical for the Kingdom in order to increase its military efforts in Yemen and Syria, as well as to gain a harder line from the United States on Iranian influence in the region.

XXVIII. South Sudan: Struggles of the Newest State

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Introduction

South Sudan's regional perspective differs from Sudan's due to its non-Muslim political regime. South Sudan has a very weak economic, social and strategic position in the region. South Sudan declared independence from Sudan in 2011. Thus far, South Sudanese statehood has been characterized by instability, violence, and humanitarian need. The civil war between the government of Salva Kiir and opposition forces has displaced 3.6 million citizens as IDPs and refugees. The violence has also resulted in a humanitarian crisis, as 4.8 million are threatened with extreme hunger, and famine has begun to affect certain areas. Due to the severity of the violence, farmers in the agricultural-based society are largely unable to plant crops. Widespread attacks on aid workers and convoys make it difficult to reach vulnerable populations. The conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives, but the presence of a UN intervention of 15,000 troops has frequently drawn the ire of the president, who desires to avoid Western influence in the country.

For the past two years, the UN has fallen below its funding goals for South Sudan. In 2015, the UN only met 62 % of its $1.6 billion goal for the 4.6 million people affected. For 2016, only 88% of the more modest goal of $1.29 billion was funded. The resulting gap in resources leaves vulnerable populations in South Sudan more susceptible to starvation and disease.

Still, the histories and present crises of Sudan and South Sudan are closely linked. In 2013, the UN Mission to Sudan compiled a study that showed that 50.6% of the population live on less than US$ 2.5 per day. The maternal mortality rate is 2,054 per 100,000 live births (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2013)[1]. In addition, according to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), only 2% of the population completed primary education in South Sudan and they have the worst literacy rate in the world, with 27% of adults and 70% of children aged 6–17 years in 2009 never having been to school (UNICEF). Thus, South Sudan faces enormous challenges in building a new state.

To provide a democratic welfare system, South Sudan will need foreign investments and a working administration. Moreover, the country lacks educational institutions important for state building. Whether or not they have the capacity for addressing these challenges is unclear. The society of South Sudan is fragmented and even after secession, the challenge for the ruling SPLM/A is to represent all people without "regard to race, creed or colour".

New challenges and conflicts since 2012 have led to a severe food crisis in South Sudan, depriving approximately 4 million people, while 2 million people were displaced during the war, posing a real challenge for the government.

In the past few decades, Sudan and South Sudan have encountered several conflicts caused by different factors. There were conflicts between Animists and African Christian population in the Southern part of Sudan (now known as South Sudan) and the Arabian Muslims population in the Northern part of Sudan (now known as Sudan) between President Salva Kiir, of the Dinka ethnic group and former vice president Riek Machar, from the Nuer ethnic group. The ongoing conflict between the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) which accuses the government of Sudan of oppressing Darfur's non –Arab population is exacerbating the current conflicts significantly. Around 3 million people died in the wake of civil war and internal conflicts in the country (Ahmed, 2008)[2]. As Jok (2015)[3] discussed, the main root of conflicts between South and North Sudan, which ultimately led to the South seceding from the North, stemmed from traditional and ethnic differences between Arab Muslims of the North, and Animists and African Christians of the South. With the expiry of the interim Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9 July 2011 and a referendum in January 2011, South Sudan officially became the youngest state in the world. 98.3% of South Sudanese people voted for independence, showing how strongly the South Sudanese wanted secession (Southern Sudan Referendum, 2011)[4]. Although the CPA created a democratic basis for relations between the North and South of Sudan on paper at first, internal conflicts within and between the countries remain even after secession.

The Middle East has faced various changes since the rise of the Arab Spring, affecting many nations in one way or another. It has changed tremendously with the rise of ISIS, the nuclear conflict between the West and Iran and the Arab Spring in Middle Eastern countries. Civil wars have not only affected Sudan and South Sudan adversely, but in other countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Syria. These political crises and conflicts in Middle Eastern countries have not only affected these nations, but the devastating effects of these conflicts are observable around the globe.

This paper sets out a wide-ranging study of Sudan and South Sudan's internal difficulties including wealth sharing, identity conflicts and deciding a demarcation line between North and South. It places special emphasis on how conflicts in the Middle East, such as the rise of ISIS or the Arab Spring contributed to these internal conflicts.

Purpose and Scope

The paper begins with a section discussing the identity and conflict narratives of Sudan and South Sudan and the behaviour of the ruling bodies of Sudan and South Sudan regarding Middle Eastern conflicts. It will then show how conflicts in the Middle East influenced internal conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan and how the position of different parties in these conflicts affects both countries. In addition, negotiation moves used for resolving Middle East conflicts will be analysed to determine if they could help Sudan and South Sudan to resolve their issues.

Five major factors will be discussed:
1. The internal ethnic groups in both countries i.e. Arab Muslims, Animists and African Christians.
2. International players in the neighbourhood of the Sudan and South Sudan who have contributed, either positively or negatively, to Sudanese conflicts and civil war between ethnic groups.
3. Non-state actors, such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) and Organization of African Union (AU).
4. Non-state international actors like ISIS or Daesh, which are posing serious threats to internal affairs of Sudan and South Sudan.
5. The North and South Sudan's involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts.

The paper will also suggest a set of policy recommendations for South Sudan.

Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

The South Sudanese were less represented in political institutions than the Northern Sudanese during the Anglo-Egyptian condominium from 1899 to 1956. The neglect of their rights, restriction of participation in politics, dominance of the North and the absence of a proportional distribution of seats in the Legislative Assembly excluded Southerners even after independence from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in 1953. Their religion was not accepted and religious gatherings outside churches were banned – a crucial interference with their human rights. These measures demonstrate the dominance of the Northern government over Southerners and the inequality between the two regions. They explain much of the cultural and ethnic marginalization of South Sudanese people, and increased their desire to exercise their right for National Self-Determination (NSD) and independence.

The exclusion of the South from government also had a socio-economic impact. The socio-economic development and investment in infrastructure (Albino, 1942) did not happen in the South, while provinces in the North developed. It can thus be said that the state, did not represent all 'people' regardless of religion, race and creed that lived in its territory. Southerners did not feel that they belong to the North which shaped their identity and values significantly.

The Northern Sudanese failed both to establish an inclusive political system and to include the diversity of the country in it. They did not foster a state of justice and equality for all ethnic groups and thus marginalized a huge part of the population in the South (Ibid, 2015) , explaining the desire of the South for NSD.

The two regions are faced with a conflict that is the result of armed rebel groups and they shape the direction that the conflict takes. It is important to note that South Sudan is in contention in regard to the leadership of the Juba government. This renders government officials powerless and prevents them imposing bureaucratic order on the state. This resulted due to the lack of an opposition in politics, as the politicians continuously break away from the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) .

The South Sudan is not only fighting Sudan, but also itself in the form of conflicts over natural resources, political power and cultural identity in the South (Simmons and Dixon, 2006) . The violence in South Sudan recently increased so that in 2010, 1,000 people were killed and 223,000 displaced (OCHA, 2010) . Some authors argue that the internal conflicts in the South can be traced through this ethnic fragmentation and the absence of a common identity in the South. The population comprises a mixture of Arabs, Africans, Bejja, and Nubia. A total of 51% of the population speaks Arabic, while 49% speak other languages and dialects (Index Mundi, 2016)) . The dominance of the Dinka tribe in politics after independence can be seen in the formation of a post-independence cabinet which consist of 42 per cent Dinka that hold the key post (Ibid., 2016) . Salva Kiir, the chief of the SPL/M favored his own ethnical group over other in the government (South Sudan Tribune, 2015) .

This diversity in South Sudan is not the major obstacle for peace in the country, but ethnic favoritism creates asymmetric relationships in its government. The fragmentation within South Sudan's society needs special policies to secure the rights of all members of society. That the SPL/M struggles to implement these policies can be seen in the current violent situation and illustrates the intractability and nature of internal wars (Maitre, 2009) . The South identity has been mainly formed from the struggle against the North. The resistance of the Southerners to the Arab and Islamic culture united the Southerners.

Sources of Leverage

Since its independence from Sudan, South Sudan has had the most underdeveloped economy in the world. South Sudan's weaknesses are its lack of infrastructure, a corrupt government, an unstable political situation, a high illiteracy rate, no proper implementation of rule of law, gaps in income level, a social crisis and poor healthcare services (William, 2014)[5]. The infrastructure is weak, with few paved roads and with several cities or villages lacking basic needs such as electricity and running water (Elbagir and Karimi, 2011)[6]. The CPA in 2005 provided a classical division of power with a judicial branch in the form of executive and legislative powers. However, the central state of South Sudan was under the hegemony of the SPLM/SPLA, the former rebel movement. Which is largely composed of Southerners under Christian leadership. According to Koos (2014)[7], the real challenge for the South Sudanese leadership and the cause of political conflict between the parties was down to the weak symbiosis between the state, the government and the armed forces. This resulted in a weak state with a lack of legitimacy and a limited capacity to establish power sharing tools when it came to the creation of political institutions. According to Spaulding and Sabr (2016)[8], the current presidency of Salva Kiir has not made any landmarks when it comes to resolving the problems of the newly formed state.

Therefore, South Sudan's key interest is to strengthen the economy by creating robust ties with more prosperous countries in the region, such as Israel, which supports South Sudan with infusions of ammunition and financial aid. However, South Sudan desires to resolve its internal political and financial issues with minimal assistance from outside actors like the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations, whom the South Sudanese government views with suspicion. In the past year, the South Sudanese government has refused or delayed UN troops from entering the country, and has raised the fee for external humanitarian actors to prohibitive levels. Such actions may seem to preserve in some way the sovereignty of South Sudan and provide the government with much-needed income, but in the long term seem likely to diminish military and development assistance.

Nevertheless, should South Sudan's political instability subside, it is well situated to become a prosperous nation. South Sudan's sources of leverage come from the land itself: energy from oil, and other natural resources. The country administers bountiful oil wells, which it presently ships across the border for processing in Sudan's refineries. However, South Sudan intends to increase their energy independence by building their own refineries. Additionally, South Sudan shares many of the same natural resources as Sudan, such as mineral resources.[9] Nevertheless, South Sudan's present conflict prevents it from fully accessing these resources and enjoying their revenue.

Since independence, South Sudan has been plagued by severe political strife resulting in civil war, widespread drought and hunger. The government has failed to control the various insurgent groups, and has a contentious relationship with neighboring Sudan. South Sudan also faces the threat of infiltration by terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Therefore, a beneficial regional strategy for South Sudan would be to focus on counterterrorism efforts, by securing its borders and collaborating with its neighbors on military and intelligence strategy. South Sudan would also profit from fixing its internal fractures, bringing home refugees from surrounding areas, and developing its natural resource extraction to bring profit to the failing economy.

Internal Conflicts

The separation of one state into two is a rare and historical achievement. However, South Sudan faces many challenges in building their new states. Who are the Sudanese and the South Sudanese? And why is the youngest state in the world threatened by wars and disintegration? After gaining independence from Sudan, South Sudan has fallen into a civil war between the government of Kiir and its opposition. In addition, internal conflict by internally displaced people has been a cause for concern for the government and public alike.

South Sudan has always accused the Sudanese government that, led by its Arab majority, it has always benefited more from revenues gained from the sale of oil and other petroleum products, which were being taken from South Sudan (Tawil, 2011)[10]. As long as demarcation, security challenges and wealth sharing issues are not resolved, the building of a South Sudanese state or the achievement of peace in the region will likely not happen.

After the independence of South Sudan, Sudan not only lost land, but also large reservoirs, which became part of South Sudan after the partition. Current conflicts in Sudan continue to pressurize Sudan even more. In order to seek safety from the political problems in newly formed South Sudan and from the hunger prevailing in that country, more than 100,000 people from South Sudan have moved to Sudan, further crushing its economy (World Bank, 2016)[11].

Just 18 months after the successful secession of the newly developed state, a power struggle between the vice president and president of the country erupted into civil war between the parties. Leaders from East Africa mediated so that peace and a ceasefire agreement could be reached, which was signed in 2015. However, it was a slow process when it came to transition of the government's establishment, so rivalry between the vice president and president continued to grow.

The armed conflicts between different sections of the country, and political crisis between the rebel forces and the government of Sudan, have led to the conflicts encountered by South Sudan in the past two decades. Before the outbreak of violence in December 2013 in Sudan, the stability of South Sudan's politics was vulnerable because of the protracted and unresolved political rivalry between Machar (former vice president) and Kiir (president at that time), dating back to the 1990s. Kiir was a major in the national army of Sudan and he joined the SPLM in 1983, helping the regulator John Garang to formulate the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Machar also joined the SPLA and SPLM in 1984 after getting his doctorate in the United Kingdom. Later on, Machar found Garang's objectives for obtaining more power unacceptable and so became a rival to the government, fighting for the secession of South Sudan. As a result, he broke away and in 1991, formed the SPLM/A. This movement emerged as the South Sudan Independence Movement/Army. Article 101 of the Transitional Constitution of Sudan gives numerous powers to the President of Sudan, who has the authority to lead all affairs in the country without major consultation with other officials. Presidents even have the power to remove officials. President Kiir overused this power, causing the main political conflict between different parties in the Sudan and ultimately the failure of all attempts to bring about peace in the country and retain it as an integrated unit.

External Conflicts

Sudan-South Sudan Ethnic Conflict
Presently, South Sudan's main source of external conflict remains Sudan. The primary reasons for the country's division were ethnic

and religious differences, of which issues persist today. According to Deng (1995) , Sudan has always been an ethnically diverse nation. There are many sub-ethnic groups living in the north and south region of the country. There are around sixty sub-ethnic groups in Sudan and in South of Sudan, including Animists and the Christian population who claim an African identity (Deng, 1995). The reconciliation of the traditional identity of the Arab and African population was not made until the inception of Sudan. The national identity of Sudan has not completely evolved, because people from West, North and East Sudan refer to themselves as Arab Muslims. However, people from Southern Kordofan, South Sudan and the Blue Nile consider themselves Africans (Jok, 2001) . People from the North of Sudan identification with the Middle East can be traced thousands years back due to Turko-Egyptian regime in 1821.The Turko-Egyptian regime was overthrown by the Mahdist revolution, an Islamic revolt against the Turko-Egyptian regime in Sudan (Salman,2013:347) . Between 1895 and 1898, the Mahdiya regime reinforced relations between the South and the North in order to collect ivory and capture slaves from the South (Deng,1973: 29) . When the Anglo-Egyptian condominium replaced the Turko-Egyptian regime in 1885 they ended the assault against the Southerners, but reinforced the division between North and South by adopting different policy approaches such as stopping free movement of people between the North and South of Sudan which reinforced the division between the North and the South significantly (Albino, 1970: 16-23) . Policies such as the "divide-and-rule-policy" introduced by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in 1930, provided different educational, socio-cultural, linguistic and administrative development of the South and North (Ibid., 2008) . This increased unequal development between the North and the South. This policy was important concerning socio-economic development of the South and caused marginalization of a huge part of the population.

According to Olson and Rothman (Olson and Rothman, 2001), the Sudanese conflict was also caused by the differences in ethnic identity between these groups. This ethnic conflict between North and South Sudan has been problematic, despite efforts from the international community. Muslim Arabs in the Northern region of the country did not consider South Sudan's ethnic groups, i.e. African Christians, to be citizens of the country who have the same basic rights as Muslims. The demands of African population at the Juba conference in 1947 included: (1) provision of equal status with the Arab Muslims in the Northern region in all spheres; (2) equal recognition without discrimination in politics as well as resources allocation, and; (3) to maintain the identities of different ethnic groups in the country, whether Arab Muslims or African Christians (Jok, 2001). This diversity itself in South Sudan is not the major obstacle for peace in this country. However, the use of ethnicity in South Sudan as a tool to secure ethnic favoritism created asymmetric relationships within the new government. The fragmentation within the South Sudanese society needed special policies to secure the rights of all members of the society.

This conflict between the parties was enlarged owing to the fact that none of the groups was willing to compromise and thus ethnic identity thus survived rather than forming a new unified identity. The lack of compromise and working as an integrated unit became the reason the conflict dragged on and made the peaceful coexistence of both parties impossible.

According to Olson and Rothman (Ibid., 2001), if "parties in identity-based conflict fear that their identity needs will be neglected or negated by a conflict settlement, they will not be motivated to engage in negotiations to settle" (Ibid., 2001) . The ethnic groups of Africa fear that their ethnic and religious identities may be assimilated with the identity and religious values of Arab Muslims.

Sudan-South Sudan Religious Conflict

According to Fox (Fox, 2002) , the conflicts between different parties can be called ethno-religious if the ethnic groups in conflict have different religious values. Like the ethnic diversity in Sudan's different regions, religious diversity was also seen in the united Sudan. Major religions in the Sudan included Islam, Christianity and Animism with traditional religious beliefs (Glickman, 2000) . The percentages of population following different religions were fractured geographically with ethno-religious distinction between groups that have Arab and African identities.

According to Glickman (Glickman, 2000), the major religious party in Sudan was the Sunni Muslims residing in the Western and Central region of the Sudan, making up approximately 60% of the population. A total of 15% of the population was Christian, while 25% had indigenous beliefs. During North-South Sudan conflict, the government led and ruled by Arab Muslims waged a "jihad" or a holy war against the Christians of the Southern region. These Arab Muslims used to call the Animists the "Kafir" or infidels in the southern parts of the Sudan (Collins, 2008) . The attempt of the Arab Muslim government to establish the Muslim identity in the country with a multi-religious population has contributed to conflicts between both groups.

Sudan-South Sudan Border Questions – Abyei

The main contention about the North-South boundary can be seen in the battle over the sub-region of Abyei, an economically important area for both the North and South. This region is inhabited by Ngok Dinka peoples, who favoured an alliance with the South. However, the Misseriya people of Abyei considered themselves Northerners. This served to aggravate the conflict between North and South. The Abyei Boundary Commission consisted of members of the NCP, SPL/M and the IGAD and was tasked with resolving this issue (Ibid.,2012)[12]. However, this proved unsuccessful, because they were unable reach consensus when it came to setting a demarcation line.

Sudan-South Sudan Oil and Wealth Sharing

Another crucial issue that remains ambiguous concerns the management of oil revenue by the NCP. This also shows the difficulty of secession, because geographically, both countries need each other for economic success. The oil production fields are in the South, but South Sudan is landlocked and therefore needs the North for the transportation of the oil (Patey, 2010)[13]. This also shows the difficulty of secession, because geographically, both countries need each other for economic success. This requires the North and the South to

cooperate. However, their relationship is marked by mistrust and enmity. For the South, oil revenue money is especially important for building their economy and industry, which was previously concentrated in the North. In addition, the distrust and poor governance of the oil sector does little to attract investment companies (Belloni, 2011)[14].

The African Union

The African Union (AU), along with the European Union and the UN established the Ceasefire Commission (CFC) to monitor the ceasefire agreement between the government of Sudan and armed opposition involving the Darfur region in the year 2004 (Appiah-Mensah, 2006) . The moment of reconciliation between the parties helped to start the process of developing peaceful conditions in the region of Darfur. They agreed in this convention that African military observers would go to Darfur, their duty to monitor the ceasefire agreement (Flint and De Waal, 2007) . The AU appointed a high-level panel of African experts an d put a lot of effort in solving the conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan. Despite all their efforts and engagement, the parties failed to reach an agreement recently. Although neighbouring countries and members of the AU such as Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia encouraged the NCP and SPL/M to engage in dialogue and contributed significantly to the CPA agreement in 2005 by providing the mediators and holding the peace process in Addis Ababa, the achievement of a long term peace in Sudan and South Sudan failed. One have to acknowledge the regional support without it would never have come to the CPA. However, the AU, Sudanese stakeholder and the International Community made mistakes during the peace process which were fatal: The International Community, the SPL/M and the NCP turned the peace process into an elite and inclusiveness process and thus "failed to buy –in a wide range of the population which was directly affected" (Eltahir, 2013:57).

ISIS and South Sudan
ISIS is not just a threat to one country, but to the whole world, specifically the Middle East and countries such as South Sudan. They also use the human capital of these countries for the purpose of their worldwide operations. According to the International Business Times (2016) , ISIS uses South Sudanese children for terrorist activities.
South Sudan is currently not in a position to fight external organizations or nations posing a threat to them. However, owing to both the geographical position and its weak economy, it is certainly not feasible for external parties to involve in South Sudan.

Al-Qaeda and South Sudan
As discussed above, Al-Qaeda found a safe sanctuary in the united Sudan. However, the main actor behind giving a safe haven to Al-Qaeda in Sudan was the late opposition leader Hassan al-Turabi, who offered help to Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. On the other hand, Hassan al-Turabi overtly provided full support and aid to the rebels in South Sudan (Taylor 2012) .
It is probably fair to say that Al-Qaeda's initiation into Sudan was driven by South Sudanese rebels and their supporters (Salih, 2016) . This makes the country more prone to a negative reputation in the Middle East. However, after the death of Osama Bin Laden, the organization's operations have slowed down. Nevertheless, South Sudan can play its role in slowing it further by permanently banning the entry of Al-Qaeda members into the country and sanctioning any moral, economic or human capital support to them.

South Sudan and the US
A senior Sudanese and former spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Khalid Musa Daffalla, said that the aim of the USA sanctions was to influence political parties and government attitudes to restrict the political Islamic agendas and support the liberation movement of South Sudan (Childress 2009) . After Al-Bashir's coup, many Islamist leaders who were studying at American graduate schools returned to Sudan, following the free market model of the US. These reforms impacted the liberalization of Sudanese, resulting in the increase of poverty and creating the gap between rich and poor. The results were disastrous as healthcare and free education became unavailable, the currency of the country deteriorated, and the livestock and agriculture sector suffered. Despite all these issues, the Al-Bashir government did not abandon the free market model (Gasim, 2016) .
Al-Bashir's government followed a federally structured system akin to the US and divided the country into smaller units in order to decentralize power and economic development. As a result, Sudan was divided into 26 small states. These changes caused a financial burden due to establishment of governmental setup at state level. Furthermore, Al-Bashir's government started a revolution of higher education from rural and remote areas. In 1989, new colleges and universities were established in the country and enrolment jumped from 5,000 to 143,000 in 2012 (Munoz, 2016) .

South Sudan and the European Union
The European Union (EU) supports peace in Darfur and national dialogue in Sudan. The EU witnessed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement and the National Congress Party. The EU's aim was to support both parties to maintain and achieve peace. The implementation of the CPA thus became the main objective dominating EU-Sudan relations.
The United Nations (UN) categorized Darfur, the Western Region of Sudan and South Sudan, as countries going through severe humanitarian crises. Violence and terrorism in the region forced thousands of people to flee their homes, having a negative effect on neighbouring countries. A force was developed to help restore stability and peace in the troubled areas, named the United Nations-African Union Peacekeeping Force (UNAMID).
The EU played its role to support peace and stability in Darfur and they took the following actions for Sudan:

1. Issued a number of resolutions and statements for the restoration of justice, peace, stability and reconciliation in the region.
2. With, NGOs, United Nations agencies and other international organizations supplied a humanitarian operation to support internally displaced people (IDPs), affected people and war refugees.
3. Provided aid to secure and make safe areas in Darfur and South Sudan to strengthen peace in the region.
4. Coordinated with regional, local and international partners to implement peace, human rights and justice in Darfur and South Sudan (EU, 2016) .

According to Africa News (2012) , the EU announced that they would send 78 million euros in the form of aid to South Sudanese displaced people and refugees. This action was taken to fulfil their basic needs, and make them economically and socially stable. The grant was endowed for basic infrastructure and needs soon after the country's partition, but this grant has not been utilized appropriately.

Potential Negotiation Moves

South Sudan's most potent negotiation moves pertain to its own internal conflict. Although thus far it has been averse to much foreign political and humanitarian interference, South Sudan has managed to attract China, India, and Malaysia to invest in its oil development. However, the civil war threatens these investments in both South Sudan and Sudan. As the largest investor, China has the greatest incentive to stabilize South Sudan and prevent ensuing conflict. Ergo, as an investor and as a great power in the region, China is well positioned to act as a mediator for South Sudan's disputes using its leverage and resources to induce the rebels and the government to engage in peace talks.

Another potential move for South Sudan would be appealing to neighboring states for assistance in ending its conflict. Once again, this move runs contrary to South Sudan's strong independence streak; however, the government may be more willing to accept assistance from African countries than global or Western entities. In particular, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda have been besieged with South Sudanese refugees. They therefore have a strong interest in ending South Sudan's conflict, and returning the refugees home. This move, if successful, would also serve to fortify South Sudan's interactions with its neighbors, thus leading to increased economic and political collaboration to strengthen South Sudan as a whole.

XXIX. Sudan: Arab Muslim Africa

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Edited by: Margaret Snyder

Introduction

Sudan's Arabic and Muslim identity has a palpable effect on the country's foreign relations, and its desire to maintain strong ties with its neighboring countries in the region. In particular, Sudan's shattered economy leads it to seek close and cordial relations with other Arabic and predominantly Muslim neighbors rich in natural resources and economy, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Sudan sees Middle Eastern problems as its own. As such, the country tries to take a fully-fledged role in Middle Eastern conflicts. Sudan sees the Middle East as a source of power, derived from a common Arabic and Muslim identity. However, Sudan's main motivation is to develop strong ties with Arabic countries, regardless of their stance on different issues. Sudan desires to maintain positive relations with such diverse allies as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and now Israel. In contrast, South Sudan has a different stance owing to a non-Muslim regime in the country.

The histories and present crises of Sudan and South Sudan are closely linked. In 2013, the UN Mission to Sudan compiled a study that showed that 50.6% of the population live on less than US$ 2.5 per day. The maternal mortality rate is 2,054 per 100,000 live births (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2013) . In addition, according to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), only 2% of the population completed primary education in South Sudan and they have the worst literacy rate in the world, with 27% of adults and 70% of children aged 6–17 years in 2009 never having been to school (UNICEF). Thus, South Sudan faces enormous challenges in building a new state.

To provide a democratic welfare system, South Sudan will need foreign investments and a working administration. Moreover, the country lacks educational institutions important for state building. Whether or not they have the capacity for addressing these challenges is unclear. The society of South Sudan is fragmented and even after secession, the challenge for the ruling SPLM/A is to represent all people without "regard to race, creed or colour".

New challenges and conflicts since 2012 have led to a severe food crisis in South Sudan, depriving approximately 4 million people, while 2 million people were displaced during the war, posing a real challenge for the government.

In the past decades, Sudan and South Sudan have encountered several conflicts caused by different factors. There were conflicts between Animists and African Christian population in the Southern part of Sudan (now known as South Sudan) and the Arabian Muslims population in the Northern part of Sudan (now known as Sudan) between President Salva Kiir, of the Dinka ethnic group and former vice president Riek Machar, from the Nuer ethnic group. The ongoing conflict between the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) which accuses the government of Sudan of oppressing Darfur's non –Arab population is exacerbating the current conflicts significantly. Around 3 million people died in the wake of civil war and internal conflicts in the country (Ahmed, 2008) . As Jok (2015) discussed, the main root of conflicts between South and North Sudan, which ultimately led to the South seceding from the North, stemmed from traditional and ethnic differences between Arab Muslims of the North, and Animists and African Christians of the South. With the expiry of the interim Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9 July 2011 and a referendum in January 2011, South Sudan officially became the youngest state in the world. 98.3% of South Sudanese people voted for independence, showing how strongly the South Sudanese wanted secession (Southern Sudan Referendum, 2011) . Although the CPA created a democratic basis for relations between the North and South of Sudan on paper at first, internal conflicts within and between the countries remain even after secession.

The Middle East has faced various changes since the rise of the Arab Spring, affecting many nations in one way or another. It has changed tremendously with the rise of ISIS, the nuclear conflict between the West and Iran and the Arab Spring in Middle Eastern countries. Civil wars have not only affected Sudan and South Sudan adversely, but in other countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Syria. These political crises and conflicts in Middle Eastern countries have not only affected these nations, but the devastating effects of these conflicts are observable around the globe.

This paper sets out a wide-ranging study of Sudan and South Sudan's internal difficulties including wealth sharing, identity conflicts and deciding a demarcation line between North and South. It places special emphasis on how conflicts in the Middle East, such as the rise of ISIS or the Arab Spring contributed to these internal conflicts.

Purpose and Scope

The paper begins with a section discussing the identity and conflict narratives of Sudan and South Sudan and the behavior of the ruling bodies of Sudan and South Sudan regarding Middle Eastern conflicts. It will then show how conflicts in the Middle East influenced internal conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan and how the position of different parties in these conflicts affects both countries. In addition, negotiation moves used for resolving Middle East conflicts will be analyzed to determine if they could help Sudan and South Sudan to resolve their issues.

Five major factors will be discussed:
1. The internal ethnic groups in both countries i.e. Arab Muslims, Animists and African Christians.
2. International players in the neighborhood of the Sudan and South Sudan who have contributed, either positively or negatively, to Sudanese conflicts and civil war between ethnic groups.
3. Non-state actors, such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) and Organization of African Union (AU).
4. Non-state international actors like ISIS or Daesh, which are posing serious threats to internal affairs of Sudan and South Sudan.
5. The North and South Sudan's involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts.

The paper will also suggest a set of policy recommendations for Sudan.

Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

Sudan is located in Africa's North Eastern region, and covers a total area of 2,505,813 kilometers. The country used to share its borders with Uganda, Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, Congo, Chad and the Central African Republic (Maddibo, 2012) . It provides shelter to a diverse population from different religious and ethnic backgrounds. These groups were divided along clear religious, ethnic and geographical lines after the advent of Islam in North African regions (Insoll, 2003) . The Arab Muslims entered Northern Sudan, now called Sudan, via Egypt in AD 652. It transformed the ideology and ethnic values of Sudanese people, who acquired the slaves from the South of Sudan and transformed the slaves identity. Religion thus has become a central factor in the conflict because it defines people's identities in Sudan. The ethnic identity in the North of Sudan is linked to Arabism. The Southern region of Sudan, now called South Sudan, didn't adopt these new religious and ethnic values after the inception of Islam in the country.

The Sudanese people suffered through the Anglo-Egyptian condominium from 1899 to 1956. When the Anglo-Egyptian condominium replaced the Turko-Egyptian regime in 1885, they ended the assault against the southerners, but reinforced the division between North and South by adopting different policy approaches (Albino,1970) . The official justification for this policy was to prevent slave trade in the South. However, the real objective of the British is thought to have been to stop the spread of Islamic religion and Arabic language in the South (Ibid. p. 347) . This intensified the ideological and cultural gap between Northern and South Sudanese.
The wide cultural gap between them was also highlighted by South Sudanese leader Bona Malwal, who said: "There is very little in common between Northern and Southern Sudanese. Basically, the North is Arab, the South is Negroid; religiously the North is Muslim, the South is pagan, linguistically the North speaks Arabic and the South some eighty different languages" (Malwal, 1984) . This ideological division later became more apparent during the colonial era of Great Britain, when the first government framework was implemented in Sudan.
After the end of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in 1953, the Southern and Northern regions of Sudan were integrated as one administrative unit. However, the Northern Sudanese did not make efforts to introduce integration policies between the North and South. On the contrary, they continued to exclude Southerners from participating in political institutions. This was a major reason for later conflicts between North and South, because the South only agreed to be part of a unified Sudan when the North guaranteed their right for political participation at the Juba conference in 1947. The dominance of the North over the South, namely the denial of the right to participate in the public affairs and administration and the unequal distribution of oil profit resulted in socio-economical disadvantages for the South (Deng, 1987) . In this way, the exclusion of the South from government also had socio-economic impacts. The socio-economic development and investment in the infrastructure (Albino, 1942) did not happen in the South, while provinces in the North developed. In addition, the draft of an Arab-Islamic constitution, from the Legislative Assembly, enforced Sharia law throughout the country, neglected the religious beliefs of the South, where the majority are Animalist and Christian. The government of the Northern region of Sudan continues with their commitment to sharia law and jihad in order to foster support from its constituency there, and from its Islamic allies in the Middle East (Sudan Tribune, 2010) . Its commitment facilitates the partnership of the Middle East with the region, particularly the ISIS group that practices the same religion.
The line of demarcation between North and South was drawn on the first of January 1953, giving semi-autonomous rule to the Southern region of Sudan, while exclusive governmental control was awarded to Khartoum in the Northern region (Maitre, 2009) . Until then the geographical boundaries and human capital of Sudan were considered to make it one of the most diversified nations. However, later on, many problems encircled the newly formed state.

Sources of Leverage

Sudan's main interests are chiefly concerned with its security and prosperity. Primarily, it desires to maintain the safety of its people from external and internal attack. Sudan aims to do this by securing its borders against the civil war in South Sudan, and combatting terrorism within Sudan's borders, particularly against the threat of al-Qaeda and ISIS. Additionally, Sudan supports self-determination, and the right of the people to rebel against corrupt governments. To that end, Sudan is a partner of Fatah in Palestine, and a rival of Israel, albeit with recent overtures of friendship from Sudan to Israel. Nevertheless, Sudan tries to foster and maintain strong ties with its allies and partners in the Middle East, in particular its financial donors which enable progress on Sudanese development.

Due to its predominantly Muslim Arab population, Sudan's regional Middle East strategy focuses on supporting Arabic and predominantly Muslim countries. Additionally, Sudan has adopted strategies against ISIS and al-Qaeda, opposing the operations of these non-state actors by securing Sudan's boundaries. Sudan opposes the hegemony of non-Muslim states like Israel and Shiite states like Iran and Iraq in order to maintain Sunni hegemony in the Middle East. However, to support self-determination in Arab Spring countries, Sudan intends to continue supplying rebels such as those in Libya and Yemen with aid, including weapons and military assistance.

Sudan's leverage comes in the form of energy, technology, and natural resources. Like South Sudan, Sudan is oil rich, but possesses the refineries to process and export the oil that South Sudan lacks. This infrastructure presently advantages Sudan in the power balance between the two countries, but will likely change in the future if South Sudan manages to implement its planned refineries despite its ongoing civil war. Sudan's land also contains abundant natural resources, including oil, water, arable land, and mineral resources. Finally, Sudan has proven itself capable of wielding soft power in the form of global news coverage regarding its afflicted Darfur region. This international attention is useful for attracting increased financial and humanitarian aid.

According to macroeconomic indicators, in 2016, GDP growth rate was 2.9%, the inflation rate was 12.8%, budget balance was -1.3%, the current account balance was -5.6% and public debt was 74%. This has declined continuously since 2011 when GDP was 4.4%, 3.6% in 2014, and 3%in 2015 (Sudan Economic Snapshot, 2016)[1]. Because its economic conditions are so poor, it does not have much power to influence conflicts in the Middle East. However, the country is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the African Union. The internal condition of the country and internal parties' relationships are weak. That is why Sudan is facing turmoil in the country both socially and politically. These factors, and the independence of South Sudan, caused a loss in oil revenues, the banking sector is in serious crisis, governance is failing, there are insecure borders with South Sudan and there is a high unemployment level in the country (Coface, 2016)[2].

In terms of its relationship between neighbouring countries and its influence on the Middle East, Sudan has always had conflicts with countries such as Israel and the USA. Regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) which to the CPA in a significant way was a strong party to influence others.   Sudan provided arms to Libyan rebels against the Libyan government, as a result of which Sudan also has conflicts with Libya.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have always had a good relationship with Sudan, as has the European Union, which supported the country by playing the role of mediator during the ceasefire agreements in 2014 in order to maintain peace and stabilize the country (European Union 2014)[3].

Internal Conflicts

The separation of one state into two is a rare and historical achievement. However, Sudan and South Sudan face many challenges in building their new states, and establishing new identities as Sudanese and South Sudanese. Politically, Sudan is largely recognized to be an authoritarian state devoid of free and fair elections. In the 2010 presidential elections, the candidate from the main opposition party withdrew from the race, and pro-democracy activists reported government intimidation.

After the independence of South Sudan, Sudan not only lost land, but also large reservoirs, which became part of South Sudan after the partition. Current conflicts in Sudan continue to pressurize Sudan even more. In order to seek safety from the political problems in newly formed South Sudan and from the hunger prevailing in that country, more than 100,000 people from South Sudan have moved to Sudan, further crushing its economy (World Bank, 2016)[4].

External Conflicts

Sudan-South Sudan Ethnic Conflict

Presently, Sudan's main source of external conflict remains South Sudan. The primary reasons for the country's division were ethnic and religious differences, of which issues persist today. According to Deng (1995) , Sudan has always been an ethnically diverse nation. There are many sub-ethnic groups living in the north and south region of the country. There are around sixty sub-ethnic groups in Sudan and in South of Sudan, including Animists and the Christian population who claim an African identity (Deng, 1995). The reconciliation of the traditional identity of the Arab and African population was not made until the inception of Sudan. The national identity of Sudan has not completely evolved, because people from West, North and East Sudan refer to themselves as Arab Muslims.

However, people from Southern Kordofan, South Sudan and the Blue Nile consider themselves Africans (Jok, 2001) . People from the North of Sudan identification with the Middle East can be traced thousands years back due to Turko-Egyptian regime in 1821. The Turko-Egyptian regime was overthrown by the Mahdist revolution, an Islamic revolt against the Turko-Egyptian regime in Sudan (Salman,2013:347) . Between 1895 and 1898, the Mahdiya regime reinforced relations between the South and the North in order to collect ivory and capture slaves from the South (Deng,1973: 29) . When the Anglo-Egyptian condominium replaced the Turko-Egyptian regime in 1885 they ended the assault against the Southerners, but reinforced the division between North and South by adopting different policy approaches such as stopping free movement of people between the North and South of Sudan which reinforced the division between the North and the South significantly (Albino, 1970: 16-23) . Policies such as the "divide-and-rule-policy" introduced

by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in 1930, provided different educational, socio-cultural, linguistic and administrative development of the South and North (Ibid., 2008) . This increased unequal development between the North and the South. This policy was important concerning socio-economic development of the South and caused marginalization of a huge part of the population.

According to Olson and Rothman (Olson and Rothman, 2001), the Sudanese conflict was also caused by the differences in ethnic identity between these groups. This ethnic conflict between North and South Sudan has been problematic, despite efforts from the international community. Muslim Arabs in the Northern region of the country did not consider South Sudan's ethnic groups, i.e. African Christians, to be citizens of the country who have the same basic rights as Muslims. The demands of African population at the Juba conference in 1947 included: (1) provision of equal status with the Arab Muslims in the Northern region in all spheres; (2) equal recognition without discrimination in politics as well as resources allocation, and; (3) to maintain the identities of different ethnic groups in the country, whether Arab Muslims or African Christians (Jok, 2001). This diversity itself in South Sudan is not the major obstacle for peace in this country. However, the use of ethnicity in South Sudan as a tool to secure ethnic favoritism created asymmetric relationships within the new government. The fragmentation within the South Sudanese society needed special policies to secure the rights of all members of the society.

This conflict between the parties was enlarged owing to the fact that none of the groups was willing to compromise and thus ethnic identity thus survived rather than forming a new unified identity. The lack of compromise and working as an integrated unit became the reason the conflict dragged on and made the peaceful coexistence of both parties impossible.

According to Olson and Rothman (Ibid., 2001), if "parties in identity-based conflict fear that their identity needs will be neglected or negated by a conflict settlement, they will not be motivated to engage in negotiations to settle" (Ibid., 2001) . The ethnic groups of Africa fear that their ethnic and religious identities may be assimilated with the identity and religious values of Arab Muslims.

Sudan-South Sudan Religious Conflict

According to Fox (Fox, 2002) , the conflicts between different parties can be called ethno-religious if the ethnic groups in conflict have different religious values. Like the ethnic diversity in Sudan's different regions, religious diversity was also seen in the united Sudan. Major religions in the Sudan included Islam, Christianity and Animism with traditional religious beliefs (Glickman, 2000) . The percentages of population following different religions were fractured geographically with ethno-religious distinction between groups that have Arab and African identities.

According to Glickman (Glickman, 2000), the major religious party in Sudan was the Sunni Muslims residing in the Western and Central region of the Sudan, making up approximately 60% of the population. A total of 15% of the population was Christian, while 25% had indigenous beliefs. During North-South Sudan conflict, the government led and ruled by Arab Muslims waged a "jihad" or a holy war against the Christians of the Southern region. These Arab Muslims used to call the Animists the "Kafir" or infidels in the southern parts of the Sudan (Collins, 2008) . The attempt of the Arab Muslim government to establish the Muslim identity in the country with a multi-religious population has contributed to conflicts between both groups.

Sudan-South Sudan Border Questions – Abyei

The main contention about the North-South boundary can be seen in the battle over the sub-region of Abyei, an economically important area for both the North and South. This region is inhabited by Ngok Dinka peoples, who favored an alliance with the South. However, the Misseriya people of Abyei considered themselves Northerners. This served to aggravate the conflict between North and South. The Abyei Boundary Commission consisted of members of the NCP, SPL/M and the IGAD and was tasked with resolving this issue (Ibid.,2012) . However, this proved unsuccessful, because they were unable reach consensus when it came to setting a demarcation line.

Sudan-South Sudan Oil and Wealth Sharing

Another crucial issue that remains ambiguous concerns the management of oil revenue by the NCP. This also shows the difficulty of secession, because geographically, both countries need each other for economic success. The oil production fields are in the South, but South Sudan is landlocked and therefore needs the North for the transportation of the oil (Patey, 2010) . This also shows the difficulty of secession, because geographically, both countries need each other for economic success. This requires the North and the South to cooperate. However, their relationship is marked by mistrust and enmity. For the South, oil revenue money is especially important for building their economy and industry, which was previously concentrated in the North. In addition, the distrust and poor governance of the oil sector does little to attract investment companies (Belloni, 2011) .

The African Union

The African Union (AU), along with the European Union and the UN established the Ceasefire Commission (CFC) to monitor the ceasefire agreement between the government of Sudan and armed opposition involving the Darfur region in the year 2004 (Appiah-Mensah, 2006) . The moment of reconciliation between the parties helped to start the process of developing peaceful conditions in the region of Darfur. They agreed in this convention that African military observers would go to Darfur, their duty to monitor the ceasefire agreement (Flint and De Waal, 2007) . The AU appointed a high-level panel of African experts an d put a lot of effort in solving the conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan. Despite all their efforts and engagement, the parties failed to reach an agreement recently. Although neighboring countries and members of the AU such as Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia encouraged the NCP and SPL/M to engage in dialogue and contributed significantly to the CPA agreement in 2005 by providing the mediators and holding the peace process in Addis

Ababa, the achievement of a long term peace in Sudan and South Sudan failed. One have to acknowledge the regional support without it would never have come to the CPA. However, the AU, Sudanese stakeholder and the International Community made mistakes during the peace process which were fatal: The International Community, the SPL/M and the NCP turned the peace process into an elite and inclusiveness process and thus "failed to buy –in a wide range of the population which was directly affected" (Eltahir, 2013:57).

ISIS and Sudan

The conflict in Sudan continues to offer the perfect platform for the recruitment of Sudanese students to ISIS . Sudan has been perceived as a safe haven by Islamist radical groups since the rising of the political Islam. For instance, it hosted Osama Bin Laden and his groups comprised of Afghan Arabs during the years 1991 to 1996 .

Muhammad al-Atta, director of National Intelligence of Sudan and Security services (NISS), said there are many ISIS recruiting cells in Sudan. To prevent groups of youths joining the extremist organization and to curtail ISIS ideology from spreading, Sudan is making an intensive effort to gain control over the cells. The director of intelligence agencies in the newspaper Al-Sudani says that to control the impact of ISIS in Sudan, Sudan is using their relationships with Turkey, efforts within Sudan itself and other nations to collaborate and help each other in order to combat the threat of ISIS for these countries (Sudan Tribune, 2015) .

The role of Sudan in controlling extremist groups in the Middle East is unclear. But the Sudanese government is therefore playing its role in controlling such extremist groups in Sudan itself and thus connected states of the Middle East (Munoz 2016) .

Al-Qaeda and Sudan

Al-Qaida was created in 1988 when Bin Laden, Dr. Fadl and Zawahiri met. In 1990, Bin Laden became angered when the US arrived in Saudi Arabia for the Gulf War. In response, Bin Laden left Saudi Arabia and headed for Sudan, where he began the preparation of operations against Saddam Hussein. According to Katz (2010) , Zawahiri showed his interest in the country for pursuing Jihad; he also wanted to establish Al-Qaeda in the country. Initially, Al-Qaeda assisted the Sudanese government, but after some time they realized that the government was acting as an agent of the West.

As a result, Al-Qaeda's leader made a speech after UN interference in Sudan's civil war, citing Western military intervention as the cause of the breakdown of the peace agreement between South and North Sudanese. It was considered that Sudan provided a safe haven for Islamic extremists, such as Al-Qaeda members.

Despite all the efforts of the Sudanese government, the country is constantly battling with charges of being involved in crimes and extremism, especially from Darfur. In the context of these conflicts, in 1993 Clinton put Sudan on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, preventing the US from making an investment in Sudan. According to Mr. Khalid, the Sudanese ambassador, they are working on building a relationship with Washington to control and eliminate extremist groups from the Sudan. He says Sudan is reliable and a real part of the counterterrorism effort (Munoz 2016) .

Sudan and the US

In 2007, in response to the violence in Darfur, President Bush imposed economic sanctions on the country, after which 117,000 individuals from Sudan, the US and other nations signed a petition requesting that the president lift sanctions. This was ignored (Gasim, 2016) . As a result, millions of Sudanese have been affected by the crisis. Despite all conflicts, the USA has been the major donor in Sudan, including donations made to Sudan to alleviate the drought in 2001. Moreover, in the same year, Bush sent a representative to explore the role that the USA could play in stopping the civil war.

In 2009, the Obama administration announced the Sudan Strategy, which included three basic principles for Sudan. The first was the achievement of a definitive end to disputes, conflicts and killing in Darfur. The second was the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between North and South Sudan. The third was certifying that Sudan should not become a safe land for international terrorists (Embassy, 2010) . President Bush and Obama did not change existing policies, which could have otherwise saved the integration of Sudan and South Sudan, and continued with the condition that the government had to sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which was a major factor in the separation of South Sudan.

Sudan and the European Union

After independence, Sudan underwent insecurity and political instability. Despite all the undercurrents of peace, conflicts, stability, instability, democracy and dictatorship, Sudan has engaged with Europe since 1977. When the government in 1990 felt that the civil war had been exhausted, peace talks with the SPLM (Sudan's People Liberation Movement) began. The first reason was down to constitutional and political developments, which was why elections were held. The second was improvement of the relationship with Egypt, Chad, Uganda and Ethiopia, to stabilize the position in the northern region of Africa. This movement in foreign relationships with other countries, such as Asian and European countries led to the renewing of relationships with the EU. In 1999, both parties engaged in formal dialogue in connection with human rights, rule of law, democratization and peace processes. Moreover, these dialogues were followed by continuous discussions in 2003 to address human rights, the civil war and humanitarian acts (Rankin, 2016) .

Potential Negotiation Moves

<u>South Sudan</u>

Despite the split between Sudan and South Sudan, Sudan's safety and security are still heavily influenced by South Sudan's instability. The South Sudanese civil war has been rife with human rights abuses, and fighting often spills across the Sudanese border. Therefore, it is in Sudan's interest to participate in or lead a solution for the South Sudan Civil War. One possible option to achieve this would be to offer to host dialogues with South Sudanese rebel leaders. In the past, South Sudan's rebel groups have struggled to articulate their demands and purpose, slowing down and impeding attempts at peace talks. Sudan's leaders have proven in the past their understanding of South Sudan's rebel aims, and could initiate conversations with the rebel leaders, and facilitate talks leading to a comprehensive overall peace agreement.

Additionally, Sudan could pursue a more creative option, and work to convince China to intervene in South Sudan. As Chinese investments in Sudanese oil refineries and planned nuclear reactor are threatened by instability in South Sudan, China has an interest in maintaining the political stability of the new nation. Moreover, China has the necessary leverage, resources, and interest to attract parties to the table. One setback to this move may be the possibility of increased tension and hostility with the United States, one of Sudan's major financial donors.

<u>Arab Spring</u>

The longstanding dictatorships, military regimes, Islamic extremists, limited freedom of the residents and civil unrest in the world – specifically in Middle Eastern nations – have led to one of the biggest rebellions by the masses residing there, called the Arab Spring. During the 21st century the world, including the Middle East, has witnessed residents of countries including Iran, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and others overtly portraying discontent with their governments (Alhassen, 2012)[5]. Similar demonstrations and protests have been observed since the 1970s. These uprisings led to the assassination of the Muammar Qaddafi, a former Libyan dictator. The resignations and arrests of many other dictators followed (Manfreda, 2011)[6].

According to Harsch (2011)[7], the Arab Spring influenced the Sudanese nation. Social media has brought students on the streets to protest in Sudan, specifically in Khartoum. These riots finally led to the demarcation of national geographical boundaries.

The relationship of Sudan to countries of the Arab Spring is important. For instance, the Egyptian government always enjoyed a cordial relationship with United Sudan. However, Egyptian diplomats recognized that soon after its inception, South Sudan had much bitterness toward North Sudan. Owing to weaker international relationships in Sudan, Al-Bashir is still trying to maintain its affiliation with Egypt and thus supported its newly formed government. Libya accused Sudan of providing arsenals of weapons to rebellion masses in the country, severely affecting the Sudanese government's reputation and its relationship with Libya (Bagadi, 2014)[8].

Backed by Iran, Saudi waged war in Yemen to help the country keep out the Houthis controlling the militants from Islamic backgrounds (Mukhashaf, 2015)[9].

These events demonstrate that Sudan is trying to strengthen its ties with these countries, focusing on bringing about peace in the Middle East and eliminating rebellions.

<u>**Syrian Conflict**</u>

In just four and a half years of conflicts between Syrian armed forces and rebels, approximately 250,000 Syrian nationals or residents have lost their lives. This unrest began with the protests against the Syrian government even before the escalation to a fully-fledged war between the parties. Around 11 million Syrians were forced to leave their homes as loyal forces of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the rebel forces continued to fight. This caused unrest and made it unfeasible for the people to stay in their homes due to heavy fighting (BBC News, 2016) . Sudan has always shown a positive attitude towards Syrian rebels. According to the Sudan Tribune (2013), the Sudanese government has been supplying both locally made and Chinese weapons to Qatar. In turn, Qatar has been supplying these arsenals to Syrian rebels. Sudan has permitted Syrian refugees to enter Sudan without a visa. They have also been able to enjoy the same rights to healthcare and state education as Sudanese people. Syrian rebels were frustrated at the West's reluctance to provide them with arms and arsenals required to overthrow the government following atrocities on Syrians outside the country. Even under the arms embargo of the international community, Sudan has maintained close ties with the rebels in Syria in order to help the community fight for their cause.

XXX. Syria: From 'Syrianism' to Sectarianism, From Protest to Proxy War

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Identity, conflict narratives, threat perceptions

Syria's history as a modern nation-state has been marked by its government's attempts to forge a sense of national identity. At the time of its independence from France in 1946, Syria, while a country in name, in fact constituted an array of different religious sects and ethnic groups, each with its own power structures and ideologies, and members who often 'lacked a strong sense of an all-Syrian territorial identity'.[1] National borders that had been superimposed on the area by European powers after the defeat of the Ottomans had little meaning to the country's inhabitants, who had primarily self-identified as subjects of the Ottoman sultans, or as part of local religious, familial, or tribal units.[2]

The creation of Syrian nationalism has been characterized by a tension between two variants of nationalist narrative: pan-Arabism, and 'Syrianism.' The uneasy relationship between the two has been further muddied by the struggle between secular and religious factions on either side. Central to the nation-building project has been the Ba'ath Party, which has ruled the country from 1963 to the present day. The party formed in post-independence Syria as a radical nationalist group espousing a Pan-Arabist ideology within which Islam held an important status. However, by the second half of the 1960s, the Party, which gained control of the state in a 1963 coup, began to focus its nationalist rhetoric on a Syrian state distinct from a greater Pan-Arab polity.[3] Also central to this ideology was a decoupling of Arabism from Islamism, and the promotion of a secular state—a move which infuriated many religious Syrians of different creeds.[4]

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has perpetuated this ideology, publicly professing 'a Syro-Arab ideology that sanctifies the territorial Syrian state and views it as a cornerstone of the regional and international policy of Damascus, albeit with an Arab colouration.'[5] The Assad dynasty has fostered a governing ideology of Syrian nationalism that frames the Syrian state as the successor to Bilad al-Sham (the historical greater Syria region, which includes Palestine and Jordan),[6] invoking both the area's Arab-Islamic history and its pre-Islamic, pre-Arab heritage, as well as the more recent past of the post-Ottoman Syrian state.[7] Under Hafez al-Assad, father of the current president, the government was relatively successful in instilling a degree of national pride based on this narrative. This sense of collective identity lent legitimacy to the state and the regime, particularly in light of the growing centrality of the state to Syria's economy under the elder Assad.[8] Beginning in the 1990s, a Syrian-Arab identity based on the Syrian territorial state became prominent in public discourse, although not all groups adhered to this below the surface.[9]

The anti-western nationalist legitimacy of the Syrian regime has also long been augmented by Syria's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[10] Syria has positioned itself as 'the only Arab state still totally committed to the struggle against Israel and to concern with the Palestinian question.'[11] The loss of the Golan Heights to Israel has given the Arab-Israeli conflict special significance for Syria.[12]

For the regime's leaders, the challenge of maintaining Syrian territorial integrity is made all the more fraught by the government's close association with the Alawite religious minority. The knowledge that the Sunni majority in particular perceives the regime as a tool for Alawite interests has made the regime ever-fearful of challenges to its authority from other religious and ethnic groups. The Alawite ascendancy is the result of large numbers of poor, rural Alawites using the military as an avenue for social mobility from the 1950s onwards.[13] They soon came to dominate the armed forces and comprise a large portion of the officer corps; the 1963 Ba'ath military coup propelled many Alawites into positions of significant authority.[14] In addition, the original Marxist ideology of the Ba'ath Party generated policies and attitudes that benefitted the largely impoverished and rural Alawite population.[15] Since those times, many non-Alawites—particularly Sunnis—have resented this minority group's disproportionate grasp over the organs of state, as well as its perceived religious heterodoxy.[16]

The Syrian Civil War, now in its seventh year, began during the 2011 Arab Spring, when fifteen boys were detained and tortured for spray-painting anti-regime graffiti. Protests arose around lack of freedom, economic troubles, Islamist opposition to the Assad government, and the torture of these boys.[17] A severe drought is also said to be a cause of social unrest leading to the war.[18] Crackdowns on protests led to the June 2011 defection of forces from the Syrian army and creation of the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups, fueling an increasingly sectarian, factionalized, and violent civil war. Over 465,000 Syrians have been killed, over 1 million injured, and over 12 million displaced, 6.3 million internally and the rest in countries around the region and the world, causing an unprecedented global refugee crisis.[19] Hundreds of armed groups have risen up to fight against the regime and against one another, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, see ISIS chapter).

As of spring 2017, pro-government forces controlled Syria's central-western urban spine, from Damascus, through Homs and Hama, to Aleppo (although it does not hold all of the outskirts of each city or all of the countryside in between them).[20] It also retains control of the important Alawite coastal heartland, including the cities of Latakia and Tartous. Non-ISIS rebels are now largely confined to Idlib province, where extremists including Jabhat Fateh al-Sham hold sway, as well as the far southwest of the country and areas just east of Damascus.[21]

Sources of Leverage

Syrian government

The Syrian government possesses two main sources of leverage in any attempt to negotiate a resolution to the civil war: territory and anti-ISIS sentiment. As mentioned above, pro-government forces have a large swath of territory and major urban areas under their control. However, Assad's actual authority over the nominally regime-held territory is precarious, and his forces are overstretched and heavily dependent on Iranian, Hezbollah and Russian backing.[22] The Syrian government has also reportedly faced trouble in coordinating the military efforts of the multiple groups, foreign and domestic, that comprise its fighting coalition.[23] Nevertheless, holding large tracts of territory as well as important urban areas places the Syrian government in an advantageous negotiating position going into any peace talks. It will be able to extract greater concessions from comparatively weak opposition groups, which, because of their splintered composition and lack of territory in strategically-important areas, hold relatively few bargaining chips.[24] The Syrian government may also continue to employ its strategy of besieging rebel communities, and, through starvation tactics, forcing ceasefires to be implemented on terms favorable to itself.[25] If pro-regime forces can encircle opposition-held communities in Idlib, southern Syria, eastern Damascus, or, eventually, in the ISIS-held east, the government will likely continue to pursue this policy.

The second form of leverage the Syrian government holds is anti-ISIS international sentiment. Any strengthening of jihadist groups at the expense of moderate rebels can serve to augment Assad's claims to be a necessary bulwark against extremist groups in Syria, thus improving his position at the negotiating table vis a vis Western nations. Aleppo was one of the last remaining hubs of moderate opposition groups broadly acceptable to the west, so its 2016 fall to the regime may swing more of the opposition towards hard-line Islamist opposition groups, less popular with the international community.[26] International actors, even those opposed to the Assad government and critical of his regime's brutality, may have to weigh the extent to which tacit support for the dictator would be better or worse than an increasingly radical opposition. Indeed, President Trump has indicated that he views Assad as a lesser evil than ISIS and other jihadist groups; tacit American support or tolerance would give Assad more latitude to negotiate a deal that would see him remain in power.[27]

Nevertheless, while the Syrian government currently sits in a more favourable position than the opposition, there are several major limitations to its leverage. Apart from the support of Iran and Russia, Syria is a virtual international pariah state. Bashar al-Assad will likely never be fully re-integrated into the international community; the probable commission of war crimes by his forces, including chemical attacks, would leave him vulnerable to prosecution under international criminal law, and unwelcome in major international fora.[28]

The government's string of military successes in 2016 owes much to heavy support by the Russian and Iranian militaries and exposess the vulnerability of the regime to this dependence on external support. The necessity of this military support gives both the Iranian and Russian governments significance leverage over Damascus.[29] While both Russia and Iran have strategic or ideological reasons for backing the Syrian government (discussed in the 'External Networks' section below), it is possible that maintaining the personal rule of Bashar al-Assad is not a non-negotiable position for these powers. Provided a regime persists in Damascus that is friendly to their interests, Iran, and particularly Russia, may countenance the Syrian President's removal from power.[30] The fundamental but concealed fragility of the Syrian regime's external alliances decreases its leverage in international negotiations; the government does not enjoy the unconditional support from its allies that its rhetoric and battlefield successes might suggest.

The opposition

The opposition is comprised of hundreds of armed groups, some in loose coalitions, ranging from moderate to salafi-jihadist to Kurdish independence-oriented to ISIS. External support -- particularly that of the US and Russia -- is the main source of leverage to any group that can secure it. The "Friends of Syria," a coalition of the US, Turkey, Western European, and Gulf States, supports moderate opposition groups.[31]

The fall of Aleppo in December 2016 was a severe blow to the moderate opposition groups whose battlefield influence was already being usurped by more hard-line Islamist groups. [32] The loose network of disparate regional groups that makes up the Free Syrian Army has little military strength, and thus limited political leverage beyond its support from the Friends of Syria.[33] At the other end of the ideological spectrum, neither ISIS nor Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra) hold much substantial political capital abroad, as their extremist brand of salafi-jihadism and ties to international terrorism have made them toxic to external powers, though they do have leverage through military strength and scare tactics.

Two opposition factions stand to gain the most from the current weak state of the moder moderate groups. The first are hard-line Islamist groups that, despite their fundamentalist views, have displayed an aversion to transnational jihad and international terrorism, and desire Sunni theocracy only inside Syria, rather than at a global or regional level.[34] The strongest of such groups is Ahrar al-Sham, which, alongside its sometime-partner, the transnational-jihadist group Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, is one of the key opposition players in most of northwestern Syria.[35] Although engagement with Ahrar al-Sham might seem anathema to Washington, its military strength and focus on the Syrian revolution rather than international salafi-jihadism may prompt American policy-makers to at least consider talking to its leadership. However, this will depend on the outcome of a rift within the group between more moderate elements with a generally Syrian nationalist outlook (albeit one underpinned by Sunni fundamentalism), and hard-liners who seek the group's closer alignment with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.[36] Western powers would most likely contemplate opening a dialogue only if the former faction prevailed.

The second group that stands to profit from the dearth of viable opposition elements for foreign powers to support is the Syrian Democratic Forces, the alliance of Kurdish forces and Arab and Christian militias operating in northern Syria. Already receiving the

backing of the United States, the SDF present a relatively reliable and secular proxy in the battle against ISIS and likely will continue to receive American backing.[37] Although Turkey is strongly against the group's objectives, America has few other feasible options to support in the fight against ISIS, and will probably simply seek to mollify the Turks by limiting the SDF's territorial gains along the Turkish border.

Internal Conflicts

The Syrian government

The Assad regime leans heavily on a narrative that depicts Syria as a sovereign state standing against a host of 'terrorists' and 'outlaws' threatening its sovereignty.[38] The regime relies on a rigid conception of an international order in which state sovereignty is sacrosanct, and any attempt to undermine it justifies any and all measures to suppress the insurrection.[39] Assad's regime has also emphasised the presence of large numbers of foreign fighters within rebel ranks, as well as alleging Israeli support for these groups, creating a narrative that depicts Syria as a state besieged by hostile foreign forces.[40] This siege mentality has been augmented by Assad's contention that the western powers seek his downfall, clearly characterising their support for some rebel groups as another manifestation of imperialism in the region.[41] In this way, he amplifies his claim to be the protector of Syria's sovereign independence.

While Bashar al-Assad has been quick to point out the foreign influences among the rebel groups opposing him, external actors also play vital roles in maintaining his regime. As of October 2016, the regime's push to retake Aleppo depended on the presence of over 5,000 Shia militiamen operating outside the formal structure of the military. Many of these were 'ideological volunteers' from Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; tens of thousands of foreign volunteers propped up the Assad regime in fighting elsewhere in the country. The extent of Syrian control of these forces is likely low; it appears that Iran's Quds Force is the primary director of their actions.[42] Iran was also instrumental in the formation of the Alawite militias known as the National Defense Forces, which act within the broader Iranian-Hezbollah-Assad coalition, rather than under the auspices of the Syrian military.[43]

As the war has progressed, the regime has sought to leverage the conflict's increasingly sectarian fault-lines to consolidate its support amongst its core Alawite and non-Muslim constituencies.[44] Many of its supporters fear what hard-line Sunni militias may do to their communities if the regime should fall, and have thus remained steadfast in their support for the government war effort. Fear of the fall of the Assad government and of rule by a largely Sunni Islamist opposition has also inextricably bound the core of the military—whose officer corps now almost exclusively comprises Alawites—to the regime.[45] This reflects the structuring of the armed forces along ethno-religious, or 'patrimonial' lines: the survival of the Alawite-dominated military depends on the longevity of the regime from which it derives its legitimacy.[46] The military is augmented by paramilitary *shabiha* units—also predominantly Alawite—who are equally dependent on and supportive of the government's survival.[47]

Despite this, there are signs that Syria's Alawite community is seeking to distance itself from the Assad regime. In April 2016, an anonymous group of Alawite community leaders released a document stressing that Alawite identity exists separately from any particular power—a pointed statement seemingly referring to the current government. The document's authors sought to downplay the sectarian dynamics of the Syrian conflict, contending that Alawism was a third strain of Islam, rather than a subset of the Shi'a sect, whose most prominent scions, Iran and Hezbollah, are major players in the fighting, and expressing a desire to work with Syria's Sunni communities towards reconciliation.[48] It is unclear how much popular support such positions have amongst the Alawite community, but this indicates that some Alawite elite see their interests as distinct from those of the Assad regime and conceive of a future Syria not defined by sectarian divisions.[49]

The opposition

In total, approximately 125,000 fighters are engaged against the Syrian government.[50] The opposition comprises a plethora of groups with wildly differing aims and ideologies, often locked in conflict with each other as much as with the Assad regime. Power is split among myriad local opposition groups, many of whom strive to implement a strict Islamic vision of Syria's future.[51]

Since the beginning of the conflict, there has been a divide between largely foreign-based political opposition movements and rebel military groups within Syria. The foreign-based opposition groups, most notably the Syrian National Coalition, which call for a civil-democratic Syria, have largely been marginalised amongst ordinary Syrians, who doubt their legitimacy or relevance.[52] Many major armed Islamic groups on the ground in Syria have specifically rejected the Coalition as a true representative of the opposition, despite its widespread recognition amongst the international community.[53] The foreign-based opposition is further hampered by a lack of cohesion across groups. For example, the Syrian National Council, which emerged as the first major political opposition group based outside Syria, left the National Coalition in 2014 when the Coalition agreed to take part in peace talks, thus appearing to renege on a promise not to negotiate until Bashar al-Assad was forced from power.[54] In late 2015, the Coalition rejected participation in peace talks of Kurdish elements, who consequently formed a rival political group, the Syrian Democratic Council, alongside Arab and Assyrian groups in northern Syria.[55] The opposition has achieved a small degree of unity in the formation of the Saudi-backed political negotiation bloc the High Negotiations Committee, although this does not include players such as the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), ISIS, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, and Ahrar al-Sham.[56]

The opposition's hostility to the Assad regime in part stems from economic grievances. Since the early years of the Assad dynasty, Syria's economy has been characterized by strong links between the state and a small band of privileged commercial players and families. Public contracts and various forms of state support cemented the wealth of this cadre of businessmen, who also came to hold a degree of influence in the formation of Syrian economic policy. This state favouritism persisted into the era of economic liberalization from the 1990s.[57] While a select few—including Sunnis—benefitted from this arrangement, the majority of the population experienced only its negative effects. Many predominantly Sunni small traders and artisan, who formed the core constituency of Syria's

Muslim Brotherhood, were severely impacted by the creation of large-scale state-run factories during the post-1973 oil boom. In addition, corruption was rife.[58] In the 2000s, increasing urbanization caused more problems as smaller provincial cities in particular struggled to provide sufficient infrastructure to serve their growing populations. Meanwhile, rural dwellers have faced the ill-effects of subsidy cuts, disinvestment, and urban flight.[59] It is thus no coincidence that the heartland of the Syrian rebellion has been in provincial cities such as Dir'a, Idlib, Homs, and Hama, and their hinterlands.[60]

The so-called 'moderate' opposition on the ground in Syria is in fact a diverse agglomeration of groups operating in various regional and provincial theatres with little unity of leadership or broad and sustained coordination. The total number of fighters in this group is generally estimated to be anywhere from 20,000 to more than 100,000.[61] The most well-known entity within the moderate opposition is the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA originally comprised deserters from the Syrian Arab Army, but is now a 'highly decentralized and loosely coordinated network of hundreds of armed groups, including local civil-defense units, groups of defectors from the Syrian military, and foreign fighters'.[62] The broad FSA network of groups also includes Turkmen militias, non-PYD-affiliated Kurdish groups, and a small number of anti-regime Alawite units.[63] Several groups who are not themselves part of the FSA nevertheless align themselves with FSA units; these range from moderates to radical Islamists.[64] The moderate opposition lacks the 'unity of command and internal coordination to repel either the Assad regime and its allies or ideological extremist organizations.'[65] Furthermore, the Pentagon has privately questioned how 'moderate' these groups really are, as they increasingly appear to subscribe to radical Islamist ideology.[66] Some commentators have contended that a truly moderate opposition no longer exists.[67]

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Southern Front, two coalitions at the secular end of the opposition's political spectrum, have received funding from the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan. The SDF, a coalition formed in October 2015, combines the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) force with local Arab and Christian groups in the north of the country. The group, whose political wing is the Syrian Democratic Council, has primarily directed its military attention against ISIS.[68] In the south of Syria, an alliance of mainly FSA-friendly armed groups known as the Southern Front constitutes the major opposition to the Assad government and ISIS[69] and has proved willing to abide by directives imposed by foreign sponsors, including the US-backed Military Operations Center, based in Jordan.[70] Both groups have, despite their reputation as moderate, cooperated intermittently with Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fateh al-Sham in the past.[71]

A major element in the opposition—and one that has probably now eclipsed the more moderate factions in strength—is a range of hard-line jihadist and Islamist groups fighting for an Islamic Syria. They are also opposed to ISIS. One of the most prominent is Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra. This hardline salafi-jihadist group was formed by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) operatives and was designated a terrorist organization by the United States government in 2012. Following a rift with its parent organization, AQI (which had by that point become known as ISIS), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham began fighting against ISIS in January 2014.[72] The group, which has a strong territorial hold in Idlib province, has coordinated with other jihadist groups fighting under the Jaysh al-Fateh banner.[73] Unlike ISIS, it has also worked in alliance with more moderate and secular groups associated with the FSA.[74] Despite instances of military cooperation, the group has proved much less willing to tolerate any forms of co-governance with other groups in the territory it controls.[75] Nevertheless, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham contains a small 'pragmatic' wing, mainly comprising Syrian fighters, who might eschew support for global terrorism if it could help them cement the group's position within Syria.[76]

In July 2016, Fateh al-Sham formally renounced its affiliation with al-Qaeda. This was largely a political rather than ideological shift, intended to make the group more palatable to Syrians, many of whom see the group as more committed to Islamic jihad than the Syrian revolution.[77] Until very recently the group harbored senior al-Qaeda strategists planning attacks against the west (most notably the Khorasan group – although it is unclear what has happened to this cell in light of Nusra's split with al-Qaeda).[78] The separation from al-Qaeda also aimed to undercut western condemnation of the group as a terrorist organization.[79] The central al-Qaeda command sanctioned the schism, which suggests that it was a strategic move by both parties rather than a split based on diverging visions of jihad. Thus, instead of emphasizing global jihad and international terrorism, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham has now consciously sought to embed itself in the Syrian revolution and to embed its jihadi vision within a framework of Syria's internal power struggle.[80] To augment this approach, the group, whose leadership is dominated by foreign fighters, has sought to minimise antagonistic exchanges between its foreign elements and local civilians, and to primarily appoint Syrians as the mid-level commanders who interact with local populations.[81]

By projecting the appearance of having moderated its radicalism, Fateh al-Sham also seeks to cement the cooperation and support of other more moderate opposition factions.[82] Regional military coalitions involving Fateh al-Sham are thus likely to proliferate.[83] In fact the ongoing conflict may actually benefit the group by necessitating a relationship of interdependence between itself, other opposition groups and the civilian population. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham has thus opposed international efforts to negotiate an end to the war, and seeks to foster hostility amongst opposition supporters towards international peace initiatives.[84]

Another major salafi-jihadist group is Ahrar al-Sham, which maintains a presence throughout Syria but is strongest in the north and west of the country.[85] An opponent of both the Syrian regime and ISIS, Ahrar al-Sham receives funding and weaponry from Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.[86] It was a vital player in the creation of the Jaysh al-Fateh, an umbrella coalition of jihadist opposition groups.[87] It has cooperated militarily and in governance initiatives with al-Nusra/Fateh al-Sham, but has also competed with it for influence in territories where both groups are present, and has criticised Fateh al-Sham's apparently global jihadist outlook and motivations.[88] Ahrar al-Sham aims to create an Islamic state in Syria too, but has stated that it seeks to achieve this through a democratic process; in December 2015, it also reportedly signed a framework of principles for future peace negotiations that accepted Bashar al-Assad remaining in power until a transitional government is formed.[89] The group is also reportedly willing to consider cooperation with western nations in the fight against ISIS.[90]

External conflicts and network of relationships

The Syrian conflict is not merely a civil war; it has become a proxy conflict involving a number of other states. While each external actor is partially pursuing its own national agenda, these states broadly fall into two camps: those supporting the Assad regime, and those backing various elements of the opposition. This section maps out the stated positions and underlying strategic interests of the major foreign players in Syria, analyzing both areas of common interest between various states, as well as divergent goals that may hamper a resolution to the conflict.

Pro-opposition states:

United States of America

The United States is foremost among the countries backing opposition forces in Syria, though there is little public appetite in America for greater intervention in the civil war between Assad and the opposition.[91] The US has two primary goals: the removal of President Assad and subsequent growth of democracy, and the defeat of ISIS and containment of radical Islam.[92]

Since 2011, America has worked with rebel groups fighting against President Assad including, in recent times, by providing light weapons, vehicles, and anti-tank missiles.[93] The provision of lethal aid has occurred via the CIA , and, more recently, the Pentagon, which has abandoned its efforts to create and train a moderate Arab force to combat ISIS, instead focusing on supporting existing rebel groups.[94] The administration has been hesitant to arm opposition groups whose materiel it fears might end up in the service of jihadist groups highly inimical to American interests. To address this fear, Pentagon support is reportedly conditional on groups passing through a vetting process and pledging to fight ISIS, as well as receiving some training on human rights and the law of armed conflict.[95] US lethal aid also appears to be conditional on groups expressing some agreement that they will seek a post-conflict Syria 'that is inclusive and [that they] will build responsive governance structures allowing for the development of civil society institutions not dominated by ideological extremist actors.'[96] However, this is complicated by the fact that many 'moderate' groups actually tend towards varying forms of Islamism, and cooperate with and support other extremist jihadist groups fighting in Syria.[97] In the northeast of Syria, the United States has found its closest allies in the war against ISIS in the Kurdish and Arab Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), whom it has supplied with heavy weaponry and Special Forces training and supported with air-strikes.[98] The United States also currently has at least 500 Special Forces supporting the SDF in northern Syria and the Trump administration has indicate they will send more.[99]

The Trump administration has not presented a fully-articulated strategy on Syria, though the President has indicated that his main goal is defeating ISIS. Beyond this, the administration has at times demanded Assad's removal and at times acquiesced to his remaining in power.[100] American support for the Syrian opposition continues despite intermittent freezes, through Trump has claimed that he will end this support due to weapons passing to ISIS and other radical groups.[101] Trump has also intimated that he would pursue a de-facto alliance with Russia against ISIS.[102]

The main US 'red line' in Syria has been around chemical weapons. On April 6, 2017, President Trump launched over 50 missiles at a government air force base in response to an alleged April 4 chemical weapons attack by government forces.[103] While the administration has said that the "limited strike" was intended to put the Assad government "on notice" it is unclear how the attack will change US Syria policy in the future.

Turkey

Turkey's relationship to Syria centers on its desires to act as a regional leader in grand diplomatic schemes to end the conflict, its denial of Kurdish autonomy, its emphasis on international law and legitimacy, and its desire for influence over its southern neighbour.[104] Turkey may nominally belong to the anti-Assad camp, but its foreign policy goals in Syria are idiosyncratic, effectively situating it against not only the Syrian regime but also the Islamic State and Kurdish groups.[105] Turkey's strategic aims are increasingly driven by a Neo-Ottoman philosophy, or in a more nuanced characterisation, Turkish Gaullism. These foreign policy orientations, rooted in a deep nationalism, entail the transformation of Turkey into 'a confident regional superpower' that is actively involved in the Middle East, and, more broadly, the restoration of 'Turkish glory and grandeur'.[106] Despite a warm relationship with Damascus from the end of the last century, Turkey quickly turned against the Assad regime in 2011. This may have been partially due to Prime Minister Erdogan's irritation at Assad's failure to follow through on reforms promised when Turkey initially supported the regime during the beginning of the uprising. There is also a key sectarian element of Sunni-majority Turkey's support for the predominantly Sunni opposition against an Alawite-led regime.[107] Turkey has provided material support to FSA units, and supported Muslim Brotherhood elements of the Syrian National Council whom it hoped would replace the Assad regime.[108] It has also provided support to other opposition groups, including Ahrar al-Sham.[109]

Though maintaining a desire to unseat the Syrian president, Erdogan may be placing most of his attention on the Syrian Kurds, who he sees as a more primary threat to Turkey.[110] In August 2016, Turkish air and ground forces entered northern Syria to support Turkmen and Arab FSA units in a campaign ostensibly targeting ISIS militants, but also clearly aimed at the Kurdish forces of the YPG/SDF.[111] Turkey, which has long opposed Kurdish calls for autonomy in the southeast of its territory, is worried that the success of Syrian Kurdish forces in gaining territory in northern Syria—particularly if they were to link the pockets of territory they now control into one contiguous zone—would bolster Kurdish separatist aspirations in the region.[112] Turkey seems to have achieved an informal rapprochement with Russia on this issue, refraining from arming certain rebel groups inimical to Russian interests in Syria in return for Russia's forbearance from supporting the Syrian Kurds.[113]

Turkey hosts over 2.5 million Syrian refugees and struggles to meet their needs and develop a long-term plan for their care.

Turkey has leveraged its support for these refugees to achieve a tenuous deal with the EU (see chapter on Turkey for more information).[114]

Saudi Arabia

Gulf states have been notable supporters of various factions of the Syrian opposition. While Qatar has backed several opposition groups, including Islamists,[115] Saudi Arabia has been a major financial and material backer of a broad range of groups, including the salafi-jihadists Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam.[116] In addition, the Saudis have been prominent in efforts to organize a cohesive face for the opposition in international negotiations for Syria, hosting the December 2015 conference of political and military opposition groups that produced the High Negotiations Committee.[117] Saudi Arabia's overriding foreign policy goal in Syria is to contain Iran, its regional rival and stalwart backer of the Assad regime.[118] Saudi Arabia's self-identification as the leader of the global Sunni community fuels its suspicion of Shi'ite Iran and its outreach to other Shi'a in the region, including Syrian Alawites. However, with no indication that Assad will be forced from power, Saudi policy now seems to be one of attrition: 'to pin Iran down in a relatively distant, costly and unwinnable conflict that will exhaust its resources and popularity.'[119]

Saudi Arabia also seeks to combat both ISIS and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, as both groups reject the legitimacy of the Saudi state, though this is a lower priority than challenging Iran.[120] Saudi Arabia continues to support a number of other radical salafi-jihadist groups which it perceives do not pose a direct threat to its own existence.[121] In general, Saudi support for opposition groups is likely to be limited to financial and material aid; its embroilment in the Yemeni conflict, and the need for the rival successors to the Saudi throne to have their armed forces close at hand will likely prevent the deployment of any substantial Saudi military force to Syria.[122]

Pro-Assad states

Russia

Russia's actions in Syria reflect both its regional and global strategic goals. At the regional level, Syria stands as Russia's main ally in the Middle East, and Russia has been the regime's primary arms supplier since the 1970s.[123] Russia also has a valuable Mediterranean naval facility in the Syrian coastal town of Tartous, and an expanding military foothold on the Mediterranean coast more generally, both of which it could lose if the Syrian government fell.[124] President Putin's support for the Syrian government has also facilitated his objective of 'alter[ing] the geopolitical balance of the region in his favor' by solidifying Russia's alliance with the Iranian-Shi'ite network of states and groups across the Middle East.[125]

Since intervening in Syria on the side of the Assad regime in September 2015, Russia has become a major player in the conflict, using its air power to help pro-regime forces make significant territorial gains.[126] It has also emerged as a prominent broker of political deals in Syria, facilitating, for example, the disestablishment of Syrian chemical weapons stockpiles, and playing a key role in negotiating a deal for the evacuation of civilians and opposition fighters during the fall of Aleppo, as well as the subsequent nation-wide ceasefire.

Another stated Russian goal in the region is the destruction of jihadist groups that threaten Russia's security; Russia has faced long Islamist insurgencies in the North Caucasus, where ISIS has recently expanded its operations, and from where approximately 2,000 fighters are thought to have joined hard-line groups in Syria and Iraq.[127] However, Russia has deployed most of its military force against non-ISIS opposition forces that pose a more direct threat to the Assad regime. This suggests that Putin prioritizes the strategic goal of maintaining a functional Syrian state over the destruction of terrorist groups on Syrian soil.[128]

At a wider strategic level, Russia's Syrian intervention reflects its foreign policy goal of carving out a place for itself as a re-emergent global power. Central to this project is the challenging of US and NATO power across the globe, and the construction of spheres of Russian influence, including in Syria and Iran.[129] Putin's publicly-declared desire to wage war against ISIS also feeds into his goal of making Russia a major international player, while undermining American/NATO power. For example, the presence of Russian military aircraft over Syria substantially increases the risks of large-scale conflict if western powers attempted to impose a no-fly zone over the country, thus making such action unlikely.[130] By assuming control of the anti-ISIS campaign and seeking to co-opt western powers into his coalition, Putin is simultaneously projecting Russian strength in the Middle East at the expense of the United States, gaining leverage to undermine western-backed sanctions against Russia, and curtailing America's options for military operations in the region.[131]

While Russia has thus far stood behind the Assad regime, the goals of the Russian and Syrian governments are somewhat divergent. Russia, despite its muscular exercise of aerial force in Syria, has also displayed an inclination towards reaching a negotiated political settlement to the conflict.[132] Such an approach, in which Russia could be the instigator of a broadly-acceptable political transition in Syria, is consistent with its aspirations to be an influential global player and a powerbroker in the Middle East. The Assad regime, on the other hand, has resolutely asserted its intention to regain the entirety of Syria's pre-conflict territory, and has rejected any negotiated approach in which Assad's presidency would be open to challenge.[133] This cleavage between Assad and his Russian backers seems to suggest that Russia, while committed to retaining its influence over the Syrian government, is less intent on maintaining the personal power of President Assad.[134]

Iran and Hezbollah

Syria is an important link in what has been termed a 'Corridor/Axis of Resistance', an anti-United States, anti-Israel arc of predominantly Shi'a-controlled territory running from Tehran, through Iraq and Syria, to Hezbollah-controlled sections of Lebanon, and the Mediterranean. [135]The Islamic Republic of Iran has staunchly supported the Syrian regime since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.[136] Its support was originally based on the two nations' shared antipathy towards Israel and the United States, as well as the closeness of Iran's Shi'a religion and Assad's Alawite sect.[137] These common interests are still highly important, but Syria has also assumed a new

geo-strategic significance to the Iranian government. Iran seeks to impose its authority in these areas through a range of military and paramilitary forces which it controls or holds influence over, including the Assad regime and the National Defense Forces auxiliary units in Syria.[138]

Iran's strategic objective in the region is to defeat Saudi Arabia and other Sunni countries and groups and build regional supremacy.[139] Further goals are to establish itself as a regional hegemon and leader of the global Muslim community, expel the United States from the Middle East, eliminate Israel, protect Shi'ites, and defeat the Sunni Islamist groups it perceives as a threat to its existence.[140] Syria is an important battleground in Iran's quest to achieve these strategic goals. Its leadership is determined to prevent the fall of the Assad regime, and has provided weapons and military advisers from the Revolutionary Guard Corps to the Syrian government; this support has been key to the regime's survival.[141] Nevertheless, although Iran is eager to prove to other Middle Eastern countries that it will be resolute in backing its allies, the Iranian government may be willing to accept a new government without Assad in power if it would continue its alliance with Iran.[142] Should Assad fall or a transitional government be established, Iran would mobilize its assets within the country, including the NDF, and possibly Hezbollah, to protect its interests.[143]

Syria's importance to Iran derives also from Iran's relationship with the Lebanese militant organization Hezbollah. This Shi'ite group was founded in the early 1980s under Iranian patronage, and has been a crucial part of the Iranian axis of resistance ever since.[144] Hezbollah acts as the frontline in the ongoing, largely 'cold', war with Israel, and also offers Iran a valuable intermediary in an Arab world often suspicious of Persian intrusions into its affairs; its protection is thus a 'core national interest' of Iran.[145] Syria has long served as a vital staging point for the transfer of Iranian arms and other materiel to the Lebanese group; Syria's Mediterranean ports and Damascus International Airport offer much more secure nodes for materiel transfer than Lebanese facilities, the use of which would be more vulnerable both to Israeli attack and a shift in Lebanon's internal balance of power away from Hezbollah.[146] For this reason, Iran will continue to defend Assad's interests in western Syria, particularly in Alawite coastal areas and around Damascus.[147]

Hezbollah itself is committed to defending the Assad regime, aware that the maintenance of a predominantly Alawite government in Syria will keep its supply lines from Iran open.[148] It has thus sent thousands of fighters to augment Assad's forces. However, Hezbollah's support for the Syrian government has made Hezbollah increasingly unpopular amongst an Arab citizenry concerned about the brutality of the Syrian regime. In response, the group has both attempted to frame its intervention in Syria as a continuation of its fight against Israel and increasingly invoked rhetoric casting Assad's enemies as Sunni terrorists, while castigating Saudi Arabia for its allegedly destabilizing role in the Middle East.[149] Hezbollah's prioritization of its links with Syria and Iran, and its espousal of increasingly sectarian rhetoric indicates that its leadership may now prioritize its geo-political and sectarian objectives over maintaining its anti-Israel and popular resistance credentials.[150] Furthermore, Hezbollah leaders may believe that entering the conflict on the side of the regime would earn it 'implicit international recognition, especially from America, as one of the pillars confronting 'terrorism' extending from Syria to Lebanon.'[151]

Potential Negotiation Moves

The Syrian government

The Syrian government will engage in any negotiation process in which its continued control over a substantial proportion of Syrian territory is assured. The regime sees no persuasive reason why it should cede power to another party.[152] Nevertheless, the Syrian government's participation in the UN-sponsored series of Geneva peace talks indicates a willingness to negotiate—even if not face-to-face—with some non-extremist elements of the opposition.[153] With the government now in a stronger military position following the fall of Aleppo, it may see engagement in further political negotiations as a way to cement its territorial gains and end the conflict without continuing a military campaign that, while successfully weakening the opposition's hold on the country, is by no means assured of total victory. As of December 2016, President Assad had expressed his support for proposed Russian-, Turkish- and Iranian-backed negotiations to take place in Kazakhstan.[154] However, it is probable that, given the regime's favorable position on the ground, Assad would be even more resolute in requiring the maintenance of regime power as a precondition for the initiation of talks. Furthermore, if the present military imbalance between the regime and the opposition persists, a political solution involving power-sharing or the inclusion of the opposition within government is unlikely. More likely would be a deal mandating the opposition's disarmament, and perhaps amnesty for some rebel fighters—modest political reform within the Assad regime may or may not be included.

The regime has been unwilling to compromise with the rebels and allow the partition or federalization of the country on ethno-religious lines—even for Kurds striving for an autonomous homeland in Syria's northeast, whom the regime appears to have sporadically supported in some of their military endeavours.[155] However, it is possible that, now the Syrian government has driven non-Kurdish opposition forces from Syria's main cities, including Aleppo, that it might countenance some form of regional autonomy for the Kurds and for eastern desert areas currently controlled by ISIS, which the regime has generally not considered 'strategic areas worth contesting'.[156] It is possible that, should the regime realize it will be unable to assert control over the entire territory of pre-war Syria, it will settle for retaining possession of a 'contracted state.'[157] Yet this remains unlikely, as the regime seems to fear that any concession of territory it formerly controlled may embolden other groups within its patchwork coalition to assert their own autonomy.[158] It may also view such a territorial contraction as a symbolic defeat.[159]

However, the regime's potential negotiation moves are also shaped and restricted by the agendas of major regional and international players, particularly America, Russia, and Iran. Much will hinge on the future policy of the United States which, while ostensibly opposing Assad's rule, has refrained from openly confronting him militarily. While the Syria strategy of a Trump administration is not fully clear at this point, Trump has stated that his main focus is to combat ISIS. This would place the United States in a tacit

alignment with the Assad government and its Russian backers.[160] In this case, Assad's position in any negotiations would be greatly strengthened at the expense of non-ISIS/Jabhat Fateh al-Sham opposition forces. The Syrian President would be free to seek to regain control of the entire Syrian territory, facing an opposition divided between jihadists opposed by both Russia and America, and more moderate rebels bereft of international support. However, such a policy on the part of the United States might have the unintended effect of driving non-extremist Syrian opposition fighters and supporters into the arms of groups such as ISIS and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.

If the United States stepped up its support to non-extremist groups within the Syrian opposition, it could reverse or stall the Syrian government's military gains, which may incentivize Assad to return to the negotiating table as the strength of his negotiating position depends on the military balance within the country. If Assad's gains were sufficiently rolled back and the United States' negotiating leverage commensurately enlarged, America might resume its calls for the President to relinquish power as part of a political settlement. This could in turn serve to create a fissure between Assad and his regime allies and external backers. Assad's domestic allies might consider that, in the interests of reaching a political solution in which they, rather than opposition figures, held the dominant position, they should cut loose the President in order to gain American and opposition support for a deal. Russia and Iran would not necessarily oppose such a measure if they believed they would retain a measure of influence over the new government—particularly in terms of its foreign policy and geo-political alignment. In Washington's view, this new regime would ideally commit to democracy, fair elections, some form of pluralistic or devolved governance, and the economic and social empowerment of opposition communities. The new government might even seek to augment its long-term prospects by co-opting moderate Sunni militias into the fight against ISIS and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham in return for amnesty and/or assured participation in the political process. However, it must be noted that a transitional government in which opposition forces exist on an equal footing with the regime seems unlikely in light of current military reality; the possibility depends on the opposition securing greater leverage through gains on the battlefield.

Opposition

Syrian opposition groups currently possess very little political cachet with which to influence political negotiations. Hemmed into isolated territorial pockets, the prospects of these groups defeating Assad militarily currently appear slim. Their main chance of increasing negotiating leverage rests on international powers deciding to offer them more support.[161] A stronger military position, bolstered by greater international support, would increase the opposition's ability to press for regime change and inclusion in a new government during political negotiations. The extent of support largely rests upon what America decides its primary long-term goal is in Syria: the removal of Assad and the creation of a democratic government, or the defeat of ISIS and other radical Islamists.

Opposition groups thus have an incentive to make themselves attractive to the United States by appearing moderate. The US is limited in its choice of viable partners on the ground by the general weakness of moderate groups, and the relative strength of Islamist factions. The fall of Aleppo may indicate the marginalization of most remaining moderate groups, and the incorporation of their fighters into the stronger Islamist alliances.[162] In light of this, the United States may prepare to support some groups that espouse Islamist ideologies in order to defeat the regime if it chooses that goal. But Washington will likely draw a red line at supporting groups which engage in sustained battlefield alliances with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, including, at present, Ahrar al-Sham. Such a policy may serve to prise more moderate Islamist elements—those who do not support international terrorism and the rigid implementation of sharia law—from more hard-line factions, like Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.[163] Ahrar al-Sham, for example, already suffers from a cleft between its radical and moderate wings; the moderates may seize an opportunity to gain a stake in a post-conflict government should the United States and other powers assure them of international support if they renounce ties with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.

International backing also likely depends on opposition groups' fulfilment of conditions, including supporting democracy, expelling terrorists from Syria, and agreeing to religious pluralism within the Syrian state.[164] Protection of minority rights and devolution of power to regional authorities may also be among the conditions. One delicate point will be the role of sharia in the future governance of Syria, as a state based on Islamic law is the end goal of many Syrian Islamist groups. but not desired by Western powers.[165] However, sharia could nonetheless be incorporated to some degree within a civil society. It would be possible, for example, for a provision to be incorporated into a new constitution—as is the case in Egypt and Iraq—affirming the centrality of sharia to the nation's law and governance, without entrenching it as supreme law.[166] The implementation of non-fundamentalist sharia could be confined to certain subject matters, such as personal status, marriage, and inheritance, and 'subject to speculation, interpretation, and evolution over time.'[167] Such an outcome would be something of a compromise between powerful Islamist groups in Syria and western powers' unwillingness to see a hard-line 'Islamic state' arising from the wreckage of the Syrian conflict.

XXXI. Tunisia: One-Party State to Multi-Party State

Written by: Eli Stiefel
Edited by: Margaret Snyder

Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

Tunisia's relative success in the post "Arab Spring" period makes its political situation and connection to the wider region critical to understand. The government is currently presided over by a coalition government of Nidaa Tounes, a diverse grouping of secularists, leftists, former regime members, traditional elites and oligarchs, and Ennahda, the Islamist party. Though working together in a coalition, these parties, disagree on many issues, particularly in the lower bureaucratic levels. Outside of politics, the Tunisia General Labor Union (UGTT) is a powerful force with a large and diffuse membership.

The explosion of political parties in the post-2011 Tunisian election was in many ways a response to years of effectively single-party rule in the country. Due to this one-party dominance, there was little to no general experience among the political elite or opposition groups in creating political parties; still less at formulating political platforms and policy positions or participating in political negotiations and substantive debates. This meant that most new parties had formed broad, ill-defined and impractical agendas, largely still connected to the demands of the revolution (employment, freedom, and dignity), but without clear definitions or ideas on how to achieve them.

This lack of distinct positions, beyond generally how best to express the changes needed in Tunisia, became evident in the constitutional drafting process between 2011 and 2014. The process dragged on past its original deadline and seemed to point to intractable disagreements among political actors over certain sections of the new constitution; however, in reality, the main issues were language and perceived intent, not of opposition to change or disagreements over what changes were needed.

This impasse was rectified by the participation of a quartet of civil society groups who managed to get a draft of the constitution completed and passed in 2014. Nevertheless, the inexperience of political actors in negotiations and the formation of distinct policy platforms continues to hamstring the government today. Importantly, though this lack of political platforms differentiating the parties clearly from one another may appear to slow progress down and muddy the waters for outsiders seeking to understand the internal workings of Tunisian politics, it has allowed the continued engagement of Tunisian society in the process of decision-making, resulting in an inclusivity which may be reducing violence.

A basic understanding of how this situation came to be is essential for engaging in a negotiation process in this complex environment. Under Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba, "the Neo-Destour (later named the Socialist Destourian Party), became synonymous with the state."[1] With control of the judiciary, arbitrary limits on press freedom, and minimum rights and privileges accorded to legislative assemblies, there were very few checks on his centralizing power.[2]

Further, Bourguiba made the Destour Party the only legal political party after 1963, which saw party branches become the only visible form of community association.[3] Though Tunisia opened to a form of multi-partyism in the early 1980s, only the least threatening parties were allowed to participate in a highly restricted fashion.[4] In 1987, Vice President Zine El Abedine Ben Ali seized power from an ailing Bourguiba through a "medico-constitutional coup."[5] Ben Ali ostensibly attempted to distance himself from Bourguiba's undemocratic legacy by renaming their party as the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD). However, Ben Ali was the only candidate to stand in the 1989 and 1994 presidential elections. The RCD party was also in charge of appointing the commission drafting electoral lists for parliamentary elections, running polling stations, and counting ballots, which it did behind closed doors.[6]

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Ben Ali regime, hundreds of small parties emerged to express their newly gained political voice. After the 2011 election, a coalition government formed out of the first, second, and fourth place parties (the Ennahda movement, the Congress of the Republic (CPR), and the Ettakatol party respectively). This coalition was later called the "Troika." Each expressed the sentiments of the Tunisian people in a slightly different voice: Ennahda expressed the wishes of the moderate Islamists following the party's leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, and CPR and Ettakatol represented the left-leaning, secular vote. Significantly, each had won a political plurality, and therefore no one could dominate the scene. Though Ennahda did attempt to do this early on, their effort was soon walked back in the face of public disapproval, and the backlash against the similar assertion of Islamist policies by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.[7]

Voted into power largely without distinct and hardened political platforms, these inexperienced parties struggled to come to agreements and run the negotiations necessary to draft and pass a constitution.[8] As a result, the stalemate that ensued threatened to undermine the legitimacy of these elected officials and their entire democratic project. Coming to their aid were four civic society organizations: the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA, Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, La Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme), and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie).

This Quartet, as they came to be known, "represent[ed] different sectors and values in Tunisian society: working life and welfare, principles of the rule of law and human rights…[and played the central] role as a mediator and driving force to advance peaceful democratic development in Tunisia"[9] during a period of social unrest and near civil war after the assassination of two opposition politicians and delayed progress in drafting the constitution. These organizations quieted their own internal divides, particularly that

between the workers and management of UGTT and UTICA, provided valuable negotiation experience and techniques, and successfully pushed for a draft of the new constitution.[10]

Presently, Tunisia's primary political actors appear to hold opposing positions on many crucial issues. Their inexperience in governing necessitates that those who have experience in running complex organizations and negotiating disagreements, namely social groups such as the Quartet that were previously subsumed within the party architecture, must come to the aid of political parties. Going forward, these groups and the Tunisian people will likely maintain a strong presence in any political decisions.

Sources of Leverage

Tunisia' status as the success story of the Arabic Spring makes it short work to convince donor countries to invest in its development and faltering economy. This position also makes it a desirable partner and recipient of Western security and economic assistance. In the recent Tunisia 2020 international investment conference, donors pledged upwards of $14 billion for Tunisia's development. These funds will take the form of aid and loans, to be doled out over the succeeding four years.[11][12]

Internal Conflicts

The primary interest of all political actors is to stay relevant and in power. Though there is a clear secularist/Islamist split in rhetoric, this does not translate to a clear binary divide in political sentiments, as many Tunisians see themselves as devout Muslims without voting along secularist/Islamist lines. This non-binary politics can be seen clearly from the massive support in Tunisia for policies typically labeled as "Islamist" and the leading Islamist party's successive inability to win a majority in the government.[13] Popular interests remain those expressed during the 2011 revolution and can be met by any party without necessitating reference to religion. Though an identity pull for certain voters may lead more toward a secularist or Islamist vernacular for expressing how changes will occur and what changes are needed, the direction of changes, at least in broad strokes, are largely agreed upon. This section will focus on the three main groups likely to be involved in shepherding these changes into being.

Ennahda

Ennahda is generally seen as more effectively organized, with better publicity, and stronger financial resources than other parties.[14] However, it began its time in governance with little confidence, vocal internal splits, poor negotiation skills, and no political experience.[15]
Though Ennahda lost significant support in the October 2014 elections, dropping to less than one third of seats, it was able to keep a coherent bloc of voters and maintain a place for itself in Tunisian politics.[16] Ennahda aims to bring a more Islamic tone to government, supported by an agenda focused more on religious teachings and keeping the party relevant by motivating Islamist leaning supporters. The party gained legitimacy by showing a willingness to shift its stance on issues such as blasphemy laws, the role of women in the nation, and the source of human rights whenever they met public pressure.[17] However, the pattern of putting forward strict positions on these issues and later walking them back also shows division between party hardliners and party moderates.[18]

Ennahda's primary interest is to remain a central actor in Tunisian politics. Its position on stricter religious influence in society may variously serve this interest or at times hinder it, but it is clearly representative of the competing interests of internal party groups. The party can best serve all internal groups' interests by remaining in government, even if this means a certain amount of compromise is necessary. This indirect strategy alienates certain people who might otherwise vote for Ennahda, but appears to be working well overall.

What holds this party together, and yet at the same time serves to divide it, is thus how to emphasize the party's Islamic philosophical character. Rachid Ghannouchi, the founder and leader of Ennahda, explains that he does not "see any conflict between moderate secularism and moderate Islam," and does not regard the current Tunisian Constitution as a secular constitution "but one that unites Islam, democracy and modernity."[19] There is a division between moderates and conservatives. Moderates like Ghannouchi see secularism and Islam as complementary, and believe Islam has a role in defending religious freedom. Conservatives within Ennahda tend more toward Salafism, want uncompromising changes to promote Islam, and are willing to impose this through violence.[20]

Ghannouchi has distanced himself and his party from violent Salafi groups, but is careful not to verbally and publically disengage from these groups beliefs too starkly for fear of losing supporters. Though Ennahda sees itself as distinct from other Islamist groups in the region, it does know that others lump it into this category and that it thus is threatened by the same fate as Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Remembering its banned status in the past, and how other political parties sided with the Ben Ali regime in the 1990s when he moved against them, is what keeps Ennahda's ultimate focus on staying a central player in the political system nearly at any cost.[21]

Ennahda is able to influence the situation in Tunisia due to its large public support and grassroots network, which allowed it to perform better than any other party so soon after the 2011 revolution. Compromises have reduced its strong hold over religious and Islamist sentiments in the country, but it still is the only viable mainstream party to speak to these interests. As a moderate Muslim voice, it is able to communicate with outside and Western actors more effectively. Western actors often give Ennahda a platform to speak

on. This allows for greater understanding in the outside world, but may also reduce its credibility among the most hardline members of Islamist groups. [22] At the same time, its apparent pragmatism, when needed to maintain political relevance, encourages a certain amount of distrust among secular and leftist political groups in Tunisia.[23]

To move the region toward more cooperation, this party may continue to maintain a place in government, and compromise to allow secular and Islamic ideas to coexist. Ennahda's strength is in its ability to compromise and partner with other parties in service of a coalition government; however, an excess of compromise could lead the party to obscure their unique political identity and erode the strong participation of the Tunisian people.[24]

Nidaa Tounes

The rise of Nidaa Tounes and its ability to draw together a diverse grouping of secularists, leftists, former regime members, and traditional elites and oligarchs is primarily motivated by a fear of "the ascendancy of al-Nahdha as the predominant player in the new political system, [which has] raised the specter in more liberal minds of Tunisia's becoming a theocratic state similar to Iran."[25] From the point of view of Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda has threatened, through its rhetoric, if not yet concretely through its actions, to undermine the secular and leftist freedoms that Nidaa Tounes views as part of Tunisian identity. The party's primary interest then is to maintain its position as a counterbalance to Ennahda in influencing national reforms and important political decisions. This diverse group is open to a great deal of compromise, though nothing that would reduce its ability to balance out the Islamist power base, or that might endanger its potential in a reelection.

Certain lingering disputes over party leadership exist that might undermine its ability to address essential security and economic concerns while in government. In particular, disputes over the presence of former regime officials in the leadership of the party and over the party's partnership with Ennahda are acute and potentially fragmentary. These divisions have led some to hypothesize that Nidaa Tounes' leaders cannot work together to handle the economic and security issues plaguing the country, and promote needed democratic norms.[26] If this is true, it would undoubtedly put at risk their electoral power base.

Of particular importance is the role played by the leader of Nidaa Tounes, Beji Caid Essebsi. At age 90, he has significant experience, but has also gained distrust from those who see him as "a symbol of the anachronistic regime reputed for its human rights violations,"[27] rather than someone with valuable government experience. Yet, Essebsi's post-revolution actions have shown "a high degree of pragmatism, flexibility, and interactive openness to political parties…cooperating with leftist and liberal leaders alike during Tunisia's transitional phase,"[28] particularly in the act of forming a coalition with Ennahda. Despite this, there is a strong distaste, particularly in the south and interior, for Essebsi and other former regime officials in Nidaa Tounes's membership.[29] Also, as the party was largely formed through his connections, if he were no longer able to lead the party, its political position could suffer.

Given the cross-pollination of platforms between political parties and the general desire to channel the goals of the revolution – employment, freedom, and dignity – it seems that Nidaa Tounis' prime motivations are to maintain power, not to be isolated by Ennahda, and to serve as a brake on potential Islamist developments in the constitution and national legal system changing Tunisia's national image.

General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT)

Arguably the most effective and important actor behind the scenes, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail) or UGTT, has a dues-paying membership ranging from 5-20% of the Tunisian population.[30] From its inception, it was always more than simply a labor union. Despite the appearance of close ties to the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, the leaders of the UGTT "retained more independence than other Arab labor unions—or even…French counterparts, many of which are allied to political parties[, and] its only general strike before the 2011 revolution—savagely put down—was against Bourguiba's 1978 effort to handpick union leadership…Bourguiba never tried to ban the UGTT."[31] Under both previous presidents, the union retained a high level of credibility in Tunisian society through its support of the struggle for workers' rights and social justice, and its capacity for gaining labor improvements and concessions from Ben Ali."[32]

The UGTT is well placed to leverage its large membership with multiple local structures through which it can apply pressure in today's political debate, even bring the country to a standstill if required.[33] Additionally, it was the only institution capable of rivaling the ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) of Ben Ali, in terms of its presence in Tunisians' everyday lives in the period before the 2011 revolution, giving Tunisians a familiarity with this strength. It also has a tradition of democratic bylaws and internal electoral practices that had traditionally provided a freer space for expression than that acceptable in the wider public. "In the view of many Tunisians, the UGTT represents Tunisians better than any of the post-revolutionary political parties do and enjoys more legitimacy." [34]

Remaining largely outside of politics, in the role of an advisor and pressure group upon elected officials, is in the interest of the UGTT, as their historical identity has been to represent the concrete needs of its members, rather than taking political power unto itself. If the UGTT were to assume the role of a political party, it would likely divide its membership, and thus undermine its power. This could lead to a similar reduction in its legitimacy if it was as unsteady at bringing rapid reforms as the currently governing groups. Thus, the best move for the UGTT at this time may be to continue serving as a conduit of popular mobilization and motivation to the elected government without identifying itself too strongly with any particular group.

External Conflicts

Tunisia's primary regional strategy is to build security and economic development partnerships to stave off insecurity and extremism next door in Libya. Additionally, Tunisia seeks to stem the flow of young Tunisians joining ISIS, as Tunisia is its largest contributor of

foreign fighters. Furthermore, Tunisia is engaged in a low-level maritime dispute with its neighbor Libya, although this issue could be said to have taken a backseat to the threat of ISIS and Libya's current fractured state.

Potential Negotiation Moves

As a partner to both Morocco and Algeria, Tunisia is well-placed to act as a mediator in the Western Sahara peace talks between Morocco and the Polisario Front. Relying on their common Maghrebi identity, Tunisia is in a good position to lean on Algeria to take some part in the Western Sahara talks, in order to lay to rest Morocco's prior preconditions for engaging in talks. Furthermore, as the success story of the Arab Spring, Tunisia could direct attention and assistance from its donor countries to the Western Sahara conflict.

XXXII. Turkey: Faith, Secularism, and Regional Ambition

Written by: Bilal Chaudhary
Edited by: Ashley Miller

Introduction

Turkey presents one of the most dynamic experiments with political Islam in 20th century, projecting the interplay of faith and secularism. With phenomenal economic turnaround to its credit, Turkish model over the years has appealed to the imagination of Arab masses and intelligentsia. Not very long ago, it was considered the pillar of Middle East's stability, but now Turkey faces the most critical challenge to its security since the creation of Republic in 1923. Since the beginning of the so called Arab Spring in 2011, one Arab state after the other has plunged into deep crises. These crises have become mammoth overtime and the challenges to resolve them more complex due to conflicting international, regional, ethnic and sectarian interests. The Westphalian order - conceived four centuries ago - that had brought the State at the center of relationships between different sets of people, seems to be in complete disarray in the Middle East. At present no country is in a position to unilaterally solve the explosive situation in the region, yet there are essentially a few key players which have more capacity than the rest, due to mixture of social, economic and geostrategic reasons, to work towards a negotiated solution. Turkey is arguably one of those players, possessing the ability to contribute towards bringing the players to the negotiating table and work towards bringing normalcy.

Identity, Conflict Narratives, Threat Perceptions

Kemalism and common Muslim identity, two inherently contrasting concepts, have been the pivotal points around which Turkish State and society have revolved during the last 94 years. Mustafa Kemal, popularly known as Ataturk (literally meaning 'Father of Turks'), had laid the foundation of Turkish State on the basis of following three principles, collectively known as Kemalism: *Secularism; Westernization; and Turkification*. Ataturk focused on creating a strict Turkish identity of the new born State, replacing the Pan-Islamism of Ottoman Empire. In his Westernization drive, Mustafa Kemal introduced a wholesale reform package which abolished all religious schools; banned Islamic head scarfs; and replaced Islamic law with Swiss civil code.[1] For almost 25 years, Kemalism remained unrivaled and was followed with great national fervor at the official level, providing a rallying point for the founding fathers of the infant State to build a national edifice. But these top down reforms created a Kemalist class that was mostly visible in military, civilian bureaucracy and urban elite, with limited impact in the rural Anatolia where the undercurrents of conservatism remained intact.

Kemalism remains a potent force to this day in Turkey, but its unbridled ascendency was brought to an end after the World War II. The threat of Soviet expansionism looming over Turkey's borders forced the liberals, Islamists and nationalists to join hands and challenge Kemalism with *'conservative nationalism'*, ushering in an era of multiple party system after two and a half decades of single party system. Once the common threat disappeared with the demise of Soviet Union, this political union also fell apart. The 1990s saw the rise of Islamists who since then have tried to build the national fabric on the basis of shared religious identity (99% of Turkish population is Muslim).[2]

At the turn of the century, the center right Justice and Development Party (AKP) rallied the Turks around the slogan of 'conservative democracy'. It laid special emphasis on regional activism, laying down the foreign policy framework on the basis of two principles: *'Zero problems with neighbors'* and *'strategic depth'*. In pursuit of first principle, it showed a non-conventional approach by offering a compromise on Cyprus issue to Greece; publicly condoling the death of Armenians during WWI;[3] and normalizing the traditionally hostile relations with Syria. The second principle manifested itself in Middle East where AK Party tried to create a regional security system by using soft power tools such as trade, economic integration, conflict mediation, and appeal of its development model.[4] Theoretically, AKP's foreign policy vision was inspired by the writings of intellectuals such as Ahmet Davutoglu, the former Prime Minister, who linked Middle East's instability to its embrace of ethnic nationalism, arguing that the concept led to the rise of autocratic regimes who had to rely on repression to stay in power. But practically, AKP's policy has been based more on real politik, preferring pragmatism over ideological underpinnings. Nowhere was it more elaborately displayed than during the Arab Spring. Instead of following a uniform policy towards all the authoritarian regimes in the region, Turkey adopted country specific approach when popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya threatened the status quo. For instance, in case of Tunisia – a distant country- Turkey remained indifferent, resisting any interventionist posturing until President Ben Ali resigned.[5] But when the demonstrations erupted in the streets of Cairo, Ankara took a hardline approach from the very beginning, with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan becoming the first international leader to publicly ask for Mubarak's resignation.[6] In Libya, an entirely different line of action was pursued. Turkey resisted regime change and opposed NATO's idea of having a no fly zone over Libya. Once again, contrary to its ideological inclinations, Ankara's reaction was based purely on national interests as it had huge investments in Libya and there were bright prospects of Libyan investments under Qaddafi coming to Turkey as a result of oil boom in those days.[7]

Ankara's overtures towards Middle East under AKP have been dubbed by many as neo-Ottomanism. But that appears to be an oversimplification. There are a number of other pressing reasons for this southward drive. Since the end of cold war, Ankara has tried to avoid being merely a US' flank State, following a more independent foreign policy and feeling obliged to focus on its southern boundaries in the midst of Iran's nuclear program and its regional ambitions; Iraq's precarious situation threatening to have a spill-over effect; and fragmented Lebanon with radical groups affiliated with Syria and Iran. A close examination of the chronology of events in

Iraq, Egypt and Syria would sum up Turkish regional policy in the following manner: it remained non-interventionist as long as the States were politically stable; and it turned interventionist when the States went through the political transition. It was only after the Islamists came out victorious in elections in Tunisia and Egypt that Ankara saw in it an opportunity to extend its area of influence through invoking traditional ties with entities like Muslim Brotherhood. But this is the point at which its regional and international isolation started. Till then, Turkey was regarded as the model of progressive Islam by fellow Muslim countries and the West,[8] and Erdogan was hailed as a 'great reformer' for his political convictions.[9] But things started to change after 2011 so much so that the 'zero problems with neighbors' popularly came to be ridiculed as 'zero neighbors without problems'.

It is true that Turkish leadership often makes thinly guised statements in admiration of their Ottoman past, but looking at the way Erdogan established relationships with all the strongmen in Middle East prior to Arab Spring, it appears that the strategy AKP employed to revive that regional glory was based on economic integration and diplomatic activism and not on territorial expansionism. A large part of its interventionism in Iraq and Syria stems from its threat perception of Kurdish separatism, which in turn has its roots in Kemalist policies of promoting only Turkic identity of the Republic. For Turkey, the transnational political networks of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - the Turkish Kurds militant organization - in Syria and Iraq are a direct threat to its territorial integrity, compelling it to remain extremely watchful of all the developments that tend to empower Kurds in Syria and Iraq.

During the war with Greece (1919-23), Mustafa Kemal had united Turks and Kurds under the shared Islamic identity. However, after the war Kemalist Republic made a deliberate effort to create a homogeneous Turkish State by aggressively promoting *Turkishness* and disapproving any other form of regional, ethnic or religious identity. Strict restrictions were imposed on promoting any language except Turkish. In 1934, it was made mandatory for the citizens to have Turkish last names, followed by a Resettlement Law, requiring non-Turkish speaking minorities to resettle in majority Turkish areas, to force assimilation.[10] Explaining the rationale behind the law, Sukru Kaya –Turkey's Interior Minister in 1934 - said: "*The law is going to carve out a country which speaks the same language, and which possesses the common sentiments" (June 14,1934).* Kemalist leaders, worried about the unity of the country during the formative years, were of the view that any cultural freedom might trigger separation of not only southeast Anatolia – home to Kurds – but also the border areas with Armenia. But the State policy deeply alienated the ethnic Kurds who numbered 11 million (19% of the total Turkish population)[11] forming a significant minority. Between 1923 and 1938, a number of unsuccessful rebellions were raised by Kurds, increasing the Turkish State's wariness of Kurdish separatism. In recent times, with the creation of Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq, the idea of Kurdish nationalism transcending the national boundaries has further added to the woes of policy makers in Ankara. Turkey's current policies in Iraq and Syria have their genesis partly in these woes.

Scholars believe that apart from Kurdish issue, post WWI events also have had a lasting impact on Turkey's policy formulation. At the end of the war, the allied powers signed the Treaty of Sevres, reshaping the entire Middle East from the ashes of Ottoman empire. The Anatolian region (present day Turkey) was divided between Greeks, Armenians, Kurds, Italians, British and French. Feeling humiliated by the imperial powers, Turks launched an armed struggle under Mustafa Kemal to drive out foreigners and scrap the treaty of Sevres. After several years of struggle they did succeed, but the legacy of Sevres has continued in Turkey in the shape of resistance to what are perceived by Turks as imperialist policies aimed at carving up Turkey – a perception that has taken the form of nationalist paranoia, leading some analysts to name it Sevres syndrome.[12] At various junctures of its history, Turkish leadership can be seen making references to Sevres to explain the contemporary difficulties in relationship with Europe. Europe's own insistence from time to time to bring Sevres to life further heightened this fear. In 1987, when the European Parliament adopted a resolution criticizing Turkey's treatment of its Armenian population, the then Turkish Prime Minister, Kenan Evren – a former General who led the military coup of 1980 - termed it a *'conspiracy against Turkey'* saying that *''the expectations of the external forces are to eliminate Turkey, divide and dismember it, and these intentions continued for centuries and continue now as well".* Similarly, when a French parliamentarian Jacques Toubon in 2005, while addressing the Turkish-EU Joint Parliamentary gathering, called on Turkish leadership to recognize Sevres,[13] there was a huge outcry in Turkey, with leading leftist newspaper "*Cumhuriyet*" in its August 10, 2005 edition stated that 85 years had lapsed since the signing of Sevres, but its spirit was still maintained by Europe in its vision for Turkey.[14]

Sources of Leverage

Before World War I, Turks had been a dominant power in Middle East for over half a millennium. Therefore, the greatest source of leverage to Turkey are its historical ties with Arabs which make it easier for her to forge relationships in the region. This is reflected by the way Turkey under AKP was readily accepted by the Arab countries, despite the fact that it had turned its back on the region after WWI. To fully understand the nature of these ties, it is useful to have a brief account of the history of Turko-Arab relationship. This would also help evaluate the common perception that Arabs viewed the Ottomans as colonists per se.

The earliest contacts between the Arabs and Turkic people who lived in Central Asia, were established with the conquest of Khwarzam and Transoxiana by the Umayyad governor of Khurasan (Persia) in 712.[15] Under the Abbasids (750-1258), these Turkics fought alongside Arab troops against the Chinese Army in the battle of Talas in 751.[16] These earliest contacts facilitated the trade relationship, allowing the Arab merchants to visit the region and interact with locals. Noting Turkmen's natural fighting prowess, Abbasids started employing them in the Arab army and created their special units, stationing them in Samarra, Iraq.[17][18] Due to their proximity to the royal seat in Baghdad, these Turkmen started wielding considerable political power. During 11th century, Seljuk Turks who by then had established themselves as the guardians of the waning Abbasid power had tightened their grip on the affairs of the State so much so that in 1055, they established the *Seljuk (Turkic) dynasty* in Baghdad and controlled the present day Iraq, Iran and Syria.[19] In 1071, Seljuks defeated a large Byzantine army which opened the door for Turcik tribes to settle in Anatolia (Turkey). Besides Seljuks, another noteable

Turkish dynasty which ruled the Arab lands was '*Mamluk*' (literally meaning 'owned slave'). Mamluks were Abbasids' military slaves, who went on to rule Egypt from 1250 to 1517.[20] Ottomans who replaced Seljuks in Anatolia subsequently, had Syria, Egypt and Yemen as part of their territory from 1516 till the end of WWI.

During these contacts which were spanned over centuries, both sides i.e. Arabs and Turks influenced each other in culture, politics and social structure. From 10th century onwards, Turkish language in particular, came under heavy influence of Arabic.[21] Ottomans who adopted the Arabic script, patronized the inclusion of Arabic and Persian vocabulary into Turkish. Consequently, the literary work originating from the official court used to have profound influences of both these languages.[22] Even today, despite the purging of Arabic's influence and change of alphabets from Arabic to Latin, Arabic traces can still be found in Turkish language.[23]

Over the course of history, Turkmen living in Arab lands assimilated in local population, but in some cases they kept their unique identity.[24] This is reflected in the demographic distribution of present day Iraq, where in 2012, the Iraqi parliament officially recognized Iraqi Turkomen as the third largest ethnic group after Arabs and Kurds.[25] There is heavy concentration of these Turkomen in and around the northern Iraqi province of Kirkuk,[26] prompting their ethnic kin Turkey to use their presence as leverage to influence the politics of northern Iraq. The presence of huge oil reserves in Kirkuk have further added to its geopolitical importance, with Iraqi central government, Kurds and Turkey all vying for a share of oil revenue. A similar diplomatic struggle, based on Turkish claim of Turkmen population living in Mosul, persisted during the negotiations in Lausanne between the British and Turks in 1923.[27] Erdogan's often quoted public pronouncements regarding the 'great injustice' done to Turkey in Lausanne has its roots partly in the loss of Mosul subsequent to these parleys with the British. [28] It is also in this historical context, that he presses for inclusion of Turkish troops in the offensive against the ISIS in Mosul,[29] which controls the second largest Iraqi city since June 2014.

It is interesting to note that during the long era of Turkish rule over the Arab lands, it is hard to find any noteworthy ethnic rebellion of Arabs against their Turkish rulers. Instead the contemporary accounts show that the Turks were successful in wooing Arab nobility and religious scholars to legitimize their rule.[30] These accounts, depicting supportive statements of notables are often used by present day Turkish media and intelligentsia in its outreach effort to the Arab world. As far as the contemporary popular Arab sentiment towards the Turkish rule is concerned, it has been aptly summed up by Bernard Lewis in these words: "*Until the impact of European political ideas, the Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire, though well aware of their separate linguistic and cultural identity and of the historic memories attached to them, had no conception of a separate Arab state and no serious desire to part from the Turks.*"[31] It is only at the twilight of the Sultanate, that the elites in successor Arab states started to severely criticize Ottoman rule as being oppressive, holding it responsible for Arab cultural stagnation.[32] Such criticism was natural in the midst of strong nationalist sentiments of the time.

In addition to history, geo-strategic location is another factor which the Republic of Turkey tries to cash in on, to influence decisions in Middle East. Being situated at the cusp of Middle East and Europe, it is at the center of global energy politics. It continues to benefit from this advantage in its relationship with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and has succeeded in signing oil contracts with local authorities despite stiff opposition from Iraq's central government in Baghdad. In another strategic move, Turkey has signed an agreement with Russia to build a gas pipeline 'Turkish Stream' that would pass through its territorial waters in Black Sea, allowing Russian gas to reach European markets without having to pass through Ukraine – a country with which Russia has difficult relationship. Already, Turkey, being the third largest importer of Russian natural gas, is a major source of revenue for Moscow, and features high in latter's strategy to counterbalance the US in its global ambitions. In the same vein, Turkey's geostrategic location is also crucial to regional rival Iran for its energy exports, since the Islamic Republic has hugely ramped up its oil and gas production[33] after the lifting of sanctions and is aggressively looking for new energy markets.

Although the recent law & order situation has led to the downgrading of its sovereign rating by the international rating agencies,[34] Turkey still remains the largest economy in the region, ahead of the oil giant Saudi Arabia – another contender for regional leadership. In the defense realm also, it remains a military power of strong reckoning, allowing it to contribute troops to NATO and UN peacekeeping operations from Afghanistan to Lebanon. The limitation of Iran- another regional military power- to commit to a large scale military undertaking west of Zaghreb mountains due to its hostile terrain is a huge geostrategic advantage to Turkey. Similarly, Israel, which has the technological edge over the rest in Middle East, has limitations on account of its size and political clout. Hence, when compared in terms of aggregate economic, military and geo-strategic strengths, Turkey appears to be placed in a relatively dominant position. [35]

Internal Conflicts and Networks of Relationships

The three-decade old armed conflict between Turkish State and Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has consistently – save for brief interludes - hampered Turkey's domestic stability. Though Kurds had always been uncomfortable with the Kemalist idea of single identity in Turkey, but in 1970s the problem got a new dimension. Encouraged by growing global trends of socialism, radical Kurds embraced the Lenninist-Marxisist ideology whose formal manifestation came in 1974 with the establishment of PKK. It was originally a political movement but the third military intervention of 1980, which intensely securitized the Kurdish question, proved a catalyst for PKK to launch its militant struggle in 1984. With alleged international support from neighboring Syria and Iraq in getting its members infiltrated into Turkey and also from Russia and Armenia in terms of flow of arms and ammunition, PKK engaged in a devastating guerilla war with Turkish State during 1990s, resulting in deaths of over 40,000 people and displacement of vast populations.[36] A recent upsurge in violence in Turkish cities has also been partly claimed by PKK. It is important to note that while EU has put PKK on the list of terrorist organization, Turkey has been accusing EU of using the PKK issue for political arm twisting instead of helping Turkey resolve the issue. [37] On the electoral front, most of the Kurdish voters, prior to last parliamentary elections, had voted for Erdogan's AK Party on account of
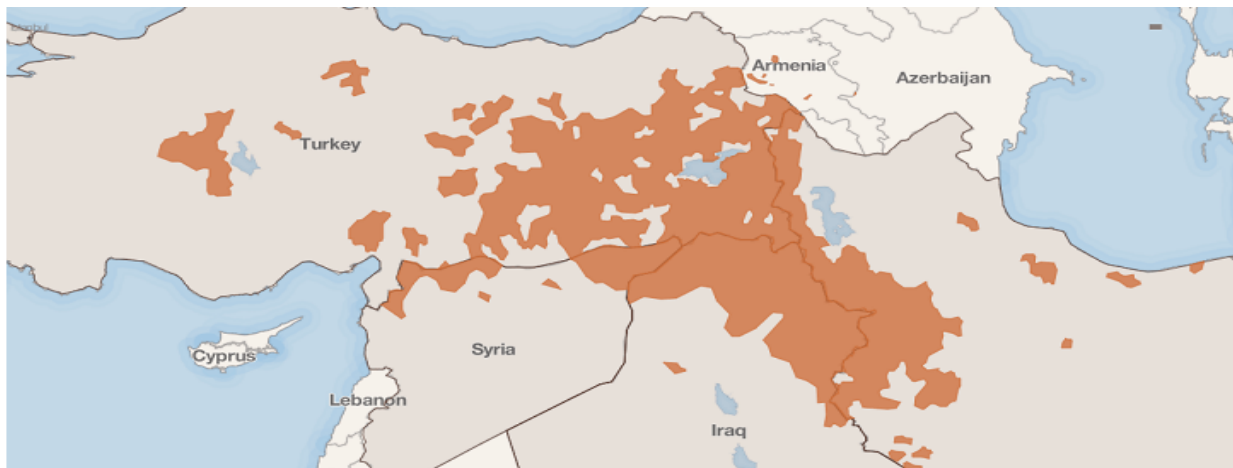
its commitments to desecuritization of the Kurdish question. But a new development took place during June 2015 elections when the pro-Kurdish Revolutionary People's Party (DHP) with leftist leanings, was able to make it to the Parliament for the first time, indicating Kurdish voters' changed preference. Election results showed that not only did it receive support from Kurdish dominated southeastern parts of Turkey but also from leftist (ethnic) Turks. Some analysts believe that ethnic voters' support was based more on their desire to limit Erdogan's power, than on their preference for DHP's ideology.

AKP's Rapprochement Policy and its Results

After the AK Party's rise in national politics in 2002, the Turkish issue was de-securitized gradually. The AK Party tried to solve the issue through its own reformist agenda. It embarked on 3-pronged strategy: As a first step, it initiated a visible process of ending the marginalization of Kurds in social, political and cultural realms. The recognition of Kurds' identity and language was at the heart of this strategy. As a second step, it embarked on ending the militant activities of PKK. For this, it resorted to a mix of soft and hard power tactics. Third, it initiated an ambitious development program in the Southeastern part of country to bring it economically at par with more prosperous regions. Erdogan's groundbreaking statement in 2005 acknowledging the injustices committed by the Turkish State against the Kurds heightened the hopes of a lasting peace. [38] This was historical in that it was the first time in the history of modern Republic that a Turkish leader had accepted responsibility for mishandling Kurds and offered a public apology. This was followed by the launching of a state run Kurdish TV channel. Erdogan's overtures were reciprocated by PKK as it dispatched its representatives to Turkish capital as 'peace ambassadors'. It marked a good beginning to reach peace after decades of bloodletting, showing that with a more generous attitude by the State, the issue could be resolved. In another landmark development, representatives of Turkish government and PKK started a round of negotiation under the Oslo Process (2008-11). This culminated in historic speech by Abdullah Ocalan which called for complete disarmament of PKK. These unprecedented Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) eventually led to the securing of a ceasefire between the government and PKK.

It is important to note that between 2002 and 2015, in every successive election in Turkey, the Kurds had voted for AK Party. But in June 2015, after Erdogan's reluctance to extend military support to Syrian Kurds in Kobane against the Islamic State forces, AK Party's support base among the Kurds withered significantly. Surprisingly a re-election in November 2015 witnessed AK Party winning back the Kurdish vote. It is important to understand the underlying reason which prompted a significant portion of Kurdish voters to reverse its decision. With PKK's decision to end the truce, the entire Kurdish region in Turkey returned to violence, causing a disruption in social and economic life of individual Kurds, besides inflicting human casualties on both sides. A sizeable part of Kurds did not seem to subscribe to PKK's strategy, and desired a return to the peaceful days. It seemed that Turkish Kurds wanted more affirmation of their rights, yet majority of them desired to achieve it through peaceful means.

Distribution of Kurdish Population across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran (Source: Council on Foreign Relations)

There are roughly 30 million Kurds living in the border regions of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.[39] Interestingly, Turkey has a transactional and a mutually beneficial relationship with the oil rich Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq. This is highlighted in the fact that KRG has been exporting oil through Turkey, without the consent of Iraqi central government. The two sides also signed a 50-year energy deal to further strengthen the economic partnership.[40] As opposed to Iraqi Kurds, Syrian Kurds do not have a very positive view of Turkey. Syrian border region with Turkey is governed by the Peoples Protection Units (YPG) which Ankara sees as a franchise of PKK. On the other hand, YPG accuses Turkey of supporting ISIS in its proxy war against YPG in Syria.[41]

As is evident from their variant relationship with Turkey, Kurdish groups spread across Middle East do not have a unified agenda. On the contrary, there exists considerable rift between the ruling party in KRG Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and YPG, with former accusing YPG of forcibly sidelining other Kurdish political parties in Syria.[42] Similarly, there also serious differences between PKK and KDP to the extent that both groups were engaged in an armed conflict against each other during 1990s.[43]

For Turkey, the current developments in Syria have given a new dimension to its Kurdish problem. Turkey fears that with growing US' support for YPG and latter's ties with PKK, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Turkish State is under siege. Another threat is posed by ISIS, which in response to Turkish armed forces' offensive has retaliated through bombings in Turkish cities, killing and injuring scores of people. Ankara also faces the challenge of Syrian refugees fleeing the war. EU has pledged €3 billion to help Turkey host these refugees on its soil, but the efficacy of these pledges, in terms of hedging the Turkish economy against the shocks of such as large number of emigrants, remains to be seen. In the backdrop of precarious situation in Turkey, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey further increase, burgeoning the already challenging situation.

The Kemalists, Conservatives and Gulenists of Turkey
The Kemalist policy has had its adherents mainly in military, civilian bureaucracy and urban elite. There was limited impact of this policy on vast rural Anatolia which created a deep schism between the Kemalist center and conservative periphery. The most glaring political cleavages in Turkey are due to the difference in degree of Kemalism's impact on various segments of society. On the political front, Republican People's Party (CHP) remains the main Kemalist party with support base in country's wealthier northwest industrial region. However, over the years CHP has become flexible in its ideological commitments to the extent that it was willing to join hands with Erdogan's AK Party in a coalition government, after the July 2015 parliamentary elections. It subsequently won 25% votes during the November 2015 elections as compared to almost 49.4% of AKP.[44] Interestingly, after the July 2016 military coup against Erdogan, CHP came out in Erdogan's full support in denunciation of the coup plotters.[45]

To understand the rise of Islamists in Turkey, it is useful to take into account the impacts of economic reforms introduced by Prime Minister Turgat Ozal during 1980s on Turkish society. Under him Turkey's export volume increased from $2910 million in 1980 to over $20 billion in early 1990s, creating a strong bourgeoisie class in rural Anatolia. As it gained economic strength by its embrace of capitalist system, this bourgeoisie class started to assert itself in country's political system dominated by Kemalists. Primarily concerned with stability of democratic system and creation of new markets for its products, its demands prompted Turkey to open itself to Middle East- a policy option which had been completely ignored by Kemalist founding fathers. The rise of center-right AK Party in 2002 is commonly associated with the transformation of Turkish foreign policy. However, a closer look would suggest that the process had already started under Ozal and Erdogan's AKP only carried it forward.

Founded in 2001 by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, AK Party is actually the fifth incarnation of Islamist parties in Turkey. Its four predecessors were outlawed by Kemalist military and judiciary. The tipping point in Islamists' rise came in 1994 when the welfare party, the third incarnation of pro-Islamist Party won the local body elections across Turkey and gained control of two main cities, Ankara and Istanbul. The following year, the Welfare Party became the largest party in Parliamentary elections and formed the coalition government at the center. The success was short-lived though, as in 1997 military intervened once again, putting an end to the phenomenal rise.
The tenacity and perseverance of Turkish Islamist Parties lies in their ability to undergo reform and become more moderate and pragmatic with successive dismemberment effort undertaken by the Kemalists. Erdogan's coining of the term 'conservative democracy' to describe his agenda is indicative of this moderation and pragmatism. This is not to understate some of his measures that raised considerable concerns amongst the Kemalists segments of the society like the lifting of ban on women's headscarves in educational institutions; attempt to criminalize adultery in 2004; appointment of conservative personnel on important bureaucratic positions; and most importantly appointment of AK Party's co-founder Abdullah Gul as the President against the wishes of Kemalists. However, by then Erdogan and his AK Party had identified the red lines as well as the common denominators affecting the Islamists, liberals and Kemalists alike. They balanced their pro-Islamist policy measures with embrace of Kemalist agenda of economic integration with the EU. AKP's economic policies, formulated with inputs from International Monetary Fund, created a strong private sector, strengthening its support among the capitalists. Second, by focusing on social services, they vastly expanded their support base, enabling them to turn to masses and street power whenever they felt a threat of another military intervention.

Simultaneously, AK Party has introduced a number of reforms to lead Turkey to an era of unprecedented civilian supremacy. The institution of National Security Council (MGK) which was the tool of Turkish military's presence in the political system, was tamed in 2003 through a constitutional amendment to make it more subservient to the civilian authority. In the same vein, two surviving military officers involved in the coup d'état of 1980 – including the former President Evren – were prosecuted and were awarded life sentences. The civil military equation further tilted in AKP's favor when it exposed two alleged coup plots, one in 2003 and another in 2011, leading to the detention of hundreds of military personnel and eventual imprisonment of around 300 of them in 2013, including three ex- army Generals. However, in 2014 a constitutional court ordered their release, causing a furor by AKP which alleged that it was done on behest of the members of Gulen group, former allies of AK Party, which in 2013 had parted ways and became rivals. Between 2007 and 2013, Erdogan and Gulen had joined hands to weaken their common rival, the Kemalist army. In this regard, the key role was played by the Gulenist Army officers, mostly at Colonel level who gave inside information and helped single out interventionist military officers.[46]

Once the Kemalists were defeated, both Erdogan and Gulen turned against each other. The split became more obvious in 2013, when four cabinet members, along with Erdogan's son were arrested on charges of taking bribes. Erdogan responded by blaming Gulenists for framing these charges through their members who had infiltrated police and judiciary. This was followed by issuance of arrest warrants of Fateullah Gulen, the group's leader, who has been living in Pennsylvania, USA since 1999. In 2016, the failed military coup was once again blamed on Gulenists. The group which is known as *Hizmet (service)* in Turkey, publicly condemned the coup; however, many observers and analysts believe that there was enough evidence linking the group, if not the Gulen himself, with the coup.[47] Following the failure of the coup, Turkey demanded Gulen's extradition from the US for his alleged involvement in coup and other illegal activities. On the domestic front, the government rounded up thousands of officials– not just the Gulen supporters – to purge the

State institutions of dissidents. Erdogan has come under severe criticism, especially in the international media, for his authoritarian tactics in the aftermath of the coup.

The failure of the coup indicated that despite setbacks to his credibility and discontent among country's secular elements and Westernized elites, Erdogan still enjoys substantial support among Turkish masses. The biggest victim of this failed coup is Turkish military which stands traumatized. The killing of over 270 people during the post-coup protests and the decision to bomb the Parliament are the blots which have seriously undermined military's reputation. It will take a lot of effort to get the military recover completely from this shock. Though Erdogan and his AK Party have come out stronger from this failed coup, military has never been weaker since the establishment of modern republic in 1923. This would allow Erdogan to further his Middle East policy without much hindrance from domestic elements, although given the state of military's morale and cohesion, fight against ISIS and PKK will be a formidable task. To ensure success on these fronts, Erdogan must rebuild and restore the respect associated with military to make it an effective fighting machine, without compromising on civilian supremacy. It will be a daunting job, though not impossible.
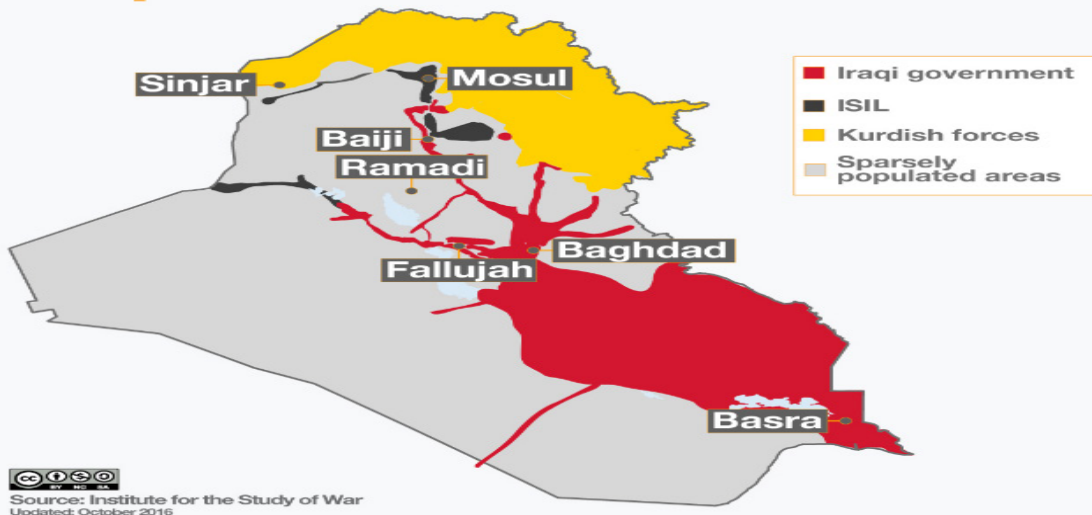
External Conflicts and Network of Relationships

Turkish activism is as much the product of geopolitical developments as it is of its ambition to follow an independent, multi-vectored and trade driven policy in the post-cold war era. West's reduced influence over the global politics, EU's constant denial of membership to Turkey coupled with criticism of its human rights record and lack of democratic credentials were added reasons for Turkey to create other areas of interest ranging from Middle East to Russia. As former US Secretary of State, Robert Gates, commenting on Turkey's eastward drive said that it was in 'no small part' pushed by some in Europe, by refusing to give Turkey the organic link it sought.[48] Europe still remains Turkey's top trade partner, yet Turkish economy has benefited tremendously due to political and economic ties with Middle East and Russia. FDI and tourism in Turkey in particular have seen a significant surge in the post 2000 era.

The first signals of Turkish activism in Middle East can also be traced back to the aftermath of first Gulf War. Following the war, the UN denied Saddam Hussein the right to govern Kurdish majority areas in Northern Iraq. The UN created a Combined Task Force for the protection of the region and allowed Turkey to be part of this force. This permission allayed Turkey's fears of Iraqi Kurdistan region becoming support base of PKK's subversive activities. Between 1992 and 2003, Turkish used the opportunity to launch operations against PKK inside Iraqi territory. Following the second Gulf War in 2003, Turkey's primary concern was to ensure territorial integrity of Iraq, which provides it a buffer against the regional rival Iran and also acts as a bulwark against the regional ambitions of Kurds.

After regime change in Iraq, the US established a no-fly zone over Northern Iraq, impairing Turkey's ability to launch attacks against the PKK inside Iraqi territory - a development that led to the straining of relations between the US and Turkey. These relations had already received a set-back when Turkish parliament refused to grant permission to the US to use Turkish territory to launch attacks on Saddam Hussein's forces. Another disagreement existed over the status of Kirkuk in Northern Iraq, which had sizeable Turkic population. Turkey opposed any moves towards Kirkuk's integration with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), as both Iraqi central government and Kurds vied for control of the oil rich province. It was partly because of Turkish activism that KRG was denied constitutional control over Kirkuk.

Recently Turkey has further consolidated its position in northern Iraq by stationing its troops near the city of Mosul in Iraq.[49] The move has stirred a lot of anger in Baghdad, which termed the move as infringement on Iraq's sovereignty. But Turkey has remained defiant maintaining that its troops were there for training the Kurdish forces in their fight against ISIS. Interestingly, the KRG President

Barzani has sided with Turkey in this row, justifying Ankara's move vividly. Turkey's main concern is about the post ISIS scenario in Mosul, suspecting that Iraqi government forces may try to change the demography of the city in favor of Shiites. Turkey views that such a scenario would give a decisive strategic edge to Iran in the Iraqi conflict. Secondly, it fears the mass influx of refugees from Mosul into Turkey in case of its takeover by the Shiite militias and government forces.[50] Thirdly, the fact that PKK has recently used northern Iraq for keeping captured Turkish soldiers and officials has further heightened its concerns.[51]

An important entity in this equation in Iraq is KRG, which is Turkey's the 3rd largest trading partner. Between 2009 and 2013, the number of Turkish companies operating in KRG rose from 485 to 1500 approximately and Turkish consumer goods and construction projects were becoming increasingly visible in the region. By having friendly ties with KRG, Turkey has tried to neutralize the PKK threat from that front.

Under AKP Turkey adopted a similar outreach approach towards Syria to address the Kurdish issue. Throughout 1980s and 90s, Hafiz al Assad had supported the PKK cause by allowing a safe passage to its militants to slip into Turkish territory. Hafiz used this policy as a retaliation to Turkey's extensive dam and hydropower construction on the upstream waters of Euphrates and Tigris. It was only through coercive international diplomacy that Hafiz had agreed to abandon the hostile policy. Under Hafiz's son- Bashar- the bilateral relationship quite dramatically transformed into brotherhood. Turkey in fact brought Bashar back into mainstream regional politics after he was abandoned by rest of the leaders in the region following the killing of Rafiq al Harriri in Lebanon. Erdogan also mediated between Assad and Israel for the resolution of Golan heights and it is reported that both sides were close to reaching an agreement in 2008. However, much to the frustration of Erdogan, the process stalled when Israel kicked off its Gaza military offensive, quashing all hopes of any settlement. Nonetheless both Turkey and Syria under Erdogan and Assad kept up their trade and economic cooperation. The situation started to change with the Syrian uprising in 2011. Erdogan responded by advising his protégé to undertake political and social reform, albeit unsuccessfully. This exposed the limitations of Davout Oglu's concepts on foreign policy i.e. 'zero problems with neighbors' and 'strategic depth'. It had become quite clear that a dictator when faced with a war of survival would not be influenced by a previous benefactor's advice. Turkish mediation efforts met the same fate in case of Bahrain, where Erdogan's willingness to act as an intermediary between Sunni Arab regimes and Shiite Iran were set aside by the Saudis and Qataris who resorted to a full fledge military onslaught to curb the violence.

In Syria, as the public anger turned violent, Erdogan changed his tack, calling for the removal of Assad regime altogether and allowing the establishment of political and military wings of Syrian opposition on its territory. In doing so, he grossly miscalculated the changed dynamics of international order. The United States was still the most powerful country but it was no longer willing to single handedly undertake another project in Middle East. At the same time, Russia under Putin had been vying to reemerge as an important player in global order. Syria provided a perfect opportunity to assert its relevance. Together with Iran, Russia came to the rescue of beleaguered Assad who was on the verge of deposition, and turned the tide in favor of Syrian regime. For Russia, Syrian project was important from two perspectives: First, Syria was the only surviving regime in the Middle East which had sided with the Soviet bloc during the cold war. US reluctance to get involved actively in Syrian imbroglio and the general negative perception of the US in view of Iraqi invasion was fully exploited by Russia in order to reenter the 'arc of crises'. For Russian strategists, Syria is also important due to the fact that Syrian harbor *Tartous* is the only naval base Russia has outside its own territory.[52] By preventing Assad's downfall, Russia has demonstrated its credibility to its chief ally and other countries in the region. Turkey's latest overtures towards Russia are partly the direct outcome of this Russian strategy. This can be judged from the fact that Turkish officials have even started to talk about the option of giving equal access of Incirlik air-base to Russians, which remains under US air-force control for launching attacks against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.[53]Second, from Russian perspective any success of Islamists in Syria would have implications for Russian own backyard in Caucuses and Central Asia which have strong undercurrents of sympathy towards Islamists.

For Turkey, a fall out with Russia had repercussions for its own territorial integrity. Under the cover of Russian air force, Syrian Kurds moved into strategically important towns near Turkish border, raising Turkey's fears of spillover of Kurdish activism into its own territory. Turkey's problems further intensified as a result of US' support to YPG (People Protection Units)[54] For the first time in history, Kurdish forces now control all but 60-mile stretch of Syrian-Turkish border. Previously, Turkey also faced severe criticism for its alleged support to ISIS to achieve its two fold objectives in Syria i.e. Ouster of Assad and limiting the influence of Kurds in any outcome. It was also alleged that ISIS recruits could move freely through Turkey, and were getting their wounded treated in Turkish hospitals. Reports from the region claimed that ISIS was using Turkey as a transit route to export oil and receive supplies from regional sympathizers. In the wake of these revelations, Turkey came under intense international pressure to act decisively against ISIS. In August 2016, Turkish forces in collaboration with Free Syrian Army (FSA) comprising Arab and Turkmen fighters attacked Jarabulus - a border town in Syria considered a stronghold of ISIS.[55] This was Ankara first full scale military intervention inside Syria since the beginning of conflict in 2011. Many analysts believe that the attack was more to contain YPG than to eliminate ISIS. Whatever was Turkey's motivation, Jarabulus offensive marked Turkey's clear intent to ramp up its act against any entity operating close to its territory. This has led to fierce retaliation by ISIS in the form of suicide attacks inside Turkey, resulting in scores of casualties in Ankara, Istanbul and Suruc.

Apart from Syria, Egypt and Libya are two other notable countries where Turkish outreach projects could not achieve the desired results due to complexity of Middle East's conflict system. In Egypt, Ankara's verbal assaults on Al-Sissi led to the downgrading of diplomatic relationship and also irked Al-Sissi's strongest regional backer, Saudi Arabia. Lately, Egypt has paid back in kind by blocking the UN Security Council's condemnation of Military coup in Turkey which sums up the state of their bilateral relationship.[56]

Iran-Turkey Relationship in the Middle East Conflict System
Turkey's relationship with Iran is unique and based on the principle of coaptation. Both are successor States to great Ottoman and

Safawid empires, and have inherited the art of coexistence from their predecessors. Despite being rivals for influence from Palestine to Central Asia, they have avoided crossing each other's red lines, and instead have carved out certain areas of mutual cooperation. The common threat of Kurdish separatism and dictates of interdependence have also played key roles in determining the nature of this relationship. Turkey is heavily reliant on Iran for its energy requirements. According to estimates, Turkey gets 30% of oil and 20% of gas consumption[57] from Iran. In the midst of US sanctions against Iran, Ankara remained the biggest customer of Iranian natural gas, and it very skillfully engaged in 'Gold for Gas' trade with Tehran. These transactions provided the financial lifeline to cash starved Iran at a time when it was considered a pariah in the global banking and financial system. The two countries had significant trade relationship as well which stood at $14 billion in 2014.

The mutual reliance is expected to continue even after the Iranian nuclear deal as Turkey appears to be a natural and the most economic route for supplying Iranian gas to Europe. As a matter of fact, Turkey appears to be a beneficiary of nuclear deal as it expects to become the hub of Iran and EU's energy ties which would reduce the cost of Ankara's expensive gas contracts with Tehran. Even in the years preceding the deal, Turks have had consistently called for a peaceful outcome of the standoff. Their pronouncements were opposed to any attempts towards isolating Iran, and instead advocated for bringing Iran back into the international political and economic system on the plea that it would soften Iranian stance, making it more compatible to the desires of international community. Before the Arab Spring, Turkey voted against the UN Security Council resolution that called for imposing new sanctions on Iran.[58] It was on Turkish and Brazilian insistence in 2010 that Iran agreed to sign the declaration to limit the size of its nuclear program. While the deal could never materialize, it signaled two things: Peaceful resolution of Iranian nuclear issue was in Turkey's interest; and second, when faced with international isolation, Iran agrees to accept Turkish mediation. At the same time, Turkey has every effectively negated the impression that its defense ties with the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia are directed against Iran by attributing such alliances to the fight against common threats such as ISIS and Kurds and to its obligations under NATO. Given the fact that Iran has a very large Azeri Turk minority, numbering 25million approximately or over one fourth of the total Iranian population, is a great leverage for Turkey.[59] This population coupled with Turkey's close ties with Azerbaijan give Iran little room to get into active hostility with Ankara. It is interesting to note that despite serious Turko-Iranian differences over Syria and Iraq, Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was among the first to announce his country's support to Erdogan during the recent coup in Turkey.[60]
Despite this calm on the surface, Turkey and Iran are actively engaged in the proxy war in Iraq and Syria. Both have used the sectarian card to gain advantage. This has prompted Sunni Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia which otherwise has serious disagreements with AKP over the issue of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Qatar to rally around Turkey.

Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and Turkey

Turkey and Israel have a 'strategic partnership', facilitated by their relationship with the US. For Turkey, this relationship has brought in benefits in the form of transfer of high tech. defense technology and modernization of its armed forces. To Israel, this relationship has provided the much needed political legitimacy and relief from regional isolation. In recent years, Israel's offshore energy resources have added an important economic dimension to this relationship. Both countries are eyeing the construction of gas pipeline to transmit Israeli offshore natural gas to Europe through Turkey. The deal is expected to get support from Europe as it will help it reduce its dependence on Russian gas supply.

The relationship between Turkey and Israel was strained since 2010 when Israeli raid on Gaza bound Turkish flotilla had killed 9 Turkish nationals. The highly volatile situation in the neighborhood has brought about a rapprochement, resulting in signing of an agreement in June 2016. Under the deal, the Israeli government has apologized for the killing of Turkish civilians, and has agreed to pay $20 million to the families of the victims as compensation.[61] Israelis have however not accepted the longstanding Turkish demand of lifting the Gaza blockade. They have instead agreed to allow the Turks to send relief goods to Gaza through the Israeli Ashdod port and build infrastructure including houses, hospitals, schools and desalination and power plants in the besieged strip. Turks will also be setting up an industrial zone in the West Bank to reduce the economic woes of its residents. In return for these concessions, Israel has secured Turkish guarantees that the Hamas headquarters in Istanbul will not be used for planning militant activities against Israel. After the conclusion of the agreement, Hamas officially thanked the Turkish President for helping Gaza and easing the blockade.[62] The agreement clearly showed Turkey's ability to act as a broker in a very complex conflict and reconcile the divergent views, at least in the short run. In the long run, the Egyptian factor will have to be weighed in as well. Al-Sissi is severely opposed to giving a leading role to Turkey in Gaza. Given the growing Israeli Egyptian ties and Israel's own security imperatives, it would not be easy for Israel to discount these concerns completely.

Potential Negotiation Moves

In recent years Turkish leadership has shown the ability to be flexible and review the strategy when beset with setbacks. This was particularly reflected in case of Russo-Turkish relations. Recent Turkish pronouncements about its willingness to accept Assad as President for the transition period[63] is also a good omen for peace. As a quid pro quo, Russia has demonstrated that it is ready to give space to Turkey to establish a buffer zone inside Syria, close to Turkish border. For a brief period after the downing of Russian jet fighter in November 2015, Russian air-force extended air cover to YPG in Syrian border towns with Turkey, facilitating YPG to establish its control over the key border towns. That support has withered now, indicating a rapprochement between Russia and Turkey. On the contrary, US has found in YPG the only potent force to fight ISIS. This has irked Turkey, as it considers YPG as a proxy of PKK and equates it with ISIS. It is clear that Turks are not ready to compromise on YPG's activities in Syria, as they consider it a direct threat to Turkey's territorial

integrity. Turkey will continue to ask US to withdraw this support.

So far, Russia has been successful in pulling Turkey- a NATO member- towards its orbit in Syria. Military coup has also had a contribution in this change of tacks by the Turks; Turkish leadership has been vocal in seeking extradition of Fetaullah Gullen from the US, albeit without success. Disagreements also exist with the EU over the issue of Syrian refugees and human rights. In the midst of this puzzle, Russia seems to have seized the opportunity. Together with Turkey, it brokered the deal between Assad and opposition forces for country wide ceasefire that came into force on 30th December 2016. Under the truce, Russia and Turkey are going to establish checkpoints at different places in Syria to ensure compliance with ceasefire. At the same time, Russia announced that a trilateral negotiation process involving Turkey, Russia and Iran would be held in Kazakhstan to chalk out a peace plan. The venue of this meeting is symbolic of the fact that the peace process has been driven away from EU/US sponsored meetings in Geneva to Russia's own backyard.

While Russia and Turkey appear to be on the same page for now, an important question is how the Iranians would react to any future settlement. Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah fighters are placed around the capital Damascus, indicating Iran's stakes in keeping Assad in office. Turkey's offensive against ISIS in Al-Bab will definitely be welcomed by Iran, as ISIS presents the most potent threat to Iranian interests in Syria and Iraq, and previously Iranians had accused Erdogan of supporting it in Syria. Given the economic interdependence of Iran and Turkey, we can expect both countries to reach a compromise over the issue of Assad. Iran might agree to his ouster, provided he is replaced by another Alawite leader. Ankara has already accepted Tehran's concerns over Jihadist groups like *Jabhat al Fatah al Sham* by excluding it from the recently brokered truce. Tehran has declared these groups as terrorists. Nonetheless, Russia would continue to hold the key in moving the things forward between Tehran and Ankara, especially because Iranian policies in Syria pass through Russian gates. Though Turkey has been insisting on including Saudi Arabia and Qatar in any eventual peace deal, it is important for Russia to limit the negotiations to Turkey and Iran in the medium term to avoid the vast sea of differences between Saudis and Iranians threaten the whole peace process. Besides Russia, EU countries can also use their clout over Tehran in view of their increasing investments in Iran.

So far, Turkish army is coming across stiff resistance in Al-Bab, suffering significant casualties. But this will be the test of Turkey's perseverance and resolve. It will have to demonstrate a consistent policy towards the ISIS. Between 2014 and 2017, it mostly ignored the threat posed by self-proclaimed Islamic State, and instead focused on YPG. This policy has not worked, and instead brought considerable flak from the US and the EU, amplifying Ankara's woes in the region. In order to confront ISIS effectively, Turkey needs to politically engage PKK. This will help defuse YPG's claims in Syria aimed at carving out an autonomous region *Rojava* comprising three key cantons in Syria's north. At present, Turkey is facing retaliation from both ISIS and PKK, in the form of devastating suicide and gun attacks, causing havoc in big Turkish cities. The two-year ceasefire between Turkish government and PKK from 2013 to 2015 demonstrated that the differences between the two are not irreconcilable. Turkey can once again bring Abdullah Ocalan in the equation to secure another ceasefire deal. On the other hand, the US can play pivotal role in bringing PKK and YPG to the negotiating table. Until now, both Turkey and YPG are vying for control over Al-Bab, situated 30 km south of border which has majority Arab population.[64] Turks' strategy is to create a buffer zone up to this depth, by hosting the displaced Syrians. For YPG, winning Al-Bab would be a 'national gain'[65], connecting the Kurdish dominated towns of Afrin in the east and Kobane in the west – a prospect which would be unacceptable to Turkey. Turkey has been moving towards Russia in regional politics, but it is important for Turkey not to lose the US in the process. It must keep a balance between the two, which will allow it the freedom of action and policy.

Source: IHS Conflict Monitor (22 Aug 2016)

For now, it seems a plausible solution to have autonomous regions within a federal structure in Syria. Turkey might agree to the proposal to have certain pockets in border areas to be dominated by YPG, but it will remain strictly opposed to any proposal that

allows YPG to govern geographically coherent region like Rajova. In Turkey's view, YPG presents a more potent threat to Turkish interests than Assad. Therefore, it can agree to Assad's stay in power, provided its concerns vis-à-vis YPG are addressed.

In Iraq, the US' mediation can be effective to avoid a showdown between Turkey backed Kurdish and Iranian backed Iraqi government forces in Mosul. Mosul's location and demographic make-up make it a highly strategic city for KRG and Turks, reducing the probability that they will agree to Iraqi central government's exclusive right to decide the future of the city after the ouster of Daesh.

XXXIII. The United Nations: From Deadlock to Action

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Introduction

As the largest and most functionally diverse international organization, the United Nations (UN) has a unique role to play in various conflicts and challenges facing countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Within the UN, numerous committees[1] address Middle East issues as they discuss various UN policies, while others focus the bulk of their humanitarian, relief, or other work in the region.[2] Among this sea of departments, committees, and organizations, two main actors stand out as the UN's most influential and visible in Middle Eastern affairs: the Secretariat and the Secretary-General (UNSG) and the Security Council (UNSC).

Conflict Narratives and Roles

The Secretary-General

The most visible single actor in the UN is the Secretary-General. As chief administrative officer of and de facto spokesperson for the UN, the UNSG is responsible for overseeing the Secretariat as it coordinates the UN's day-to-day operations, to include carrying out UN policies, conducting humanitarian and relief aid work, and executing peacekeeping missions.[3] This position is currently held by Antonio Guterres, formerly the head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. He has stepped into an office that was most recently shaped by his predecessor, Ban Ki-moon.[4]

Throughout his tenure as UNSG, Ban framed his view of the Middle East primarily in terms of the Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as the Syrian crisis. In numerous statements on the Middle East to the UNSC, Ban focused his remarks on the "hurdles to peace"[5] in Israel and Palestine. To this end, Ban concentrated his 2016 statements to the UNSC on the Middle East on the Israel-Palestine conflict or Israel's issues with Lebanon and Syria. In addition, Ban focused largely on seeking an end to the war in Syria, as well as to support those countries most impacted by the refugee crisis. Although Ban will no longer be the face of the UN, the prioritization of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Syrian crisis will likely continue throughout the opening stages of Antonio Guterres' tenure.

Guterres' public record indicates that he primarily views the Middle East crisis through a broader humanitarian lens. Guterres regularly frames regional problems in terms of an international failure to prevent or end conflicts. In public statements, Guterres has spoken about his belief that terrorism and weak political systems or undeveloped institutions are the root causes of conflict in the Middle East. Before running for UNSG, Guterres blamed regional turmoil on a lack of "effective leadership" and a loss of the international community's capacity to "prevent…and solve conflicts."[6]

As such, Guterres views the UN's role – and his own role as UNSG – in the Middle East as one of an "honest broker, bridge builder and messenger of peace" responsible for finding political solutions to humanitarian problems.[7] During his time at the UNHCR, Guterres was very active in his management of the agency, becoming personally involved in crises and restructuring his office and its budget to place more emphasis on responding to crises in hotspots around the world.[8] Given his background as a politician, it is likely that Guterres envisions a significantly strengthened role for the UNSG in the Middle East and will quickly become very engrossed in trying to work through the political divisions that have plagued the UN under Ban.

The Security Council

While the UNSG is the unitary actor, administrator, and spokesperson at the head of the UN, the UNSC is quite the opposite. Made up of 15 countries[9] – including five permanent representatives (P5) – the UNSC's primary role is to ensure "the maintenance of international peace and security"[10] through the use of "negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement"[11] up to and including "urgent military measures."[12] To this end, the UNSC is the only UN body legally allowed to authorize the "use of force to prevent or stop aggression."[13]

Despite – or, perhaps, because of – this broad mandate, there is rarely agreement within the UNSC of what its role is or should be – particularly in the Middle East. Given the structure of the UNSC and the veto power of the P5 members,[14] it is essential to understand the UNSC as a laboratory for decision making, politics, and diplomacy, rather than as an actor unto itself. To best understand the potential role of the UNSC in any given conflict or situation, one must closely study the interests and goals of the individual UNSC members. Rather than the UNSC serving as a tool for conflict resolution, P5 states often treat the Council as a tool for its own interests by using their veto power to defend an ally or "client state" or to protect itself when it is an aggressor.[15] The UNSC is often limited when the P5 countries – the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France – see problems in the Middle East and elsewhere "as core security issues that they want to handle themselves."[16] To this end, the conflict in Syria highlights the challenges faced by the UNSC and the paralysis of the international system in preventing or mitigating conflicts.

The UNSC can also serve as a vehicle for the other UNSC countries to imprint their vision of what the UNSC's role should be in conflict resolution. As active Council members or during their time as rotating president of the UNSC, smaller states have been able to expand the UNSC's roles beyond the P5 interests, such as Turkey's drive to put the Flotilla Incident on the UNSC agenda[17] or Australia's push to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria by passing UNSC Resolution 2118 during its chairmanship of the UNSC.[18]

Even when the UNSC is able to address members' concerns and avoid a P5 veto, it is still "not a powerful political actor in the Middle East."[19] Due to a lack of resources and its inability to provide "security guarantees" to concerned parties, the UNSC is unable to "force recalcitrant parties to take particular courses of action."[20] Given these problems, the UNSC's role in the Middle East is significantly reduced from the grand vision dictated in the UN Charter.

Internal Conflicts and External Relationships

Due to the sprawling bureaucracy of the UN and the diversity of interests and positions within each committee and between each member state, the UN can often appear to send disparate and, often, conflicting signals on the various issues it discusses. Due to the structure of the different committees – the ultra-deliberative UNSC, which can be bogged down by the threat of a P5 veto versus the more-open General Assembly, which passes resolutions with 50 percent plus one vote – certain organs offer smaller states the opportunity to press an issue by playing an "activist" role or "getting ahead" of the UNSC or other committees. Thus, internal and intra-committee conflicts may result in unaligned policies.

One example of this in the Middle East is the recognition of Palestine. Legally, the UNSC – the only body legally able to recognize a new state – has not recognized Palestinian statehood – and likely will not until there is a substantial change in US foreign policy.[21] However, this lack of legal recognition has not stopped other UN organs from pressing the matter. While caveating that granting statehood is not up to the UNSG, Ban proclaimed his support for "the statehood of Palestinians, an independent, sovereign state of Palestine," which "has been long overdue."[22] Likely emboldened by the UNSG's support, on November 29, 2012, the General Assembly voted to grant Palestine "non-Member Observer State" status[23] and on December 17, 2012, the UN's protocol office mandated that the "'State of Palestine' shall be used by the Secretariat in all official United Nations documents."[24] Ultimately, "the [UN's] large and diverse presence is also a potential source of weakness: without careful and disciplined management the UN's various agencies, envoys and organisations can mix messages and sow confusion."[25]

Sources of Leverage

The Secretary-General
The UNSG has no hard power and very little resources to use as leverage at the head of the UN, making it "a job of influence rather than power."[26] Generally speaking, the primary source of leverage for the UNSG is the individual's international reputation as a leader and the bully pulpit of the UN. Outside of controlling "a few UN agencies, which command budgets tiny in comparison to those of most individual countries", most of the UNSG's leverage comes from "the sense of legitimacy that comes from being in charge of the world's largest and most famous international organization."[27] As Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak once put it, the UNSG "represents the position of the world."[28]

The rhetorical bully pulpit can be used in several ways. By speaking about issues that are traditionally overlooked, the UNSG can "rally world public opinion around issues that wouldn't necessarily have been addressed otherwise."[29] In the past, UNSGs have acted "as a catalyst for reform"[30] by leading efforts to change how peacekeeping operations are conducted – such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 *Agenda for Peace* – or reshaping norms about humanitarian intervention – including Kofi Annan's efforts that led to the 2001 *Responsibility to Protect* doctrine. The UNSG's "independence and impartiality as the head of a global organization" can also be used by becoming personally involved in mediation efforts to prevent and mitigate conflicts.[31]

Outside of rhetoric, the UNSG is able to guide and direct the efforts of the UN. While the UNSC and General Assembly are the only bodies that can create a peacekeeping operation, the UNSG is responsible for overseeing, executing, and reporting on those peacekeeping missions.[32] Additionally, the UNSG is responsible for hiring the heads of key UN agencies and departments, which allows him the opportunity to highlight certain regions or policy priorities for the various posts.[33]

Additionally, the UNSG has the ability to shape the perception of conflicts and "influence conversation" in the UNSC.[34] He can do this by referring issues to the UNSC that he believes "threaten international peace and security."[35] Another opportunity to influence the UNSC is through the UNSG's annual report to the USNC[36] as well as regular reports on the implementation of UNSC resolutions and other issues of concern to the UNSC.

Where Ban struggled with the limited ability of the UNSG to force change, Guterres may be better positioned to make the most of those narrow powers. During the "honeymoon" period of his first term, Guterres' unanimous election as UNSG – a remarkably rare and aspirational display of unity in the UNSC according to former US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Powers[37] – will likely be his primary source of leverage. As he meets the difficult realities of life as the UNSG, his main source of leverage will likely be the relationships and credibility gained as a head of state and as the head of the UNHCR. From negotiating with rich countries to contribute more to refugee aid[38], to his heavy reliance on "collective diplomacy," Guterres will benefit from his reputation as a "diplomatic activist" and his willingness to pressure international leaders towards further engagement.[39] His demonstrated readiness to restructure and refocus the UNHCR will also be a key source of leverage as Guterres attempts to redirect the UN towards preventing and resolving conflicts.

The Security Council
When it is able to avoid a P5 veto and pass a Resolution, the UNSC has numerous tools available to influence conflicts and negotiations in the Middle East. However, much like the UNSG, the UNSC lacks the resources to wield as leverage in a conflict.[40] The UNSC "can be paralyzed when there is no consensus among Security Council members."[41] Generally speaking, the UNSC has the most

leverage in a conflict when the P5 have significant overlap in their policy and outcome preferences. If a P5 member is directly involved in the conflict, the UNSC will have tremendously less leverage in influencing the negotiation process.[42]

The most powerful of the UNSC's leverage options are sticks: economic sanctions and military action or peacekeeping missions.[43] Other resolutions can be used as carrots or sticks to certify or deny the end of an occupation, declare borders, recognize or deny new states, and grant or reject legal legitimacy on certain actions of member states.[44]

The UNSC has a decidedly mixed record in conflict resolution. A quick review of the UNSC's past – even since the end of the Cold War – shows numerous examples of successful interventions (sanctions against Saddam Hussein[45] and peacekeeping in Liberia[46]), failed efforts (preventing the US's 2003 invasion of Iraq[47] and numerous failures of peacekeepers to protect civilians[48]), and simple inaction (repeated vetoes on Syria resolutions[49] and ongoing inaction in response to Ukraine's request for peacekeepers[50]). Even when the UNSC is able to pass a resolution, its inability to enforce its decision leads to a reputation-damaging "gap between what the [UNSC] promises and its ability to make a difference on the ground."[51]

Potential Negotiation Moves

The Secretary-General

Guterres' tenure at UNHCR points to four main ways that he will use his post to influence negotiations in the Middle East: (i) public pressure; (ii) restructuring and refocusing the UN; (iii) intense shuttle diplomacy; and (iv) creativity.

Public Pressure

Rather than "giving in to the traditional US pressure on the UN to stay out of international conflict resolution,"[52] Guterres has proven his willingness to use his own leverage to gain his desired outcomes. He has shown this inclination to "put his own career prospects on the line by calling out powerful countries" on numerous occasions in the past, to include publicly chastising the US government in front of US administration officials in Washington, DC for its refugee policies.[53] The independence he displayed as head of the UNHCR may become tempered in his more political role of UNSG, but his use of public appeals and direct criticism to pressure major powers into further and more productive engagement in response to international crises will likely remain a hallmark of his management and negotiation style.

Restructuring and Refocusing the UN

Guterres will likely use his mandate to reform the UN. Part of his campaign platform was to create a "permanent attitude" of reform at the UN, to focus on "delivery and results," and to become "less bureaucratic and more efficient, productive and field oriented."[54] As head of the UNHCR, Guterres revamped the organization to focus on "international crises by deploying more staff closer to hotspots."[55] In addition to making his agency more field-centric and expanding its capacity to handle refugees, he also halved the agency's headquarters and staff budget.[56] Although Guterres will likely meet resistance in reforming the UN, his past actions indicate that he is truly dedicated to reforming the UN. While he has very little hard power and resources to use as carrots or sticks, his ability and willingness to focus on delivering technical support and restructure agencies to better address certain regions or problems will likely be his main non-rhetorical bargaining chip.

Other ways of refocusing the Secretariat include giving the agencies new priorities or adjusting protocols. For instance, under Ban, political affairs officers maintained communication and had regular discussions with political figures in Hamas.[57] Guterres may allow the agencies in his Secretariat the flexibility to use such legitimizing tactics for non-state actors, or to reward certain groups for changing their positions.

Shuttle Diplomacy

Guterres has repeatedly stated his desire to serve as an active mediator in conflicts. As head of the UNHCR, Guterres regularly met with Western leaders to encourage them to increase their assistance to refugees.[58] While campaigning for UNSG, Guterres called for a "surge in diplomacy for peace" and announced his intention to "actively, consistently and tirelessly exercise his good offices and mediation capacity"[59] as a "convener, a mediator, a bridge-builder and an honest broker to help find the solutions that benefit everyone involved."[60] While his passion clearly lies in the Middle East's refugee problem, Guterres will likely bring this tireless zeal and reliance upon personal diplomacy to whatever negotiations he may face in the region and beyond.

Creativity

Guterres will likely be a proactive Secretary-General in terms of conflict resolution.[61] During his campaign, Guterres emphasized his willingness to think creatively; from more effectively using the UN's public diplomacy tools to strengthening relationships with regional organizations, international financial institutions, and civil society.[62] Already, Guterres has met with international think tanks to hear "different conflict-resolution perspectives" and has begun to consider new proposals to create UN missions to assist in the creation of a Palestinian state.[63] Whatever conflict or negotiation that Guterres may face, he "will undoubtedly bring to the office of the UN Secretary-General some innovative approaches."[64]

The Security Council

Depending on the scope and intensity of P5 interests in any given conflict or negotiation process, the UNSC has three main tools at its disposal: (i) military force and economic sanctions; (ii) negotiations; and (iii) normative options.

Military force and economic sanctions

The most disruptive options available to the UNSC are economic sanctions and military force. Sanctions can range from "comprehensive embargoes" against whole states or "smart sanctions" that target specific individuals or issues.[65] Peacekeeping options range from removing landmines and assisting with elections, to disarming combatants and actively protecting civilians in active warzones.[66] Though these options are the most robust tools available to the UNSC, they are also the least likely, particularly in conflicts with significant P5 involvement or conflicts between P5 states or their interests.[67]

Negotiations

The UNSC can certify the end of an occupation, as it did for Israel in 2000,[68] or it can use its power to alter one party's cost-benefit calculus, like its refusal to recognize a Kurdish referendum in lieu of a political solution.[69] The UNSC can legitimize certain actions (such as NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya)[70] and refuse to legitimize others (like the US's invasion of Iraq).[71] However, the use of such tools are entirely dependent on the political will and cooperation – or abstention – of P5 members.

Normative Options

In addition, there are other options available to the UNSC. Given the UNSC's eminence and legal mandate, it has "a unique capacity…to cement developments or concentrate international attention on a single course of action."[72] When the UNSC has no ability or will to enforce its resolutions – or even when it is unable to agree on a resolution itself – the very act of discussing a conflict can subtly shift the tone and language of the larger debate in ways that can massively change negotiations over the course of a conflict.

This can happen when the UNSC concurs on a resolution that it is unable to enforce – such as Resolution 1515's endorsement of the Roadmap for Peace in Israel, which became the foundation for the next five years of negotiations.[73] This normative shift can also occur when non-P5 states in the Security Council submit resolutions, propose agenda items, and preside over the UNSC.[74] Such examples include the draft resolution denying the validity of the 2014 Crimea referendum;[75] although this proposal was vetoed by Russia, thus preventing a full-fledged rejection of the referendum, the UNSC's consideration and debate made clear "the position of the international community…the referendum…will have no validity, no credibility and no recognition."[76] The failed 2006 resolution calling for Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip is a similar case;[77] although it was vetoed by the US, this resolution – submitted by Qatar while Peru was chairing the UNSC[78] – contributed to the drumbeat that led to Israel's eventual withdrawal. In these ways, symbolic resolutions – or even failed resolutions – can be used as long-term tactics to affect the bargaining process, shift the language and baseline of negotiations, and alter the landscape of the conflict over its lifespan.

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XXXIV. The United States: Balance of Power

Identity, Conflict Narratives, and Threat Perceptions

Since World War II, the U.S. has been a significant stakeholder in the Middle East. From WWII to the end of the Cold War, the US parried the USSR's moves under a strategy of "offshore balancing," primarily relying on partners in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, to pursue US interests as allies and clients. In this balance, both major powers ordered their priorities in the region based on the other's movements. Later, from the end of the Cold War to the mid-2000s, the US was undisputed as the most influential power in the Middle East.[1]

However, US power has arguably begun to wane in the past decade. The US has appeared to pull back from commitments in the Middle East as a result of several factors: most notably, the American public's war-weariness from military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and the uncertainty in US capabilities born of the 2008 financial crisis. These factors have encouraged US allies like Turkey and Israel toward warmer relations with Russia. Although the US still exerts the largest influence in the region, in recent years Russia and China have stepped up to more aggressively pursue their own interests.[2][3]

Traditionally, the US has organized its foreign policy strategy under three evolving pillars of security, reform, and peace. While the US administration under Donald Trump may choose to alter the intensity or trajectory of one or all of these pillars, US Middle East policy has typically interpreted them with the following strategies: national security/ counterterrorism; balance of power; energy security; Israel; and human rights and democracy. Trump has indicated a strong preference for an increased share of the burden of Middle East interventions be shared by other interested nations, particularly with regard to defeating ISIS. However, in the absence of collaboration from its allies, the administration has said it will proceed alone.[4]

1. **National Security/Counterterrorism:** This interest is the top U.S. priority.[5] The U.S. aims to work with its partners in the region to degrade and deter terrorist groups, primarily through intelligence sharing and coalition building.
2. **Balance of Power:** The U.S. wants to avoid any other single country accumulating more influence than itself. Since the early 1900s, the U.S. has had an antagonistic relationship with Russia (then the Soviet Union). Specifically, the U.S. has publicly advocated democracy and capitalism against Russian communism and socialism. Today, China is also gaining power. The U.S. is concerned about the ascendance of both China and Russia in the Middle East, not only with regard to military dominance and resource access, but also due to China and Russia's historical lack of concern for human rights.[6]
3. **Energy Security:** After China, the U.S. is the world's second largest consumer of energy, and oil is the largest source of its energy.[7][8] But as the US has itself become a major oil producer, access to Arab oil is less essential than it has been in recent years. In recent years, the U.S. has prioritized increased energy independence through development of shale oil and other domestic energy sources, but still largely relies on the Middle East as an oil resource.[9] The U.S. imports a substantial amount of that energy from the Middle East, and would like to ensure continued cheap access.
4. **Israel:** Israel enjoys a special relationship with the U.S.. Since the end of World War II and the creation of Israel, the U.S. has prioritized maintaining Israel's security amidst its enemies. Today, Israel is an important strategic ally in the Middle East, and the US seeks to maintain a strong partnership in promoting security and democracy in the region. The US also desires peace between Israel and the Palestinian Territories.[10]
5. **Human Rights and Democracy:** The US has always at least nominally supported the promotion of human rights and democracy in the Middle East. To be a champion of democracy in the world is central to US identity; however, historically the US has supported development of these ideals less in the Middle East than in other regions. The U.S. wants people around the world to enjoy human rights and democracy, but the Middle East has consistently ranked as the worst performing region in terms of these ideals.[11] Additionally, the US remains concerned that Russian and Chinese ascendance in the region will threaten democracy and human rights.[12]

Sources of Leverage

Despite the US's weakened power in the Middle East, it still exerts the widest-felt influence of the Great Powers through a regional strategy combining soft and hard power tactics. In particular, the US has a strong interest in maintaining energy security, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, promoting human rights and democracy, and partnering with regional allies to combat terrorism. Lately, the US has been lessening its energy dependence on the Middle East by lowering consumption and developing domestic resources, like shale gas. Further, although the Iranian nuclear agreement was regarded as at least a moderate success, the new US administration's negative view toward the agreement may threaten its implementation. One key strategy of the new administration, vocalized early and often, has been the desire for the US' allies to bear more of the brunt of maintaining stability in the Middle East.[13][14]

To achieve its foreign policy goals in the Middle East, the U.S. has at its disposal a wide range of sources of leverage. The most visible resource is the military: the U.S. boasts the most powerful military in the world, allocating hundreds of billions of dollars more

budget than its closest competitor, China. The US' military influence comes from a combination of military intervention, assistance and training. It is superior in size, personnel expertise, and access to state-of-the-art technology. The US also demonstrates superior unity and clarity of military command. [15]

The U.S. similarly dominates as a global economic powerhouse. As the U.S.'s economy comprises approximately 24.5% of gross world product, it is able to wield considerable influence utilizing economic tools. Since the 1950s, the US has sent approximately $170 billion in financial assistance to countries in the Middle East; Israel alone received another $62bn. The US also finances economic stabilization through a combination of carrots, like civilian assistance and economic support, and sticks, like economic sanctions against states and pertinent businesses and individuals. [16]

The US is able to pursue its interests through political partnerships and alliances with powerful local stakeholders, like Israel and Saudi Arabia, as well as coalitions in Syria and elsewhere. Such political bonds are also imperative to the U.S.'s function as a convening power, as it funds peace negotiations and uses its considerable motivating power to bring warring parties to the table for peace talks, albeit often with mixed results.[17]

Furthermore, the US maintains access to significant energy resources in the region. However, the U.S. has considerably expanded its energy independence in recent years by exploiting domestic shale oil resources. While this method has its critics, it is undeniably lessening U.S. dependence on Middle East oil; the U.S. now possesses the largest oil reserves in the world, beyond even Russia and Saudi Arabia.[18]

The US has developed some of the most advanced technological prowess in the world. This can be used to influence destructively, as with drone strikes for counterterrorism initiatives, or peacefully, as with technology transfers to regional partners and allies. [19] Some of these technological measures, such as the drone strikes, have garnered controversy and criticism that they do more harm than good by turning potential allies into enemies. Such actions run counter the U.S.'s stated mission of promoting human rights and rule of law.

The US primarily exerts soft power through a combination of public diplomacy, and private diplomacy and persuasion. Additionally, US soft power influence is communicated by exporting culture through popular music, movies, fashion, and other conduits. The country's arsenal of soft power tools further includes: coalition-building, diplomacy, experts in an array of nation-building topics, funding for civil society-building initiatives, and reputation. Of these tools, the most valuable is its network of partners and allies. U.S. partners include NATO, the UN, the EU, individual European states, and Israel. Further, the U.S. considers the following countries "Major non-NATO Allies:" Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Morocco, and Tunisia.[20][21] The U.S. has a history of partnership with numerous other Middle Eastern states.

The U.S. diplomatic force is another soft power tool. For example, U.S. Ambassadors and Foreign Service Officers meet with foreign political leaders to communicate the importance of democratic and economic progress. And the U.S. Foreign Service has a branch dedicated to engaging with foreign publics through educational exchange programs and social media. Further, the Department of State publishes annual reports on the state of human rights and trafficking in persons in foreign countries. Countries around the world care about their reputation as presented in these reports. Thus, U.S. politicians can use the reports to 1) hold foreign leaders accountable to human rights standards and 2) nudge foreign leaders toward humanitarian progress.

Next, the U.S. can leverage its technical experts on nation-building   topics. The government's United States Agency for International Development (USAID) areas of expertise include economic growth, governance, conflict, crises, gender equality, and health. USAID can use this well of technical know-how to advance its interests in the Middle East. Additionally, the U.S. can fund projects that support civil society. The goals of such initiatives include empowering women and girls, improving education, and advocating for minority groups' rights. Thus, the U.S. can advance its humanitarian aims through building a strong civil society to foster democracy. [22]

The final U.S. soft power tool is reputation. The country has a long history of economic success and democratic institutions. However, U.S. reputation has stains that hinder its ability to influence the Middle East. One salient factor that harms U.S. reputation in the region is the negative effect of the country's past interventions there. For example, experts on the region and policy attribute ISIS's creation to the U.S.'s 2003 intervention in Iraq.[23][24] Furthermore, people criticize the U.S. government for failing to solve domestic problems, like systemic racism, poverty, and inadequate healthcare, and excessive consumption of the world's resources. [25][26]

Internal Conflicts

When characterizing Democrat and Republican political parties, it is important to note that many smaller factions within the parties have differing views on U.S. interests. Nonetheless, in terms of broad strokes, the Republican party tends more toward hawkishness and hard power, while the Democratic party tends toward dovishness and soft power.

National Security

Foreign Policy Establishment

Armed security is the *raison d'être* for one subgroup of the foreign policy establishment: the military. Thus, this subgroup advocates for the U.S. to allot maximum resources and jurisdiction to the security apparatus. High ranking military officers, after retiring from service, often work for defense contractor companies. Such companies include Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics,

Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. Sometimes the retired officers simultaneously advise the Department of Defense and the defense industry. Through such interconnectivity, the military and defense equipment suppliers can cooperate to gain support from the U.S. government. For example, retired officers can use their government contacts to help certain companies win government contract bids. Former officers' being employed by said companies presents potential conflicts of interest. That is, an officer may prioritize his salary over government interests.[27] Further, defense companies spend large amounts of money on lobbying in D.C.[28] As a result, the government's and defense industry's decisions may not serve broad U.S. interests.

The military's predominant role in foreign policy is problematic for U.S. diplomats. After 9/11, U.S. diplomatic and military personnel in a given foreign country have had to cooperate under a single authority, a regional Combatant Commander.[29] Bacevich writes that, in recent decades, the U.S. has sought to signal to the world that it takes conflict in the Middle East seriously. The U.S. has used military power to communicate this message. As a result, diplomatic personnel lost power to military personnel: "…rather than military power serving as the handmaiden of diplomacy, the reverse would be true."[30]

But the Obama administration subtly shifted away from armed intervention. For example, in 2011, Obama withdrew U.S. troops from Iraq, and attempted to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014.[31][32] Further, to the extent that he intervened in the Middle East, he used less military force than his predecessor, George W. Bush.[33] Specifically, although Obama supported regime change efforts in Libya and Syria, he avoided sending ground troops.[34]

On the other hand, President Donald Trump so far seems to be reversing this military drawback. Prior to his inauguration, Trump stated his intention for the U.S. to act more in its self-interested, and avoid nation building.[35] Also, as an anti-establishment figure, Trump is not tied to old policies of liberal hegemony in the way that his predecessors were. Conversely, Trump has also promised to significantly increase U.S. military involvement against ISIS.[36]

Public

The U.S. public considers national security an important issue. But within this group, subgroups disagree on how to address the country's security threats and on the nature of said threats.

In general, Republicans tend toward hawkishness and a reliance on hard military power to advance the US's interests. The Republican platform demonstrates suspicion of international alliances, and demands greater commitment from US allies. They particularly focus on counterterrorism and diminishing the power of foreign aggressors. For example, about 74% of Republicans are concerned that "U.S. military action will not go far enough" in its campaign against ISIS. Among Democrats, this number is only about 34%. Democrats, overall, prefer to exert soft power in the form of diplomacy and dialogue, development, and economic assistance. They tend to trust international alliances and are content to encourage rather than enforce burden-sharing. Accordingly, 61% of Republicans say "The U.S. should increase defense spending." This figure is up from 37% in 2014. But only 20% (up from 12% in 2014) of Democrats agree with an increase in defense spending.[37]

This political party difference in how to protect against terrorism corresponds with party differences in assessment of the nature of terrorist threats. First, Republicans think the threat of a terrorist attack is higher than do Democrats. One in four people in the U.S. think that terrorists' ability to attack the county is greater now than it was on September 11, 2001. This is the most support this opinion has received in the past fourteen years. Republicans drive the growth in this figure:

> Today, 58% of Republicans view the ability of terrorists to attack as greater than at the time of 9/11, up 18 percentage points since November 2013. Only about a third of independents (34%) and 31% of Democrats say terrorists are now better able to strike the U.S. than they were then, and these views are similar to three years ago (32% of independents, 29% of Democrats).[38]

This narrative also corresponds with Republicans' stronger preference for military intervention in the Middle East. That is, among many Republicans, rhetoric about the region and people associated with it is more menacing than rhetoric among Democrats. For example, after the March 2016 Brussels bombing, Republican Ted Cruz proposed that the U.S. "patrol and secure" American Muslim neighborhoods.[39] And after the San Bernadino and Orlando nightclub shootings Trump advocated banning Muslims from entering the U.S.[40][41] He has also indicated that he plans to bomb the Middle East with abandon.[42] 2016 Democratic presidential hopefuls Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, on the other hand, were more restrained in their speeches regarding these events.[43] For example, after the Boston bombing, they both advocated against targeting Muslims.[44]

In addition to political party affiliation, someone's age, gender, and race influences her perception of the Middle East. Younger people, women, and racial minorities are less likely to support U.S. military action against ISIS.[45]

Balance of Power

Foreign Policy Establishment

One prevalent justification for U.S. intervention in the Middle East is a Cold War vestige: to prevent a rival country from dominating the region. This rationale is popular among the U.S. foreign policy establishment. U.S. politicians often warn that the consequence of U.S. drawdown from the region will be an adversary's rushing in to fill the void.[46]

Public
        Republicans, relative to Democrats and independents are more likely to say that America's power has declined over the past decade. Republicans are also more likely to see China and Russia as threats.[47]

Energy Security
Foreign Policy Establishment
        Because the U.S. uses large amounts of energy for various essential purposes, the foreign policy establishment value access to the Middle East's oil. One group that wields much influence on U.S. energy policy is the energy supply lobby, who rank among the highest-spending lobbyists.[48] For example, together the American Petroleum Institute, Exxon Mobil, and Shell spend about $104 M annually to lobby against carbon emissions reduction.[49]
Public
        Republicans largely favor expanding domestic fossil fuel extraction, while Democrats tend more towards exploring alternative fuel sources.[50]

Israel
Foreign Policy Establishment
        Among the Middle Eastern states, Israel has the closest relationship with the U.S. Some policy leaders believe that this special relationship advances U.S. interests in the Middle East. They list shared interests: freedom, democracy, and security.[51] [52] For example, one argument is that providing Israel military assistance decreases U.S. boots on the ground and other military spending in the Middle East.[53] The strong Israel lobby ensures that this special relationship endures.[54]
Public
        Republicans lead the pro-Israel camp, with 75% support. Alternately, 52% of independents and 43% of Democrats sympathize more with Israel. And within the Democratic Party, Clinton and Sanders supporters differed significantly. 47% of Clinton supporters side with Israel. But only 33% of Sanders supporters share this view.[55] As it influences policy leaders, the Israel lobby also plays an important role in shaping U.S. public opinion.[56]

Human Rights and Democracy
        Since World War II, the U.S. has aimed to spread human rights and democracy abroad. U.S. leaders have often presented this aim as justification for its actions in the Middle East.[57] The current administration appears to be leaning more towards military intervention than promotion of human rights and democracy. However, while US policy has traditionally embraced some tradeoff of democracy for stability, it has never abandoned these ideals entirely. It would be surprising if this administration were to implement such an extreme stance.

External Conflicts and Network of Relationships
The US is involved in most of the major Middle East sub-conflicts and cross-cutting issues.

Non-Middle Eastern Actors
NATO
        The strongest U.S. alliance is with NATO. That is, compared to the U.S.'s other bilateral or multilateral agreements, the U.S.-NATO relationship is the most institutionalized. It contains detailed mechanisms for action, and the U.S. has the most influence on the organization's actions, relative to the other NATO members. For example, the head of NATO armed forces is always a U.S. commander.[58]
UN, EU, and Individual European States
        Other international community parties with whom the U.S. has positive relations include the UN, EU and individual European states. The U.S. wields a great deal of power in the UN. As a permanent Security Council member, it has veto power. Further, insofar as other countries rely on the U.S. militarily and economically, the U.S. can sway their support.
        The EU is a natural U.S. partner because the two parties share interests. With regard to security, the EU has a greater interest than the U.S. does in Middle Eastern stability. Being geographically closer to the Middle East, effects of the region's instability influence the EU more profoundly. For example, due to the EU's closer proximity, more of the Middle East's refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants have fled to the EU than to the U.S.
Russia
        But not all international parties have a friendly relationship with the U.S. The U.S.'s most notable rivals are its fellow Great Powers, Russia and China. Since the Russian Revolution in 1917, the U.S. and Russia (then the Soviet Union) have had an antagonistic relationship, competing for global influence. Russia and the U.S. may never be allies. However, given their common interests of political stability in the Middle East, Russia and the U.S. may choose to turn from rivals into a "cordial business partner…more friendly than not."[59] Trump has indicated that he plans to take such an approach. But this rosy outlook is complicated by several factors, including Russia's sidelining of the U.S. in the Syria peace negotiations, the Russian election hacking scandal, and accusations of Trump's advisors' inappropriate contact with Russia.[60] [61] [62]

China
The U.S.-China relationship is currently a rivalry. Traditionally, China has avoided challenging core U.S. interests.[63] However, in recent years China's economy has grown until its purchasing power is on par with the U.S.'s. With this growth, China has increasingly advanced its business interests in the Middle East, and seeks to protect its assets from political instability. As China's stamp on the region expands, the U.S. will have the choice between working with or against this rising great power. The latter effort may be complicated by China's predilection to dominate rather than share power.[64]

Middle Eastern Actors
Iran
The U.S.-Iran relationship is improving slightly. For many years, the U.S. and Iran were rivals. The 2015 U.S.-brokered nuclear agreement is evidence of the improved relationship. Potential for further relationship-building with Iran exists. For U.S. actors who are worried about China as a rival in the Middle East, Iran presents an opportunity. That is, strengthening the U.S.-Iran relationship could preclude China allying with Iran in a way that disadvantages the U.S.[65] But President Trump may reverse this trajectory. During his presidential campaign, Trump threatened to renege on the nuclear deal. However, he has alternately stated that he would seek to improve the deal.[66] Thus, the direction of the U.S.-Iran relationship is uncertain.
Israel
With regard to U.S. relationships with Middle Eastern parties, the U.S.-Israel alliance is unparalleled. That is, the U.S. gives more financial aid to Israel than it does to any other country in the Middle East, indeed, in the world. Further, the U.S. affords Israel special military and intelligence assistance.[67]
The preferential treatment that the U.S. gives Israel is misaligned with the U.S.'s set of interests.[68] To be sure, the U.S.-Israel alliance is geo-strategically advantageous. For example, Israel has nuclear weapons. Some terrorists in the region threaten Israel. For national security, the U.S. is interested in preventing these terrorists from acquiring these weapons. Further, as an established, economically developed democracy, Israel is an example of the kind of progress the U.S. envisions for the rest of the Middle East.[69]
Still, the vast amount of support that flows from the U.S. to Israel is disproportionate to fulfilling these interests. And it sometimes directly contradicts U.S. interests. For example, accountability is lax for U.S. financial aid to Israel. So, Israel can use this money toward building West Bank settlements. The U.S. is opposed to these settlements,[70] which hinder progress toward regional peace. Further, the current level of aid to Israel jeopardizes the U.S.'s relationship with other states, both within and outside the Middle East.[71] Within the region, many countries see U.S. intervention on behalf of Israel as harmful. Similarly, Western political leaders often accuse the strong U.S.-Israel alliance of impeding regional and global security efforts.[72] Finally, the U.S.-Israel alliance jeopardizes U.S. national security. Specifically, it exacerbates anti-U.S. sentiment among terrorist groups like Hamas and Al-Qaeda. These groups lament Israeli policy – and, by extension, U.S. policy – that harms Palestinians.[73]
The Trump administration, in reaction to Israel's announcement of 5,500 new settlement housing units, warned Israel to not make any more unilateral moves, insisting that Israel must consult White House first.[74] Overall, Trump has indicated an ambiguous policy on Israeli settlement construction, saying that it is not an "impediment" to peace, but it "may not be helpful"[75] Nevertheless, as of February 2017, Trump had not announced an official stance on the settlements.[76]
Besides Israel, the U.S. has alliances with other Middle Eastern parties. In the past, alliances have strengthened, weakened, and shifted as context changed. Stephen Walt refers to some past, temporary U.S. partnerships with Middle Eastern parties as "marriages of convenience."[77]
Gulf States
U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil has shaped relationships with the oil-rich Persian Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, and Oman. Specifically, the U.S. has supported state leaders that would ensure a steady flow of oil imports. Further, the U.S. has sought to prevent Gulf states' leaders from allying with Russia, which could threaten U.S. access to gulf oil reserves. In recent years, U.S. dependence on these states' oil has decreased. Meanwhile, U.S. relations with these countries have worsened. The U.S.-Saudi Arabia partnership is one example. The U.S. deplores the Saudi leadership – the royal family – for its brutal actions in Yemen.
Other Middle Eastern States
The U.S. cooperates to varying degrees with other states in the region. But anti-U.S. sentiment pervades there. One reason for this sentiment is the view that the U.S. is responsible for their problems. Particularly, people blame past U.S. intervention for precipitating the rise of violent extremists, including ISIS. Another source of tension is U.S. support for Israel ahead of other countries in the region.[78]
Turkey and Egypt are two more examples of countries whose relationship with the U.S. is in decline. In Turkey, Erdogan's government is growing increasingly conservative and inciting tensions between Turkey and its neighbors. These shifts disincentivize the U.S. from supporting Turkey. And Egypt and the U.S. have long had friendly relations. This relationship is partly tied to the U.S.-Israel alliance. Specifically, remaining friendly with Egypt allowed the U.S. to encourage Egypt to maintain peace with Israel. In this way, the U.S. pleased Israel. But the U.S.-Egypt relationship has since cooled.[79]

Potential Negotiation Moves

Pursue collaboration over confrontation. In the coming years of predicted great power struggle in the Middle East, the US can choose

to engage positively or destructively with fellow giants Russia and China as they jockey for position. A strategy of pooling resources toward a common goal would capitalize on the powers' shared interests in political stability and energy security. This strategy would decrease the financial and human capital burden on the US, and free it to shift scarce resources toward other regional goals. Additionally, the great powers' collaboration on Middle East issues would increase mutual trust, and likely grease the wheels for warmer relations on other issues like North Korea and the Ukraine.

Improving the U.S.-Russia relationship would be beneficial. It could help the U.S. achieve its long-term stability goals for the region and allay the foreign policy establishment's fears of a global Russian takeover. Trump could initiate a thawing of U.S.-Russia relations, and a break from the tradition of mutual hostility. His stance, up to now, is that the U.S. shares the blame for the poor relationship.[80] This new starting point could be the foundation to cooperative dialogue between the two powers.

One step the Trump administration could take to improve the U.S.-Russia relationship is to create a tactical alliance with Russia and Iran regarding Syria. The three states could cooperate to restore the Assad regime, defeat ISIS, and restore order in Syria. As opposed to past U.S. policy that demanded Assad's ouster, this move would save U.S. resources by dividing the burden. And it would have the added benefit of increasing U.S.-Iranian goodwill.

Organize joint efforts around universal concerns. For instance, the US could organize efforts toward finding solutions for scarce water resources. While such initiatives and conferences exist today, they are not widely known or used and would benefit from the critical mass of resources and publicity the US is capable of attracting.

Mediate Israel-Palestine Peace Agreement. The current Israeli-Palestinian situation is arguably a tradeoff in pursuit of a normalization of relations with Israel. Full annexation of settlements is no longer a practical option. Therefore, two options are left: 1) Trump maintains the status quo, allowing Israel to continue as it has been, or 2) Trump launches a negotiation channel, predicted to be a futile ego trip. Regardless, the latter choice would have to include security considerations for other countries, eg: Jordan, Saudi, Gulf States, because of the threat of ISIS.

The threat of ISIS would be a mixed blessing in this situation, as it would makes Arab countries more conducive to working with Israel and moving forward with resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For instance, Saudi Arabia announced in 2002 its readiness to formalize relations with Israel. This has not yet been done, but the ISIS issue makes formalization of relations with Saudi's powerful neighbor a more pressing issue.

Additionally, Benjamin Netanyahu is not ready to turn Israel into a nondemocratic Jewish state. So, Israel would likely not break totally with the US if the US was to insist that Israel become a democratic secular state. Given its status as world power, the U.S. can always act as a mediator in the Middle East, regardless of its military involvement; nevertheless, the U.S.'s effectivity as a mediator in the region will be affected by its evolving relationships with Russia and China.

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XXXV. Yemen: Persistent Conflict, Underdevelopment, and Displacement

Yemen, the Arab world's poorest state, finds itself ensnared in a seemingly intractable conflict and a desperate humanitarian crisis. A multipolar civil war backed by competing international powers has created a bloody stalemate with little incentive for any side to negotiate. Since the 2011 riots that saw the overthrow of former Yemeni President General Abdul Ali Saleh, the undemocratic transition of power to President Hadi, and the takeover of Sana'a in 2014 by the Houthis, negotiations have been half-hearted and futile.

Governance in Yemen, always fragile and contingent, is splintering. A tribally-based society, provinces are now controlled by numerous, and shifting, alliances. Marriages of convenience can change quickly, and cut across religious, social and ethnic lines. War has led to the displacement of approximately 3.2 million Yemenis and there are currently 14 million who are food insecure, with 5 million suffering severe food shortage.[1] 80% of Yemen's 26 million population are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, but terror attacks, interminable fighting and unsanctioned blockades constrain the ability of international agencies and NGOs to supply necessary aid.[2]

This paper offers a framework through which to understand the current state of affairs in Yemen, seeking to understand how the country deteriorated into such devastating warfare, and the possibilities for Yemen's future. The first section of this paper explores Yemen's fragile history, offering deeper background as well as offering a timeline of events post-2011. The second section analyses the major players within Yemen itself — the Houthis, the Saleh network, Hadi, the Islah network, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula — and the contorted, and often contradictory, coalitions they have formed. The third section explores the broader implications that the Yemeni war has for the Middle East, as well as looking at the contentious roles that Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States and other Gulf States have played in the conflict. Finally, we explore possible steps towards solutions for Yemen.

Part One: History, Identity and Conflict

Background History

Unlike many other parts of the Arab world the riots in Yemen were of little surprise to analysts, who had long warned of Yemen becoming the 'next Afghanistan, or Somalia'.[3] The brittleness of the Yemeni nation-state is primarily due to a problematic combination of under-development, limited state reach, and fragile national identity.

It is impossible to understand the war in Yemen — the fragile basis on which political legitimacy is formed, the division between the north and the south, and the regionality of rule — without reference to Yemeni history. Before 1990 Yemen was split between the north and the south. In 1962 an Arab nationalist movement overthrew the Zaydi Imam Mohammed al-Badr, and with the support of Nasserist Egypt, ended a one thousand year long primacy of the Immamte in the north and central territories of the country. An Arab nationalist state was formed; however, civil war soon broke out between the republicans and the royalists. The royalists, backed by Britain and Saudi, were victorious and formed the Yemen Arab Republic in 1970. In the south of Yemen however, a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group rebelled and formed a socialist state — People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). Two Yemens emerged: the north, which was backed by the United States and led from 1978 by Saleh; and the south, that the USSR supported. Tensions never fully subsided, and alongside a long-time soft power conflict, Sana'a and Aden, the respective capitals of the north and south, sponsored cross-border raids. Major wars broke out in 1972 and 1986.

The modern unified state of Yemen formed in 1990 when, due to impending economic collapse and the fall of the USSR, the two sides merged. This was a rapid, ill-thought out merger, dominated by the YAR. Just four years later, there was a bitter civil war in the newly united Yemen as southern secessionist forces tried to break. Southern Yemenis were brutally repressed during the war, the memory of which is still very much alive in Yemen today, exemplified by the anger at the appointment of Vice President Ali Mohsen, remembered for his brutality as a general in charge of Islah forces during the war. Indeed throughout Saleh's rule, the vast majority of the security personnel were drawn from the northern highlands, and these forces acted with little local sensitivity.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s Saleh worked on cementing his influence through a complex network of patronage and largesse, ruling through the General People's Congress (GPC), which consisted at first of an uneasy alliance between tribal leaders controlled by Saleh, and the Islah network, a largely Salafi Islamist organisation. The country was run extractively, with oil money greasing the pockets of the leadership, and a subsidiary cause of rampant corruption and desperate underdevelopment. In the early 2000s, Islah left the GPC, and in 2011 became sworn enemies of Saleh.

After the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000, the US fear of Al-Qaeda led to a focus in Yemen on counter-terrorism and increased support for Saleh as the lesser of two evils. The US and the Saudis channeled money into the military and bolstered his rule.[4] Though there were a series of uprisings from 2004 to 2010, in which the Houthis attempted to wrestle control from the government, the Saleh administration was able to subdue it and avoided an existential threat to their regime.

The Difficulty of Governing Yemen

Weak state capacity, legitimacy, and authority is not unique to the Saleh administration. Indeed, for one thousand years, Yemen has been a particularly difficult terrain to govern. The geographic region largely coterminous with the modern state has had a long history of independence and was only under Ottoman rule for one century. Regions were able to maintain firm tribal allegiances and these allegiances have never been able to be displaced by a weak modern state. As a result, Yemeni national identity has always been fragile.

Geography: With territory spanning some 500,000 square kilometers, Yemen has been something of a graveyard for empires. In 1962 for instance, Nasser intervened to stop the Zaydi Imams reclaiming power, ultimately proving an extremely costly and difficult quagmire. There is no permanent, natural source of water in Yemen, and the country ranks sixth on the UN index of water scarcity. Only 3% of land is arable and, in part due to extremely high production of *khat*,[5] only 0.6% of the land has permanent crops.[6] The western and central highland areas are difficult to travel through, leaving areas almost untouched by government or infrastructure.

The State: The state's lack of reach meant that, at the turn of the century, only 56% of Yemenis were connected to water networks (the figure was 96% for rest of Middle East). In 2011, electricity usage was still only 1/6 of the regional average. Educational underdevelopment has left women's literacy rates at 44%, approximately the same as Britain in 1820.[7] Poverty worsened from 2004-11 and has nose-dived since the war broke out. There is therefore a sustained lack of deliverance of the basic necessities of a state. This is essential to understanding the conflict in Yemen, with kaleidoscopic allegiances moving towards whoever can provide basic services. This also explains a widespread lack of faith amongst the Yemeni people in the prospects of a sustained solution to the problems the country faces, including violent armed conflict.

The Nation: If the Yemeni state is weak, the notion of the nation is also. Familial, tribal, and religious networks are more frequently invoked to define one's identity than the label of 'Yemeni'. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the 'Famous Forty',[8] the generation of Yemen's founders, effectively used the myth that Arabs of South Arabia were all descended from Qahtan and descendants of Sam / Shem, who was the son of Noah. A famous revolutionary poem begins: "Qahtan is your ancestor and mine, the people of Yemen are your possession and mine.".[9] On September 26th, the day independence is celebrated, Yemenis are reminded of this myth. For several decades, the fragile notion of Yemeni nationhood was in the ascendancy. Yet, events of recent years, including the fracturing of the state and the passing of many of Yemen's founding fathers, have undermined the consolidation of a national identity. The lost generation of the Famous Forty has left Yemenis with no legitimate leaders to inherit the mantle of 1962 revolution, nor of the unification of north and south.[10]

Post-2011 History

In 2011, the Arab Spring gave reason for a coalition of disgruntled forces to come together and protest Saleh's increasingly repressive and reactionary rule. The effectiveness of the protests in Yemen, which failed to yield change in the rest of the Arab Gulf, is due in part to divisions in Saleh's ruling coalition of the Saleh and Islah network, that had formed the backbone of the General People's Congress in the 1990s. Though Islah had split from the government years before, their public supported for the protests and calls for Saleh's removal were poignant.

Wars raged from 2004-10, and Saleh was fast losing effective control over territory. The 2011 uprising encouraged insurgent movements — the Houthis in Saadah, Hirak in the South, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula — to take advantage. The ensuing power struggle in the northwest with the Houthis, meant vacuums emerged elsewhere, and the Yemeni state began to unravel.

Saleh was forced to stand down in 2011. In November 2011, there was a Saudi-led transition of power to Hadi, his Vice-President. This was criticised as being wholly undemocratic. There was a public election, but Hadi was the only candidate. For this reason, Hadi, who remains the internationally recognised President of Yemen today, is widely regarded as illegitimate within Yemen.

From March 2013 to January 2014, a National Dialogue Conference aimed to bring together a wide cross-section of Yemeni political parties and opinion. Following this, a 17-member Constitution Drafting Committee was appointed by by President Hadi, which was sought to consolidate the NDCs recommendations into a 'constitution'. Predictably, few of the recommendations were implemented and, crucially, Yemeni governance did not improve. There needed to be optimism going forward and for regular Yemenis, as services further depleted, there was even less hope. These were exemplified by the riots in Sana'a in 2014 over fuel shortages, during which time the government could not pay their civil servants and indicators of satisfaction with government rapidly declined.

Increasingly the Hadi administration was seen as a failure. It was the Houthis who were seen as the exciting, up-and-coming party. In August of 2014 they ramped up their rhetoric, and by the end of September they were stationed at the outskirts of Sana'a. Hadi refused to sign an order allowing the Houthis in. Yet the Houthis were allied with supporters of Saleh, many of whom were disgruntled government workers, allowing the Houthis to take the city. Hadi was placed under house-arrest but managed to flee to Aden. He then fled the country in March 2015 when the Houthi-Saleh alliance arrived on the outskirts of Aden. Hence, a supposedly democratic and internationally-recognised peace process, which had been deteriorating, came to a dramatic close within just two months of the start of the government's alleged mandate from the NDC.

The Current Situation

Yemen finds itself in a desperate political, economic and social situation. Politically the state is splintered, and Yemen is becoming an increasingly failed and balkanized state. Militarily fighting continues, and has indeed intensified, with no solution in sight.

The Yemeni economy has deteriorated since 2011, and in particular since the Houthi takeover in 2014; the general revenues of the

state decreased by 45.5 percent in 2015 and the revenues from gas and petroleum also decreased by 52 percent.[11] The economy has long been a weapon in the war. This was furthered in September 2016 when Hadi moved the central bank from Sana'a to Aden. The central bank was run by Mohammed Awad bin Humam, and had been given responsibility, as the closest thing approaching an impartial body, to protect the riyal's value, pay public-sector fees, and guarantee the import of basic commodities. The movement of the bank to Aden further politicises the institution, has exacerbated north-south animosity, and led the bank towards insolvency.[12]

Part Two

Internal Networks

Rather than thinking of factions as 'parties', it is more accurate to think of 'networks of influence', with all the messiness that this entails. The war is often reduced, in both the press and policy-making, to a Sunni-Shia conflict, a conflict between north-south, or a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In reality it is a complex overlaying of different identities, of shifting coalitions and contradictory interests, and alliances whose malleability and kaleidoscopic fragmentations often confuse Yemenis themselves.

This is not an exhaustive list of all the players in Yemen. From the business interests in the Marib, to the loose coalition of southern secessionists gathered around al-Hirak, to an elite in Taiz, there are views not fully encapsulated in five networks offered below. Nonetheless, the majority of the fighting is between the following networks, and it is agreements between these players that will see the end of war in Yemen.

The Houthis

The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, are a Zaydi-Shi'ite organisation who are currently in a loose coalition with Saleh, and in control of Sana'a and much of the west of the country. Their remarkable increase in power has led many to speculate that they will be the next rulers of Yemen.

History: The movement is an offshoot of the 'Believing Youth' from the 1990s. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 hardened their views, a process catalysed by the killing of their leader, Hussein al-Houthi, in 2004. Based in Saadah in the north-east of the country, there were six wars waged against the government from 2004 until 2010, drawing on general anti-Saleh discontent. The 2011 risings altered the political dynamics and catalysed the Houthis' rise, propelling them to the centre of the national political stage.

Active participants in the 2011 Yemeni Revolution, they then sat in the NDC, advocating popular positions — including that of federal state and political pluralism. Their position as opponents of the Saleh era and 'outsiders' helped them gain credence. They rejected the GCC's implementation of Hadi as an elite power play that did not represent the interests of the people of Yemen. The current leader of the party Abdul Malik al Houthi who comes from a prominent Zaydi family that seek to restore the Zaydi Imamate, which ended in 1962. He became leader following the death of his brother, Hussein al Houthi, in 2004, and now leads alongside another Houthi brother, Yahia.

Ideology: The Houthis have become a broad movement comprised of religious parties, leftists, and rebels, all united under a loose coalition of anti-establishmentism. There are, however, three elements that form the backbone of their ideology and are shared by the majority of the party — Zaydism, anti-Westernism and anti-establishmentism.

Zaydiism is a form of Shi'ism. However, the practice of Fiver Shi'ism is as close to Sunnism as it is to Twelver Shi'ism, the mainstream Shi'ite movement in Iran. Zaydis believe in an Imamate and their leaders ruled Yemen for 1000 years. Many Zaydis, who make up approximately 40% of the population, feel excluded and let down by the government. A number of traditional scholars were sceptical of the Hussein's claim to authority, but the repressive tactics of Saleh, aided by Saudi Arabia, in 2009 pushed many towards supporting the Houthis.

Anti-Westernism: The Houthis slogan is "God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam." Despite this rhetoric, they have relied on Israel, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan in the past. Their anti-Westernism is populist and based on similar Iranian slogans but is perhaps not as permanent as their rhetoric would suggest.

Anti-Establishmentism: Many felt as if they have been neglected by the Saleh government, with the north-east of the country being purposefully underinvested in, to keep the Zaydi Shiite weak. This anti-establishmentism has been complicated by the Houthis coalition with Saleh.

Objectives: The Houthis do not have clear objectives. Throughout their fights with the government between 2004 and 2011, they kept their message deliberately inclusive and vague. Due to both their internal diversity, but also the sheer surprise at the success of their recent incursions, there is uncertainty as to what the future holds. Some within the movement think that the Houthis are positioned to restore the Zaydi Imamate and rule over Yemen, while others within the movement want an independent state in the north-east. Others desire the reinstitution of Saleh, with whom they are in alliance, but with better treatment for the Zaydis.

The Ansurallah militia is effective, fierce, and well-resourced, backed by Iran. Many have contrasted their inclusive rhetoric with their tactics of repression, with a clear lack of religious toleration and fears of reprisals on the Sunnis in areas in which they take power.

Saleh Network and Alliance with the Houthis

Under Saleh, Yemen was ruled through carefully negotiated and mediated relations with tribal leaders. Saleh was the lynchpin that held the system together. His overthrow in 2011 led to the disintegration of the state. It was Saleh's centralising power that his opponents feared, but it was this very quality that also made members of the government and armed forces loyal to him. Many Yemenis still believe, as the leader of North Yemen since 1978 and the only President of Yemen from 1990 until 2011, he is the single person who can effectively unite Yemen's different communities.

Alliance with the Houthis: From 2004 to 2010 Saleh and the Houthis were sworn enemies. In 2011 the Houthis joined protesters, vociferously calling for Saleh's removal. It is difficult to ascertain precisely when the Houthis and Saleh began to cooperate. For years it was northern tribal leaders — usually members of the Zaydi and Sayyid families — who had acted as mediators between the Houthis and Saleh, and it was these very same people who most likely brought the together. Many tribal leaders who ended up under Al Ahmar and the Hashid tribal confederation (in effect under Islah rule), signed with the Houthis to throw them off. Military tactics cemented the relationship between the two sides. Although the degree of integration between the Houthi and Saleh forces is unclear, the unexpected ease with which the Houthis took Sana'a was largely due to Houthi reliance on cooperation with old Saleh guards who manned key posts in the city.

This Houthi-Saleh coalition is clearly a marriage of convenience, and it is unclear whether it is sustainable. Certainly it has lasted longer than some expected, but it is hard to see, even in the case of a Houthi-Saleh victory, what a Houthi-Saleh Yemen would look like — a federated system with an independent Zaydi state? Houthi leadership with the reinstating of the Zaydi Imamate with Saleh as a key advisor? Or back to Saleh rule, with more resources dedicated to the north-east? If the political process was to restart, it is difficult to see how the Houthi-Saleh alliance could present a cogent and cohesive platform. Is it likely that the alliance would soon unravel.

Islah

History: The Islah Party was founded in 1990 after the new Yemeni state was formed. It was a combination of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were influential in the larger cities; tribal Islamists, and Salafi sheikhs who ran the madrasa system. Politically it included business interests, conservatives, pragmatists and traditionalists. Islah was incorporated into the GPC but split in the late 1990s and in 2006, putting forward a candidate to challenge Saleh in a national election. They have become a pragmatic party who have been both opponents and supporters of the government.[13]

Ideology: There is enormous variance in their beliefs and there is no one voice on the major issues. In their manifesto they state that they are "a popular political organization that seeks reform of all aspects of life on the basis of Islamic principles and teachings." Yet their policies are "centered on the realities and events of their [people's] experiences" as well as "appreciating the network of external and internal factors that influence the running of … [Yemen's] affairs."

Two factors appear to be of utmost importance for Islah. Firstly, they believe in Sharia law and the implementation of Islam as a way to structure social and political life. They are also proud defenders of Sunnism and concerned about the influence of the Houthis and Iran in Yemen. They place greater emphasis on individual liberty, gender rights and democracy than many other Islamist parties in the Middle East. Their most famous member is human rights activist and Nobel laureate Tawakel Karman. Secondly, they are a gradualist party, who believe in evolutionary change. This can be achieved through realpolitik and deal-making. They are willing to work with a wide variety of players — from the Yemeni Socialist Party they allied with in the early 2000s, to Saudi Arabia.

Objectives: As with the Houthis, the sheer breadth of ideology within the party means that Islah does not speak with one single voice on major issues. It is fair to say, however, that Islah want to limit the Houthis force; to be an active and important part of the next government of Yemen; to cement Islamic values at the core of political governance; and to catalyse a rapid improvement in social conditions in the country.

Capabilities: Islah played a key role in the formation of the Yemeni state and the maintenance of Saleh's rule. Their power comes from their intimate connections with tribal families and traditional, religious values, along with individual tribal leaders themselves. Saleh enlisted the Zindani and Sheikh Abdullah al Ahmar, chief of the northern Hashid Tribal Confederation—home of Saleh's clan and Yemen's largest tribal grouping — to launch Islah, which would strengthen Saleh's control over Yemen. The Ahmar family to this day remain powerful. The most powerful figure in Yemen today is perhaps Vice President Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar, a former ally of President Saleh and pivotal in combating the Houthi insurgencies throughout the 2000s. In 2011, he defected in support of the protesters and he was subsequently fired by Hadi in 2012. He has strong Salafist leanings, and is a key military figure. Islah's military prowess means that Saudi Arabia relies on them to do much of the anti-Houthi fighting on the ground. However, this is complicated by Saudi Arabia's intense dislike of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The organization also have a strong history of success in the provision of social services, working with community leaders to provide education, housing and healthcare for the Yemeni people.

Hadi Network and Alliance with Islah

President Hadi claims that United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216 legitimizes his rule since it calls on all parties to refrain from taking any actions that undermine the legitimacy of the President of Yemen. Islah support Hadi's stance on this, although the extent to which they truly believe Hadi is well-equipped to be President is unclear.

History: Hadi himself was a major in the Southern Yemeni military, fleeing to the North in 1986 and becoming an ally of Saleh. He served as Saleh's Vice-President for 18 years and assumed the presidency following the 2011 uprisings.

Objectives: Hadi believes that he has the sole right to govern Yemen and should be the president of a single, unified Yemen. Hadi holds little popular legitimacy, and has only a limited network and sphere of influence as a result. He has been tainted by charges of corruption, association with the old regime, and an inability to inspire people or unite leaders. Even the Saudis are unsure of his ability to govern; Hadi may therefore be a straw-man, in office only until a better alternative presents itself. Nevertheless, he retains control of Yemen's armed forces, which remain well-resourced despite the many defections to Saleh.

AQAP

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has been described by the Obama Administration as "the most active and dangerous affiliate of al-Qaeda today,"[14] with "several thousand adherents and fighters" inside of Yemen.[15] In December 2015 they captured much of the Abyan province, and though they lost control of Mulkalla in the Spring of 2016, they still retain a significant amount of territory. AQAP have initiated a 'hearts and minds' campaign to win over Yemenis, exasperated at decades of ineffective governance.

History: Bin Laden, a Yemeni himself, had planned to make Yemen — with its sparse, mountainous and poorly governed territory, proximity to East Africa, and relative lack of international attention — the home of Al Qaeda.

The group were behind the USS Cole bombing in 2000, propelling themselves to become the US's primary concern in Yemen. They remained near the top of the US national security agenda as attacks occurred in Little Rock in 2009, the attempted Christmas Day bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253, and the 2010 cargo plane bomb plot, amongst others.

Ideology: Al-Qaeda are radical, cellular and transnational. Their 2012 platform states the need to "expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula" and "establish the Islamic Caliphate and Shari'ah rule which the apostate governments have suspended."

AQAP compete within the wider Salafi network, many of whom are part of the Islah network and hostile to AQAPs radicalism. This is a major source of tension for both sides, although there have been reports of increased cooperation in recent months.

Objectives: Al-Qaeda's ultimate aim is to establish a transnational caliphate. They have historically attempted this via the dissolution and destabilisation of the Yemeni state through terror and armed struggle.

However AQAP have increasingly been able to prove themselves as effective and responsible rulers. Unlike ISIS, they have attempted to embed themselves in local populations, rather than committing headline-grabbing acts of terrorism. They have gained a reputation for being firm but effective governors. Indeed, there have been many stories of people purposefully moving into AQAP controlled territory, not for ideological reasons but out of more pragmatic motivations.

AQAP's political section, headed by Qasaim al-Raymi, maintains an active media channel *al-Malahem*, with an English language magazine called *Inspire*. They have religious experts who will answer followers questions and AMAs (ask me anything) on Twitter.

According to the US State Department, a large share of their income is derived from kidnappings and extortion. A document from Wikileaks suggested that they made $500,000 from a single heist. AQAP generated significant revenues through the port city of Mlukallah, which they held for a year but then lost in the spring of 2016.

US drone strikes, which have killed a large number of AQAP's leaders, are growing increasingly problematic for the movement. AQAP have faced threat from Houthis who present an existential threat to Al Qaeda. The group is Shiite, but also represents an effective, grass-roots, resourceful armed force, who consider Sunni extremists foreign, apostate, and unwelcome in Yemen.

Part Three: Major International Actors and Broader Implications for the Middle East

Yemen has garnered surprisingly little media attention, and is sometimes refereed to as the 'forgotten war' of the Middle East. In the Western media it has been overshadowed by the Syrian conflict where there is fear of domestic terrorism from ISIS, refugee flows into Europe and more advanced Western intervention. However the conflict in Yemen has become symptomatic of many of the problems that many other Middle Eastern countries are tackling   today: the legacy of a secular autocracy that was corrupt and unpopular, but backed by the West for security reasons, and left the state dangerously underdeveloped; the careful negotiation of the role of religious values and politics within society; a bitter war not started but now fuelled by bitter animosity between Sunni and Shia, Saudi Arabia and Iran; a paralysed international community; and the people of the country who ultimately end of suffering catastrophically.

The portrayal of conflict in Yemen as a Saudi - Iran proxy war is not an accurate representation of a much more complex war — one that is primarily a domestic conflict. However the depth of the pockets of external actors has certainly prolonged the war. There is also a danger that the more the narrative of Saudi-Iranian war or Sunni-Shia is reinforced, the more it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Though the war was not caused by Saudi-Iran, it is certainly being fuelled by them and is becoming part of an increasingly visible 'Middle Eastern Cold War'.

Saudi Arabia and their Coalition

Saudi Arabia are currently the most powerful external actor in Yemen. They are 18 months into a concerted effort to change the

course of the war, but have been unable to effect the war as they might have wished. Riyadh is backing Hadi and also maintains close ties to the Islah network.

The coalition that Saudi leads also include Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, and Senegal. They are referred to as the 'Saudi-led coalition', although major differences within these powers do occur.

History: Saudi Arabia and Yemen share a 1,000-mile border. As such, there are significant personal, familial and economic ties across the border. Currently, for instance, there are an estimated one million Yemeni migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, sending home remittances of $1.4bn.

Saudi Arabia have often feared their Yemeni neighbours. With almost identically sized populations, Saudi Arabia have at once tried to keep Yemen weak, yet strong enough to avoid state collapse, preventing both foreign powers influences on the Saudi border and the potential for an influx of Yemeni migrants.

Traditionally, Saudi Arabia has not been an interventionist power. Their foreign policy has been dominated by soft power influence, offering a combination of money and religious instruction to see their aims fulfilled. However, in March 2015 Saudi Arabia launched Operation Decisive Storm, a predominantly aerial campaign seeking to push the Houthis out of Sana'a and change the direction of the war in Yemen. Saudi Arabia contributed 100 warplanes and 150,000 soldiers to the military operation. In April 2015, the Saudi Defence Minister announced an end to the airstrikes, and the beginning of Operation Restoring Hope. This came alongside an increased aid package, with King Salman doubling his country's Yemen aid pledge to $540 million. However airstrikes resumed soon after their end was announced. According to Bruce Riedel, this is the "most ideological, sectarian and assertive foreign policy in modern Saudi history".[16]

Current Role in the Conflict: Eighteen-months after its initial engagement, Saudi Arabia remains the most powerful fighting force in Yemen but is nevertheless unable to retake Sana'a or push the war in the direction that it desires.

Saudi Arabia is the major aerial power in Yemen and responsible for a majority of civilian deaths caused by bombing. Their naval and aerial blockade has starved Sana'a and other areas of fuel and other critical resources.

Objectives and Capabilities: It is challenging to understand Saudi Arabia's end-game in Yemen. Some see this as "Saudi Arabia's Vietnam" — a difficult war they felt pushed into, that Mohammed bin Salman took upon himself to reinforce his own leadership credentials, and that he now cannot retreat from for fear of losing face. Others view the war as popular amongst the Saudi Arabian population and, in the wake of the Iran nuclear deal, a means for Riyadh to reassert regional dominance.

As the war becomes longer and more expensive, Saudi Arabia's aims have gradually become less and less expansive, retreating from seeking Hadi's outright victory as legitimate ruler of Yemen to now settling on merely reducing the Houthis' territorial control. [17]

The Saudis' most important ally is Ali Mohsen, who has strong tribal allegiances, the preferred way for Saudis to do their dealings; a ferocious fighting force, and conservative Salafist views that the Saudis respect.

The selection of a partner in the south of Yemen is challenging for the Saudis. They enjoy greatest support in this region of the country but may end up supporting secessionist movements, who ultimately undermine Saudi Arabia's stated end-goal of a unified Yemen.

Iran

Though the Yemen conflict is often portrayed as an Saudi-Iranian conflict, the level of involvement from Saudi Arabia far outweighs that of Iran, which has less strategic, economic, and military involvement in Yemen. Tehran regards these actions as a low-risk investment with potentially high returns.

History: Relations between Iran and Yemen have been cordial since the 1979 Revolution, with Yemen not playing a significant role in Iran's strategic calculations. The Houthis are not long-term allies of Iran; between 2004 and 2010, Iran offered only minimal support to the Houthis' attacks against the Yemeni state. It is important to note that whilst both parties are Shiite, there is a substantial difference between Fiver and Twelver Shiism.

Current role in the conflict: The role of Iran in the conflict is widely exaggerated. According to the UN Security Council Iran Sanctions Committee, Iranian support for the Houthis began in 2009 — with shipments of arms and millions of dollars of cash. This is often read as the Houthis being proxies of Iran. However, as National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan remarked in 2015, "It remains our assessment that Iran does not exert command and control over the Houthis in Yemen."[18] Indeed, Iran are said to have cautioned the Houthis against an assault on Sana'a in 2015.

As of early 2017, there does not appear to have been an increase in weapons shipment, from both maritime smuggling, and overland routes through Oman.[19] Yemen is awash with arms, with an estimated 60 million weapons in a country of just 26 million people. There is a persistent fear, however, that Iran may supply more advanced weaponry, or at least the financial resources necessary for their acquisiton, to the Houthis in the coming months and years.[20]

Objectives: Iran's engagement in Yemen can be regarded as part of a wider regional objective of capitalising on instability, focusing on parties who oppose the regional status quo. Iran's ties with Hamas and Hezbollah have been frayed by the war in Syria, and Tehran is now seeking out new allies across the region.

Iran's minimalist end goal in Yemen is to trouble Saudi Arabia, threatening the country from its southern border. A more maximalist interpretation of its support for the Houthis would be to help foster new leadership in Yemen more positively inclined to Tehran.

United States

Although the U.S. is not directly involved in the fighting in Yemen, its role in arming Saudi Arabia, its development assistance in the region, and continued status as a global superpower combine to give Washington, D.C. significant influence in shaping the future of Yemen.

History: Since the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, and subsequent AQAP attacks on the American homeland, the US has doubled-down on its support for Saleh. However in 2011, the US supported the transition to Hadi and supported resolution 2216, claiming that Hadi is the only legitimate President of Yemen.

Current role in the conflict: The US has shifted from its previous position of robust support for Saudi Arabia to taking a more nuanced stand in the past eighteen months. On the Day of Operation Decisive Storm, the White House issued a press release stating that the Houthis were responsible for the outbreak of war, stating strong support for Saudi Arabia's responsive engagement. In late 2016, after months of ineffectual and bloody fighting, the National Security Spokesperson of the Obama Administration stated that 'security cooperation with Saudi Arabia is not a blank check' and called for an 'immediate review of our already significantly reduced support to the Saudi-led coalition to help achieve an 'immediate and durable end to Yemen's tragic conflict.' [21]

Objectives: The US has three primary aims in Yemen. Firstly, to restore order and the provision of services, to improve the situation of the Yemeni people. Secondly, to prevent the takeover of Yemen by the Houthis. And thirdly, to diffuse tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and to limit the 'Cold War in the Middle East'.

The US is wary of being dragged further into the war. In October 2016, the Houthis launched anti-ship missiles at US Navy Vessels on patrol off the coast in Yemen: the first time that US forces have come under direct fire in the conflict. The US responded by firing back and also deploying more naval assets to Bab al Mandab to protect international shipping. Secretary of State John Kerry has attempted to use America's diplomatic muscle to bring all sides to the negotiating table. However, waning American influence in the region is reflected in the cavalier attitude that powers have adopted in response to Kerry's demands.

Part Four: The Peace Process in Yemen

Peace is increasingly difficult to envision in the short-term in Yemen: the conflict is multipolar and it is extremely challenging to identify zones of potential agreement. There are multiple claimants to executive authority; this is an 'all-or-nothing' conflict for Hadi-Islah and Saleh-Houthi coalitions, with little incentive to negotiate; and the war is backed by international powers with deadly weapons, deep pockets and little sensitivity to the suffering of the Yemeni people.

There are glimmers of hope, however. Yemen is a country that has a history of mediating between different interest group. There was an active and robust civil society which, though damaged by the war, is still functioning. This final section of the paper looks at potential ways forward, arguing that we can learn, in both the content of negotiation and method, from previous negotiation attempts.

A future peace process in Yemen will require:
- a comprehensive, inclusive national dialogue;
- to address the short, medium and long term needs of the Yemeni people through the provision of services. This includes the immediate ability to access humanitarian aid;
- to solve local conflicts through localised mediation, as well as national and international-level conflict drivers.

History of Failed Negotiations

Since the 2011 uprisings, Yemen has been in a continual state of mediation and crisis management. So far there has been little success. However, analysis of these transition processes can prove instructive in forging a path forward.

The transition of power from Saleh to Hadi was an elite-led process, engineered by the GCC and executed without consultation of the Yemeni people. In the transition to Hadi, there were two primary mistakes made. Firstly, the guaranteed amnesty provided to Saleh for the violence he and his administration committed affirmed violence as a legitimate and low-risk tactic to adopt. Secondly, the process was defined by elite decision-making and denied access and authority to those who felt they had a stake in Yemen's future.

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) attempted to remedy this, bringing together 565 Yemenis from all different political parties. Seats were given out on a quota system with 40 seats each allocated to youth, women, and civil society. The conference's administrators received over 10,000 applications within two weeks. The scope and ambition of the conference was remarkable, and this paper recommends a similar process be replicated in the future. There were nevertheless mistakes made in the NDC process. Notably, Hadi was afforded too much discretionary power, notably via the 62 seats that he filled with his own allies. The south was also marginalized, and were in effect represented by the leaderless al-Hirak secessionist movement, who did not feel adequately consulted or listened to by Hadi. Yemeni civil society groups participating in the NDC also struggled to speak with a singular, unified voice on major issues.

UN talks, Switzerland 2015 and Kuwait 2016: Throughout 2015 and 2016 there were several discussions mediated by international bodies, none of which able to meaningfully influence dynamics on the ground. Intermittent ceasefires have been broken with impunity. In October 2016, the UN Envoy to Yemen presented plans for the country, including the formation of a new national unity government and moving towards parliamentary elections; transferring presidential and vice-presidential power; removing Houthi-Saleh forces from cities seized between between 2014 and 2015, and creating an international mission to oversee this process.

In November, Secretary Kerry travelled to Oman and announced that Houthi-Saleh forces had agreed to once again respect the cessation deal of April the 10th if other sides also would. However, less than a week later, Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdel-Malek al Mekhlafi said: "I believe the current U.S. administration is incapable of providing any guarantees to any party and what Kerry has said is no more than a media bubble at our people's expense.'[22] Currently, neither the US nor the UN are trusted as mediators.

Moving Forward

There will be a three-track diplomatic process:.
- an international mediation that recognises the Saudi-led coalitions enormous influence on the war, is transparent and ensures agreed cease-fires.
- a peace process between the Hadi government and the Houthi-Saleh alliance.
- a broader political dialogue, similar to the NDC, that includes local groups and civil society activists.

Throughout this process, three important dynamics should be considered:

The first is an understanding that the Yemeni state, as it existed prior to 2011, cannot be reconstituted as a carbon-copy of the previous state. Regional tensions, mass feeling of disenfranchisement in the Zaydi north-east, and secessionist impulses in the south, mean that a return to the status-quo is unsustainable. Furthermore, whilst the generation of 1962 — the founding fathers of the Yemeni state — were able to sustain a national narrative that brought different factions together, this conflict has seen the end of this generation. A new Yemeni state and the forging of a national compact is required.

This could mean a federated Yemen. Yemen could be divided into a Houthi-led north centered around Saadah, a southern secessionist south, and a semi-autonomous eastern region coming under local leadership. Each of the three could elect leaders to sit in a national parliament that holds the regions in loose confederation. Yet the risks of dividing Yemen are high. There is no guarantee that fighting will stop, either between or within the country's different regions. How, for instance, would a southern al-Hirak led government deal with AQAP, who will certainly refuse any form of a peace deal? Furthermore, the international community have rallied around the notion of a united Yemen. Relinquishing this unique area of broad consensus among the stakeholders would be extremely challenging.

Secondly, more efficient and effective governance of Yemen is essential. This must begin with the passage of aid, agreed by all sides, as well as a promise not to attack NGOs. Currently NGOs are unable to access crisis points due to blockades and bombings. Médecins Sans Frontières, for instance, was bombed in Hajjah in April 2016, leading to their withdrawal. Cities such as Taiz have seen blockades which have starved the population of food, gas, and other resources.

Services must improve if there is to be any hope of peace. A 2013 survey revealed that 56 per cent of respondents believed the economy was worsening. 69 per cent believed that the jobs situation was getting worse.[23] In 2015, when Aden was taken from Houthi control, the Hadi government attempted to use Aden to showcase how they could govern fairly. The UAE pledged to support them but, following a deteriorating security structure and the assassination of the governor of Aden in 2015, a lack of infrastructural improvement, and increased infighting, the UN withdrew. Al-Qaeda has proved itself a more efficient provider of public services than a combined effort from Hadi's government supported by the UAE and UN.

Thirdly, there should be a national dialogue, similar to the previous one but reformed, in Yemen that continues throughout other negotiations. National dialogues are inclusive, incorporate large segments of civil society, business and politics, and in complex and fractious conflict environments, offer a way forward. According to Thania Paffenholz and Nick Ross, who considered 40 studies of inclusive negotiations from 1990 and 2013, there is a far higher likelihood of solutions being found. This has been a method proposed, with variable successes, in Myanmar, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Nigeria, Ukraine, and Lebanon.[24] The problems identified with the previous NDC must be rectified, with a renewed consultation process buttressed with stronger UN support, backed by an interest in the immediate betterment of the services.

This will be an extremely complicated and intricate process, contingent on cooperation from parties within Yemen and the international community, who will have to pay closer attention to the civil war in Yemen than they have up until this point. There are a number of issues – from reinstating the central bank's autonomy to the water crisis that Yemen faces, the glut of arms to the lifting of naval blockades – that are beyond the scope of this paper, but that require careful, sustained attention. Nonetheless, Yemenis have the capacity, and the will, to end this brutal and barbaric war – a war which will, in some painful form, give birth to a new Yemen.

PART FIVE TEAM

I. Team Overview

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Anna Saakyan
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II. Team Biographies

Micah Ables

Micah Ables graduated Summa Cum Laude from Israel's Interdisciplinary Center in 2016 with a Master's in Government, Diplomacy, and Conflict Studies. At the IDC, he focused on US foreign and military policies. His research interests also include politics and foreign policies of former USSR members and NATO military actions. Micah is an active-duty U.S. Army infantry officer and, prior to attending the IDC, he was deployed to southern Afghanistan as part of Operations Enduring Freedom and Resolute Support. The views and analyses in this paper are his and do not necessarily reflect the official position of any U.S. government agency.

Marie-France Agblo

Marie-France Agblo graduated from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 2015 with a Master of Science in Global Politics. Her research interests are regional and interstate conflicts, political transformation and international development. Marie-France spent a year at Sciences Po Paris and was a visiting Fellow with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, where she focused on peace, conflict and security studies in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. She worked for the Spokesperson Service for the Cabinet of the President of the European Commission and is currently serving as a consultant on behalf of the German government in Malawi.

Lisa Akorli

Lisa Akorli graduated from Harvard Kennedy School in 2017 with a Master in Public Policy. At the Kennedy School, she focused on women in peace and security. Before beginning graduate school, she worked in international law in The Hague, and then in inner-city youth development in New York.

Hala Al Hariri

Hala is a Master in Public Administration candidate at Harvard Kennedy School, focusing on comparative politics, social institutions and economic development. Hala is particularly interested in development projects at the intersection of private sector and social development. Hala is an MBA holder from Boston University, and has six years of work experience in management consulting in the private sector, in the Middle East and U.S. regions. Hala has also consulted for the World Bank Governance Global Practice MENA unit promoting inclusive, transparent governance and empowering women to participate in governments and state-building.

Eileen Babbitt

Eileen F. Babbitt is Professor of Practice of International Conflict Management, Director of the Institute for Human Security, and Co-Director of the Program on Human Rights and Conflict Resolution at The Fletcher School. She is also a Faculty Associate of the Program on Negotiation at the Harvard Law School. Her research interests include identity-based conflicts, coexistence and trust-building in the aftermath of civil war, and the interface between human rights concerns and peace building. Her practice as a facilitator and trainer has included work in the Middle East, the Balkans, and with the United Nations, U.S. government agencies, regional inter-governmental organizations, and international and local NGOs.

Harry Begg

Harold Begg is Research Associate at McChrystal Group in Washington, D.C., where he is working on a book project on the history of leadership with (Ret.) General Stanley McChrystal. Previously, he was the Michael von Clemm Fellow at Harvard, where he researched in the modern history of technological change. A British citizen, Harry was educated at the University of Oxford and University College London.

Arvid Bell

Arvid Bell is a Fellow at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University. His research interests include negotiation analysis, complex conflict systems, and international security. Arvid has presented in the United States, Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East,

briefed NATO military personnel before their deployment to Afghanistan, and works with public and private sector clients as a negotiations subject matter expert. Arvid holds a dual degree in political science and International Affairs from Free University of Berlin and Sciences Po Paris, and a Master in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.

Bilal Chaudhary

Bilal Chaudhary recently completed his Master's degree in International Business from The Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, where he concentrated on the Middle East and the renewable energy. Before coming to Fletcher, he served in the Foreign Service of Pakistan for over 10 years. In his foreign service career, Bilal has worked extensively on Pakistan's bilateral relations with Arab countries and on the issues related to counter-terrorism.

Natalie Crone

Natalie D. Crone graduated Magna Cum Laude from the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya's Lauder School of Government with an M.A. in Government. She specialized in Diplomacy and Conflict Studies with a focus on Counter Terrorism. As a researcher with the International Institute for Counter Terrorism and the Institute for Policy and Strategy, Natalie focused on Kurdish politics and militias, as well as the greater Middle East. Her research pursuits earned her the prestigious Ragonis Foundation award. Prior to IDC, Natalie completed National Service through AmeriCorps and obtained her B.A. in Political Science from Berea College. When not researching, Natalie runs marathons and works at a global human rights nonprofit in Chicago.

Miguel de Corral

Miguel is currently pursuing a Master in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. Previously, he worked as an operations analyst in the World Bank's Middle East and North Africa department. Miguel also gained experience at the NATO Defense College in Rome and the United Nations Office in Geneva, and earned his B.A. in International Affairs from Northeastern University. In addition, Miguel has published over 25 op-eds, papers and reports focusing largely on political and security developments in the Middle East and Europe.

Ashley Ertilien

Ashley Ertilien graduated with the Class of 2017 from Brandeis University with the class of 2017. She wrote her independent thesis on the extent to which AP US History is able to stimulate students of minority to think critically. Interested in law and education policy, Ashley was able to mold her classes, internships, and other extracurricular activities around these interests.

Chen Gilad

Chen Gilad is a lawyer and former Senior Counsel to the Israeli State Attorney, where she advised the State Attorney on various legal and policy issues and complex high-profile cases. Previously, Chen served as Deputy District Attorney (Civil Law) in the Jerusalem District, litigating complex civil law cases, including Israel's military administration in the West Bank. Chen graduated from the Hebrew University Law School, and clerked for the Israeli State Attorney. During law school, she was a teaching assistant in constitutional law courses, and served as assistant to the Israeli Justice Minister's Senior Advisor. Chen's professional interests include constitutional and administrative law, international law and human rights.

Roland Gillah

Roland A. Gillah graduated from Tufts University in 2016 with B.A. in International Relations. While living in Amman, Jordan, he was attacked by two young men with a sword. Experiencing the violence that has become so commonplace in the Middle East drove him to examine why young people become involved in violence. He wrote his Senior Honors Thesis on why violent extremists choose to leave extremist groups. He has conducted research on Turkish Civil-Military Relations and Bahrain's Youth Movements. He currently works as an Analyst at BMNT Partners, where he runs the Hacking For Defense program, connecting government agencies with people and technology in Silicon Valley to rapidly build and deploy solutions for defense, diplomacy, and urban resilience.

Clare Gooding

Clare Gooding is a Master of International Business candidate at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy where she studies business development and operations with a regional focus in the Middle East and North Africa. She is the co-chair of the Fletcher Initiative on Religion,

Law & Diplomacy and member of the Fletcher Social Investment Group. Prior to Fletcher, Clare worked in operations for the American Refugee Committee and as a caseworker for the US Refugee Admissions Program in East Africa. Her professional interests include the cooperation of humanitarian agencies with religious institutions particularly around financial inclusion. In 2011, she was an intern at the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York and has since followed closely the diplomatic work of the Holy See.

Rosi Greenberg

Rosi Greenberg will graduate from Harvard Kennedy School in 2018 with a Master in Public Policy. At the Kennedy School, she focuses on Conflict Resolution and Organizational Development. Rosi is an elected Core Academic Council Cohort Representative, a co-founder of Resistance School, and a member of the Kennedy School Negotiations Project team. Prior to coming to Harvard, Rosi spent two and a half years working with refugees and disadvantaged youth in Jordan with Questscope for Social Development in the Middle East. Rosi has also taught Arabic and Math in the public schools of Boston and Baltimore.

Ankit Grover

Ankit Grover is a MA in Law and Diplomacy candidate at The Fletcher School, Tufts University. At Fletcher, Ankit focuses on International Political Economy, with a focus on the Middle East, Islamic Finance and International Development. Prior to coming to Fletcher, he studied journalism, conflict transformation and peacebuilding at the University of Delhi, and worked with a Middle East-based human resource consulting company in designing skill development and repatriation programs for overseas Indian workers.

Patrick Hamon

Patrick Hamon graduated from Tufts University in 2016 with a Bachelors in International Relations. At Tufts, Patrick focused on security studies, particularly fragile and failing states. During his undergraduate career, Patrick served as Co-Director of the Alliance Linking Leaders in Education and the Services (ALLIES), a group dedicated to studying and practicing effective civil-military relations. His research interests include violent non-state actors, criminal networks, and other non-state security threats as

well as security sector reform and peacebuilding. He currently works in New York City for Linklaters LLP as a paralegal in antitrust and competition law.

Eva Kahan

Eva Kahan is a rising junior at Tufts University, scheduled to graduate in 2019 with a Bachelors of the Arts in International Relations and History, concentrating in the Middle East. She was a member of this year's EPIIC Colloquium through the Tufts Institute for Global Leadership, focusing this year on "Force and Diplomacy," and directs programming for the Alliance Linking Leaders in Education and the Services (ALLIES), a student civil-military relations think tank. Eva's research interests include security sector reform and post-conflict reconstruction. She will be exploring these interests throughout the 2017-2018 academic year while studying Arabic in Jordan.

Minjee Kang

(Deborah) Minjee Kang is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. At the Fletcher School, she focuses on migration, counterterrorism, and conflict resolution. Prior to coming to Fletcher, Deborah worked at a Migrant Youth Foundation in South Korea, assisting the resettlement of refugee and immigrant youth. Her research interests are the socioeconomic factors that lead to radicalization or crime and the role of community in combating terrorism. Her professional interests include preventing violent extremism, supporting reentry programs of inmates, and researching policies that aim to integrate the marginalized into society.

Brandon Kappy

Brandon Kappy graduated from Harvard Medical School and Harvard Kennedy School in 2017, with a joint Medical Doctorate and Master in Public Policy degree. While at the Kennedy School, he was a Kennedy School Negotiation Project (KSNP) fellow, developed and implemented two complex and emergent negotiation simulations, and wrote his Public Policy thesis on the role of complexity in negotiation teaching. He is currently completing a pediatric internship at Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

Juliana Kerrest

Juliana Philippa Kerrest is a dual-degree candidate

focused on the intersection of business and human rights, earning her MPA from the Harvard Kennedy School and her MBA from the MIT Sloan School of Management. She graduated Cum Laude from The Johns Hopkins University, after which she served a year in AmeriCorps working with immigrant and refugee women helping them start small businesses. Juliana founded the startup eLibris and prior to graduate school worked for Amazon.com for several years. She has been a mental health advocate for over a decade and is currently a member of the Active Minds Speakers Bureau.

Ameya Kilara
Ameya is a student in the Master in Public Administration program at Harvard Kennedy School and a Gleitsman leadership fellow with the Center for Public Leadership. She is a dual-qualified lawyer (in the UK and India) with extensive experience of working in peacebuilding. At the Kennedy School, her study and research concentrate on multi-party negotiation, diplomacy and conflict resolution. Her prior work includes legal practice and pro-bono mediation support at Linklaters, research on armed insurgencies in South Asia at Inter-Mediate, and managing the South Asia program at Conciliation Resources, focused on facilitating dialogue and Track 1.5 diplomacy in the India-Pakistan/Kashmir context.

Alya Koraitem
Alya Koraitem graduated from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 2017 with a Masters of Arts in Law and Diplomacy. During her time at Fletcher, she pursued her academic interests on comparative politics, conflict resolution and democratization in the Middle East. Her professional interests are focused on higher education, stemming for her role as Coordinator of the first ever Masters of International Relations program for women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, at Dar Al Hekma University.

Aurora Lachenauer
Aurora Lachenauer graduated from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 2017 with a Master of Law and Diplomacy. While at Fletcher, she focused on International Security and Transatlantic Security. While completing her degree, she spent a year at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, focusing on International Law. Aurora also spent a year working at the Belfer Center at Harvard Kennedy School, as a Summer Fellow and Course Assistant. She completed an internship at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and worked for MIT Sloan School of Management. Her professional interests include security policy and strategy.

Benjamin Leibowitz
Ben Leibowitz earned his A.M. in Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University in May 2017, where he was a Kennedy Scholar. Having received his B.A. in History from the University of Cambridge in 2015, his focus has steadily shifted from modern history to contemporary Middle Eastern politics, and his work now focuses on negotiation and conflict-resolution in Yemen, Israel-Palestine and Syria. Ben is a student of Arabic and Hebrew, and hopes to work in diplomacy.

Alain Lempereur
Alain Lempereur is the Alan B. Slifka Professor and Director of the Conflict Resolution and Coexistence Program at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management. He is an affiliated faculty and executive committee member of the Program on Negotiation (PON) at Harvard Law School. He published a dozen books, namely "The First Move. A Negotiator's Companion" that appeared in many languages, and contributed over 100 articles and book chapters. His recent research and field expertise address responsible negotiation and leadership, as well as humanitarian negotiation and mediation.

Brian Mandell
Brian Mandell has taught at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government since 1993, where he is Senior Lecturer in Public Policy and the Director of the Harvard Kennedy School Negotiation Project. He is a Senior Fellow at the Future of Diplomacy Project, Senior Research Associate at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, and faculty affiliate of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. Mandell serves as the faculty chair of a number of executive education programs at Harvard Kennedy School, including the Wexner Senior Leadership Program, and Mastering Negotiation: Building Agreements Across Boundaries. His current work addresses the theory and practice of negotiation and conflict resolution with an emphasis on third party facilitation, mediation, collaborative problem solving, and

multi-stakeholder consensus building in negotiations.

Andrew McIndoe
Andrew McIndoe is a candidate for a Master of Arts in Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. He focuses on 20th century Arab political history, with particular interests in state- and nation-building, land issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the formation of the post-Ottoman international order. Before beginning his graduate studies, Andrew worked as a research assistant at the Waitangi Tribunal, a New Zealand judicial body addressing indigenous peoples' land and resource claims. He is currently interning in the Department for Peacekeeping Operations at the United Nations, working on disarmament and demobilization issues.

Ashley Miller
Ashley Miller is a Master in Public Policy student at Harvard Kennedy School, planning to graduate in May of 2018. At the Kennedy School, she concentrated on International and Global Affairs, especially the Middle East region. She served as a Course Assistant for Empirical Methods class and as a Student Worker for the Harvard College Office of Career Services. Prior to coming to Harvard, Ashley spent four years at Deloitte Consulting where she was a strategy consulting working on implementing the Affordable Care Act. Ashley graduated from Miami University in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in International Studies.

David Moulton
David Moulton is a graduate student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. His studies focus on security and negotiation in the Middle East and North Africa. David's experience includes working as a Senior Associate for an international government relations firm as well as teaching English at the Shatilla refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon. David is currently interning in the Foreign and Defense Policy Division of the Embassy of Canada in Washington, DC.

Tom O'Bryan
Tom O'Bryan is a UK Kennedy Scholar and Masters of Public Policy student at the Harvard Kennedy School, focusing on conflict resolution and human rights issues. Tom has worked for an array of multilateral, governmental and non-profit organizations across the Middle East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. He has testified before the British Parliament, United Nations, and French Senate and has published articles with Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy. Tom grew up in the UK; he speaks fluent French and some Swahili.

Julie Pulda
Julie Pulda is a Master's Candidate at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. She is focusing on public health, innovation, and business as a driver of social impact. She is the Co-President of the Global Health Club and Co-Leader of the Fletcher Israel Trek and is a member of the Fletcher Social Investment Group and Consulting Group. Prior coming to Fletcher, Julie lived in Tel Aviv for six years where she worked with local and international NGOs on refugee and migration issues and civilian trauma.

Namrata Raju
Namrata Raju is an MPA candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School, due to graduate in 2018. She is an economist by credentials, with her previous MSc in Economics from the University of Warwick. Prior to Harvard, Namrata worked for 8 years in the socioeconomic and market research sector, with particular focus on the MENA region and emerging markets. Her most recent position involved heading and structuring a consumer research department from scratch for Oman's number 2 bank by market cap: the first department of its kind in the country's incipient research industry. Many questions addressed were behaviour-based: from migrating branch customers to echannels, to developing behaviour-based branch networks. At Harvard, Namrata is part of the student 'Behavioural Insights Group' and also occasionally blogs for the Behavioural Science Think Tank, 'The Decision Lab'.

Faheem Rathore
Faheem Rathore graduated from Harvard Kennedy School in 2017 with a Master in Public Policy. At the Kennedy School, he was an IGA concentrator and focused on American foreign policy. He wrote his PAE on measuring the successes of countering violent extremism programs in America. At Kennedy, Faheem served in student government and helped to organize a student trek to Pakistan. Prior to coming to Harvard, Faheem worked for the Justice Department focusing on international corruption after receiving a degree in political science from Davidson College. Faheem plans on returning to

Washington to eventually work on American foreign policy issues.

Anna Saakyan

Anna Saakyan graduated from the Harvard University in 2017 with a Master of Arts degree. She was a Shelby Cullom Davis and Kathryn Davis Scholar at the Harvard Davis Center, where she developed a broad regional expertise in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies. She specifically focused on researching the international relations and diplomacy of Russia. Anna came to Harvard with a Bachelor degree in World Politics from the Moscow State University, and a Master of Science degree in International Diplomacy from the University of Oxford. Her professional interests lie in the areas of diplomacy, international development, international relations, multiparty negotiations, and conflict resolution.

Daniel Schade

Daniel Schade is a Postdoctoral Fellow in International Relations at the Vienna School of International Studies. His research focuses on foreign policy coordination in the European Union and European security policy. He previously completed his doctorate at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and has studied at the University of Cambridge, Harvard University and Sciences Po Paris.

Vora Seher

Seher Vora is a Masters of Law and Diplomacy (MALD) candidate the Fletcher School at Tufts University, focusing on Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization, and Human Security. She serves as a Staff Editor on Fletcher's primary academic journal, The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, and is a co-leader of the Fletcher Islamic Society. Seher received her BA from the University of California, Irvine in International Studies and Linguistics, with a certification in Middle East Studies. She spent the previous two years working in corporate immigration law as a paralegal. Her research interests include democratization and good governance strategies in the Islamic context. She is fluent in Urdu and French and is studying Arabic and Turkish.

Phillip Shattan

Phillip Shattan will graduate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 2018 with a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy. At the Fletcher school, his focus has been on the Asia-Pacific region, The Middle East, and international political economy. At Fletcher, he has worked as a staff editor at the Fletcher Security review and is co-president of the China Club. Before coming to Fletcher, he spent two years teaching English in Shenzhen, China. He hopes to continue researching the evolving relationship between East Asia and The Middle East.

Margaret Snyder

Maggie Snyder is a recent graduate of The Fletcher School at Tufts University, where she received her Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy. At Fletcher, Maggie specialized in International Negotiation and Conflict Resolution and International Security Studies. Maggie served as president of the Fletcher International Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Club, as well as the Fletcher Christian Fellowship. Previously, Maggie focused on conflict resolution efforts for Burundi and Boko Haram at the Department of State, Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Prior to Fletcher, Maggie worked at the RAND Corporation in Washington, DC, and advocated for human rights at the United Nations and European Union with the World Youth Alliance.

Elayne Stecher

Elayne Stecher graduated from Tufts University in 2014 with a B.A. in Arabic and International Relations. She currently works at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, where she has continued her study of international affairs as a part-time student. This fall, she will matriculate into the Master's Program through the Committee on International Relations at the University of Chicago. Her research interests include the role of sub-state groups in global politics; the impact of terrorism; and the future of countries with a legacy of violent extremism.

Eli Stiefel

Eli Stiefel is a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy (MALD) candidate in the class of 2018 at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. At Fletcher, Eli specializes in the fields of International Conflict Resolution and Negotiation, and International Security Studies. Eli is also on the editorial staff of the Fletcher Security Review, a student run journal, and a recipient of the Sarah Scaife Frank Rockwell Barnett Memorial Grant in International Security Studies. Prior to

attending Fletcher, Eli worked in a boutique immigration law firm in Cambridge, MA and spent a year studying Arabic in Fez, Morocco.

Anna Thomas

Anna Thomas is a dual MBA/MPA student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Harvard Kennedy School, where she focuses on opportunities for private sector contribution to international development in the Middle East and Central Asia. Previously, Anna worked for the US Department of State, McKinsey & Company, and Khan Academy, and also completed an internship with Nike. At Harvard, Anna works at the Middle East Initiative, and conducted research through the Asia Center on private sector disaster relief efforts in Southeast Asia.

Dana Wolf

Dana Wolf is a lecturer at the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya where she focuses on public international law, especially international humanitarian law and international criminal law, as well as on international conflict resolution and negotiation. She previously was a Research Fellow at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, served as an Adviser to the Legal Counselor at the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations in New York and practiced law in the criminal litigation department at the top Israeli law firm S.Horowitz & Co. She holds an S.J.D. from American University Washington College of Law, an LL.M from NYU School of Law, as well as an LL.B from IDC Radzyner School of Law and a B.A. in Business Administration (Finance) from IDC Arison School of Business.

APPENDIX A   **REFERENCES**

Part One, Chapter II: *Literature*

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34   For example, the telling comment by Industry Minister Abdeslam Bouchouareb to the head of the far-left Workers Party, Louisa Hanoune, that General Mediène and the DRS would no longer be able to protect her in response to her complaints about a corruption allegation run in a media outlet close to the government. This shows a clear understanding that such partnerships existed in the past. Though Mediène may no longer be officially in a position of power, the network of the DRS is not likely to have been completely dismantled. Robert S. Ford "Challenges Ahead for Algeria in 2016," The Middle East Institute, January 5, 2016, accessed December, 29, 2016. http://www.mei.edu/content/article/challenges-ahead-algeria-2016 see also Abdallah Brahimi, "Algeria's Cabinet Reshuffle," June 2, 2015, accessed: December 28, 2016. http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/60285

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AQAP: Salafi Spoiler: The Middle East Strategy of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

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Rohan Gunaratna
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11	Ibid
12	http://image.slidesharecdn.com/aqapmid-levelleadershipslidedeck-150603200750-lva1-app6892/95/al-qaeda-in-the-arabian-peninsula-midlevel-leadership-8-638.jpg?cb=1433435204
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14	An AEI Critical Threat Project statistic from 2015 has the US and Yemeni forces eliminating 59 out of 63 mid-level commanders in the organization. http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/koontz-aqap-mid-level-leadership-june-3-2015
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25	https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf
26	Ibid
27	http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/maps/view/alqaeda
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36	The former AQ branch in Syria, now disaffiliated from AQ central and renamed as Jabhat al Fatah.
37	However, the rise of ISIS has caused a few smaller jihadi groups to switch their allegiance from AQ to ISIS. This, as far as we know, does not seem to have a huge organizational impact on either organization.
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