The Frailty of Authority

Borders, Non-State Actors and Power Vacuums in a Changing Middle East

edited by **Lorenzo Kamel**

New-Med
research
network

Edizioni Nuova Cultura

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IAI
Istituto Affari Internazionali

in collaboration with

Ministero degli Affari Esteri
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

Compagnia
di San Paolo

International
Affairs

G | M | F The German Marshall Fund
of the United States
STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

Edizioni Nuova Cultura

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List of abbreviations

ATGW	Anti-Tank Guided Weapon
AUB	American University of Beirut
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDF	Gaz de France
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air Defence System
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	Kurdish Democratic Union Party (Syria)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWI	First World War
YPG	People's Protection Units

Preface

Nicolò Russo Perez

"Joins the sea that separates the countries", wrote the 18th-century English poet Alexander Pope. The Mediterranean, broadly defined, is experiencing a number of complex and overlapping crises. From environmental challenges to citizenship and the weakening of the state system, from radicalization and the threat of ISIS to the migration and refugee crisis, Mediterranean societies are facing common and shared challenges that require a joint vision and response.

The New-Med project was launched in June 2014 with the goal of establishing a research network of Mediterranean experts and policy analysts with a special interest in the complex social, political, cultural and security-related dynamics that are unfolding in the Mediterranean region. The network was developed as a public-private partnership by the Istituto Affari Internazionali in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretariat in Vienna, the Compagnia di San Paolo foundation in Torino, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

At the core of the New-Med activities stands the need to rethink the role of multilateral, regional and sub-regional organizations, to make them better equipped to respond to fast-changing local and global conditions and to address the pressing demands of Mediterranean societies all around the basin. A priority of the network is to promote a non-Eurocentric vision of the region, featuring as much

as possible views from the south and from other regions. The network also seeks to provide a platform where emerging researchers can put forward new perspectives about regional cooperation. By undertaking research and outreach activities, this "Track II" initiative aims at fostering scholarly reflection on the changing scenarios in and around the Mediterranean and providing key input to the political dialogue taking place in policy fora.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries continue to bear the brunt of the refugee and migration crisis, placing further strain on their fragile economies and political systems. Climate change and environmental challenges are having adverse effects on state capacity across the region, straining limited resources and contributing to insecurity and violence through food shortages and population displacement. At the same time, as argued in this book, the Middle East state system is itself in a transition phase, if not in crisis. Institutions have collapsed, civil and proxy wars are ravaging both the centre and the periphery of the region, and the gulf between rulers and ruled has become wider than ever. Heightened threat perceptions have focused in particular on the Syrian conflict and ongoing efforts to counter the self-proclaimed Islamic State, where the narratives accompanying the rise of ISIS and the means to counter the spread and appeal of its radical ideology need to be further elaborated. Across all these challenges, the role of youths in pushing for a renegotiation of the social contract based on a new vision of power relationships, more inclusive citizenship and equity before the law, has become crucial. The medium- to long-term effects of all these trends are extremely worrying, and yet both regional and international actors have largely ignored their implications.

Against this background, the spillover effects of crises taking place in the region, in Syria and Libya in particular, illustrate the growing interdependence between European and Mediterranean security. Security issues that need to be tackled include not only traditional challenges such as arms control, but also transnational threats and growing phenomena such as the trafficking in human beings. Because security is a global topic that requires global answers, it is unavoidable that Europe must develop an enhanced di-

alogue with its partner countries on the southern shore, to which European countries are connected via the Mediterranean Sea.

Euro-Mediterranean interdependence is an inescapable reality. The security of Europe is inextricably linked to the security of the Mediterranean. But, as highlighted in this collected volume, today's challenges convince us even more that a comprehensive definition of security needs to extend well beyond the military- and state-centred domain to include "non-state" actors who can better address the complex and often overlapping political, economic, environmental and human dimensions of security.

Most remarkably, a growing interdependence is developing not only at the geographical level, but also between different spheres of the Mediterranean at all levels, including the societal one. The multiplication and differentiation of "actors" operating in and/or with a stake in the Mediterranean region is growing. The role of private companies, private foundations, social and charitable movements, non-governmental groups and broadly defined "non-state" actors is increasingly relevant to the emerging Mediterranean security equation. By the same token but in an opposite way, transnational non-state actors such as terrorist groups and networks have become a primary threat to Mediterranean peace.

States across the Mediterranean region are facing greater demands than ever before, while they seem less able to provide answers to the challenges ahead. The notion of "Mediterranean public goods" – common and shared priorities across the Mediterranean – may capture some of the new elements we are facing. But the question of what are the best tools to be applied in order to protect and at the same time enhance them remains unanswered.

New-Med was therefore launched as an open, inclusive platform for dialogue on all these Euro-Mediterranean issues. It aims to leverage the expertise of practitioners, researchers and academics from the Mediterranean region to promote a truly "two-way dialogue" on Mediterranean cooperation beneficial to a plurality of actors, particularly featuring perspectives "from the South". We are convinced that a public-private partnership such as New-Med – where a key international organization, the OSCE, and the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of Italy are joining forces with leading private think thanks and foundations – can serve as a truly useful platform.

This volume is the result of some of a number of debates held within the New-Med Research Network on the occasion of several international conferences and workshops organized over the past two years in Amman, Ankara, Athens, Brussels, London, Malta, Rome, Turin, Tunis and Vienna.

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of a number of people. In addition to the editor of this book, Lorenzo Kamel, who is playing a key role also as scientific coordinator of the whole New-Med initiative, my sincere thanks go to the authors for their remarkable contributions. Special thanks go to the colleagues of the New-Med steering committee: Emiliano Alessandri of the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna, Massimo Carnelos of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international Cooperation/Policy Planning Unit, Ian Lesser and Charlotte Brandsma of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and Ettore Greco, IAI director. Finally, this book would not have seen the light without the ongoing support of the whole staff at the IAI involved in the New-Med adventure in different capacities: my gratitude goes in particular to the strategic support provided by Nathalie Champion, Andrea Dessì and Elisabetta Farroni.

Introduction

Lorenzo Kamel

> *Invention does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos*
>
> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. xxiv

Governance failures, combined with 21st-century social, economic, environmental and demo-graphic conditions, have all contributed to paving the way for the rise of highly heterogeneous non-state and quasi-state actors in the Middle East. Has the state, then, been irremediably under-mined, or will the current transition lead to the emergence of new state entities? How can the crumbling of states and the redrawing of borders be reconciled with the exacerbation of traditional inter-state competition, including through proxy wars? How can a new potential regional order be framed and imagined? This volume, written by leading scholars within the New-Med Research Network, provides answers to these and a number of other related questions, analysing developments in the region from the standpoint of the interplay between disintegration and polarization.

In Chapter 1, Rami Khouri, a Senior Fellow and Adjunct Professor of Journalism at the American University of Beirut (AUB), sheds light on the historical and political dimensions of the issues addressed in the volume, providing in-depth analysis of ten early warning signs that indicated preparation of the ground for the multiple power vacuums and crises that are currently affecting the region. Most of these crises are the consequence of policy decisions made by lo-

cal autocrats, regional states or global powers, all of whom have engaged in military adventures across the region since the 1920s. A review of the early warning signs of the past, Khouri contends, might help us to understand the root causes of the current situation and to develop inclusive, dynamic societies and states.

Francesco Cavatorta (Chapter 2), an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Université Laval in Quebec, turns our attention to the "legitimacy" of the Arab state. Much of the scholarship discussing the weakness of the Arab state focuses intently on identity-based mobilization. It suggests that such mobilization weakens legitimacy because specific groups – ethnic, linguistic or religious – refuse to acknowledge an authority that marginalizes them. In this respect the challenge to the solidity of Arab states comes from the fact that sub-national groups claim either full autonomy or outright independence, refusing therefore to express loyalty to the state. While identity-based mobilization is indeed a significant phenomenon, the legitimacy of the Arab state is also challenged by the socio-economic disparities experienced by local populations. Through a detailed analysis of specific case studies, Cavatorta highlights this often overlooked reality and argues that exclusionary decision-making mechanisms sap the legitimacy of state institutions.

In Chapter 3, Florence Gaub, a Senior Analyst at the EU Institute for Security Studies, also addresses the "legitimacy" of the Arab state and challenges the hypothesis that the existence of non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa is the result of state vacuums. Gaub argues that the relationship between states and non-state actors in the region is more complex: Arab states have either deliberately used non-state actors, tolerated them out of convenience, or indeed been challenged by them. In all three cases, the state as a construct has remained the reference point for non-state actors. Consequently, she contends, the existence of non-state actors per se does not signal a state vacuum and the absence of a state; instead, it expresses the co-optation (for constructive as well as destructive purposes) of non-state actors by the state, whether for reasons of structural weakness, political expediency or strategic calculus.

Chapter 4, by Kristina Kausch, a Senior Resident Fellow at the German Marshall Fund, assesses the relationship between non-state challengers and their external state patrons in the Middle East. The author argues that non-state actors are increasingly attractive as partners for regional powers in a mutually beneficial alliance in which empowerment is traded for influence. Iran's relations with Hezbollah, Qatar's patronage of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Russian and US support for Syrian and Iraqi Kurds provide evidence of the increasing impact of non-state "proxy agents" on regional security. Moving largely within the boundaries of state-drawn structures, Kausch notes, non-state groups are shaping the battles between regional powers.

Waleed Hazbun (Chapter 5), Associate Professor in Political Science at AUB, traces the ongoing transformations of regional geopolitics in the Middle East as a result of the erosion of state governance and capacity, the mobilization of self-organized political movements, and intense forms of regional and external intervention. Hazbun highlights the resulting rise of "hybrid" actors that are creating networks and organizations that are not fully or formally sovereign but nonetheless increasingly wield power and control territory. With rival states across the region's geopolitical divides each seeking to influence and control different hybrid actors and confront the challenge of self-organized armed groups and political movements, the result is a turbulent regional system in which state interests are often hard to discern and shift in complex ways. Drawing on the case of Lebanon, the chapter concludes by suggesting that the best way to promote security and political resilience in the current era is not the building of strong (authoritarian) states but rather the assembling of pluralistic arrangements and coordination between diverse state, hybrid and non-state ac-tors.

Hybrid partnerships are also the focus of Chapter 6, authored by Raffaele Marchetti and Yahya Al Zahrani, Assistant Professors respectively at Rome's Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli and Riyad's Naif Arabic University for Security Science. Their contribution sheds light on the cooperation that governmental and non-governmental actors establish in order to

pursue their political goals. Within this analytical frame, the case of hybrid foreign policy in the Middle East is placed in a broader comparative perspective, with the aim of finding similarities with and divergences from the global level. Hybrid partnerships between governments and non-state actors constitute a new, increasingly influential feature of global governance: non-state actors have taken up a number of public functions previously performed exclusively by states. In the context of the Middle East, a similar dynamic is present; here, however, the institutional context is different insofar as it is characterized by an originally weaker form of state sovereignty. The authors conclude that the policy orientation of many Middle Eastern countries might turn towards a comprehensive fusion of regional, national and local security dimensions as a new way to analyse the threat posed by non-state actors under conditions of state boundary fragility.

In the concluding contribution (Chapter 7), written by me, the attention is turned to the thesis of the "artificiality" of the Middle East and the potential new regional orders that might arise. A number of scholars are today suggesting the necessity of "stemming the frailty of authority" through a more "natural" reconfiguration of the region's borders, a sort of "Balkanization" that could mirror the "true" ethnic and religious local context. These approaches are underpinned by the belief that the region and its borders and geographical toponymy are largely deprived of historical precedents, and therefore of legitimacy. The first part of the contribution contextualizes and deconstructs each of these aspects (the expression "Middle East" serves as one of the main case studies), while the second part lingers on the counterproductive effects that such approaches are generating. They mirror the perceptions and potential gains of those who foster them, far more than a complex millenary *milieu* or the interests of those living in the region.

1.

Early Warning Signs in the Arab World That We Ignored – And Still Ignore

Rami G. Khouri

Never in modern history has the Arab world experienced such a wide range of jarring political developments as it is undergoing today. The region is riddled with worsening sectarian tensions and conflicts, fragmenting states, refugee flows, a terrorism export industry, stagnant or contracting economies, and long-running, devastating wars in which foreign parties actively participate. Arabs and their friends across the world wonder what can be done to reduce the violence and return the region to a normal state of affairs where men and women and their families live decent lives and countries get on with the business of promoting national development and social calm. Everyone asks how we reached this point. We all ask how and why the broad national developmental thrust of the entire Arab world in its first half-century of modern independent statehood – roughly from 1925 to 1975 – has been transformed in the past 40 years into the turbulent conditions we see today.

These conditions of warfare, terrorism, mass human displacement, and broken states did not suddenly emerge overnight. In retrospect, there were many early warning signs in recent decades that should have been appreciated as signalling structural problems and deep injustices in our political, economic, environmental, and social systems. Those signs were never recognized by the Arab ruling elites, or by the external and regional powers that supported them – the very same powers that are now actively engaged in warfare in several Arab lands (the United States, the UK, France, Russia, Iran,

Turkey, Saudi Arabia) and continue to bolster chronically autocratic Arab regimes whose people have already risen up against them in some cases. Others in society who did see the troubling early warning signs – political parties, social movements, activists, civil society groups – lacked the ability to do anything about them, because of the total control of power in their societies by the ruling elites.

It is important today to acknowledge those early warning signs for three reasons: we should recognize that the signs of our own discontent and occasional national frailty, and even some dismemberment, were there before our eyes all the time, so that we learn to look for them in the future; we should note the specific issues and underlying conditions that created the political, economic, and social stresses that came to the surface in the form of these signs of structural problems in our midst, and start working to address them seriously, since most of them still persist; and we should look around our societies today and ask if new indicators of social or national stress and fragmentation are appearing that we should recognize as yet another set of early warning signs that we should respond to in their earliest stages, before they lead to more problems like the ones the Arab region suffers from today.

We reached today's violent and troubling situation over a period of nearly a full century, divided into two very different phases: a period of broadly positive development from 1920 to 1975, followed by one of much stagnation and regression from 1975 until today. We need to see the genesis of our current malaise in the decades just before and during the formative years of Arab statehood, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our problems were not entirely anchored in the abuses of post-1970 dictators and strongmen like Muammar Gaddafi, Hosni Mubarak, Hafez Assad, or Saddam Hussein. They started in the early years of the 20th century, as the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the first signs of Zionist-Arab tensions emerged, and the post-WWI period, beginning around 1920, launched the creation of the modern Arab world as we know it, eventually becoming 22 states that formed the Arab League. Most of these states have been remarkably stable; however, a handful have been brittle, and some are already fracturing and giving birth

to new states, like South Sudan and the Kurdish regions. During the period immediately before and after WWI the seeds were planted that a century later have resulted in much national fragility, widespread citizen discontent, and constant political violence by all leading local and foreign actors in the Middle East. The key defect at birth for modern Arab statehood was that it came into the world without any serious mechanisms to guarantee citizen rights or the application of the principle of the consent of the governed. One after another, independent Arab states were defined by rule by unelected and unaccountable elites and minorities, whether they were self-imposed through conquest or put in place by the colonial powers. Arab states became formally independent and sovereign, but the political behaviour of their ruling elites in many cases continued to reflect a mindset characterized by colonial dependency. Such governing systems persisted for decades throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The climax of the Zionism-Arabism confrontation in the 1947-48 Arab-Israeli conflict and the creation of Israel introduced into the Levant what I believe has been the most persistent and destructive phenomenon in modern Arab history, and one of the greatest obstacles to good governance and stable, legitimate statehood: the capture of the state and permanent political rule by military officers. This has been a death knell for good governance, democratic transitions, citizen self-respect, political pluralism, and equitable and sustainable national development. These ailments continue unabated across most of the Arab world, which has been, and continues to be, completely and chronically undemocratic (with the recent exception of Tunisia since 2014).

Long-serving Arab presidents like Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Ali Abdullah Saleh, Omar Hassan Bashir, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, Abdelfatteh Sisi, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Hafez Assad and his son Bashar, Zein el Abedin Ben Ali, and others were all military or police officers. With their friends, business partners, fellow officers, and family members, they took power and kept it for decades on end, in some cases for more than 40 years. In Egypt, where this trend started in earnest in 1952, the country has been continually ruled by the military ever since, with

the exception of the brief one-year tenure of an elected president in 2012-13, until he was removed from power and jailed by the military.[1] The Egyptian military in 1952 introduced two debilitating legacies that still haunt and debase the region: the tradition of military officers who hold total executive power, and the creation of the "ministry of information" that determined what citizens were allowed to hear, say, and discuss in the public sphere. These two phenomena were followed by others, like unsustainable economic policies, inequitable social policies, and irresponsible environmental policies – all of which contributed to the mass distress that finally erupted in uprisings, rebellions, and revolutions in 2010-11.

That post-1950 legacy of military rule in many states had by the mid-1970s produced family-run, military-anchored security states. The bonanza of oil and gas income that spread across the region beginning in the early 1970s in the form of aid, trade, investments, and labour remittances helped to cement this reality; poor military-run Arab regimes coordinated closely with energy-rich Arab states to pursue policies that ensured calm and stability, at the expense of democracy and citizen rights. Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya perhaps were the most egregious cases, so it is no coincidence that some of the most violent examples of state fragmentation, government violence, ethnic tensions, and communal collapse in the Arab world today have occurred in those four countries. It is also no surprise that the 2011 uprisings started in those countries. The army officers who commanded the total power and resources of their states ran these countries for three or four decades in some cases, or handed power over to their children in others. They also ran their economies and societies into the ground. Where some Arab citizens sought a negotiated social contract between the people and their leaders, they met with total resistance from a ruling elite that refused to share power or be held accountable for its policies. This reality, over the course of a half-century or so, totally destroyed any possibility of a social contract by which genuine national develop-

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[1] Yezid Sayigh, "Above the State: The Officers' Republic in Egypt", in *Carnegie Papers*, August 2012, http://ceip.org/2kOD3lp.

ment could take place on the basis of active citizen participation in anything, it seemed, beyond the buying and selling of consumer products and real estate.

The failures of military-run, family-based rule were camouflaged for many years by several factors. Early decades of genuine development and the oil-fuelled boom after 1972 were one key reason why uprisings against the prevailing order did not break out earlier in the region, with only one or two exceptions such as the rebellion against Jaafar Numeiri in Sudan. National development momentum in most Arab countries from the 1920s to the 1970s meant that schools, hospitals, and roads were built, along with telephone systems, housing, and other elements of genuine national development. Most Arabs, for most of the half-century to the mid-1970s, genuinely saw their lives improving at the material level, and they expected their children to enjoy even more fruits of national development. Politically, however, they had no rights, including no credible means to experience political participation, accountability, or redress of grievance. But they remained docile, because their housing and road systems were improving, their children went to school and then to university, new hospitals were built, water systems were upgraded and expanded, and the material side of life was constantly improving for a majority of citizens.

In addition, the Cold War between the Soviet- and American-led camps kept a lid on domestic Arab developments for 45 years, because both world powers actively supported the Arab security states run by families and military officers. The ongoing effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict also took their toll. They curtailed the democratic aspirations of many Arab citizens and cemented the rule of officers like Gaddafi, Assad, Nasser, and others, who justified their iron-fisted rule by arguing that only they and their militaries could promote brisk national development and defend their countries and Palestine against Israel. Democracy could wait. But the 1967 Arab-Israeli war showed that family-run security states were not able to defend against Israel or defeat it, could not build strong economies, and were totally incompetent before the challenge of promoting equitable and sustained socio-economic development.

The officers-turned-presidents-for-life ran these countries into the ground, to the point where millions of Arabs today are displaced internally or refugees abroad because of wars in their countries, and hundreds of thousands have fled. Many risk death in the sea or on the road, rather than stay in their societies, because the risk of death in the Mediterranean is less than the risk of continuing to live in one's own country. Three big issues over the last century were key factors that brought us to this point today: the Arab-Israeli conflict and its consequences, the mismanagement and corruption of incompetent militaristic Arab regimes, and the colonial legacy that includes continuous external militarism by foreign powers. All three of these factors persist today virtually unchanged, so it is to be expected that conditions will continue to deteriorate in many Arab lands.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is the oldest and most serious destabilizing force in the region, and has plagued us all since the 1930s. One of the reasons so many Arabs are critical of the USA and other Western societies is that foreign powers have seemed to pay more attention to the security and rights of Israelis than to those of Palestinians and Arabs. This chronic imbalance generated considerable anger and frustration because Arab governments were unable to do anything to rectify it. This tension built up over decades, and it was one important factor in the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the 1980s, and of Hamas and Hezbollah, who fought particularly against Israeli occupation of Arab lands. The Arab-Israeli conflict contributed to the frustrations of tens of millions of Arab citizens who were humiliated by their own governments' inability to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, either through war or peace. One reason for this was the post-1973 American commitment to always maintain Israel's qualitative military advantage over any combination of adversaries. Arab governments understandably could not defeat Israel militarily, because in fact they were also facing the military power and political will of the United States. In some cases Arab countries could not purchase military equipment from the United States because of Israel's veto. This further aggravated Arab citizens' disdain for their own governments, which con-

tributed to the lack of legitimacy of many Arab governments in the eyes of their own people; this was responsible in part for triggering the 2010-11 uprisings, when many Arabs challenged and sought to change their governments.

These and many other issues sparked the recent uprisings and the consequent turmoil that we have experienced across the Arab world. We have reached this point after a cumulative process of national autocracy and mismanagement, local and regional warfare, repeated external military interventions, an enduring Arab-Israeli conflict, and serious imbalances between populations and natural resources.

The last point regarding population/resource balances is striking, because the Arab world is still characterized by some of the world's most challenging population dynamics. During the first half-century of modern statehood from 1920 to 1970, economic growth generally was able to sustain high population growth rates and bring about steady improvements in living conditions for most people; but by the mid-1980s, populations had outstripped the ability of economies or government subsidies to keep providing all citizens with the basic services they expected from their government, like water, electricity, housing, jobs, education, and reasonably priced food. The Arab world's population growth has been phenomenal.[2] The 60 million Arabs in 1930 became 92 million in 1960, 313 million in 2010, and have reached some 400 million today.[3] In just the six years following the uprisings, the Arab world's population grew by 52 million people (from 348 million to 400 million). Maintaining decent social services and promoting job opportunities for this fast-growing population has been impossible in recent

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[2] Farzaneh Roudi, *Population Trends and Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa*, Washington, Population Reference Bureau, October 2001, http://www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2001/PopulationTrendsandChallengesintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica.aspx.

[3] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Demographic Profile of the Arab Region. Realizing the Demographic Dividend*, Beirut, United Nations, 2016, http://arabdevelopmentportal.com/indicator/demography.

decades, and it is even more impossible today, especially in view of the contraction of state domestic spending and foreign aid due to lower energy income.

For nearly the past half-century since the 1970s, citizens across the Arab world who suffered political, social, economic, and environmental stresses lacked the opportunity to respond through organized political action that held power accountable. They responded in the few ways that were available to them, like emigrating, joining politicized religious movements, partaking in the corruption that distributed some wealth to a minority in society, and occasionally by using violence or terrorism. It was clear at the time that their behaviour and the actions they took were signs of dysfunction in the society and discontent in the lives of individual citizens and families; it is even more clear today in retrospect.

The behaviour of millions of citizens since the early 1970s should have been recognized for what it was: the desperate actions of ordinary people who were unable to care for their families, in an environment of increasingly stressful economic and political conditions. I suggest that the following ten significant developments across the Arab world since the mid-1970s should have been seen as early warning signs of problems in our societies. They offer some guidelines for citizen behaviour that we should look out for today and in the near future; they also challenge us to acknowledge and act on new early warning signs we may currently be witnessing in our societies, rather than repeating the mistakes of the recent past by ignoring those blatant signs.

1. The first big sign of widespread Arab citizen discontent was the rapid expansion of popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other non-violent Islamists in the mid-1970s. This was due to multiple factors, including the humiliation of the June 1967 Arab defeat by Israel; the failure of socialism, Arab nationalism, Baathism, and other ideologies to meet citizen needs; the scourge of corruption; and the immediate added stresses of inflation and high living costs that resulted from the oil price increases in the early 1970s. The Muslim Brothers were the only

locally credible opposition groups that governments and their security agencies could not easily ban, and their focus on social justice at home and confronting Israeli aggression abroad resonated deeply with popular sentiments across society. It was no wonder that Muslim Brotherhood groups, often operating under different names, consistently did well in elections from the mid-1980s – and they continue to do so today.

2. Because all Arab electoral systems were configured to give the ruling power elite a built-in majority and permanent control of public life, frustrations with the inability of the Muslim Brotherhood to actually improve people's lives led to the birth of some smaller, more extreme Islamist groups that used violence against their governments. Such groups in Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia were quickly smashed by the state. Yet their very birth and expansion across the region should have been recognized as a sign of deep discontent that reached such an acute point among some citizens that they turned to violence against their own governments and economies. The Arab elite's refusal to recognize this or to address the underlying discontent that gave rise to popular resistance and armed action led to more severe forms of the same phenomenon years later, including Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS).

3. A major sign of widespread personal discontent and societal dysfunction as of the early 1980s (and also continuing today) was the permanent emigration of tens of thousands of the Arab world's smartest and most dynamic young men and women. Millions of Arabs have emigrated from their home countries in recent years,[4] but the loss of large numbers of educated, active young people has certainly deprived the region of one of its most important developmental assets. For various political, social, and economic reasons, these cohorts of talented and educated youth refused to put up with the restricted opportunities

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[4] Ibid., p. 14-17; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report 2016*, New York, United Nations, November 2016, Chapter 7, http://www.arab-hdr.org/PreviousReports/2016/2016.aspx.

for personal and professional development, and the ignominies of harsh security states, that their parents had endured all their lives; instead, they left and found abroad the professional and personal development opportunities, and the political and cultural rights and freedoms, that their societies had denied them.

4. By the early 2000s, public opinion polls by reputable local and foreign companies repeatedly confirmed Arab citizens' low level of trust in most of their public institutions. In countries other than wealthy oil-producers, half or more of respondents routinely said they had no confidence in their government, courts, media, political parties, elections, or parliament. The gap between citizen and state that was repeatedly captured in such polls indicated that citizens not only lacked faith in their governments' and states' efficacy to deliver the services they wanted; they also doubted the very legitimacy of their own governments, and in a few cases of their own countries as well. This lack of trust in many Arab countries persists today, with the exception of the few wealthy oil-producing states, as well as trust in some institutions like the armed forces.[5]

5. Simultaneously, large numbers of Arab citizens by the early 2000s were expressing pessimism about their future well-being, in terms of material needs (jobs, income, health care) or political rights and opportunities for self-improvement. These trends were in contrast to the early decades of Arab statehood and sovereignty, when most citizens felt that their lives were improving and that their children would enjoy even greater well-being and personal development opportunities. A combination of factors that evolved over time – and that are captured in part in the ten early warning signs presented here – slowly but steadily resulted in a significant percentage of Arab populations feeling pauperized, marginalized, powerless, vulnerable,

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[5] "Trust in Arab Government vs. Trust in Arab Armies", in *R ¬ R blog*, 17 September 2016, http://rnotr.com/chloropleth/plotly/r/barometer/plotly-facets; Arab Barometer Online Data Analysis, http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/online-data-analysis.

and therefore hopeless. These factors included mismanagement and corruption due to incompetent rule by family- and military-based regimes, population growth that outpaced economic growth, the impact of recurring wars and civil conflicts, heavy reliance on foreign aid, severe socio-economic disparities, increased labour informality, declining educational standards, and – since the early 1990s – the cumulative impact on jobs, rural economies, and import costs of neo-liberal economic policies that were often required by foreign donors and international financial institutions as the price for bailing out distressed Arab economies.[6] By the period 2000-10, more and more people were saying that they struggled to meet their families' needs, and also feared for their future well-being, as evidenced in polls by Gallup and others.[7] As has often been the case, nationals of wealthy oil-producers who enjoyed welfare state benefits remained the exception to this trend – though this may also be changing today, as reduced oil and gas income causes many of these countries to radically reduce government spending and subsidies.

6. The slow but steady increase in families' negative perceptions of their socio-economic and political conditions reflected both the social and economic polarization that had started in the 1980s: larger and larger numbers of Arab citizens lived near or below the poverty line, while a small wealthy minority enjoyed luxury and opportunity.[8] Governments did not have the resources to provide a social safety net for all the needy, and

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[6] Lorenzo Kamel, "Reshuffling the Middle East: a Historical and Political Perspective", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (September 2016), p. 132-141.

[7] Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, *Tunisia: Analyzing the Dawn of the Arab Spring*, Washington, Gallup, June 2011, http://www.gallup.com/poll/157049/tunisia-analyzing-dawn-arab-spring.aspx.

[8] Jon Clifton and Lymari Morales, *Egyptians', Tunisians' Wellbeing Plummets Despite GDP Gains*, Washington, Gallup, 2 February 2011, http://www.gallup.com/poll/145883/egyptians-tunisians-wellbeing-plummets-despite-gdp-gains.aspx.

many simply slipped into abject poverty and chronic suffering and vulnerability.[9] As some governments slowly retreated from certain sectors of society, the vacuum they left was replaced by a combination of local groups (including the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists) alongside some powerful non-state organizations like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and various Islamist, ethnic, and sectarian groups in Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen. It was clear that Arab sovereignty and state legitimacy were starting to fragment 30 years ago – but few people took notice, or action, as the trends of socio-economic polarization persisted, and in some cases worsened.

7. Alongside poverty and the polarization it caused, two other important indicators of serious structural problems in most Arab countries have continued to worsen during the past few decades, namely education results and labour force composition (two critical factors that determine a family's well-being and opportunities in society). International standardized tests of mid-primary and mid-secondary schooling show that an average of some 45 percent of Arabs in school are not learning to read, write, or do basic maths.[10] Many of them will drop out, or if they finish school they will graduate with no usable skills. A total of nearly 25 million young Arab children who should be in school are not, due to the low quality of schooling they receive, gender issues, and the impact of recent wars. Perhaps as many as 40 percent on average of workers in Arab countries are in the informal sector, where menial labour is the norm and workers lack the protection provided by health insurance, minimum wages or maximum working hours, or social security.[11]

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[9] Elena Ianchovichina, Lili Mottaghi and Shantayanan Devarajan, "Inequality, Uprisings, and Conflict in the Arab World", in *Middle East and North Africa Economic Monitor*, October 2015, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/25119063.

[10] Liesbet Steer et al., *Arab Youth: Missing Educational Foundations for a Productive Life?*, Washington, The Brookings Institution, 2014, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/arabworld_learningbarometer_en.pdf.

[11] Anthony O'Sullivan, Marie-Estelle Rey and Jorge Galvez Mendez, Opportu-

8. These trends in the three decades to 2010 meant that more and more people across the Arab world were feeling vulnerable and unable to improve their life conditions or meet the basic needs of their families. Unable to change things through political action, mass Arab frustration and humiliation culminated in the 2010-11 uprisings, the most dramatic sign of region-wide disconnect in modern Arab history. Millions of citizens who had reached breaking point spontaneously rebelled against their ruling elites; yet today those elites, along with their foreign supporters, continue to ignore most of the uprisings' underlying drivers of discontent and disparities.

9. The birth of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS) is the latest sign of deep distress in our societies. Such violent Salafist-*takfiri* movements did not suddenly emerge from a vacuum; they developed slowly over 25 years, and now find active support among hundreds of thousands of Arabs, and passive support or understanding among millions.[12] The relative support for ISIS among Arabs is low, but the absolute numbers in question are in the millions. Various published and unpublished polls suggest that some degree of support or empathy for ISIS among Arab populations ranges between 4 and 8 percent, which would translate into somewhere between 16 and 32 million people.

10. Arab governments, non-state militias, and foreign military powers are now coordinating to defeat ISIS and Al-Qaeda – the same combination of forces that in recent decades contributed to the chaos and massive citizen discontent that helped give birth to these groups in the first place. This trend is part of the reason political violence has been expanding across our entire region for the past 40 years or so and has become a common means of expression by the four major actors in our lands: na-

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nities and Challenges in the MENA Region, in *The Arab World Competitiveness Report 2011-2012*, October 2011, p. 42-67, https://www.weforum.org/reports/arab-world-competitiveness-report-2011-2012.

[12] Michael Kaplan, "Arab Views on ISIS: Support for Islamic State Group in Middle East, North Africa Is Low and Dropping, New Poll Suggests", in *International Business Times*, 22 December 2015, http://www.ibtimes.com/node/2236993.

tional governments, opposition and sub-state organizations, foreign governments, and small terrorist and criminal groups. Along with our polarization and fragmentation has come our continued militarization.

Our ruling establishments and their foreign backers consistently ignored these and other glaring signs of social disequilibrium and mass citizen discontent across the Arab region in the past half-century. The most dangerous consequence of this has probably been the chaos that allowed ISIS to arise. Now that it is being fought and will likely be broken up, this may be a good time to look back and consider the underlying discontent and disparities that caused so many Arabs to join or support it. The ISIS "state" may soon be broken, but those underlying factors that gave birth to it remain untouched; in fact, they are likely worsening across the region, especially sectarian tensions and the lack of economic opportunities.

The many and varied reasons why tens of thousands of people from the Arab world joined ISIS,[13] while millions of others looked on it with some tacit approval, provide a fairly accurate agenda for the political, social, and economic reforms that we must undertake in our Arab societies to finally overcome this continuing phase of violence, fragmentation, warfare, and extremism. The broad categories of reasons people join or support ISIS include: lack of jobs and economic opportunity; lack of citizen rights to participate politically in society; ordinary people feeling they are mistreated by their own power structure, and that poor and rich people live according to different rules; a sense among many that their societies are lawless and corrupt, and therefore people can be robbed, exploited, jailed, or beaten up at will in their own country; the rising cost of living that allows only the wealthy to live a normal life; lack of bread, water, electricity, and other basic services; people feeling their societies do not respect Islamic traditions and values; and many other political, social, and economic grievances that have only increased in recent decades.

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[13] Rami G. Khouri, "Military Responses Alone Will Not Defeat ISIL", in *Al Jazeera America*, 15 November 2015, http://alj.am/gy3l.

In the eyes of desperate young men, the ISIS experience often seems to solve all their problems – getting work, living in a safe environment, joining a stable social order and a community of people who think like them, and being part of a group of companions who work and live together for a common cause, all in the service of God's command. The many different political, social, and economic reasons people join or support ISIS underscore the legacy of mismanagement, inequity, and deprivation in the Arab world that we need to address in order gradually to fix the problems in our societies and return to a normal condition of statehood – where citizens matter, and the governed and the governing agree on a rule book for managing statehood and sovereignty via a social contract to foster the sustained economic growth, opportunity, and stability desired by all.

ISIS will only disappear when the driving forces in society that have generated support for it are reformed and removed, which will take decades. The tragic irony today is that the current drive to defeat ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa is being conducted by the same two forces that inadvertently created ISIS – autocratic Arab conservative regimes with their armies, and Western militarism. American and British militarism in Iraq and radicalized Arabs in Arab government jails were critical factors that helped to create ISIS; they fostered mass discontent and resentful, radicalized individuals who sought revenge and created other Islamist militant groups in the decades before ISIS, like Al-Qaeda, Gamaa Islamiya, Al-Shabaab, and a dozen others. Ending this ugly recent legacy requires that we start acknowledging and redressing the many imbalances and deficiencies in the Arab world that are captured both in the ten early warning signs I mentioned above and in the many factors in people's lives that have led them to join or at least appreciate ISIS.[14]

This effort will require decades to reach fruition. Unless we start

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[14] Kourosh Ziabari interview with Rami G. Khouri, "ISIS, An Important Wake-up Call about Arab World's Problems and Deficiencies", in *Iran Review*, 15 June 2016, http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/ISIS-An-Important-Wake-up-Call-about-Arab-World-s-Problems-and-Deficiencies.htm.

on this path, we will only find ourselves in a few decades noting many more than these ten early warning signs in modern history that I suggest we either ignored or failed to effectively address; if that happens, the Arab region will probably continue to rip itself apart through violence, extremism, intolerance, and foreign militarism. We reached the difficult condition in which we find ourselves today largely due to the poor decisions of intemperate Arab and foreign officials, combined with the inability of activists, social movements, civil society, and other political and social forces in society to address the problems and threats that repeatedly reared their heads. We can exit this situation by making better policy decisions, respecting the equal rights of all citizens, and allowing those same citizens to participate meaningfully in the daily activities and occasional shared decisions that define the direction of our national path.

2.

The Weakness of State Structures in the Arab World: Socio-Economic Challenges from Below

Francesco Cavatorta

In a recent article examining the shortcomings of the political science literature on the Middle East and North Africa, Khostall argues that the failure to predict the Arab uprisings provided new research opportunities for scholars.[1] One such research avenue is the renewed interest in the Arab state and, in particular, its weaknesses. While much of the scholarship in the region often underlined the artificial nature of the states created in the Middle East and North Africa following World War I, it should be highlighted that such assumptions neglected to consider a more nuanced understanding of borders. Kamel points out, for instance, that the argument for the "artificiality" of Arab states might not actually find overwhelming evidence in historical reality in as much as an embryonic state formation process can be observed in the region well before modern times.[2] In addition, some Arab states such as Egypt,

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[1] Florian Kohstall, "Beyond Regime Change: Middle East Studies and Academic Cooperation in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings", in *Academia in Transformation Working Papers*, No. 5 (November 2016), http://agya.info/fileadmin/user_upload/Working_Groups-images/Transformation/WPS_Academia_in_Transformation/Paper_5_Middle_East_Studies_in_the_Wake_of_the_Arab_Uprisings.pdf.

[2] Lorenzo Kamel, "Artificial Nations? The Sykes-Picot and the Islamic State's Narratives in a Historical Perspective", in *Diacronie. Studi di storia contemporanea*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2016), p. 1-20, http://www.studistorici.com/2016/03/29/kamel_numero_25.

Oman and Morocco can also claim a long, often millenary, history, putting to rest the notion that all states in the region are inherently artificial creations. This does not mean that Arab states enjoyed thick sovereignty following formal independence or that they did not have significant weaknesses that could prove problematic for their survival, but little about their current crisis was preordained or inevitable. Most states across the globe were created through violence, have contested borders and experience problematic domestic cleavages that hinder unity and solidity. As Ahram and Lust convincingly argue, in most of the post-colonial world sovereignty has always been somewhat limited and state structures far from solid, but states have been able to survive and even become stronger over time.[3] Thus, it is necessary to see the current crisis of the Arab state in its wider international context, where the sovereignty and capacities of the state in general are increasingly under pressure – and not necessarily because of historical weaknesses that they might have inherited at birth. More specifically, it is important to underline that the challenge to the Arab state and its authority as well as its legitimacy to rule does not simply come from what can be called identity-based mobilization. While political mobilization against the Arab state based on ethnic, religious or linguistic tropes is certainly present, scholars should not overlook the role played by the discontent that local populations express against authorities in view of growing socio-economic disparities and centralized decision-making in undermining state legitimacy. Focusing on identity-based mobilization as the most pervasive threat to the Arab state marginalizes socio-economic struggles and prevents analysts from linking events in the Arab world to wider trends in world politics.

There is, for instance, a large literature in international relations that focuses on explaining how neo-liberal globalization has undermined the capacity of states to act autonomously and independently. This has certainly been the case in the Middle East and North

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[3] Ariel I. Ahram and Ellen Lust, "The Decline and Fall of the Arab State", in *Survival*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (April-May 2016), p. 7-34, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1161897.

Africa,[4] while regional conflicts have further weakened states in the region, heightening the perception that the state is unable to manage the polity. Thus, since 2003:

> after having destroyed the Iraqi state and security forces, the US presence and the Shia sectarian forces empowered within the new Iraqi state helped foster diverse armed insurgent movements, militias and jihadists including foreign fighters and Iranian-backed forces. From the Egyptian Sinai to Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, armed non-state actors challenged occupying forces and the authority of central government to carve out their own spaces of quasi-sovereignty, beginning a process of territorial fragmentation between political authorities.[5]

The proliferation of non-state actors securing sovereign powers over chunks of territory that formally belong to states has been a feature of the region for the last two decades, and it deserves attention because it speaks to instances of marginalization that need to be addressed, for example in the case of the Kurds or the Palestinians. The Arab state therefore faces significant challenges that are both structural (challenges that all states face) and contingent (the high levels of conflict in the region since 2003 which have deepened following the 2011 uprisings). Fragmentation, however, is not always linked to the rise of actors with a transnational and/or sectarian agenda. It is also not limited to ethnic groups traditionally seeking to create their own state – the Kurds, the Saharawis or the Palestinians. Finally, it should be noted that the presence of armed

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[4] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine. The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York, Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007; Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (eds.), *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization. The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, Reading, Ithaca Press, 2009.

[5] Lorenzo Kamel et al., "The Past: Terminology, Concepts and Historical Junctures", in Eduard Soler i Lecha et al. (eds.) "Re-conceptualizing Orders in the MENA Region. The Analytical Framework of the MENARA Project", in *MENARA Methodology and Concept Papers*, No. 1 (November 2016), p. 23, http://www.iai.it/en/node/7032.

violence is not an ever-present characteristic of fragmentation. When scholars focus intensively on traditional threats to the Arab state through the frame of security, they tend to neglect other, and often more relevant, sub-national challenges that the Arab state faces. Ranging from the return of tribalism in unlikely places such as Tunisia, to the reaffirmation of regionalism in countries such as Morocco and Algeria, to the entrenchment of tribal practices in Yemen, the pressure being put on the state by local populations below "it" is also significant. This is because this sub-national mobilization places at its core issues of social justice, wealth redistribution and economic development. In most cases this is disconnected from the usual questions related to ethno-linguistic or religious identity. It is in far-flung regions such as Tataouine in the south of Tunisia or the Rif in Morocco, where none of the benefits of economic growth and globalization have been seen, that challenges to the legitimacy of the Arab state to rule are also found. While they might not yet have developed secessionist claims, social movements and political groups – no matter how loosely organized – see the state as increasingly unable or unwilling to respond to their demands, placing the authorities in the awkward position of having to justify not only the policies they implement, but, more significantly, the legitimacy of the process through which decisions are made.

2.1 THE REVENGE OF REGIONS

Centrifugal and disruptive dynamics have characterized the post-colonial Arab state system since its inception because many of the borders of the new nation-states were often contested. In addition, "newly created minorities" were dissatisfied with post-colonial arrangements, and calls for Arab brotherhood seemed to suggest that individual states would disappear into some sort of unified super-state. For these reasons, after their creation, Arab rulers – through authoritarian leadership – attempted to secure external borders and infuse the new state structures with a national

spirit that would replace previous power structures and allegianc-es, reneging in practice on Arab nationalism.[6] This was more easily done in some countries than in others, but it was a process that took place across the region. In many ways this was no different from what other nation-states had done in the past when first cre-ated, and what they would also do later on, as in Central Asia for in-stance after the collapse of communism.[7] The authoritarian nature of post-colonial politics did not permit the newly created states to accommodate multiple identities and ideological persuasions, nor did it allow for balanced discussions about the divided nature of society and how best to address it. The authoritarian leadership in each country – president, king or military officer – saw itself as the "father figure" of the whole nation, and society was to be mobilized behind a developmental project that allowed no dissent.[8] This pro-cess of nation and state building rested on the political primacy of the authoritarian leadership, which, in the name of absolute sover-eignty and independence, had to smash previous social and politi-cal structures to build a new, successful state. Although this process went far deeper in the socialist republics, the assertion that state structures had to override previous socio-political arrangements was made in conservative monarchies as well. Following the estab-lishment of such state structures, the literature on the Arab state focused on three issues. Firstly, scholars paid attention to "minority groups" that had national objectives themselves and agitated for the creation of a nation-state for the members of the group. In particu-lar, the national struggles of Kurds and Saharawis were examined as the rejection of post-colonial arrangements that included them in nation-states to which they had no allegiance. Secondly, Ayubi and subsequently other scholars began to study how the Arab state

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[6] Roger Owen, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 2nd ed., London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

[7] Sally N. Cummings and Raymond Hinnebusch (eds.), *Sovereignty after Em-pire. Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Univer-sity Press, 2011.

[8] Nicola Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2007.

performed, suggesting that it was actually quite weak in many respects and able only to "do repression" well.[9] Thirdly, sectarianism occupied – and still does – a central place in studies about the Arab state insofar as some of them created formal structures to accommodate it – Lebanon – or tried to marginalize it within state institutions if not within the wider society – Syria and Iraq. In any case, the picture emerging until the late 1990s was of an Arab state in crisis because of its authoritarian nature, poor socio-economic indicators and security concerns, but not on the verge of collapse. The rise of armed non-state actors had been noted and is an important feature of regional politics, but states throughout the 1980s and 1990s had been able to deal with armed rebellions by both secessionist and ideological movements intent on taking over the state.

The genuine challenge for the Arab state came increasingly from its inability to deal with socio-economic grievances and disparities, issues that were central in the 2011 Arab uprisings.[10] Such grievances were eventually linked with other types of discontent, such as the repressive nature of regimes or the absence of an ideological and identity project with which citizens could be reconciled. In this respect it is worth examining how current challenges to the Arab state are in part rooted in the failure to implement a programme of balanced economic development capable of empowering local communities in large parts of the country. State structures are weak or collapsing because the state is actively contested through armed struggles, but it would be erroneous to downplay the role of the economic marginalization of regions in fuelling disenchantment with state authorities. What is crucial here is that such disenchantment is not necessarily the product of identity issues. It is the twin processes of increasing globalization – with its focus on capital cities and integrated selected centres of economic excellence – and arbitrary political power that have led to what Bogaert labels the "revolt of

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[9] Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 1995.

[10] Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want. A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013.

small towns."[11] These revolts are rooted in economic malaise and a sense of profound injustice for which the state is held responsible. With some notable exceptions, the issue of sub-regional challenges had been largely absent from the debate about the Arab state and how it developed over time, but it came back with a vengeance in December 2010 to compound an already problematic decade for Arab rulers. Examples of such revolts abound and speak to economic grievances, political dissatisfaction and identity. They constitute powerful challenges to the state because they ultimately question its legitimacy to rule over the territory given that the decisions it takes, the policies it implements and the responses it provides to citizens are increasingly perceived as unjust, disempowering and illegal. In such a context, other forms of allegiance as well as other means to obtain material and moral goods are found which further undermine the legitimacy of the state and its representatives. What is interesting about these forms of dissent is the paradox that while citizens would like "more state" or a "better state," they do not find it and therefore withdraw their support from it, finding refuge in alternative networks built for instance on kin or tribe. This is not to suggest that concepts such as "tribe" or "kin" are actual realities; they are in fact social constructs with a problematic history. However, they constitute a form of social organization that can informally provide material and moral goods where equal citizenship is weak. In many ways the concept of *asabiyya* as bonds of solidarity with the group is perverted to suggest partisanship and group loyalty to the detriment of others, when in fact it is possible to see it as the prelude to loyalty to the state. In any case, sub-national challenges of this nature have yet to lead to demands for secession, but should be taken seriously at a time when feeble Arab states seem increasingly to resort to repressive and violent practices to maintain what little order there still is and legitimacy they still have. The following examples illustrate how these sub-national dynamics function and affect the state.

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[11] Koenraad Bogaert, "The Revolt of Small Towns: The Meaning of Morocco's History and the Geography of Social Protests", in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 42, No. 143 (2015), p. 124-140.

The self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi, which sparked the Tunisian revolution and the Arab uprisings, occurred in one of the most impoverished regions of the country, far from the tourist attractions, leisure facilities and industrial parks near the coast that had many scholars enthused about the Tunisian economic and political miracle.[12] In fact, the depiction of the Tunisian socio-economic and political development that Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (in power form 1987 until 2011) and his regime pushed domestically and internationally was a continuation of the narrative Habib Bourguiba (in power from 1956 until 1987) had promoted since becoming president in the aftermath of independence. This narrative was based on the image of Bourguiba – and later Ben Ali – as the father of the nation who knew how to bring about socio-economic and political development. This was to be obtained by maintaining absolute national unity[13] and punishing those who did not want to or could not conform. In this respect dissenting voices were equated with treason and, significantly, a betrayal of the national family. In fact, in constructing this narrative Bourguiba "embarked on a project of constructing the 'nation' by shifting primary identity and loyalty from the family unit to the Tunisian family."[14] While both Bourguiba and Ben Ali did obtain significant results and enjoyed, early on during their terms in office, a degree of genuine popular support,[15] the reforms they undertook and the authoritarianism underpinning them benefited economically only small sectors of society concentrated in the coastal areas. As became evident after the overthrow of the regime in 2011, many parts of Tunisia were far different from the modernizing and liberalizing country

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[12] Antoine Sfeir, *Tunisie. Terre de paradoxes*, Paris, L'Archipel, 2006.

[13] Larbi Sadiki, "The Search for Citizenship in Bin Ali's Tunisia: Democracy versus Unity", in *Political Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (August 2002), p. 497-513.

[14] Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, "'Together for Tunisia': Tribes and Social and Political Mobilization", in *Informal Networks and Political Transitions in the MENA and Southeast Asia*, 19 October 2016, http://www.mei.edu/node/23721.

[15] Francesco Cavatorta and Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, "The End of Authoritarian Rule and the Mythology of Tunisia under Ben Ali", in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (July 2012), p. 179-195.

with quasi-European standards of living that the regime put on display on the coast and projected abroad. Despite the efforts of both Bourguiba and Ben Ali to reinvent Tunisia as one big family and marginalize tribal and clan-based ties, "the reform policies and the articulation of a transcendant Tunisian nation-family as a replacement of the small, close family based on kinship were only partially successful […] kinship ties proved remarkably resilient."[16] This became clear in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising when social and political mobilization occurred partly through kinship ties in direct opposition to the state or to fill vacuums left by weakened and illegitimate state structures. Family and tribal ties became central to the creation of networks to help refugees from Libya when the state failed to do so, to organize demonstrations against the economic policies of the new government, and to make demands for the recognition of regional – or even town-specific – claims. Haugbølle suggests that tribal and family ties are central to Tunisian politics today and concludes her study as follows: "we might discover […] that socio-political activism and mobilization can be based on kinship, tribal and family belonging; and that such frames were never really dismantled and are indeed still very much alive in Tunisia."[17]

The point here is that such mobilization takes place because the state is unable or unwilling to act on a number of issues that matter in a number of sub-national contexts, leading to greater disenchantment with state representatives and structures, which find it difficult to impose their will without employing repressive violence. The Tunisian example provides a powerful illustration of how challenges to the state do not necessarily take the form of identity politics, as is often presumed.

In January 2013, the Algerian government authorized the exploitation of shale gas to increase revenues from the hydrocarbons sector. The decision was made with no public debate and the potential negative consequences of such a choice were not publicly

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[16] Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, "'Together for Tunisia': Tribes and Social and Political Mobilization", cit.

[17] Ibid.

discussed.[18] By 2014, the plan for exploiting shale gas succeeded in attracting the interest of some of the world's most significant oil and gas companies, including ExxonMobil in the US, Italy's Eni and France's Total and GDF Suez. In the same year the government announced plans for 70 billion dollars in investment in shale gas extraction and announced the drilling of four shale gas wells in the Illizi basin (south-east of Algeria) and the Ahnet basin (south-west) by the end of the year.[19] Once again, the south of Algeria seemed destined to have to put up with the negative spillover of oil and gas extraction without having a say in the decision or enjoying any of the benefits. Two issues were particularly significant. Firstly, fracking and shale gas extraction have significant environmental costs that will have a negative impact on the local economy. Secondly, the profits, as usual, would not be reinvested in the south, where living standards are low, unemployment is high and infrastructure not linked to the exploitation of hydrocarbons is either absent or in poor shape. The mobilization of citizens in the south of the country against shale gas development represents a first in Algeria's political history, because traditional channels of communication with decision-makers in the capital city have been bypassed in favour of direct action. This is particularly the case in Ain Salah, a town close to the proposed test drilling sites, but protests have also broken out in the communities of Ouargla, Ilizi, Ghardaia, Timimoun, Adrar, Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Oum El Bouaghi, Bejaia, Oran and Ain Beida. As in Tunisia, regional socio-economic disparities have long been a feature of the country. For decades, the developmental discourse and the appearance of a fair redistribution of the oil wealth masked the gap between the north and south. In addition, local notables in the south and their contacts in the capital city were able to maintain a degree of control through mutually beneficial clientelistic ar-

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[18] Hamza Hamouchene et al., "Algerians in London Protest against Shale Gas and the Lack of a National Debate", in *openDemocracy*, 22 April 2013, https://www.opendemocracy.net/node/72259.

[19] Richard Nield, "Algeria Looks to Develop Shale Gas Sector", in *Al-Jazeera*, 28 July 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/algeria-shale-gas-2014722901333264.html.

rangements. In the wake of the 2011 revolts, many citizens in the south were no longer willing to accept such regional disparities and "challenged" the state to respond to their concerns. While Algeria did not experience widespread demonstrations in 2011,[20] the discontent in the south highlighted the fact that considerable problems persisted. In fact, the threat posed by the sub-national challenge from the south of the country was twofold. The first concern was that the protests in the south might worsen the security situation in an area that is crucial for the regime because of the oil wells and installations. The second, and possibly more important, element was the disruption of the national Algerian narrative of how the state came about, how it united the whole population in the pursuit of economic success and political independence and how it promoted equality over time. As Boukhars underlines, the narrative of national unity never applied in reality to the Saharan south insofar as the authorities were more interested in "transforming the Sahara into a strategic redoubt and a hydrocarbon lifeline" rather than "fostering deep integration between north and south."[21] The protests in the area have therefore gone beyond their contingent causes and reflect instead how socio-economic inequalities fuel sub-national demands to the point that the state is no longer perceived to be legitimate because of its perseverance in discarding local concerns or meeting them only with the riot police. There is a striking similarity between the sub-regional challenges in Tunisia and Algeria, suggesting that the nature of the regime – a democracy in Tunisia and a dictatorship in Algeria – might not be all that relevant in the way in which these challenges emerge and gather consensus. What is more, the case of southern Algeria is equally difficult to deal with from the perspective of the authorities because the claims made do not overlap with strong identity and linguistic cleavages. The latter usually charac-

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[20] Frédéric Volpi, "Algeria versus the Arab Spring", in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (July 2013), p. 104-115.

[21] Anouar Boukhars, "In the Eye of the Storm. Algeria's South and its Sahelian Borders", in Luis Martinez and Rasmus Alenius Boserup (eds.), *Algerian Modern. From Opacity to Complexity*, London, Hurst, 2016, p. 112.

terize the traditional demands of the Kabiliye region, which was at the centre of the 1980 and 2000 "Black Springs." This does not mean that the potential for the linkage between socio-economic grievances and identity is completely absent in the south and that scenarios of secession cannot develop. For the moment, though, the central issue is socio-economic inequality and the inability or unwillingness of the central authorities to address it in a satisfactory manner.

Bogaert developed the above-mentioned notion of the "revolt of small towns" to illustrate similar trends in Morocco. Once again the challenge of sub-national protests is not new in the country – the very issue of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara is forcefully contested – but the 2011 uprisings brought to light the profound divide between the privileged areas of the country and those that have been left out of the modernization project implemented by the monarchy in the course of the last two decades.[22] A significant number of small-scale riots, strikes and popular protests occurred even before the Arab Spring and intensified thereafter, indicating widespread disaffection with the political system. Protests did not focus on political demands, however, but on socio-economic grievances, particularly in the regions far from the urban centres that have been integrated into global networks of tourism, production and consumption. The existence of "two" Moroccos challenges the notion and the narrative of a united country moving towards European-style modernity under the watchful and benign rule of the Commander of the Faithful and father of the nation. This is in fact far from the case for many Moroccans and for underprivileged regions such as the Rif, where forms of mobilization find their roots in past rebellions and are nurtured by a sense of injustice that pervades daily life. While the real threat to the stability and the viability of the state coming from the sub-national level is small – with the exception of Western Sahara – questioning the legitimacy of the state is no longer unthinkable. What is all the more striking about

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[22] Sami Zemni and Koenraad Bogaert, "Trade, Security and Neoliberal Politics: Whither Arab Reform? Evidence from the Moroccan Case", in *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2009), p. 91-107.

Morocco is that the urban/rural divide affects opposition politics as well, suggesting that many struggles have taken on very local and localized features. For instance, the February 20th movement, which led the 2011 protests across the country and constituted for a while a powerful opposition to the monarch, found itself unable to overcome centre/periphery divisions. In fact, powerful centrifugal factors precluded greater unity and coordination during 2011, with centre/periphery tensions undermining the coherence and national reach of the February 20th movement. The movement remained largely urban based and did not make much headway in the countryside. Contacts between the February 20th movement and protesters in rural areas in the High Atlas were sporadic[23] and similar dynamics of disaggregation were observed in the Rif.[24]

Far from being an exclusively Maghrebi phenomenon, sub-national challenges of a similar nature are a feature of countries in the Levant as well. Although the armed conflicts that have emerged there following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the Arab uprisings are often understood and explained through the lens of sectarianism, it should be noted that this factor is overemphasized as an explanatory variable to the detriment of more nuanced explanations for the weakness and collapse of state structures. As Hinnebusch remarked:

> there are, especially in the Middle East, multiple credible identities, located at different 'levels:' some are small, particularistic and exclusivistic (family, tribe); others define larger more universalistic and inclusive identities (the state, supra-state (Arabism, Pan-Islam). Sect is therefore only one such identity, located somewhere between the two poles and, as such, by no means inevitably dominant.[25]

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[23] Sylvia I. Bergh and Daniele Rossi-Doria, "Plus ça Change? Observing the Dynamics of Morocco's 'Arab Spring' in the High Atlas", in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (July 2015), p. 198-216, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2015.1033900.

[24] Ángela Suárez Collado, "Territorial Stress in Morocco; from Democratic to Autonomist Demands in Popular Protests in the Rif", in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (July 2015), p. 217-234.

[25] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Sectarian Revolution in the Middle East", in *R/*

It is in this context that the collapse of the state in Yemen and its near-collapse in Syria, for instance, can be further problematized. While sectarianism has certainly played a role in the descent of the two countries into civil conflict, other factors have also been important. One among them is the increasing socio-economic regional disparities in the two countries, where sectarian cleavages do not necessarily coincide with specific grievances against the central government. In Syria, for instance, it is true that the Assads' home region has grown economically and been modernized thanks to the infusion of money from the seat of power.[26] However, not all Alawites have benefited, and increasing globalization has favoured other places and classes. Thus, it might be more useful to look at the rural/urban divide as one of the main explanations for the conflict insofar as the neglected areas of Syria – south of Damascus, the countryside to the east of Aleppo and the areas close to the Iraqi border as well as mountain areas above Latakia – took the opportunity to rebel against the central government. The context of neo-liberal restructuring that Syria experienced throughout the 2000s was particularly favourable for producing a blowback, as state-led development and redistribution in marginal regions decreased considerably.[27] To some extent Yemen has undergone a similar process. While sectarianism dominates explanations for the civil conflict, the reality is much more complex. In particular, it should be pointed out that the process of unification of the country in the early 1990s marginalized south Yemen, leading to periodic bouts of rebellion against the central government quite separate from the conflicts with sectarian undertones that feature in the struggle with the Zayidis, for example.

In short, sub-national challenges centred on socio-economic grievances and notions of social justice are an important part of the story of the weakening and collapsing Arab state.

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evolutions: Global Trends & Regional Issues, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2016), p. 122, http://revjournal.org/?p=1865.

[26] Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*, Paris, Khartala, 2006.

[27] Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria. The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012.

2.2 Overcoming exceptionalism

While the chapter cannot do justice to all the sub-national dynamics at work throughout the Arab world, it should be clear that the current crisis of the Arab state owes a lot to them because they go to the heart of its remaining legitimacy to rule. State and nation building did not proceed all that differently in the Middle East and North Africa than in other regions of the world, nor is the current weakness and, in some instances, failure of state structures in the region unique. The crisis of the Arab state can be seen as a subset of the crisis of the state worldwide, where both transnational and local forces undermine its legitimacy and stability because of its perceived inability to deal with considerable economic, social and political challenges. Interestingly, the crisis of the state affects both democracies and dictatorships. Although they might manifest it differently, citizens in both systems are increasingly dissatisfied with how the state and its representatives deal with the challenges with which they are presented, which are often very similar. The Arab state might be at the extreme end of this crisis because of the armed conflicts in the region that add a further destabilizing element, but the trend is a shared one across the globe. Sub-national challenges, particularly when de-linked from the demands of specific ethno-linguistic or religious minorities, are particularly relevant insofar as they oppose a way of doing politics and implementing policies that seems increasingly divisive. Once such grievances connect with identity issues, the potential for conflict increases, and democracies are not immune to the effects.

3.

State Vacuums and Non-State Actors in the Middle East and North Africa

Florence Gaub [*]

The state appears to be a challenged concept in the Middle East and North Africa – now more so than ever, if one is to believe the observers noting its retreat in this part of the world: "The map of the modern Middle East, a political and economic pivot in the international order, is in tatters," writes a scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center;[1] another at the New America Foundation claims that

> Nowhere is a rethinking of 'the state' more necessary than in the Middle East," going so far as to say that "[t]he Arab world will not be resurrected to its old glory until its map is redrawn to resemble a collection of autonomous national oases linked by Silk Roads of commerce.[2]

The main reason for these statements is not just the many demonstrations and violent uprisings since 2011 but, more structurally, the emergence of non-state actors declaring borders null and void

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[1] Robin Wright, "Imagining a Remapped Middle East", in *The New York Times*, 28 September 2013, https://nyti.ms/18zCi0k.

[2] Parag Khanna, "The End of the Nation-State?", in *The New York Times*, 14 October 2013, https://nyti.ms/1bt9pEC. See also Itamar Rabinovich, "The End of Sykes-Picot? Reflections on the Prospects of the Arab State System", in *Middle East Memos*, No. 32 (February 2014), p. 1, http://brook.gs/2bNxhwi.

and taking on governance roles. After all, Weberian ideal-type notions of statehood equate the very concept with exclusiveness and a monopoly over key areas of governance. Where non-state actors take on this role, something must be amiss with the state. In this reasoning, the existence of non-state actors translates into state collapse and therefore an absence of statehood: a state vacuum.

Indeed, be it the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Hezbollah, the plethora of Libyan militias, the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas in the Palestinian territories, the Kurds or others, the Arab state appears to be undermined by non-state actors. Not only do they take on certain roles states traditionally fill, they even aim at being states themselves.

The Arab state – traditionally accused of being "artificial" and therefore weak (see Chapter 7) – is consequently once more challenged as a concept as much as it is as an institution. There is nothing new about this allegation: Arab state capacity was considered poor even before independence loomed. In 1919, the American King-Crane Commission sent to the Middle East to evaluate whether the people were ready for statehood concluded that they were not; in 1953, the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* worried about the vacuum resulting from the Arab states' lack of ability.[3] Arab states regularly appeared to be challenged on two fronts: in bureaucratic terms they struggled to penetrate their societies, and in ideological terms they seemed to fail to generate nationalism capable of rivalling the allure of pan-Arabism. The reason for this, so some conclude, is the state system as it was created after World War I: had Arab states had different borders, they would have been able to overcome both challenges. According to this logic, non-state actors are the natural expression of this disconnect between Arab states and their given populations.

But there are several problems with this line of reasoning. Notwithstanding the fact that neither borders nor an alleged homoge-

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[3] Emil Lengyel, "Middle East Power Vacuum", in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 288, NATO and World Peace (July 1953), p. 47-55.

neity among the people define a state, the mere existence of non-state actors does not imply the absence of a state altogether. Instead, the interaction between states and non-state actors is more complex than a zero-sum game. More importantly, however, the process of state-formation and state-building appears to be misunderstood in its complexity as well as in its timeline.

3.1 What is a state vacuum?

A state vacuum can be understood, using an analogy from physics, as a state in which control has vanished without being replaced. It is in that sense a "state in reverse": everything that an ideal state is not. Where an ideal-type state provides internal and external security, as well as a certain level of representation, legitimacy, welfare and wealth, its absence implies that there is no security, no legitimacy or representation and no welfare.[4] This state of being would imply state collapse: a state in which "the complete order breaks down and a war of all against all emerges."[5] But a closer look at the states currently challenged in the Middle East and North Africa reveals that they have not ceased providing all three dimensions of statehood entirely. In fact, most states in the region do not even correspond to the definition of state failure, defined as "a sort of state de-formation in which the state fails in providing its most basic functions."[6] Instead, even the struggling states continue to embody elements of statehood to at least some extent.

Syria, for instance, in conflict since 2011, continues to deliver services to the populations under the regime's control – in fact, it

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[4] Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause, "State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies", in *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (November 2002), p. 753-774.

[5] Rolf Schwarz, "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: The Challenges of Security, Welfare and Representation", in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (December 2005), p. 429-446 at p. 430.

[6] Ibid.

provides increased services in order to legitimize the regime and intertwine it even more closely with the Syrian state. It also seeks to provide security in the areas it controls, and has controversially sought legitimacy through elections and a changed constitution. More interestingly, the regime also has not ceased delivering services to the areas no longer under its control, although it does so in a limited fashion. It has continued to pay salaries to civil servants and provide electricity in areas held by the opposition or even by ISIS.[7]

Similarly, the Libyan government has managed to continue providing several services in spite of the turmoil it has undergone since the fall of the Gaddafi regime. It continued to deliver electricity throughout the conflicts, encountering serious difficulties only in 2016.[8] It also continued to export oil – albeit at a lower rate than before 2011 – and to pay Libyan state employees' salaries.[9]

Perhaps the closest to state failure is Yemen, where war and conflict have destroyed large parts of the state's regular management capacities. As of August 2016, although the government was still delivering six hours of electricity a day, salaries of state employees were no longer paid, leading to a nationwide strike.[10]

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[7] Kheder Khaddour, "The Assad Regime's Hold on the Syrian State", in *Carnegie Papers*, July 2015, http://ceip.org/2kkfsZQ; Natasha Bertrand, "We Just Got the Clearest Sign Yet That the Assad Regime Helped Make ISIS Very, Very Rich", in *Business Insider UK*, 26 April 2016, http://uk.businessinsider.com/assad-oil-isis-2016-4.

[8] "Libya Struggles to Keep Electricity On", in *Reuters*, 11 February 2015, http://reut.rs/1E8tzS5; Moutaz Mathi, "Now GECOL Warns of Complete Collapse of Electricity Supply in Tripoli", in *Libya Herald*, 13 June 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/?p=93646.

[9] Benoit Faucon and Hassan Morajea, "U.S., U.K. Diplomats Meet Libyan Militias to Restart Oil Exports", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 September 2016; Jason Pack, "Controlling Libya's Wealth: Hifter's Long Game", in *Al-Monitor*, 29 September 2016, http://almon.co/2qzf.

[10] Mohammed Mukhashaf, "Power Cuts, Violence Fuel Yemen Separatists' Dreams", in *Reuters*, 14 June 2016, http://reut.rs/21k29Et; Hamoud Munsir, "Yemenis Go on Strike to Protest Salary Delay", in *Al Arabiya*, 23 August 2016, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/2016/08/23/Yemenis-go-on-strike-to-protest-salary-delay.html.

The continued delivery of certain elements of state services imply that the Middle Eastern and North African states have not ceased to exist; in fact, it implies that state failure has not even occurred yet.

State failure is generally rare and state collapse even more so – so rare that the Failed State Index, often used as an indicator, was renamed the Fragile State Index in 2014. In the 2016 index, Syria and Yemen ranked 4th and 6th, Iraq 11th and Libya 25th – still far below Somalia, Sudan and the Central African Republic.[11] But if Arab states have not failed or collapsed entirely – how do we explain the existence of non-state actors?

3.2 A binary relationship: states and non-state actors

Non-state actors are somewhat more difficult to define than states. Whereas a state is a politically organized and sovereign body of people within a certain territory, a non-state actor is simply a group with economic, political or social power. These can be sub-state actors (such as labour unions, large companies, professional associations, religious communities) or transnational actors (such as non-governmental organizations, e.g. the Red Cross, Greenpeace); the term also includes criminal networks and politically violent actors such as ISIS or Al-Qaida.

Just as non-state actors differ greatly in nature, so too does their interaction with the state: states purposefully outsource some of their tasks to non-state actors, co-opt non-state actors to their own advantage or tolerate them. In return, non-state actors accept their role in said state's structure, attempt to control the state or even to replace it – but in all cases non-state actors continue to define themselves via or against a state. What all non-state actors have in common in spite of their variety is their pursuit of "aims that affect

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[11] Fund for Peace, *Fragile State Index 2016*, June 2016, http://library.fundfor-peace.org/fsi16-report.

vital state interests"[12] –thus the state consequently continues to constitute the major reference point even for actors seeking to undermine it. This indicates that what is challenged is not statehood as such, but rather methods of governance.

The most constructive relations typically exist with sub-state actors to whom states have outsourced key areas of governance – for a variety of reasons. One such example is Lebanon, where personal status law falls into the realm of the religious communities recognized by the state.[13] Another example is the charities operating across the Middle East, taking on health care and social services roles, for instance Hezbollah's very extensive activities including construction work to repair war damage, educational services and health care provision, or Hamas's medical programmes for severely disabled Palestinians, including psychosocial support and reintegration.[14] These non-state actors, although providing a state service, do so within the context of the state and with its consent.

State interaction with non-state actors provides an interface with politicized communities. In this case, non-state actors become the representatives of community interests in a similar way to political parties in democracies, albeit often without any mandate. For instance, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen represent (or claim to represent) Shia interests.

More controversially, Arab states have also actively outsourced security to non-state actors. In Libya, the government has regularized and funded – and continues to fund – those militias chief-

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[12] Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes", in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (February 2012), p. 3.

[13] Anna Louie Sussman, "In Lebanon, a Tangle of Religious Laws Govern Life and Love", in *The Atlantic*, 29 September 2011, http://www.theatlantic.com/article/245857.

[14] James B. Love, "Hezbollah: Social Services as a Source of Power", in *JSOU Reports*, No. 10-5 (June 2010), http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA525243; Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza. Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

ly responsible for the breakdown of law and order since 2013.[15] In Syria, a whole range of militias raised from among the civilian population have supplanted the government's forces, from the *Shabihas* created in the 1970s to the more recent National Defence Forces.[16] Similarly, Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Committees were formed in 2014 following the call by Ayatollah Sistani – but were regularized by the Iraqi parliament.[17] In Yemen, tribal militias have supported the military for decades; more recently, they have operated under the name Popular Resistance Committees against Al-Qaida in the Arab Peninsula as well as against Houthi militias.[18]

This use of non-state actors for security purposes is seen as undermining state capacity because security appears to be the most important of state services: "the essence of stateness is enforcement: the ability, ultimately, to send someone with a uniform and a gun to force people to comply with the state's laws."[19] In reality, however, the monopoly of violence is not undermined if the state deliberately tasks the non-state actors with it – in fact, Arab states are not alone in having resorted to this; most states have done so

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[15] Philippe Droz-Vincent, "Libya's Tentative State Rebuilding: Militias' 'Moral Economy,' Violence, and Financing (In)Security", in Elke Grawert and Zeinab Abul-Magd (eds.), *Businessmen in Arms. How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA Region*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, p.175-196; Colin Freeman, "Libya's Central Bank Causing 'Civil War' by Paying Rival Militias, Says UK Envoy", in *The Telegraph*, 8 February 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/12146453/Libyas-central-bank-causing-civil-war-by-paying-warring-militias-says-UK-envoy.html.

[16] Yassin al-Haj Salih, "The Syrian Shabiha and Their State", in *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Middle East Articles*, 16 April 2012, https://lb.boell.org/en/node/1355; Aron Lund, "Who Are the Pro-Assad Militias?", in *Diwan*, 2 March 2015, http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/59215.

[17] Renad Mansour, "From Militia to State Force: the Transformation of al-Hashd al-Shaabi", in *Diwan*, 16 November 2015, http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/61986.

[18] Sasha Gordon, "Tribal Militias in Yemen: Al Bayda and Shabwah", in *Critical Threats Reports*, February 2013, http://www.criticalthreats.org/node/5153.

[19] Francis Fukuyama, "The Imperative of State-Building", in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April 2004), p. 21.

in the process of state formation. In fact, "subnational coercion and the use of 'irregular' armed force were necessary to the consolidation of national states in the first place."[20]

In addition to these purposeful outsourcings, Arab (or indeed non-Arab) states have also used non-state actors to further their own interests in somewhat more opaque ways – mostly in reference to violent actors.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah continues to operate as the country's legitimate resistance against Israeli occupation – at least in part because maintaining an asymmetric defence posture protects the Lebanese military from Israeli retaliation. It has also been of use to Iran and Syria.

The Syrian regime's relationship with ISIS has been equally ambiguous. Although it is speculative to say that the regime deliberately furthered the rise of ISIS when it released Islamist prisoners in the early days of the uprising, its existence suited the regime just fine since it discredited the opposition as terrorists. This also explains why the regime (and indeed Russia) have spared ISIS-controlled territories from large-scale bombardment and even warned the militia of the imminent recapture of Palmyra in the spring of 2016.[21] But the links between Damascus and Raqqa are more extensive than just tolerated existence. The regime and ISIS concluded agreements which allowed the latter to cross through regime-held territory to export its oil; some reports go so far as to claim that the regime even purchased oil and gas from ISIS, delivering in turn electricity and fertilizer.[22] And this

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[20] Diane E. Davis, "Contemporary Challenges and Historical Reflections on the Study of Militaries, States, and Politics", in Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira (eds.), *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 7.

[21] Jenny Stanton, "Leaked Documents from ISIS Headquarters Show Terror Group and Syrian Dictator Assad Colluded over the City of Palmyra with Warnings to Withdraw Forces Before Attacks", in *The Daily Mail*, 2 May 2016, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3569934.

[22] Matthew M. Reed, "Revealed: Assad Buys Oil from ISIS", in *The Daily Beast*, 10 December 2015, http://thebea.st/1IGfwuj.

would not be the first time the Syrian regime had used violent non-state actors to further its strategic interests: in the years following the invasion of Iraq, it was accused repeatedly by both Washington and Baghdad of turning a blind eye to jihadists travelling to Iraq via its eastern border and even allowing them to train in its territory.[23]

But the somewhat undefined coexistence of state and non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa does not end there: in Egypt, members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood were allowed to run for parliament in 2000 and 2005, and the organization's charitable activities continued. While the Brotherhood was subjected to a certain level of repression, the regime considered its checked existence the better alternative to total suppression.[24]

Lastly, Arab states have also sought to suppress or annihilate non-state actors violently – but they have been unsuccessful in eradicating them permanently in most cases. While several Islamist networks were dismantled by the Egyptian and Libyan regimes in the 1980s and 1990s, the threat itself never vanished completely; Al-Qaida, albeit on the defensive, is still active in Yemen and in North Africa. Where non-state actors did disappear – such as communist or pan-Arabist cells – they did so because the ideology discredited itself.

The different ways in which states choose to interact with non-state actors are not coincidental, however, and echo the state's *raison d'être*. States will seek to use non-state actors in order to fulfil many roles; they can do this by tasking them directly or indirectly. But even where non-state actors challenge the state violently, they can unintentionally contribute to the protection of its legitimacy and narrative.

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[23] John Ward Anderson and Hasan Shammari, "Iraq Says Syria Harbors Foreign Killers", in *The Washington Post*, 14 November 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/13/AR2005111300466.html.

[24] John Walsh, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: Understanding Centrist Islam", in *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter 2003), p. 32-36, http://wp.me/p4AGKz-gU.

Just as the state defines its relationship with non-state actors according to its own reason for being, non-state actors do the same. As seen above, a non-state actor can fold into the state's purposes, be it by providing security, welfare or charity, or by acting as the representative of a given community within the state – but it can also take on more antagonistic forms. In this case, the non-state actor challenges the regime or political system in place, usually legitimizing its own existence by disproving the state's capacity to deliver. Examples are those which seek mainly to destabilize the state (such as Al-Qaida) or even to replace an existing one (such as ISIS, Hamas and, in the longer term, also Al-Qaida), whereas others (such as the Houthis in Yemen, the Libyan militias or Hezbollah in Lebanon) seek to control the state in which they operate.

This is also expressed in the way these non-state actors behave: ISIS and its rather extensive governmental role is of course a case in point, but even Hezbollah's military tactics have increasingly taken on state features. Both ISIS and Hezbollah now use man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and anti-tank guided weapons (ATGWs) rather than asymmetric guerrilla conflict tactics. The former organization also continues to maintain the border between Iraq and Syria in spite of its PR-worthy destruction of the border: it imposes tariffs on trucks seeking to cross from one into the other and controls identification. In Yemen, the Houthis took over military barracks and official infrastructure in their assault on Sanaa, declaring themselves to be the new Yemeni army.

Crucially, for all non-state actors in the region statehood remains the reference point, rather than the abolishment of statehood altogether.

The emergence of non-state actors in areas from which the state has retreated also implies that a vacuum is nearly impossible since non-state actors take on state roles in such a situation.

3.3 State formation in the Middle East and North Africa

Having established that the concept of statehood is not under assault in the Middle East and North Africa, we are left with the question of why non-state actors do exist in the region.

There are, in essence, two explanations for their existence which, as push- and pull factors, are intertwined. Both relate to state-building and the circumstances under which Arab states came into being.[25]

The first is the bureaucratic aspect of state formation. Where states have formed – whether in Europe or elsewhere – this has constituted first and foremost a process of bureaucratic creation and penetration. War-making and state-making went hand in hand as the state had to develop mechanisms to draft men, collect resources and manage internal conflict. Without wars, the reasoning goes, there would be no bureaucracy and consequently no state. But where European states underwent this process over centuries and with no outside interference, Arab states underwent a different process.

Instead of having to establish the mechanisms to undertake war, most Arab states (with the exception of Algeria and Saudi Arabia) achieved independence from an outside power without war. The bureaucratic process was curtailed and replaced with colonial institutions.

These institutions, already underfunded during colonial times, faced even worse financial crises right after independence. Arab states therefore found themselves in a chicken-and-egg situation: how to build costly state institutions in the absence of taxation schemes which are themselves the result of state-building?

In addition to the bureaucratic challenges, Arab states faced a legitimacy problem from the very beginning. This was not, how-

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[25] Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London and New York, I.B.Tauris, 1995, p. 3.

ever, simply the result of borders lumping heterogeneous peoples together. Instead, pan-Arabism as a political movement transcending particularly the Middle East (less so North Africa) implicitly as well as explicitly challenged the state system as it was effectively enshrined in the League of Arab States. Syria in particular displayed unification ambitions to expand its borders to include Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and parts of Iraq and Turkey. Striking a similar tone was pan-Islamism, although it gained traction a little later.

Taken together, these two challenges – bureaucratic as well as ideological – meant that the first task of Arab states became survival and the consolidation of their existence. More importantly, however, Arab states did not have the luxury of centuries that European states had and were not rooted in concepts such as the Roman *cives* and Greek *polites*: as latecomers in the International System, they had to build states much more quickly.[26]

Financially, the goal was therefore to generate income quickly. One way of doing this was, and still is, foreign assistance. Jordan, which became independent in 1946, not only faced severe budget crises but literally depended on the United Kingdom to finance its state activities, and indeed its process of state *consolidation*, as it was still building institutions such as the Jordanian military. In that, Jordan was not alone: most Arab non-oil producing states relied on foreign assistance to meet their budgetary goals, albeit to a less dramatic extent than Jordan at the time.

In addition, several Arab states relied on, and still do rely on, income generated from oil and gas or indeed other forms of rents, such as the Suez Canal in the case of Egypt. This means that taxation never penetrated Arab society to the extent that it did in Europe. Even today, taxation in the region is not the main tool of financing: on average, 17 percent of non-oil producing Arab states' budgets are funded through taxation – in oil-producing states, this sinks to 5 percent. In part this is because tax collection is not en-

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[26] Ian S. Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political 'Backwardness' in Historical Perspective", in *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 1997), p. 653-683.

forced even where taxes do exist: in Yemen, a mere 20 percent of the payable taxes are indeed paid. But even those taxes that do exist are not raised individually, but are indirect, hidden in the price of products.[27] However, the absence of taxation in Arab states represents a missed opportunity not only to develop their bureaucracies effectively, but also to penetrate their societies.

Consequently Arab states developed other mechanisms to achieve this: namely bureaucratic expansion. The creation and growth of state institutions served not only to recruit and thereby financially control the population, but also to redistribute wealth. Between 1930 and 1980, Arab governmental expenditure rose by between 40 times at the minimum and 2400 at the maximum, indicating not so much a rise in income but rather the concentration of wealth within the state institutions.[28]

As state institutions grew in size, however, they did not grow equally in capacity. Arab states consequently had to rely on non-state actors from the very beginning to meet their governance goals – in the same way European states did in their early stages.[29]

Arab states also undertook steps to address the legitimacy challenge. While bureaucratic expansion played into this by distributing welfare, they also used coercion when it came to groups challenging their authority. Internal and external security forces as well as intelligence services focused their activities mainly on citizens of the state rather than those of other states (in contrast to Israel- and Iran-heavy rhetoric). This concerned particularly entities with a regional agenda, such as pan-Arabists, pan-Islamists or communists – in essence, any entity challenging the state's existing shape. Consequently, political violence in the region has occurred mainly

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[27] Brian Whitaker, "Why Taxes are Low in the Middle East", in *The Guardian*, 23 August 2010, https://gu.com/p/2j697/stw.

[28] Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, cit., p. 292. Gerd Nonnemann, *Development, Administration and Aid in the Middle East*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 34.

[29] Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975; Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970.

between suspected opponents and proponents of the state system as it is.

As state formation progressed, Christians and Shiites, at least, in Lebanon preferred independence over integration into a pan-Syrian state; Jordanian Bedouin tribes allied themselves with the Hashemite state; and Palestinian identity took shape in the context of a state formation struggle with Israel.

However, non-state actors opposing this system – be it ISIS or Hamas – continue to operate as pockets of resistance. It is very arguable, however, that they are in themselves not so much an expression of state weakness or lack of systemic legitimacy, but rather a normal by-product of the state formation process.

As Charles Tilly noted, extended localized violence played an integral part in the formation of European states, which took several centuries.[30] It is entirely conceivable that the ongoing existence of antagonistic and violent non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa is merely a normal side effect of state consolidation.

3.4 Beyond state vacuums

Non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa are not merely an expression of a state vacuum – partly because true state vacuums are extremely rare, and partly because the actors take on these roles in the name of the state. Even when they do so in opposition to the state, they do not question statehood as such but rather want to replace the state altogether. Therefore it is not the state as a concept that is in crisis in the region, but rather governance and political systems.

This has to do with the very genesis of the Arab state system, which was born with a twin challenge: to generate income as well as legitimacy as quickly as possible in order to ensure survival. Al-

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[30] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1990.

though this in itself created other problems, such as social discontent and inefficient bureaucracies, Arab states in sum succeeded in this quest: only one Arab state, South Yemen, has disappeared from the map – and only because it merged with North Yemen.

However, as a number of Arab states were born with lack of funds and legitimacy, non-state actors emerged either to supplement the efforts of the state – or to question it. Indeed, it is in the context of violent non-state actors that Arab states ultimately became consolidated even further, in the same way that European states became consolidated in the process of war and conflict. Although its historic trajectory is different, the Arab state will prove its existence in the context of war and confirm that while states make war, war makes states.

4.

Proxy Agents: State and Non-State Alliances in the Middle East

Kristina Kausch [*]

Proxy wars in the Middle East empower non-state actors. In a seemingly intractable overlay of domestic, regional and global power struggles, major powers such as Russia and the United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia confront each other on battlegrounds beyond their own territories. They do so by means of collaborations with non-state local forces. Non-state actors, therefore, are becoming increasingly decisive in shaping the power struggles between major state powers.

Addressing a wide array of heterogeneous actors, the literature groups non-state actors into a myriad of categories. The majority of non-state actors coexist peacefully alongside state institutions, and often complement them. This chapter will focus on those non-state actors that challenge the state, categorized by whether or not they use violence to achieve their aims. Among non-state actors prepared to use violence, common categories include terrorist organizations, criminal organizations, quasi-military organizations, militias, national liberation movements, pirates and guerillas. As demarcations between state and non-state actors become increasingly blurred, the clear-cut dichotomy of traditional International Relations theory between state and non-state actors alone appears increasingly unfit to assess power relations in international affairs.

Instead, an in-between grey zone is growing as some groups, such as Hezbollah and the Islamic State (ISIS), combine features of both state and non-state actors.[1]

It has been amply noted that non-state challengers thrive in the voids left by weak state institutions and their lack of accountability and effective provision of services and security. Next to weak governance, the deterioration of state-citizen relations rests on states' relative fading value as a source of identity. In a parallel development, sources of higher authority such as Arab nationalism and royal families are losing ground, and alternative identities tied to sub- or transnational identities are on the rise, further eroding the legitimacy of the state. At the same time, the strengthening of local identities enhances the difficulties of building a consensus on how a shared state should be designed and governed.

Widespread endemic state fragility has led to a contestation of the notion of statehood. Many states in the Arab world hold territory, raise taxes and celebrate elections, but are lacking in the deeper features of a resilient state such as popular legitimacy and national cohesion. Citizens' sense of national belonging is increasingly being challenged by parallel notions of identity, such as sectarian and ethnic affiliations. Deprived of social security networks by their states, many local communities turn increasingly inward (toward their families, communities, confessions) looking for protection. State institutions suffering from eroding legitimacy become more vulnerable to non-state challenges. However, while local identities and governance models thrive, these communities often lack the capacities and reach of states to tackle transnational security challenges, limiting their ability to replace the state. Most non-state challengers, therefore, contest not the concept of statehood in itself, but rather the state's institutional design and performance.

The relations between state and non-state challengers affect statehood in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and region-

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[1] Carmit Valensi, "Non-State Actors: A Theoretical Limitation in a Changing Middle East", in *Military and Strategic Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2015), p. 59-78, http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=9390.

al security at large. Examples such as Iran's relation with Hezbollah, Qatar's patronage of the Muslim Brotherhood and Russian and US support to the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds might provide additional patterns of how states' proxy warfare and the increasing influence of non-state actors erode (or strengthen) statehood. Although it could be argued that antagonistic relations between states and non-state groups (such as Turkey's efforts to impede Syrian Kurdish empowerment) can impact the regional balance of power just as allied partnerships do, this paper focuses on the latter. To what degree are states and non-state actors using each other as a means to increase their prospects in a given conflict and/or their broader regional environment? What do notable examples of such relationships tell us about the nature of alliances between state- and non-state actors? And how do these cross-border proxy alliances affect statehood, and regional stability more broadly?

4.1 Non-state actors as a foreign policy tool

State weakness can create political vacuums that attract outsiders. Rather than filling the ensuing gap by direct intervention, outsiders often prefer to team up with local non-state actors who have the domestic roots, connections and knowledge but lack the financial and military resources, and the ideological and political support, to advance their agendas.[2] From this constellation arises a mutually beneficial partnership in which empowerment is traded for influence. Importantly, however, the relationship between state and non-state groups is not always asymmetrical; the degree of autonomy of non-state proxies and their leverage over the patron state are subject to heavy variation over time, and from one context to another.

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[2] F. Gregory Gause III, "Beyond Sectarianism. The New Middle East Cold War", in *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Papers*, No. 11 (July 2014), http://brook.gs/2bl1yS3.

As varied as the kinds of non-state actors is the relationship between states and non-state actors. Non-state groups in the Middle East and beyond can be challengers or partners to their government, with a large grey zone in between. At one end of the spectrum, many governments benefit from domestic non-state actors who complement government functions in service delivery that the state does not sufficiently provide. States may also benefit from influential non-state actors whom they manage to co-opt or instrumentalize. Often governments feel threatened by political opposition, pressure groups and public mobilization and will seek to repress them. At the opposite end of the spectrum, violent non-state challengers will seek to weaken state institutions and/or overthrow the incumbent government via direct military confrontation.

While much analysis focuses on the challenger role of non-state actors within a given state, the transnational role of non-state actors is less explored.[3] A non-state challenger to one state can be a partner to another. Some governments use non-state groups abroad to challenge other governments in their place. Proxy wars are the military result; but proxy confrontations also come in many non-violent forms. Non-state actors are increasingly becoming trans-border actors with a regional influence, and as such increasingly attractive to regional powers as partners and proxy agents.

As Florence Gaub has noted in this volume, most non-state challengers do not challenge the concept of the state as such, and operate within their home states' political economy and given structure.[4] Non-state groups may rely on external states' financial, political and military support and in turn use these assets to help advance their patrons' interests on the ground. Strong non-state challengers' capacity to seriously challenge their home states' central authority makes them all the more attractive as a strategic partner for outside forces with regional ambitions. Nevertheless, non-state

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[3] See for example Anthony Vinci, "Anarchy, Failed States, and Armed Groups: Reconsidering Conventional Analysis", in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (June 2008), p. 295-314.

[4] See the chapter of Florence Gaub in this volume.

groups' influence on the regional balance of power is mostly rooted not in whatever ambition they may have to supplant the domestic regime, but in their increasing impact on which regional power will prevail. Moving largely within the boundaries of state-drawn structures, non-state groups are "shaping the battles" between regional powers.[5]

4.2 Influential alliances

Among the many examples of transnational alliances between states and non-state actors in the Middle East, some stand out for their impact on the regional balance of power. Among these are the long-standing alliance between Iran and Hezbollah, Qatar's patronage of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the role of the Kurds in the triangle between Russia, Turkey and the United States in Syria.

4.2.1 Iran and Hezbollah

Iran is often seen as the proxy patron par excellence and the midwife of the modern militia through its long-term support of Hezbollah, which it helped establish in Lebanon in the early 1980s. Iran has systematically provided support to non-state proxies to further its interests in the region for decades. According to the US State Department, which has listed Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1984, Tehran directly supports non-state actors in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Iraq.[6]

Hezbollah has been referred to as a "poster-child for Iran's call to export and internationalize the Islamic revolution."[7] Over three

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[5] Ibrahim Halawi, "The Non-States of the Middle East: A New Era", in *Middle East Eye*, 26 June 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/node/44674.

[6] US Department of State, "State Sponsors of Terrorism", in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015*, June 2016, p. 300-301, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257520.htm.

[7] Benedetta Berti, "Lebanon", in Assaf Moghadam (ed.), Militancy and Polit-

decades, Tehran has successfully used Hezbollah simultaneously as a threat and as a deterrent against the US and Israel. Given the opaque nature of Tehran's support to local proxies, however, the precise nature and scope of the support is impossible to determine.[8] Naame Shaam, an independent campaign group focused on Iran's role in Syria, has estimated Iran's level of support to Hezbollah from the 1980s to the beginning of the Arab Spring as between 100-200 million dollars annually, which was later cut to around 50-100 million dollars per year from 2010 onwards.[9] Hezbollah is frequently portrayed as an Iranian puppet and the poster child of instrumental Middle Eastern non-state proxies. However, despite Iran's decisive influence over the group and the fact that Tehran provides a large part of Hezbollah's funding, the group remains an actor of agency.

Iran has benefited from Assad's and Hezbollah's increased vulnerability in the wake of the 2011 Syrian uprising, which greatly increased Tehran's leverage and influence in the Levant.[10] Tehran, perhaps more than any player in the region, has been adept at filling power vacuums through support of local proxies, with devastating results in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. According to Karim Sadjadpour and Behnam Ben Taleblu, the systematic use of non-state actors constitutes a central pillar of Iran's quest for regional influence:

> Tehran spreads its influence by 1) creating and cultivating non-state actors and militant groups; 2) exploiting the fears

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ical Violence in Shiism. Trends and Patterns, London and New York, Routledge, 2012, p. 127.

[8] Karim Sadjadpour and Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Iran, Leveraging Chaos", in Kristina Kausch (ed.), *Geopolitics and Democracy in the Middle East*, Madrid, FRIDE, 2015, p. 41, http://fride.org/publication/1266/.

[9] Naame Shaam, *Financing Terror. The Economic Impact of Iran's Nuclear Programme and its Support to Paramilitary Groups across the Middle East*, December 2015, p. i, http://www.naameshaam.org/financing-terror. See also Karim El-Bar, "Proxies and Politics: Why Iran funds Foreign Militias", in *Middle East Eye*, 6 October 2016, http://www.middleeasteye.net/node/57352.

[10] Karim Sadjadpour and Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Iran, Leveraging Chaos", cit., p. 37.

and grievances of religious minorities, namely Shiite Arabs; 3) fanning anger against America and Israel; and 4) influencing popular elections in order to ensure the victory of its allies.[11]

The example of Hezbollah and Iran also illustrates how regional powers carry on their antagonism through their relations with a non-state proxy. As Hezbollah advances Iranian interests in the MENA, states opposed to a greater Iranian influence in the region – most notably Saudi Arabia, its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies and Israel – oppose Hezbollah as well and form a counter-force against its empowerment.

Finally, the Hezbollah-Iran alliance stands like no other for the rise of sectarianism as a means of political and military mobilization in the larger regional power struggles in the MENA following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which entrenched Iranian influence in Iraq and favoured regional axis-building along sectarian lines. Unlike Saudi Arabia, the Iranian state depends upon ideological antagonism with the West and conflict with its neighbours to secure its domestic legitimacy and survival.[12] The role of ideology in Iran's regional ambitions is debated, and many analysts see sectarian-religious and ideological affinities in the service of geostrategic considerations. That said, sectarian affinity is by no means a guarantee for political alignment, as Tehran has experienced for example in the case of Iraqi Shia who mostly sided with their fellow Arab and Iraqi Sunnis. Parallel to its efforts to build a regional Shia axis, however, Tehran's frequent alliances with non-Shiite (Taliban, al-Qaeda) or non-Muslim actors (Russia, North Korea, Venezuela) suggest that sectarian and ideological affinities enjoy considerable flexibility as a criterion for partnerships.[13]

Like no other actor, Hezbollah, with its multiple parallel identities as a major Lebanese political party, a quasi-army and a regional

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Karim El-Bar, "Proxies and Politics: Why Iran funds Foreign Militias", cit.

[13] Karim Sadjadpour and Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Iran, Leveraging Chaos", cit., p. 39.

proxy actor, illustrates the blurred demarcation between state and non-state. In each of its identities, Hezbollah has undergone a significant transformation: a political transformation from a marginal political group into a party; a social transformation from a charity into a governance and social security apparatus; and a military transformation from a militia into a regional army and Lebanon's most sophisticated military force. Using multilayered identities, the group has been able to "develop parallel political discourses merging nationalism, sectarian politics, pan-Islamism, and internationalism" and appeal to a broad audience "within Lebanon, the Shii community at large, as well as in the Muslim world."[14]

Since early 2013, at Tehran's insistence, Hezbollah has been fighting in Syria to ensure the survival of the Assad regime. Hezbollah was initially reluctant to undertake the mission, which would inevitably shake the ideological foundations of the organization. Hezbollah's engagement in Syria constituted a watershed moment for the organization and transformed it from a national Lebanese contender confronting Israel into a regional player engaged in conflicts far beyond its traditional realm, often in collaboration with Iran.[15] Hezbollah only reluctantly bowed to heavy Iranian pressure to back Assad, as its Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah feared this would undermine Hezbollah's standing in Lebanon by associating it with helping a repressive Tehran-backed Shia government to smash its Sunni-majority population. Despite these concerns, Hezbollah reportedly agreed following a direct appeal from supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei.[16]

Hezbollah's engagement in Syria remains a contentious issue inside the movement.[17] Although it serves Hezbollah's interests to keep Assad in power, to prevent war from spilling over into Lebanon, and to strengthen the group's position as a security provider

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[14] Benedetta Berti, "Lebanon", cit., p. 122.

[15] Matthew Levitt, "Waking Up the Neighbors", in *Foreign Affairs Snapshots*, 23 July 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/1114934.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Karim El-Bar, "Proxies and Politics: Why Iran funds Foreign Militias", cit.

in Lebanon, it also leads to two major internal dilemmas. Firstly, by putting greater emphasis on the regional army, helped by external actors, it becomes ever more difficult to keep the balance between the political, social and military. Secondly, the group's enhanced regional engagement has posed an ideological challenge to an organization that had been defining itself as a national resistance movement. In order to match its Syria engagement to its traditional resistance narrative, Hezbollah's leadership has linked its Syria engagement to the Palestinian cause, portraying Syria as another front of resistance aside from fighting Israel, and the *takfiri* challenge as a threat to Islam. The regional engagement exacerbates Hezbollah's identity problem as the national resistance ticket loses ground. Therefore, the group is likely to be increasingly (albeit reluctantly) drawn into a more explicitly sectarian identity, to the benefit of Iran's regional agenda.

Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's remarks over the last two years support the notion that the group, alongside Iran's Quds Force, is taking on the role of a regional Shia military force. Over the course of the conflict, the war in Syria has come to represent a fundamental battle that will determine the future of the region, and both Iran's and Hezbollah's role in it.[18] From an Iranian point of view, the battle in Syria and Iraq will shape the MENA for many decades to come, and Tehran has shown its readiness to apply all means at hand. Hezbollah's regional engagement in Syria, and later in Yemen, has turned it essentially into a Shia regional army that fights alongside Iran's Quds Force at the behest of Tehran.

4.2.2 Qatar and the Ikhwan

Although the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) is said to have enjoyed the political and/or financial backing of a number of states, Qatar has stood out for politically and financially supporting the group and its affiliates across the Arab world. In 2012, Qatar provided 7.5 billion dollars in loans and grants to the Morsi government in

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[18] Matthew Levitt, "Waking Up the Neighbors", cit.

Egypt. Doha has also spent "hundreds of millions" of dollars to support Hamas in order to enable it to pay the salaries of civil servants in Gaza.[19] In Libya, Qatar went further than most Arab countries in politically, militarily and financially backing military intervention and aligning itself with the revolutionaries. It also provided political backing to lobby for softer lines on the Brotherhood in Washington, including turning a blind eye to the Morsi government's human rights record.[20]

Qatar's regional strategy in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings initially focused on supporting and promoting Muslim Brotherhood affiliates across the Arab world, in a bid to enhance its own regional reach by bringing allies to power. Seen by Doha as an opportunity to shape a nascent order, the 2011 Arab uprisings saw Qatar's foreign policy focus shift from regional conflict brokerage towards bold interventionism.[21] Qatar's long-standing ideological ties and support for the Brotherhood were meant to guarantee Doha the loyalty of prospective upcoming Ikhwan-led governments in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria and Libya. This included Doha's financial support to Ikhwan affiliates, including Hamas in Gaza, and the influence of its pan-Arab, pro-Ikhwan cable network Al-Jazeera. But the Brothers fell short of delivering the kind of sweeping success Doha had hoped for. They did not win a majority in Libya, were ousted by a military coup in Egypt, had to agree to consensus-based power-sharing in Tunisia and were co-opted in Morocco. The confrontation between Islamist forces and armies was fought out in civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen. Qatar's risky bet on the wrong horse eventually weakened its position in the Middle East and damaged its relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States.[22]

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[19] Mohamed Fahmy, "Doha's Domestic Troubles", in *The New York Times*, 13 January 2016, https://nyti.ms/2kl6R5Q.

[20] Lina Khatib, "Qatar and the Recalibration of Power in the Gulf", in *Carnegie Papers*, September 2014, p. 5-6, http://ceip.org/2j6W12a.

[21] Ana Echagüe, "Emboldened yet Vulnerable: The Changing Foreign Policies of Qatar and Saudi Arabia", in *FRIDE Working Papers*, No. 123 (July 2014), http://fride.org/publication/1206/.

[22] Lina Khatib, "Qatar and the Recalibration of Power in the Gulf", cit.

Unlike Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and (post-Morsi) Egypt saw the empowerment of the potent political challenger of the Muslim Brotherhood as a potential threat to their own domestic rule. Fearing that the Brotherhood's grass-roots connections could serve as a catapult for the group to successfully question incumbent authoritarian governance models in the Arab world, these countries had declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. Tensions with Qatar peaked in March 2014 when Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Doha. The conflict was eased in November with a closed-door agreement among GCC states, by which Doha reportedly agreed to shift course and scale down its support for the Brotherhood. Eventually, Qatar reduced its financial support to Hamas and other Brotherhood affiliates, and numerous Ikhwan leaders previously hosted in Doha were asked to leave. At a time when the Ikhwan's political fortunes were already in shatters, Doha's policy shift reflected a realization that it was backing the losing side while alienating some its most important allies. Moreover, the new Saudi king was more worried about preserving Gulf unity than about the Brotherhood. While Doha and Riyadh continue to differ on the Brotherhood, Doha has clearly concluded that in the face of regional conflict and polarization, it cannot risk its alignment with the GCC.[23]

Discredited in transition states as an unwelcome meddler in others' internal affairs and having avoided only by a whisker a lasting fallout with the GCC, Qatar has reverted to a quieter, more conciliatory profile, trying to reclaim some of the ground as a regional broker which it readily abandoned in 2011.[24] Through its (admittedly downscaled) pro-Ikhwan posture, Qatar continues to be "an important spoke of the wider Ikhwan wheel, expanding its importance regionally."[25] Although Doha back-pedalled when its bet on

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[23] Hussein Ibish, "Qatar Changes Course", in *The New York Times*, 29 June 2015, https://nyti.ms/2jS8g70.

[24] Kristina Kausch, "The Promise of Middle Eastern Swing States", in *Carnegie Articles*, 12 May 2016, http://ceip.org/2iXIjnf.

[25] David B. Roberts, "Qatar, the Ikhwan, and Transnational Relations in the Gulf", in *POMEPS*, 18 March 2014, https://pomeps.org/?p=4560.

the Brotherhood backfired, it maintains low-profile relations (including financial support), and may well revive them in the future.[26]

4.2.3 Russia, the United States and the Kurds

In the complex struggle for Syria and Iraq, the Kurds have taken up a key role in the triangle between Russia, the United States and Turkey over the fate of Syria. Itamar Rabinovich details how the Kurds, a stateless people in the Middle East for a century, have seen their role and influence enhanced dramatically in recent years. Syrian Kurds – a diverse group with their own internal conflicts – have been among the few winners in the war. Rabinovich stresses: "As the Russian-U.S. competition in the Iraqi-Syrian space is likely to intensify in the next few years, the Kurds' attractiveness as a local ally is likely to increase."[27]

Fighters from the Northern Syrian Kurdish combat force, the People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed ally of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), gained international recognition following the battle for Kobani in 2014, after which they were supported by the United States as a key local military force against IS. US support to Iraqi and Syrian Kurds angers the United States' NATO ally Turkey, which claims direct institutional links between Syrian Kurds and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Kurdish nationalist movement that has long sought secession from Turkey and that is considered a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and the EU.

Aside from their support of Syrian Kurds, Russia and the US are also both supporting Kurdish fighters battling IS in Iraq, known as Peshmerga. Washington has long cooperated with Iraqi Kurds but had been reluctant to extend that support to Syrian Kurds prior to the surge of IS, inter alia because the US was opposed to the idea of self-ruled autonomous areas within Syria. This US reluctance was

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Itamar Rabinovich, "The Russian-U.S. Relationship in the Middle East: A Five Year Projection", in *Carnegie Task Force on U.S. Policy Toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia Papers*, 5 April 2016, p. 6, http://ceip.org/2gTbt5U.

taken advantage of by Russia.[28] Washington had been cooperating with Iraqi Kurdish forces in the aftermath of the 2003 intervention, all the while trying to promote rapprochement between Turkey and what became the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. The rise of IS in Syria and Iraq strengthened US-Kurdish cooperation further, with Washington extending support to the Syrian Kurds as well. The US, while not in favour outright of Kurdish independence, was the most important outside supporter of the Kurds – until Russia stepped in. Moscow's support for the Kurds, especially its coordinated air cover to help Kurdish fighters advance on the ground in Northern Syria, has created a dilemma for Washington: if the United States reduce their support in response, they risk losing influence with the PYD (and Kurdish nationalists more broadly) to Russia. However, its continuing support of the Kurds strains Washington's relations with Turkey.[29] At the same time, even after Moscow and Ankara's reconciliation following their fallout over the November 2015 jet-downing incident, the continued strategic threat posed to Turkey by Russia's military role in Syria and its support of the Kurds may help smooth relations between Washington and Ankara.[30]

Russia is the oldest great power patron of the Kurds, and linkages between Moscow and the Kurds have been a recurring theme in Middle Eastern geopolitics for two centuries.[31] Over recent decades, Moscow has sought to balance its support for the Kurds and the governments of the countries with Kurdish minorities (Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq). Alongside its backing of the Assad regime, Russia supports the Kurdish PYD/YPG. By cultivating ties with Kurdish groups through arms and oil deals, Moscow is able to keep a foothold in the area, building upon the presence it established

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[28] Maxim A. Suchkov, "How Russia Sees Kurdish Quest for Autonomy", in *Al-Monitor*, 6 May 2016, http://almon.co/2nm3.

[29] Mark N. Katz, "Russia and the Syrian Kurds: A Complex Interaction", in *The Arab Weekly*, No. 61 (19 June 2016), p. 8, http://www.thearabweekly.com/?id=5529.

[30] Itamar Rabinovich, "The Russian-U.S. Relationship in the Middle East: A Five Year Projection", cit.

[31] Michael A. Reynolds: 'Vladimir Putin, Godfather of Kurdistan", in *The National Interest*, 1 March 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/node/15358.

with the help of the Assad regime.[32] Kurdish military advances against IS, paired with a perception of US negligence of the Syria conflict, have boosted Moscow's motivation to expand its ties with the Kurds in Syria and Iraq.[33] By cooperating with the Kurds, who share Russia's opposition to both Turkey and the Islamic State, Moscow can advance the fight against IS, punish Turkey, reduce US leverage in Syria and drive a wedge between the US and Turkey, thus weakening NATO.[34] Moreover, by intervening in Syria in September 2015, Moscow skilfully exploited Washington's hesitation and portrayed itself to Middle Eastern powers and to the world as the more decisive, reliable patron and ally.[35]

As Mark N. Katz points out, Russia's support for Syrian Kurds is creating various dilemmas for Moscow's own Middle East policy.[36] Russian support for the Kurds bolsters Moscow's claims that its actions in Syria are aimed not merely at keeping Assad in power but also at effectively fighting IS. At the same time, support for the Kurds strains Russia's relations with several other governments. Despite a preference for regional stability, Russian political circles reckon on a possible future Kurdish statehood. The Kurds are likely to capitalize on their key role in central battles in a region in flux to support their claim for statehood. A profound restructuring of the Middle Eastern state system would likely backfire on those who have sponsored it by damaging relations with countries with Kurdish minorities (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran). Some voices in Moscow therefore argue that Russia should stick to its advocacy of strong states as guarantors of regional stability, or else support more moderate minority arrangements.[37]

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[32] Thomas Grove and Ben Kesling, "Russia Pursues Ties with Kurds to Keep Foothold in the Region", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 April 2016.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Michael A. Reynolds: 'Vladimir Putin, Godfather of Kurdistan", cit.

[35] Yaroslav Trofimov, "Russia's Long Road to the Middle East", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 May 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-long-road-to-the-middle-east-1464361067.

[36] Mark N. Katz, "Russia and the Syrian Kurds: A Complex Interaction", cit.

[37] Maxim A. Suchkov, "How Russia Sees Kurdish Quest for Autonomy", cit.

Moscow's favourable view of far-reaching Kurdish autonomy within Syria is also at odds with Assad's determination to rule over the entire Syrian territory. A post-war clash between Russia's two Syrian allies – Assad and the Kurds – is likely, complicating Moscow's relations with both. Moscow's alliance with the Kurds is also frowned upon by Iran, which fears that its own Kurdish nationalist opposition at home could be inspired by an empowerment of Kurdish minorities elsewhere in the region. In the case of a clash between Assad and the Syrian Kurds, continued Russian support of the Kurds would therefore pit Moscow not only against Assad but also, and foremost, against Tehran – a confrontation Moscow will undoubtedly wish to avoid.[38]

4.3 Proxy agents, statehood and regional stability

The examples assessed in this chapter illustrate how in some instances alliances between states and non-state challengers can potentially work towards restoring regional stability. In most cases, however, they show proxy relationships as a factor that tends to weaken statehood and exacerbate regional instability.

Proxies as military challengers to regimes: Perhaps most obviously, proxy wars fuelled by external powers are more likely to destabilize a non-state group's domestic government than a confrontation without such external interference. State patrons' military, financial and political support empowers their non-state clients to directly confront incumbent regimes they would otherwise not have been able to challenge. For external patrons, the use of local proxies provides battle advantage and often spares them direct military involvement. In a few cases – such as the Kurds' role in fighting the Islamic State – non-state partners help restore regional stability by neutralizing other non-state challengers to the existing state system.

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[38] Mark N. Katz, "Russia and the Syrian Kurds: A Complex Interaction", cit.

Proxies as future rulers: Some external state patrons support specific non-state actors deliberately with the goal of challenging, destabilizing or ousting the government of its home state, shaping it to the patron's liking and/or influencing political agendas. Qatar's strategic bolstering of the Muslim Brotherhood in a (failed) bid to shape a nascent regional order dominated by governments to its liking is a case in point.

Proxies as bearers of identity: Middle Eastern non-state actors are becoming more attractive to governments as bearers of identity. The relative erosion of nationalism as a source of identity has shifted power to non-state groups and given them significant leverage over states and political agendas.[39] Alliances based on non-nationalist identities can be both an expression and an aggravator of a weak sense of nationhood. Transnational alliances thriving on sectarianism can erode nation-state identities further (e.g. the regional Shia agenda advanced by Iran, helped by Hezbollah).

Proxies as sources of legitimacy: As local and transnational identities gain in importance over nationalist notions, states turn to non-state actors to draw legitimacy from their religious, sectarian, ideological or tribal affiliation. Moreover, affinities between patron and client based on kinship, ideology and religion are key to establishing and sustaining the relationship. In an overlay of sectarianism, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have used sectarian proxies to legitimize and support their regional power competition guided by the formation of a sectarianism-led axis.

Proxies as leverage cards: Rather than supporting non-state actors as an alternative to inter-state cooperation, states often back specific non-state groups as a means to gain leverage over other regional powers (e.g. Russia gaining leverage over Turkey by supporting the Kurds). Hence, the rise of regional non-state actors does not ease the current environment of increasing classical inter-state competition, but tends to fuel such competition further.

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[39] Ibrahim Halawi, "The Non-States of the Middle East: A New Era", cit.

4.4 Increasing agency in a global context

While many non-violent non-state actors complement the state in ways beneficial to society, the impact of notable transnational collaborations between non-state groups and regional or global powers is leaving a profound mark on the Middle East, and on global order. The multilayered nature of proxy wars, combining domestic with regional and global power competition, makes these conflicts ever more intractable. In this constellation, non-state groups are actors of increasing agency, and some of them are taking on regional or even global roles, venturing far beyond their original domestic playing field.

Governments seeking to influence developments in the Middle East must adopt non-state thinking and factor non-state groups far more systematically into their policy calculus, not only militarily but also politically, diplomatically and legally. In doing so, states must part from their habit of perceiving non-state actors as key players only once they turn into violent spoilers. Instead, non-state entities must be factored in as both challengers and potential partners. As the state and loyalty to public institutions constitute but one possible authority, non-state actors with regional influence should become important allies of transatlantic Middle East policy.

5.

(In)security in an Era of Turbulence: Mapping Post-Statist Geopolitics in the Middle East

Waleed Hazbun

The 29 June 2014 declaration by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), of the formation of a new "sovereign" political entity, self-defined as an Islamic caliphate, led to a new wave of debates about the nature of state authority and territorial boundaries in the Middle East. A common shorthand for this debate is the question of the "end of Sykes-Picot." The secret 1916 agreement between Britain and France sought to divide the lands of the soon-to-fall Ottoman Empire between areas of British and French control and influence. It is often (but incorrectly) considered the blueprint for the colonial construction of artificial borders used to carve up the Arab world. The formation of ISIS and the rise of its caliphate have not only sought to erase parts of the Syrian-Iraqi border but are also more broadly viewed as a challenge to the Arab territorial state order. Regardless of the longevity and sustainability of the caliphate as a political entity, its formation is a stark representation of one aspect of the changing geopolitical map of the Middle East and the ever-increasing limits of using a statist map to explain geopolitical change in the region.

Beyond the Syria-Iraq border, in most cases the territorial boundaries of states across the region still enjoy international recognition and legitimacy. Such lines, however, are limited in their

ability to offer a complete map of political organization and change across the region. While addressing these limits, this chapter also offers an alternative to the discourse that maps Middle East politics in terms of state vacuums, ungoverned spaces, and weak states. These expressions are too often based on a Westphalian binary in which the failures of states in the region to fulfil all the functions of an ideal-type Weberian state are read, almost by definition, as signs of state failure, disorder, and insecurity. In contrast, this chapter begins by contextualizing the current era of political reorganization in a longer history of state-building, political mobilization, and insecurity from the point of view of political actors within the region, including state/regime elites as well as different societal actors and non-state actors. While the primary concern of state elites has often been to maintain their power in the face of domestic and regional threats, most other actors have struggled to promote the interests and security of their self-defined communities by constantly renegotiating their relationships with state and non-state forces.

Viewed in this historical perspective, the ISIS declaration of a caliphate is unusual because the Islamic State's model of state-building more closely resembles the European patterns of state-building and war-making (as organization crime) identified by Charles Tilly than historic patterns of externally defined state-building in the Middle East.[1] At the same time, the rise of the caliphate is the starkest example of both self-organized political mobilization and the erosion of the capacity of external powers to control patterns of state-building and political change in the region.

The history of externally defined state-making in the Middle East left the region with a legacy of both state and societal insecurity, often defined in opposing ways. Newly independent states often relied on external support to secure their regimes against both internal and regional threats. As a result, as Steve Niva observes, across Middle East societies there existed "a powerful discourse of region-

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[1] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1990.

al insecurity about the threat to the region posed by the West and Western powers."[2] He also notes:

> Opposition movements in the region frequently contend that the present global order subordinates the rights of the colonized and postcolonial states to the requirements of the self-defined national interests and security concerns of the West.[3]

Thus even before the most recent era of globalization in the 1990s, across the Middle East domestic politics was always interwoven with regional and international politics. During the 1950s and 1960s regional "Arabist" forces were able to challenge pro-Western regimes and sought to redefine the regional order long dominated by the British and French. By the 1970s, however, radical nationalist forces were contained and/or suppressed with the consolidation of authoritarian regimes, often backed by oil resources and/or external aid. Due in part to this repression and the regimes' external dependence, a range of oppositional Islamists movements arose to challenge the power and legitimacy of Middle East rulers. With American efforts in the 1990s and 2000s to remake the politics of the region, most disastrously with the US-led invasion of Iraq, the already fragile architecture of state governance began to collapse. The region witnessed the vast expansion of self-organized political movements and the emergence of hybrid political actors where non-state and sub-state actors have come to exercise state-like capacities and authorities. What external powers came to call state vacuums, ungoverned spaces, and weak states were not simply spaces lacking direct state control. They were more often spaces governed by local forms of political authority that external or occupying powers could not control and where state authority was

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[2] Steve Niva, "Contested Sovereignties and Postcolonial Insecurities in the Middle East", in Jutta Weldes et al. (eds.), *Cultures of Insecurity. States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 147-172 at p. 149.

[3] Ibid., p. 151.

viewed as illegitimate. As a result, many external/Western readings of the regional geopolitics in the Middle East define its shape as "disorder" and suggest the need for external intervention, viewing such intervention as the antidote to disorder rather than one of its main causes.

Rather than viewing these trends as the product of characteristics specific to the region, this chapter, drawing on insights from the work of James Rosenau, explains these developments in terms of the evolution of "turbulence" within the Middle East regional system.[4] Rosenau's turbulence model not only recognizes the interconnectedness of domestic and international politics, but also highlights the erosion of hierarchical state-centred forms of order at the domestic and international levels and the rise of the capacity and authority, as well as the numerical proliferation, of societal and sub-state actors. Using Rosenau's framework, this chapter identifies the shift from statist to "post-statist" geopolitics in the region with a focus on the era since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Noting how the erosion of state governance and capacity across the Middle East and the rise of self-organized political movements were combined with intense forms of regional and external intervention, the chapter suggests how the texture of regional geopolitics is being transformed by the rise of diverse "hybrid" actors, and how transnational processes are creating networks and social organizations that are not fully or formally sovereign but nonetheless increasingly wield power and control territory. In most cases, the initial development of political forces that have exhibited hybrid-sovereignty has been in response to external occupation, such as by Israel in Palestine or Lebanon or the USA in Iraq. Then, in the wake of the self-organized political mobilizations of the Arab uprisings, hybrid actors have proliferated due to expanded state erosion and transnational interventions by regional powers and allied forces. As a re-

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[4] James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics. A Theory of Change and Continuity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990; James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier. Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

sult, the Middle East regional system has come to be shaped by the ways in which rival states across the region's multiple geopolitical divides – such as the geopolitical struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia – seek to influence and control such hybrid actors and networks, with the result being a turbulent regional system in which state interests are often hard to discern and shift in complex ways.

5.1 The geopolitics of (in)security in the Middle East

Too often the geopolitics of (in)security in the Middle East is viewed almost exclusively in terms of state actors with a focus on the security concerns of external actors. By this I mean that security is defined in terms of "national security," with a focus on the interests and perspectives of state elites. In the Middle East context, threats to security most often consist of internal challenges to regime power rather than external threats to the state and the civilian population. At the same time, the study of Middle East security issues in Western academic research and policy discourse tends to be focused on the concerns of external (Western) states and their political interests. The agency of regional Middle East actors is most commonly viewed in terms of how it either threatens or serves Western interests and allies.[5]

In contrast, I suggest an alternative approach to the study of security in the Middle East that recognizes the heterogeneous nature of the regional security environment. The value of such an approach is made clear by the observation that across the Middle East societal actors often understand the sources of insecurity they face in ways that differ from those of state elites and political regimes. This disjunction is due in large part to the way the region became

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[5] See Waleed Hazbun, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Challenge of Postcolonial Agency: International Relations, US Policy and the Arab World", in Graham Huggan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 217-234.

integrated into global political and economic structures and the resulting patterns of state-building.[6] Middle East regimes have tended either to gain security directly from external powers, or else to collect the needed resources from external or rentier sources (like oil receipts or foreign aid). This process short-circuits the European-style state-building dynamics as understood by Charles Tilly "in which the state essentially promises other groups and forces in society a certain level of security, in return for the resources it extracts to purchase this security."[7] As a result, state elites in the Middle East tend to define their interests in relation to their external patrons rather than their own societies, while societal groups often view external forces, rival societal groups, or even the state itself as threats.

In addition, especially since 2003, the interests and actions of state actors in the Middle East must be considered along with diverse non-state and sub-state actors as well as what can be referred to as "hybrid" actors that are not fully or formally sovereign but increasingly wield power and control territory. While the region witnessed the rise of actors such as Hezbollah and Hamas prior to 2003, the US invasion of Iraq and the resulting collapse of the Iraqi state mobilized nationalist insurgencies and jihadist forces, led Kurdish forces to claim more semi-sovereign powers, and opened the door to Iran and other regional states backing local militias and proxies to serve their own interests. These diverse actors serve as agents of both security and insecurity for various political organizations and communities. In the shift from statist to post-statist

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[6] Waleed Hazbun, "A History of Insecurity: From the Arab Uprisings to ISIS", in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Fall 2015), p. 55-65, http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/history-insecurity-arab-uprisings-isis. See also Steve Niva, "Contested Sovereignties and Postcolonial Insecurities in the Middle East", cit.

[7] Keith Krause, "Insecurity and State Formation in the Global Military Order: The Middle Eastern Case", in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1996), p. 339. See also Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, cit.; Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994.

geopolitics, the exclusive sovereignty of central states has become fragmented between rival claimants and/or decomposed into a network of complex relationships, where selective authorities and functions are subcontracted by state actors to non-state and hybrid actors. Lastly, this approach views all actors (including state and non-state actors) as embedded in transnational security relationships, where they both gain security and generate insecurity based on transnational connections and interactions. The fragmentation and decomposition of state authority is driven both by state-society dynamics within each territory and by new forms of regional and external intervention that seek to control and exploit these new dynamics.

5.2 Statist order in the Middle East:
From consolidation to erosion

While the evolution of what I am terming a post-statist order can be viewed as a recent transition, the establishment of the statist order in the Middle East has from its origins been bifurcated within each state between a ruling elite with external ties and a society with divergent understandings of security. The post-World War I League of Nations Mandate system carved out territorial states in the former Ottoman lands and installed elite nationalist political leaders to rule them. While many of these territories gained formal independence during World War II, "because of the way they were structured and the elites that governed them, [they] continued to behave as colonies."[8] These territorial states and their leaderships were often defined more by colonial geopolitical interests than by local notions of territory, identity, and sovereignty. Rather than creating a stable order, the post-Mandate state system was rejected by powerful societal forces driven by Arab nationalist and social

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[8] Tamim Al-Barghouti, *The Umma and the Dawla. The Nation-State and the Arab Middle East*, London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 4.

reformist ideologies, various territorial nationalisms, Islamic solidarity, and different notions of *asabiyya* (collective group identity). In the first decades of the 20th century, colonial powers and the newly established colonial states faced a series of populist revolts against the externally imposed authorities in North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Iraq.

Even after they were granted independence, ruling elites in Arab states were often more dependent on external powers than on popular support for maintaining their power, resulting in the Arab world being incorporated into a hierarchal global order.[9] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s conflicts between regime and societal understandings of insecurity were defined by the rise of radical-populist Arab nationalism, which sought to challenge the role Western powers played in Arab regional politics.[10] Following a wave of military coups that brought Arab nationalist leaders to power, the mobilization of Arab nationalist forces compelled some states to follow Arabist policies even when they challenged the regime's own interests, often tied to their external patrons. By the 1970s, however, the consolidation of state regimes and the suppression of dissenting social forces resulted in foreign policies more reflective of regime preferences, often tied to the security interests of external powers. As famously noted by Fouad Ajami in the late 1970s, "*raison d'état* [...] is gaining ground [... as] a 'normal' state system is becoming a fact of life."[11] With the decline in the salience of transnational forces like Arab nationalism, external powers and the newly wealthy oil states gained leverage in shaping regional geopolitics. The goal of revisionist forces, such as the Palestinian nationalist movement, was often to conform to and become integrated into the regional

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[9] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Middle East in the World Hierarchy: Imperialism and Resistance", in *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 2011), p. 213-246.

[10] Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War. Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd ed., London and New York, Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1971.

[11] Fouad Ajami, "The End of Pan-Arabism", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Winter 1978/79), p. 355.

state order.[12] At the same time, the USA came to play a much larger role in the region, with the British and the French having retreated. In its approach to the region, the USA sought to manage a statist order, backing authoritarian allies and seeking to deter their rivals through offshore balancing and an "over the horizon" military capacity to intervene if needed.

By the 1990s, however, new disjunctures arose between societal groups and their regimes over their understanding of insecurity. The major challenge came from Islamist movements and as a result of neo-liberal economic policies that produced social dislocation and political marginalization. As states suppressed social mobilization and shut down spaces for political expression, many Arab regimes increasingly came to depend on outside economic and military support from the USA to maintain their power and security in the face of domestic threats to their authority. As a result, an ever growing gap developed between societal and state discourses of insecurity, setting the stage for the process of state erosion that followed. As Marc Lynch notes, "The progressive hollowing out of autocratic states left states such as Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen without the capacity to survive the combination of popular uprising and regional proxy wars."[13] Social exclusion, state exhaustion, and authoritarian repression helped give rise to militant Islamist movements that offered an ideological challenge to the modern secular-nationalist state and at times resorted to violence in efforts to bring down regimes. The failure of the US-backed peace process to establish a US-dominated regional order created further tensions for US allies and insecurity for both Arab regimes and societies. But it was the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and with it the resulting rise of Iranian regional influence, that really produced the fragmentation of political order in the Middle East. Compounding the existing

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[12] Yezid Sayigh, "Armed Struggle and State Formation", in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer 1997), p. 17-32.

[13] Marc Lynch, "Failed States and Ungoverned Spaces", in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 668, No. 1 (November 2016), p. 27, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0002716216666028.

state-society disjunctures, this fragmentation helped to enable the self-organized political mobilization of the Arab uprisings but also, driven by regional and external interventions, their subsequent slide into civil wars.

5.3 TOWARDS A GEOPOLITICS OF TURBULENCE

Drawing on insights from James Rosenau's theory of turbulence in global politics, I want to suggest that the era since the US invasion of Iraq should be viewed in terms of the broader trends towards a multipolar system at the global level, declining political and economic control by states over societies, and increasing power of non-state and transnational actors. Across the Middle East, these trends date back decades, but it was in the 2000s that centralized governance in many states and the architecture of a regional US-backed order began to collapse. Rosenau's theory of turbulence was developed towards the end of the Cold War to explain how geopolitical change can be driven by the increasing capacities of individuals and local actors to create new self-organizing networks and movements.[14] He shows how these forces reshape politics outside the structure of the sovereign state political order at both the sub-state and transnational levels. Eurocentric understandings of globalization have often prevented Western observers from fully recognizing patterns of turbulence in the Middle East. These patterns of popular mobilization generally did not mimic expected patterns of globalization or trends found elsewhere, which many viewed as moving towards convergence around liberal-democratic capitalist systems. It was only during the first wave of the Arab uprisings of 2010-11 in Tunisia and Egypt that Western observers seemed to recognize the capacity of Arab societies to mobilize self-organized protest movements and offer alternative visions for their political

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[14] James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics*, cit.; James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier*, cit.

future. Decades earlier, however, the Palestinian intifada, Islamist community groups, Kurdish regional autonomy, the Iraqi insurgency, and Lebanon's Hezbollah movement all represented different, innovative forms of political organization that challenged the centralized authority of states and occupation regimes. Such mobilizations, while often benefiting from external support, were not simply a product of failed or weak states, but also represented the realization of alternative forms of self-organized political mobilization and governance. Rosenau's turbulence model allows us to view these developments in the light of broader processes that proliferated globally around the time of the end of the Cold War, such as movements towards regional autonomy, environmentalism, indigenous rights, and transnational civil society.

Many of the key sources of turbulence that define Rosenau's model are processes that had been largely ignored in studies of Middle East politics but quickly gained prominence during the Arab uprisings. These include the proliferation of non-state and societal actors engaged in political struggle, the deployment of new technologies for communication and organization, the transformation of national economic systems by expanded transnational flows and networks, and more broadly the weakening of the state-controlled hierarchies within the domestic and global spheres.[15] Turbulence is a product of global politics being transformed by simultaneous developments at multiple scales and levels. At the micro level, while technological changes increase the capabilities of individuals to engage in collective social mobilization, the capacity and authority of states is eroded by their failures to provide order, well-being, and security for their populations. Such trends have developed in the Middle East in recent decades with societal and informal sector responses to the shift from statist to neo-liberal economic policies and more repressive authoritarianism. Within this context, community-oriented groups – organized along family, religious, nationalist lines – developed their own survival strategies and communal networks to promote

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[15] James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier*, cit., p. 65-77.

economic well-being and security, at times relying on trans-border networks. Such efforts blossomed during the Arab uprisings as democratic activists and followers of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as Salafi networks and, eventually, the extremists of ISIS, developed their own political maps and imaginary futures outside of the authority structures of existing regimes whose legitimacy had been deeply eroded.

Most critically for the region, as Barry Posen recognizes, one aspect of the "diffusion of power" has been that of military capacity.[16] The spread of the ability to buy or manufacture low-tech weapons, the diffusion of military expertise, and increased access to networks of communication, transportation, and trade have enabled even the smallest militant groups and insurgencies to challenge state authorities and "secure" their local communities. The process of state erosion and territorial fragmentation, previously seen during the 1990s in places like northern Iraq and southern Lebanon, vastly expanded in the early 2000s with the US invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, and Israeli policies towards the Palestinian territories. In these cases, the projection of military power by external actors and their efforts to administer occupations helped generate new networks of resistance by armed militias, transnational terrorist groups, and underground insurgencies. These dynamics have expanded with the militarization of the uprisings leading to the fragmentation of territorial control not only in Syria, Iraq and Libya but also in parts of Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon. Referring to Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, Lynch notes, "[e]ach country has witnessed the collapse of central state authority over significant portions of its territory and the emergence of alternative contenders for political legitimacy."[17]

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[16] Barry R. Posen, "The Case for Restraint", in *The American Interest*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (November/December 2007), p. 10.

[17] Marc Lynch, "Failed States and Ungoverned Spaces", cit., p. 27. See also chapter 5 in Samer Abboud, *Syria*, Cambridge and Malden, Polity, 2015.

5.4 The dynamics of hybrid actors and networks

At the centre of the erosion of state authority by both political and military means is the development of "hybrid" actors with semi-sovereign authority over territory and military capabilities. Hybrid actors create networks and social organizations that are not fully or formally sovereign but increasingly wield power and control, if not also govern, territory. Hybrid actors and networks often emerge from among non-state actors but can also develop from among state-affiliated actors (like pro-government militias) that come to operate outside the direct hierarchical control of the central state. Hybrid actors from Hezbollah and Hamas to the Kurdish peshmerga, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, the Sadrist movement and other Iraqi militias, as well as the countless armed groups operating in Syria, have come to define patterns of (in)security and political change in Middle East politics in this era of "chaos."[18] As Marc LeVine highlighted a decade ago, such movements eschew the goals of national liberation movements or of revolutionaries seeking to capture the state.[19] Instead, they have developed new forms of semi-sovereign authority, selectively developing sovereign-like authorities and obligations over the populations and territory under their rule. These hybrid organizations operate as actors in the global system, developing economic, diplomatic, and military relations with states and other hybrid organizations.

While the diffusion of state power and the transformation of political and security architectures are the products of mobilization within society, state policies also result in the formation and proliferation of hybrid actors. As sub-state and non-state actors gain more authority and control over local resources and populations, state actors might need to "subcontract" or "outsource" tasks to local militias or popular organizations. Doing so represents a shift from a hierarchical command mode to something more like a net-

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[18] Mark LeVine, "Chaos, Globalization, and the Public Sphere: Political Struggle in Iraq and Palestine", in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Summer 2006), p. 467-492.

[19] Ibid.

work, or at times a market. Even when the central state actors and their sub-state or non-state subcontractors have similar interests and goals, these patterns of transaction represent a more horizontal structure of organization and a diffusion of authority and control. They allow local agents serving the state more autonomy in deciding how to perform tasks. At the same time, these patterns do not reflect the collapse of the state, but rather these forms of reorganization can increase the resilience of "the state" as the line between state and hybrid actors becomes blurred. Consider, for example, Kheder Khaddour's observation about the unexpected resilience of the Syrian state as the Assad regime battles to regain control of its population and territory in the midst of the ongoing war:

[T]he army's networks of patronage and nepotism, which predate the war, have morphed into a parallel chain of command that strengthens the regime. By withdrawing the army from select front lines, the regime has managed to bolster its social, political, and local community base after outsourcing its infantry needs to ad hoc militias. The parallel chain of command has enabled the regime to adapt its strategy to reflect the conflict's quickly changing dynamics, secure its authority over loyalist paramilitary forces, and entrench itself in key territories.[20]

Thus the regime is strengthened by what might be viewed as a "weakening" of the state, as this process gives state structures more flexibility. As has been the case in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and to some degree Palestine, such patterns of reorganization also allow for more diverse challenges of external support. In particular, Iran and its allies (such as Hezbollah) have been able to give aid and support directly to diverse militias across the region. This bypasses formal hierarchies, thus avoiding direct challenge to central state authorities, while giving outside powers more influence within ongoing political and military struggles.[21]

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[20] Kheder Khaddour, "Strength in Weakness: The Syrian Army's Accidental Resilience", in *Carnegie Middle East Center Regional Insights*, 16 March 2016, p. 1, http://ceip.org/2gX9Sfl.

[21] Ibid., p. 6. See, also, David W. Lesch and James Gelvin, "Assad Has Won in

5.5 The reconfiguration of US power in the region

Across the Middle East, new possibilities for post-statist politics have been enabled by a reconfiguration of the role of external and regional powers. Their relative influence, I suggest, will be shaped largely by their ability to navigate amid the region's evolving turbulence and gain means to influence, control, and/or contain rising hybrid actors. One major factor has been the "retreat" of the USA from region-wide power projection and intervention. This has entailed the so-called "rightsizing" of the US presence, shifting in its military strategy to what it calls a "lighter footprint."[22] Many US policies since 2003, from its deployment of military forces to its backing of repressive regimes, have sought to project power directed at containing non-state actors and transnational networks in an effort to re-establish state power and sovereignty over territories.

The USA has responded to the limits of these efforts and the decline in its political leverage regionally, however, by deploying new tools and techniques to foster and wield influence over hybrid actors and networks. It has done so, for example, by supporting diverse militias and the flows of arms and intelligence that sustain them. Meanwhile, US military power and modes of engagement with the region have been reconfigured to match the networked and self-organizing patterns of these emerging forces.

One way in which the USA has accommodated rising turbulence has been to develop new organizational structures in the deployment of US power. Often unnoticed in the shift towards a "light footprint" military posture is that the reconfiguration of US power projection from large land- and sea-based military forces has not diminished US engagement. Rather, it has expanded the scope and

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Syria. But Syria Hardly Exists", in *The New York Times*, 11 January 2017, https://nyti.ms/2jHQlQ2.

[22] Marc Lynch, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 5 (September/October 2015), p. 18-27, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/1115032.

increased the intensity of its engagements, but in less visible and less politically accountable ways.

As Steve Niva explains, the development of new organizational structures in the US military evolved from the ground up among US forces fighting on the front lines of the post-9/11 "war on terror" in Afghanistan and Iraq.[23] In the process, the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) became an organizational hub for coordinating the activities of teams within different militaries commands and covert agencies that had established their own forms of networked military operations. These include the use of small units of elite special forces, reliance on high-tech operations using drones, electronic tracking, cyber war, and closer military-to-military cooperation with (US-trained) foreign units in the region. In many ways, this evolving form of networked warfare mirrors the networked structures of self-organized militias and fighters that have come to control large areas of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

As a result, more and more US forces operate within a largely autonomous command structure while engaging in a shadow war of targeted killing that, in Niva's words,

> resembles a global and possibly permanent policing operation in which targeted operations are used to manage populations and threats in lieu of addressing the social and political problems that produce the threats in the first place.[24]

Within this system, units have increased operational autonomy to locate, target, and strike. As war comes to consist more of night raids and drone strikes, Niva argues, US military violence progressively disappears from media coverage and evades existing mechanisms for political accountability in the USA and abroad. The US campaign against ISIS has in fact largely been an extension of such existing operations. The continuing post-uprisings deployment of

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[23] Steve Niva, "Disappearing Violence: JSOC and the Pentagon's New Cartography of Networked Warfare", in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (June 2013), p. 185-202, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0967010613485869.

[24] Ibid., p. 185.

US military power accommodates the decline of US popular support for American wars in the Middle East and uncertainty about core strategic interests, but it also represents a form of perpetual warfare disconnected from political processes in both the USA and the Middle East.

5.6 A REGIONAL CONFLICT OF NETWORKS

Another major factor in the reshaping of Middle East geopolitics has been the effective containment of the core regional states that have historically defined state-centred geopolitics in the Middle East. The constraint of Egypt, Syria and Iraq by their own internal power struggles has allowed for the rise of regional powers such as Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran. These rising regional powers have played increasingly important roles in reshaping the regional order and in its shift towards post-statist geopolitics. While Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent Turkey, have been involved in military operations (respectively in Yemen and in Kurdish areas of Iraq and Syria), all these states to different degrees have projected power indirectly through their influence over flows and networks.

Thus, while states remain key actors in regional geopolitics, both regional and external states have sought to advance their interests by backing hybrid and sub-state actors, such as political parties and militias, directing transnational flows of funds, arms, and intelligence. With the breakdown in state order in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya, armed hybrid and sub-state actors have come to play central roles in regional politics. The impact of these trends has also been felt across borders in more relatively stable territories, such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The role of hybrid actors and the declining authority of states is most evident in the rise of a regional struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was first termed a "new Arab Cold War" in the mid-2000s. By 2014, the sectarian-tinged geopolitical struggle between Saudi-led forces and Iran's allies in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon

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emerged as the defining feature of regional politics, displacing the Arab-Israel conflict as the main axis. Regimes and political forces have been increasingly evoking sectarian language that seeks to mobilize societies by refocusing their insecurities away from socio-economic conditions and the lack of political rights. As Gregory Gause explains, "It is the weakening of Arab states [...] that has created the battlefields of the new Middle East cold war."[25] This endemic societal insecurity, made still worse by foreign intervention across the region, is what has provided the basis for the rise of non-state and hybrid actors seeking to carve out their own spaces of sovereignty and security, even as they gain backing and support from regional and external states. Meanwhile, with rival and allied states each seeking to influence and control rival networks, the result is a turbulent regional system in which state interests are often hard to discern and shift in complex ways.

Some of the most complex patterns of conflict are found across Syria, where outside of regime control, territorial sovereignty has been fragmented between Kurdish-controlled Rojava, ISIS, a "Salafist-Jihadist network of violence" dominated by the group formerly known as Jabhat an-Nusra, and other rebel organizations.[26] Each of the ruling authorities in these territories has different, at times shifting, relationships with external states and rival hybrid organizations. In a state-centred regional order, it is likely that the rise of a revisionist "non-state" challenger such as ISIS would have been swiftly met with coordinated action by regional states. But in the existing turbulent environment, the norms of state sovereignty (under which ISIS, with no allies, would be viewed as a threat to all states) have been replaced by the fluid rivalry of states and hybrid actors.[27] Turkey, for example, is more concerned about the expanding power of Kurdish forces, while

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[25] F. Gregory Gause, III, "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War", in *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Papers*, No. 11 (July 2014), p. 4, http://brook.gs/2bl1yS3.

[26] Samer Abboud, *Syria*, cit., chapter 5.

[27] Curtis Ryan, "Regional Responses to the Rise of ISIS", in *Middle East Report*, No. 276 (Fall 2015), p. 18-23, http://www.merip.org/mer/mer276/regional-responses-rise-isis.

the Gulf states prioritize backing armed groups seeking to overthrow the Syrian regime. Nor can regional politics be clearly viewed as defined by sectarian affinities. In Iraq, the USA finds itself fighting ISIS in parallel with Iran, its major regional rival who strongly backs the Syrian regime and Hezbollah in Lebanon. While the post-2013 regime in Egypt receives extensive backing from the Gulf states, neither this aid nor its "Sunni Arab identity" have compelled Egypt to commit to supporting the Saudi-led war in Yemen or siding with the Sunni-based opposition seeking to overthrow the regime in Syria. In the view of the Egyptian regime, its main threat is the now suppressed Muslim Brotherhood, and thus they have common cause with the Syrian regime, who are opposed by armed Islamist groups. Thus even in Egypt, where only in the Sinai is state authority under challenge, the continuing divide between regime and societal security interests makes it vulnerable to the fluid geopolitics of regional turbulence.

5.7 Lessons from the Lebanese case

Drawing on the notion of turbulence offers guidance to explain how and why the capacities of states in the region, even as they become more ruthlessly authoritarian and deploy more deadly military power, are declining in the face of the increased agency and authority of non-state and hybrid actors. Too often the seeming "chaos" of regional conflict, state collapse, and civil wars in the Middle East is viewed in particularistic, even primordial terms. What might be particular about the Middle East, however, is the frequency of efforts by regional regimes and external powers to use military force to uphold or re-impose a decaying order, as the USA did in the Iraq war of 2003 and the British and the French did in the Suez War of 1956. As Posen observes about US policy in the post-Cold War era, "the very act of seeking more control injects negative energy into global politics as quickly as it finds enemies to vanquish."[28] These

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[28] Barry Posen, "The Case for Restraint", cit., p. 13.

interventions have led to swarms of self-organized resistance that have come to reshape regional geopolitics. The USA and its regional allies have also resisted inclusive, democratic modes for developing alternative structures of authority. Just when the uprisings suggested new possibilities for crafting alternative systems of governance, the counter-revolution led by long-standing US allies, as well as its rivals, cut off such an avenue for change.

Many outside observers, who recognize the declining leverage of external powers and reject the deployment of military force as a means to regain influence, often advocate the adoption of "a political strategy designed to support the consolidation of states rooted in the rule of law and respect for human rights."[29] The consolidation of "strong" states, however, might be unsustainable in this era of turbulence. An alternative, but to some degree also complementary, approach is one that draws lessons from the case of Lebanon. Lebanon is most often depicted as a "weak state" lacking territorial sovereignty and thus fostering the proliferation of violent non-state actors that generate political instability and regional insecurity. In contrast, the dynamics of security politics in Lebanon can be understood through the lens of hybrid sovereignty.[30] Such an approach suggests how an assemblage of state and non-state actors has been able to navigate between rival understandings of insecurity, producing at times shared, but still contested, understandings which have sustained a system of plural governance over security that has been able to respond to a shifting geography of threats.

While external patrons and regional sectarian-based conflicts clearly shape the course of security politics in Lebanon, a framework reduced to the rivalry of external states cannot fully explain how Lebanese actors have been able to negotiate between rival understandings and produce shared, though highly contingent, understandings of how to address security threats, as this assem-

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[29] Marc Lynch, "Failed States and Ungoverned Spaces", cit., p. 26.

[30] Waleed Hazbun, "Assembling Security in a 'Weak State:' The Contentious Politics of Plural Governance in Lebanon since 2005", in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 6 (2016), p. 1053-1070.

blage approach to security attempts to do. Fraught with tensions, security politics in Lebanon requires continual adjustment to avoid collapse and the resort to internal war as occurred between 1975 and 1990. Another implication of this approach is that it turns the "weak state" approach upside down. As long as the regional system remains defined by turbulence and post-statist geopolitics, the formation of a stable order might not be within reach. An alternative approach would be the development of dynamic institutions that are flexible and resilient. External powers that wish to support both state and societal security across the Middle East would best focus their efforts on enhancing the ability, as found in Lebanon, of state and societal institutions to support mechanisms that foster the dynamics of pluralism across state, hybrid and non-state actors, in which tensions between rival understandings of security are continually defused but possibly never eliminated.

6.

Hybrid Partnerships in Middle East Turbulence

Raffaele Marchetti and Yahya Al Zahrani

This chapter analyses the turbulence in the Middle East by examining the nature of hybrid partnerships and the role they play. By hybrid partnerships we mean the cooperative arrangements that governmental and non-governmental actors establish in order to pursue their political goals. These hybrid relationships may be overt or covert, may use peaceful or violent means, may be successful or failing. While other chapters in this volume also look at these new political forms, the specific contribution of this chapter lies in its comparative angle. We argue that forms of hybrid politics are not unique to the Middle East. They represent a key characteristic of contemporary global governance. The co-existence of state and non-state actors is becoming a central feature of global governance. In a similar vein, in the Middle East, non-state actors are becoming increasingly influential in the current dynamics and future trends in the region. The interpretative approach of this chapter remains strongly anchored to the wider transformation occurring in the international system. In order to correctly capture the political nature of contemporary Middle East dynamics, we need to focus on non-state actors both as independent actors and as actors operating through hybrid partnerships with regional and international powers.

The chapter begin with an examination of the transformation of the international system from Westphalia to global governance. It then analyse the role played by transnational non-governmental actors in this process, paying special attention to the rise of hybrid

partnerships and their impact on global politics. In the second part, the framework of hybrid partnerships is used to compare the case of the Middle East with the global trend, in order to identify both similarities and differences. In this way the notion of hybrid partnership is refined and made more expedient for understanding the political dynamics of the Middle East.

6.1 FROM WESTPHALIA TO TRANSNATIONALISM

The modern international system has been largely shaped by the principle of state sovereignty that was established in the West and then slowly spread to the rest of the world. Reflecting as it does its origins (conventionally fixed with the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia), the modern state system is centred on the absolute sovereignty of a state within its territory. In opposition to the medieval "two Suns" convention, that is, the Pope and the Emperor, the cardinal principle of sovereignty differentiates territorial political units in terms of juridically and morally exclusive domains.

This grounding principle has characterized international politics for more than three centuries, generating several secondary – and very significant – norms of international law. Among them, the following derived principles are of particular note: (a) no superior authority that is recognized above the state (which produces an international system completely dependent on state consent); (b) formal equality of status granted to each state, with de facto control over territory as the only accepted principle of legitimacy; (c) indifference of international organizations to domestic political organization, that is, the relationship between citizens and state is entirely relegated to national law; (d) non-intervention; and (e) the right to self-defence.[1] The notion of self-contained units remained dominant in international practice until the end of the 20th century.

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[1] Alan James, *Sovereign Statehood. The Basis of International Society*, London and Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1986.

In recent decades a significant change has taken place in the international institutional framework in terms of a substantial increase and intensification of the mechanisms of global governance,[2] which has led to a gradual overcoming of the notion of sovereignty and non-interference. The increase in interdependence has created a need for wider and deeper international cooperation, which has led to the establishment of a dense network of hybrid and mono-functional organizations. The institutional landscape of global governance has thus been characterized by a constant growth of political norms and legal dispositions which have eroded the legitimacy of both the state and classic international law.

Five tendencies characterize the recent forms of global governance: the fusion of national and international; the growing complexity of the institutional horizon; the emergence of private governance; the move to a new method of compliance; and the increased role of non-state players.[3] In order to understand the political dynamics in the Middle East, it is especially important to focus on the last of these.

Globalization links communities that are geographically far apart and de-territorializes the relations of power beyond traditional national borders.[4] By diminishing the exclusivity of states as international actors, globalization has opened up space for new social players.[5] In order to understand today's global politics, we

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[2] James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (eds.), *Governance without Government. Order and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992; Thomas Hale and David Held (eds.), *Handbook of Transnational Governance. Institutions and Innovations*, Cambridge and Malden, Polity, 2011; Thomas Risse (ed.), *Governance Without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011.

[3] Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore and Susan K. Sell (eds.), *Who Governs the Globe?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; Walter Mattli and Ngaire Woods (eds.), *The Politics of Global Regulation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009.

[4] David Held et al. (eds.), *Global Transformations. Politics, Economics and Culture*, Cambridge and Malden, Polity, 1999; Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization. A Critical Introduction*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

[5] A. Claire Cutler, *Private Power and Global Authority. Transnational Mer-*

must not limit ourselves to observing unilateral or multilateral action by states, but must necessarily take into consideration also the actions of other non-state actors. Four categories of such actors are particularly relevant: profit-oriented transnational enterprises; non-governmental civil society organizations, which tend to pursue public goals either peacefully or violently; local authorities, both at the regional and city level; and private or hybrid organizations that regulate specific sectors through the formulation of standards (so-called standard setting bodies).

Non-state players have acquired an ever larger role in world politics by taking on an increasing number of functions.[6] They contribute to bringing new issues to public attention and in so doing they participate in the formulation of the political agenda. They lobby policy-makers. They offer technical assistance to governments and to intergovernmental organizations. They provide funds for both private and public players. They formulate regulatory decisions. They implement programmes and public policies. They provide services. They monitor the compliance of international agreements. They resolve disputes. And they also apply the decisions – so-called enforcement.[7] In addition, they may participate in the political dynamic in less formalized and more contentious contexts. Just consider the Syrian or the Ukrainian conflict and the grey area in which rebel, combatant and terrorist groups have operated, often with strong identitarian or religious connotations.[8]

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chant Law in the Global Political Economy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Lanham, Rowan and Littlefield, 2005.

[6] Raffaele Marchetti, *Global Strategic Engagement. The Rules of Global Governance*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2016.

[7] Henry F. Carey and Oliver P. Richmond (eds.), *Mitigating Conflict. The Role of NGOs*, London, Frank Cass, 2003; David Hulme and Michael Edwards (eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors. Too Close for Comfort?*, London, Macmillan, 1997; Raffaele Marchetti (ed.), *Cooperation and Competition between Governments and NGOs. Perspectives from Asia, Europe, Middle East, and Africa*, London and New York, Routledge, 2017 (forthcoming).

[8] Sabine C. Carey, Michael P. Colaresi and Neil J. Mitchell, "Governments, Informal Links to Militias, and Accountability", in *Journal of Conflict Resolutions*, Vol. 59,

6.2 Hybrid partnerships

Among the many forms that transnationalism takes, the engagement between governments and non-state actors is particularly important for the sake of this study. This engagement represents a shift away from classic Westphalian sovereignty. A political dynamic known as the "boomerang effect" may help us to clarify its nuances.[9] The assumption here is that we no longer live (if we ever did) on islands. If a local group is marginalized from the national decision-making process, it can appeal to a foreign actor (whether a non-governmental organization (NGO), a foreign government or an international organization) to put pressure on the national government to open up channels of access to the decision-making process. Together with this inside-out dynamic, we often observe also an outside-in dynamic, used by foreign actors (NGOs, states and international organizations) to push for specific policy reforms in a country: if they fail to persuade the government, they ally themselves with local civil society actors to influence the government from below. Finally, there is at least a third important mechanism that we should bear in mind in this context: the inside-out dynamic led by a government. The national government itself can rely on foreign support to constrain local opposition.

The partnership between national governments and non-state actors is at the core of hybrid public diplomacy.[10] By public diplomacy we mean, in a minimalistic way, the action carried out by a government with the aim of interacting with the citizens of another country. At the global level, we have witnessed recently an intensifi-

No. 5 (August 2015), p. 850-876, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022002715576747; Rosaria Puglisi, "A People's Army: Civil Society as a Security Actor in Post-Maidan Ukraine", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 15|23 (July 2015), http://www.iai.it/en/node/4418.

[9] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1998.

[10] Raffaele Marchetti (ed.), *Partnership in International Policy Making. Civil Society and Public Institutions in European and Global Affairs*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

cation of public diplomacy activities essentially by the United States and the EU. Going beyond the traditional government-to-government diplomacy, with public diplomacy (thus government-to-population of another government) governments try to influence the citizens of another state in order to promote their own foreign policy goals. Among the various channels that can be used for public diplomacy, two are particularly salient: direct action through the internet and indirect action through civil society organizations. Through the internet, especially new social media, governments are today able to open up channels of interactive and direct communication with foreign citizens with the aim both to receive information to enhance the effectiveness of foreign policy and to offer non-intrusive help. Through civil society, foreign governments are able to provide services locally but also to promote changes in the society that are in line with its vision and interests.

Hybrid public diplomacy may also have murky connotations. Governments may rely on illegal groups in other countries to promote their interests. Governments may support terrorist or combatant organizations to destabilize rival countries. Governments may operate through the internet and interfere in the domestic affairs of other states through cyber operations and crimes. The partnerships between governments and non-governmental actors may be directed towards positive ends, but also towards negative goals, or they may be implemented in illicit ways.

As a matter of fact, national boundaries have become porous. Many items cross national boundaries: ideas and information, migrants, refugees and trafficked people, foreign investments and money laundering, political support and terrorist networks, traditional weapons and cyber crime, pollution and popular culture. Ideas, people, money, political support, weapons – none of these cross national boundaries with 100 percent legitimacy, and yet they all do so, either independently or, more frequently, with the help of other countries.

We are in a transition period which has intensified in the last 20 years. But we do not have clear political guidelines for how to handle this. It is enough to ponder events in Ukraine, Syria, Hong Kong

– all cases in which foreign influence is denounced by each party to the conflict. All major actors practise it, all major actors denounce it. In a different context, of course, one can point to other examples. These include Russia shutting down the USAID offices in Moscow for illegitimately interfering in domestic affairs, yet providing funding to major populist movements around Europe, like the National Front in France, or even providing support to the fighters in the Donbas region; China accusing foreign actors of interference during the protests in Hong Kong or in the vexed issue of Tibet, yet providing generous funding for Confucius Institutes abroad (which are currently at the centre of a hot debate over whether they are propaganda instruments, with some American universities planning to close them down); in the United States, the recent debate on foreign funding of major think tanks (such as the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies or the Atlantic Council) suggesting that this involves an alignment with foreign governments' agendas, yet through the National Endowment for Democracy providing significant financial support for opposition forces in authoritarian countries or, more concretely, providing military training for moderate Syrian rebels; or in the EU itself, the debates about the need to shut down mosques too close to political Islam or even jihadist cells, yet providing NGOs around the world with funds through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, or the European Endowment for Democracy, with the goal, among others, of introducing constitutional changes in third countries. Or in a further twist, think about the so-called freedom fighters in Syria: Iran launching accusations of domestic interference during the so-called green protests in 2009, yet providing continuous support to Shia groups in countries such as Syria and Yemen. These are just a few examples. The world in which we live is complex, and power politics is pluralist and hybrid. In this context, multilateral and bilateral partnerships constitute a central, if controversial, element in today's global politics.

The increase in the number of non-state actors has generated both positive and negative national responses. In terms of national responses to the increasing presence of multinational corporations,

an overall trend of acceptance is noticeable. In the case of international NGOs, a more mixed pattern can be observed: while a general opening occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s, from the late 1990s a significant increase in different kinds of restrictions on the operations of foreign NGOs is observable. This trend is very much in line with the notable increase in transnational activism by many civil society organizations (CSOs), including the increase in CSO accreditation by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

What emerges from this analysis is the growing relevance of non-state actors in all those environments that had been traditionally reserved for diplomatic relations. We live in an age in which power is spreading via thousands of channels within societies, and politics has become an art which is increasingly difficult to practise, requiring the ability to play on more levels and to interact with actors of different natures at the same time and in a very short time frame. In this sense, CSOs are thus a permanent element of any global political action.

A somewhat similar pattern can be observed in the Middle East.

6.3 HYBRID POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The transformations at the international level also shed light on the political dynamics in the Middle East.

The first phenomenon to be taken into account is globalization, which has obviously impacted developing countries differently than "developed" ones. In the MENA region, globalization has been a factor in fostering the fragmentation of societies. Besides the effects of globalization on the socio-economic conditions in the region, we should also remember that the region has been torn apart by wars. Iraq has been at war or in a war-like situation since 1980, first with Iran and then with the US-led coalitions. This is important for understanding the transformations occurring at the state level and the development of "hybrid politics."

The national state in the Middle East is showing signs of ero-

sion.[11] Despite many of the states in the region being rooted in very deep "(proto)national" experiences,[12] the idea of the nation-state was not easily accepted there. The nation-state (i.e. the state of the Westphalian system) was formed only at the beginning of the 20th century. The political framework of the nation-state arose slowly in the region. The Arab public consciousness continued to refer predominantly to concepts related to the country, the land, the area rather than the state.[13] When the state structures were finally implemented, they took a specific, often authoritarian, shape. Tamim al-Barghouti noted that when the colonial powers were strained during the two world wars, "their Middle Eastern colonies got their formal independence and, because of the way they were structured and the elites that governed them, continued to behave as colonies."[14] The leaders or clans in these states were in power for many years. In the 21st century, because of mass demonstrations, statehood in several countries of the Middle East has begun to break down.

In explaining the decline of countries in the Middle East, two different dimensions need to be taken into account simultaneously. On the one hand, a significant argument can be made attributing such decline to internal causes that are political, economic and cultural in nature.[15] On the other hand, external processes and transnation-

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[11] Marina Lebedeva and Raffaele Marchetti, *Middle East Instability and the Decline of the Westphalian System*, Moscow, Valdai Club, September 2016, http://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/report-middle-east-instability-and-the-decline-of-. For a different interpretation, please refer to the chapter by Kristina Kausch in this volume.

[12] Lorenzo Kamel et al., "The Past: Terminology, Concepts and Historical Junctures", in Eduard Soler i Lecha et al. (eds.) "Re-conceptualizing Orders in the MENA Region. The Analytical Framework of the MENARA Project", in *MENARA Methodology and Concept Papers*, No. 1 (November 2016), p. 23, http://www.iai.it/en/node/7032.

[13] One notable exception is Oman, where the state was started in the 8th century (its first Ibadi imam was elected in 751) by a radical dissident Muslim group (al-Khawariji).

[14] Tamim Al-Barghouti, *The Umma and the Dawla. The Nation-State and the Arab Middle East*, London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 4.

[15] This despite the important principle of *Asabyya* ("arises from an inner need

al forces have played an equally important role in this decline. External factors such as foreign interference and colonialism are clear examples of the existence of external interests in the Middle East, such as that of France in Algeria, Italy in Libya and England in Iraq.

Despite their proto-national experiences,[16] the foundational history of these countries remains somehow peculiar: their borders were not determined based on national or natural borders, as they were to some extent in Europe, but rather according to the will of the occupier, who drew lines between those countries arbitrarily. It should also be noted that many countries in the Middle East did not try to build state institutions or encourage public participation, leaving them continually vulnerable to both external threats from foreign infiltration and internal threats such as massive protest deriving from socio-economic and political failures.[17]

It is also important to highlight the role of social media and mass communication, which has created a platform that increases the speed at which non-state actors can function. By exploiting these forms of media, new groups have managed to gain political power. In this way, transportation and communications have changed the dynamic and the reaction time of non-state actors, allowing them to respond more quickly than the state, particularly in those domains in which the state bureaucracy is embedded in social or public affairs.

The erosion of the Westphalian system is reflected in several phenomena in the region. New actors whose identity is based pri-

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of social life and is the cause of mutual assistance and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength"). Equally interesting is the work of Ibn Khaldun. In al-Muqaddima, Ibn Khaldun sketched a model of the creation of states in the Maghreb and analysed the forces behind their political and social organization which is very relevant for this kind of analysis.

[16] Lorenzo Kamel, "Artificial Nations? The Sykes-Picot and the Islamic State's Narratives in a Historical Perspective", in *Diacronie. Studi di storia contemporanea*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2016), p. 1-20, http://www.studistorici.com/2016/03/29/kamel_numero_25.

[17] In this regard, the efforts of the monarchic state in the Middle East to sustain its authority in the face of these threats is particularly interesting. However, with the rise of non-state actors we might predict that there will be pressure on these states to focus on security and alliances.

marily on ethnicity or religion have emerged in this context,[18] often on a transnational basis.[19] At times they have adopted an extremist stance and terrorist methods of struggle to pursue their ideas. This can be seen vividly in Afghanistan, Iraq and more recently in Libya and Syria, where many groups fight each other and at the same time trade with each other, most commonly oil and weapons, in asymmetric and hybrid wars.[20] These actors usually operate at the local or regional level. However, some groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, have become global actors, putting forward the idea of a global caliphate and creating cells in a number of states.

The idea of the caliphate has been present in Arab political culture since the 7th century. Modern extremist groups revived the idea of the caliphate as a political organization, but they tried to expand it to the global level. However, their interpretation of political Islam remains very controversial and their political organization (ISIS) is unlikely to be sustainable. The notion itself of political Islam continues to be interpreted in different ways: the issue of Palestine is an important political motivation for Al-Qaeda, for example, whereas ISIS is not especially focused on it. The difference in their narratives is also reflected in their different methods of recruitment and attack. There are many different versions of radical Islamism, and ISIS itself is composed of different groups, which makes the manipulation by international actor somehow easier.

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[18] Vincent Durac, "The Role of Non-State Actors in Arab Countries after the Arab Uprisings", in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2015*, 2015, p. 37-41, http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-la-mediterrania/sumaris/iemed-mediterranean-yearbook-2015; Carmit Valensi, "Non-State Actors: A Theoretical Limitation in a Changing Middle East", in *Military and Strategic Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2015), p. 59-78, http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=9390.

[19] Katerina Dalacoura, "Islamist Movements as Non-state Actors and their Relevance to International Relations", in Daphné Josselin and William Wallace, eds., *Non-state Actors in World Politics*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p. 235-248.

[20] Josef Schroefl and Stuart J. Kaufman, "Hybrid Actors, Tactical Variety: Rethinking Asymmetric and Hybrid War", in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 37, No. 10 (2014), p. 862-880.

According to ISIS views, the political organization of the world, currently based on nation-states, should be replaced by a system based on the principles of Islam as they understand them. Several Islamist non-state actors such as ISIS and others have been able to manage conquered territories, more or less successfully developing fundraising mechanisms, management systems and ideology. For fundraising ISIS uses methods that violate Islamic law: robbery, confiscation of property, control of oil production facilities, trade in oil, kidnapping, donations – including those obtained from or through various NGOs, collecting funds with the help of modern communication networks and so on. Information technologies are actively used to attract new supporters not just from the region, but also from other parts of the world, as is clearly shown by the recruitment of foreign fighters from Asia and Europe.

A typical feature of today's Middle East politics is the use of hybrid partnerships between governments and non-governmental actors, both at the national and the transnational level.[21] This practice of partnership derives from the combination of two different kinds of transnational sources of inspiration: the traditional Islamic reference to the *Ummah* and the contemporary reference to globalization and global politics. Taken together, these two sources provide a very powerful ideational reference for envisaging the cooperative interaction between government on the one hand, and a plethora of different non-governmental actors with transnational reach on the other hand. Because of the alleged commonality among the peoples of the *Ummah*,[22] at times with a pan-Arabic turn, transnational Islamic interference in domestic affairs is considered legitimate. At the same time, following common patterns of hybridization of

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[21] Sham uz Zaman, "Rise of the Non-State Actors in Middle East: Regional Dimensions", in *IPRI Journal*, Vol 15, No. 1 (Winter 2015), p. 51-65, http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/3-article-w15.pdf.

[22] Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-97) identified European imperialism as an experience common to Muslims and sought to mobilize anti-colonial sentiment around a renewed sense of *Ummah* consciousness. See Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, 3rd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 171.

foreign policy widely practised in global governance, Middle Eastern governments are relying more and more on partnerships with non-governmental actors for several reasons, including lower visibility, better effectiveness, lower financial costs and better chances of enlarging the network with additional partners.

The Syrian case is illustrative of this kind of hybrid dynamic. The Syrian government is partnering with a number of foreign governments (Russia, Iran, etc.) and foreign non-governmental actors ranging from Hezbollah to Iranian groups. The pluralist galaxy of rebels has so far received support from foreign governmental and foreign non-governmental actors as well. ISIS is similarly backed also by foreign actors. All in all, the situation in Syria clearly shows that governmental and non-governmental actors on the one hand, and local, national, international and transnational actors on the other hand, are closely intermingled in a post-Westphalian scenario.

While the increasing importance of non-state actors and their alliance with states is evident, the political dynamics underpinning it are more complex. One could also argue that the Syrian government is allying with these actors with an aim to restore its full authority within the territory of the state, in other words, to "go back" to the conventional understanding of statehood and the state system. Similarly, foreign powers that support the Syrian regime and the non-state actors in the armed conflict do not "partner" with them in order to come up with an alternative to the status quo (not envisaging/favouring the redrawing of borders, the emergence of alternative sub-state or non-state governance structures), but to safeguard the Westphalian system, at least in its inter-state sense.

Another interesting example is that of the Muslim Brotherhood, which presents three different cases: (a) in Tunisia, where it was integrated into the democratic game; (b) in Egypt, where it failed because it did not turn into a governing body characterized by leadership and a sense of public institutions; and (c) in Saudi Arabia, where it failed for both internal and external reasons. These three examples show that the same actor can fail or succeed in different places, accordingly showing a differing ability to act collectively ei-

ther in an inclusive or exclusive manners, i.e. to be open to political compromise with non islamist groups.

Looking to the future, two scenarios seem possible in the overall context of the Middle East. In the first scenario, the region goes back to the Westphalian system. In the second scenario, new forms of political organization emerge. The first scenario is the most obvious option. History can attest to attempts to set up alternatives to the Westphalian system that then died out. However, in the current context of transnationalization, it will be much more difficult to go back to the Westphalian system. The form that the second scenario would take is unclear. A precise blueprint for alternative political systems is not yet available. In any case, it would be a long time before it fully supplanted the present one. At the moment, the most likely prediction points simultaneously to gradual steps towards both scenarios, or rather a combination of the two, which in itself is a recipe for increasing instability.

What can more readily be expected is the duplication of the successful model of engagement with non-state actors. In this way, more and more Middle Eastern countries will presumably try to increase their soft power by engaging with NGOs as part of their strategy to deal with other countries. Adopting the model of so-called "triplomacy," the state will not only engage via official channels but will also try to cooperate with NGOs, business organizations and intellectuals in order to have an impact on the societies of other countries, thereby finding themselves with more fragile borders.

At a more strategic level, the policy orientation of many Middle Eastern countries might turn towards a comprehensive fusion of regional, national and local security dimensions as a new way of analysing the threat posed by non-state actors in the context of fragile state boundaries. This, however, can only be achieved through a consolidation of national sovereignty itself, which brings us to the paradoxical question of whether countries that did not build a real Westphalian model in the first instance can indeed sustain the Westphalian model.

6.4 Future trends

In this chapter, we have developed a comparative analysis of hybrid partnership in order to refine its definition. We connected the analysis of non-state actors in the Middle East with analysis of non-state actors at the international level. Our intention was to illustrate both their similarities and their differences.

In the first part, we analysed the transformation of the international system and the new characteristics of global governance. The specific role of transnational non-state actors was examined together with the typical form that hybrid partnership takes. In the second part, we turned to the Middle East to analyse the role that non-state actors are playing in the region. The interaction between non-state actors and governments turns out to be intense, having both positive and negative impacts on the stabilization of the region and the sovereign-based order. It is a dimension that we cannot ignore if we aim to perceive correctly the current and future trends in the region.

7.

A "Natural" Order? States, Nations and Borders in a Changing Middle East

Lorenzo Kamel *

Three central themes appear in most academic and journalistic publications dedicated to the past and present of the Middle East. The first refers to the name itself ("Middle East") which, as is often noted, "was invented by the English, to designate the territories of the former Ottoman Empire [...] when one speaks of the Middle East it must be remembered that it is a 'Eurocentric' interpretation."[1] The second, directly connected to the first, concerns the alleged "artificiality" of the region and its borders. More specifically, a growing number of scholars describe what is taking place in the region as "the end of the Sykes-Picot order," in reference to the agreement by which France and Great Britain defined their mutually agreed spheres of influence in 1916.

The primary assumption inherent in these types of analysis is that the region and its borders and states are for the most part deprived of legitimacy or historical precedents. It would, therefore, be desirable, and this is the third theme, to imagine a new and more

    [1] Luciano Tirinnanzi (ed.), *Medio Oriente. Dove andiamo. Riflessioni, domande e possibili risposte sul futuro di una regione in pieno cambiamento*, Rome, G-Risk and Lookout News, 2016, p. 82.

"natural" reconfiguration of borders, a sort of "Balkanization" that could mirror the "true" ethnic and religious local context. The first part of this chapter contextualizes and deconstructs each of these aspects, showing that, despite their diffusion, they are themselves "artificial": the main roots of the current crises should be found in the lack of inclusive social contracts and not in the alleged "artificiality" of the region's states. The second warns of the counterproductive effects that such approaches are having. They express the points of view of those who support them, far more than the interests and the complex history of those who will continue to populate the region.

7.1 "Artificiality" and the Middle East: Deconstructing a pattern

The plethora of books and articles fostering the idea of the "artificiality" of anything connected to the Middle East should indeed serve as a reminder of how assumptions that are repeated in systematic ways can become almost uncritically accepted as truths. Actually, most of the local toponyms, nations, states, borders and peoples in the region are not simply recent artificial creations,[2] and widespread claims should not be allowed to simplify a millenary historical context.

This section contributes to this by focusing on one specific, yet meaningful, aspect: the debate around the name most frequently used to refer to the region, the "Middle East." The term, argued British-American historian Bernard Lewis, "was invented in 1902 by the American naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan."[3] Echoing an opinion expressed by a significant number of other scholars,[4] Lewis

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[2] See Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine. British Influence and Power in Late Ottoman Times*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2015.

[3] Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 3.

[4] The word "invented" is used frequently in studies focusing on the modern

went so far as to claim that "this new geographical expression was taken up by The Times [of London] and later by the British government [...] a world with Western Europe in the center and other regions grouped around it."[5]

It is certainly true that unlike geographical names used to refer to other regions or continents – such as America, Africa or Europe – "Middle East" refers to an area of the world largely defined from the perspective of those living on the two sides of the Atlantic; the expression bears no cultural or geographical connotations.

However, the same allegation (the accusation of "centrism") is rarely applied to other geographical terms no less widespread. *Maghreb* (in Arabic, "the West"; its trilateral root, *gha-ra-ba*, hints also at the concept of being "a stranger") might, for instance, be linked to an "Oriental-centric" perspective and projection that has Egypt – and more generally the Eastern Mediterranean "Arab heart" – as its centre of gravity.

People have always tended to name areas of interest according to their own geographical and cultural perspective, an approach that has rarely met with allegations or arguments of artificiality. For instance, *Anatolia* (from Greek Ἀνατολή, or "sunrise"), which makes up the majority of modern-day Turkey, was named as such from a Greek perspective, while *Nippon*, or "sun origin," is rooted in a Chinese perception: seen from the latter, the sun rises from Nippon/Japan.

To return to the Eastern Mediterranean, *Eber-Nari* ("beyond the river," in the Akkadian language spoken in ancient Mesopotamia) was the term used by Assyrians and Persians to refer – from an "Assyrian-centric" and "Persian-centric" perspective – to the land beyond the Euphrates river, that is, modern Syria. For centuries, and still at present, that same area has been known by Muslims as *Bilad al-Sham*, the "land to the left," meaning to turn the eyes to-

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"Middle East". See for instance David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace. The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, New York, Holt & Co., 1989, p. 224.

[5] Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, cit., p. 4.

ward where the sun rises, the land on the left side of the "Holy City of Mecca." The "land to the right" (*Bilad al-Yemen*) of Mecca is still known today, both in and outside of the region, as "Yemen."

A clear hint as to the perspective of the "interested observer" can be found in dozens of other terms used to refer to most or part of these and other areas, including *Outre-Mer* ("beyond the [Mediterranean] sea," or "overseas," from the perspective of the Crusader states), *Holy Land* (the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, which boasts a rich millenary history antecedent to the three monotheistic religions), *Levant* ("Mediterranean lands east of Italy," a recognition of the strategic role played by the Republic of Venice and other maritime city-states), *Mashreq* (in Arabic and Persian, "the East"; as in the case of *Bilad al-Sham*, and contrary to the other terms mentioned above, the name Mashreq was born within the region).

Despite the fact that most of these expressions have promoted a simplified and often misleading perception of the region (or part of it), none of them has suffered a "stigma process" comparable to what is seen in relation to the Middle East.

It may be said, correctly, that over the past century the term "Middle East" has been "hijacked," acquiring some colonial connotations. Yet despite what has often been argued, this expression has much older and deeper roots than almost all geographical terms mentioned up to this point, as attested by both Islamic and European sources.

In his *Historiae Adversum Paganos* (416), the Roman historian Paulus Orosius (375-420), a native of today's Portugal, made a reference to a Spanish delegation stationed in Babylon (present-day Iraq) using the expression "Medio Oriente" [Middle East],[6] translated fourteen centuries later by French historian Joseph Toussaint Reinaud as "*le coeur de l'Orient*" ("the heart of the East").

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[6] "Hispanorum Gallorumque legatio in Medio Oriente apud Babylonam" [A legation of Spaniards and Gauls in Babylon, in the Middle of the Orient]. See Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum Adversus Paganos*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1889, book vi, p. 19-20.

Similar expressions, often not referring to a clearly defined area, have been used by a number of other scholars and intellectuals over the centuries, including Goethe – who used the term *Mittler Orient* in his *West-östlicher Diwan* (1819) in reference to Hafez's land (1315-1390), that is, Persia and its neighbouring areas; thanks to the huge cultural influence exerted by Goethe in the European *intelligentsia* of his time, the expression became quite popular already then.

Deconstructing the common assumptions surrounding the expression "Middle East" has the positive effect of shedding light on the many ways in which this part of the word has been referred to and perceived throughout much of its history, making clear the relevance of the point of observation of the "beholder." At the same time, it provides a further element for tackling the widespread, yet simplistic, "artificiality thesis."

7.2 "Artificial" states and peoples: *cui prodest*?

On 9 May 1916, Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to London, sent a letter to the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edward Grey, containing the terms of the secret agreement negotiated in the previous months by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot. A century later, a growing number of academics are focusing their attention on the reasons Sykes-Picot "has taken almost a century to die."[7]

At the end of World War I, however, the Sykes-Picot agreement went largely unheeded, and few of the items discussed by Sykes and Picot in 1915-1916 were ever realized, including the expected internationalization of Jerusalem. None of the post-Ottoman borders of the Middle East were drawn at the time: the Sykes-Picot agree-

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[7] Robert Bowker, "Ending Sykes-Picot. The Arab World and the West After 2011", in *HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Publication Series*, No. 7 (September 2013), p. 5, https://www.dur.ac.uk/alsabah/publications/insights/no-7bowker.

ment, for instance, aspired to split present-day Iraq and Syria into three or four nations. In 1920, the San Remo conference explicitly postponed the designation of regional borders.

Despite its limited historical value, the thesis of the "end of the Sykes-Picot agreement" has been utilized in many ways and to varying degrees, starting with the desire to promote the image of a region with "artificial" peoples, borders and nations. What does still play a meaningful role is the way in which British and French authorities have related to the region, in particular during the historical period in which the agreement was signed. London and Paris defined local realities and forms of dissent as expressions of primitive religious cleavages and crafted new communal institutions (for instance the Supreme Muslim Council in Palestine) as modern systems to sit above what they perceived as a "medieval fray."[8] The judicial and communitary frameworks that were created and put in place in the second decade of the last century were able, in other words, to impose legal value on religious differences. From this it might be argued that the "Sykes-Picot *Zeitgeist*" has been influential to the extent that it has contributed to hindering or postponing the rise of an order shaped from within the region.[9]

In this context, it is significant that some of the leaders of the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" have also made reference to the end of the Sykes-Picot order. The original name of the group, "The Islamic State of Iraq and the East," was itself modified for a specific purpose: to negate the existence of any type of local division or peculiarity. The entire area, in the eyes of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his followers, represents a monolithic "Islamic State" within which spatial divisions and religious diversity lack any sort of legitimacy – a thesis which many members of the Western media seem to have largely accepted.

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[8] Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011, p. 54.

[9] Lorenzo Kamel, "Reshuffling the Middle East: a Historical and Political Perspective", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (September 2016), p. 132-141.

The approach of the "Islamic State" and the "order of Sykes-Picot" represent, in reality, two sides of the same coin: they have both based their approaches on an ahistorical, artificially constructed view of the past, and they reflect vested interests far more than they represent local experience.

Contrary to the narrative of the "Islamic State," countries such as Syria and Iraq have numerous significant antecedents in the pre-Islamic world. For many years both were subject to different regimes. The Lakhmids (300-600), for instance, ruled large parts of contemporary Iraq, while the Ghassanid Kingdom, in the sixth century, was located in much of present-day Syria. Under the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750), which had Damascus as its capital, Iraq was a centre of dissent, and when in 750 the Abbassids succeeded in overthrowing the Umayyads, they moved their capital from Damascus to the newly built Baghdad. In the centuries that followed, the two areas were often governed separately, or by distinctively different administrative units.

A study entitled *More than Shiites and Sunnis* conducted by a group of Iraqi intellectuals for a Norwegian think tank highlighted that "the claim that Iraq is an 'artificial' creation concocted by the British after World War I overlooks the fact that the separation between the three Ottoman provinces that was in place in 1914 dated back only thirty years, to 1884."[10] For most of the 18th and 19th centuries the same three Ottoman provinces, Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, were governed as a single unit with Baghdad as their pulsing centre. Already at that time many intellectuals identified the area as Iraq, while the expression "the region of Iraq" (*Iklim-i Irak*) can be traced back to the first Ottoman chronicles of the 18th century (*Gulshan-i khulafa*, 1730). It would certainly be correct to assert that a defined border between Iraq and Syria can be traced back to 1918-1920, mainly due to the efforts made by a group of

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[10] Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), "More than 'Shiites' and 'Sunnis'. How a Post-Sectarian Strategy Can Change the Logic and Facilitate Sustainable Political Reform in Iraq", in *NUPI Reports*, February 2009, p. 18, http://www.historiae.org/documents/Post-sectarian.pdf.

Iraqi officials enrolled in the Syrian army. But the cliché according to which Iraq is nothing more than an artificial creation, or that the "only person" who ever really believed in its existence was Saddam Hussein,[11] represents a misleading simplification that implicitly suggests the need to trace new borders that mirror considerations of an ethnic or sectarian nature.

The thesis about the artificial nature of Iraq, and more generally of a number of other countries in the region, can in large part be traced to the colonial period, when London opposed the claims of Iraqi nationalists using as justification the need to govern a nation that, in their eyes, did not yet demonstrate sufficient "consistency." When, in the summer of 1920, Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis sparked what has gone down in history as *al-Thawra al-'Iraqiyya al-Kubra* ("The Great Iraqi Revolution"), they were inspired by a nationalistic ethos whose aim was to legitimize Iraq within the post-Ottoman borders and that left little room for religious, social or ethnic divisions. The revolution was put down two years later, in 1922, thanks to the use of poisonous gases and white phosphorus bombs by Britain (Secretary for the Colonies Winston Churchill played a prominent role in the process). It is significant that these same methods were used several decades later by Saddam Hussein against dozens of Kurdish villages.

Analysing the "artificiality thesis" from a broader perspective, it is possible to conclude that the modern states in the region do not represent defined or uniform geographic, social, political or cultural entities. Nonetheless, the cultural and political development of countries such as Iraq has followed a much more complex historical path than what the Sykes-Picot narrative would seem to suggest. This is not to imply that local inhabitants felt the need to create well defined borders, nor does it diminish the historic role played by Western powers. It is instead aimed at highlighting that the modern and contemporary Iraqi identity has been imagined and shaped like any other identity in history. Still today it is that com-

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[11] Paul Rich (ed.), *Iraq and Gertrude Bell's The Arab of Mesopotamia*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2008, p. xxix.

plex shared identity, often stronger than sectarian divisions, that is considered paramount by a considerable majority of the local population (around 70 percent, according to a survey conducted in 2008 by the Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies).[12] For instance, in a letter written in March 2004 to the UN representative in Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, Ayatollah al-Husayni al-Sistani underlined that the institution of a three-party presidency comprised of a Sunni, a Shiite and a Kurd would enshrine sectarian divisions in Iraqi society, causing a schism within the country.[13]

It is important to stress that until 2003, around 40 percent of the population of Baghdad, or a quarter of all of Iraq, comprised people born from mixed Sunni and Shiite marriages – Iraqis still call them "Sushis."[14] The reality of the Sushis has today largely been replaced by a more prosaic vision. This prefigures, and in many cases foreshadows, the "Balkanization" of the region, an approach rooted in the early 1990s and expressed in a 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article by Bernard Lewis entitled "Rethinking the Middle East." Lewis argued that many nations of the region represent artificial Western creations and that, among the most likely future scenarios, it is possible that the Middle East could fall "into a chaos of squabbling, feuding, fighting sects, tribes, regions and parties."[15] In subsequent years, various academics noted that following this potential chaos, it would be much easier for the people of the region to accept an externally imposed order.

Until the very recent past, a number of peoples of the region did not find it necessary to draw borders that could split up their *Hei-*

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[12] "Iraq Center for Research & Strategic Studies' Survey of Iraqis", in *Musings on Iraq*, 26 October 2008, http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2008/10/iraq-center-for-research-strategic.html.

[13] John F. Burns, "Shiite Ayatollah Is Warning U.N. Against Endorsing Charter Sponsored by U.S.", in *The New York Times*, 23 March 2004, https://nyti.ms/2k9Mj0o.

[14] Raed Jarrar, "'We've Lost Our Country': An Iraqi American Looks Back on a Decade of War That's Devastated a Nation", in *Democracy Now!*, 19 March 2013, https://www.democracynow.org/2013/3/19/weve_lost_our_country_an_iraqi.

[15] Bernard Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Autumn 1992), p. 117.

mat, which in German refers not to a country or a nation, but rather to a place in which our most profound memories are rooted. Contrary to what is implied by Lewis and others, however, this should not suggest that the fluid local identities were deprived of peculiar, if not protonational, characteristics, or that they and their states are simply "Western artificial creations." Indeed, a number of local states and nations (in the sense of cultural communities, or, to borrow a term from the Indian context, *Rashtra*) are more ancient and "rooted" than some in the West. Countries like Oman (where a state was established in 751 CE with its first Ibadi imam), Yemen (state founded in 900 CE by a descendant of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib), or Egypt (state rooted in the ancient Naqada II culture of Upper Egypt), to name a few, remind us of a millenary and often neglected "statual" background,[16] while Morocco, Tunisia and others have been nearly independent political units already since the 19th century. At the same time, Iraq and Syria, but also Palestine[17] and others, show a deep-rooted "self-awareness" that lacks to a certain number of European countries. All this is not meant to suggest that local peoples were in need of well-defined borders: when crossing new borders, merchants became, often in the space of a few days, smugglers, la-

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[16] See Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Al-Hulul al-mustawrada wa kayf ianat 'ala ummatina* [The Imported Solutions and its Effect on Our Nation], Beirut, Maktabet Wahba, 1977.

[17] Most of the Arab Palestinians were people deeply rooted in what Khayr al-Din al-Ramli (1585-1671), an influential Islamic lawyer from Ramla, defined in the 17th century as "*Filastin biladuna*" ("Palestine our country"); this is not a way to suggest that a fully-defined territorially identity existed, but the fact that it was not a separate political and administrative entity did not make al-Ramli's "*Filastin*" less real. Also, the Nabi Musa festival, which every year gathered thousands of people coming primarily from areas in present-day Israel and the Palestinian territories, was for instance the expression of a clear emerging "proto-national cohesion" aiming at commemorating the traumatic events related to the Crusades. See Kamil Jamil al-'Asali, *Mawsim al-Nabi Musa fi Filastin. Tarikh al-Mawsim wa 'l-Maqam* [The Nebi Musa Feast in Palestine. A History of the Feast and the Sanctuary], Amman, Dar al-Karmil, 1990; Umar al-Salih al-Barghuti, *Al-Marahil. Tarikh Siyasi* [Turning Points: A Political History], Beirut, al-Mu'assa-sa al-'Arabiya lil-Dirasa wa 'l-Nashr, 2001, p. 76-77.

bourers were transformed into refugees, and goods became contraband. Yet, it aims to emphasize that the modern and contemporary identities of many peoples in the region have been "imagined" and "constructed" like any other identity in history and that it is at that complex, shared and often deeply-rooted identities toward which a considerable percentage of the local populations is still today looking at.

7.3 A "natural" order?

The image of a region characterized largely by "artificial" borders, states and peoples has often been paired with a more or less concealed desire to promote solutions that could guarantee a "more natural" order. These solutions are rarely put forth by groups or populations living in the region, but are mainly proposed by external actors or observers.

The director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oklahoma, Joshua Landis, contended, for example, that the Middle East is witnessing the "rearrangement of populations in the region to better fit the nation states that were fixed after WWI,"[18] while controversial historian Daniel Pipes noted that, amid great suffering, "as populations adapt to the brutal imperatives of modern nationalism, all four countries [Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan] are becoming a bit more stable."[19] Other scholars have gone a step further,[20] suggesting that the creation of a "Shiitestan" in

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[18] Joshua Landis, "The Great Sorting Out: Ethnicity & the Future of the Levant", in *Qifa Naqbi*, 18 December 2013, http://wp.me/pitIS-1P4.

[19] Daniel Pipes, "Like-to-Like Ethnic Migration in the Middle East", in *The Washington Times*, 25 February 2015, http://go.shr.lc/2l2i1wo.

[20] According to Parag Khanna, "Nowhere is a rethinking of 'the state' more necessary than in the Middle East [...] The Arab world will not be resurrected to its old glory until its map is redrawn to resemble a collection of autonomous national oases linked by Silk Roads of commerce." Parag Khanna, "The End of the Nation-State?", in *The New York Times*, 14 October 2013, https://nyti.ms/1bt-

southern Iraq,[21] or the "partition" of Syria,[22] could initiate a process of stabilization in the area. Similar ideas – including the thesis according to which Iraq is the "fault line" between the Shia and the Sunni world[23] and that "the main issue [in Yemen] is the 7th century struggle over who is the rightful heir to the Prophet Muhammad – Shiites or Sunnis"[24] – and solutions – "to defeat ISIS, create a Sunni state"[25] – have been put forth by dozens of other academics, diplomats and journalists in the mainstream media.[26]

In these and numerous other recent analyses, the Middle East appears as a somewhat obscure and distant region, one in which the life of local populations is punctuated by ancestral "tribal" (a concept, defined by outsiders during colonial times) and religious splits. These approaches can be traced to a process of "medievalization of the Middle East,"[27] or rather the growing tendency to juxtapose a presumed medieval Arab world with a modern, secular, normative Western one.

The growing impulse to create "natural borders" can be traced to the tendency to project the process of the formation of European nations onto a very different *milieu*.

9pEC. See also Itamar Rabinovich, "The End of Sykes-Picot? Reflections on the Prospects of the Arab State System", in *Middle East Memos*, No. 32 (February 2014), p. 1, http://brook.gs/2bNxhwi.

[21] Robin Wright, "Imagining a Remapped Middle East", in *The New York Times*, 28 September 2013, https://nyti.ms/18zCi0k.

[22] James Stavridis, "It's Time to Seriously Consider Partitioning Syria", in *Foreign Policy*, 9 March 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/its-time-to-seriously-consider-partitioning-syria.

[23] Erin Cunningham, "Iraq in Delicate Balancing Act amid Saudi-Iranian Feud", in *The Washington Post*, 7 January 2016, http://wpo.st/jLQZ2.

[24] Thomas L. Friedman, "Tell Me How This Ends Well", in *The New York Times*, 1 April 2015, https://nyti.ms/2k2KSAG.

[25] John R. Bolton, "John Bolton: To Defeat ISIS, Create a Sunni State", in *The New York Times*, 24 November 2015, https://nyti.ms/2k2S1kH.

[26] See the UN Special envoy Martin Kobler cited in Associated Press, "UN Envoy: Iraq and Syrian Conflicts are Merging", in *Dunya News*, 16 July 2013, http://dunyanews.tv/en/World/183617.

[27] Ussama Makdisi, conversation with the author, European University Institute, Florence, 5 June 2015.

These solutions, however, only address part of a wider and more complex reality. On the one hand, they seem to suggest that the conflicts unfolding in the region are in large part connected to ethnic and/or religious differences. On the other hand, they promote the idea that separating peoples and populations could bring about a relatively quick resolution and the extended stabilization of the region. It should be noted that Sunnis and Shiites, and also Christians, Jews and other religious groups or confessions, have lived for centuries in the region, reaching a level of "coexistence" – a concept that implicitly acknowledges their differences, as well as the fact that they are negotiable – that has rarely been attained elsewhere in the world.[28]

The thesis of a conflict between Sunnis and Shiites that has lasted 1,400 years,[29] frequently put forth today, is in this sense problematic and tends to ignore the fact that belonging to a certain religious denomination has been for centuries only one of the many (and often not the most important) ways people of the region have identified themselves.

This does not mean that historically there have not been religious conflicts; in fact, they have been reported since the Middle Ages. However, their nature and scope is hardly comparable to those of recent times. As Fanar Haddad has noted regarding Iraq, "[i]n early medieval Baghdad, there were sectarian clashes, but that is extremely different from what you have in the age of the nation state."[30] This further confirms the need to contextualize and problematize the concept of "sectarianism," or *Ta'ifiya*, a neologism introduced into the Arab language in the course of the 19th century.[31]

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[28] See on this Rebecca Bryant, "Introduction", in Rebecca Bryant (ed.), *Post-Ottoman Coexistence. Sharing Space in the Shadow of Conflict*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2016, p. 3.

[29] Jeremy Bowen, "Sharpening Sunni-Shia Schism Bodes Ill for Middle East", in *BBC News*, 20 December 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25458755.

[30] Fanar Haddad interview with Zack Beauchamp, "The Real Roots of Iraq's Sunni-Shia Conflict", in *Vox*, 20 June 2014, http://www.vox.com/2014/6/20/5827046.

[31] The concept of "*asabiyya*" (reciprocal solidarity), is more useful than "sec-

The sectarian tensions that are tearing apart a large part of the Middle East and North Africa, therefore, have less to do with religious conflict (it is significant that already during the war between Iran and Iraq, in 1980-1988, a large portion of the Iraqi Shiites took the side of their Sunni compatriots against the Iranian Shiites) and more to do with practical considerations largely connected with the medium- and long-term effects of nationalism and the outcomes of World War I. More recent historical events have also had a great influence, such as the Iranian revolution of 1979, the consequences of the economic sanctions imposed on Baghdad following the first Gulf War (1990-1991),[32] the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the "Arab Spring" (often called "*al-marar al-Arabi*," or "Arab bitterness," in the region),[33] when local communities, increasingly deprived of social security by their states, turned more and more inward (toward their families, communities, confessions) in search of protection.

Some recent academic works would seem to contradict what has been argued so far. In a study entitled *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*, for instance, it is argued that peace "does not depend on integrated coexistence, but rather on well-defined topographical

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tarianism" to understand complex local dynamics. The concept was introduced, in vague as well as positive terms, by Ibn Khaldun in the Muqaddima. It may be likened to that which Said Nursî (1878-1960) defined as "positive nationalism," a predisposition which "arises from an inner need of social life and is the cause of mutual assistance and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength." See Said Nursî, *Letters, 1928-1932*, Instanbul, Sözler, 1993, p. 381. *Asabiyya* is not, then, a concept comparable to nationalism as it is understood in the West. Baron De Slane (1801-1878) translated it as "*esprit de corps*" while Hellmut Ritter (1892-1971) interpreted it as the more convincing "feeling of solidarity."

[32] During the 1990s, when the UN sanctions (the largest and most stringent ever applied by the UN) hit the regime of Saddam Hussein and, even more, the Iraqi population, the country witnessed a further strengthening of social and religious networks.

[33] Lorenzo Kamel and Daniela Huber (eds.), *Arab Spring and Peripheries. A Decentring Research Agenda*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 2. Hashim Salih, *Al-Intifadhat al-'Arabiya 'ala Dhaou Falsafit at-Tarikh* [The Arab Uprising in Light of the Philosophy of History], Beirut, Dar al-Saqi, 2013.

and political boundaries separating linguistic and religious groups, respectively."[34] Taking Switzerland as a case study (using Belgium would have produced different, but no less significant, results), the authors argued that the mountains and lakes are an important part of the boundaries between sharply defined linguistic areas.[35]

However, concentrating on aspects based on theory and method that deliberately avoid taking into due consideration the historical context can provide misleading feedback. The elements mentioned above, for example, make little sense when applied in the context of the Middle East, a region still largely deprived of homogeneous communities and with linguistic characteristics that can hardly be equated with those found in Europe. It is enough to mention that many ethnicities in the region have both Sunni and Shia branches that exist in parallel with the sectarian identity, and that local dynamics have always been less strict than they are often perceived to be from the outside. For example, in the Iraqi context, among the 23 prime ministers who held office in the country from 1921 to 1958, there were 12 Arab Sunnis, four Arab Shias, four Kurdish Sunnis, two Christians and one Turkman Sunni.[36] It is also noteworthy that Baghdad today still hosts nearly one million Kurds that have never suffered from sectarian violence, that a fifth of the population of Basra is Sunni, and that Samarra, a city with a Sunni majority, hosts two of the most important Shiite ruins. The provinces of Diyala and Salah ad-Din, finally, have for centuries represented the image of a multi-ethnic Iraq, within which the separation of one or more of its components could only create further violence and ethnic cleans-

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[34] Alex Rutherford et al., "The Geography of Ethnic Violence", in Philip Vos Fellman, Yaneer Bar-Yam and Ali A. Minai (eds.), *Conflict and Complexity. Countering Terrorism, Insurgency, Ethnic and Regional Violence*, New York, Springer, 2015, p. 235.

[35] "In exactly one region, a porous mountain range does not adequately separate linguistic groups and violent conflict has led to the recent creation of the canton of Jura." Ibid.

[36] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq. A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 180-184.

ing. This is not to suggest that the past and present of the region should be seen in terms of a non-sectarian nationalism, but rather that the temporal and spatial specificities should be brought back to within their original inclusive dimensions.

7.4 Toward a "post-artificial" perspective

Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East is the title of a successful book (in terms of critical acclaim) published by Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac.[37] The text, judged by the *New York Times* as "admirably fair-minded and well researched,"[38] is entirely focused on 13 figures – ten British and three American – to whom, according to the authors, the construction and invention of the nations and borders of the Middle East can be ascribed. As is the case in countless other publications on the history of the region, there is no trace in the book of the region's millenary local history, nor of the internal dynamics or the repercussions it has produced.

Conversely, in recent years many academics have underlined the importance of abandoning "the self-righteous victimization paradigm that has informed Western scholarship for so long,"[39] highlighting, for instance, that Iraq was created "on behalf of Emir Faisal of Mecca and at his instigation, while Jordan was established to satisfy the ambitions of Faisal's older brother Abdullah."[40] According to historian Efraim Karsh, most of the nations of the region "were established pretty much as a result of local exertions."[41]

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[37] Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers. The Invention of the Modern Middle East*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.

[38] Alex Von Tunzelmann, "Middle East. Sunday Book Review" in *The New York Times*, 10 August 2008, https://nyti.ms/2k9qMr3.

[39] Efraim Karsh, "Efraim Karsh on the Ottoman Catastrophe. A Review of Eugene Rogan's 'The Fall of the Ottomans', in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 13 May 2015, http://on.wsj.com/1HyqBtb.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid. For a more informative analysis than the one offered by Karsh see

To ignore or minimize the efforts and actions of "local peoples" is certainly a problem. Their attempts to move history in a different direction represents an important resource for historians. The same could be said in regards to feelings expressed by representatives of the local populations in the many cases in which such efforts did not reach their desired objective.[42] That said, describing the post-World War I Middle East, or that of the decades to follow, as largely the result of local exertion is also, in itself, problematic. To identify Emir Faysal as an example of "local exertions" is particularly misleading. It is enough to mention that Faysal, chosen as king of Iraq by the British authorities in August 1921, had never set foot in Mesopotamia before that moment, spoke a different dialect than the local Arabs and was a Sunni in a Shia-majority country. Already at the time of the Arab Revolt, in 1916-1918, both Faysal and his father Husayn, the last member of the Hashemita family to be named *Sharif* of Mecca by an Ottoman sultan, had chosen to trust their ambitions in the region to a solid alliance with London. The strong ties established by T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") and Gertrude Bell,[43] two key figures in the context of British strategies applied to the post-Ottoman Middle East, are further testimony to this.[44]

What is relevant here is that both Meyer-Brysac's and Karsh's books mirror an increasingly widespread tendency in the literature. The latter puts forth a dichotomous viewpoint, promoting two interpretive, parallel and exclusivist lines, concentrated on the

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Iliya Harik, "The Origins of the Arab State System", in Giacomo Luciani (ed.), *The Arab State*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 1-28.

[42] A meaningful example of this was provided by the representatives of the Palestine Arab Delegation in a letter to the British public on 19 May 1930: "The present administration of Palestine is appointed by His Majesty's Government and governs the country through an autocratic system in which the population has no say." See Israel State Archives (ISA) – RG65 1054/1-P.

[43] In a letter written to his father on 8 July 1921, Bell complained that "making kings" was more difficult than he could have imagined. Bell's letters are available at http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letters.php.

[44] Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) and a number of other Muslim intellectuals used harsh words to condemn Faysal's ties with T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell.

concept of "artificiality" ("suffered artificiality" versus "induced artificiality"). Both shed more light on the points of view and the potential interests of those who support them than on a complex local history and the interests of those who still live in the region. A process of de-artificialization or post-artificialization of the region and its peoples must overcome these approaches and every Manichaean temptation. Hegel noted that "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk,"[45] meaning that philosophy comes to understand a historical condition just as it passes away. After decades of intense debate on colonialism and postcolonialism, nationalism and post-nationalism, it is perhaps time for balance and understanding.

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[45] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1942.

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Governance failures, combined with 21st-century social, economic, environmental and demographic conditions, have all contributed to paving the way for the rise of highly heterogeneous non-state and quasi-state actors in the Middle East. Has the state, then, been irremediably undermined, or will the current transition lead to the emergence of new state entities? How can the crumbling of states and the redrawing of borders be reconciled with the exacerbation of traditional inter-state competition, including through proxy wars? How can a new potential regional order be framed and imagined? This volume provides a historical background and policy answers to these and a number of other related questions, analysing developments in the region from the standpoint of the interplay between disintegration and polarization.

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