

The Middle East: Thinking About and Beyond Security and Stability

by Eliza Friederichs



ABSTRACT

On 7–8 February 2019, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) organised a two-day international conference within the framework of the New-Med Research Network. Several leading scholars and prominent journalists gathered at AUB to address a number of security-related issues, all connected to one main question: What does (in)security mean from the perspective of people living in the Middle East and North Africa?

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Introduction

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) organised a two-day international conference on 7–8 February 2019. Several leading scholars and prominent journalists gathered at AUB to address a number of security-related issues, all connected to one main question: What does (in)security mean from the perspective of people living in the Middle East and North Africa?

The meeting took place within the framework of the New-Med Research Network – a project developed by the IAI, Compagnia di San Paolo, the OSCE, the German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation¹ – and benefited from support provided by the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS) and the PSPA Department at AUB.

The conference was divided into four panel sessions. The first addressed the concept and practice of sectarianism and identity formation from a historical perspective. The second approached the security/insecurity nexus from a conceptual point of view, highlighting how scholarship has defined and addressed (in)security in the region. In the third panel, the production of (in)security was assessed in relation to the role of international actors/institutions and regional actors, especially highlighting the repercussions of extensive arms supply into the

¹ Since 2014, the New-Med Research Network has organised over 40 international conferences and workshops, and published 39 edited volumes, policy papers and reports covering a wide range of topics connected to the Mediterranean. Most recently, the network published an edited book: see Lorenzo Kamel and Asli Selin Okyay (eds), *Realizing Youth Potential in the Mediterranean. Unlocking Opportunities, Overcoming Challenges*, Rome, Nuova Cultura, October 2018, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/9617>.

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· Report of the New-Med international conference entitled “The Middle East: Thinking About and Beyond Security and Stability”, held in Beirut on 7-8 February 2019 and organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

region. The fourth and final session focused on the issue of security/insecurity from a bottom-up perspective – i.e. from the perspectives of the people in the region – and shed light on human security, the deterioration of socio-economic conditions, and state–society relations.

The conference was introduced by some welcome remarks delivered by **Karim Makdisi**, Associate Professor of International Politics at the American University of Beirut; **Lorenzo Kamel**, Associate Professor of History at the University of Turin, Senior Fellow at IAI and scientific director of the New-Med Research Network; and **Charlotte Brandsma**, Senior Program Officer for Mediterranean Policy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Speakers welcomed the various participants at the Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs, a modern building located on the AUB campus and designed by Zaha Hadid, by pointing to the current challenges affecting the security and stability of the region.

To introduce the conceptual framework for the conference, speakers emphasised the necessity of going beyond static understandings of security (and stability) by taking current dynamics that are creating instability and insecurity in the region – such as increased militarisation, the sectarianisation of conflict, and a changed role of the US on the international political stage – as a point of departure to historically and conceptually deepen and to reassess the discourse on (in)security. The premise of this conference was that it is vital to undertake a more critical analysis of such concepts and practices, and better contextualise them in their historical and social realities.

Throughout the conference, some recurring themes were raised by the panellists, such as the problematic tendency among many scholars, policymakers and the media to refer simplistically to the “sectarianisation” of conflicts, shaped by primordial perceptions rather than a deeper and more rigorous contextualisation. Such mainstream perceptions, participants agreed, often serve the interests of external actors who seek justifications for intervention. Thus, a non-Eurocentric and bottom-up perspective in considering the regional dimension when it comes to addressing questions of security and stability might trigger more productive discussions.

Introductory remarks

Representatives of the organisers and institutional partners of the New-Med Research Network delivered introductory remarks, providing an outlook over the critical discussion to follow, and raising pressing questions on (in)security in the region. **Karim Makdisi** welcomed the speakers by stressing the importance of elaborating on the “beyond” aspect, because we have to go deeper historically and conceptually to critically reflect on security dynamics in the region. In this regard, Lebanon for instance could be taken as a starting point to investigate what security means from a local or regional perspective, applying a bottom-up approach. To mention a positive example where this approach has been materialised, Karim

Makdisi pointed towards the creation of the Critical Security Studies Working Group at the ACSS – one of the sponsors of this conference – and the publication of the related *Beirut School for Critical Studies* in 2016.² A key contribution of this working group is to think about what security (and stability) means from the perspective of people experiencing conflict and violence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which is subject to constant external interventions. The idea is also to link up with other such critical views in the larger Global South. Makdisi concluded his remarks by expressing the hope that this regional bottom-up, critical perspective on security and stability would be applied in the upcoming sessions.

Lorenzo Kamel agreed with Karim Makdisi regarding the need for providing non-Eurocentric perspectives on security-related issues and outlined the reasoning and the content of the conference. He pointed out that in a number of articles published in Western media in recent years, the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean appear as somehow distant and obscure regions. Yet, what the region is experiencing should not in any way be perceived in these terms, or as someone else's history. This, not – or not only – in light of a relatively distant past, but also a present that hinders the construction of a sustainable future. In line with this, Lorenzo Kamel asked whether, in a comparative perspective that takes into account the region's past, massive military supplies did in fact help to stabilise the region, and if this has provided any sort of positive regional effect. One of the most meaningful possible answers, he contended, can be found in the data provided by the US State Department, according to which "incidents of terrorism" have increased by 6500 per cent since the "war on terror" began in 2001: half of these have been registered in Afghanistan and Iraq, whose destabilisation has had a sort of earthquake effect throughout the entire region.

Lorenzo Kamel concluded by stressing that the content of several studies on the use of weapons – such as armed drones – carried out by some leading international think tanks, including many based in Washington, has been strongly influenced by the donors' agenda. He also mentioned that too often "we" tend to approach the dramatic present of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean as something pertaining to peoples and countries that are largely detached from our political, historical and economic past and present. It is instead necessary to overcome this segregated interpretation of "our history" and "their history", paving the way for a more humble approach toward the peoples' region and their traumas.

Charlotte Brandsma, Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, concluded the introductory remarks by sincerely thanking the IAI, PSPA/AUB and Karim Makdisi for organising and hosting the event, as well as the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Arab Council for Social Sciences, the Compagnia di San Paolo and the OSCE for their funding. As a partner of the New-Med network,

² See the Beirut Forum website: *The Beirut Security Studies Collective*, <http://www.thebeirutforum.com/our-vision>.

the very active Mediterranean programme at GMF benefits from New-Med as a good resource for its policy reports, Brandsma stressed. It is more important than ever to be present in the discussions on the Middle East, considering that EU and US perspectives have much diverged recently regarding this region. This increasing rift in the transatlantic relationship has been analysed by Brandsma's GMF-colleague Kristina Kausch in her article "Balancing Trumpism: Transatlantic Divergence in the Middle East".³ Continuing the theme of divergence in the global political order, Brandsma ended her welcome remarks by raising the following question for subsequent discussion: What does this divergence mean for further prospects of instability and insecurity in the MENA region?

Session I: "Security" and "stability" in the Middle East: the historical dimension

Chaired by **Lorenzo Kamel**, the first session aimed at historicising the problematic framing of sectarianism. To this end, the role of external powers in the region as well as the production of sectarian and identity formations on a domestic/regional level were considered.

Nader Hashemi, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies and Associate Professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, opened by thanking the organisers for stressing the importance of addressing security in the MENA region from a bottom-up perspective. In providing a few historical reflections on sectarianism, Hashemi argued that the problem of sectarian conflict today should be rooted in politics rather than theology. Moreover, he argued that widely popular explanations for the rise of sectarianism in the Middle East today are often based on intellectually lazy and simplistic explanations that need to be challenged if we are to advance an understanding of this important topic.

There are three schools of thought, according to Hashemi, which have sought to explain the rise of Sunni–Shia conflict in the Middle East today. Drawing upon his 2017 published book,⁴ he argued that the first school of thought seeks to explain the topic as a function of ancient sectarian hatreds that have deep historical roots. Hashemi quoted US Senator Rand Paul, who recently argued that Sunnis and Shia have been "fighting each other since the Battle of Karbala [in] 832 A.D." This framing is widely believed in the West among policy analysts and the media. It is also widely erroneous. It is, in addition, connected to the Arab Spring revolutions and is sometimes used to justify Western backing for authoritarian regimes. The argument is that the regional "chaos" of the Arab Spring resulted from the loosening

³ Kristina Kausch, "Balancing Trumpism: Transatlantic Divergence in the Middle East", in *GMF Policy Briefs*, No. 38 (December 2018), <http://www.gmfus.org/node/13184>.

⁴ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (eds), *Sectarianization. Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.

of the power of authoritarian regimes who allegedly kept a lid on sectarian tensions. By this logic, the solution to sectarianism is to back dictatorship in the Middle East in the name of stability. Hashemi went on to argue that even President Obama was a proponent of the narrative of the ancient sectarian hatreds. In a 2016 interview Obama said that in the Middle East, "the only organizing principles are sectarian". The second school of thought comprises journalists, political activists and some policy analysts who are motivated by "good intentions" toward the region. They seek to interpret sectarian conflict as result of the legacy of European colonialism using the 1916 Sykes–Picot agreement as a point of departure. Nader Hashemi quoted from Robin Wright, an influential US journalist who has advanced this thesis by linking the fate of Sunnis in Eastern Syria with Sunnis in Western Iraq who might want to form a "Sunnistan",⁵ in place of the existing state system that was formed in the Middle East over a century ago. Hashemi criticised this argument that sectarianism might be alleviated by redrawing the borders in the Middle East. He argued that this approach misunderstands the roots of the problem. "It is not where the borders have been drawn", he argued, "but what has been happening within those borders politically over the past century". The third school of thought that Hashemi referred to in seeking to explain sectarian conflict is rooted in myth and folklore and exists within both Sunni and Shia communities. Stereotypes are produced and perpetuated from generation to generation. For example, some Sunnis believe that Shias are not authentically Muslim and have always been disloyal citizens and thus cannot be trusted. Similarly, some Shia also hold pejorative views of Sunnis that are rooted in longstanding myths and stereotypes.

According to Nader Hashemi, if you want to understand sectarian conflict today, you must begin in the year 1979 not 632 A.D. (when the Prophet Muhammad died). It was the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran that was the key moment which brought the Sunni/Shia issue into play. Prior to the 1979, Hashemi argued, there is zero evidence of sectarianism in the politics of the region. During the post-WW II era the primary sources of regional conflict revolved around what Malcolm Kerr called an "Arab Cold War" that was fought between revolutionary Arab nationalist republics versus conservative monarchies. Finally, Hashemi discussed the case of Jamal din al-Afghani (the founder of Modern Islamic Political Thought). He pointed out that in his writings and lectures in the late 19th century, Afghani did not discuss sectarianism. It was not a topic that concerned him or his intellectual successors in the Islamic world (especially among mainstream political Islamist groups). The fact that Afghani hid his Shia background, however, suggests that he was aware of sectarian differences among Muslims. Hashemi suggested that this story undermines the romanticised claim that all was wonderful between Sunnis and Shia. If this were true, there would have been no reason for Afghani to present himself as a Sunni (when he was born and educated in Shia Iran). Hashemi concluded by stressing that sectarianism hasn't been the main issue of conflict in the Middle East and its manifestation is a recent development in the politics of region.

⁵ Robin Wright, "Imagining a Remapped Middle East", in *The New York Times*, 28 September 2013, <https://nyti.ms/18bGCnl>.

The second speaker, **Morten Valbjørn**, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Aarhus University in Denmark, asked whether it makes sense to speak about a “new Middle East” or whether we are instead witnessing some kind of return to the past. That is, is there a historical analogy between the “revolutions” of 2011 and 1789, 1848, 1952, 1979 and 1989? Further, to what extent are our past theories and analytical approaches to Middle Eastern politics still useful, or have they been made obsolete by changes in the Middle East since 2011? These questions were examined through discussion of whether and how current regional rivalries should be grasped in terms of some sort of “regional cold war” carrying similarities with the classic “Arab Cold War” of the 1960s. In his presentation, Valbjørn argued that it does not make sense to speak of some sort of “replay”, as the regional and global contexts of today are fundamentally different from those of the 1960s. The global context is no longer defined by a bipolar superpower rivalry and the regional system has also changed. Iran and the Gulf states are more important players today, whereas Egypt is less important. While supra-state identities do still play a role in regional politics, the most important of these is no longer Arabism and, compared with the past, today the Israeli–Palestinian conflict carries less significance. Instead the Saudi/Iran divide has become a much more important regional cleavage, and as for supra-state identities, sectarianism has become much more influential. So historical analogies are not useful if they are applied based on an assumption that history repeats itself. Still, they can be useful, if they are used not to seek firm answers but to identify perhaps neglected questions and issues to consider. Thus, the classic Arab Cold War carries a number of lessons of relevance for today. Among others, it serves as a reminder of how regional rivalries are sometimes more important in terms of expanding domestic/regional influence than in terms of military involvement. The presence of supra-state identities in regional conflicts can also contribute to the blurring of international/domestic distinctions, where regional rivalries are played out through proxies in domestic theatres. Yet another lesson learned from the past is that a shared identity can also promote conflict rather than cooperation, as reflected in the inter-Arab rivalries among Nasserists and Ba’thists. So, all in all, historical analogies can be a useful tool in the analyses of the present. However, they are more useful as a generator of questions than as a provider of answers, concluded Morten Valbjørn.

Yonca Köksal, Associate Professor, Department of History at Koç University in Istanbul, ended the first panel by focusing on how findings in Ottoman history can be linked to the notions of tribalism and sectarianism, which are often misrepresented today. Thereby, Köksal proposed a new reading of socio-political developments in the Tanzimat era.⁶ First, sectarian conflicts are more of a political, social and economic nature than of a religious one. The Ottomans never used the term sectarian until the late nineteenth century when the millet system was introduced, but they used ta’if, cemaat, or aşiret to define local communities.

⁶ For further reading, see Yonca Köksal, *The Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat Era. Provincial Perspectives from Ankara to Edirne*, London/New York, Routledge, 2019.

The community life was not static, but there were multiple layers of everyday interaction between communities, social-, economic-, and religious-wise. Further, she argues that the millet system is idealized by academics and in contemporary Turkey, but religious communities were not treated equal within the system, it was based on the superiority of Muslim subjects instead. Since the introduction of new state policies regarding the millet system in the course of the Tanzimat reforms in the late nineteenth century, sectarian identities became more politicized. Second, another stereotype is that change in the region only was induced from outside, and that socio-political structures before the French interventions in the early 19th century and the introduction of the Tanzimat reforms were stagnant. This approach contains an Orientalist way of thinking, the speaker claimed, since no options for change are assigned to the Ottoman context before the nineteenth century. Third, tribes and tribalism are referred to by the West as stagnant and archaic entities, but examples from Africa or Asia show that they are quite actively engaged in everyday politics. Therefore, tribal loyalties are still crucial in challenging state authority until today, and are perceived as a security threat, since they endanger the concept of national unity. Today's tribal activities can be linked to Ottoman state policies in the late 19th century in the Black Sea region, Central Anatolia and Arab provinces, since tribes were considered as problematic already back then. However, the settlements which were imposed to condemn their activities, reinforced tribal identities. Consequently, the state failed in terms of bringing loyalty to the tribes, and the state policies imposed also harmed the economy, since trade relations/networks between tribes, state authorities and money lenders were shattered.

Köksal concluded the session by stressing that political top-down induced settlements brought problems instead of progression, since tribal identities were reinforced. The lesson we can learn for today is that the maintenance of social and economic networks based on an everyday basis, which predated the Tanzimat reforms were crucial and that instead of attempting to abolish tribal structures, states and tribes can learn to coexist while managing these social and economic networks on a daily basis.

Session II: Thinking critically about (in)security in the Middle East

Chaired by **Rami G. Khouri**, Senior Fellow and Adjunct Professor of Journalism at the American University of Beirut, the second session set out to explore conceptual and scholarly underpinnings regarding (in)security in the Middle East on both the regional and local levels.

Meliha Benli Altunışık, Professor at the Department of International Relations at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, opened the panel proceedings by raising two questions: (1) how has the security situation changed since 2011? What have been the continuities and the discontinuities; and (2) how has scholarship defined (in)security? Meliha Altunışık detected a more region-based security understanding in terms of security/insecurity since 2011. The prioritizing of the region as a site of security and (in)security has become more pronounced. While

external factors remained crucial, they stand in a dialectical relationship with the regional framework.

A corollary of this is to deal with the question of how we perceive the regions. This is not necessarily only a problem of definition but rather to deal with the fluidity of regional borders and the issue of how the Middle East links with neighboring regions, a development that increased after 2011. Growing rivalry between three blocks expanded the boundaries of the region. A new development since the Arab uprisings is the emergence of new blocs (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates; and Turkey and Qatar) and the establishment of new military bases, in Djibouti for instance by Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in addition to the competition of regions. Moreover, we can observe an increased securitization of regional identities since 2011 in terms of sectarian and ethnic identities. A continuing trend has been securitization of sectarian identities. Yet in the post-Arab Spring period there has been securitization of ethnic identities. Non-Arab involvement in the region largely characterized as an “intrusion” and a security threat. Similarly, we witnessed Turkey’s “re-securitization” of Kurdish identity. The speaker argued, the threat perceptions have evolved mostly from within (i.e. regime security), considering the Muslim Brotherhood- “threat” in Egypt, the speaker argued.

How has scholarship defined the region? The IR theory of Realism is still largely applied to analyze conflicts in the regions, since the emphasis on the state is still crucial in the debate on (in)security after 2011. Further, the issue of human security (i.e. refugees) and physical security challenges (i.e. authoritarian states) is high on the agenda, as well as the proliferation of violent non-state actors. But violent extremist groups mimic the state, and, in this sense, they are not exceptional. Altunışık ended her presentation in highlighting that challenges, which existed before 2011, have been deepened after 2011 and produced insecurity in terms of the politicization of sectarian identities. Despite the rise of violent non-state actors mimicking the state, states arguably remain the main actors of producing (in) security in the region, she concluded.

Waleed Hazbun, Associate Professor for Political Studies and Public Administration, proceeded with a conceptual approach to security studies in his presentation by critically assessing its normative underpinnings. The security discourse is often framed as a normative political order to provide stability. In this sense, Hazbun claimed that security has always been framed by scholars of the region according to a normative understanding of the global political order. Further, threats in insecurity have been explicitly and implicitly defined in relationship to the structure of a political order that is understood to produce security. So, Hazbun suggests a critical approach to thinking about security in the region: first, to critically assess the dominant normative understanding of the regional order; and second, in recognising viable understandings of order (i.e., UN, international law, alternative political forces). In a third step, we need more alternative conceptions of order from which a new critical approach can be framed for security studies. To this end, Hazbun suggests the approach of a pluralist political order without a

regional hegemon.

Especially since the US invasion in Iraq in 2003, the security discourse towards the region, even from the perspective of Middle Eastern states and societies, is determined by notions of security and insecurity depending on a US-dominated regional order. Consequently, local actors fail to recognise that they have agency, and the prevalent normative regional order fails to understand hierarchical power relations and is therefore blind to the notion that the US has crucial influence on shaping the regional order and insecurity in the region. Nevertheless, the relative decline of US leverage on the regional order has made the concept of a US-dominated regional order less feasible, thereby bringing confusion to the US policy debate. The current moment is one in which alternative approaches to security in the region might arise.

The concept of regional order is highly fragmented, shaped by political rivalry and different security interests. Thus, the self-defined regional security system lacks a normative order. In order to develop a critical approach towards security studies, we need to rethink the understanding of global order and the possibilities of a Middle East regional order within that system. However, forms of US design of the Middle East regional order continue to dominate the discourse, and local perceptions of regional order are often at odds with the dominant normative regional order shaped by the US. This is due to the fact that the Middle East became integrated into the global political and economic structures in the course of the establishment of nation states. Eventually, these new states became embedded into the framework of international state order that has prevailed since the late 19th century, gaining security, resources and aid from external actors. This, Hazbun argued, led to a deterioration of state–society relations in the region and states failing to provide security for their citizens. This in turn gave rise to trans- and supra-state identities culminating in the rise of Arab Nationalism/Nasserism in the 1950s and 1960s, which challenged the influence of external actors on the regional political system. By the 1970s, state power was consolidated. In the course of rising insecurities among societal groups in the 1990s, however, the US became dominant in terms of defining the global and regional order and the Middle East security architecture. Since then, politics were understood as either opposing or going with the US-dominated regional order and ignored alternative conceptions, and the US invasion in 2003 led to the fragmentation of the regional state system.

The Arab uprisings and civil wars in various countries gave rise to a post-American order, the speaker proposed. In this sense, we witnessed the transformation from a US-dominated regional security architecture to a fragmented multipolar system lacking norms and balancing mechanisms, which was not the result of US retreat or a power vacuum but can be considered as a US effort to apply force on the region within the context of an emerging multipolar system on the global level. Waleed Hazbun closed his presentation by pleading for a more bottom-up regional order without a regional hegemon, to minimise conflict and insecurity in the Middle East.

Ayman Khalil, Director of the Arab Institute for Security Studies in Amman, Jordan, introduced his presentation by mentioning good and bad news related to the state of security in the MENA region: the battle against terrorism is progressing very well, but non-state actors are regaining power. Therefore, a security architecture for the Mediterranean is highly necessary. To start with the existing infrastructure, Khalil mentioned the Euro-Mediterranean Process and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) within the Mediterranean framework – which however, he pointed out, lack an agenda.

The Middle East is a strategically important region, congested by international alliances (i.e., US-led coalition against ISIS). Further, there is an “Arab alliance” (Saudi, Pakistani and GCC observers) engaged in Yemen, and there is a trilateral alliance operating inside Syria (Iran, Russia and Syria). However, the communication within these alliances is rather unstable and uncoordinated. Thus, the formation of international alliances has failed to bring security and stability and has instead delivered regional instability and insecurity.

In a nutshell, on the one hand the Arab Spring led to the downfall of Arab traditional players (Iraq, Syria and Egypt), and on the other hand Israel and Iran emerged as regional hubs and Russia appeared to be victorious in filling the void created by the repercussions of the so-called America First Policy. So, in analysing security in the MENA region, we must apply a pragmatic approach in addressing symptoms instead of root causes. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict and especially the Israeli occupation are still destabilising factors in the region, causing radicalisation and giving rise to violent movements (i.e., huge recruiting during the Israel–Gaza conflict in 2014). Finally, the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) is another factor of instability in the region, which together with Israel’s nuclear presence would lead into a non-conventional arms race.

Session III: Producing (in)security in the Middle East: the regional perspective

Lorenzo Trombetta, a Beirut-based journalist and Middle-Eastern Senior Correspondent for Italian news agency Ansa and chair of the third panel, introduced the session by setting out to explore the production of regional insecurity by considering the destabilising effect of regional and global powers in the MENA region.

Youssef Cherif, a Political Analyst and Head of the Columbia Global Center in Tunis, opened the fourth panel by arguing that the current Qatar crisis, which broke out in 2017, amplified the “Arab war of narratives”, contributing to the political polarisation (Islamists vs. Secularists) in Arab countries including North Africa since the so-called Arab uprisings in 2011. According to Cherif, the upsurge of insecurity and instability is partly a result of Qatari policies and propaganda and the joint Saudi and Emirati reactions. Considering the MENA region in general and the North African perspective in particular, the production of fake news by Gulf

players has emerged as a factor of instability.

Since the Arab citizenry is highly interconnected via Internet and TV channels, news is spread widely and rapidly. In the MENA media landscape, this “war of narratives” has been going on for two decades but is often neglected in analyses of the region. However, this “war” has contributed to the securitisation and polarisation of politics, and the speaker takes Libya and Tunisia as examples. Concretely, the political opponent, for example one with relations to Qatar or Turkey, is constructed as a foreign spy and therefore poses a security threat in the Saudi or Emirati media outlet, to be eliminated instead of fought by democratic means.

Although Pan-Arabism failed – referring back to Bahgat Korany⁷ – its language is still persistent in the spread of fake news/polarised narratives from both camps, argued the speaker. Both still use Israel as an enemy; the “Qatar camp” for instance criticises the alliance of “dictatorships” like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt with Israel. The Saudi/Emirati/Egyptian camp, on the other side, points to an alleged relationship between Qatar and Israel that produces instability. For the Saudi/UAE/Egypt alliance, security and stability is decisive, and comes through the fight against political Islam (and democracy). From the Qatari and Turkish perspective on the other side, it is important to achieve democracy, through the inclusion of political Islam. Both claim that their ultimate goal is to transform the Arab world, and also to liberate Palestine. The propaganda is well precepted among the gullible population of the MENA region, even though they take notice of the destabilising effect of the Gulf countries in their internal politics.

Cherif concluded his presentation by emphasising that the provocative and inflammatory language used by both camps has led to fear and disdain in the public sphere and the polarisation between so-called secularists and Islamists. Politicians are seen as traitors, terrorists or corrupt individuals, creating a feeling of distrust within the society. Thus, dictatorship is gradually seen as a more stable and favourable order than democracy, among the population in Libya and Tunisia, argued the speaker.

Coralie Pison Hindawi, Associate Professor of International Politics and Law at the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut, and member of the Critical Studies on Security in the Arab Region network (Beirut Collective), contributed to this panel discussion by critically reflecting on Western policies towards disarmament/arms control as well as arms transfers and military assistance in and to the region and how important these aspects are for security in the region. Western countries in particular are highly engaged in the transfer of military means to the region. Paradoxically, they

⁷ Cited in Pinar Bilgin, “Region, Security, Regional Security: ‘Whose Middle East?’ Revisited”, in Elizabeth Monier (ed.), *Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings. Narratives of Security and Threat*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 19-39.

are also engaged in the construction of norms to enable a better regulation of the transfer and possession of arms, stressed Pison Hindawi. The MENA region has witnessed extensive processes of arms control and disarmament in the last decades, especially in the non-conventional sector, i.e. biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, often called weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). For instance, Iraq was obliged in the 1990s, through the most intrusive process ever adopted, to dismantle its biological and chemical weapons arsenal, along with its nuclear weapons programme. Libya post-2003 and Syria later in 2013–14 followed suit with the dismantlement of their chemical weapons programmes. In the light of the “Iran-nuclear deal” brokered in 2015, Iran is now subjected to the most stringent form of monitoring ever designed for a nuclear programme. The Security Council was involved in all of these cases, with its Western permanent members playing a leading role. As for conventional arms transfers to the Middle East, the region has seen a huge increase, with Western states holding high stakes. According to recent figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, from 2013 to 2017 there was a global increase in arms exports, with the P5 (US, Russia, France, China, UK) and Germany accounting for 80 percent of arms exports worldwide. During the same period, the Middle East accounted for 32 percent of global imports of weapons. Overall, three out of the five top arms importers were Arab countries, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE being the frontrunners and Algeria and Iraq ranking seventh and eighth. Even though China and Russia account for 28 percent of global arms exports, only 11 percent of their respective exports were directed to the region in the 2013–17 period. Overall, European and North American countries are the leading exporters to the region. US exports to Saudi Arabia, for example, increased by 448 percent between the 2008–12 and 2013–17 periods. In addition, the UAE buys a large number of weapons from North American and European countries, being the fourth largest importer worldwide. Though Israel is a more prominent exporter than importer, it continues to be a major military partner of Western countries. Israel receives the highest amount of US military assistance worldwide, oscillating between 2.5 and 3 billion US dollars annually since 2009, and with a recently adopted 40 billion dollar deal for the coming decade. In addition, transfers from Germany and Italy to Israel have increased in recent years.

Yet, selectivity is a crucial aspect in the field of arms transfer and arms control processes, emphasised the speaker. The massive exports to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE were accompanied by a UN Security Council weapons embargo on Iran, which became effective in 2006. For the 2013–17 period, Iran thus accounted for only one percent of arms imports by the region. Also, Israel was left out of the processes of non-conventional weapons disarmament, although it is the only state in the region to possess a nuclear arsenal.

How do these selective policies relate to the question of (in)security in the Middle East? In the course of disarmament processes in Iraq, there was a notion in the West that the Middle East cannot be safe when Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Muammar al-Gaddafi in Libya possess WMDs. Regarding arms transfers, there are now more legal norms regarding the effect of conventional weapons on human rights and security within the import state, i.e., the Arms Trade Treaty sealed in 2013.

Did these instruments play a significant role, though, in terms of the selection process for countries to export to? No, not really, argued Pison Hindawi. After the European Parliament voted in February 2016 in favour of an EU-wide arms export embargo on Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands was the only country that immediately implemented the non-binding measure. Now, Germany, Denmark and Finland have also adopted legal restrictions, for instance an arms export embargo on Saudi Arabia. But these efforts are pursued slowly, since Saudi Arabia is still relatively unchecked in taking military action in the devastating war in Yemen, or considering Israel's attacks on Gaza, benefitting directly or indirectly from Western military support. One would think that disarmament processes are a positive development and would have a positive effect on the increase of human and regional security. However, these processes are delusive due to their selective nature, stressed Coralie Pison Hindawi. Selective disarmament processes have left Israel in possession of the most powerful weapons while all other non-conventional arsenals have been dismantled on a regional level.

Consequently, the prospect of a concerted regional process to control arms and to build trust seems unlikely. Finally, what these policies show is that there are narrow and exclusive understandings of security in the West, mirrored in the selective disarmament and arms transfers processes. Eventually, this will lead to even more insecurity in the region with deteriorating implications for the local population. Despite a change in discourse and norms, and although the security consequences, for the Middle East and beyond, of the policies discussed here seem obvious, the speaker argued that the patterns haven't changed much. This is a tragedy, as just a fraction of the funds directed to the arms trade could radically improve the socio-economic situation of the region's "ordinary" population.

Abdallah al-Arian, Associate Professor of History at Georgetown University in Qatar and author of the book *Answering the Call: Popular Islamic Activism in Sadat's Egypt* published by Oxford University Press in 2014, took the floor as the third speaker to analyse regional security through the prism of Islamism and the Arab counterrevolutions. His first point was to propose a "periodisation". The Arab uprisings should not be looked at in the past tense but put into historical context, even though this is a way of thinking, which has entered already into conventional wisdom. The authoritarian upsurge in Egypt and the civil and proxy wars ongoing in Yemen, Libya and Syria are all continuing outcomes of the Arab uprisings, and the phase of mass mobilisation is not over yet, emphasised al-Arian. Secondly, the analysis undertaken by scholars of the region has been overly one-dimensional, neglecting to take into account differing developments in various countries. We need a more critical differential approach, especially with regard to the development of the Muslim Brotherhood in different countries. The different kinds of narratives in respective countries must be considered. A case in point is the division between secular and Islamist opposition, for instance in Egypt, which always has been analysed within this binary framework. Here, the narrative implies that the religious opposition was at odds with other civil society activists. However, the differences were less of a religious/secular nature than differences

between political strategies among activist groups, which were influenced by their various ideas of what a post-authoritarian transition should look like. Therefore, there was not really a religious/secular conflict in the post-Mubarak era as has often been portrayed, as for instance the Mursi constitution had more to do with the context of the post-authoritarian reality in Egypt than with religious notions. As a consequence, the narrative of secular vs. religious conflict needs to be deconstructed.

But what are the underlying reasons that uphold and reproduce this binary? Religion is instrumentalised here to counter the rise of a prospective Islamist counterrevolution in the form of political Islam, and in a second step, to support moderate versions of Islam. The actors in this political strategy game are the US or its regional allies, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, according to the speaker. Although the most recent construction of Islamist narratives by Islamist actors has always existed as a form of self-legitimation, the current developments need to be perceived in the context of the Arab Spring. Another binary conception, which was propagated by Saudi Arabia especially in the course of the Arab Spring, was the notion of "stability" (authoritarian regimes) vs. "instability" (forces of political change). In this narrative, the 2013 takeover by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Egypt has been perceived as recreating security in form of political stability and economic prosperity, but in fact the opposite was the case. The counterrevolution created power vacuums and a worsened economic security and economic situation, argued al-Arian.

The initial narrative of the Arab uprisings, construed as nonviolent and supported as a legitimate non-ideological cry for socio-political change, has more recently been downplayed by the West in constructing the success of Islamist political forces in democratic elections as a security threat in order to legitimise military interventions (i.e., Mursi's ouster in 2013). Finally, the current conflicts have been largely misrepresented and commodified by regional and global powers, through all of these false binaries. Al-Arian concluded by presenting two future visions for the region that are fundamentally at odds with each other: counterrevolutionary movements backed by their regional alliances and international support have defined themselves in opposition to an Islamist threat (i.e., linking the Muslim Brotherhood to terrorist activities in Sinai), as a façade behind which to hide from the demands brought up in the Arab uprisings in the first place.

Elijah J. Magnier, Al-Rai Chief Correspondent and Veteran War Correspondent, began his talk by highlighting that the security situation in Middle East differs from security in Europe and the world at large. To understand security in the region, we must first understand the conflicts the region has suffered from in the last decades. For instance, mis- and disinformation culminated in the miscategorisation of regional wars as sectarian. Further, it served the purpose of removing dictators and killing huge parts of the population as a pretext to demonstrate regional hegemony and to have access to natural resources. Also, the misinterpretation of events on the ground by respective media outlets has played into the hands of violent actors such as ISIS, helping them to recruit foreign fighters on a wide scale from all over

the world, emphasised Magnier. At the same time, these groups have received substantial funding from the region and around the world, thereby weakening religious minorities.

What initially led to the emergence of extremist groups in the region? The US invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s to push back the Soviet Union with the support of the Mujahideen gave rise to Al-Qaeda, as was further exacerbated by the US invasion in Iraq. Consequently, sectarian tensions were enforced in Iraq, bringing the notions of "Sunnistan", "Shiistan", etc. to the fore and contributing to the rise of ISIS, which became a global phenomenon recruiting fighters from all over the world.

With the emergence of ISIS in the course of the Syrian uprisings, all minorities became subject to ISIS atrocities, even Sunnis. Consequently, the war in Syria cannot be considered a sectarian war, proposed the speaker. The amount of money that was invested especially by Gulf states to topple the Syrian government, and for the aid needed today to reconstruct Syria, could have been used to improve the economic and educational situation and to create job opportunities for the population instead. In addition, the war in Yemen has been largely ignored by the Western media, enforced by the West's closest allies Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The situations in Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan have geo-political features in common, namely their geostrategic position and their energy resources – reasons for external powers to get involved. To sum up: Assad remains in power, Hezbollah has developed from a domestic actor to a strong regional actor with a strong army, Russia has increased its influence over the region, and Turkey has "scammed" the West with the migration deal. Further, the US idea to establish an Arab NATO is doomed to fail, eventually creating more conflict. However, the United States is still present in Syria, blocking the state's access to oil in the northeast of the country, and Turkey occupies northern parts of Syria with no perspective of a withdrawal any time soon.

The local population in Syria has been haunted by seven years of war and is displaced domestically, regionally and beyond, but Arab countries that were supporting the opposition have recently opened embassies and are signalling their support for the reconstruction of Syria. So, what were their stakes in the conflict? To push back Iran?

Magnier ended his talk by highlighting a few policy recommendations for Western countries. Although Iraq and Syria have natural resources, which are of interest to external powers, the West should invest in education, medicine and development instead of engaging in internal affairs. Beyond being on the frontline of migration, Europe and especially the southern Mediterranean member states could play a positive role in the region due to their geographical position.

Session IV: Beyond security: the region and its stability seen from within

Since the former sessions mainly addressed security in the Middle East from a macro analytical perspective, the fourth and final panel, chaired by **Natalia Sancha**, Correspondent for El País in Lebanon, aimed to shed light on the production of (in) security from a micro lens, investigating how people of the region are affected by political, social, economic and identity security in their daily lives.

Jamil Mouawad, lecturer at the American University of Beirut and a member of the Beirut School for Critical Security Studies, opened his talk by referring to the recent CNN interview with Lebanon's foreign minister Gebran Bassil, in which he was asked about the political and economic stagnation in the country. Apparently, Bassil joked about the fact that Lebanon could teach the UK and the US how to run a country without a budget, since Lebanon has learned to adapt to this kind of difficult situation in the past.

This anecdote, Mouawad emphasised, was not intended to show that there is no Lebanese state or that it is weak or has been taken over by non-state actors, but to ask what this situation in Lebanon tells us about how state, governments and state–society relations work and by whom security/insecurity is produced in the region. In this regard, three key points should be mentioned. First, two decades ago, Lebanon was barely integrated into the Arab state system, and was dismissed as “weak”. However, some scholars argue that the successfully managed power-sharing formula prevented Lebanon from becoming an authoritarian actor. In reality, and after 2011, Lebanon appeared as the most resilient state among its neighbours. Thus, the classification of strong/weak states should be overcome.

Second, Mouawad referred to the collapse of the Arab state system and the rise of sectarianism in the course of the Arab uprisings, with the war in Yemen and state failure in Libya. The state accordingly is no longer the main actor governing these spaces (i.e., militias, non-state actors). Thus, in Lebanon we can perceive the hybrid model of governance, and indeed the nature of the state itself, that is being reproduced elsewhere in the Arab world. Importantly, this is not a model where state and non-state actors stand in opposition to each other. The speaker posited the existence of something in between the public formal state and a parallel informal state, that is not opposed to the state, and where non-state actors gain their legitimacy from the state. As a result, instead of a power-sharing formula we see the sharing of state authority and resources between the state and non-state actors, and the weakening of the Arab republics such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen, which has intensified the rise of sectarianism to some extent. In this sense, sectarianism becomes contradictory to the idea of the nation state. However, these entities are not affecting but nourishing each other, which is why sectarianism cannot be perceived as independent from the state.

Third, we must understand politics as lived by people. Lebanon is only a weak state when it comes to the Western perspective on states, since Lebanese people only define their state as absent and not as weak, argued Mouawad. The state idea is strongly rooted in society, and this has actually prevented Lebanon from becoming a failing state. In fact, there are no stateless societies (i.e., tribes, sects), they only exist through states. However, Western journalists and academics have contributed to the rise of sectarianism by putting this aspect at the centre of analysis. According to Mouawad, sectarianism can sometimes even be irrelevant to understanding the Lebanese context. Authoritarian states use a certain image that they impose on their society to create security and lead them to believe that this is the only means of security. As is the case with authoritarianism, the strength in sectarianism lies in the ability of sectarian leaders to impose a certain image on people.

How then is this notion related to the starting point of formal/informal and state/non-state actors? We should not perceive the state as the sole locus of power, since power has become more and more diffused and less centred in state institutions, but rather shared between various actors. Yet, the formal public state remains the main source of privileges for elites and is still very much rooted in society, concluded the speaker. Finally, although the informal state provides services just as “traditional” states do, often in the name of the sect, it cannot act independently from the formal public state – they are intertwined and conflated.

Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, founding President of the Middle East Research Institute, a policy institute in Erbil, Iraq, took the floor as the second speaker in this panel to provide a bottom-up perspective regarding security in the region, since there has been much scrutiny coming from top-down approaches. The speaker’s first key point was that illegitimate stability and security, allegedly provided by the bipolar system inscribed in the Middle East and global order, have prevented the region from gaining legitimate stability.

The second key point is linked to state and non-state actors, which should be the focus of analysis, Aldeen stressed. We assume that the phenomenon of ISIS is new, but the very concept of states is new to the Middle East, it is just one hundred years old. Before the evolution of nation states, decentralisation in the form of vilayets was the modus vivendi, relying on the existing tribal structure. When borders were drawn, they were imposed followed by the formation of nation states around those borders. However, this project has failed, and we are witnessing the consequences today, since there was no adequate nation-building following these processes.

Third, at a recent conference in Baghdad with the Iraqi president, the Kurdish president and the leader of al-Haq, a listed jihadi leader worldwide, were present. Further, Hassan Nasrallah claimed quite recently that the Lebanese state has no capacities at present to run and defend itself, but that he has the means to get high tech weaponry, medical supplies, etc. What does this tell us about the situation we are in today regarding the discourse on state and non-state actors? Vertical and horizontal structures are intertwined, so global and regional/local actors shape the regional political order. Moreover, non-state actors don’t need official (legal)

legitimacy; they have it already and can determine events as they prefer to due to their international linkages, independent economic activities and provision of state-like local services to the population. Non-state actors engage in alliances and proxy relations with states, regional powers and superpowers, which are mutually beneficial in terms of power and interest. So, state and non-state actors are intertwined with actors at the local, regional, and international level. When borders were drawn roughly one hundred years ago, there were successful attempts to establish democratic structures in Iraq, for instance by the Hashemites and the British (i.e., checks and balances, constitution). In addition, sectarian rifts were almost non-existent, since Kurds, Shias and Sunnis and so on were integral components of Iraq, stressed the speaker. After thirty years, Iraq has been transformed into a nation state and all minorities have been treated relatively equal. But when King Faisal II was disposed, the idea of the Arab nation was realised in the form of a dictatorship starting in 1958 in Iraq, which gave rise to social fragmentation and sectarianism culminating in a genocide against the Kurds. After those fifty years of dictatorship, Iraq had become weak and bankrupt. In 2005, a new democratic constitution was established, but hopes soon diminished due to internal rivalries and a high level of corruption. The Sunni community has been internally divided and Kurds even more so.

The problem, according to Aldeen, is that some of the ethno/religious minorities are even militarised, and none of the local and regional actors accept the borders of Iraq. Therefore, stability and security can only be brought back eventually by promoting efforts of nation-building, institutionalisation and good governance. To give a prospect for the future: non-state actors are here to stay, a trend which started decades ago and cannot be reversed, since state structures are weak, and these actors are filling the gap.

Sarah Boukri, Board Member of the Moroccan Institute of International Relations, introduced her presentation by pointing towards significant geographical and political differences between North Africa and the Middle East as regions. For instance, North Africa as a region is less important for external actors when it comes to challenges regarding energy politics, since its oil reserves are not as big as in the Middle East. Further, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is treated with distance and the Sunni/Shia conflict is hardly on the table in this part of the MENA region. Moreover, North African countries haven't agreed on a common set of North African policies as is the case for the Middle East region but are promoting bi-national agreements.

Sarah Boukri focused on the North African region in her presentation and gave a quick overview of the state of the region country by country. The recent events in Tunisia (i.e., Ben Ali's departure, revolution, change of the government) have not been adequately digested. The security challenge for Tunisia today is the maintenance of national stability, and its example shows very well the interrelatedness of stability, security and human security in terms of economic development, social security, etc. Since tourism is Tunisia's main source of income, the terror attacks in the last years and the rise of violent extremism constitute a

big obstacle for economic development. Therefore, the focus should be directed towards countermeasures against violent extremism in order to enable economic development.

Algeria has enormous potential due to its abundance of natural resources (energy, fisheries, etc.) and regarding tourism. However, the current situation is muddled. According to the International Crisis Group, Algeria is economically and politically in a state of paralysis. Since the main source of income for the country is derived from oil, Algeria is suffering from the drop of the oil price in the period between 2014 and 2017. The worse state of the economy is reinforced by the uncertainty regarding the political legacy of 81-year-old president Abdel Aziz Bouteflika, who is expected to run for a fifth term in April. This deteriorating political and economic situation creates a rather tense social climate within the country.

Egypt is comparatively quite stable despite the terrorist insurgency in Sinai, where ISIS affiliate Ansar Bait al-Maqdis gained a foothold in 2014. Also, the border region with Libya is shaped by similar terrorist activities. Further, the demographic challenges Egypt faces (1.8 percent population growth expected for 2019) and its geographical proximity to the highly conflictual Gaza can be considered as security risks.

In taking into account the devastating situation in Libya, Sarah Boukri pointed out that foreign intervention, under the guise of human rights, dislodged Muammar al-Gaddafi. Despite his controversial political legacy, al-Gaddafi maintained a certain stability and provided economic development for the country. However, the problem was not Gaddafi's dislodgement but the fact that external powers left the country immediately after the intervention without helping to establish a political transition enabling the formation of a transitional government. This gave the opportunity to terrorist groups, human traffickers and drug dealers to fill the power vacuum and to step up their activities in the country. Libya provides a perfect textbook example of what the world would look like without state authority.

Mauretania hasn't experienced any terrorist attacks since 2011, which is good news in itself. Further, there are rumours that the Mauritanian government arranged an agreement with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which expects the Mauritanian government to pay a certain amount every year to prevent terrorist insurgencies, kidnappings, etc. In addition, public mistrust has been sown in light of a controversial constitutional reform in 2017, containing legal amendments that would pave the way for Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz to establish himself as an authoritarian leader.

Morocco, the only monarchy in the region, has a police regime, which is not directed against citizens, according to the speaker, but aimed at countering terrorism as well as groups and parties that are threatening the stability of the country. Although in a general sense the conditions are secure and there is no looming of a war-like situation, social insecurity is high among the population due to lack of governance, economic insecurity and a lack of public services.

Consequently, migration to Europe is on the rise, and increasingly involves the well-educated middle class striving for better opportunities in terms of education, health and public services, which constitutes a new phenomenon. Morocco thus has challenges concerning economy, migration and terrorism, but manages them in a calm way and adopting a global approach. The Moroccan government is trying to develop a specific economic and societal model.

To direct the focus back to the MENA region in its entirety, Boukri listed some key facts: The region has 74 percent of the oil reserves and four percent of the world's gas reserves at its disposal. Further, it has 340 million inhabitants and the main population is Arab of which the majority are Sunni Muslims. But education performance of the region is low (41 percent of the population has less than one year of education), and the situation for women is bad. Moreover, there is a lack of good governance, poor management of the distribution of natural resources, and decreased trust in politics and state structures. This has led to increased outward migration and brain drain in the last decade, as well as a rise of religious extremism on a domestic level. In conclusion, states tend to focus on regime security instead of human and social security, culminating in fragmentation of state–society relations. Boukri ended her talk by providing an outlook: confidence must be restored, the focus of policy makers should be on education and health, and finally, citizens must be empowered to shape the direction of their countries.

Yahia Zoubir, Professor of International Studies and Director of Research in Geopolitics at Kedge Business School, Marseille, began his talk as the final speaker in the panel by raising the thesis that, considering the times before 2011, we have returned to the status quo, since the creators of instability are back. Regarding the North Africa region, regional governments, no matter if they are illiberal democracies or hybrid regimes, are still trying to recreate and reorganise themselves, and have successfully managed to sustain rule so far by imposing limited reforms to ward off criticism and to create “stability”. For instance, the discourse on Libya is directed not towards establishing stability but towards containing instability. Considering the status quo in the MENA region, there are no efforts made by governments to orchestrate genuine reforms. Further, the concept of neo-patrimonialism must be revised vis-à-vis Algeria, since efforts have been made to sustain president Bouteflika's rule. He is about to enter his fifth term although he is not physically present in the public, a unique phenomenon in the MENA region. Thus, we are witnessing a return to the status quo security-wise, according to Zoubir.

Tunisia is at a standstill, since we are not looking at the core, considering the real cause of instability, which is unemployment among the youth, as well as their disenchantment, which eventually leads to their sympathy with jihadism and violent extremism. Thus, we should shift the focus towards issues of human security, authoritarianism and bad governance. In this sense, political exclusion accounts for instability due to the marginalisation of youth.

In terms of the discourse on regions, the Maghreb and Sahel can no longer be analysed separately, since we are witnessing more failed states like Niger, Mali and Libya, and there is a spillover coming from the devastating situation in Libya due to the increased mobilisation of the Touareg, which is active in the above-mentioned countries. In the course of the military strikes by the international coalition in 2012/13, the number of various militias was multiplied in North Africa, and violence and a high number of casualties were the consequence.

The "hard" security issues are rooted in political and socio-economic problems, though, and there is a correlation between the rise of violent extremism and the domestic situation in states like Libya for instance, which became a playing ground for regional and international politics. Another security issue, the speaker mentioned, is the return of foreign fighters coming back from Iraq and Syria. In taking into account the fruitful breeding ground for terrorism in Libya and the upswing of violent extremism in other MENA countries, de-radicalisation and re-integration have apparently failed in the region.

The speaker also elaborated on the trend of external powers' policies in the region. It has become clear that the US is back to support authoritarian regimes. Thereby, the focus will be on energy and counterterrorism strategies. Even countries that were sceptical of US influence in the region (i.e., Algeria) are jumping on the bandwagon now and stepping up their counterterrorism activities in Africa. In this sense, the US is bringing these regions closer together. Also, China is very present economically in the region and in Africa. According to the US National Security Strategy, however, instead of supporting development in Africa, the US will invest any means to counterbalance China. Moreover, Russia is coming back to the region with armament supplies. Last but not least, the European policies in the region within the framework of the Barcelona process (i.e., re-launching UfM) have failed. Zoubir concluded the last panel by arguing that the European Union has no real means to support development in the region anyway, due to its deep internal fragmentation among the member states.

Concluding remarks

Rosemary Hollis, Professor of Middle East Policy Studies at City University of London, opened the concluding session by outlining eight key points she had noted during the course of the seminar. First, Hollis thanked Nader Hashemi for identifying three schools of thought on the phenomenon of sectarianism – all appealing, but all flawed. One is the "ancient sectarian hatred" school, which claims that the region has been characterised by sectarian strife since the battle for Karbala; the second school, prevailing among well-intentioned commentators and journalists, dates the rise of sectarianism back to Sykes–Picot and the colonialist carve-up of the region; and the third school, which is the region's preferred theory, constructs both the Sunni and Shia essentialist terms. Her second point, derived from Morten Valbjørn's presentation, was to caution against assuming that history can provide prescriptions for the future, although it can trigger ideas

about how to understand the present. So, we should not overdo the production of historical analogies, but at the same time not dismiss the lessons we can learn from the past. Hollis's third point, gleaned from Yonca Köksal's presentation, was that many of the constructions and interpretations of Ottomanism do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, the millet system has been idealised or over-romanticised by academics and politicians as a basis for relatively peaceful coexistence between sects, ignoring the everyday negotiations that enabled that system to regenerate repeatedly. Fourth, referring to Meliha Benli Altunışık's presentation, Hollis thanked her for demonstrating how the issues which have been securitised, at one time or another, are constantly changing. A case in point is the Kurdish issue, which has been constructed as a big security threat one minute and not the next. Related to this, Hollis drew attention to the competing perspectives on security that Altunışık identified with the two axes or blocs represented by the UAE and Saudi Arabia (plus Israel) on the one hand, and Turkey and Qatar on the other. Fifth, Hollis concurred with Youssef Cherif, that these and other regional actors are engaged in a war of narratives. Narratives are a rich source of material for students of regional developments to trawl for insights – to find out who is deemed the "villain" and who the "hero" at any given time. Sixth, Hollis noted the value of Waleed Hazbun's emphasis on pluralism and the case he made for a "pluralist regional order" rather than a "regional security order". Seventh, as Ayman al-Khalil demonstrated, the area is congested with military alliances, and the "contribution" to security in the region by the suppliers of arms has been to construct norms for the control of WMDs. The eighth and last point made by Hollis in her summary of the presentations, was to highlight Abdullah al Arian's identification of the production of false binaries. One such false binary, embedded into the post-Arab Spring context, is the equation of revolution with instability and counterrevolutions with stability.

Finally, Hollis argued, governments in the MENA region and the West *choose* to misrepresent sectarianism for their own purposes, and they can only do this because the concept has *some* validity or traction. As scholars of the region, we should take that into account. Further, in her view, solidarity with the Palestinians comes from disenfranchised groups in the MENA region and the West alike, and this is because they identify with the Palestinians as the dispossessed and suppressed fighting for their rights. Ultimately, the alleged quest for regional security and stability involves two contradictory agendas. First, the demonisation of radical Islamic groups to detract from the need for fundamental reform, and to bolster authoritarianism. Second, the encouragement and enabling of instability –through interventions and regime changes – which then justifies authoritarianism.

Marta Dionisio, Officer at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, pointed out that the New-Med Research Network has been supported by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs since its beginning. Dionisio highlighted that Lebanon was a good choice to host this conference, since the Italian prime minister just recently visited Lebanon to signal Italy's support in working towards stability and security in that country. Italy is already engaged in security and peacekeeping missions in Lebanon and beyond through its participation in the UNIFIL mission in the Mediterranean country and its provision of military

cooperation and training for the Lebanese army. The notion of the enlarged region (from Morocco to the Gulf) is part of Italy's foreign policy, which considers the geographical connection via the Mediterranean Sea, and the deep historical, cultural and economic ties with the region. Due to the conflicts and crises in the region in the last years, which have affected Italy and Europe at large, Italy is eager to support initiatives aiming at reconstruction and stabilisation, especially in war-torn countries like Syria, Yemen or Libya. Besides the support of development and stability in these countries, we need a positive agenda, resilience and economic prosperity in the region, Dionisio emphasised. Finally, through a positive agenda we can enforce the potential of the region.

Ettore Greco, Executive Vice President of the IAI, wrapped up the sessions by emphasising that important points have been made but that they need to be deepened further. In thanking the participants for the fruitful debate, he stressed that security in the Middle East had been discussed comprehensively with a variety of critical and thought-provoking perspectives throughout the sessions, challenging conventional wisdom. Also fruitful was the historical perspective on the conflict dynamics in the course of the Arab Spring, and the repercussions for the situation today. We need to address persistent factors and the capacities of some states to maintain resilience.

The more pressing question that evolved throughout the debate was which types of commonalities do exist between the different Arab Spring countries. Also, the interplay between regional and external actors, and the configurations and changes in interregional relations (i.e., counterterrorism or border management between states of the MENA region and Africa) will eventually influence the conflict dynamics in the region, Greco stressed.

Further, there is the rise of violent non-state actors, although different views on their political role were raised in the debate, regarding their mimicking of traditional states for instance. With this in mind, we need to make a proper distinction between such actors. Another crucial aspect mentioned is the rise of sectarianism and identity politics, along with the question of what have been the main factors that fused and enforced these phenomena. In this regard, historical accounts were critically discussed. Regarding the domestic context, we face the question of which kinds of social transformation and reform governments should promote.

Moreover, the conference examined specific regional "long-burning issues" such as the Israel/Palestinian conflict, which still have an important symbolic function but whose overall impact on regional politics has been contentiously discussed. Within the New-Med project, we have been trying since 2014, when the project was established, to address the concept of security comprehensively and systematically. Greco ended his remarks by highlighting that the title "New-Med" was chosen to challenge the prevailing Euro-centric perspective on the region, to explore issues of regional cooperation, and to engage the new generations of scholars interested in these topics.

Conference Programme

Beirut, 7-8 February 2019

Introductory Remarks

Karim Makdisi, American University of Beirut (AUB)

Lorenzo Kamel, University of Turin / Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Charlotte Brandsma, German Marshal Fund of the United States (GMF)

Nicolò Russo Perez, Compagnia di San Paolo of Turin

Session I

'Security' and 'Stability' in the Middle East: The Historical Dimension

It has become increasingly common, in recent years, to come across academic and journalistic publications in which the Middle East is described as an inherently violent region 'splintered by sects and tribes'. Session I historicizes these perceptions and explores a complex milieu in which identities were largely flexible, contested, multifaceted. Attention will also be given to the role of external powers in the establishment of communal and/or sectarian institutions in the region as tools for putative stabilization, security and control, as well as on some of the concurrent local and national forms of adaptation and resistance. What do these historical lessons tell us about the ongoing debates on security and stability in the region?

Chair **Lorenzo Kamel**, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / University of Turin

Panelists **Nader Hashemi**, University of Denver

Nussaibeh Younis, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Morten Valbjørn, Aarhus University Denmark

Yonca Köksal, Koç University, Istanbul

Session II

Thinking Critically About (In)Security in the Middle East

With the intensification of political violence in the Middle East and the rise of populism and Islamophobia in the West, there is an increasing need to re-evaluate what security and insecurity means to people living in (but also moving in between) the Middle East, the Mediterranean and Europe. Session II lays out the "big picture" thinking about and conceptualizing questions of (in)security in the Middle East on both the regional and local levels. How has the production of (in)security in the region changed over the decades? What has been "secured", by whom, through which means, and for which purpose, and to whom has "security" been denied? How has scholarship defined (in)security and reflected on this issue?

Chair **Rami G. Khouri**, American University of Beirut

Panelists **Meliha Benli Altunışık**, Middle East Technical University, Ankara
Waleed Hazbun, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
Tarik M. Yousef, Brookings Doha Center
Ayman Khalil, Arab Institute for Security Studies (ACSIS), Amman

Session III

Producing (In)Security in the Middle East: The Regional Perspective

Session III explores the production of (in)insecurity, stability, and order on the regional level, including its international dimension. Speakers have been asked to shed light on a number of security-related topics, such as conflicts in the region and the role of global and regional powers in them, arms flows, securitization of refugees, the use of demographic movements, the politicization of identities, and the role multilateral institutions can play in the production of security (international law, the UN, the ICC, UNWRA, UNHCR, the GCC, the JCPOA, a proposed "Arab NATO" etc).

Chair **Lorenzo Trombetta**, ANSA, Beirut
Panelists **Youssef Cherif**, Columbia Global Center, Tunis
Coralie Hindawi, American University of Beirut
Abdullah Al-Arian, Georgetown University in Qatar, Doha
Elijah J. Magnier, Al Ra'i, 'Kuwait

Session III

Beyond Security: the Region and its Stability Seen from Within

Panel IV explores what a critical approach to thinking about (in)security means from the perspective of people living in the Middle East and North Africa. For decades, global actors such as the US, European states, and Russia have supported authoritarian regimes for "security" reasons. Together with some regional powers, they have invested enormous amount of resources in opposing the rise of any government or party/movement that could have represented a credible alternative to authoritarian regimes. For the large majority of people living in these contexts, this has provided a context of insecurity in their daily lives, including political, social, economic, or identity insecurity. Session IV will problematize these aspects, shedding light, on the one hand, on the contours of a stable and legitimate order that responds to the needs of the peoples in the region, and, on the other, on "human security", which encompasses the dimension of human rights, political rights and social/economic security: a crucial factor for the security of both single states and the region at large.

Chair **Natalia Sanchez**, El País, Beirut
Panelists **Jamil Mouawad**, American University of Beirut
Dlawer Ala'aldeen, Middle East Research Institute, Erbil
Sarah Boukri, Institut Marocain de Relations Internationales, Casablanca
Yahia Zoubir, Kedge Business School, Marseille

Concluding Remarks

Rosemary Hollis, City University of London

Marta Dionisio, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation

Ettore Greco, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affarinternazionali*), two book series (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

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- 19 | 05 Sinan Ekim, *Engaging Civil Societies in Turkey and Europe: Can They Break Through the Deadlock?*
- 19 | 04 Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, *La politica estera del Governo giallo-verde*
- 19 | 03 Alessandro Marrone e Michele Nones (a cura di), *Il futuro velivolo da combattimento e l'Europa: Executive Summary*
- 19 | 02 Alessandro Marrone and Michele Nones (eds), *Europe and the Future Combat Air System*
- 19 | 01 Nicoletta Pirozzi, Matteo Bonomi and Tiziano Marino, *Shaping the EU's Future through Differentiated Integration*
- 18 | 26 Maria S. Liperi and Asli Selin Okyay, *Policies and Politics of Migration towards the European Elections*
- 18 | 25 Luca Bergamaschi, *Italia e carbone: come uscire al 2025 in modo sicuro, giusto e sostenibile*
- 18 | 24 Karolina Muti e Livia Botti, *La sicurezza dell'Italia e la minaccia nucleare, biologica, chimica e radiologica*
- 18 | 23 Nico Frandi, *Omc e mutamenti geopolitici. Multilateralismo e coalizioni di membri tra crisi, adattamento al cambiamento e rinascita*