Transformations of Middle East Geopolitics and their Impact on Regional Coalition Building

PhD DISSERTATION

Muhammad ALZAWAWY

Department: Middle Eastern Studies

Supervisor: Doç. Dr. Ismail Numan TELCI

April – 2022

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effects of three main geopolitical transformations that occurred in the Middle East as a region and their impact on the process of regional coalition building. The study analyzes the geopolitical impact of the Arab Spring, transformation in energy sector and dominance vacuums and power projections of regional actors. Then it analyzed the current web of coalitions and their different axes, and the impact of the geopolitical transformation on them, as observed in affects such as the liquidation of coalition and the centrality of Islam and its interpretations in regard to its role in public spheres and its relation to state, and the absence of an ideological umbrella for coalitions in the region. Then the study followed the model of Jeremy Ghez in categorizing coalition as Tactical, Historical and Natural, and applied this model on the current situation in the region, as we used a qualitative approach to measure the main pillars of the political culture of the region, through polls and surveys. The study concluded that there is a certain degree of commonalties in political culture, constructed ideas and shared values concerning main issues like democracy, good governance and stance from dictatorship, as people also looked up to the Turkish model of conservative democracy for imitation. The study concluded with a normative approach towards building natural coalitions in the Middle East and its requirements.

Keywords:

Coalitions, Political Culture, Middle East, Natural Alliance, Constructed Ideas.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Ortadoğu'da meydana gelen üç ana jeopolitik dönüşümün etkilerini ve bunların bölgesel koalisyon kurma sürecine etkisini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu anlamda Arap Baharı'nın bölgesel jeopolitik etkisi, enerji sektöründeki dönüşüm ve bölgesel aktörlerin hakimiyet boşluklarına dair geliştirdikleri güç projeksiyonları incelenmiştir. Mevcut koalisyonlar ve siyasi eksenlerin jeopolitik dönüşüme etkileri analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada koalisyon kavramı Jeremy Ghez'in taktik, tarih ve doğal şeklinde sıralanan kategorizasyon modeli takip edilmiş ve bu modelleme bölgedeki duruma uygulanmıştır. Bölgedeki temel siyasi kültürü ölçmek adına anket gibi nitel yaklaşımlar kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca çalışma, siyasi kültürde demokrasi, iyi yönetişim ve diktatörlüğe karşı duruş gibi temel meselelerle ilgili olarak inşa edilmiş fikirler ve paylaşılan değerlerde belirli bir derecede ortaklıklar olduğunu ve Ortadoğu'daki halkların Türk tipi muhafazakâr demokrasiyi model olarak gördükleri sonucuna ulaşmıştır. Çalışma bölgede koalisyon kurma noktasında gereken koşullara dair normatif bir yaklaşım sunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Koalisyonlar, Siyasi Kültür, Ortadoğu, İttifak, İnşacılık.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

FORWARD

To the soul of my late father

Soliman Al-Zawawy (1937-1984)

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last Name: Muhammad ALZAWAWY

Signature   :

THESIS APPROVAL

This work supervised by Doc. Dr. İsmail Numan TELCİ which has been prepared by Muhammad Soliman ALZAWAWY is approved as a Ph.D. thesis by our jury in majority vote.

Date of Acceptance 6th April 2022

(Title, Name-Surname of Jury Member)	Opinion
Doç. Dr. İsmail Numan TELCİ	Successful
Doç. Dr. Othman ALI	Successful
Doç. Dr. Philipp O. AMOUR	Successful
Doç. Dr. Muharrem Hilmi ÖZEV	Successful
Doç. Dr. Mustafa YETIM	Successful

CONTENTS

List of Tables, Graphs and Maps

List of tables:

List of Graphs:

List of Maps:

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the world has witnessed number of geopolitical upheavals that worked as a reminder to scholars of International Relations that geography still matter, even in a world that become more connected and globalized than ever before. Land masses, buffer states, seas, demography, natural resources still carry vital importance in international relations, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and its annexation of Crimea before that in 2014, what may lead to a reformation of the world order that was materialized after the Cold War. The Middle East was no exception as well, as the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its everlasting consequences, the Arab revolutions[1] that started in Tunisia in 2010 were two landmarks that contributed to changes on the geopolitical landscape, and brought a new era to the Arab World. Those upheavals severely weakened many Arab regimes, some of them collapsed in the Arab revolutions, leaving power vacuums across the region, that resulted in the rise and spread of non-state actors that proved to be even stronger than many governments in many cases, as they were supported by foreign actors, what resulted in the beginning of a proxy war across the region.

As a result, the Middle East went through a transformation in the pattern of coalitions according to the rising different threats, and the power projection of non-Arab powers of the Middle East that started, willingly or forcibly, to intervene in the collapsed Arab states after the Arab uprisings, with the direct or indirect participation of international powers like the USA, Russia and China. The regional order of the Arab World, that is overlapping with the Middle East, and was based on the Arab League and the centrality of the Palestinian

---

[1]   In this research, we will refer to the cross-border protests that occurred in the Arab World since the end of 2010 starting from Tunisia with Arab Uprisings, or Arab Spring interchangeably. When generally mentioned in this study, that means we refer to those upheaval events that toppled number of dictatorships around the region, in Tunisia, Libya Egypt, and Yemen, and resulted in a civil war and the regional and international armed intervention in Syria, with protests in Bahrain, and later on ignited protests that toppled head of governments in Lebanon, Algeria, Iraq and Sudan.

issue, also waned, what opened the door into a new conceptualization of "threat". The transition of decision making center of the Arab World from traditional powers into its new core in the Gulf led to a new interpretation of ideological and geopolitical threats. The emergence of Islamists as main triumphant from the ashes of the Arab Spring let to a renewed ideological competition on who owns the interpretation of Islam and its role in public spheres, especially vis a vis governance. That was added to the already volatile struggle between Sunni and Shiite across the region, and their different conceptualization of Khilafa, on a wider context of rivalry between monarchic Islam and democratic one in an area extended from Morocco to Turkey and ending at Indonesia even beyond the Middle East.

So, in this area of the world that is highly charged with rivalry and competition over the heritage of the Ottoman Empire is now witnessing new geopolitical transformations that may affect the map of coalitions around the region that is missing a regional security order after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the waning of the Arab League and other regional organizations and alliances, that most of them were shortly lived since the Baghdad Pact, where others were not politically effective like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). So, in this study we are going to analyze three types of geopolitical transformations that we deem most important, in a sense that it will affect the way the regional actors will behave in their foreign policy making process towards enacting new coalitions in the region; mainly: **1) the geopolitics of the Arab Spring; 2) the geopolitics of power projections; and 3) the geopolitics of energy in the region.**

In this study, we will consider the power projections as an independent variable by itself, as the region is witnessing a state of collapse of traditional regional security preparations and there is no clear hegemon, hence, the main regional powers are vying for the expansion of their power projection across the dominant vacuums that are occurring due to many geopolitical transformations, among them is the American-led occupation of Iraq. Since then, the region is facing the repercussions of the collapse of Saddam Hussein regime and what ensued from the expansion of Iran's influence and its control over the Iraqi security and non-security institutions, in addition to the rise of the power of the non-state actors

alike. Ideology plays a very important factor in forging the political values and culture, as the main cohesive umbrella for the region used to be the ideologies either derived from Islamic interpretation of governance, or the Arab Nationalism.

Political and democratic Islamism[2], and the Shia Ideology that supported by hard power of Iranian intervention in the region are both important in order to decipher the current debacle. The geopolitics of power projection in the region is related to the expansion of the main regional powers and their military build-up in terms of forward bases around the waterways of the Middle East, in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, as its related military posture is being upgraded day after another in a rapid format. The new found gas fields in the East Mediterranean are also a new geopolitical transformation that moved the energy center of gravity from the Gulf states into this region, which witnessed new balancing and coalition building not only according to their conception of threat, but also as a result of the conception of interest.

In this thesis those geopolitical transformation will be analyzed in light of their impact on the ongoing regional coalition building, and the regional alliances that are based in many cases on the different interpretation of "good governance" in Islam in general, and the historical and sectarian differences and struggles around this notion and others related to the structure and shape of state in Islam, as many of the current struggles in the region are

---

[2] Since the 1990s, scholars have used the term "Islamism" to refer to a number of modern Islamic revolutionary organizations and ideologies with the objective of establishing Islamic law (sharia) as the absolute foundation for all aspects of life in Majority-Muslim countries. In this study, Islamists are political Muslim activists who have decided to participate in political and democratic processes throughout the region, as opposed to Jihadists, who use violence and Jihad to force their Islamic point of view on governance. Other self-identified Muslim groups have emerged, which are frequently referred to as radical Islamist movements or Islamic fundamentalists. Political organizations and socio-religious movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Nahda Party, and others in the region will be considered Islamists that generally call for the Muslim's global unity and the fulfillment of Sharia, or Islamic law, by various degrees.

revolving around the different types of governance in the Muslim World as whole, as this region, the Middle East, is considered as the core of it.

Research Objective

This research aims to add to the understanding of the core reasons and problems that occurs in the Middle East, and to build a new framework of understanding its new coalition map that is now underway according to the transformations of the perception of "threat" and "interest" according to different actors in the region, and to help the decision makers in understanding the main patterns of coalitions in the region and how to deal with it and with any future crisis that may explode due to the different perceptions of interests and threats in the Middle East.

It also tries to examine the current changes in the geopolitics of the Middle East and hence tries to explain them in the scope of the current reshaping process of regional order and the power struggle that engulfs the weaker states in the system, trying to analyze what kind of long term or short-term coalitions or alliances that can shape a new security preparation that can come closer to a viable Regional Order.

Practical Importance

It is highly important for the states of the Middle East to find a solution to the security dilemma that is going on in the region since the inception of the Arab uprisings, and it is also important to analyze the effects of the current geopolitical transformations on the process of coalition building in the region. For decision makers around the region, understanding those effects and analyzing the main determinants for coalition building in the region is key for reaching sound formulas for foreign policy making around the region, and using their both soft and hard powers in order to guarantee their interests, either mutual or individual, for the states in the region.

Research problem and questions

The thesis is trying to focus on the impact of the current geopolitical transformations in the Middle East and their impact on the regional coalition building, with the main question that may be phrased as: **what are the factors that can shape the coalition building process in the Middle East, in light of the current geopolitical transformations**? With sub questions related to studying:

- What are the main geopolitical transformations in the region?
- What are the threat perceptions of different actors in the region?
- What is the role of Ideologies and geographical proximity in the shaping process of the coalitions in the region?
- What are the different coalitions in the region?
- What are the bases of the current coalitions in the ME?

Research Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this research is that there is a struggle going on in the region around both the notion of good governance and its different ideologies regarding Islam and democracy and their relation to the state from one hand, and a struggle for resources and interests that both lead the current map of coalitions in the Middle East. The reemergence of **political Islam or the spread of democracy** across the region will be pivotal in severely changing the map of coalitions. Hence, the new geopolitical transformations in the region will have a severe impact on the process of coalition building and inclinations for different axis, in a highly ideologically-charged environment. The severity of these geopolitical transformations will determine the degree of inclination form different actors towards one coalition or another, and the more competition over the relation of Islam to public spheres, the more the gaps will widen between regional actors, and then may lead to more rivalry across the Middle East.

Methodology

This study will be based on the combination of the Neo-Realism and Constructivism school of thoughts in the field of International Relations, using Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat thesis from his book "The Origin of Alliances" as a model and the Realist Constructivism of J. Samuel Barkin in his book of the same title. This methodology will make a synthesis between the factors related to power politics, geopolitical facts and the socially constructed ideas and norms that shape the decision making process of the leaders of the regional regimes. The Balance of Threat theory, which is based on Defensive Realism, argues that governments join alliances largely to counter threats. Because balance and bandwagoning are more correctly understood as responses to threats, other elements that determine the level of threat that states may pose should be evaluated: geographical proximity, offensive power, and hostile intentions are all factors to consider.[3] As Stephen Walt describes ideological solidarity as a tendency for nations with comparable internal qualities to favor alignment with one another over alignment with states with dissimilar domestic characteristics, ideology is a key component in forming alliances.[4]. To assess the development of coalitions based on this aspect, he offers three questions: first, how powerful is this tendency? Second, does it have a varied influence in different cases? Third, do certain philosophies cause division among members by inciting conflict rather than encouraging cooperation?[5]

Stephen Walt's Offshore Balancing can be viewed also as a main interpretation of the U.S. strategy in the Middle East after Obama's wars, as Washington appeared to be intervening militarily "only when absolutely necessary" and keeping "its military presence as small as possible[6]. The latest American retreat from war zones around the Middle East

---

[3] Stephen M. Walt, **The Origin of Alliances**, Cornell University Press, 1ˢᵗ edition, 1987, USA, p: 180.

[4] Ibid, p: 181.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Stephen M. Walt, "Taming American Power", **Foreign Affairs**, (September–October 2005), https://cutt.ly/0nPCLao (5 March 2021).

affirms this policy, as both Trump and Joe Biden followed the path, what make the regional powers take on their own the burden of security preparation and structure of the region and opens the door for more competition and rivalry over the power vacuums that occurred as a result of various geopolitical transformations that will be discussed here in this study.

From the other hand, Realism and constructivism, while considered as two different key contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of international relations, are commonly taught as mutually exclusive ways of understanding the subject. The term Realist Constructivism explores the common ground between the two, and demonstrates that, rather than being in simple opposition, they have areas of both tension and overlap. This overlapping reality can be used for better understanding of both the power-based nature of the struggle in the Middle East and also the cultural, ideological and social accumulation of factors that led to the current web of coalitions in the region. Also the Omni-Balancing theory of international relation can be used to analyze the behavior of illegitimate and weak regimes of some main actors and explains why some leaders prefer to make concessions even to their enemies for the sake of regime survival, and hence affects the decision making process of their own foreign policies.

For answering the research questions on the framework of the theoretical approach, this research will follow a descriptive analytical approach that will use also the Political Culture approach to measure the orientations of different countries in the Middle East, and analyzing their behavior concerning the process of coalition building in the region. The research will begin by spotting main geopolitical transformations of the Middle East and the interventions of various regional and international actors in the power vacuums in the regions, and will analyze their ideologies and objectives from this intervention, and hence measuring the conception of threat and its impact on their efforts to make coalitions according to the theory of Balance of Threat (BoT). In this case, the threat will be measured in their aggregate of power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions, putting in mind the effects of differences in ideologies across the region.

Time Scope of the Research

This research will focus on the major transformations of the region that started to take place since the beginning of the Arab uprisings at the end of 2010 in Tunisia, that toppled regimes and enacting others, while this period witnessed the rise and fall of the forces of Islamists across the region, putting in mind the transformations that took place since the American led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The scope of the research will end at 2020, as this period seems to be enough in order to study and analyze the transformations and its repercussions, as this period witnessed also a rise in the explorations of gas fields across the Eastern Mediterranean and the demarcation of maritime boarders in addition to the aforementioned military interventions by both regional and international powers.

Geographical Scope of the Research

Although that the main title of the study is about the Middle East[7], the overlapping region of the Arab World cannot be ignored in such an analysis, as the Middle East is considered as the core of the Muslim World, while the Arab World is one of its most important regions, for that reason many scholars consider analyzing the whole region of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a more consistence region. Studying the Middle East cannot overlook the cultural, ethnic and civilizational exceptionalism of the Arab region and the Muslim World, although we can debate about the importance of some sub-regions over others. The Maghreb sub-region, for example, can be considered as a distinctive consistence area for analysis, in regard to its ethnicity and cultural backgrounds attached more to the Sahel and the Mediterranean southern of Europe areas. Hence, its relation to the Arab world and the Middle East can't be ignored, as it is part of the Arab

---

[7]   This research's primarily focus will be on the Middle East, as we will endorse the traditional definition of the region as "countries to the east of Egypt and west of Pakistan" , that is adjacent to other geographical areas that will be in the scope of this research as well; like the North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean regions; as those areas will be affected in a way or another by the main actors in the Middle East as the analysis of this paper will deal with them as part of the spill-over effects and the cross-border interactions.

League and participated actively in the Middle east wars against Israel from Libya to Morocco.

From Sudan and the Horn of Africa to the Sahel region can also be bonded with the main problems of the Middle East, as the cultural and security related issues in the Middle East have great and mutual impact on the main issues of conflict, terrorism and instability in the whole Sub-Sahara region. Here comes the important of the Middle East as a central region related to many other sub-regions that is deemed the most volatile and dangerous areas of the world, as we may see in the coming analysis.

Previous Studies and Literature Review

There were many literatures that has been written about the transformations that occurred in the Middle East in the past decade, especially after the ground-breaking event of the Arab Spring. The geopolitics of the region were also under the scrutiny of many scholars, while the issue of energy and the transformations of demand and patterns of consumptions have also subjected to deep analyzation, besides the major issue of redrawing the coalitions and its building process across the greater Middle East. But in this study, as abovementioned, we will discuss the effects of these geopolitical transformation on the regional coalition process, and hence will try to analyze the issue from different approaches and perspectives. The available literature was helpful in studying these scattered issues, but not on one coherent study. For example, Anoushiravan Ehteshami work titled: "Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules"[8] examines globalization in the Middle East and presents an assessment of its effects in the region, in the context of its enormous geopolitical dynamics which are currently unfolds. It examines the influence of globalization on the larger Middle East's politics, economics, and social environment, in light of the region's status as the epicenter of global geopolitical competition at the turn of the twenty-first century.

---

[8] Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. **Globalization and geopolitics in the Middle East: Old games, new rules**. Routledge, 2007.

John Davis also edited a book in this regard titled: "The Arab Spring and Arab Thaw"[9], as the study spoke about the unifying concepts and techniques that governed the protest movements that rocked the Middle East and North Africa in the spring of 2011, which were examined in details. It studied a variety of successful and unsuccessful protest strategies and counter-revolutionary methods used by demonstrators and autocratic regimes to analyze the effects of the Arab Spring on several levels that transformed the face of the Middle East. Contributors examined the reactions of the United States, the European Union, and the Arab League to events in the region, as well as the ethnic and tribal differences that persist in the post-revolt period. By resolving these concerns, the book shows how the Arab Spring has turned into a long-term *Arab Thaw*, which continues to have a significant impact on regional and international affairs.

While Ramu, C. M. also made a study titled "Gas looms large in Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics"[10], as he tried in this small piece to examine the problem of maritime border demarcation and the conflicts that might arise as a result of this procedure, including both legal and military clashes. It looks at the effects on Asian economies, which are major energy importers, particularly China and India. In an another work, Bülent Aras & Emirhan Yorulmazlar wrote about the geopolitics of the Arab Spring, in their work titled: "State, region and order: geopolitics of the Arab Spring"[11], as they argued that state failure, sovereignty disputes, non-state territorial formations, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary currents, and other factors are all entwined in the Arab Spring, forcing old and new regional actors to operate in the absence of a regional order. Within interdependent sub-regional formations, the emerging geopolitical picture brings the poisonous combination of state power loss spiraling toward instability, characterized by sectarianism,

---

[9] Davis, John. **The Arab Spring and Arab thaw: unfinished revolutions and the quest for democracy**. Routledge, 2016.

[10] Ramu, C. M. "**Gas looms large in Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitics**." IndraStra Global 1 (2018): 1-6.

[11] Bülent Aras and Emirhan Yorulmazlar. "**State, region and order: geopolitics of the Arab Spring**." Third World Quarterly 37.12 (2016): 2259-2273.

extremism, and global rivalries. This claim is supported by extensive and specific evidence from intra- and inter-state relations' evolving and multi-layered alliance formation processes, as well as state and non-state actors. The study also analyzed ties and alliances in a dichotomous flow from domestic to regional and regional to global levels, as it gives information on a potential future order which could emerge around a new vision of the Middle East and North Africa, with porous delimitations in the form of emergent sub-regions.

Amr Yossef, and Joseph Cerami also wrote about the geopolitics of the Arab Spring in regard to security threats and revolutionary change, in their study titled: "The Arab Spring and the Geopolitics of the Middle East: Emerging Security Threats and Revolutionary Change". [12] The co-authors present an assessment of the revolutionary changes in the politics and security of the Middle East and North Africa in this study, which underlines a renewed emphasis on international affairs on regional studies (MENA). The book tackles the issue of the Arab revolutions' long-term security implications, as well as the policy alternatives accessible to regional governments and the international community to resolve them. The authors offer concrete suggestions on how to move beyond the violence and insecurity generated by the Arab uprisings and toward sounder institutional and political structures that can promote stability and security by reorienting security reference points from states to people and demonstrating how this new reference point demands alternative policy paths.

One of the main studies that tackled the issue of the Arab Spring and its relation to the change of the geopolitics of the Middle East is the work of Bassel F. Salloukh, titled "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East". [13] He argued that since the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, regional geopolitics in Lebanon, the West Bank

---

[12] Amr Yossef and Joseph Cerami, 'The Arab Spring and The Geopolitics Of The Middle East: Emerging Security Threats And Revolutionary Change', **Springer**, 2015.

[13] Bassel F.Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings And The Geopolitics Of The Middle East." **The International Spectator** 48.2 (2013): 32-46.

and Gaza Strip, postwar Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, Yemen and Bahrain, they were all have been influenced by the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Arab uprisings heightened the geopolitical rivalry, which now extends to Syria. The sectarianization of the region's geopolitical wars, as well as the instrumental use of some uprisings for geopolitical objectives, has hardened sectarian attitudes across the region, hampered post-authoritarian democratic transitions, and turned a popular revolt into a civil war in Syria.

Bülent Aras and Richard Falk wrote in their work titled "Authoritarian 'geopolitics' of survival in the Arab Spring"[14] that not only has the Arab Spring disrupted the political and societal elements of MENA countries, but it also has shattered the power of long-serving authoritarian leaders. This study looks at how authoritarian nations reacted to the new political environment generated by the Arab Spring. The goal of the study was to figure out how geopolitical reasoning influenced the creation of new legislation designed to keep authoritarian governments in power. It focuses on Iran's and Saudi Arabia's geopolitical reasoning, which includes building threat-enemy chains in domestic politics, shifting alliances in regional diplomacy, and winning domestic support for authoritarian leadership through the use of relationships with external parties.

Each of those previous literatures covered only one aspect of the abovementioned current research problems and objectives, as they didn't analyze the impact of geopolitical changes on coalition buildings process in one hand, and they didn't also study the impact of both internal and external factors on this process on the other hand. Furthermore, the uniqueness of this study is that it tries to put forward a normative framework for coalitions in the region as part of its findings and conclusion. Hence, understanding the context of changing geopolitics of the region is essential in order to examine their impact on the security preparation for the region for the vying actors, and those who are trying to take advantage of the current power vacuums in order to establish new realities on ground.

---

[14] Aras, Bülent, and Richard Falk. "Authoritarian 'geopolitics' of survival in the Arab Spring." **Third World Quarterly,** 36.2 (2015): 322-336.

Divisions of the Research

This research will be divided into an introduction, five distinctive chapters and conclusion. The first one will include the basis of the study in terms of **conceptual and theoretical framework**, which lays out the main theories, methods and concepts of the research, and different approaches that is related to the issues of the study, that varies between International Relations theories and different methods of studying political culture and the combination of elites in the region. Then we will have four other chapters; the first will deal with the **main geopolitical transformations** in the Middle East; the second will try to categorize and analyze the **current pattern of regional coalitions**; while the third will try to analyze the **impact of the current geopolitical transformations on the regional coalition building process**; then the fifth which will try to make a **Categorization of Coalitions in the Middle East**; and then will **conclude** with the final results and findings of the research.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

After the spread of Liberalism in International Relations in the past decades, what was dubbed as the "Liberal Hegemony", there were rising arguments, especially after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine, that the Liberal international order is declining, and there is a return of geopolitics once more[15], due to number of manifestations, among them are the rise of Nationalism and indigenous local cultures that is, in a parallel way, recalling the role of religion once more to the front on the international politics. A prominent example of this is new assertive Russian Doctrine of Putin, or the Putinism[16], which aims for reinstating the previous status of the Soviet Union on world politics once again, in the shape of the Russian Federation and its satellite states in the buffer zone of the Cold War. The American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was also deemed as a violation to the United Nations Charter, and the international system that was laid out after the World War II, as the then UN Secretary General Kofi Anan said the war

---

[15] See for example: Albert J. Bergesen and Christian Suter, "The Return of Geopolitics", **World Society Studies**, the World Society Foundation Zurich, Switzerland, 2018, and: Walter Russell Mead, The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers, Foreign Affairs, May/June 2014.

[16] For more about the Russian new strategy that was inaugurated by the annexation of Crimea in 2014, see: Alexander Dugin, **The Fourth Political Theory**, Eurasian Movement, 2012, 264 pages. Dugin, a Russian Strategist and thinker, is considered the closest aide of Mr. Putin and one of the most important thinkers of the Putin's regime, who is calling for the restoration of the Russian status by introducing a new doctrine that combines between conservatism and religious identity with the Russian model of governance that is based on an absolute power for a strong leader that imitates the Russian Tsar in a quasi- monarchical system.

on Iraq was "illegal"[17], what was deemed as a failure of the Liberal dreams in front of the new international realities.[18]

Since 2011, the events in the Middle East returned to the center stage in global politics after the Arab uprisings, as geopolitical rivalries have begun to seize the opportunity to expand their influence over their regions, as what was happening in many parts of the world. Russian forces seized the Crimea and China was aggressive in its claims in its coastal waters, while Japan responded to an increasingly assertive strategy of Beijing, also Iran was trying to use its alliances with Syria and Hezbollah to control the Middle East. Those upheaval events, in addition to a more isolationist policies from the United States and its pull out from Afghanistan and parts of the Middle East, supported the argument that the power plays of ancient regional actors have returned back to international relations.[19] Despite the claims made in favor of ever more intense forms of globalization, the relevance of territory, international boundaries, and claims to sovereignty remain as pressing as ever.[20]

In the Middle East, those transformations in geopolitics were apparent, especially after the Arab uprisings that started at the end of 2010 in Tunisia, and what ensued from regime collapses in many Arab countries and the fall into civil wars and power vacuums in others, those vacuums were filled by various international and regional actors who intervened politically and militarily to take advantage of this crisis. The Arab uprisings didn't only result in a power vacuum in the region, but also in an ideological rivalry that shaped the geopolitical dispute over territories occupied by different sects and races in the region. In this sense, we can divide the region into major regional powers with different axis that are

---

[17] **BBC**, "Iraq war illegal, says Annan", 16 September, 2004, https://bbc.in/3JkGibN (8 April 2022).

[18] John J. Mearsheimer, **The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities**, Henry L. Stimson Lectures, 2018.

[19] Walter Russell Mead, "The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers", **Foreign Affairs**, April 17, 2014, https://fam.ag/3fxFy6P (5 May 2021).

[20] Klaus Dodds, **Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction**, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.: 18.

trying to make regional coalitions according to their perception of threat: A **Turkey-led coalition** that includes Qatar, Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) and some Islamists parties and movements in different countries; a **Saudi-led coalition** that includes Egypt, UAE and Bahrain; and the **Iranian-led coalition** that includes Shiite militias in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Al-Assad regime in Syria. The Turkey-Led coalition for example is a pro-democracy in the Middle East[21] and is supporting the inclusion of Islamist parties in the political process, while the Saudi Arabia's stance, for example, vis-à-vis the popular uprisings was shaped by its own very realist geopolitical objectives: to insulate the kingdom from the winds of the Arab Spring, protect the survival of supportive regimes in the region, and to undermine Iran's power around its boarders.[22] The Iranian coalition is shaped generally by to its world view of its sectarian affiliation that is enshrined in its constitution with the aim of exporting The Twelve Imams Shiite sect and its revolution across the Muslim World[23].

On the geopolitical scene, we have regime collapses, power/dominance vacuums, regional and international interventions, cross-border non-state actors, collapse of the old regional order, transformations on the international level that allows for more Realistic approaches and decline of Liberal international order, and many regional collisions of ideologies, especially around and about governance in Islam. With Iran back in the game and the US on the defensive on the need for a regional makeover, particularly after the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, Moscow saw an obvious chance to restore Russia's great power status, which it had lost since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russia began to strengthen its position in the region, particularly in relation to the autocratic governments that were under pressure. In this context, Putin transformed himself into an

---

[21] Muhammad Soliman Alzawawy, "In Pursuit of Democracy: A War of Paradigms on the Libyan Front", **ORSAM**, January 7th 2020, on: https://bit.ly/3nvRPNG .

[22] Bassel F. Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East", **The International Spectator**, Vol. 48, No. 2, June 2013, p: 40.

[23] **CIA**, National Foreign Assessment Center, "Iran: Exporting the Revolution, An Intelligence assessment", 27 April, 2006, https://bit.ly/3A0nz1G (5 March 2021).

alternative security, or more precisely, comfort provider for leaders from Syria to Egypt and abroad, and Iran became a more valued partner.[24]

The theoretical analyzing of these intertwined issues of the Middle East that is related to geopolitics, threat perception, alliances, coalitions, role of religion and political culture in enacting alliances can be formulated in a mixed approach that uses a Realist Constructivist theory, that is trying to make a synthesis between both the essence of the Realist and a Constructivism schools of thought in International Relations theories.

Realist Constructivism and Omni-Balancing

Realism and Constructivism are used to be considered as two key contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of international relations, and are commonly taught as mutually exclusive ways of understanding the international phenomenon with different scopes of vision. The Realist Constructivism mixed approach explores the common ground between both of the two main schools of thought, and demonstrates that, rather than being in simple opposition, they have areas of both tension and overlap. There is indeed space to engage in a realist constructivism. But at the same time, there are important distinctions between them, and there remains a need for a constructivism that is not realist, and a realism that is not constructivist. Samuel Barkin argues more broadly for a different way of thinking about theories of international relations, that focuses on the corresponding elements within various approaches rather than on a small set of mutually exclusive paradigms. Realist Constructivism provides an interesting new way for scholars and students to think about international relations theory.[25]

The Realist approach put in its consideration the power-related factors, and sees international politics as an anarchic arena with no overall sovereign power to enforce and

---

[24] Aron Lund, "Stand Together or Fall Apart: The Russian–Iranian Alliance in Syria," **Carnegie Endowment**, CEIP Syria in Crisis, 31 May 2016. https://bit.ly/3LU9vMF (20 April 2020).

[25] J. Samuel Barkin, **Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory**, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2010, p. 1.

guarantee conformity to rules of behaviour between states, that are key for understanding power projection, balance of power, balance of threat, influence and the use of military and hard power capabilities that aims to fill the gaps of dominance vacuums and impose its vision on the regional rivalries, while the state security and its survival tops above other non-material related issues, hence Realism places considerable emphasis on the role of great powers in an anarchic system in maintaining a balance of power. Constructivism, on the other hand, puts in its consideration the non-material factors, like ideology, culture, norms, values, shared history and other issues that are related to how the state is socially constructed. Both agree on number of issues, especially when it came to the perception of threat. One main example of Constructivism shows why states goes into war, or at least perceive higher threat from rivals that are from different civilizations or cultures, like the example why the North Korean Nuclear missile is more considered as a threat than that of Britain or France for example, to the United States.

Constructivism as a specific logic of the study of international relations is about the social, which is to say the intersubjective, construction of international politics. From this definition follows the focus on the co-constitution of agent and structure, because only through a recognition of co-constitution can the researcher address both the social aspect (existent norms and discourses matter) and the constructed aspect (it is agency, rather than, say, system structure or biology that create those norms and discourses). Other features of constructivism also flow from this definition, including the assumption of historical contingency, and a need for reflexivity on the part of the researcher.[26]

Therefore, studying coalitions in the Middle East is not only an agent/structure issue, but rather a study of norms and ideas that may contribute to a coalition-making process in an international and regional system structure, with regard to the updated perception of threat. In this thesis, where there are both material and non-material factors are intertwined to shape the map of coalition across the Middle East, a mixed approach of both the Realist and Constructivism disciplines are key to analyze and understand this fast-changing web of

---

[26] Ibid, p. 156

alliances and coalitions, while the researcher can see that it is not only an interest-based coalitions that guide the compass of their foreign policy making process, but it goes beyond to ideas and norms, culture and religion, which are all important factors in shaping their foreign policy preferences.

On the local level, there is one important theory that puts an analytical framework to explain why states make alliances, especially in the third world countries. Omni-Balancing is a theory devised by Steven R. David (1991) as a modification and a correction to what he sees defects in the origional Realist and Neo-Realist theories of International Relations. He depended on the Balance of Power theory as his main analytical startpoint, arguing that it needs modifications when it comes to the developing (third world) countris. He judges the previous theory is having a limited relevance when it comes to a better explain and understand why developing countries- more specifically their leaders- make particular choices about "alignment". David argues that the third world contains enough similarities between them that makes such a category a useful unit of analysis, as his theory focuses on threats to state leadership, rather than threats to states as a unit[27].

It also departs from existing balance of power approaches by emphasising on both internal and external threats in developing countries that are unable or unwilling to guarantee stability, order and security for its citizens. He suggests that leaders align in particular ways primarily to help them deal with threats at national level- to their rule, and even their survival. In overall, Omni-balancing accepts the realist view of the international system as anarchic, and the primacy of power, rationality and interests.

It also subscribes to the realist view of human nature, emphasising survival as the most important goal, however, this interest is related to leaders rather than states. David argues that "most powerful determinant of third world alignment behaviour is the rational calculation of their leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary

---

[27] Steven R. David, **Explaining Third World Alignment**, World Politics, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991), p.236.

to keep them in power". But he departs from balance of power in three ways: first, leaders will appease or align with secondary threats (external ones) to allow them to focus their efforts on dealing with primary adversaries (inside their states); second, arguing that leaders seek to divide those who threaten them (internally) by appeasing the international allies who may support their domestic opponents; finally, they may act in ways which protect their own security at the expense of the best interests of the state[28].

Geopolitics and Coalitions

Geopolitics is a method of foreign policy analysis in the field of International Relations which seeks to understand, explain and predict international political behavior of international actors, primarily in terms of geographical variables. Those variable are such as location, size, climate, topography, demography, natural resources and technological development. Political identity and action is thus seen to be (more or less) determined by geography.[29] Therefore, Geopolitics is an interdisciplinary endeavor that can address more fully the intersecting complexities of our current international situation. It encompasses three broad fields of inquiry: geography, history, and strategy.[30]

Many concluded that the study of geography in conjunction with politics will lead to the field of strategy, which in turn meant a predilection for war and conquest. The German study of geopolitics as a pseudo-science is associated with the work of R.J. Kjellen, Freiderich Ratzel and more especially with the founding in 1924 of the Institute of Geopolitics in Munich under Karl Haushofer[31]. Haushofer had strong links with the Nazi

---

[28] Ibid, 235-6.

[29] Graham Evans and Jeffrey Neumham, **The Penguin dictionary of international relations**, Penguin Books, 1998, pp. 197.

[30] Leonard Hochberg and Geoffrey Sloan, "Mackinder's Geopolitical Perspective Revisited**", Foreign Policy Research Institute,** August 17, 2017

[31] Karl Ernst Haushofer (27 August 1869 – 10 March 1946) was a German general, professor, geographer, and politician. Through his student Rudolf Hess, Haushofer's conception of Geopolitik influenced the development of Adolf Hitler's expansionist strategies. He coined the political use of the term Lebensraum,

party and after Hitler's rise to power in 1933, he became an influential academic policy adviser. Because Haushofer and the Munich Institute were regarded as exploiting geographical concepts for specific power-political purposes, the whole enterprise was frowned upon in UK and US academic circles where the term 'political geography' was preferred to the more value-laden 'geopolitics'.

Nevertheless, a number of important hypotheses have been advanced concerning the geographical dimension of political relationships. These concern the global distribution of land and sea, climatic variations, the distribution of raw materials and the distribution of people and institutions. In relation to the spatial distribution of land and sea, two names in particular stand out, both of whom were writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Mahan (1890) and Mackinder (1919). The core of Mahan's thesis, which had an important and acknowledged impact on the development of the US navy, was as follows: given that the sea and the great oceans are continuous and uninterrupted and given that sea transport was more efficient and cost effective than land transport, whoever controlled the sea would soon ascend to primacy in world politics. Ability to control the sea depended on the possession of a powerful navy, strategically located overseas bases, and an insular and defendable home base. Insular states with these properties (and he saw the United States as a 'continentally insular' state) would therefore play the major roles in establishing the future patterns of world politics. Mackinder, while agreeing with Mahan that the key to understanding world politics is the layout and configuration of the sea, reached the opposite conclusion and saw control of the continental heartland as the vital objective if hegemony was to be achieved. [32]

Geopolitical hypotheses connecting climate (i.e. recurring patterns of weather) to political behaviour have a long history stretching back at least to the ancient Greeks. It is

which Hitler adopted in Mein Kampf and used to motivate global Nazi expansionism and genocide. For more information about Haushofer, see Holger H. Herwig, **The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer "Educated" Hitler and Hess**, Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 292 pages.

[32] Graham Evans, Op. Cit., p. 198.

known, for example, that both Hippocrates (400 bc) and Aristotle (300 bc) made correlations between climate and human behaviour. It is a commonplace assumption that the Mediterranean and milder North temperate climates are more conducive to the development of civilization and rapid technological growth than the more equatorial or Arctic conditions that prevail elsewhere[33]. Therefore, cyclical fluctuations in climate are important (though not fully understood) variables in predicting political behaviour. Other hypotheses generally deal with the distribution of natural resources in regard to its size of population, given the state power is directly related to the ability to convert raw materials into military instruments of statecraft, and also that sheer manpower can be decisive.

However, technological expertise and knowledge can and do whittle away at these premises. The term geopolitics has now acquired some academic respectability although the subject is still not central to mainline international politics courses. In the United States especially, it has had a number of outstanding practitioners, including H. & M. Sprout,J. Hertz and N.J. Spykman. It is still a somewhat neglected field but it has seen something of a revival in the area of military/ defence analysis. One of the major pitfalls associated with the approach has been its avowedly determinist character, although its more sophisticated adherents now stress that their hypotheses are 'possibilistic' rather than 'probabilistic'. In contemporary foreign policy analysis, the realist preoccupation with the military/territorial dynamic of world politics has largely given way to the neoliberal emphasis on interdependence and an ordering of world politics based primarily on economic considerations rather than strategic ones. Thus, 'geoeconomics' (or even 'geoinformation') is said to have replaced geopolitics as the guiding motive in foreign policy formulation and conduct. Nevertheless, the retention of the prefix 'geo' continues to highlight the importance of geographical location in international relations[34].

---

[33] For more information about the rise and fall of civilizations and the role of climate, see: Arnold Joseph Toynbee, **A study of history, Geneses of Civilizations**, Volume 2, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford University Press, 1934.

[34] Graham Evans, Op. Cit., p. 199.

The popularity of geopolitical theory declined after World War II, both because of its association with Nazi German and imperial Japanese aggression and because the emergence of nuclear explosives and ballistic missiles reduced the significance of geographical factors in the global strategic balance of power. However, geopolitics continued to influence international politics, serving as the basis for the United States' Cold War strategy of containment, which was developed by George Kennan as a geopolitical strategy to limit the expansion of the Soviet Union. Political geographers also began to expand geopolitics to include economic as well as military factors[35].

Therefore, the importance of geopolitics is clearly visible in the Middle East, as the value of land, waterways, mountainous borders between different religious sects and races, the role of deserts as a buffer between different rivalries are widely witnessed in the region, especially after the American-led invasion of Iraq and as consequences of the Arab Spring. Hence, geopolitics plays an important role in enacting alliances and coalitions across the region, as the natural barriers and different regions inside the Arab World and the Middle East effectively dividing the region into Maghreb, Mashreq, Nile Valley, the Levan, Iraq, Arab Peninsula regions, while the non-Arab actors are behind mountainous barriers and water ways, like Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. The war in Yemen can give an important example of the power of geography, as the Houthis are entrenched in their strongholds covered by mountains and deserts as buffer zones, and surrounded by waters of the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, that led to the extensions of the war led by Saudi Arabia into years without a clear victory at the end.

The geography helped them to survive and also to strengthen their alliance with Iran, that both share a sectarian and ideological overview to the region. Even with the proximity of Libya to Egypt, the latter couldn't make the first as a satellite state to its influence, as the armed intervention of Cairo, which it threatened to launch, couldn't be fulfilled at the end, due to the harsh geography of the desert buffering the Egyptian core to the Libyan mainland, what made the Government of National Accord (GNA) to seek help from a

---

[35] Daniel H. Deudney, Geopolitics, Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/geopolitics (8 April 2002).

distant ally, Turkey, only because it shares the same Islamic-based mentality and political ideology, what highlights the importance of both geography and ideology in enacting alliance and coalition in the region[36].

Absence of A Core of A Regional Order

The deterioration of traditional regional powers like Egypt, Iraq and Syria, led to a loose regional order that lacks for a core. Historically, the Palestine issue worked as that core for regional politics that gathers regional power and considered to be a catalyst for regional cooperation and organization. Taking a back seat after the Arab Spring in 2010, the Palestinian cause was replaced by other local and regional threats to state order in the Middle East. In this thesis we are going to analyze the different coalition making process across the region, in light of the abovementioned geopolitical transformations, and the absence of a viable regional order or a security architecture, that can afford a security umbrella for different regional actors to cooperate and use mechanisms for conflict resolution and confronting collective security challenges. Every country's foreign policy debate revolves around which country to align with and for how long. Both powerful and weak nations feel forced to form alliances. When weak states need protection from powerful states or need to defend themselves, they create alliances. Strong states create alliances to counter the dominance of other strong states or to keep the balance of power in their favor. States expect their partners to help them militarily and diplomatically during a conflict. The alliance's commitment can be formal or informal, implying that treaties between them may or may not exist.[37]

---

[36] For more about the relations between Geopolitics and Alliances, see: Dalrymple, R., (1987), "**The Pacific Basin: Alliances, Trade and Bases**", Australian Foreign Affairs Record, vol. 58, n°3, pp.142-146. And: Ashley Richard K., (1987), **The geopolitics of geopolitical space: toward a critical social theory of international politics,** Alternatives, vol.12, pp. 403–434.

[37] Michael Don Ward, "Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics"**, Monograph Series in World Affairs**, Vol. 19, Denver, Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver, 1982, p. 26.

Hence, studying the coalitions and alliances in the region in the scope of the current patterns of political culture would give us a deeper insight to the underlying dynamics of the current coalition building process across the region. Political culture is a systematic attempt to apply social psychology's findings to the study of comparative politics. Scholars underlined the inadequacies of structural theories if they did not take into consideration the attitudinal settings of political structures while attempting to establish a structural framework for the study of politics. "Every political system is enmeshed in a certain pattern of orientations to political action... the political culture," as Gabriel Almond argued in 1956. Political culture, according to Almond and Verba, is "particularly political orientations— attitudes toward the political system and its various aspects, and attitudes regarding the function of the individual in the system". Later, Verba described political culture as "a subjective orientation to politics" or "a system of empirical ideas, expressive symbols, and values that determine the context in which political action occurs".[38]

In studying coalitions in the Middle East, it is important to put in mind the exceptionality of the region in regard of its sets of values, norms, culture and religious symbols regarding political participation and practice. Combining between different International Relations theories and methodologies is imperative in order to analyze and understand the pattern of thinking and attitudes of the people of the region towards political and social phenomenon. Hence, the combination between the Realist and the Constructivist paradigms may lead to the better understanding of the coalition making process across the region. Constructivism, particularly Alexander Wendt's and Peter Katzenstein's state identity theory, has drifted away from the virtually exclusively rationalist mainstream of international relations theory. The constructivist theory, which is often regarded as the most serious threat to rationalist supremacy, claims that a theoretical framework centered on the concept of state identity can provide a viable alternative to rational choice theory. Constructivist scholars study non-material aspects such as values, culture, norms, and ideas

---

[38] Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Political Culture Approach to Middle East Politics", **International Journal of Middle East Studies,** 8 (1977), p.45.

to understand state identity. It provides crucial causal ties to support the constructivist theoretical framework's key assertions.

1.1. Alliances and Coalitions: Conceptual Differences

The terms 'alliance' and 'coalition' are often used interchangeably, especially in the field of International Relations, as differences can be viewed more in the contexts of International Law and other legal frameworks. For example, alliances are formal treaty-based multilateral security agreements between two or more countries to combat a common threat. Coalitions, on the other hand, are characterized as ad hoc collaboration and coordination among countries in response to a common threat or security issue. The distinctions between them are frequently overlooked or dismissed as having no analytical significance. For instance, Christopher Bladen conflates alliances with coalitions and notes, "Alliances, like coalitions in broader form, grow out of coercive and conflict situations".[39]

Stephen Walt also uses the term interchangeably: "states join alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat."[40] Others propose a broader definition of alliance and coalition to allow for such a conflation. For instance, in their discussion of alliances, Holsti, Hopmann and Sullivan note that "There is little to gain from a restrictive definition, and a broad one offers the distinctive advantage of enlarging the scope" of a scholarly review.[41]

Despite the fact that the phrases alliance and coalition are frequently used interchangeably, some scholars contend that there are at least three significant differences between them. The first distinction is between formalized and ad hoc military cooperation;

---

[39] Christopher Bladen, "Alliance and Integration," in Julian R. Friedman, Christopher Bladen, and Steven Rosen, **Alliance in International Politics** (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970), p. 121.

[40] Stephen M. Walt, **Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power**, International Security, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1985), p. 5.

[41] Ole R. Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John D. Sullivan, **Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies** (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972), p. 3.

the second is between defensive and reactive military cooperation; and the third is between coverage of a single topic versus numerous issue areas. As a result, alliances are codified and institutionalized cooperation agreements, whereas coalitions are informal agreements between states.[42]

According to Robert Osgood, an alliance is "a formal agreement that pledges states to co-operate in using their military resources against a specific state or states and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force."[43] Holsti et al offer a similar definition emphasizing the formalization of the alliance process: "an alliance is a formal agreement between two or more nations to collaborate on national security issues".[44] Some argue that alliances are formed in peace time and coalitions are often found during war, while coalitions lack many of the political functions, such as deterrence of attack, preclusion and restraint of the ally.[45]

However, we can differentiate between various levels of cooperation and alignment in international relations. According to the realist theory, states are the central political actors and their actions are measured by perceptions of sovereignty, national interest and security. Realism is primarily concerned with the protection of the state and the survival of it as a separate actor. Therefore, the related terminology and concepts may be useful in defining the main difference between various levels of international cooperation.

Threat isn't a measurable phenomenon. It's a perception-based idea. A state's capabilities and objectives are essential factors in defining threat. The concept of security, according to realists, is a vicious circle. To be secure, in its most basic sense, means to be devoid of

---

[42] See: Julian R. Friedman, "Alliance in International Politics", in Julian R. Friedman, Christopher Bladen, and Steven Rosen, **Alliance in International Politics** (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc, 1970), p. 15.

[43] Robert E. Osgood, **Alliances and American Foreign Policy** (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 17.

[44] Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan, **Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances** p. 4.

[45] Glenn H. Snyder, 1990. **Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut**, Journal of International Affairs, 44 (1), p: 105.

hazards and dangers. States are neither entirely secure nor completely insecure; rather, they experience both in varying degrees. Formal alliances, on the other hand, strengthen or create existing alignments. According to Snyder, an alliance is "a subset of the broader phenomena". When a state aligns its policies with those of another state in order to achieve mutual security goals, this is known as alignment. On the other hand, Kann[46] compares and contrasts alliances and ententes. There are no firm commitments between partners in the case of ententes. Simple acknowledgment of the fact that agreements between them will only make sense if they serve common interests is all that is required. He claims that the underlying trend of an entente is the polar opposite of that of an alliance. Secrets, ideological differences, and other topics are clearly defined in alliance treaties, but not in ententes. Entente is a more flexible state-to-state relationship.[47]

Alliances, on the other hand, can be defined as formal groupings of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, for either the security or maximization of its members' capabilities, against a specific adversary, either explicitly identified or not. As a result, alliances are tools of a bigger and more fundamental phenomenon, which differs from "alignment," which is defined as a set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will support one other in disputes or wars with other states. These expectations are mostly based on perceived common interests (or dangers), and their strength is determined by their dedication as well as the degree of conflict with a common enemy. By virtue of their solemnity, specificity, legal and normative requirements, and (in modern times) public prominence, formal alliances enhance existing alignments or maybe generate new ones.[48] These four elements may make up an alliance relationship: a strategic notion or goal that determines alliance partners' shared responsibilities; a unified defense strategy that defines roles, missions, and duties; a consensus on the types and numbers of forces needed to carry

[46] R. Kann, "Alliances Versus Ententes", **World Politics**, 28(4), 1976, pp. 612-615. doi:10.2307/2010069.

[47] Edwin H. Fedder, "The Concept of Alliance", **International Studies Quarterly**, Volume 12, Issue 1, March 1968, Pages 65–86, https://doi.org/10.2307/3013558.

[48] Glenn H. Snyder, **Alliance Theory**, Op. cit., p: 104.

out a shared defense plan; a slew of more specific agreements on command and control, basing arrangements, and burden- sharing.[49]

1.2. Coalition Building Process

In this study we will focus on the current coalition building process in the region, and what governs its nature and relations, in light of the historical and cultural buildup of both regimes and states. In addition, studying the role of major powers in the international system and their relations to regional actors in the Middle East can lead to understanding the current behavior of different regional players and analyzing their motives and ambitious. Analyzing the Map of defense capabilities in light of the tendencies of states in the region to either balance or bandwagon under the Neo-Realist theory in IR will enable us to understand the current map of coalitions. A look back at the history and cultural fabric and the current state systems will give us a broader view on how those regimes chose one side and not the other for enacting long or short-term coalitions.

To a far extend, the relation between regional actors' political systems and their choices of coalitions is visible across the region, as the lesser they enjoy popular support the more they tend to get legitimacy from abroad by Bandwagoning, and if vice versa they tend more to have a coherent foreign policy that is based upon the national sovereignty and their state interest instead of the survival of their authoritarian regimes. In International Relations, alliance formation is an inevitable result of interaction among sovereign political units driven by the interests of either dominating or balancing the power according to their perception of threat. Nations develop alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions with greater resources, as Stephen Walt discovered, and the weaker states often join alliances to balance power.[50]

---

[49] Chae-Sung Chun, "Theoretical Approaches to Alliance: Implications on the R.O.K.-U.S. Alliance", **Journal of International and Area Studies**,71, Volume 7, Number 2, 2000, p. 73.

[50] Stephen Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power**"**, **International Security**, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985), pp. 3-43

According to coalition theories of alliance, allied governments develop collective strength within inherent limits on the size of the alliance or the number of allies to be included. The effect of strengthening an alliance on the behavior of alliance members is the subject of research on moral hazard within an alliance. More studies contend that the wording of an alliance agreement can constrain coalition members by raising doubts about whether they will intervene or limiting the domain in which alliance members' military duties are important. The idea that governments negotiate agreements with the strength of an alliance in mind is central to all of these studies.[51]

To Kenneth Waltz, "balancing is a sensible behavior when the victory of one coalition over another leaves weaker members of the winning coalition at the mercy of the stronger one... On the weaker side, they are both more appreciated and safer, provided of course, the coalition they join achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking"[52]. Waltz specifies two types of balancing as well. Threats could be countered by states using their own resources. Internal balance is the term for this process. Alternatively, they can seek out and ally with other states who share their dread. External balancing is the term for this. Internal balancing, he claims, is more prevalent and exact than external balancing in bipolarity. Bandwagoning Individual nations react differently to threats if the system fails to establish a balance against an invader. Joining the stronger side for the sake of protection and payoffs, even if it meant insecurity with the protecting power and a certain loss of independence, is known as bandwagoning.[53]

Bandwagoning has historically been more common than balancing, especially among minor nations. Bandwagoning refers to partnering with a rising state, either out of fear or money. Bandwagoning is defined by Walt as "alignment with the source of risk." He classified it into two categories: offensive and defensive. The act of aligning with a

---

[51] Edwin H. Fedder, **Concept of Alliances**, p. 72.

[52] Kenneth Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, California, 1979, pp: 126-127.

[53] Ibid, p. 168.

dominant state in order to participate in the spoils of victory is known as offensive bandwagoning. Defensive bandwagoning is a type of appeasement in which a state joins forces with an aggressive state to avoid being attacked. Walt also distinguished between detente and bandwagoning. Bandwagoning entails unequal exchange; detente entails nearly equal compromises that benefit both parties. Detente entails mutual acknowledgement of genuine interests, whereas bandwagoning is a capitulation to pressure. The state's behavior can be revealed in a variety of ways, including balancing and bandwagoning. There are a variety of responses and tactics available.[54]

According to Walt's Balance of Threat (BoT) theory, states tend to "balance" against the most dangerous state or coalition rather than "bandwagoning" with it. In most cases, balancing is done in terms of power. The strongest state or coalition is said to balance against the weakest state or coalition. In fact, they are balancing against the state that is the most dangerous. The level of threat posed by a state to others is determined by its strength, geographic closeness, offensive military capability, and perceived aggressiveness, though the relative importance of each aspect will vary depending on the scenario. It is critical to analyze all of the factors that influence the level of threat posed by a state, or Aggregate Power, which is the entire power of states as a component of the threat they can pose to others. The more total resources a state has, such as population, economic and military capability, and technological proficiency, the greater the threat it may offer to others. The total power of a state may be a motivator for balancing or bandwagoning. Also, because the ability to project power diminishes with distance, states that are close by offer a bigger threat than those that are far away. States are more inclined to form alliances in response to neighboring powers rather than in response to those that are distant.[55]

Other researchers tweaked the alliance and balance of power theories as well, adding Omni-balancing, buck-passing, and chain-ganging to the list of policy possibilities beyond balancing and bandwagoning. Steven David looked at how regional nations and global

---

[54] Ibid, p. 21.

[55] Stephen Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1978, p. 22.

powers interact. The balance of power theory proposes that the determinants of alignment are primarily determined by the structure of the international system, particularly the real and potential external threats that states confront. This assumption ignores the state's internal qualities, which may have a role in shaping state alignment decisions. Domestic dangers to a government can also push its leaders to pursue an appeasement policy, in which they collaborate with secondary opponents in order to divert resources away from key adversaries. The threatened leadership aligns with one threat to confront the other in this fashion.[56]

Internal risks to ruling regimes in developing countries, notably governments in the Middle East, were likely to be as concerning as foreign power balances or threats. Weaker governments, in particular, were more prone to participate in Omni-balancing, which entails allying with a global power to assist a local regime in countering its own domestic or internal dangers. Similarly, Harknett and Vandenberg stated that Middle East alliances were responses not only to foreign concerns but also to interrelated domestic and international challenges, stressing the importance of both internal and exterior security concerns.[57]

Weaker states in regional systems, on the other hand, may aim to avoid any of the above behaviors in the hopes of countering a rising hegemonic or otherwise dangerous power. This buck-passing strategy is frequently a gamble taken by states trying to avoid losing conflicts. However, if states believe coalitions are necessary for their own security, they may follow the opposite path, not just committing to an alliance but possibly overcommitting. When governments effectively chain-gang in this way, forming strong

---

[56] Steven R. David, **Explaining Third World Alignment**, World Politics, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991), p.233.

[57] Harknett, Richard J., and Jeffrey A. VanDenBerg. "Alignment Theory and Interrelated Threats: Jordan and The Persian Gulf Crisis." **Security Studies** 6.3 (1997): 112-153.

alliances in the face of threats, they risk a different kind of gamble, in which allies may force a state into a war it would otherwise avoid.[58]

1.3. Categorization of Coalitions

Many scholars differ around classifying alliance and coalition, as some of the classify them as strategic or tactic, short term or long term, treaty based or not, and coalitions created for certain purpose for certain period of time, while other make different categorization for them. In this study we will focus on certain types of coalitions, mainly: Tactical, Historical, and Natural, depending on the methodology adapted by Jeremy Ghez in categorizing alliances in the U.S.-European partnership[59]. In his study, he laid out the differences between the main three as follows: A **tactical alliance's** principal goal is to counter an urgent threat or enemy that threatens a state's most essential interests. They are useful and frequently opportunistic in that they allow states to handle a pressing and pressing issue. **Historical alliances** are long-term partnerships that endure despite major disruptions or changes in the international order. The structural characteristics of such an alliance, which outlast time- or threat-specific conditions, enable allies to maintain cooperation, depending on previous triumphs as focal points to support further partnerships. Historical allies are more likely to tolerate short-term compromises that aren't totally aligned with national goals in the hopes of gaining rewards in the long run. Within the framework of a tactical alliance, such a trade-off is unthinkable.

Natural alliances entail hypothesizing parallels in political culture and narratives about how the world works or should work, in addition to partners' shared sense of history. These commonalities adapt to the changing landscape by constantly reconstructing the identities of natural allies who attempt to tell or recreate history in order to better face the present and adjust to the future challenges. As a result, a Natural Alliance is more resilient and is more

---

[58] Curtis R. Ryan, "Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East", in: Marc Lynch and Amaney Jamal, "Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East**", The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS)**, New York, March 2019, p. 7,8.

[59] Jeremy Ghez, pp.: 6-11.

likely to withstand exogenous shocks, even if they may have a short-term impact. It does not eliminate arguments and tensions, but it does minimize the chances of misunderstandings over time. As a result, if a group of countries are natural allies, one would expect: a) larger commonalities in terms of political culture than the rest of the world, and b) greater commonalities in terms of responses to international crises than the rest of the world.[60]

The measurement of categorization in this context, according to Ghez, is the level of cooperation that can enhance the accuracy of predictions regarding their long-term sustainability, as he argues that a Natural Alliance may also rely on a historical component and be at times justified by tactics[61]. He determined two datasets and a statistical tool that can help the measurement of the nature of alliance: The World Values Survey database as an operational tool to decide the orientation of a country's political culture, and the PEW Global Attitudes project that offers various cross-country polls covering reactions to international crises across a wide set of nations since 2001. The aggregation of this project's data is indicative of commonalities in terms of the reaction of countries to current international affairs.[62]

However, considering the exceptionality of the Middle East as a third world with mostly hardships in information access and totalitarian regimes that's in most cases are obsessed with security fears, data-collecting mechanisms may not be available in some countries, therefore, gauging and measuring the perceptions, impressions and attitudes of their people about political affiliation and their cultural and religious opinions via polls maybe beyond reach in most cases, as the majority of the countries of the region are not democratic regimes and their decision-making outcomes doesn't necessarily represent their people's political culture. Still, we can trace their political rhetoric and outcomes of different regimes' foreign policies decisions, in order to have certain categorization of states'

---

[60] Ibid, p: 6-10.

[61] Ibid, p: 10.

[62] Ibid, p: 13.

orientations, concerning the three above mentioned types of alliances. The research will deal also with categorizing those states (and coalitions) on the Middle East if they are either a status quo state or a revisionist state, which will help in understanding their behavior and their policies toward different issues and security threats across the region, and their relations to different regional powers that will help in understanding the pattern of the current process of coalition building.

1.4. Identity and Coalitions

Identity plays a vital role in enacting alliances and coalitions in the field of International Relations. A major example of how identity and ideology plays a cornerstone of coalitions is that of the World War II. When alliances and coalitions were built to confront the Nazi regime in Germany, they were built upon their perception of threat from Nazi Germany, and hence the Allies cooperated with the Soviet Union to defeat the Nazi. When the war is over, each side realigned themselves according to their identity and ideology, what resulted in the eruption of the Cold War. Therefore, understanding the nature of political culture of the regime is vital in understanding its behavior against certain developments and tendencies in world politics.

In this setting, a pragmatic approach to international affairs does not have to be driven solely by power concerns, economic links, or realpolitik, rather, there are parallels in political culture and created identity, as a feeling of shared history, it can be a strategic advantage for improved coordination and collaboration, improved predictability. Hence, identity-based coalitions can demonstrate greater strength in this regard and a higher degree of significance than previously argued. This approach does not imply that traditional alliances, which are based on tactics and whose strategic utility has been well-documented and intuitively obvious, are no longer relevant. It does imply that there is another dynamic

at work based on identities, which may have been suppressed by the Cold War and is now playing a significant role it continues to play, as it has in the past.[63]

In fact, the end of the Cold War and the ideological rivalry between the West and the East has given identity a new meaning both at home and abroad. Politics, values, identity, and political problems have recently resurfaced. When it comes to internal politics, polarization often implies that cultural identification is a factor. At the very least, at the national level, it plays a crucial influence in political processes. With the increase in speed, as a result of globalization, there is a heightened awareness of disparities in political identities and ideologies. In a West that no longer faces an existential threat from the Soviet Union, ideologies have become increasingly sharp. As a result, tribalism and communitarianism have arisen as two defining dynamics of domestic political conflicts in the twenty-first century, while they are lauded by some and despised by others. More broadly, the growth of multiculturalism and challenges to the social contract's continuity and the preservation of domestic peace have been at the center of debates in both the United States and Europe, while thinkers and policymakers have clearly framed the issue differently.[64]

Therefore, we may argue that countries with same culture, religion, identity, race, sec, traits, may think like mindedly and their interpretations for symbols and signs became the same, and so their perception of threat or the need for cooperation, alliance or coalition, as same identity creates a bonding sensation, especially in the political context or their attitude towards a neighboring or eminent threat. The Middle Eastern countries with the same religion and culture may have the same feeling and impressions towards certain political or social phenomenon, while religion and historical experiments can make their political culture almost the same, especially their attitude towards their ruler and the governing elites.

---

[63] Jeremy J. Ghez, "The Enduring Partnership? The Trans-Atlantic Community as a Natural Alliance",
RAND Corporation, USA, 2010, p.13.

[64] Ibid.

Although this study depends mainly on the Realist approach in International Relations concerning Balance of Power and Balance of Threat, and why nations make coalitions and alliance, we may resort also to the Constructivist interpretations of these phenomena as how the world is socially constructed can illuminate the way for understanding how certain counties under the same culture and social criteria may have almost the same interpretations and perceptions for rapprochement and alignment in regional policies. Having a common enemy or a certain source of threat will definitely push them to balance against it, as the balance of power is considered one of the oldest practices in international relations, emanating from the need for the accumulation of aggregate power against the source of threat.

Different theories in International Relations can be combined to make an analytical framework for the interpretation of political and social phenomenon on local, regional and international levels. J. Samuel Barkin, argues that as part of the geography of international relations theory, a realist/constructivist synthesis would serve a number of beneficial tasks. One is to resolve a number of disagreements in the area in which the protagonists speak past each other rather than to each other, notably over the definition of and linkages among distinct approaches. Another is a vocabulary for discussing the link between the study of power politics and the study of ideals in international relations on the one hand, and the study of international politics' social construction on the other. A third purpose is to clarify the relationships between conventional approaches to international relations and critical and postmodern approaches to international relations, which are skeptical of both constructivism and realism, but for different reasons. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for both realist and constructivist researchers of international politics, this function clarifies both the essential notions and limitations of these two systems.[65]

---

[65] J. Samuel Barkin, **Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory**, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2010, p. 3,4.

CHAPTER TWO

GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction

There were many geopolitical transformations that took place in the region in the past decade, many of them are due to ideological, ethnic and sectarian differences, while the others are related to the transformation of the energy resource and consumptions. The ideological transformations were in part as a result of the Arab Spring, which resulted in the rise of the role of Islamism and the collapse of the state authority paved the way to the formations and expansion of religious and ethnic militias around the region. In northern Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and the Horn of Africa a new fault lines were created in the region, while the contention about Political Islam, the proliferation of democracy and old regimes reached its peak since the wave of the counter revolutions that erupted starting from 2013's coup in Egyptian.

Furthermore, the collapse of the so-called Arab Regional System that was embodied in the Arab League resulted in new power vacuums and circles of influence across the region, in addition to the rise of new definitions of threat perception and the substitution of Israel as the main threat to the region with Iran and Islamism. In this chapter we are going to analyze three different geopolitical transformations that occurred in the region and hence have great impact on the process of regional coalition building, namely **1) The geopolitics of the Arab Uprisings; 2) The geopolitics of dominance vacuums (resulted in state collapse); and 3) The geopolitics of Energy.**

2.1. The Geopolitics of the Arab Uprisings

The Arab Uprisings that once were dubbed as the Arab Spring brought new realities to the Middle East, as it affected it on local, regional and ideological levels. The waves of human masses that gushed into the Arab streets resulted in the shaking of the bases of Arab authoritarianism in general, and led to the collapse of the regional order as well. The Arab

uprisings also led to the erosion of the legitimacy of the Arab nation-states, and also led to the transformations of political Islamist currents, along with the increase of sectarianism and transnationalism, new forms of extremism have emerged. Long-running civil wars, the emergence of non-state actors, proxy wars, and external interventions all contributed to the breakdown of the normative order. These factors have been entwined in the Arab rebellion, forcing old and new regional actors to coexist in the absence of a clear regional order. There is general agreement that the old system has come to an end, but there is no such agreement on the chances for succession.[66]

Regional powers are now competing for the establishment of a new regional order, and increasing their influence, generally through proxy wars, with financing and arming different factions and ideologies around the Middle East. The areas of ideas, norms, perceptions and beliefs were also common fields of this rivalry, as the battle goes on wining minds and hearts alongside with winning battles on the ground. Islam and its political interpretation among different factions is pivotal in shaping the future of the Middle East, as ideological battle revolve around its role in public spheres and its interpretations as an inspiration for political ideology, as well as being a source for legitimacy or depriving legitimacy from current ruling elites in the region.

At the core of the regional rivalry in the region is a religious struggle that goes as far as the historical events that occurred in the first decade of the history of religion, when Muslims were divided into Sunna and Shiite. Political Islam, from the other hand, resembles the ideological disagreements between different factions at that early point in regard to governance and political issues since the first fitnah of killing the third Khilafa Uthman ibn Affan. We now have three main axes in the region, representing royal Sunni Islam, revolt Shiite Islam, and revolt Sunni modern Islamism.

---

[66] Bülent Aras & Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "State, region and order: geopolitics of the Arab Spring", **Third World Quarterly,** 2016, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2016.1205442, https://bit.ly/33m80X1 (5 March 2021).

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia *vs* Islamic Republic of Iran : a proxywar in the Middle East

The Maghreb and Orient Courier
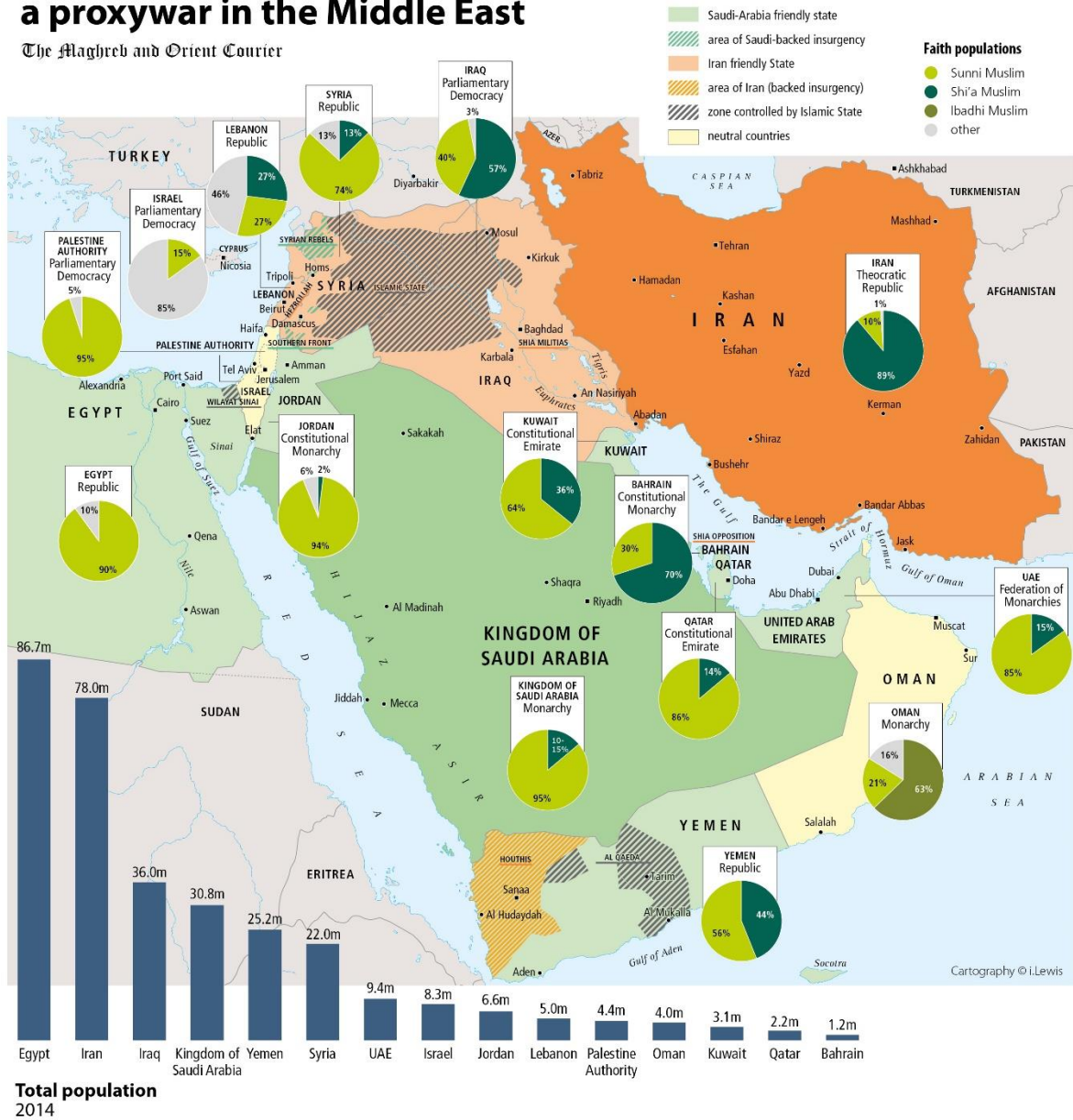
Graph (2.1): Proxy wars in the Middle East[67]

---

[67] Henry Johnson, "This Map Explains the Saudi-Iran Proxy War", **Foreign Policy Magazine**, January 6, 2016, https://cutt.ly/snBR3Fj, (15 May 2021).

The Arab Spring was a revolution not only on the local issues and political injustice, but also on regional and cross-borders problems in almost homogenous social and economic environments across the region. This process gave rise to Political Islam and its main actors as the leading forces in the beginning of the Arab uprisings; be they are political parties, socio-religious movements, or even cross-border non-state armed actors, as the outcomes revealed in various Arab states that witnessed uprisings, namely Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria.

In this study, we identify five main geopolitical outcomes of the Arab Spring, which are:

1. Collapse of the Regional Security Order;
2. Shaking of the bases of Authoritarianism;
3. Erosion of the legitimacy of the Arab nation-states;
4. Transformations of political Islamist currents and its impact on the map;
5. The rise of sectarianism and transnationalism, and novel forms of extremism;

2.1.1. Collapse of the Regional Security Order

While the people in the Arab streets were chanting with "Bread, freedom, dignity, and social justice", they were eyeing on front of them, on the regional level, the failure of the Arab regimes in gaining any concrete outcomes after their Arab League's summits, which proved crippled in front of the American-backed Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians. The so-called Arab Regional System was deemed irrelevant and incapable of producing any viable actions, and even became the source of sarcasm in private and general gatherings, and its status was described as a "clinical death" by many Arab analysts and writers.[68]

Both internal and regional dynamics were closely interrelated for the youth in the Arab revolutions, as the consecutive Arab League's summits presented hollow speeches about social justice and the empowerment of the youth around the Arab World. Regional role of

---

[68] See for example, Abdullah Al-Sanawy, "The Egyptian role was not an invention", **Al-Shorouk newspaper**, 17 June 2020, https://bit.ly/3etWBVj, (4 December 2020).

the Arab states was also eroded in front of the Israeli war machine in Palestine, Lebanon and elsewhere that proved the Arab states were powerful only where it comes to their own people. For example, in 2004 summit Tunisian president Zayn Al-Abidin Ben Ali proclaimed Arab leaders' commitment to comprehensive political reform and democratic practice would be consolidated by expanding the role of civil society, increasing women's engagement in all aspects of life while supporting their rights and position, and protecting the family and Arab young. This would be done in tandem with a comprehensive economic and social development strategy that prioritized education, social solidarity, and poverty alleviation, while also ensuring an independent judiciary and freedom of expression, opinion, and belief.[69]

Since this summit and until the Arab revolutions that started in Tunisia in 2010, their final declarations were always worthless, both on the internal and the local level. The criticism was mainly directed at the Arab leaders in person, especially after the increasing role of the satellite stations and the spread of social media that led at the end to the Arab revolutions. In this decade, the whole regional system and the fearful status of the regional dictatorships were in the wane, and a lot of anti-regime movements spread around the Arab world, that culminated in the overthrow of the long-entrenched dictators in the region. The effects were not confined to the internal level, but also spread into the regional level and affected its structure. Some analysts argue that the most affected variable by the Arab uprisings was the transformed regional power structure, after some longstanding Arab regimes were overthrown by revolutions or experienced forms of state disintegrations.[70]

Among other manifestations of the failure on the regional order were the case of Iraq and Kuwait war, when they system failed to deter Iraq or even liberate Kuwait without an international coalition that was a final proof that the Arab League's- based security

---

[69] Tunis Declaration of League of Arab States, 2004, issued at the 16th session of the Arab Summit, 22-23 May, Tunis. Available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/compilation_democracy/league.html.

[70] Felsch, Maximilian, "The Arab regional system after the Arab uprisings: Reaching hegemonic stability**", Orient**, 2018, 59. 16-24, https://bit.ly/31Ll9FD (5 March 2021).

umbrella and the so called The Joint Defense Council of the Arab League was a fake and a non-realistic entity, with all endeavors to revive it.[71] With the permanent presence of the U.S. troops in the region after the Gulf war, and the rise of the Iranian influence after the collapse of the Saddam regime in Iraq, and the eruption of the Arab uprisings, there was a new post-revolution' regional security order, which is distinguished by its inclination towards defining new enemies to the traditional Arab dictatorships that survived the different waves of the Arab uprisings. The core of the decision-making process in the region moved to the Gulf region led by Saudi Arabia, with the main mastermind in UAE. The new system started to target the most powerful regional social movements in the Arab World that have the capabilities of public mobilization and organizing political violence against their security apparatus in one hand, and the regional powers that can support them, namely Turkey and Iran, on the other one.

2.1.2. Shaking of the bases of Authoritarianism

Contrast to the new democratically elected regimes around the region, the image of the old dictatorships is worsening, as the awareness of the people is on the rise, as was shown in the second wave of the Arab Uprisings in Iraq and Lebanon, that the protestors upgraded their understanding of Sectarian Democracy in their countries and its impact on the political environment, as These power-sharing arrangements have a number of unintended implications. Through social contracts that prioritize the rights of communities over the rights of individual citizens, they allow for an unhealthy alliance between religion and politics. This means that sectarian and ethnic communities mediate Lebanese and Iraqi relations with their respective states, allowing sectarian or ethnic political elites to usurp communal representation.[72]

---

[71] For more information, revise: **Arab League** main website, The Decision of Establishing the Arab Security and Peace Council, 13th of January, 2005, https://bit.ly/2Ku7wnR (15 May 2021).

[72] Maha Yahya, "The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq", **Carnegie Middle East Center**, 30 June 2017, https://bit.ly/3mRqJ3N (4 June 2020).

This awareness, which was created by the new social media outlets and the proliferation of information in the Arab World, represents a new challenge to the Arab dictatorships that managed to survive in the past decades upon the blackout operations they practiced upon their Arab citizens, via their government-owned propaganda apparatuses that is mainly based on the expansion of entertainment and the lack of information. The new social media tools were pivotal in upgrading the awareness and provided the tools of public mobilization and means of social change to the youth of the Arab World.

That finally led to a legitimacy crisis for the old regimes in the region that found themselves in a battle of life or death against this new trend, which is a two-fold sword in nature: democracy and Islamists. Democracy was the main domain for dismantling the Arab dictatorship, while the Islamists proved to be its main tool, as they managed to be the wild card of the Arab uprisings and swapped different elections on many states across the region. They present themselves as a new alternative to the old elites that governed their states, be them are military elites or monarchic royal families that accumulated power and wealth over decades. The Arab world became divided according to, among other factors, their position on the democracy index that is shown in the next graph:
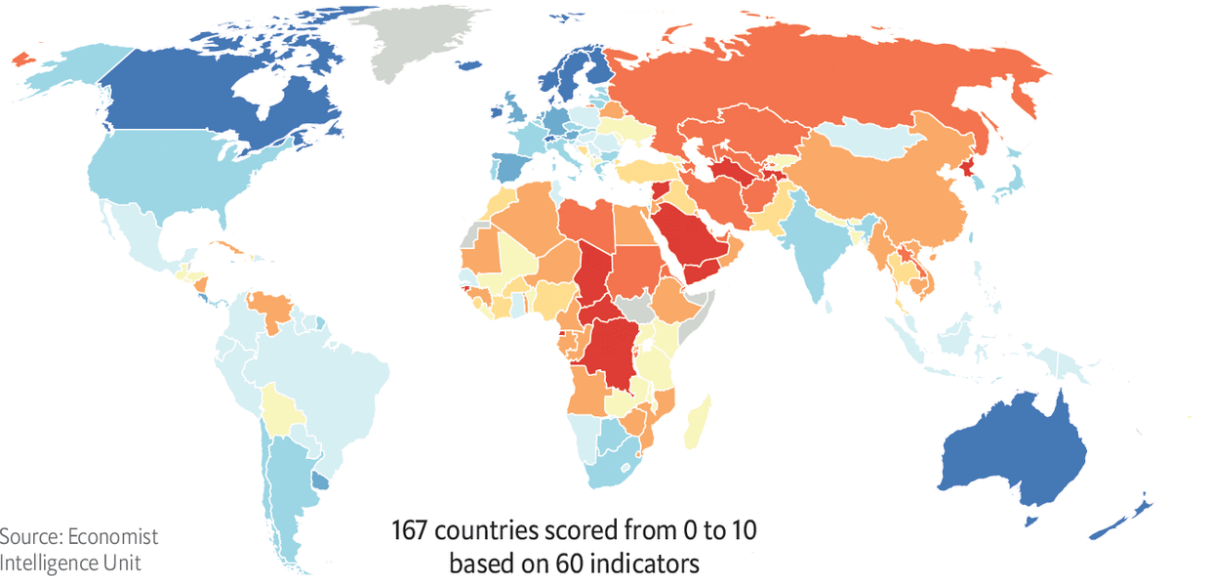
Map (2.1): The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for 2019[73]

This posture affected the old Arab consensus in the Arab League on main political issues in the region, as their focal point in the past was the Israeli Palestinian issue, but the new realities of the era of the Arab Uprisings brought new geopolitical fault lines across the Arab World, which is still scrambling to redraw them whether according to the type of their monarchic political systems and their satellite states, or according to their perception of threat towards Islamism and Democracy, or against the main threats to the stability of their authoritarian model, namely Qatar and Turkey in one hand, and Iran and its militias on the other.

The bases of the modern Arabic/Islamic authoritarianism can be traced back to the Umayyad dynasty, when the Khilafa was converted into a kingdom, and dynasties substituted the Shoura (consultancy) practice in choosing the ruler and hence shaping the

---

[73] **The Economist**, Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for 2019, https://econ.st/3fBZZjc (15 March 2021).

political elite, what paved the way to the current situation in the Arab world, where royal or military dynasties or even tribal coalitions are vying for power and accumulation of wealth. The Arab Uprisings brought new dynamics to the current game, as the power of the people was reinstituted into the formula once again, and democratic elections took place in number of Arab states, either fully or abruptly, what resulted in this process of shaking the bases of the Arab authoritarianism around the region.

This shake of Arab authoritarianism can be translated into geopolitical outcome, as they made counter moves in order to reinstall dictatorships around the Arab world, we saw that in Egypt as the Gulf countries led by Saudi Arabia worked on toppling the first democratically elected president of Egypt Muhammad Morsi. Leaked audio recordings of senior Egyptian officials suggest that the United Arab Emirates gave the Egyptian Defense Ministry money for a protest campaign against Mohamed Morsi when he was a president. The recordings show that the Egyptian military and its sponsors in the United Arab Emirates were far more engaged in inciting anti-Morsi protests in June 2013 than either party has admitted. They appear to record Gen. Abbas Kamel, Mr. Sisi's office manager and top aide at the time, speaking on the phone with Gen. Sedky Sobhy, the military chief of staff at the time, about a bank account controlled by senior defense officials that had been used by Tamarrod, a movement that called for protests on June 30, 2013, to demand an early end to Mr. Morsi's presidency and outlined the so-called "roadmap" used by Mr. Sisi in the 3rd of July military coup[74]

The aim of such move appeared to be preserving the old model of governance in Egypt, as the Arab dictators in the Gulf used to deal with the military dictatorship in Egypt since decades. The two sides, since a Nasser's era, used to coexist with each other in harmony and were able to upgrade certain grade of understanding and agreement on various regional issues. Losing many countries from the side of dictatorship to the other side of rising democracies in the Arab world will contribute to the ongoing process of changing the

---

[74] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Recordings Suggest Emirates and Egyptian Military Pushed Ousting of Morsi",
The New York Times, March 1, 2015, https://nyti.ms/3mXODL4 (3 March 2020).

regional order, as we saw in the second wave of Arab uprising in the cases of Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria. Success of the newly democratically elected governments around the Arab world will represent a challenge to the rest of the dictatorships around the region, and will remain as a comparison case in front of the local population in both sides that will continue to irritate not only the local political systems in these countries, but also on the whole regional order of the Arab world.

2.1.3. Erosion of the legitimacy of the Arab nation-states

The main target of the Arab uprisings was the Arab military dictatorships, in Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen, and in the second wave it erupted also in Algeria and the Sudan, while the Tunisian regime was also a security one that led by an ex-minister of interior. In that sense, some analysts believe that the Arab Spring revolutions erupted against the regimes created by the era of Arab Nationalism, which brought only military governments that established authoritarianism and a prolonged state of tyranny, that suppressed thought and freedoms of expression, and did not achieve any of its goals, whether on the local levels of achieving social justice, or on the regional levels that aimed for the Arab unity and the restoration of the lands occupied by Israel.

The Arab Nationalism was considered as the main umbrella that can combine the whole Arab World as a tool of formation for a homogenous Regional Order, away from the Middle Eastern one that includes Turkey, Israel and Iran, or the Islamic umbrella that will be polarized according to sectarianism. Therefore, the Arab Nationalism has become outdated and failed to keep pace with present developments and the aspirations of youth in the Arab streets, which has a geopolitical consequences, that divided that new Arab world after the Arab uprisings into old and new regimes; while the new ones are more open to democracy and the incorporations of Islamic parties on their political systems in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, the old ones are labeling those Islamic parties as terrorist organizations and are preventing the establishment of Democracy across the Arab world with financing and equipping Militias around the region, and launching propaganda campaign that demonize Islamists and their backers,

47

mainly Turkey and Qatar, as Muhammad bin Zayed (MBZ) is believed to be the lead mastermind of this process around the Arab World. He worked to thwart democratic transitions in the Middle East, helped install a reliable autocrat in Egypt and boosted a protégé to power in Saudi Arabia, and has long argued that the Arab world is not ready for democracy, claiming that it is because Islamists would win any elections.[75]

The rise of political Islam around the region and in the core of the Arab uprisings represents an added challenge to the idea of Arab Nationalism, as Islamists see the main bond should be with the Muslim world not only the Arab one. That sense will be even more fortified after the role of Turkey in harboring and endorsing their cause in front of the dictatorship in the Arab world. The role of the Turkish experiment in molding Islamism with democracy will enable Islamists leaders, most of them currently living in Turkey, to embrace an upgraded version of political Islam inspired of this experiment. The old concept of forming the regional policies according to the Arab umbrella only will be deemed from the past, under the current circumstance in which the Turkish regime, led by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), played a pivotal role in the regional level both on the ideological, strategic and logistic levels, on the various cases of the post Arab uprisings countries, mainly in Syria and Libya.

After this point of Turkish engagement in the events of the Arab uprisings, Ankara became a main and a pivotal actor, especially with its model of governance that is the Arabs look up into as an alternative model of governance for the Arab regimes and their slogans of Arab unity and their products of Arab dictatorships, combined with rising feelings toward the role of religion in public spheres, including the increasing role of Sharia in the making of official law in Arab and Muslim countries alike (look at the graph). After the Arab uprisings, and especially after Muslim Brotherhoods reach power in Egypt in 2012, the main debates were about the role of religion in governance, and the notion of Khilafa and the application of Sharia law.

---

[75] David D. Kirkpatrick, "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler Isn't M.B.S. It's M.B.Z.", **The New York Times**, June 2, 2019, https://nyti.ms/3jCICRY (3 March 2020).

After long time of neglect, the then Egyptian president Muhammad Morsi, managed to stop an Israeli war against Gaza in 2012, after long series of atrocities that were directed to the civil population of the strip in the era of Mubarak, and under the ear and the eyes of the Arab regimes, what appeared to the Palestinians that the new era of Islamists rule will be more efficient than their previous counterparts to their cause, what embarrassed the traditional Arab leaders in the region and their ideology of Arab Nationalism, and presented Islamism as an ideal substitute for it. The role of Morsi towards the Palestinian cause proved to be a viable alternative for the Arab-based brotherhood, as Morsi worked also on the issue of opening the crossing and left the embargo imposed by Israel upon the people of Gaza.

Many Back Sharia as Official Law

Median % of Muslims who favor enshrining sharia
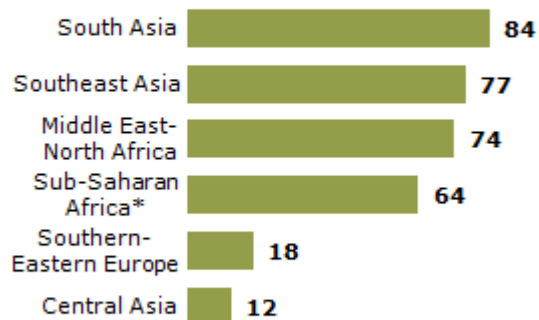
South Asia	84
Southeast Asia	77
Middle East-North Africa	74
Sub-Saharan Africa*	64
Southern-Eastern Europe	18
Central Asia	12

*Data for all countries except Niger from "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa."

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q79a.

Graph (2.2): Muslims Who Favor Making Sharia Official Law (2013)[76]

[76] James Bell, ed., "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society", **Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life**, April 30, 2013, p.15.

2.1.4. Transformations of Political Islamist Currents and Its Impact On the Map

One of the main outcomes of the Arab uprising and its geopolitical manifestation in the region was the transformation that occurred in the political Islamists ideologies, especially after the military coup in Egypt. The July 3rd 2013 coup in Egypt led to further shifts in Islamists' thinking and ideological orientations. Whereas, the regional pro-coup of authoritarian states in the Arab region led to a bloody split between the Muslim Brotherhood - which had always been a peaceful political movement - and the Gulf regimes that financed and supported the coup. That eventually led the group to adopt more radical visions towards the authoritarian Arab regimes, after its basic strategy to coexist with them and avoid entering into a state of hostility with them, as we witnessed in the era of President Mohamed Morsi, whose first foreign visit was to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

There was a state of cautious cooperation between the two sides, before it reached the point of tension in relations with the Emirati regime, which arrested local members of the Muslim Brotherhood in anticipation of any operations to destabilize or repeat Arab revolutions within the UAE. That move was followed by a process of clashing by one of the most prominent cadres of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Shura Council, the late Dr. Essam El-Erian, who crossed the threat limit for the first time[77]. This incident represented a reversal in the relations between the two sides, followed by a rapid deterioration in relations that reached the point of Abu Dhabi financing the coup against the democratically elected president. They followed that with the declaration of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group in Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which was the axis that strengthened again after Sisi's coup in July 2013.

---

[77] **Al-Ahram newspaper**, "Al-Arian attacks the Emirates because of the Egyptian detainees and says: You will be slaves by the Persians ... and a tsunami coming from Iran", 17 June 2013, https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/360462.aspx (30 May 2020)

This coup, financed and supported by the UAE, led to shifts in the Muslim Brotherhood's thought towards both the Egyptian military regime, as well as the authoritarian Arab regimes. An intellectual split occurred within the group as well, which resulted in the emergence of a current that adopted armed violence from the standpoint of self-defense, which was the late Dr. Muhammad Kamal's faction inside Egypt, which represented the beginning of a new era of transformation in the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology. They even described the offensive operations against regime targets as "Creative peacefulness". This was accompanied by a state of open hostility against the regimes of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. While the old-guard leadership, which has become managing the group from the exile, kept trying to preserve the Brotherhood's peaceful literature and not to be drawn into the cycle of violence.

But in the midst of this, increasing numbers of the Muslim Brotherhood, who disbelieved in peace and the practice of democracy alike, split, and joined the new armed groups, such as ISIS, which arose in response and as a result of the collapse of authoritarian regimes in the Arab Spring, whether in Syria or in the Egyptian Sinai, in connection with the collapse of the state in Iraq, while armed groups were formed within the Muslim Brotherhood enjoyed a great deal of independence, targeting regime figures with assassinations such as the "Hasm" group and the "Revolutionary Punishment" and others, which did not formally join ISIS.

Those transformations in the ideology of political Islam movements, whose manifestations are still forming and taking shape as of the writing of these lines, represent a new paradigm shift in regional politics. Now the battle is zero-sum between the two sides of political Islam and authoritarian governments. As those governments declared a military, political, media and religious war against them relentlessly, that became the title of the post-Egyptian military coup era, which had an impact on the formation of regional alliances, as we will see in the following chapters. The Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters from Islamic political groups have launched media platforms to attack authoritarian Arab regimes, mainly from Turkey, in a manner that marks a new era of zero-sum conflict between the two sides that will only end with the elimination of the other,

which marked the end of the era of coexistence between those regimes and political Islam. Moreover, that military coup in Egypt gave impetus to the armed Islamic movements, whose ideology revolving around lack of faith in democracy and political practice, was strengthened, as they offer radical solutions to completely eliminate authoritarian states, and these ideologies were even more strengthened after the failure of the Syrian revolution as well in achieving its goals.

On the other hand, the state of alienation and voluntary exile that the Muslim Brotherhood gone through after the July 2013 coup allowed a close encounter with the Turkish experience because most of the cadres and senior leaders of the group lived there. Where the movement lived through the experience of the conservative party with leaders from Islamic backgrounds in a closely secular environment, plus its possession of satellite channels, that allowed it an unprecedented opportunity to express its religious ideas, political ideology, programs and perceptions for the future, as well as hosting thinkers and researchers from various Egyptian political currents, which led to the process of intellectual exchange that did not have the chance to mature or fully crystallize in the stormy conditions back in Egypt. That added to the political experience of the Islamists and resulted in the existence of a new current within the group that may be more pragmatic and open to the other, and also more accepting of secular solutions and the possibility of political Islam coexisting with it.

However, the most important shift in the experience of political Islam remains the zero-sum war with the authoritarian regimes in the region, which led them into an open and declared war without abashing or equivocation, as it was in the past with those regimes, and attacking all their royal family's symbols without exception, this was doubled by the state of hostility and blockade from those countries to Qatar, which also brought the conflict into a new phase of conflict without red lines. In the past, the tribal traditions of the Gulf prevented the harsh criticism to the royal family or the political system of those states, but after the siege of Qatar, the political Islamists became more ferocious and open to the

indefinite attack on those authoritarian regimes, and any possibility of coexistence or reaching a common ground between the two sides was diminishing day by day.[78]

That confrontation also resulted in new convictions among the Islamists, which is that it is impossible to coexist with the Egyptian military regime as well, as the Muslim Brotherhood also became in a zero-sum war with military authoritarianism. After the Brotherhood came to power the relationship has witnessed a state of truce between the two sides, as the Morsi regime attempted to co-opt the army and use it in order to protect its legitimacy, in light of the struggle it was engaging with the secular forces in the country at this stage that were preparing to overthrow his regime. That experience produced new literature about the army's corruption, its fighting doctrine and its relation with Israel and the USA, and the necessity to end its political role in the country forever, which represents a break with the traditional literature of the Muslim Brotherhood that avoided a direct clash with the army even in the darkest periods of conflict between the two rivals.

The plight of the Muslim Brotherhood in exile also led to intellectual transformations represented by a further trend towards the use of political science professors to establish multiple research centers and an increase in interest in the human sciences as a whole among its young cadres, which may lead in the long run to more rationalization and pragmatism of the conservative religious thought of the group it relation to its political ideology. It may in one point make a rapprochement with the model of the Turkish Justice and Development Party's approach, which also means more alliance with the Turkish regime at the regional level, as well as more crystallization of their political thought, which may represent an attempt to bridge the vacuum with modernity and its products and produce a new generation of young cadres who may eventually be able to make political maneuvers and coexistence with secular currents that are working on democratization in the

---

[78] Ilhem Allagui and Banu Akdenizl, "The Gulf Information War and the Role of Media and Communication Technologies"**, International Journal of Communication,** University of South California, vol. 13, 2019, p.1297.

Arab world, in a way that represents a further encirclement of authoritarian regimes with its implications on the geopolitical map of the Arab world.

2.1.5. The Rise of Sectarianism and Transnationalism, And Novel Forms of Extremism

One of the main manifestations of the Arab revolutions was the collapse of state authority in front of social and armed movements alike. When state authority collapses, people tend to return back to their original affiliations of tribe, sect and race. The rise of sectarianism was clear in the cases of Syrian and Yemeni conflicts, where the role of Iranian intervention and instigations was clear. Iran has worked since the first day of the Arab uprisings to benefit from these revolutions and try to color it with the Iranian experience and its revolution of 1979, as it made comparisons with the historical events that formed the Shiite sect with the current events of the Arab revolutions against the authoritarian regimes in the region, and then worked to encourage revolutions, especially the Shiite ones, as in the case of Bahrain.

On the other hand, it contradicted its revolutionary literature in various situations, as it supported Bashar al-Assad regime, which represents everything that is against Al-Hussein's historic revolution against Umayyad rule. It supported Bashar al-Assad's dictatorial regime controlled by the Alawite sect against the revolutions of the Syrian people, as events proved that The Iranian compass is adjusted to support only the Shiites and not the freedoms in the Arab world against the authoritarian regimes as it claimed. It clearly worked on strengthening the Bashar regime, supporting it and preventing its fall by all means possible, as it supported the Syrian Lira and prevented it from collapsing, while it armed and supported the Shiite Yemeni Houthi group in its quest to control several Arab capitals in the wake of the Arab Spring.

In light of the Iranian foreign policy and its expansionist goals in the region, Tehran worked to increase its influence in its western flank starting from Iraq. It also worked on controlling the regional seas by developing a large naval fleet, while trying to increase its

capabilities to close the Strait of Hormuz in the case of being attacked, in addition to its plethora of militias. It supported Shiite armed militias around the Arabian Peninsula, starting from Iraq in the north through Lebanon in the west and Yemen in the south, ending with its Shiite movements in Bahrain in the eastern flank of the Arabian Peninsula. Collapse of the state in Iraq after the American-led occupation resulted in an increase in Iranian influence and control over Iraqi army and security forces there, which resulted to an increase in sectarian tension that culminated in the escape of big chunks of Sunni communities out of Iraq, fearing of armed Shiite militias backed by Iran. Those militias practiced identity-based killing and a large-scale sectarian cleansing, which also led, in return, to the formation of many Sunni militias in a response to that vicious attack.[79]

In the Syrian front, Tehran supported the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and summoned the Lebanese Hezbollah militia to confront the Sunni militias that were formed after the transformation of the Syrian revolution into a civil war, as Bashar al-Assad regime's employed armed Alawite and Shiite militias with the help of Iran which also recruited Shiite elements from Pakistan and Afghanistan under the pretext of protecting Shiite shrines. In Syria, it contributed greatly to the transformation of the youth revolutionary uprising for Freedoms into a sectarian proxy war inside the Syrian arena. In the Yemeni case, Iran has worked since the first day to support the Shiite Houthi militia and supply it with weapons through the port of Hodeidah. It reached its climax in the Houthi militia's control over the Yemeni capital and over the army's weapons, government funds and the Central Bank of Yemen, which required a Saudi response that represented the launch of Operation Asifat Al-Hazm (Decisive Storm), which in turn constituted the height of the sectarian confrontation in the region.[80]

---

[79] Ehud Yaari, "Iran's Ambitions in the Levant: Why It's Building Two Land Corridors to the Mediterranean", **Foreign Affairs**, May 1, 2017, https://fam.ag/38Ajxku (4 March 2020).

[80] Dr. Ghassan Shabaneh, "Operation Decisive Storm: Objectives and Hurdles", **Aljazeera Center for Studies**, 12 April 2015, https://bit.ly/3t8DSqz (4 March 2020).

In contrast to this sectarianism, the monarchical governments in the Gulf, in response to the waves of the Arab Spring, launched an ideological counter-war against both political Islam and Shiite sectarian Islam alike, by trying to re-impose a new version of Arab nationalist ideology. This new version was unprecedented with its extreme and radical vision towards political islam and Shiite model in one hand, and a normalization and enacting unconditional peace accords with Israel in the other. This new version represented an exaggeration of national sentiments that affirm the Arab identity of the region, and the betrayal of political opposition groups, both Islamic and secular ones, considering them as fulfilling western agenda of launching "war from the 4th generation". They considered the calls for democracy and liberal ideas within Arab regimes as a tool to dismantle states from within by spreading Western-based ideas and undermining citizens' confidence in their governments with the aim of dismantling those regimes and states. They accompanied that with a relentless McCarthyism-like campaign against all opponents of various political trends that have grown within the framework of the Arab Spring experience.

This ideological war was marked by an extremist character of patriotism and Arab nationalism, and reached the point of inciting their propaganda and media arms to kill activists at home and abroad, and their satellite channels were used in a large-scale incitement process against oppositions, while mobilizing state institutions from Judicial and executive branches in this purification war against the opposition, which led to the transformation of some activists into armed radicalism against this state-backed terrorizing campaign. We witnessed that in Egyptian Sinai, and Al-Wahat region in the west, plus the emergence of armed groups in Yemen, Syria and Libya.

For the first time in modern Arab history, we witnessed the phenomenon of the rise of non-state actors and the increase in their effects in the face of the national state. These groups now carry heavy weapons, anti-armor missiles and drones, and have not only led to a threat to state authority, but it has gone beyond that to the regional scale and threatening of neighboring countries in North Africa, the Levant and southern Arabia. This also led to a change in the social structures in those countries, and they became divided into areas of

influence of regional actors, a conflict that threatens to split these countries into states divided according to the lines of ethnic, sectarian and tribal conflicts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we saw most of the geopolitical manifestations of the Arab uprisings are revolving around the role of Islam in governance and the different historical interpretations of its political aims on one hand, and its current interpretations vis-à-vis modernity and secularism on the other. The long-entrenched dictators in the Arab world can also draw their style of governance back to some Sunni interpretations of governance, as well as the authoritarian era from the Islamic history, starting from the Umayyad dynasty. Likewise, we can follow back the origins of the current sectarian movements to the early years of Islam, when the Muslims after the death of the Prophet Muhammad struggled for leadership and governance. So, this is unsettled wars within the Muslim world, which still unfold in the world today.

The main slogans of the Arab uprisings, adopted by youth in various Arab streets, were 'bread, freedom, social justice and human dignity" soon converted into "people want to overthrow the system". Calling for the overthrow of the regime meant restructuring the political systems in the Arab world, and then placing social justice and political rights in the priority goals of those regimes. Despite the secularism of these demands, Islamic political movements took the initiative, and the internal political debates soon turned into addressing the role of Islam in the public sphere, the type of Islamic rule that Islamic movements aim to implement, and their position on issues of citizenship and dealing with non-Muslims, the application of Sharia and its likes from thorny issues. Hence, this radical change required by revolutionary movements, both secular and Islamic, faced by regional interventions that worked to divert the direction of the Arab revolutions, from being movements aimed at political reform, to marking them as terrorist movements, with the aim of protecting and fortifying these regimes from the waves of the Arab Spring.

This political polarization, in turn, produced transformations in the region's map and the positioning of religious and ethnic groups on the ground, and the fall of despotic governments led to vacuums of power that were soon filled with puppet militias for the various regional powers, and the Arab Spring countries were turned into proxy war zones between regimes that have historical ideological differences, and authoritarianism trying to preserve its tyrannical rule, be it family or military ones, in front of ordinary people who became no longer able to tolerate the continuation of the status quo, with its tyranny, failure and injustice it has carried over the decades.

Although the waves of the Arab Spring began in the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain, they quickly moved to what is considered the second wave of Arab revolutions in the streets of Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan, which led to a change in those regimes by varying levels. That also led to fundamental changes in the form of alliances and the regional security structure, as well as the role and influence of those countries in various regional organizations. We witnessed a huge change in the decision-making process and power centers across the Middle East that was culminated in the rise of Gulf countries' influence in the Arab League, for example, as it is considered stable and have the financial capabilities that enabled them to buy loyalties, whether in fragile states or even within regional organizations themselves.

The Gulf crisis, in which the countries of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain blockaded Qatar is another example of how the Arab uprisings affected the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in which these despotic governments saw that Qatar played a major role in instigating revolutions through its influential media arm - Al-Jazeera Channel – as many analysts consider it as the first channel to break and challenge the authoritarian taboos and host dissidents from across the Arab world, while promoting the ideas of democracy, human rights, the peaceful transfer of power, and the integration of Islamists into the political process. Those ideas that have come to be seen by the blockading countries today as part of the conspiracies of fourth generation wars that aim to dismantle regimes from within by agitating the people and rise their dissatisfaction with their governments, and then igniting the region with revolutions and angry demonstrations, while

ignoring the main causes of these uprisings. They also looked suspiciously towards the Qatari move to bring the Turkish troops to the region, as they considered it as a destabilization step and a further intervention of non-Arab countries in their regional affairs.

2.2. Geopolitical Transformation of Dominance Vacuums

Power Vacuums occurs when governments lose their control or authority over all or some parts of its territories, then other forces will tend to "rush in" to fill the vacuum as soon as it is created, perhaps in the form of an armed militia or insurgents, military coup, warlord, or dictator. These power vacuums give rise to the position of "dominance vacuums," in which state hierarchical ties are unclear. Because there is no dominant power in these vacuums, all other governments have a greater potential to participate in significant wars in pursuit of their foreign policy objectives.[81]

One of main outcomes of the Arab Spring was the dissolution of state power, the fall of long-ruling leaders and the surge of popular protests against the old order, although some of those uprisings have failed to create enduring new regimes, except for the case of Tunisia. The power of popular movements, on the other hand, has dissipated into sectarianism, political polarization, and — in the worst cases, such as Egypt — capture by the deep state[82]. In other cases, the power or dominance vacuums appeared elsewhere in Syria, Libya and Yemen following the Arab Spring and in Iraq as a result of the US led invasion of 2003, and in Somalia as a result of the fragmentation of state order.

In this chapter, we will analyze the main regional actors in the Middle East that we deem they have power projection ambitious, either out of defensive or offensive objectives;

---

[81] J. Patrick Rhamey et al, "Order and Disorder Across Geopolitical Space: The Effect of Declining Dominance on Interstate Conflict", **Journal of International Relations and Development**, June 2014, p: 383, DOI: 10.1057/jird.2014.3.

[82] Marc Lynch, "The Middle East Power Vacuum", **Foreign Policy**, 25th October, 2013, https://bit.ly/3DEgmXb (28th January 2021).

namely the UAE, Iran and Turkey. Saudi Arabia's main regional objective is to contain Iranian expansion, hence it upgraded a more defensive posture against Tehran and its satellites in the region, while its offensive efforts in more concentrated on the Yemen war and the Houthi militias and is buck-passing some of its other objectives to the UAE. Yet, it has many more important internal objectives; as it is preparing to make a smooth power transition to the next generation; finding economic alternatives to its over-dependence on oil, and to pacify its local population during this process and keeping them away from the disturbance of revolts in the Arab uprisings. Regionally, Riyadh is putting its weight behind Abu-Dhabi's strategies of redrawing the Middle East, while the Saudis are keeping low profile in regional politics due to the relation of the crown prince Muhammad bin Salman to the Khashoggi case and the ensued tension with Biden's administration. The delicate situation of the crown prince makes the whole Royal Family at a great tension, as the absence of King Salman may alter the whole internal politics of the Saudi Arabia.

As a result, the Saudi regional foreign policy is at a standstill, it didn't even join the peace with Israel at the Abraham Accords or taking any strides at any regional issues, what make many observers argue that the UAE took the lead, and even has the ability to manipulate even other many major countries in the region, such as Egypt, Ethiopia and Yemen, in addition to Saudi Arabia when it comes to regional politics, while its interference in Libya, Syria Somalia and even Mali accredited Abu-Dhabi with the reputation of a regional powerhouse[83]. On the other hand, Israel now achieved regional acceptance after the new wave of normalization with UAE, Morocco, the Sudan and Bahrain, while its main expansionist policy is within limited space of lands in order to reach a defensible border, even if this is only in the foreseeable future.[84]

---

[83] Frank Gardner, "How the UAE emerged as a regional powerhouse", **BBC**, 22nd September 2020, https://bbc.in/3DBhn2a (28 January 2021).

[84] Maj. Gen. (res.) Uzi Dayan, "Israel's Critical Requirements for Defensible Borders", **Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs**, 2014, https://jcpa.org/pdf/DB_web.pdf (23 January, 2021).

2.2.1. Dominance vacuums in the Middle East

We have witnessed Iraq's exit from the regional balance equation after its occupation by the United States in 2003, as the American-led invasion left behind power vacuums that were filled by expansionist Iran and its affiliated militias in the country. The collapse of Arab regimes after the Arab Uprisings left behind many power vacuums in Libya, Syria and Yemen that was filled by non-state actors and other regional powers in different waves of ebb and flow. Damascus is still in the process of ending a horrific civil war that was engineered by the Assad regime after the eruption of the Arab Spring in its lands, while Cairo has been focused domestically since 2011, as the ruling military elite are busy in eliminating the civil opposition. These three major Arab countries, most notably Egypt, are no longer major geostrategic players in the region.[85]

Military interventions in the region demonstrated the fragility of the Arab regional system and its inability to manage intra-conflict within the geography of the Arab League organization. It also proved that the joint Arab defense treaties were nothing but an ink on paper and that they were not enforced, leading some analysts to consider that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and summoning the international coalition led by the United States to the region represents the end of the Arab regional order.

Since then and the subsequent invasion of Iraq and the division of the Arab world into conflicting wings, the Palestinian issue has receded from being a central, and hence, a galvanizing issue for the Arab Nationalism, while other issues like those of Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya in the aftermath of the Arab Spring have become major security shifts that have changed the perception of threat, especially for the Gulf states. They are now looking at both Iran and Turkey as outsiders who have ambitions in invading their lands on the one hand, and are working to export their political models on the other, which led to the formation of alliances against both Iran with its Shiite model and Turkey with its model of

---

[85] Bruce jones, ed., "The New Geopolitics of the Middle East: America's Role in A Changing Region", **Brookings**, January 2019, p: 2.

political Islam as well. Gulf powers that took over the Arab leadership after the decline of Egypt and Iraq started to balance against these powers, with the aim of preventing both democratic change and the exportation of Turkish and Iranian models to the Arab World.

The Gulf crisis and the blockade of Qatar also represented a new chapter in that conflict, regardless of the cold reconciliation that followed after signing the Al-Ola agreement, as this crisis revealed that Qatar cannot trust its Gulf allies anymore, and that Turkey represents a counterweight to the Gulf powers, while the relation between Qatar and Iran could represent a balance of another kind to the threat of the Saudi leadership. That eventually led to the recall of Turkish forces to the Gulf region and the establishment of a military base, the first of its kind in the region since the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate. The Turkish intervention in the Libyan conflict also proved Turkey's strength and its ability to resolve conflicts, as well as creating a positive balance against the authoritarian forces that are working with all their strength to destroy democratic experiences in the Arab world. Therefore, Turkey, in order to secure its interests, it decided to make its defensive borders outside its geographical area, and it worked to take military bases in Qatar, Libya, Sudan, Somalia in the Middle East, which was seen by the forces that fall under the Saudi alliance as a threat to their interests in the region.

As a result of the abovementioned geopolitical transformations in the region, many dominance vacuums were exposed, that was also due to number of hierarchical factors of the regional order and the absence of a hegemon to the sub-system. Collapse of the state order in many countries in the region led to the rise of non-state actors and the external interventions of potential hegemons, as we witnessed the cases of Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq. Multiple regime changes have occurred in the country, as well as high levels of popular mobilization, terror, and transnational activism. The outcomes have been extremely destabilizing, posing challenges not only to governments but also to the regional order. As a result of this situation, the regional power balance has shifted, and there have been several episodes of foreign interference. Some argue that the entire regional structure, which has

always been unstable and disputed, is finally undergoing fundamental change, whereas others argue that it is resilient.[86]

Due to the declining influence of traditional powers in the Middle East, mainly Egypt, Iraq and Syria, small countries with large financial capabilities, such as the UAE and Qatar, grow ambitions of leading the regional system in line with their national interests and their network of alliances linked to international powers. Those countries have become interfering in vacuums of power and dominance in the region and its neighboring areas in both North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Red Sea that has become an arena for conflict and competition, as the latter has emerged recently as an independent sub-regional system. The Council of Arab and African States bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden emerged as a new forum for influence, mainly for Saudi Arabia and to some extent Egypt, as the two regional powers are trying to hedge off the new fledgling Turkish projection of power in Somalia and Sudan.

Furthermore, Ethiopia has emerged as one of the most important potential investment destinations in Africa, especially after the construction of the Renaissance Dam, which may lead to a wide reclamation and cultivation of vast areas of fertile land that could become an export destination for a number of crops to the countries of the world, in addition to projects of fattening calves, livestock and a potential headquarters of factories for dairy products that may compete with major international companies, what prompted Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel to extend the hand of partnership and investment in that country, which is still suffering from ethnic problems, the risks of division and civil war.

The election of president Joe Biden also came as a blow to some countries that forged their regional policies upon Trump's preferences and his acceptance of dictatorship in the Arab world as they engineered their network of alliances accordingly, and embarked on opening a new and special relations with Israel led by the UAE in a new wave of warm normalization. The new role of Abu Dhabi in the region upsets Cairo who lost number of

---

[86] Louise Fawcett, "States and sovereignty in the Middle East: myths and realities", **International Affairs**, Volume 93, Issue 4, July 2017, p. 789, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix122 (5 March 2020).

its main role of the gate of normalization with Israel in one side, and the main counter terrorism asset of the West from the other. Likewise, the side-lining of the Egyptian role in the Palestinian case urged Cairo to recalibrate its compass and searching from new alliances, specially reconsidering its relations with Turkey.

The special importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region also emerged in view of the enormous reserves of energy, which prompted a country like the UAE to its intention to be present in that region in order to share its wealth on the one hand, and in order to try to contain Turkish influence on the other hand.

2.2.2. Power Projections in the Middle East

Power projection refers to a country's ability to use all or parts of its national power - political, economic, informational, or military - to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces in and from multiple dispersed locations to respond to crises, contribute to deterrence, and improve regional stability.[87] A state usually practices its power projection in weak areas or in the presence of a state of power vacuum, where it can fill these gaps with its different types of national capabilities. Power projection is generally occurring when dominant vacuums appear and in the absence of a dominant power or a stable regional order or a coherent form of the Regional Security Complex System Theory.

The theory's central logic is based on the idea that all of the system's states are entangled in a worldwide web of security interdependence. However, because most political and military dangers are more easily transmitted over short distances than they are over long ones, insecurity is frequently linked to proximity. Most governments are more afraid of their neighbors than of faraway powers, and as a result, security interdependence across the international system as a whole is not homogeneous. In an a geographically diversified anarchic international system, the natural structure of security interdependence is one of

---

[87] **American Department of Defense**, "Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms", Joint Publication 1-02, April 2001, p: 413.

regionally based clusters, which was named regional security complexes[88], in the absence of that interdependency and the distorted nature of regionalism with the rise of dominance vacuums, the power projection of different actors will be on the rise.

Therefore, power projection resulted in many geopolitical transformations in the Middle East, as the repositioning of regional actors and the expansion of their reach led to a different map of power politics. There were many geopolitical transformations that took place in the region in the past decade generally, that affected its regional security order, and hence resulted in the rise of power/ dominance vacuums, some of it were filled by different actors in the region, as whenever a 'power vacuum' appears to exist, it will be naturally passed through to the most strong actor, often after a struggle, as expansion is not inherently a push, but rather a normal outcome in the region of a decreasing power level. The theory of control logic filling a 'power gap' basically says there is no alternative left: either one expands power (internally or externally) to hold the pressure up or one is engulfed in the expansion of the other. Such is the sort of power politics' supposed reasoning.[89] Normally, geopolitical agents act toward achieving their goals, but their chances of success and the pattern of their strategy is partially dependent upon their context. They do not have freedom of action as usual, but they do have choices to pick among them, as they also do not act within a geopolitical vacuum, but rather they make calculations based upon other agents.[90]

In recent years, the breakdown of stability and security across a large area of the Middle East and North Africa has resulted in a situation in which no single force, or coalition of forces, can control, or at least stabilize, the entire region. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the catastrophic occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States, the only force capable of playing a leading role across the Middle East and North Africa, has diminished

[88] Barry Buzan, **Regional security complex theory in the post-cold war world,** Theories of new regionalism, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003. 140-159.

[89] Stefano Guzzinin, **The Return of Geopolitics in Europe**? Cambridge studies in international relations: 124, First edition, 2012, pp.: 31, 32.

[90] Colin Flint, **Introduction to Geopolitics**, Routledge, first edition 2006, p: 25.

its involvement in the region. Conflict, turmoil, and insecurity have befallen a large number of countries in this region, creating a highly complicated and ever-changing situation in many areas. That forced many traditional and rising powers in the region to move beyond its boarder in order to fill those power vacuums in one hand, and to project its power in the other hand, either for offensive or defensive objectives, with great repercussions on various actors in the region.

2.2.2.1. Power Projection of the UAE

Although of its modest weight in terms of traditional geopolitical criteria; i.e. land mass, size of population, strategic geographical position and etc., the UAE may be considered as one of the most active actors when it comes to power projection in the region. The main motive of this power projection may be seen as a defensive one, as the small coastal state doesn't appear to have chronic internal threats, but they are rather external. The Arab uprisings represent an existential threat for Abu-Dhabi, as it saw the Muslim Brotherhood, and regional actors supporting them, as a direct threat to their internal authority. While the expansion of its giant neighbor Iran in the power vacuums around the region and the possibility of targeting coastal oil facilities and its economic powerhouses is a real nightmare for Abu-Dhabi. The propagation of democracy across the region equals the dissolution of the political, social and cultural order of the Gulf region. Hence, the UAE turned to be the center of the counter revolution movements across the Arab World.[91]

The steps that have been taken from Abu-Dhabi since the Arab uprising can be traced back to its fear from the social mobilization that engulfed the region since late 2010 starting from Tunisia, that mostly brought about Islamists whether political ones like the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Nahda Party, or Militant ones like the rise of Daesh (ISIS and latter IS) and its likes in Sinai, Syria, Libya and elsewhere in the region. There is a huge difference between the interpretation of Islam between those regimes and the political Islamists over

---

[91] James M. Dorsey, "Reshaping the Middle East: UAE Leads the Counter-revolution", **Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS),** No. 200/2014, 14 October 2014, p.3.

the role of Islam in governance and the public sphere in general. Since then, the UAE took on its shoulder the mission of combating political Islam around the region, with a parallel route of combating democratization process as well, to protect their federation of oil-rich sheikhdoms that were built upon tribal arrangements, that have soon became the region's economic marvel, a desert Xanadu of gleaming skyscrapers, endless malls and marble-floored airports.[92]

The Arab Spring was a defining moment for the new UAE vision to the region, as the so-called American abandonment of the Arab dictators like Mubarak, Qaddafi and Bin Ali, forced a huge change in Abu-Dhabi's strategy towards the unfolding events of the Middle East. When the West welcomed the movement of the people in the streets and was open to restructuring political systems in the region according to liberal democratic change, the tide was high for traditional dictatorships, especially in the Gulf, that were unready to face the rising demands of its own people for more openness and the new requirements of change in the social structure and the tribal fabric of the society in the Arabic Peninsula.

UAE's interference in war zones and leftover power/dominance vacuums, trade lanes, sea ports, logistics, private security companies, accumulation of advanced weapons, and anti-terrorism efforts accredited it the reputation of an Aspiring for Domination. With the help of this considerable size of power in addition to its remarkable sovereign wealth funds, its relation with international powers, and its ability to capitalize in the leadership-gap in the region, the UAE played a significant role in shaping the regional policies that was culminated with its fast-developing relation with Israel. Traditional powers in the region were in decline, namely Egypt, Iraq and Syria. Owning giant world class corporations in the fields of aviation, maritime ports and clean power energy, Abu-Dhabi also managed to project its power at many power vacuums beyond the Middle East, as the area of its operation expands from the Horn of Africa to the African Sahel region. It also managed to upgrade a consolidate partnership with France, in addition to its unique alliance with the

---

[92] Robert F. Worth, "Mohammed bin Zayed's Dark Vision of the Middle East's Future"**, The New York Times**, July 14, 2020, https://cutt.ly/6keLM19 (30 January 2021).

USA, especially in the Trump era, which allowed it to have an initial thumb's up sign for its purchase of the advanced high-tech F35 Fighter.[93]

The Emirati power projection unfolds in three main fields: strategic islands and maritime ports; private security companies; and energy.

Strategic Islands and Maritime Ports

The UAE has expanded its presence in the southern region of the Middle East, and made strategic steps such as building military bases on the Yemeni islands of Socotra and Perim, Eritrea's port town of Assab, and Somalia's Puntland and Somaliland regions. The military bases serve as a conduit for the UAE government that wants to become a major player in the Horn of Africa. The Bab al-Mandab Strait is protected by a military force in the Gulf of Aden as well as the Red Sea; the Emirati government also wishes to exert power in the region by means of political, military, and economic tools. As a consequence, it is important to emphasize that the UAE's military bases are strong indications of the transformations that have occurred in its foreign policy and hence power projection[94].

---

[93]Mike Stone, "UAE signs deal with U.S. to buy 50 F-35 jets and up to 18 drones: sources", **Reuters**, https://reut.rs/3l2nHYf (28 January 2021).

[94] Ismail Numan Telci and Tuba Öztürk Horoz, "Military Bases in the Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates", **Insight Turkey**, Vol. 20, No. 2, Spring 2018, p: 147.

Map (2.2): UAE presence in the Gulf of Aden[95]

The UAE, via its state-owned DP World, began to invest in the development and management of number of sea ports around the Middle East, as it extended its reach into the Mediterranean via its new signed accords with Israel that aims to boost its power projection in the region and taking advantages of its cooperation with Tel Aviv in number of strategic projects, among them are energy, military and infrastructure projects. The latest Abraham Accord opened the door to deeper cooperation in defense industries, as EDGE, the UAE's advanced technology group for defense and beyond, has agreed upon an MoU with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to develop an advanced C-UAS (Counter-Unmanned

---

[95] Ibid.

Aircraft System) Solution tailored to the UAE market, with wider ranging benefits for the MENA region and beyond.[96]

While the Dubai conference held on early 2021 highlights online security, cooperation with Israel on cyber defense systems[97]. The Israeli Aerospace Industries Company, "Israel Aerospace Industries", announced that it will cooperate with the UAE company Edge, which specializes in advanced technology in the defense sector, to develop an advanced defense system against drones.The state-owned Israeli company, one of Israel's major defense industry companies, said in a statement that the two companies would work to develop an advanced anti-drone system "specifically for the UAE market, and would provide several broad benefits to the Middle East, North Africa and beyond". EDGE, which is tasked with supplying the UAE armed forces with advanced weapons, is focusing on developing drones, unmanned vehicles, smart weapons and electronic warfare tools in place of conventional weapons.[98]

The Abu-Dhabi participation in Yemen war represented a defining moment to the UAE power projection in the region, as it controlled vast areas of strategic importance and has seized control of the Yemeni island of Socotra, a key archipelago located near major shipping routes between the Indian Ocean States, East Asia, and the rest of the area's geopolitical landmarks. Some Israeli-leaned media outlets reported that the UAE and Israel are setting up "spy bases" in Socotra and that the two nations have already deployed

---

[96] **Arabian Aerospace**, "MoU marks new era of cooperation between UAE and Israel", 12 March 2021, (from: https://www.arabianaerospace.aero/mou-marks-new-era-of-cooperation-between-uae-and-israel.html

[97] Yaakov Lappin, "Dubai conference highlights online security, cooperation with Israel on cyber defense", **Jewish News Syndicate**, https://cutt.ly/Sbj7Gh5 (20 April 2021).

[98] **Aljazeera.net**, "Israeli-Emirati cooperation in anti-aircraft technology", https://cutt.ly/sbW3jMJ (5 June 2021).

"espionage equipment" on the island, which is about 350 kilometers off the Yemeni mainland[99].

Private Security Companies and Military Bases

Based on its perceptions of security threats, and given that it is a small country, the UAE has taken an offensive approach to confront the potential threats that could result from jihadist and political groups in the Middle East and in the Arab world in general; The UAE has established private security companies in order to deploy its forces in conflict areas in Yemen and Libya, and it has recruited mercenaries for it from around the world, and it followed the United States' approach during its invasion of Iraq with the help of private security companies and mercenaries in order to reduce the number of its human losses. Given the nature of the UAE as a small country in terms of geopolitics, it used the establishment of these companies to achieve its foreign policy goals, taking advantage of its financial ability to buy weapons and pay salaries to mercenaries, as well as importing the latest technologies and drones and integrating them into those private armies.

These Emirati private security companies work side by side with the regular armies, such as coordinating with the Egyptian army in eastern Libya, in addition to cooperating with local militias, such as the case of the militias of the retired General Khalifa Haftar, or even in coordination with foreign security companies such as the Russian Wagner Company, in addition to Its cooperation with foreign regular armies and its foreign intelligence services, such as the case of the Yemeni island of Socotra. This Emirati influence is mainly the result of the dominance vacuums arising from the Arab Spring and the collapse of the state in those regions and its authority, and in return the rise of Islamic militias and armed movements, which the UAE has been able to keep pace with and deploy its forces to achieve its national security interests in repelling the influence of movements and Islamic groups, and preventing their political rise in the Arab Spring countries, based

---

[99] **TRT World**, "What is the UAE doing on the Yemeni island of Socotra?", 1 September 2020, https://cutt.ly/EbB0o4C (17 May 2021).

on the premise that democracy or political Islam both pose a threat to the model of tribal rule in the Emirates and beyond. As a result, the UAE made security coordination with other Arab authoritarian regimes given the congruence of the interests and objectives of those countries at the regional level.

The Emirati engagement in Libya has progressed beyond military and logistical support, establishing regulations for its soldiers to hit targets for the Libyan Al-Wefaq administration, causing observers to look into the Emirati military involvement in Libya. Emirati airplanes targeted the military college in Tripoli on January 2020, killing at least 30 people and wounded more than 16 others, including civilians, according to a military source. Despite its claim to fight terrorism and address regional goals in Libya, observers think the UAE military bases show its occupation intention and enhance its permanent influence in Libya, especially after the Al-Wefaq government troops shot down more than one Emirati drone.[100]

The Emirati military bases in Libya are stationed at the Al-Khadim camp in the Al-Khrouba area. Most Emirati soldiers are in the control rooms, and their function is confined to running drones and some strategic plans, as well as giving logistical support to retired Major General Khalifa Haftar's forces, which lack the capabilities and expertise. The UAE had previously attempted to keep the identities of its military troops a secret, but number of its officers had been killed in a crash, but that word of their deaths in the collision had been leaked to the public.

The Al-Khadim Air Force Base is roughly 170 kilometers east of Benghazi, with a 15-square-kilometer area and a number of Russian, Emirati, and French aircraft. It protects the Al-Rajma camp, which is the bastion of retired Major General Khalifa Hifter on the outskirts of Benghazi. The Sheebel drones are hit by the S 100 helicopter's laser-guided missiles, which are based inside the Al-Kharrouba military airfield. The Al-Jafra facility, located 600 kilometers east of Tripoli, is one of Libya's most vital bases since it serves as a

---

[100] **Aljazeera.net,** "Al-Khadim and Al-Jafra ... Know the Emirati military bases in Libya", 7th January 2020, https://bit.ly/3gmXpx8 (8 June 2020)

link between the eastern Libyan territories, particularly the city of Benghazi, and the fighting in the north axes in the Libyan West.[101]

The UAE is using mercenaries for its regional aspirations, as some analysis point out to Mohammed Dahlan, the former senior Palestinian security official, and the UAE crown prince's security adviser as the main mastermind of the private security firms that provide mercenaries. In 2011, the UAE inked a deal worth of $529 million contract with Reflex Response Security Consultants, which is run by the infamous Blackwater Worldwide - founder Eric Prince, to recruit and employ mercenaries in its wars in Libya and Yemen, and has also utilized them in a number of sea ports in countries along the Red Sea coast. Approximately 450 mercenaries from South American countries dressed in UAE military uniforms were dispatched to Yemen in 2015 to fight hand in hand with the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi rebels, as the fighters received training in the deserts of the UAE before being deployed. There were also other media reports claiming that in 2018 the UAE hired US mercenaries to assassinate politicians close to the al-Islah party, which the UAE considers as a "terrorist group" because of its alleged affiliation with Muslim Brotherhood. The UAE-based Black Shield Security was also accused of deceiving Sudanese youth workers by offering them contracts as security guards in the UAE, only to train them at a military installation and then forcibly dispatch them to Libya and Yemen. The company recruited at least 3,000 Sudanese through local travel agencies and other intermediaries working for them.[102]

In addition to mercenaries, the UAE also uses its troops and military personnel in war zones overtly, as the case of Yemen under the Saudi-led war on the country, and also covertly, as the case of Libya, as it uses its officers to lead, operate and train the forces loyal to it in the oil-reach state. The Government of National Accord's Facebook page "Operation Volcano of Rage" published a video clip of a group of Emirati officers

---

[101] Ibid.

[102] **Anadolu Agency, "**UAE-based Black Shield recruits mercenaries in region", https://bit.ly/3uYIMWk (20 September 2020).

operating an air defense system. The page said that "The video shows a group of Emirati officers trying to operate the Pantsir-S1 air defense system, accompanied by a group of officers affiliated with Haftar's forces," while the National Army forces did not comment on this clip.[103]

---

[103] **Al-Hurra**, "Libya's battles: "Al-Wefaq" publishes a video of "Emirati officers" and accuses them of operating Haftar's air system", 9 June 2020, https://cutt.ly/knB19pZ (9 December 2020) .

Graph (2.3) fortune spent in Libya by the UAE since 2014[104]

[104]   **Anadolu   Agency**,   "Spending   fortune   to   weaponize   Haftar**"**,   20   May   2020,
https://www.aa.com.tr/en/info/infographic/18701 (5 April 2021).

2.2.2.2. Power projection of Iran

Since the 1979 revolution, Iran's objectives have been driven by a desire for military assets and swiftly advancing technology. The then-new government, inspired by Imam Khomeini's philosophy, undertook a strategy of exporting the revolution to Muslim countries. The Shah's military was modern and well-trained. The new rulers, suspicious of the institution's loyalty, stripped the armed forces of its foreign-trained, experienced leadership, causing a major blow to the institution. Iran's military stockpile shrank as a result of the Iraq war, and it lost fighter jets, helicopters, and naval vessels. The sight of Iraqi missiles striking Iranian cities is indelible in Iran's memory, not just because of the human and economic losses, but also because of the psychological impact. As a result, sanctions were intensified against Iran, and the air force gap became permanent. The Iranian military began cannibalism of its own inventories to compensate for its inability to acquire replacement parts for US-made military equipment such as the F-14 Tomcats. The Air Force, for example, used half of its F-14 aircraft for spare parts to keep the remainder flying.[105]

Iran's geographical panorama stretches throughout the coast of the Arabian Gulf, with it looking at the Arab Gulf States. Besides this, its co-controls the strategically essential Hormuz Strait's with the Arab Gulf States. Iran's foremost strategic significance stems from its geographical region, that overlooks the intersection of the arena's land and sea routes. It is the coronary heart of the vintage world, as it connects with Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. It is the only land corridor among the Arabian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Iran is the route that links the Indian Subcontinent to the Mediterranean. From a historical attitude, Iran's multi-directional expansionist impulses have been visualized through its motion towards the Fertile Crescent, the Caucasus's, Central Asia and the Southern Arabian Peninsula. However, presently Iran's expansionist plans have moved

---

[105] Naveed Ahmed, "Iran's 'Forward Defense' Doctrine Missile and Space Programs", **International Institute of Iranian Studies**, 11 October 2020, https://bit.ly/3v4kiLh (20 April 2021).

towards the neighboring Arab Gulf States, given that it's far sandwiched among nuclear powers within the North and the East.[106]

Therefore, Iran has had to adapt and adjust to changes in its environment, just like other countries. For example, since 2014, Iran has increasingly relied on direct military intervention to safeguard its major influence and interests in Iraq and Syria. However, this decision was made in light of the instability in these two nations and the success of Islamist organizations in acquiring territorial control while nuclear discussions were ongoing. Furthermore, despite Iran's reliance on self-deterrence, its limited ability to address threats in its area has opened the door to military coordination with global powers, either directly (as with Russia in Syria) or indirectly (as with the United States in Iraq).

The religiously-driven foreign policy and war strategy of Iran proved that it is more important even than its economic resources and upgrading its oil dependent economy. While its currency was speedily diving downward and deteriorated in front of the US Dollar, the Iranian leadership kept on preserving the Syrian Lira to maintain the leadership of Bashar Al-Assad and the Shiite Alawites rule. Some argue that for example, the Iran-Syria relationship is frequently framed in terms of either identity or geopolitics. The manufactured and fluid nature of sectarian identity, the occurrence of cross-sectarian coalitions, and the correlative rather than causal nature of sectarianism in regional clashes all undermine accounts that credit alignment to fundamental identifications. Subtle approaches to identity as a driver of Iranian policy toward Syria and other like-minded ideological entities in the region focus on the symbolic importance to Iran of maintaining a so-called axis of denial that includes Syria and Hezbollah, as well as Palestinian Islamist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and can be applied to Al-Houthi militias in Yemen to a large extent. The significance of the axis in such depictions for Iran is that it underlies Iran's identity as a foe of Western imperialism on the one hand, and as an alternative to Saudi Arabia's Sunni Islam on the other.

---

[106] Gen Misfer Saleh Ghamdi, "Iran's Influence in the Red Sea Targets and Outcomes", **Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies**, Journal for Iranian Studies, Year 2, issue 5, Dec. 2017, p. 85.

This prestige, in turn, is based on the regional resonance of anti-Zionism, anti-imperialism, and solidarity with the "enslaved" Muslim masses to whom Iran's revolutionary identity is directed. However, this explanation based on regional identity cannot explain why Iran should support a regime whose prestige among the region's publics has hit rock bottom. Hezbollah's prestige, once a shining beacon of vitality Islamic Revolution, has also plummeted due to its role in the Syrian civil war. Iran's identity as a champion of the oppressed in the Muslim world has been seriously undermined, despite its dogged commitment to preserving the axis of denial.[107]

In order to achieve its regional hegemonic goals, the Iranian leadership was frantic to get weapons from all possible sources, including sovereign states and the rouge individuals in the black market alike, which had grown since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and later the dissolution of Yugoslavia. There were a multitude of missiles available, each with its own set of technologies, ranges, and delivery systems. The unmanned missiles were not only cheap, but they were also simple to conceal and improvise. Their addition to the air force is no less significant when the air force is short on fighter jets and ammunition. Iran acquired not only entire missile systems, but also critical subsystems and parts from around the world in the years that followed. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) created its military doctrine and strategy on unmanned aerial vehicles, ranging from ballistic and cruise missiles to armed and surveillance drones, through reverse engineering and improvisation.[108]

To expand its power projection across the region and beyond starting from its eastern borders with Afghanistan, Iran used its oil revenues and the Khums (one fiveth) Zakat money they collect from Shiites around the world in order to expand its reach both on its western and eastern boarders. Iran has a circle of religious influence easternward in the western tribes of Afghanistan, the Hazzarah Shiites tribes that it depend on them to recruite

---

[107] Ewan Stein, "Ideological codependency and regional order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal", **PS: Political Science & Politics**, 50.3 (2017): 676-680.

[108] Naveed Ahmed, Op. Cit.

soldiers for defending the Shiites graves and shrines in the levant. Westernward, Iran used to have full control of the Iraqi government and a wide influence on the security apparatus that is consists of a majority of Shiites drawn from the different militias in the country of different factions and sects of Iraq.
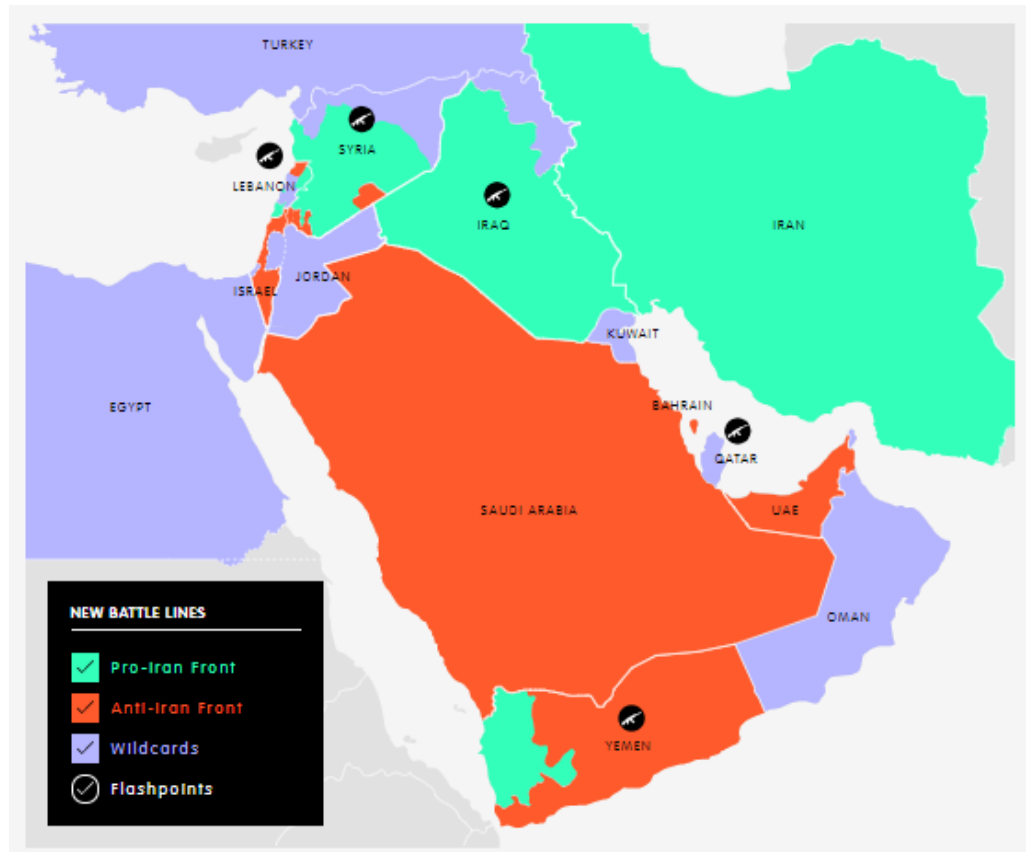
Map (2.3): Iranian and Anti-Iranian influence in the Middle East[109]

Iran is trying to project power in the dominance vacuums occurs around its boarder and in the other vacuums left after the Arab uprisings, especially in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Iran also has a maritime fleet that is ready to close the Persian Gulf in case of attack on its soil and facilities by the US or its allies. Iran also articulated its strategy on a statement from Navy Commander Rear Adm. Habibollah Sayyari in April 2013, when he said: "The golden

---

[109] Julien Barnes-Dacey, "The Middle East's New Battle Lines", **European Council on Foreign Relations**, May 2018, Issue # 259, p. 4.

triangle of Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz is an important triangle and is the Navy's point of concentration", as articulated by the Iranian military official. When the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, gave his orders that the Iranian Navy must focuses on operations that stretches across the Strait of Malacca, extending from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, which includes the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea arriving to the Strait of Hormuz, this definitely indicate a deliberate strategy to redeploy and reallocate resources to higher value activities.[110]

Iranian officials see the Persian Gulf and parts of Central Asia as "near abroad" where Iranian culture and interests should have substantial influence, and one of their strategic aims is to strengthen their authority in the Middle East and push back US dominance in the region. Recent events show that Iran is committed to achieving this goal, has a plan in place to do so, and is making great progress toward it. Iran also has clear goals to become a strong and relevant participant on the world arena, with capabilities and intents that superpowers must consider. The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy (IRGCN), as well as Iran's merchant fleet, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), are deployed in precise, defined ways to further Iran's strategic aims.

Iran has also made three key acts that represent its larger strategic goals: First, Iran has reprioritized parts of its local maritime exercises in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Caspian Sea in order to solidify or expand its territorial claims. Second, in order to support strategic connections with key partners, IRIN has greatly increased its long-term operations. Third, at the same time as IRISL is deployed to offer logistical support to Iranian objectives, IRIN may be performing comparable activities. Iran, on the other side, controls the Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb, that Tehran occupied from the UAE and still disputed. These islands are strategically placed in the Persian Gulf, just beyond the Strait of Hormuz and can be used to close the whole Persian

---

[110] Christopher Harmer, "Iranian naval and maritime strategy", **Institute for the Study of War**, Middle East Security Report 12, 2013, p. 20, 21.

Gulf in case of war. Despite the fact that the United Arab Emirates claims legal sovereignty of the islands, Iran has military garrisons and commercial interests on each of them. Iran planned to reinforce its legal claim to the disputed islands and demonstrate its military capabilities to possible regional adversaries by conducting short-range exercises to underscore its authority over the islands. Iran's legal claims to control passage to the Strait of Hormuz are based on its claims to the disputed islands.[111]

Iran and Russia have common interests in the Caspian Sea region and the Caucasus, as well as in backing the Assad regime in Syria. IRIN is enhancing support for Russian Navy ships on long-range missions at the same time that it conducts long-range operations in the Pacific and strengthens Iran's connections with China. IRIN has made its Bandar Abbas facility available to the Russian Navy as a friendly and secure sanctuary for refueling, replenishment, and maintenance. Russian Navy deployments from their Pacific Fleet home port of Vladivostok to Russian Navy Base Tartus, Syria, are far more sustainable as a result of this strategy.[112]

Iran is using its traditional military capabilities and its maritime fleet to support the operations of various Shiites militias in the region, as it equipped them with weapons and even advanced drones, and in the case of Hizballah and Houthi, they have short and medium range missiles. Iran strategy depends also on maritime islands in the Red Sea to observe its operations in Yemen and to break the Saudi embargo on its allied militia of Al-Houthis, who managed to direct sever damage to the Saudi interest by striking strategic targets inside the depth of the Saudi soil, either by targeting oil refineries or airports or other strategic facilities, and even threatened to hit the Holy lands in Mecca and Medina.[113]

From that stand point Iran is pursuing its ideological and sectarian objectives in the vacuums of the Middle East, trying to fulfill its dream of a Shiites crescent in the region

---

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] **Egypt Independent**, "Arab League condemns Houthi attack against Mecca", May 21, 2019, https://bit.ly/2SeGqFB (9 March 2020).

that starts from its western boarders ending in the Mediterranean states of Syria and Lebanon, and stretches from that north area into the south of the Saudi boarders with the existence of Al-Houthi in Saada and trying to link it with the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia in the Shiite majority governorates alongside the Persian Gulf. The role of ideology is apparent in its foreign policy that aims to make a new arch of Shiite coalition around the Arab peninsula. Some analysts attribute Iran's stance to the country's "strategic loneliness." Since the Islamic Revolution, it has been deprived of real relationships, leaving it weak and isolated. Others have stressed Iran's regional circumstances: it is surrounded by US soldiers and bases on many of its borders, and the regional forces are aiding unfriendly atmosphere. Others feel Iran's uneasiness derives from the revolutionary state's fear of internal challengers. Insisting on an external threat encourages internal vigilance in order to secure the regime.[114]

2.2.2.3. Power Projections of Turkey

Compared with previous Turkish foreign policy eras, in the regional and international environment, there has been a shift in size and in the sphere of Ankara's foreign policy activism. Turkey's foreign policy translates to an extended perspective of wider regions, such as the Middle East, Caucasus, the Balkans and North Africa, that transcends the traditional geographically defined geopolitical approach fixed by its borders. More crucially, unlike Turkey's defensive foreign and security policies, which tended to prioritize intra-territorial geopolitics, the new foreign policy activism arose with a distinct vision as a result of the country's regional and worldwide expansion. Since the Arab uprisings, and as the Middle East-North African region's security landscape has changed, Turkish military activism has grown more assertive in order to gain greater strategic autonomy and flexibility in containing security and geopolitical threats posed by violent non-state, international, and other regional actors. As a result, the Turkish army has begun to engage

---

[114] Farideh Farhi, "second chapter: Iranian Power Projection Strategy and Goals", in "Deterring Iran after the Nuclear Deal", **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS),** 1 March, 2017, p.9.

in both direct and indirect military operations in order to assert its regional and international interests, in the area expanded from northern Iraq and Syria, western Libya and beyond.[115]

After the geopolitical transformations that occurred in the Middle East, Turkey found itself obliged to take sides, especially after the Arab uprisings that erupts in late 2010. The initial strategy of Turkey was to fulfil its objective of Zero Problems, devised by the AK Party starting from 2002, that was based on making normalization of relations with Turkey's neighbors in order to achieve its trade and economic goals of being able to reach the markets of those countries, and to reach a win-win situation for all its neighbors in the region. But after the Arab uprisings, Turkey found itself in a volatile region that it can't afford being idle about its cross-border crisis and decided to use its hard power for the first time in decades in the Middle East. Supporting the demands of the Arab people of democracy and freedoms made Ankara viewed as an enemy of the traditional and authoritarian regimes in the region, especially after the wave of counter revolutions that swept the Arab revolutions' countries starting from Egypt's coup in 2013.

After forced interventions in many volatile vacuums of the Middle East, Ankara decided to use its hard power and taking sides in the war of fast-transforming coalitions in the region, starting from the Syrian civil war and its intervention in the north combating the different factions allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that Turkey consider it as a terrorist organization. Its role in Libya was to support the legitimate Government of National Accord (GNA) in front of the retired general Khalifa Hafter who was supported by the counter revolutions axis in the region. Ankara found itself forced to send military assistance to the GNA in order to prevent a bloodshed of innocent people and undermining democracy by fulfilling an Egypt-like style of military coup in Libya supported of Egypt and the UAE.

---

[115] Murat Yeşiltaş, "The Rise of Turkey's 'Military Activism': The Causes, Context and Strategic Implications", in: "Ak Party Years in Turkey: Domestic and Foreign Policy", Kiliç b. Kanat, Burhanettin Duran, editors, **SETA Publications,** 69, 2020, p. 288, 289.

The recall of Turkish troops into a newly founded military base in Qatar was another example of the Turkish power projection in the region, as Ankara's ally in the Gulf was in a delicate situation after the Saudi-led axis forced a blockade against Qatar and there were reports of an imminent attack on the small Gulf country. Sending troops, equipment and being in readiness for interventions against gulf states prove that Turkey is serious about projecting power in this region that used to be in the traditional sphere of influence of the late Turkish Empire, and the alliance with Qatar was fortified with that move, as both became a core of a new regional alliance in the Middle East.
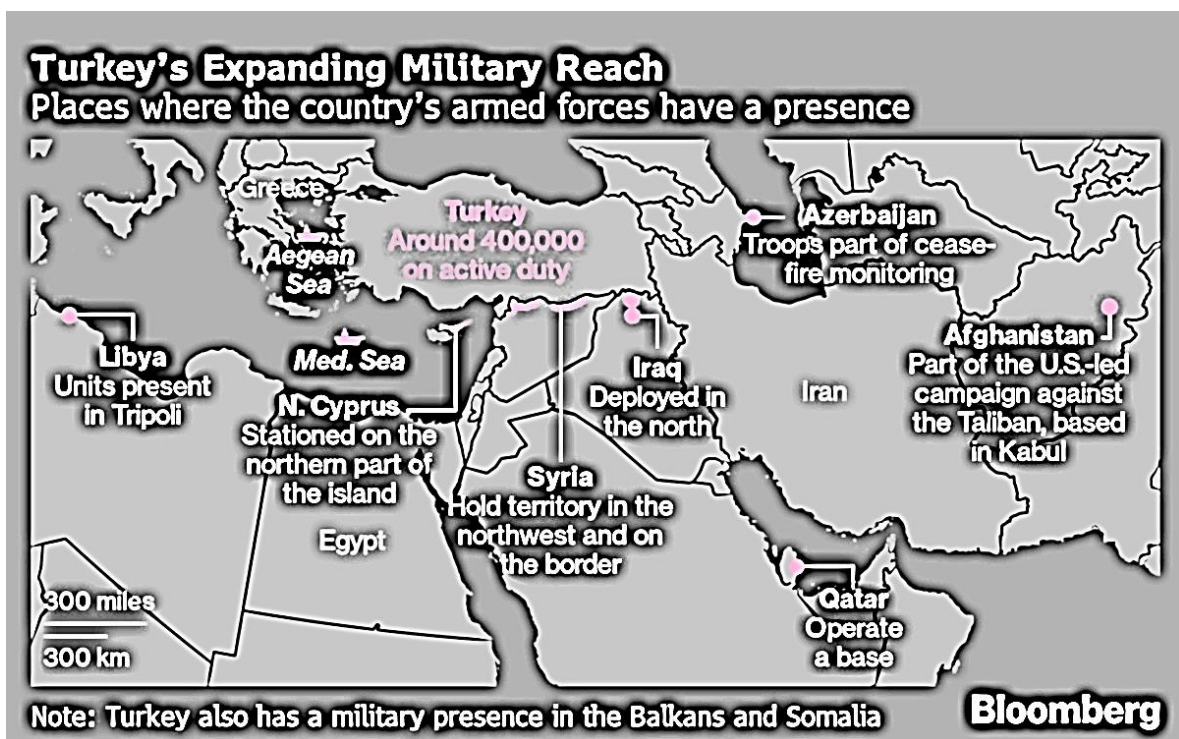
Map (2.4): Turkey's Expanding Military Reach[116]

The cases of both Libya and Qatar, in addition to the Turkish existence in Somalia and the Horn of Africa proves that Turkey is dedicated of restoring its presence in the Middle East as a leading actor. Also, its decision of rebuilding the Sudanese island of Suakin to

---

[116] Selcan Hacaoglu, "Mapping the Turkish Military's Expanding Footprint: Quick Take", **Bloomberg**, Dec 24 2020, https://bit.ly/3jkVXy1 (27 August 2021).

revive the Ottoman strategic sea port proves that Turkey dedicate a special attention to the Red Sea, what alerted the Arab traditional actors to lead the establishment of a council for the Red Sea. The Council of Arab and African States Bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden was established on January 6, 2020, as a platform for boosting regional waterway security. Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Jordan, and Yemen[117] are the eight members of this new Arab-African alliance. As a result, Turkey's power projection might take place in three primary areas: modern military gear, military bases, and rapid armed involvement.

Since the AK Party came to power, it has upgraded its strategy of being an independent military gear exporter, ranking among the top ten in the business. Turkey has devised a comprehensive plan to deploy indigenous Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAV) capabilities. Turkey's efforts to develop a domestic drone program have been impeded by the rupture of diplomatic relations with Israel in 2010, as well as the US Congress' unwillingness to provide armed drones, after depending solely on US-made and Israeli (unarmed) platforms for over two decades. As a result, Turkey currently manufactured its own indigenous UAV and UCAV fleet: the armed variant of the Bayraktar TB2, which is considered one of the most precious component of Turkey's drone fleet, that has been operational since 2015, and has been used to launch airstrikes against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on Turkish soil and beyond, in northern Iraq and in northern Syria as well, while Ankara has been moving its drones and other military hardware to support Al Sarraj's Government of National Accord in Libya.[118]

With the manufacturing of the Bayraktar TB2, Ankara has become more reliant on UCAV air strikes in both urban and rural battlefields on Turkish and Syrian soil, as well as

---

[117] **Anadolu Agency**, "Arab-African alliance announced in Riyadh", 6 January 2020, https://bit.ly/3wdIlJ0 (May 2021).

[118] Francesco F. Milan, and Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, "Armed, unmanned, and in high demand: the drivers behind combat drones proliferation in the Middle East", **Small Wars & Insurgencies**, 31.4 (2020), p.733.

in the mountains along the Turkish-Iraqi border. In reality, the Bayraktar TB2 has become the Turkish military's 'most substantive strategic asset in counter-terrorism operations,' since it has utterly decreased the operational gap between the target acquisition phase and the hit, among other factors. Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 has been seen also operating over Libya since mid-2019, enabling GNA troops to launch air strikes against the so called Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Haftar's militias airbase in Jufra, what is considered a critical asset in the march towards Tripoli, for the first time.[119]

Turkey's defense and aerospace industry billed up $950 million in exports in the first quarter of 2021, as the sector raised its exports to 47.7% comparing to the same period in 2020, according to the Trade Ministry and the Turkish Exporters' Assembly[120], as Turkey is exporting its military hardware to various countries in the Middle East. Turkey's defense and aerospace industry exports gained $2.3 billion in 2020. Therefore, as turkey is posing itself to be one of the main 10 weapon exporters in the world, engaging in the regional battlefield work as a theater for showing up the capabilities of the Turkish weapons, as the cases of Azerbijaani Armenian war and the interference of the Turkish military hardware in northern Libya showed how the Turkish drones and other military equipment contributed to alter the path of war.

Now countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait have shown interest in the Turkish hardware, while Ankara is already exporting weapons to Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. The quality of Turkish military industries is evidenced by the fact that the United States of America occupied the position of the first importer of arms from Turkey, followed by Germany and then the Sultanate of Oman in third place, in addition to the great boom in exports to friendly countries such as Qatar. The value of Turkey's defense and air industries exports to Qatar has reached 138 million and 753 thousand dollars in the first half of 2020, achieving an increase of 1336.6 percent compared to last year. Turkey has also sold

---

[119] Ibid.

[120] **Anadolu Agency**, "Turkey exports $950M of defense, aerospace products in Jan-April", 6 May 2021, https://bit.ly/3v7lSMl (10 May 2021).

hundreds of Kirby anti-mine armored vehicles to Tunisia and Turkmenistan, and has exported Cobra armored personnel carriers to countries such as Bahrain, Bangladesh, Mauritania and Rwanda. Turkey and Uzbekistan have also agreed to produce 1,000 Dragon armored vehicles on Uzbek soil, which contributes to Turkey's defense industries to spread into Asian markets, what may increase Ankara's reach and power projection in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the future.[121]

Foreign military bases are the important means for power Projection and represents the country's sphere of influence. Bases strengthens the political, military and economic reach of a state and of great significance to enhance the intervention capabilities. In the examples of Turkey, foreign bases are sought to assert great power status, participate in global governance, and protect wide political and economic objectives, all of which promote Ankara's hard and soft power. Basing states help reduce the risk of backlash by modifying and selecting appropriate bases, which range from big permanent presence to low-cost, low-profile light footprints. Furthermore, bases reaffirm the alliance between countries, as the host state will be more dependent on the basing state for security and regional politics and power balance in its region, as the case of Qatar and Somalia for the Turkish bases.

A foreign military base (FMB) is a place on land or at sea outside of a sovereign state's sovereignty where a contingent of armed forces is stationed with military activities, institutions, and facilities. It's a crucial tool for states to project power, intervene in regional affairs, spread culture, protect overseas interests, and increase political clout. Foreign military bases can be classified into several groups based on a variety of factors. For example, based on the difference in duration, they can be separated into permanent (with a long-term target) and ad hoc (with a short-term aim) bases. They can be classified as army bases, air bases, naval bases, logistic bases, communication bases, arsenal bases, and so on,

---

[121] **SIPRI Fact Sheet**, "Trends in International Arms Transfers", 2018, March 2019, https://bit.ly/3qzcEJP (20 May 2020).

depending on their functions[122]. In and around the Middle East, Turkey has military existence and bases in northern Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, Libya and Syria, while it has also military foothold in Azerbaijan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Cyprus and Somalia. In Libya, Turkey expanded its influence after its allies of the GNA retake Al-Watiya air base in western of the country, to add it to other bases in the area such as Mitiga and Misrata, in addition to Zwara airport.[123]

One of main motives of Turkey for its power projection strategy is to attain "strategic autonomy," or the establishment of a self-sufficient and sustainable defense industry, in order to maintain an assertive and deterrent military posture and, second, to address the fundamental security problems posed by the first-tier threat scenario. Strategic autonomy refers to Turkey's ability to determine its own strategic priorities and make its own judgments in foreign, security, and defense policy. More crucially, it emphasizes Turkey's ability to implement strategic decisions for critical national security concerns with or without its allies. Turkey is attempting to present itself as one of the region's most powerful players. Since 2002, this foreign policy goal has been the cornerstone of Turkey's regional strategic orientation,14 and it has been reflected in Turkey's regional integration project, which is based on regional economic mobilization, political dialogue, and the de-securitization of traditional security issues, particularly with its neighbors. However, as a result of the wave of regional insecurity that followed the Arab revolutions, Turkey's goal to become a regional force required a shift in strategy. As a result, the new military and defense policy was redesigned to meet the demands of the assertive regional power of Turkey.[124]

---

[122] Robert E. Harkavy, **Strategic basing and the great powers, 1200-2000**, New York, NY: Routledge, (2007), pp.2-9.

[123] **The Arab Weekly**, "the fall of al-Watiya base ushers an era of permanent Turkish presence in western Libya", 19/05/2020, https://cutt.ly/VnPPQN0 (21 September, 2020).

[124] Murat Yeşiltaş, "Deciphering Turkey's Assertive Military and Defense Strategy", **Insight Turkey,** 22.3 (2020), p. 97.

Likewise, the ability of Turkey to participate with its troops in peace keeping operations gives Turkey an opportunity to have a say in world politics, as we witnessed in the cases of Afghanistan and even in Azerbaijan latest war in November 2020 with Armenia, when Turkey participated in peace keeping in Nagorno-Karabakh after helping Azerbaijan to regain its territories with both advanced military equipment and vigorous diplomacy that put both Turkey and Russia on an equal footing on this dispute and elsewhere in the Middle East, like the Turkish intervention in both Syria and Libya. As one of the biggest armies in the Middle East, Turkey have the capacity to deploy troops to volatile areas and hence being an important asset for the NATO and for the peace keeping process in the Middle East and beyond.

2.3. The Geopolitical Transformation of Energy

Energy is considered one of the main factors of geopolitics in the Middle East since the discovery of oil in the beginning of the 20th. After the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, the importance of the region increased even more, with future plans of pipelines that will dictate the future of coalitions in the region. While the discovery of gas reserves threatens the throne of oil, the major oil producing countries in the region are already coping with this transformation, like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who are now trying to invest in clear energy. Iraq, which is a major oil exporter as well, is enacting new cooperation deals with Egypt and Jordan, while Israel become a major player in this market and imposed itself as a potential broker of alliances and a hub of energy. These transformations will contribute to the change of the map of coalitions that are no longer solely based on traditional axis of resistance and moderation, as interest-based alliances may exceed ideology-based ones, and even the long-cherished slogans of unity against Israel.

Also, shifts in energy sector, the size of production, consumption and logistics are considered among the most important geopolitical shifts that may change the map of the region, which would have a significant impact on regional alliances on the near future. In

this part we are going to analyze the effects of this change of the geopolitics of energy on the coalition building process across the Middle East.

2.3.1 Changes to Energy Supply and Demand

With the possibility of oil depletion or lack of reliance on it in the future, the Gulf countries are anticipating the post-oil era that may affect the stability of their countries, while the fluctuation in demand due to Covid19 pandemic led to instability in prices and hence affects the Gulf countries' ability to project future plans and preserving the current status of welfare society. Major Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia started to make cuts in its social programs and imposed new fees on expats, what resulted in a mass exodus of workers to their own countries in the region that are already in economic hardship like Egypt, Jordan, Syria and elsewhere.

Furthermore, the emergence of other types of energy consumption that can remove oil from its throne of global energy, or in the event that main consumers are turning toward more clean energy like wind, solar energy or Nitrogen, as the European Union is working to transform its dependence to a clean energy as soon as possible, and the European Union is one of the most important and largest energy importers, with which energy-exporting countries, led by Russia, Iran, Qatar and the Arab world are competing for its lucrative market.

The change in energy patterns also includes the United States, which has become the largest energy exporter in the world and has surpassed Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has made Washington reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil since the Obama era, as he began his doctrine of Pivot to Asia, that led, since then, to the gradual withdrawal of American forces and interest in the region. The US since then started to hand over security tasks to regional actors in the era of Trump and then Joe Biden. Those shifts in the geopolitics of energy are expected to lead to accelerated changes in the regional alliance networks, and push the Gulf states to more alliance with Israel to counterbalancing Iran.

The UAE is trying to extend its influence in the region by expanding regional energy projects. The UAE didn't confine itself in the Gulf region, but considered that the eastern Mediterranean region holds new hopes and opportunities for Abu Dhabi through which it can not only invest in that promising market, but also enhance its influence by expanding regional networks with developing its alliances in that region, which has become a new center for energy in the Middle East, as natural gas became the first choice for energy consumers due to its cheap price, ease of transportation, as well as not polluting the environment compared to oil. The eastern Mediterranean region became the host of the world's largest oil and gas, exploration and excavation companies, as the UAE saw enhancing its alliance with Israel as a portal for increasing its regional influence.

On the other hand, the UAE is leading the road to clean energy, with vast investments in this promising sector. The transformation in the energy sector from the dependence on hydrocarbons to cleaner energy in the Middle East will make sever challenges to the oil and gas producing countries, especially the emerging actors like Egypt.
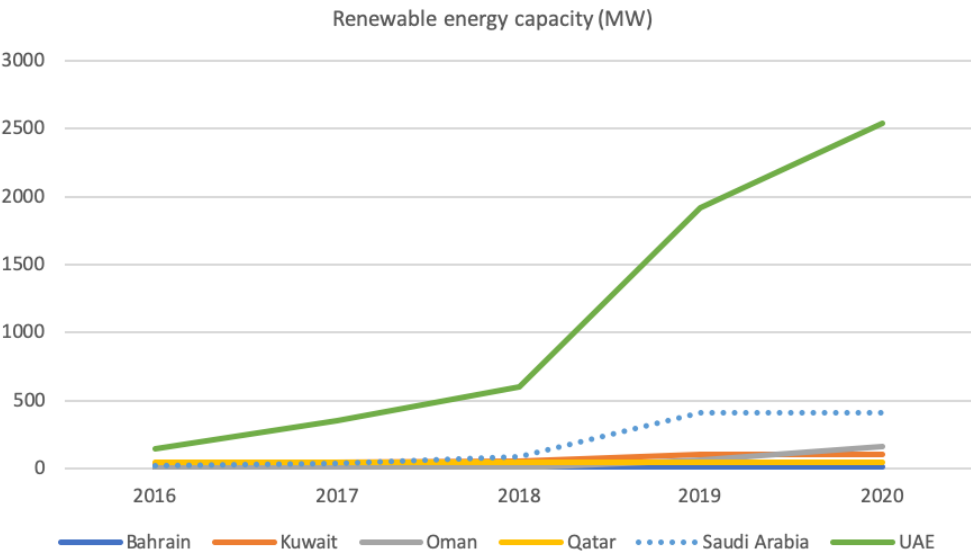
(Graph 2.4) Renewable energy capacity in Gulf states, 2016-20[125]

[125] Renewable Capacity Statistics 2021, **International Renewable Energy Agency**: Abu Dhabi, 2021.

The Gulf states offer abundant solar and, to a lesser extent, wind resources, thanks to some of the world's greatest sun irradiation levels. Despite the fact that Kuwait was a pioneer in the use of solar power in the 1970s and 1980s, the UAE leads the area in terms of installed renewable energy capacity (Graph 2.4). Renewable energy projects in the UAE will grow more slowly than in Saudi Arabia because it is a mature market. Renewables will account for 22% of the value of all power projects in Saudi Arabia between 2021 and 2025, according to an estimate by the Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation, compared to 8% in the UAE. As a result, if Saudi Arabia is to fulfill its announced national target by 2030, it will need to surpass the UAE with installed capacity roughly double that of the UAE.[126] The UAE ambitious plan led it to a deeper cooperation with Israel in the solar energy, and forced Abu-Dhabi to normalize its relation with Turkey with the objective of investing in its natural resources and lucrative market, although of different disagreement on political and cultural issues.

The search for clean energy and the aim of isolation of Russia as a result of its invasion to Ukraine will affect the supply and demand of the energy sector for years to come. And given that the main energy consuming countries are now trying to invest more in the clean energy, to reduce the cost of production and pollution from one hand, and for political reasons as the case of isolation of Russia from the other hand, the result will be more hardships for the oil-dependent economies of the Middle East, what forced number of them to be ready for the post-oil era and its political and social repercussions.

---

[126] Li-Chen Sim, **Renewable power policies in the Arab Gulf states**, Middle East Institute, February 8, 2022, https://bit.ly/376lOXd (8 April 2022).

Renewable energy investment, 2015-2019 (in US$ billion)
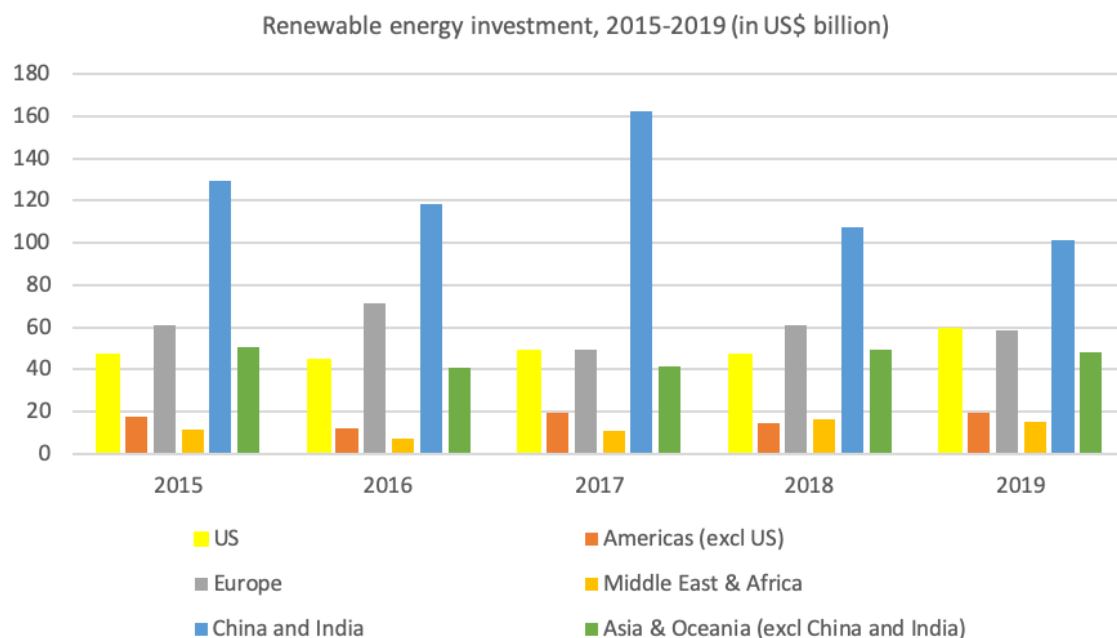
(Graph 2.5): Renewable energy investment by geography[127]

The argument is that intra-Gulf economic competition is mirrored in the actions of national energy champions in developing countries, as it is already visible in free zones, banks, aviation, and sports. It's worth noting that the establishment of Nebras Power (Qatar) in 2014 coincided with the intra-Gulf crisis over Qatar, and was ostensibly an attempt to employ renewable energy diplomacy to break free from Saudi Arabia's conventional regional hegemony. Acwa Power (Saudi Arabia) and Masdar (Abu Dhabi), have secured contracts in Uzbekistan to boost the country's young renewable energy sector, while Nebras was part of a group that won a bid to build a gas turbine power plant. "Strategic relationship" is a term used to describe a relationship between two parties. Although the upgrading of Uzbekistan's electricity sector presents an appealing commercial opportunity for Gulf (and other) governments, regional politics, particularly Turkey's recent expansion to Central Asia, should not be overlooked as a motivating factor. Acwa and Nebras control

---

[127] Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment, **Frankfurt School-UNEP Centre**/BNEF, 2020.

40% and 14% of Jordan's total installed power capacity, respectively, while Masdar's initiatives account for 18% of the country's installed renewable energy capacity. Gulf oil champions therefore supplement their state sponsors' already substantial contributions to foreign direct investment, remittances, financial aid, and humanitarian aid, providing Gulf governments significant influence over a "strategic partnership."[128]
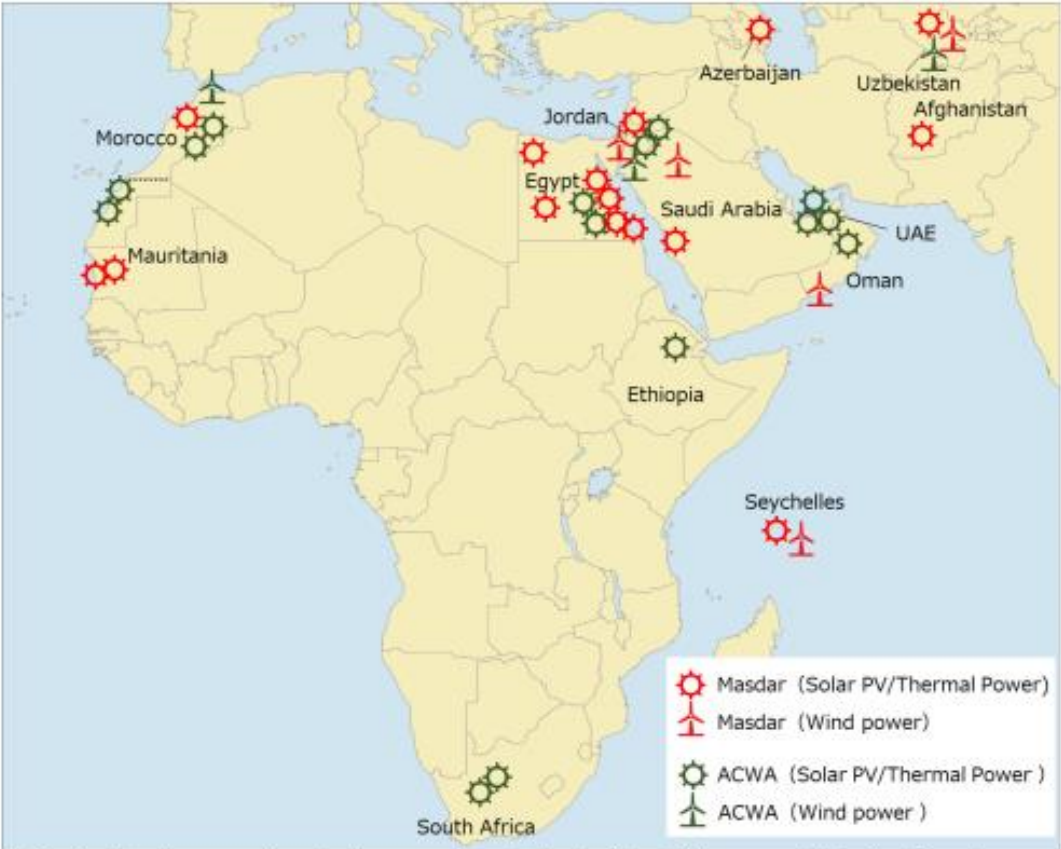
Note: Masdar also operates solar home systems in local cities in Morocco and Egypt, although they are not included in this figure.
Source: Compiled by MGSSI based on the press releases of each company

(Map 2.5) International projects of Masdar and ACWA[129]

---

[128] Li-Chen Sim, Op. Cit.

[129] Ito Mashino, **UAE and Saudi Arabia Lead the Decarbonization of the Middle East**, Mitsui & Co. Global Strategic Studies Institute, Monthly Report December 2021, p.6.

2.3.2 Geopolitics of Regional Pipelines

Because of its strategic location, Israel became a cornerstone in the pipeline strategies of the Middle East, and hence because crucial for the alliance building process due to the transformation in the energy sector. Historically, there were tradational oil pipelines across the region that were built even before the existance of the state of Israel, and otheres that were built after 1948 that aimed at bypassing it, while the map of pipelines were constantly changing according to changes in geopolitics and especially according to war and conflict zones across the reigon. Hence, the establishment of Israel and its geographical position in the region is key to understand many of the current process of coalition building. After the Camp David peace accord between Egypt and Israel, the U.S., that worked as a broker for peace, tried to insure a long standing peace between the two sides, and helped in enacting number of strategic agreements between the two sides, atop of them were the Qualified Industerial Zone (QIZ) agreement[130], and the strategic projects related to exporting the Egyptian natural gas to Israel (and vice versa later on).

The issue of energy supply was a strategic topic for the consecutive American adminstrations since the Arab oil embargo during the 1973 war against Israel, and latter on, the Eastern Mediterranean region appeared to be a good European alternative for the Russian gas, especially after its annexation of crimea in 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Egyptian-Israeli pipeline that was established as a strategic project to avoid more wars and to strengthen ties of interests between the two countries helped to cement the growing relationship between Cairo and Tel Aviv, that wast culminated latter on with the joining of Arab Gulf countries in the Abraham Accords in 2020.

---

[130] The QIZ program was introduced in 1996 by the U.S. Congress to stimulate regional economic cooperation between Egypt, Israel, Palestinian Territories and Jordan with the help of the U.S., as the Goods produced in QIZ-designated areas can directly access U.S. markets without tariff or quota restrictions, subject to certain conditions. It was aimed at stimulating peace in the region. For more information, see: Oren Kessler, Trading Peace in Egypt and Israel: How QIZs Could Save the Middle East, **Foreign Affairs**, August 23, 2015, https://fam.ag/3rfbvqX (11 April 2022).

Pipeline	Date of previous and current shut down	Reason	Actual pumping/age (year)
Kirkuk, Iraq-Haifa, Palestine	Since 1948	Arab–Israeli conflict.	16/89
Kirkuk, Iraq-Tripoli, Lebanon	Three days in 1956. June 1972-March 1973. April 1976-December 1981. January and March 1982. Since April 1982.	Conflict over Suez Canal. Nationalization of the line by Iraq and Syria. Disputes over transit fees. Sabotage attacks. Iraqi-Syrian antagonism.	41/87
Kirkuk, Iraq-Banias, Syria	Three days in 1956. June 1972-March 1973. April 1976-February 1979. Closed since April 1982.	Conflict over Suez Canal. Nationalization of the line by Iraq and Syria. Disputes over transit fees. Iraqi-Syrian antagonism.	26/70
Kirkuk, Iraq-Ceyhan, Turkey (IT I)	September-November 1980. 1990-2003.	Iranian air attacks. Conflict over Kuwait and UN embargo against Iraq.	31/44
Kirkuk, Iraq-Ceyhan, Turkey (IT II)	1990-2003	Conflict over Kuwait and UN embargo against Iraq.	21/34
Iraqi pipeline across Saudi Arabia (IPSA)	Closed since August 1990.	Conflict over Kuwait and UN embargo against Iraq.	5/36
Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia-Zahrani, Lebanon (Tapline)	Three days in 1956. Several days in 1969, 1970, 1971, and 1972. May 1970-January 1971. February 1975-September 1990. Closed since September 1990.	Conflict over Suez Canal. Sabotage attacks. Disputes over transit fees Economic reasons, only some pumping to Lebanon and Jordan for local use. Meanwhile the line was attacked by Israel in 1981 and 1982 Conflict over Kuwait and deterioration in Saudi–Jordanian relations	24/71
Total			164/431

Table (2.1) History of Security of International Oil Pipelines in the Middle East[131]

---

[131] Naji Abi-Aad, Petroleum Pipeline Security in the Middle East, **The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut**, December, 2021, p.4.

The Arab Gas Pipeline was established originally to export Egyptian gas to the Arab states in the Levant, to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and then up to Kilis in Turkey, and was designed to bypass Israel from the south for obvious political reasons. But the new transformations in the regional geopolitics utilized the line now to gush the Israeli gas in it as part of a deal to curb Iran's influence. In this plane, the gas that is planned to be pumped to Lebanon through the Arab pipeline, which stretches from Egypt, Jordan and Syria, is now mostly Israeli as part of the broader gas deal between the two sides, while even the electricity that will be sent to Lebanon through Syria and Jordan will be also mostly Israeli, in line with an agreement that was drafted by senior US diplomat Amos Hochstein. He informed Beirut that the Arab Gas Pipeline will be exempted from the Caesar Act sanctions imposed by Washington on Syria. The US official was also behind a Jordanian-Israeli deal in 2014 that sought to promote an "axis of moderation in the Middle East between moderate Arab countries and Israel." [132]

As a part of the deal between the U.S. and Russia, a western official quoted a senior Russian official as saying that Israel encouraged Moscow and Washington to force the return of the Damascus regime to southern Syria and agree to delivering energy to Lebanon, as a part of a plan to curb Iranian influence. CIA chief William Burns, who had toured the region in recent months, was also involved in the gas deal, which was also backed by National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk.[133]

---

[132] **Asharq Al-Awsat**, Israeli Gas to Be Pumped to Syria and Lebanon through Arab Pipeline to Curb Iran's Influence, 27 October, 2021, https://bit.ly/3NTTAQ6 (11 April 2022).

[133] Ibid.
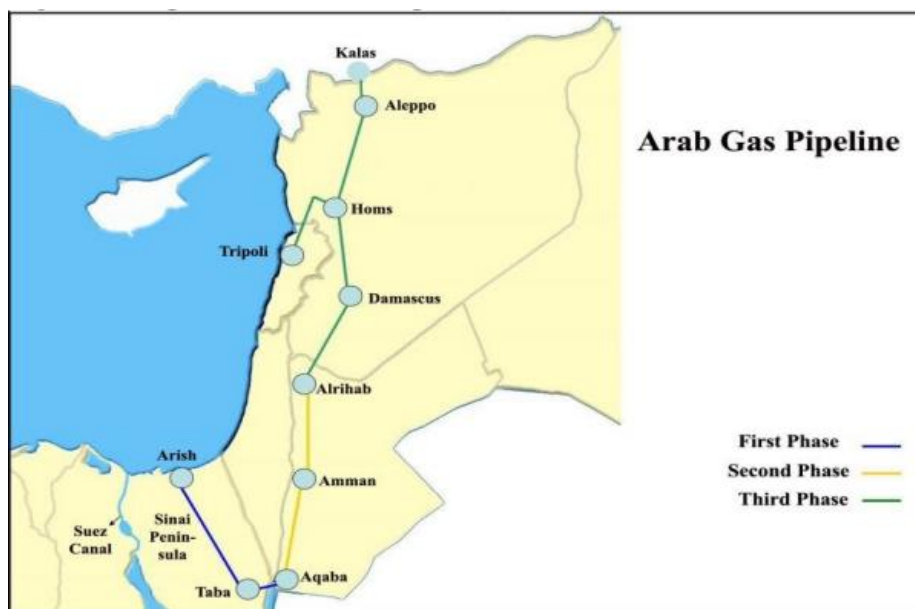
Map (2. 6) Arab Gas Pipeline with its different phases[134]

Egypt has been experiencing significant domestic natural gas shortages since the Egyptian revolution, causing disruptions and financial losses to various Egyptian businesses that rely on it, as well as restricting natural gas exports from Egypt via the Arab Gas Pipeline (even when it has been operational) and Liquefied natural gas (LNG) export terminals in Egypt. The prospect of using the Arish-Ashkelon Pipeline to transfer natural gas in reverse mode was raised as a result of this predicament. The consortium controlling Israel's Tamar gas field stated in March 2015 that it has secured an agreement with Egyptian company Dolphinus Holdings - a firm representing non-governmental, industrial and commercial consumers in Egypt - for the sale of at least 5 billion cubic metres (180

---

[134] Saviolakis I. Panagiotis and Pazarzi Georgia, Transportation of Energy Resources in the Middle East and Central Asia, **International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy**, Vol. 3, Special Issue, 2013, pp.127-139.

billion cubic feet) of natural gas over three years, subject to regulatory permissions in both countries.[135]

In November 2015, a preliminary deal was made for the pipeline to transport up to 4 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year (140 billion cubic feet per year) from Israel's Leviathan gas field to Dolphinus. The consortium EMED, which includes Israel's Delek Drilling, Noble Energy of the United States, and Egypt's East Gas Company, completed a contract to buy a 39 percent interest in the pipeline in November 2019, with the remaining 61 percent with the consortium Mediterranean Gas Pipeline Ltd. Israel began transporting gas from the Tamar field to Egypt in January 2020, following a six-year of halt when the pipeline was idle. The original daily shipments were 200 million cubic feet, with intentions to rise to 500 million.[136]

The utilization of gas and piplines politics as a tool of regional influence for Israel and its assimilation in the region is a part of a wider plan to isolate Iran, with the help of the Moderation Axis. Even Turkey, in front of the realpolitik on the ground, was forced to normalize its relation with Tel Aviv and started negotiations to import the Israeli gas, in a wider context of reconstructing the regional coalitioin map that led to a rapproachment with Ankara and its rivals the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The gas resources and the map of pipelines in the region changed the tools of negotiations dramatically, and gave leverages to states that own the newfound reservs of hydrocarbons, even in front of regional traditional powers like Turkey, who is now searching for restoring its geopolitical eminence by upgrading its military industry with advanced technologies in the field of drones and aerospace industry. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting changes to the international system will add to the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields and pipelines, as a main alternative for the

---

[135] Ari Rabinovitch, Israel's Tamar group to sell gas to Egypt via pipeline, **Reuters**, 18 March 2015, https://reut.rs/3jsi1Gh (11 April 2022).

[136] **Aljazeera**, Israel begins exporting natural gas to Egypt, 15 Jan 2020, https://bit.ly/3rgnlRF (11 April 2022).

European gas policies, and hence, will be used in the battles that are expected to come as a result.

2.3.3. Regional Roles of International Powers

Both the U.S. and Russia became stakeholder in the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean. The American involvement in the energy sector of the region dates back to the first discoveries of energy reserves, as the American interest can be attributed into threefolds: As being a lucrative opportunities for its oil and gas giant companies; for its strategic importance of being a potintial promising alternative for the Russian gas for its allies in Europe; and for being a tool to curb Moscows revenues from the energy sector on the long run. Russia, from the otherhand, was deeply involved in the region's politics since its military presence in Syria after the Arab Spring, when Moscow decided to have bases and hardware installations in Syria. The strategic location of Syria and its internal crisis temptated Russia to intervine in deeply in the region, to support its old ally from one hand, and to continue export military hardware to its army from the other, while mainting with deep foothold on the warm waters of the Mediterranean.

Russia's motivation for interfering in Syria's civil war is to safeguard its economic interests in the country. Russia's efforts to keep Bashar al-Assad in power are thought to be aimed at safeguarding its geoeconomic (primarily natural gas) interests in Syria and the wider Middle East, which helps to ensure the long-term viability of its monopolistic natural gas supply to Europe. These interests are believed to be threatened by the United States' position and actions in Syria. Russia seeks to protect its geopolitical interests, which have been built around a reliable mutual strategic and geopolitical relationship between Moscow and Damascus since the Cold War, which has helped Russia and Syria maintain a balance of power in the Middle East against the US and its western allies' anti-Russian and anti-Syrian geopolitical interests. The United States and Russia are locked in an unending battle over geoeconomic interests in Europe and the Middle East. Because Russia is basically the only provider of natural gas to Europe, which is so reliant on this crucial energy, Russia's

economic importance to Europe is huge. The US is envious of Russia's apparent economic dominance over Europe and is trying to undermine it through its activities in Syria.[137]

While the U.S. was pulling out from the region, leaving behind a destroyed Iraq and a Sunni-Shiites rivalry with more secured Israel, the Russians seized the opportunity for asserting their alliance with Iran and Syria, and using its influence over the Syrian government to oppose the extension of the Arab Gas Pipeline to Kilis in Turkey, to prevent exporting the regional gas into Europe via Turkey. Ankara, with its economy exhusted after the Covid19 crisis and the repercussions of the Russian war on Ukraine, with volatile energy prices, extended its hand to Tel Aviv to import its gas, and to mitigate any more negative ramifications of its bold foreign policy since the eruption of the Arab revolutions since 2010.

Eastern and southern Europe are still vital to the United States' Russian containment strategy. Following the discovery of shale gas deposits in the United States, the Balkans and other energy-scarce regions of Europe became a priority for the US energy industry, as the US surpassed Russia and Qatar as the world's largest energy provider. Despite warnings against the militarization of conflicts in the region, the United States relies on weapons exports as a major economic and military dominance strategy, and in the wake of Russia's deployment of S-400 missiles in Syria and Turkey's purchase of the system, the US is providing military hardware and bases to its Greek and Israeli allies, as well as increasing its own presence in the region. Some speculate that the US is strengthening its alliance with Turkey's adversary, Greece, in order to force Ankara to the negotiating table. In October 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signed a protocol of amendment to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) between Greece and the US, which pertains to

---

[137] Clement Ndidi Oligie, **Why Russia is involved in the Syrian Civil War: One Issue, Many Views**, Relationes Internationales, Audri, Vol. 12, no 1/2019, pp. 101,102.

the use of Souda Base in Crete, the airbases of Stefanovikeio and Larissa in central Greece, and the port of Alexandroupolis.[138]

Maintaining a footing in the region necessitates ensuring that tensions between the various parties do not escalate, as the working energy firms in the region represent an international coalition of interests centered on the region's energy fortunes, as well as a containment mechanism against both Turkey and Russia. The US also wants to take advantage of the lucrative energy market in the region, with plans to grow exports and gain a competitive advantage over Russia, which will result in a strategic reaction in the shape of reduced Russian gas shipments to Europe in the long run. Taking a piece of the European cake of energy demand will be a blow to Russia's economy in terms of the fundamental US purpose of restraining Russia. The United States has already made significant progress in this dThe United States is already making progress toward this goal, having increased its LNG shipments to Europe by 300 percent.

According to the European Commission, Europe received more over 10% of total US LNG exports in 2017, up from 5% in 2016. In 2018, the EU received roughly 11% of US LNG exports; but, during the nine-month period from August 2018 to April 2019, when exports increased by 272 percent, that percentage skyrocketed to nearly 30%. 22 Since July 2019, the United States has nearly tripled its natural gas exports to the European Union and signed new licenses with the goal of establishing American energy as a foundation of EU energy security.irection.[139]

The European Union, which is traditionally dubbed as an economic giant but a political dwarf, was watching the affects of the war on Ukraine hopping to find more alternatives for the Russian gas, imposing, with the help of the U.S., heavy sanctions on Moscow, and finally benifitting from the compitition for the advantage of its energry diversification

---

[138] Muhammad Soliman Alzawawy, What Biden May Bring to the Eastern Mediterranean Region, **Insight Turkey**, 2021, Vol. 23 / No. 1 / p.26.

[139] Ibid, p.28.

policy. The impact on regional power will differ according to their degree of engagement in this rivalry and to how extend they are backed by one or more of the international heavy weight actors, and hence bandwagoning their interests with the winner. Preventing Russing gas from entering Europe in one point at the future, will bring back Iran to the forefront as and alternative, in addition to other energy exporting country like Algeria, Qatar, Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt.

2.3.4. Impact On Regional Coalition Building

The abovementioned interest-based alliances is in compition with other ideological-based ones over the region, resulting in a more tactical nature of coalitions that is contributing for the escalation of disputes rather than metigating them. The absence of a core for a regional order is another problem for the region, as the tradational regional actors are still vying for influence and filling the political and dominance vacuums rather than enacting long living alliances that help in mitigating the pace of rivalry. This fast-changing natre of alliances and coalition in the Middle East will be heavily affected by the deplition of energy in some countries, and the cost of extraction in others, in addition to the security environment and the role of Russia in preventing the establishment of pipelines, plus the higher cost of constructing pipeline in the deepwater crossing the Mediterranean into Europe, like the case of the EastMed pipeline which is not cost effective in one hand, in was vetoed by the U.S. from the other. Another challenge is the future plans to move into clean energy by the main international consumers around the region. There are some other alternative of pipelines, which are the export of electricity produced by regional countries like Egypt and Israel. The EuroAfrica Interconnector is intended to transport power from Egypt to Cyprus, then to Greece and Europe via Crete, while the EuroAsia project is expected to begin in Israel and connect to Europe via Cyprus. Both projects connect the power networks of these countries to Europe's.[140]

---

[140] Henri J. Barkey, **US pipeline withdrawal marks new chapter in Eastern Mediterranean**, Ekathimerini Greek newspaper, 7 Feb. 2022, https://bit.ly/37EAkoZ (12 April 2022).

The Eastern Mediterranean has emerged as a crucial strategic zone for the UAE's ambitions to restrict Turkey. As the region attracts an increasing number of stakeholders, developments in the area have helped Abu Dhabi to form promising new alliances and consolidate current ones. The Eastern Mediterranean, a hydrocarbon-rich area connecting Europe's beaches to the Middle East, has a long history of geopolitical tension. The UAE's expanding strategic interest in the region is driven by two key objectives. The first is to pursue important potential partners' economic and trade interests. The second goal is to keep Turkey's regional rise in check. To put this in context, tensions between Abu Dhabi and Ankara have slowly grown into a fierce rivalry that has played out across the Middle East and in neighboring countries since 2011, before it took a halt in 2022 after bilateral relations restored, a move that was seen as tactical more than strategic. Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, and France have become increasingly alerted by recent developments in the Eastern Mediterranean over Turkey's claims and movements in the Mediterranean. As a result of these developments, Abu Dhabi seized the option of incorporating these governments into a cross-regional front hostile to Ankara.

This was demonstrated when Turkey sent naval personnel to escort its hydrocarbon exploration vessel through waters claimed by both Athens and Ankara, which are rich in natural resources. In the midst of rising tensions between Greece and Turkey, the UAE dispatched four F-16 fighter jets for joint training with Greece's military forces. The development of Turkish drilling activity in the Cypriot Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ) has fanned simmering regional animosity, prompting the UAE to step up its bilateral diplomatic involvement with Cyprus. Abu Dhabi seeks to contain Ankara's increasingly assertive activities in the region while enhancing its image in the European Union by increasing collaboration with its new European Allies in the Eastern Mediterranean. Both of these objectives played a role in the UAE's decision to hold the first-ever trilateral summit between the UAE and southern Cyprus.[141]

---

[141] **Gulf International Forum**, "The Eastern Mediterranean: The UAE's New Frontier", https://bit.ly/3geGmxo (20th December 2020).

With its energy giant Total SA holding vital exploration rights in Cyprus' EEZ, France is leading the axes against Turkey, and Paris has shown its willingness to send major military assets to the region to dissuade Turkey. Such circumstances motivate the UAE and France to strengthen their anti-Ankara collaboration, which is already robust on the Libya issue. The Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline, which will supply an estimated 10% of the EU's total liquefied natural gas (LNG) demand when completed, was announced in January 2020 by Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. Greece, Cyprus, and Israel are hoping that Abu Dhabi will help them cover any project budget gaps. According to the UAE, the EastMed project has the potential to reduce the relevance of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), putting Turkey's existing position as an LNG export center in jeopardy. The UAE and Israel share similar interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Abraham Accords are expected to boost bilateral energy cooperation even further. The UAE can diversify its natural gas imports away from Qatar, the world's largest LNG exporter and Turkey's closest ally, thanks to Israel's rise as a natural gas exporter. A continuing diplomatic offensive has been launched by Abu Dhabi and its regional partners against Qatar. Furthermore, Israel and the United Arab Emirates share a same goal of achieving ambitious renewable energy targets.[142]

On April 26 2020, Israeli company Delek announced that it had signed a memorandum of understanding with Mubadala, the UAE's sovereign wealth fund, to take over the company's 22 percent stake in the Tamar offshore natural gas sector. The UAE announced it will also establish a $10 billion fund to invest in Israeli energy and other strategic sectors, and the Delek deal is the largest commercial agreement between the two countries since the historic Abraham Accords normalized relations. However, the gas deal's potential position in advancing the UAE's diplomatic credentials may be more significant. On the energy front, Dana Gas, an Emirati company, had previously obtained the "North al-Arish" concession off Egypt's Sinai coast, which borders the Palestinian maritime region. Exploratory exploration in 2019 yielded no hydrocarbons, and analysts speculated that the

---

[142] Ibid.

company would relinquish its license just a few weeks before the Abraham Accords. Dana, on the other hand, now claims that the bloc may contain significant gas reserves.[143]

With such a bold deal, the UAE wants to have a stake in the Eastern Mediterranean region, not only in its lucrative wealth, but also to have a foot print in this region as part of its power projection and tying its interests with rising and regional powers in the main scope of the Western Alliances led by the US, and in order to be part of the energy alliance in the region with its major oil and gas companies as well. The UAE, in order to have enhanced leverage in the region, asked to join the Cairo-based East Mediterranean Gas Forum, the UAE's Mediterranean drive has met with some opposition, as the Palestinian Authority, which was upset by the Abraham Accords, vetoed Abu Dhabi's application to join the Forum as an observer.[144]

On the other hand, there are expected changes in the eastern Mediterranean alliances as a result of Egypt's resetting its network of alliances and the possibilities of its rapprochement with Turkey after the UAE made an alliance with Israel and ignored Egypt's interests in the eastern Mediterranean, with the escalation of stimuli for the conflict over demarcation of maritime border between Turkey and its neighbors, as the West is supporting its alliance with Cyprus and Greece. The adoption of the Seville map for Eastern Mediterranean maritime demarcation gives them large economic areas compared to Turkey, which in turn made its on map of the Turkish Blue Homeland. All these variables in the energy sector in the eastern Mediterranean are expected to have major repercussions on the network of alliances as well as on the security of the entire region, in addition to the relationship of Arab countries with Israel and the transformations that could occur in the event of an escalation of the conflict between Turkey and its neighbors.

Finally, the results of these factors and variables will be further analyzed intensivily in the coming chapters of this study.

---

[143] Simon Henderson, "UAE Wealth Fund to Buy Share of Israeli Gas Field", **The Washington Institute for Near East Policy**, https://cutt.ly/tbBTh8I (17 of May 2021).

[144] Ibid.

Conclusion

Geopolitical changes in the Middle East are catalysts for shifts in regional alliances, especially those that are tactical based on rapidly changing interests, and are not linked to a comprehensive security, cultural or civilizational umbrella. The nature of the relationship between authority and peoples in the Arab world was severely changed, as the Arab Spring revolutions erupted in order to reorganize the pyramid of power to be from the bottom up, with the peoples being the source of the authorities, the sovereign, and the ones who choose their rulers. In this context, the current of counter-revolutions swept the region after it was funded and planned by the traditional Arab authorities that feared the transmission of democracy and the tensions accompanying the change in power patterns to their countries, especially in the Gulf region, which has long enjoyed stability in authoritarian regimes due to the prevailing political culture that relies in part on tribal arrangements on the one hand, and on fatwas and erroneous interpretations of religion on the other hand that make peoples unable to lead political change, as those fatwas are urging for the prohibition of political activism and the formation of parties and promoting democracy in general.

The changes brought about by the Arab Spring with the fall of authoritarian regimes in some countries led to the strengthening of peoples, movements, groups and non-state actors in front of the authority of the state, creating a vacuum not only in internal politics, but also led to dominance vacuums as well. We witnessed the lack of hegemonic power in the Middle East that have the capability of making Hegemonic Stability or even ones that can lead the process of regulating the process of conflict resolution or bringing about stability by hegemony. We found that non-Arab actors are competed in the region whether with defensive goals to prevent the spill-over of conflicts to its territories like Turkey, or with expansionist ones to benefit from that security deteriorations. In addition, we witnessed also the interventions of major powers such as Russia, which works to find a foothold in Syria to achieve its geopolitical and strategic goals by being present in the Arab world again, in order to participate in reshaping it according to its interests with regard to arms exports and by blocking some projects to supply Europe with gas that is competing with Russia, or by finding naval military bases in Tartus, Syria, and airbase in Hmeimim, Syria as well. Those

regional and international interventions eventually led to a reconsideration of regional alliances and rearranging the link between each of them with different regional and international axes.

Shifts in the field of energy also represented transformations in regional alliances; The decline in the importance of oil versus gas and the prospects of oil depletion led the Gulf powers to work out plans to diversify the sources of their economy on the one hand, as well as to diversify their regional alliances on the other hand. The traditional Gulf countries participated in the process of normalization within the framework of the Abrahamic agreements with Israel, and even the cold peace led by Egypt turned into a warm peace at the hands of the new leadership in the UAE. They worked to build bridges of communication with Israel with expanded alliances, whether in the eastern Mediterranean gas and potential strategic projects such as the EastMed pipeline, as well as cooperation in the fields of renewable energy, or in developing projects to deliver oil to Europe through an Israeli port of Eilat and then to Ashkelon and from there to Europe.

They also have plans in the areas of establishing an alternative route to the Suez Canal, which also led to shifts in the relationship between the Emirates and Egypt. The latter began to rethink a rapprochement with Turkey in order to compensate and counterbalance for the damage that the Emirates inflicted on the Egyptian role in the region. Cairo historically has been marketing itself as the main counter-terrorism force in the region that works on behalf of the West, as well as it plays as the gateway to normalization with Israel. The first role is now being played by the UAE strongly through its security private companies, and through its advanced weapons and drones, which it used in conflict areas, as it also took over the role of being the gate of normalization with Israel to Gulf states.

All of these transformations led to an imbalance in the geopolitical landscape, as well as rapid changes in the network of regional alliances, which were not based on clear cultural or civilizational pillars that enhance their sustainability, but on the other hand were based upon rapidly changing and temporary interests according to changing patterns of consumption and energy discoveries and other short-range factors. Among the

repercussions that occurred as a result of the collapse of the Arab League's system and Arab nationalism, was the rush from small states to search for alternatives to alliances outside its framework, which would ultimately benefit non-Arab and non-Islamic countries, which we will discuss about its possibilities and paths in the following pages.

CHAPTER THREE

COALITIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction

In this chapter, we are going to describe the pattern and structure of the main coalitions in the Middle East. We are going to analyze the coalitions that occurred before the latest geopolitical transformations that were mentioned in the previous chapter, in order to compare it to the new form of coalitions that occurred after it. Here, we will analyze the traditional Egyptian-Saudi led Axis of Moderation; the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance; and the Turkey-led axis that can be best described as being more tolerant to political Islam from one side, and supportive of peoples' demands of freedoms, democracy and social justice after the Arab Spring, from the other one, hence we can call it an Islamism-tolerant axis.

Hence, the reaction to Israeli existence in the region and the interpretation of Islam and its role in state and in governance have big share of those conflicting currents; as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire led to the disintegration of the region into various, and sometimes conflicting factions and currents from different ideologies that varies about identity and revivalism of Islam in the modern context and its relation to politics. Islamism, one of the main currents opposing the normalization with Israel, is a trend that effectively born with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, as Hasan Al-Banna created the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 as a tool to restore the Khilafa and helped, among others, in the inauguration of the path of Political Islam. On the other hand, in the fifties, which was dominant by the speeches of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul- Nasser, a new trend of political current inspired an entire generation of young Arabs with the ideals of pan-Arabism, Arab unity, Arab socialism, and rapid economic development driven by the state.[145]

---

[145] David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway, **A Tale of Four Worlds: The Arab Region After the Uprisings**, Oxford University Press, New York, First Edition, 2019, p.5.

Arab unity in reality was reduced to a few short-lived experiments, while the Arab socialism failed to deliver the anticipated economic breakthrough. Instead, it left a permanent legacy of overbearing government control over the economy, inefficient welfare systems, a tendency towards megaprojects, and a dysfunctional bureaucracy that suffocated enterprise in a sea of red tape and corruption. In many countries, militaries have also become the major political powers and turned into an authoritarian dictatorship.[146]

3.1. The Axis of Resistance and its Metamorphosis

The Arab defeat against Israel in 1967 opened a new chapter in Pan-Arabism. For the first time, the role of the Arab League was activated as a regional umbrella for collective action, as the Axis of Resistance was effectively born in the Khartoum summit of the Arab League in 1967. That summit resulted in an important cornerstone of this axis's actions: the "Three Nos": "no peace, no negotiation, no recognition of Israel", attended by all the Arab countries except for Syria, which called for a popular war of liberation for the lands occupied by Israel.[147] While the pan-Arabism current made the liberation of Palestine as one of its main mottos, there were another current that given a push after the 1967 defeat, which was the Islamism current with its different variations. Many youths who converted from Arab nationalism into Islamism were affected by this humiliating defeat, one of them was one of the most influential in the violent Islamism: Ayman al Zawahiri himself, the current leader of Al-Qaeda. Al Zawahiri, as he wrote in his own biography[148]:

The Nasserist regime thought that the Islamic movement had received a fatal blow
by killing Sayyid Qutub and his companions and arresting thousands of the Islamic
movement's sons, and that was the beginning of the formation of the contemporary

---

[146] Ibid.

[147] **Aljazeera.net**, "Khartoum Conference 1967: The Three No's Summit", 29 August 2016, https://cutt.ly/xnFvpKf (12 January 2020).

[148] Ayman al Zawahiri, **Knights under the Prophet's Flag**, al Sahab foundation, 1st edition, July 2001, p.12.

jihadist movement in Egypt. The events added a dangerous factor that affected the course of the jihadist movement in Egypt, namely the defeat of 1967, the humiliating retreat of the Egyptian army aimlessly in the Sinai desert, the destruction of the Egyptian military machine in hours, and the miserable performance of the Egyptian military leadership that led the nation to disaster.

The other is one of the most influential also, but in the Muslim Brotherhood, the deputy of the Murshid Khairat al Shater. He became involved in public Islamic work since the defeat of 1967, and participated in the establishment of public Islamic work at Alexandria University since the early seventies. He was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood since 1974, and then was included in multiple levels and various activities within the movement. Khairat al Shater was imprisoned and his property confiscated about six times, the first of which was in 1968 during the era of the late President Abdel Nasser, for his participation in the student demonstrations in November 1968 protesting the defeat and the reduced sentences against the officers responsible for it, where he was imprisoned for four months, and was dismissed from Alexandria University and conscripted into the armed forces during the war of attrition before the scheduled date of his military service.[149]

The Pan-Islamism currents started to have a new push after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, that was in the same year of Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel. At that point, other Arab countries boycotted Egypt and the resistance axis gained a new different player with different roles and natures; which was Iran. The rise of Pan-Islamism from the other hand coincided with those events, to compose a new mingled, Shiites-Sunni axis of resistance to the Israeli atrocities, while each of them, in essence, was vying for influence and leadership over the region. In the ensuing decades after 1979, the Axis of Resistance consisted of Arab-nationalist regimes, like Iraqi, Syrian, Libyan and Yemeni regimes; Iran and its satellite militias and movements; and the rising current of Islamism that called for, among other things, the destruction of Israel and the unity of Muslims.

---

[149] **BBC Arabic**, "A brief about Khairat al Shater", March 31, 2012, https://cutt.ly/Xn6bwR3 (6 July 2020).

This axis can be also seen as a revisionist axis that works to resist the status quo and the surrender to the Israeli will on the region, forcing its existence with military deterrence and atrocities. We can also argue that this axis reflexes the popular attitude in the region against Israel, that can be observed in the attitude of the masses in the Arab Spring against Israel, especially in Egypt when the angry mobs marched towards the Israeli embassy in downtown Cairo and stormed it. Therefore, this axis claims that it represents the real Arab and Muslim streets as they refused the recognition of Israel and the ensuing peace accords with it unless it stops its aggression against the civilians in Palestine. The Arab spring was seen in Tel Aviv as an Israeli winter, before the counter revolution took place and reversed the populist tide and enacted a warmer peace with Israel.[150]

The American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 resulted in the demise of Saddam Hussein regime, while the waves of the Arab Spring resulted in the destruction of the remaining Resistance Axes regimes in Libya and Yemen, while the Syrian regime survived but became a satellite to Iran and hence gave the de-facto lead of this axes to Tehran. The absence of leading figures of this axis; like Gamal Abdul Nasser, Saddam Hussein, Muammar Al-Qaddafi and Hafiz Al-Assad emptied this axis from its effectiveness and influence, while Tehran managed to upgrade a firebrand literature of resistance based on sectarian and historical grievances, while fortifying it with arms proliferation to its satellite militias across the region. With exporting medium range rockets and drones with its technologies to resistance movements in the region, Iran managed to have the upper hand of this axis and became its main patron across the Middle East.

The "axis of resistance," the decades-long cooperation between Iran, Hezbollah, and the Syrian regime, was changed by Iran's engagement in the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. In each theater, Tehran has established military footholds, loyal collaborators, and long-term influence. During each confrontation, Tehran's motivations changed, as it began with

---

[150] Panayiotides, Nicos, "Is The 'Arab Spring' Israel's Winter? Strategic Instability in The Middle East", **International Journal on World Peace**, vol. 29, no. 1, 2012, pp. 21–40. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23266587 (28 July 2021).

defensive goals of defending allies and maintaining the axis, before shifting to offensive goals against Israel, the US, and Saudi Arabia. Iran's allies gained increased military power, political legitimacy, and a regional worldview as a result of the conflict. These factions see each other as battlefield partners, ideological allies, and opposing flanks on a single regional front. Relationships with Tehran have strengthened and evolved as Iran's axis have strengthened and evolved. Affiliated groups work on a dynamic spectrum with Iran, ranging from ally to proxy, based on their skills, history, and influence in a given country. Today's axis of resistance is more of an Iranian-led coalition oriented on collective security and prolonged deterrence supported by expeditionary strength, rather than a "patron-proxy" connection. The axis' transformation into an alliance necessitates a fundamental adjustment in how the national security community views the Iran threat and its associated entities.[151]

Historically, and despite the fact that the Shah's Iran never formally recognized Israel, the two countries maintained a connection based on shared geopolitical objectives. Until the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran was the "gem in the crown of the peripheral alliance." In the 1950s, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion created the peripheral theory, which was based on the idea that Israel would need to form close ties with non-Arab countries in the region to safeguard itself from hostile Arab neighbors. Despite initial government opposition to Israel's establishment, Iran finally acknowledged it in 1950. Isolated in the Middle East, Israel welcomed the Shah's informal gesture.[152]

Israel's security apparatus did not perceive Iran to be a major security threat until the 1990s. Nonetheless, Israelis currently see Iran as the source of practically every regional problem. Part of Israel's threat perceptions of Iran originate from the country's growing missile and nuclear capabilities, while the other part of that fear is related to its belief that Iranian regional influence is growing, infringing on basic Israeli interests and jeopardizing

---

[151] Brian Katz**, "**Axis Rising: Iran's Evolving Regional Strategy & Non-State Partnerships in the Middle East", **CSIS Briefs**, October 2018, p. 1, https://cutt.ly/Nmep7Pa (22 April 2020).

[152] Dalia Dassa Kaye, Alireza Nader, Parisa Roshan, "Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry", **RAND Corporation**, 2011, 1st edition, p. 10.

regional stability. Israeli leaders fear that if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, its influence will grow, severely limiting military and political maneuverability in the region for both Israel and the United States. Growing Israeli fears about Iran stem from more than only Iran's growing military capability and links to terrorist organizations and activities. Israelis have also become increasingly concerned about increased Iranian influence in the region, which they believe is changing the regional power balance in favor of "resistance" groups at the expense of the US and its regional allies.[153]

Iranian regime as a religion-based system found a common ground with other Islamic movements across the region, regardless of sects; as both agreed upon the liberation of Palestine from sea to river, and the creation of an Islamic governance system in their countries. Hence, we can see the centrality of Islam as a religion and its different interpretation across the region in relation to war and peace, as regional coalitions and its relation with non-state actors are also revolving about that notion, alongside the role of sectarianism inside the Muslim world. Religiously- driven leaders from both Sunni and Shiite blocs are looking at the dispute from a more of a scriptures-related view than from a pragmatic and interest calculation one, as this pragmatic view became more tied now with the second axis, which is the Axis of Moderation.

3.2. The Axis of Moderation

On the other hand, the axis of moderation was built gradually after the 1979 Camp David Accord, as Egypt individually decided to go to peace negotiations with Israel. Years later, other Arab countries formally joined that path when the Saudis introduced their version of peace initiative at the 2002's Beirut Summit of the Arab League. The Saudi peace initiative was adopted by the organization in its final statement that set forward a path of peace with Israel based upon considering peace as the strategic choice for Arabs,

---

[153] Ibid, p. 24, 25.

and demanding Israel to consider it as such[154]. The Axis of Moderation evolved into including countries that were traditionally in the Axis of Resistance, as, over time, they turned into that axis which is more tolerant with the idea of coexistence with Israel, as culminated in the so-called Abraham Accords.[155]

This axis upgraded a more pragmatic views towards the existence of Israel based on a vision that Tel Aviv is not an enemy anymore for the Arabs, while the real threats are the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran. This axis is now having the ambitious leadership of the UAE that is embarking on a warmer relation with Israel and leading the way of normalization. In his interview with the Assistant of the US President for National Security and Counter-Terrorism Affairs, leaked by WikiLeaks, documented on April 29, 2006, Muhammad bin Zayed (also known as MBZ) expresses his fear of the issue of free elections, saying that "if elections are held in Dubai tomorrow, the Muslim Brotherhood will take over." On the other hand, bin Zayed believes that the challenge lies in finding a way to eliminate the extremists once and for all, one of the ways he and his brothers are trying to try, as the diplomatic cable's writer, former US ambassador Michelle Sisson explains, it is the reform of the education system that they say the Muslim Brotherhood has infiltrated since the late 1960s.[156]

It appears from the documents that bin Zayed holds this hostile stance even before the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, coinciding with the revolutionary movement that was followed by free elections that some Arab countries had not previously witnessed. Using this "Brotherhood scarecrow", Bin Zayed expressed to former US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns his strong reservations against the idea of free elections in the Middle East, noting that more democracy in the region will within a short time

[154] **Aljazeera.net**, "Articles of the Arab Peace Initiative", October 3rd, 2004, https://cutt.ly/gnGgdND (7 May 2020).

[155] **The US Ministry of State**, "The Abraham Accords Declaration", https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/ (March 20, 2020).

[156] **Al-Araby newspaper**, "Among the WikiLeaks papers... What bin Zayed fears that the Emiratis will know and stone him", (2/3), 12 July 2017, https://cutt.ly/2mdgODE (15 March 2020).

enable the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hezbollah. During the same meeting, recorded in the leaked documents on January 24, 2007, bin Zayed immediately focuses the discussion on the phenomenon of elections, and asks his American guest, invoking the victory of Hamas movement in the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006: "Why does the United States support elections in the Middle East?" While the results are visible in places like Palestine? Bin Zayed then follows up his question by saying that he does not agree with promoting elections "if we want to achieve peace" .

The Emirati official continues to repeat his idea to his American guest, saying: "In the post-9/11 world, you will see the same result in any Muslim country," and explains his point of view by saying: "While members of the US Congress and Senate are loyal to their countries and constituencies, the masses of the Middle East are more inclined to get carried away by their emotions and vote overwhelmingly for the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadists like Hamas and Hezbollah. There is no peace with Hamas and Iran's nuclear ambitions". US Ambassador Richard Olsen says: "Mohammed bin Zayed's preoccupation with Iran (and his secondary interest in Islamic fundamentalism) leads him to a strategic vision for the region that is strangely close to the Israeli vision".[157]

The aforementioned leaks support the arguments that the UAE is leading the axis of Moderation towards more tolerant relations with Israel, while framing Iran and political Islam as the new enemy. While some countries in this axis, like Egypt for example, doesn't necessarily recognize Iran as a direct enemy, it has a historical enmity with Islamism. Therefore, the main pillars and objectives of this axis can be traced as follows: 1. Peace as strategic choice in dealing with Israel; 2. Iran and Islamism as main threat to peace and stability of the region; 3. Preserving the status-quo of traditional regimes and resisting democratic change across the Arab World; 4. Preventing non-Arab countries from the interference in the region, namely Turkey and Iran.

---

[157] Ibid.

Attitude toward Western states	Attitude toward Political Islam	Attitude regarding liberalism	By leadership	Major involved actors formal/ informal alliance	International backer
(Conservative-) moderate	Anti-Muslim-Brotherhood	Conservative- (moderate)	Saudi/UAE-led	KSA, UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, *Yemeni Islah Party, Iraqi Islamic Party, Haftar's Libyan National Army*	USA
(Conservative-) resistance	Case-dependent	Conservative- (resistance)	Iran-led	Iran, Syria, *Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad (Hamas 1991–2011), PMF, Houthi movement*	(Soviet Union)/Russia
Moderate-resistance	Pro-Muslim-Brotherhood	Reform-minded	Turkey/Qatar-led	Turkey, Qatar, Tunisia (2011–2014), Egypt (2012–2013), Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), *Ennahda, SNC, FJP, FSA, JCP (Hamas 2012–2016)*	Russia/USA
Moderate	Anti-Muslim-Brotherhood	Reform-minded	Israel-led	Approaching countries from the conservative- moderate power bloc	USA/Russia

Table (3.1): Regional Subsystems in the Gulf Region and The Broader Middle East[158]

3.3. Turkish-led Axis

Some scholars tend to describe the Turkish-led axis in the Middle as a "moderate resistance axis"[159]; as this axis is resisting the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians in one hand, while inclined to use the peaceful and diplomatic means at the same time. Tying this axis vis-à-vis the Palestinian cause can also be traced back to the new Turkish foreign policy in the region, that became more engaged in the volatile issues of the region, since the flotilla incident that took place in March 2010 that resulted in the martyrdom of number of Turkish citizens, what underscored Turkey's changing role and rising influence in the region, with a rising interest in the Palestinian cause in the foreign policy of Ankara, comparing to previous Turkish governments. As we mentioned above, the Turkish-led axis

---

[158] P. O. Amour (ed.), **The Regional Order in the Gulf Region and the Middle East**, Palgrave, 1st edition, 2020, Switzerland, p.408, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45465-4_5 (5 March 2021).

[159] Ibid, p.131.

can be defined as a more tolerant to political Islam, and supportive of peoples' demands of freedoms, democracy and social justice since the Arab Spring.

The active Turkish role in the region can also be traced back to the Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), when Turkey, Iraq, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Iran formed the Baghdad Pact as a defensive coalition to promote similar political, military, and economic aims. The major goal of the Baghdad Pact, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, was to prevent communist intrusions and promote peace in the Middle East. After Iraq's withdrawal from the Pact in 1959, it was renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO. In 1954, Turkey and Pakistan inked an agreement to improve regional security and stability. Iraq and Turkey signed a "pact of mutual cooperation" in Baghdad in February 1955 to combat outside aggression, and they expanded it to include other countries in the region. In April, the United Kingdom announced its intention to join the Pact, which was quickly followed by Pakistan and then Iran. Jordan's King contemplated joining, but he was unable to overcome local opposition to the deal. The US signed individual agreements with each of the Pact's countries, but did not formally join. Instead, the US acted as an observer and participated in committee meetings.[160]

At that time, the Baghdad Pact was seen from the Arab Regimes as an Anglo-American quest from hegemony over the region, and to prevent it from falling into the Soviet hands, in the scope of the Northern Tier project. Following the Islamic revolution, Iran withdrew from CENTO on March 11, 1979, stating that it "primarily protected the interests of imperialist governments." On March 12, Pakistan followed suit, claiming that "the organization was not capable of protecting Pakistan's security," while Turkey declared the next day that "CENTO had effectively lost its function in the region."[161]

---

[160] **US department of State official website**, "The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)", 20 January 2001, https://bit.ly/3GD44zr (4 April 2020).

[161] Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, "CENTO: the forgotten alliance in the MiddleEast (1959-1979)", **Middle Eastern Studies,** (2020), 56:6, p. 868, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2020.1755841

Egypt at that time declared its objections to that Pact and described it as a Western-dominated entity, as Cairo wanted to establish an Arab unity under its leadership. Egypt promptly indicated that she would not join that defense organization, and she used this to exert pressure on other Arab countries. Turkey and Iraq's efforts were hampered by these factors. In January 1955, Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes paid visits to Damascus and Beirut. Syria declined to join the alliance that would be established, while Lebanon remained silent. Other Arab states opposed and compelled Iraq to withdraw from the treaty afterwards. With these political events, Turkey and Iraq signed a mutual cooperation agreement on February 24, 1955, resulting in the establishment of the Baghdad Pact.[162]

That Pact signaled one of the first Turkish attempts to engage in a collective defensive coalition in the region, even though it was not seen as an individual initiative from Ankara, but rather under a higher umbrella of the international powers within the global political competition between the East and the West in the course of the Cold War. After the devastating outcomes of the World War II, the regional powers in the Middle East searched from security and joining a collective security preparation in order to avoid any further challenges, as others preferred to join the then fledgling Non-Aligned Movement that was established in 1961, and led by number of countries, among them was Egypt. The relation between Turkey and other regional powers at that time was not close ones; as Turkey at that time was part of the Western alliance and was one of few Muslim countries that recognized Israel on 28 March 1949.[163]

On the other hand, the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel witnessed ebbs and flows on the course of the last two decades, when Ankara decided to become more active in the negotiation process between the two sides. Since the Annapolis conference held in the US in 2007, Turkey became more active in the peace process, as the then

---

[162] Özgür Yıldırım, **The Attitude of Egypt Towards Baghdad Pact**, Tarih ve Günce Atatürk ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi DergisiJournal of Atatürk and the History of Turkish Republic I/3, (2018Yaz), p. 135.

[163] Shamir Hassan, "Turkey's Israel Policy since 1945", Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Published by: **Indian History Congress**, Vol. 69 (2008), p.921.

Turkish foreign minister Ali Babacan of the AK Party attended the conference after a tour in the region, to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Israel. In 2003 and 2005, the former Minister of State Vehbi Dinçerler was designated as the Coordinator for Economic and Social Cooperation with Palestine, and an Action Plan was developed. In May of the same year, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) opened an office in Ramallah. Small and medium-sized projects have been launched to aid Palestine's development.[164]

Yet, we can't define the rising role of Turkey and its leadership of this axis in the region only by its foreign policy towards Palestine, as Ankara led a multi-dimensional policy towards the Middle East after the Arab uprising since 2011, as Ankara found itself forced to intervene in its unfolding transformations and aftermath, as a defensive aspect from one hand, and to fill the power gaps and vacuums left over after the collapse of the state systems after the Arab Spring from the other one. With their rapprochement with the Muslim Brotherhood in several Arab countries, Turkey and Qatar formed a new alliance to take advantage of the vacuum and develop an autonomous sphere of influence for themselves in the region, constituting the third axis. Despite the fact that their ambitious and revisionist foreign policy agenda was derailed during and after 2013, Turkey and Qatar continued to strive to find a middle ground between the two pre-existing poles and pursue their alternative regional strategy.[165]

This new-born axis propagates democracy and the incorporation of various social factions of Arab societies into the political process, as it is believed that both the Turkish model of governance and the outcomes of Aljazeera satellite channel paved the way to the Arab uprisings. The practical model of the AK party was supported by the Qatari model of social science institutions that broke the long-held taboos of the region, and challenged the enshrined model of dictatorship in the Arab's history. These institutions included media

---

[164] **Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs** official website, "Middle East Peace Process", https://bit.ly/33ITxny (May 2020).

[165] P. O. Amour (ed.), Op. Cit., p: 134.

outlets, think-tanks, Western universities and Islamic organization, that aimed to raise awareness and alleviate poverty and ignorance around the Arab world. The most notably impact was that of Aljazeera channel, that hosted political activists, experts in social science, and religious reformists from various currents around the Muslim World, which can be considered as the main tools that paved the way to the eruption of the popular uprising in the Arab capitals since late 2010, what become known as "Aljazeera Effect".[166]

Likewise, during the early months of instability after the Arab Spring, Qatar played a critical role in steering the wheel of events. Through the Doha-based Al Jazeera television network, it, to a far extent, shaped the growing protest narratives via its media powerhouse. On the institutional level, it also rallied Arab support, first for the UN intervention in Libya in March 2011 and then for Bashar al-Assad's regime's isolation in Syria, through the Arab League. Even as demonstrations spread across neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Qatar offered an appealing image as an outpost of security and prosperity at a time of major regional uncertainty. Qatar's rise to international prominence can be traced back to its country's possession of the world's third-largest liquefied natural gas reserves, as well as economic and financial policies geared to leverage those reserves.

These policies were created and implemented during the reign of Emir Hamad (1995–2013) and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, the country's energetic foreign minister (and prime minister from 2007 and 2013). These two individuals emerged as the architects of a bold internationalization strategy that catapulted Qatar into prominence as a key regional player. The measures also mirrored a broader set of regional foreign and security policies that Qatar has pursued. The challenges of maintaining peace in a volatile region and dealing with the vulnerabilities of a small state surrounded by larger and more powerful neighbors

---

[166] Hugh Miles, "The Al Jazeera Effect", **Foreign Policy Magazine**, 9 February 2011, https://bit.ly/3GFkpn5 (20 April 2020).

were among the most pressing ones, but Qatar, although of that, managed to preserve its independent and leading foreign policy around the region.[167]

Turkey, from the other hand, represented a practical model for the coexistence between Islamism and secularism in a highly charged community of identity politics, that long suffered from a deep state and military interventions in governance. The successful story of the AK Party in dismantling the military grip on power inspired many activists and thinkers alike around the Arab World, that challenged the status quo of the Arab regimes and that the violent dictatorial leaders can be faced with peaceful activism. Al-Jazeera, from the other hand, propagated reformist ideas and challenged the long-feared taboos of the Arab regimes, and dared to criticize dictators in the size of Mubarak and Bin-Ali. Aljazeera also hosted oppositions from various political spectrum around the Arab world, that spoke against internal politics and corruption in ruling elites, what affected the diplomatic relations with various Arab regimes that culminated in the siege of Doha in 2017.[168]

As a result, the roles of the two sides were deemed compatible and mutually supportive for the ideas of freedoms, dignity and social justice that soon became the main mottos of the Arab Spring. Peoples around the region started to believe that they can find solutions to their historically inherited political problems. The rapprochement between Ankara and Doha can be traced back to the early 2000s, when the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq paved the way to the Qatar and Turkey attempts to fill the regional power vacuum through the use of soft-power tools (2001–2011). But the ignition of the Arab Uprisings in the early 2010s came with serious challenges to the soft-power-oriented policies of the two countries.

During the initial period of the Arab Uprisings, between 2011 and 2013, Ankara and Doha's regional policies faced the first major challenge, as they had to choose between

---

[167] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Qatar and The Arab Spring: Policy Drivers and Regional Implications**", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, 2014, p.4.

[168] Haitham M. Alkhateeb, Ed., **Qatar: Political, Economic, And Social Issues**, Nova Science Publishers, 2019, p. 266.

maintaining their previous stance, which mostly prioritized friendly relations with existing regimes, or lending their support to popular demonstrations at the expense of the ruling regimes. After some hesitation, Turkey and Qatar chose the second method and, as a result, supported popular uprisings against authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, among other places, in the name of democracy and human rights.[169]

Some scholars argue that the AK Party's interest in the Middle East and the Muslim world goes back to a hidden Islamist agenda for the party that came from a pro-Islamist tradition, and the main foreign policy objective for the AK Party elite is not EU membership, but rather, leadership in the Muslim World, given their "solidarity with Islamist causes and regimes". On the other hand, some argue that Turkey's interest in the region is mainly driven by economic considerations, and Ankara's desire to attract foreign investments and gain access to new markets. The security issues are present in the analysis of Turkey's strategy towards the region as well, as it aims to have a foothold in northern Iraq and now in northern Syria in order to disrupt any plans for making a Kurdish independent state or any political entity that may jeopardize the Turkish security. A fourth vision argues that the main objective of Turkey is to become a global power and is drifting away from the West to make its own circle of hegemony by the expansion in the dominance or political vacuums around the region.[170]

As the heir of the Ottoman Empire, we can imagine that Turkey as a rising Middle Power[171] in international politics can pursue all or some of those objectives in the region, as Ankara was steadily expanding both its soft and hard power since years, while cementing its relations with various Arab countries with maritime and military bases in the waterways

---

[169] Ibid, p. 148.

[170] Özlem Demirtaş Bagdonas, "A Shift of Axis in Turkish Foreign Policy or A Marketing Strategy?", **Turkish Journal of Politics**, Vol. 3, No. 2 Winter 2012, p. 114, 115.

[171] For more about regional and Middle Power in international relations, see: Holbraad, Carsten, **Middle Powers in International Politics**, London: Macmillan, 1984, and: Hasan Basri Yalçın, "The Concept of "Middle Power" and the Recent Turkish Foreign Policy Activism", **Afro Eurasian Studies**, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring 2012, 195-213.

of the Middle East starting from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Eden to the Red Sea into Libyan costs and the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Turkey's capabilities as a regional economic and political powerhouse was at the core of a new strategic vision that emerged first under Turgut Ozal's governments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and then became prominent in the foreign policy of the conservative AK Party governments starting from 2002. Some analysis sees this idea as enacting a new national identity and turning it into foreign policy by leveraging historical, cultural, and religious linkages to former Ottoman territories. Turkey's potential as a regional great power and (eventually) as a middle-range power in the international system was evaluated for the new strategic vision. Main political thinkers, such as Ahmet Davutoglu, who has been a key architect of Ankara's foreign policy since the Ak Party first came to power, believe that Turkey, as a critical state, can and should play a prominent diplomatic, political, and economic role in the vast region in which it is situated.[172]

Since the Arab uprisings, the Turkish model was prominent in the imagination of the activists around the Arab world, even among those who are against the Islamist model, as they saw in the Turkish model a modernized version of Islamism that is aptly coexist with the secularism in the country, a model that focuses more on politics and economy rather than ideology and identity politics. Egyptian Coptic activist Naguib Sawiris, for example, who is the founder of the Free Egyptians Party (Hizb al-Masryeen al-Ahrar), said in a conference in London after the 2011 revolution in Egypt that "If the Muslim Brotherhoods applies the Turkish model, I'll be the first to say: long-live Islam".[173]

Aside from the abovementioned objectives of Turkey in the region, Ankara found itself obliged to resist the counter revolutions current that is trying to fail democratic transition

---

[172]Lars Haugo, **Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan: A change in international orientation?** in: Rahat Shah, Wang Li. (2020) **Rationales behind Pakistan–Turkey relations since September 11, 2001**. The Round Table, 109:5, p. 209, 210.

[173] **Al-Masry Alyoum newspaper, "**Sawiris: If the Muslim Brotherhood applies the Turkish model, I will be the first to say, "Long live Islam"", 24th May 2011, https://bit.ly/3IbC46j (1 August 2021).

around the Arab world, and reached Turkey itself in a failed coup that occurred in 15 July 2016. Since then, Ankara expanded its hard power deployment and the reach of its operations in northern Syria, northern Iraq, and Libya. The two sides, Turkey and Qatar, found common grounds in the volatile issues of the Middle East, as both sides encouraged the integration of Islamists in local and regional politics, considering them as integral part of the regional politics.

The Turkish-Qatari cooperation reached its peak in the military cooperation by building the first military base in the Middle East for Ankara on the Qatari soil. The mission's goal is to help Qatar improve its defense capabilities and increase military cooperation. The mission's highest-ranking officer is a brigadier general. In addition to aviation and naval troops, the Turkish military includes trainers and special operations personnel. The station will also help with anti-terrorist and international peacekeeping missions. In 2018, Turkey and Qatar announced a deal for Turkey to build a naval facility in Qatar's northwestern region.[174]

Under Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Turkey and Sudan signed bilateral agreements in 2017 to expand military cooperation and create a docking facility for navy and civilian vessels in the coastal city of Suakin. Following President al- Bashir's fall from power, it is unclear how the transitional administration will treat existing agreements with Turkey. As a result of bilateral agreements with the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Turkey operates hundreds of military bases in and around Bashiqa, training Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni Arab fighters. The Turkish military undertakes reconnaissance and intelligence mission's south of the Syrian border, as well as training and equipping local allies. The military operation there aims to confront the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. Turkey has more than ten monitoring sites around the Syrian province of Idlib.[175]

---

[174] Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, "Excursus: Turkey's Military Engagement Abroad", **Centre for Applied Turkey Studies**, December 16, 2020, https://bit.ly/3rW6Sku (5 April 2021).

[175] Ibid.

To the east from the Egyptian border in Libya's capital of Tripoli, Turkish troops trained and advised the Government of National Accord (GNA) forces. They also provided information about the movements of the rebellious local militias of retired general Khalifa Hafter. Turkish troops were led by a two-star general, who is the highest-ranking commander currently deployed in a cross-border military operation. The major goal was to increase capacity of the local police and army forces. South to the Horn of Africa at the southern tip of the Middle East, Turkish troops exist also in Mogadishu's Camp TURKSOM for training Somali Armed Forces leaders and soldiers, and assisting the Somali government in developing a national military force. This military installation also supplies the country's coast guard and navy with vital equipment.[176]

Consequently, this axis is vying for influence and power in this region which is considered the legacy of the Ottoman Empire from one hand, and the core of the Muslim World from the other, as all factions are competing to impose their vision and different interpretations of Islam and its role in governance and in its relation to the state and public sphere, as political Islam and its activism still at the core of the current debates, as it is considered as a Revisionist Power among the Muslim World that want to challenge the current local, regional and international preparation after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

3.4. The Overlapping Sunni Shiites Rivalry

Other than geopolitical transformations mentioned in this study, the region may witness a major repercussion as a result of the depletion of oil, or at least the slowing demand for it comparing to other sources of cheap or clean energy. The energy discovery in the US that put it on the world throne of energy, exceeding Russia and Saudi Arabia, may result in enormous ramifications for the region, starting from the Gulf region. The oil-based economies of most of the Gulf countries may face a social and political unrest and a long period of turmoil and instability, that will not affect only the Gulf states, but will also go

---

[176] Ibid.

beyond to states like Egypt that has around 5 million workers in the Gulf, 36% of them in Saudi Arabia.[177]

Internal conflicts between ethnic and religious groups arbitrarily assembled into states (now collapsing); and domestic pressures stemming from detrimental political, social, and economic domestic policies confront the Sunni Middle East camp. Shiite-ruled Iran and its legacy of Persian imperialism; ideologically and religiously radical movements seeking to overthrow existing political structures; internal conflicts between ethnic and religious groups arbitrarily assembled into states (now collapsing); and domestic pressures stemming from detrimental political, social, and economic.[178]

As for the nuclear deal with Western powers, Tehran's regional rivals will not stand by and let Iranian influence to grow unchecked. Despite sharing a number of objectives, Turkey and Iran are natural rivals. Although Kurdish confinement is a common objective, the Kurds are sometimes exploited to undermine one another. While Turkey is primarily Sunni and Iran is mostly Shiite, it is vital to recognize that both Ankara and Tehran want to rule over a mostly Arab region. For many Arabs, the choice between Turkish and Persian control is like to deciding between drowning and self-immolation.

Unlike Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran share few, if any, common interests. The kingdom is a Sunni Arab nation, and the Wahhabism sect of Islam to which most Saudis subscribe views Shiites with deep suspicion. Saudi Arabia, with a Shiite minority of 10% to 15% of its population and Iraq no longer serving as a bulwark against Iran's goals, or sees itself as being on the front lines of the confrontation with Iran. Because the Iranians are already attempting to agitate Saudi minority communities, the Saudis will very certainly try to empower an autonomous Kurdistan capable of influencing regional economic and security issues - despite the fact that aiding the Kurds will strain Riyadh's ties with Ankara. After

---

[177] **Al-Youm Al-Sabea**, "Map of Egyptian Workers Abroad", 5 April 2021, (28 August 2021) https://bit.ly/3yupidT.

[178] Henry A. Kissinger, "A Path Out of the Middle East Collapse", **The Wall Street Journal**, October 16, 2015, https://cutt.ly/VnDm3Op (15 March 2020).

all, despite the fact that both countries are Sunni, Saudi Arabia has almost as little interest in seeing Turkey rule the Middle East as Iran.

Egypt is an Arab Sunni power, like Saudi Arabia, but it is far more restrained in its actions than either Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Egypt is grappling with major internal challenges as it attempts to reverse a subsidy regime, quell civil unrest, and deal with several Islamist threats. Nonetheless, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have intensified their collaboration in recent years, and they may try to pool their resources to safeguard the Middle East's Arab heartland. Cairo is aiming to maintain a key role in the regional alignment by developing a joint Arab defense force, which might easily become part of this plan. Overall, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt will increasingly use various factions to battle with one another for regional influence in the Middle East.[179]

Conclusion

The Middle East region is witnessing a competition over power and hegemony, especially after the American withdrawal from the region and the expected isolationist policy that it may pursue after its self-sufficiency of energy as becoming one of the leading energy exporting countries in the world, and consequently, hence the decline of the importance of the region in the US foreign policy priorities. Role of Islam and its interpretation vis-à-vis governance and its role in public sphere still witnessing competition between various coalitions in the region, starting from a Shiite vision from Iran to a Sunni vision of the Muslim Brotherhood, into a more secular vision of Islam from other countries, mainly in the Axis of Moderation.

The core of the competition is revolving around securing the governing elites around the Arab World, that want to insulate their ruling class, family or ranks from the wrath of the people in the Arab Spring, hence unleashed a counter revolution to overcome the revolutionary tide and to resist the demands of change, either from democratic, social or

---

[179] **Stratfor**, "The Middle Eastern Competition for Influence", Sep 1, 2015, https://cutt.ly/BnDWoVL (7 April 2020).

political one around the region. Classifying the region into three main axis resembles the vying blocks for hegemony over the regional politics, while the issues of interpretations of Islam and the stance from Israeli existence still govern the relations and the formations of coalitions in the region.

In the coming chapters we will try to analyze the impact of the abovementioned geopolitical transformations on the coalition building process around the region, and trying to re-categorize the main coalitions in a more normative manner, that may present a roadmap to the regional decision makers. We are already witnessing many transformations in the coalition building process as a result of the current transformations. But, on the other hand, the classification of alliances in the region into only three alliances may be more arbitrary than a scientific classification; considering the rapid transformations in the map and networks of alliances in the region.

We are also witnessing a transition from states, especially smaller ones, from one alliance to another, and there is a phenomenon that has become worrying for some traditional forces, which is the increase in the geopolitical importance of Israel to become a leader in a network of new alliances that is not based on ideology or religion, but goes beyond that. It is based on achieving quick and short-term interests, despite the repercussions of this on collective security and the cohesion of the region. It also ignores the most important and historical issues of the Arab and Islamic worlds, especially the Palestinian issue. However, Israel's leadership of a new axis seemed to become a reality, given that Tel Aviv is intertwined with security and energy issues in the eastern Mediterranean and new projects in the Red Sea that depend on advanced technology in the fields of clean and renewable energy.

Therefore, the transformations of energy patterns and their future manifestations will be an important factor that determines the shape of future alliances, especially after the that may be played by advanced technologies in determining the power projection of the states in the near future, as Gulf countries are now vying for the post-oil era with unique and advanced technological projects in this field. The region is also turning the page of

traditional and all out wars, entering the era of militias and proxy wars. We may also witness the rising role of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) into the arena of conflict, hence, the competition for taking the lead in that field, especially between Turkey and Israel on the one hand, as well as the entry of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt into the fields of military manufacturing of advanced, fast-moving, lightweight and low-cost weapons which is now being used in conflict areas in the Middle East, starting from Syria and Libya to Yemen and eastern Arabia, which will also contribute to increasing the pace of conflict between regional powers in the form of future alliances in the Middle East.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACT OF GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATION ON REGIONAL COALITIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, we will try to analyses the effects of the geopolitical shifts, which we discussed in Chapter 2, on the process of making regional coalitions in the Middle East. Over the past few years, we have seen shifts in the networks of regional coalitions, the transition of states from one coalition to another, disintegrations within the same coalition, the rise and fall of regional powers, interventions by regional and international powers in the Middle East, the rise of militias and non-state actors, and the support of regional states for those Militias in the context of proxy wars. The transformations in the fields of energy have also been reflected in the foreign policies of countries in the region, especially with the Gulf states preparing for the post-oil era with projects in the fields of renewable and clean energy, and competition even among allies within the same axis, as we saw in the Saudi-Emirati case, as we witnessed the repercussions of this in the formulation of new alliances that were not imaginable from within the Arab world with Israel, which was replaced by Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood as the most important enemies of the Arab world, by allying with non-Arab powers in the face of the Iranian rise.

The effects of the US withdrawal from the region also appeared in the form of coalitions as well. As the regional powers began to bear the burdens of imposing security and the consequent process of an arms race and participating in advanced weapons production projects with some regional and international powers, especially in tactical areas such as manufacturing drones and producing short-range anti-missiles, as we also witnessed a new coalition in a new geographic area within the Middle East. It is the coalition of the countries bordering the Red Sea, after the regional powers realized the importance of that navigation course in international politics, as a means to impose security on the one hand, and as a means to repel what they considered interference by non-Arab powers in the

Middle East, from the other hand, which pushed the Egyptian-Emirati alliance in the fields of armaments to new limits. The UAE participated in the inauguration of two Egyptian military bases, one on the Red Sea and the second on the Mediterranean, reflecting the interest of these countries in imposing power and influence to inaugurate a new defensive arc extending from the Persian Gulf through the Red Sea ending with the Mediterranean on the Libyan border.

We can also examine, through the geopolitical transformations mentioned in the previous chapters, the beginning of the decline of the ideological umbrellas that have long worked to unite the Arab World, as it is now replaced with networks of tactical and short-term interests, with the accompanying shakes of the belief system and collective values through media wars. The UAE, for example, worked to dismantle ideological systems, namely Islamism, while, at the same time, promoting for a warmer peace relation with Israel that aims at integrating it into the Arab World. Inaugurating peace agreements with Tel Aviv followed by media campaigns in the state-owned, and Emirati sponsored media outlets, to pave the way for deeper trade partnership with Israel, a step that was, until date, not welcomed even by its major ally, Saudi Arabia, what may have a great repercussion on the relations between both sides within their coalition in the region.

In this chapter, we will discuss four main subjects, which we consider the most important manifestations that occurred in the past few years as a result of the aforementioned geopolitical transformations; namely 1) Liquidity of Coalitions in the Middle East; 2) Absence of Ideological umbrella for coalitions; 3) The rise of the use of hard power and armed interventions; 4) the centrality of the interpretation of Islam vis-à-vis politics as a determinant for coalition building and regional competition.

4.1. Liquidity of Coalitions in the Middle East

Due to the recent upheavals that occurred in the Middle East, especially after the Arab Uprisings, regional powers, namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Turkey, felt threatened, and hence started to wage preemptive military interventions outside its borders. In the

region, solid blocs do not exist, and alliances are formed based on fear and new forms of threat perception rather than shared identity or a common objective. One-time occurrences alter people's perceptions of what or who poses a threat, demonstrating how short-term coalitions focused on a specific subject can spread. They're fluid coalitions that adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Rivalries are also becoming more fluid. Actors who have previously been at odds band together to combat a specific threat without recognizing one other as comrades.[180]

In alliances and rivalries, the solid and liquid coexist. Alliances that last a lifetime are uncommon. On multiple war frontlines, former foes collaborate while ostensible partners face off. It's a time of fleeting reconciliations and brief conflicts. To avoid becoming lost, it's important to focus on the events that cause a shift in perceptions of who or what represents an existential threat. These facts alter the pace of a dance of alliances that takes place on three levels: local, regional, and global. It's a game in which a variety of players take part, including regional organizations, governments, and transnational political groupings, and militias are just a few examples. Some regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia and possibly Iran, continue to seek to be the leaders of stable blocs. Other actors, on the other hand, wish to maintain their liberty in order to adapt to new conditions and avoid being left behind. Their behavior is less predictable, there is a climate of suspicion, and there is a possibility of abrupt shifts and defensive reactions. The fluid nature of alliances is contributing to making the Middle East and North Africa a more unstable and unpredictable region.[181]

When a major regional power faces a crisis, like Egypt after the 2011 revolution, or Saudi Arabia after the succession crisis inside the house of Saud, they start to behave in an isolationist manner, trying to consolidate pillars of their internal governance and control conflicts that could undermine the state, hence, negatively affect its regional policies. We

---

[180] Eduard Soler i Lecha, "Liquid Alliances in The Middle East", notes internacionals CIDOB 169, Barcelona **Centre for International Affairs**, MARCH 2017, p. 1.

[181] Ibid, p. 6.

have witnessed this in the Egyptian case, where Cairo lost its ability to regional deterrence, which encouraged Ethiopia, for example, to build the Renaissance Dam in a blatant defiance of Egypt. Also, the crisis of the post of the crown prince within the House of Saud undermined Saudi efforts in its war against the Houthis in Yemen, as most of the attention was directed to the security services inside the kingdom in anticipation of rouge family members that may launch a palace coup, especially after Prince Muhammad bin Salman launched a soft coup against Prince Muhammad bin Nayef and removed him from the throne heir, followed by widespread arrests within the royal family, and then the conflict also escalated over the leadership of security institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and the National Guard in order to ensure their loyalty to the Saudi king and the new crown prince. Although Egypt has maintained the strength of its army and developed it in recent years with weapons and equipment, and added new military bases in both the Red Sea and its western borders on the Mediterranean, the fragile internal conditions still represent a crisis for the military institution and handcuffs it from extending its power and fighting long-term foreign wars; whether along the Nile Valley or to face any threats on the western front with the Libyan border.

On the other hand, the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) is one of the most daring attempts to form a stable coalition. Despite the fact that it has had the full support of Washington since it was originally announced during US President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017, it continues to face impediments that prevent it from becoming a reality. The alliance, according to the Riyadh Declaration, contributes to "regional and global peace and security." It aspires to incorporate all GCC members—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—as well as Egypt, Jordan, and the United States. The primary focus of the concept is security. However, it has increasingly acquired economic and political components as well. It joins a crowded field

of regional alliances that exist in practice, on paper, while its materialization is still far from their reach.[182]

Another coalition in the region that has an international recognition with participation of many countries of the Middle East and worldwide is the Global Coalition Against Daesh that was established in September 2014 and is unique in terms of membership, scale, and commitment. The Global Coalition is dedicated to weakening and ultimately defeating Daesh as a whole. The 83 members of the Coalition are dedicated to defeating Daesh on all fronts, eliminating its networks, and fighting its worldwide ambitions. Beyond the military campaign in Iraq and Syria, the Coalition is committed to: disrupting Daesh's financial and economic infrastructure; preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders; assisting in the stabilization and restoration of essential public services in Daesh-free areas; and combating the group's propaganda[183]. Coalitions can be geopolitical, and their loosely organized nature allows for isolated and temporary collaboration in the context of shared goals. This brings together states that aren't always cordial with one another (for example, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates [UAE], Turkey, and Egypt are all members of this coalition).

Coalitions with a clearly stated but limited aim, as well as a reasonably open-access method for members to opt in or out of certain operations, provide members with a competitive edge. They can also act as a deterrent against the perception of explicit direct involvement in military operations abroad, particularly in a disputed region – a problem Western powers frequently face as they try to manage domestic ramifications. States can utilize the coalition as a front to wash their hands of apparent unilateral engagement in other countries, or they can benefit from the anonymity that the coalition front provides, thereby decreasing their perceived irrationality, given also the religious nature of the

---

[182] Yasmine Farouk, "The Middle East Strategic Alliance Has a Long Way to Go", **Carnegie Middle East Center**, February 2019.

[183] The official website of the coalition, https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/ (9 August 2021).

dispute that is preferred to be kept concealed to avoid irritating further sectarianism in the region.[184]

4.2. Absence of Ideological Umbrella for Coalitions

In coalition building process, what Stephen Walt called as "Ideological Solidarity" can represent a base for wielding alliances. Walt defines it as "ideological solidarity as a tendency for states with similar internal traits to prefer alignment with one another to alignment with states whose domestic characteristics are different"[185]. Walt studied the role of ideology in inter-Arab politics, focusing on the ethnic solidarity of the Arab states against Israel; the divisive ideology of Pan-Arabism; and the monarchical solidarity among the conservative Arab states. Despite that the Middle East was defined as a separate region in International Relations, still, many commentators and scholars are debating whether to label it as a homogenous region or not, while others consider the wider region that includes most of the Muslim countries of Middle East and North Africa as more homogenous according to the culture and political ideologies emanating from the history of Islam and its practice over the past centuries.

Trade networks (including the slave trade) and religion (the introduction of Islam) have long linked Africa and the Middle East, dating back to the seventh century. More pertinent to the theme of regional security, according to Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, is that they share a long and ambiguous border through the Sahara, where there is significant security interaction. Both have been through decolonization, and as a result, many of them are weak states with shallow roots. However, this merely makes them a part of a larger third world.[186] Historically rooted political ideas of Islam still cast its shadow on the current

---

[184] Roudabeh Kishi and Kars De Bruijne, "Special Focus On Coalition Forces in The Middle East", **Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED),** 31 July 2018, https://bit.ly/3fIRyTF (9 August 2021).

[185] Stephen Walt, *the Origin of Alliances*, Op. cit., p. 181.

[186] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, **Regions and Powers the Structure of International Security**, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2003, p. 185.

political and regional affairs of the Middle East, which some scholars name it "the region without regionalism" or a space of weak regionalism, due to its lack of coherence in terms of economic and political integration.[187]

Buzan and Wæver also suggest that the structure of the Middle East is riddled with still powerful premodern elements of clan, tribe, and religion[188]. The main historical soft power cohesion tools in the region were both religion, and later on the ideology of Arab Nationalism. Empires occupied and ruled this region for centuries before the rise of the nation state in the West in the nineteenth century. Imitating the nation state in the Middle East faced many challenges, as the religious and sectarian bonds still dominant on forging the political and social values around the region. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire opened the door to a long period of turmoil and instability, as the regional new-born states after the end of colonization era started to search for a collective identity and ideological alternative to the old empires. The notion of Arab Nationalism was born from within the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, as it struggled to find an ideological cohesion tool to bring about a new regional order.[189]

The experiences of unity among regional states were rare and short lived, even under the ideological alternatives for the Caliphate or the Ottoman Empire, like the Arab Nationalism with its variation of Baathism or Nasserism. Historically, residents of the Fertile Crescent lived under a variety of overlapping power and political frameworks until the late nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire, Islam, and local tribal and village organizations all fought for and controlled different aspects of people's life. While the decline of the Ottoman Empire, imperialism, and new ideas of nationalism all combined resulted in the undermine of local political structures and identities, great power intrusions were primarily responsible for unleashing statist and transnational forces that created a chasm between

---

[187] Paul Aarts, "The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism**?", Third World Quarterly**, 20, no.5 (October 1999.), pp: 911–925

[188] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, Op. cit., p. 187.

[189] Michael N. Barnett, "Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System", **International Organization**, MIT Press, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer, 1995), p. 492.

where political authority should be based and the political loyalties of the people in the region. Specifically, while the major powers built a new geopolitical map, the residents' political affiliations encircled these limits and called into question the map's legitimacy.[190]

No misconception about the Middle East is more widespread, in both the east and the west, than the notion that the region's politics must be understood in terms of universal and all-explaining "cultural" principles. Culture, which is generally a nebulous phrase at best, is now being used to include a variety of phenomena in political culture, such as attitudes toward power and wealth, as well as trust, all of which are grouped under the heading of 'Islam.' All analyses of politics and power should and do include consideration of values and perceptions. Any attempt to categorize the region in terms of political or sociological categories, however, will run across this phenomenon, which is not so much a measured application of culture as a comprehensive explanatory framework. Furthermore, such ostensibly all-encompassing notions are widely promoted throughout the region as seen from the outside.[191]

Many of the most influential studies of Middle Eastern politics and international relations are concerned with the importance of culture and ideology in forming the region, which is understandable. This subject is addressed in the classic argument on capitalism in Islam, whether by Max Weber, Karl Marx, or Maxime Rodinson. Some works are legitimate intellectual histories, such as histories of nationalism or Islamic political theory. More recently, in IR, 'constructivist' writers on the region have suggested that the policies of regional governments can also be understood through value systems.[192]

On the other hand, any regional analysis, including that of the Middle East, requires a definition of "region." There has been a trend to downplay geographic characteristics of areas in favor of political and ideological ones. Regions are thus "socially produced and

---

[190] Ibid.

[191] Fred Halliday**, The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology**, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1st Ed, 2005, p. 193.

[192] Ibid, p. 194.

politically contested," according to Katzenstein[193]. Scholars emphasize several factors for becoming or becoming a region when defining regions. Geographic proximity, social and cultural homogeneity, political institutions, and economic interconnectedness, for example, were all highlighted by Russett[194]. Geographical proximity, social and cultural homogeneity, political institutions, and economic interconnectedness are all factors that influence economic interdependence, while other scholars consider geographic proximity, shared historical, cultural, and linguistic linkages, as well as international exchanges, to be essential for the concept of a region.[195]

Given that the region has a common historical experience and Arab-Muslim identity represents a very high degree of cultural, religious, and linguistic homogeneity, the Middle East has the potential to be regarded as a region, taking into account cultural and religious commonalities. The presence of transnational actors like Islamists, migrants, and business communities has also helped to identify the region, as evidenced by broad family and tribal relationships across borders and the presence of homogenous value system. Furthermore, the development of a well-integrated Arab media market has resulted in the creation of an Arab public sphere.[196]

Despite all of these commonalities, the states of the region failed to make a viable regional political, security or economic regional system that reflect these commonalities, especially after the Arab uprisings that resulted in the collapse of state authority vis-à-vis sectarian, racial and tribal bonds. The last viable regional bond was the Ottoman Empire, that controlled the region under the banner of Islam as a broad umbrella for the majority of the population. Arab nationalism also failed in integrating the states of the region under a

---

[193] Katzenstein, J. Peter (ed), 1997. "Introduction: Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective." In "**Network Power: Japan and Asia",** edited by J. Peter Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, 1–47. Ithaca N.Y: Cornell University Press.

[194] Russett, Bruce M. 1970. **International Regions and International Systems**. Chicago: Rand-McNally.

[195] Ayşegül Sever, "Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East", **E-International Relations**, ISSN 2053-8626, 12th October 2018, p.2.

[196] Ibid.

viable regional order that can lead to a deeper cohesion on economic, political or social level. The successful forms of regionalism, as discussed earlier, are the one that can result in viable political institutions, and economic interconnectedness, in a context of geographical proximity, social and cultural homogeneity.

With the struggle over interpretation of Islam and its role in public spheres, and the failure of Arab Nationalism, a new suggestion for a Greater Middle East came into light in 2003, as a substitute for the previous ideological umbrella, that can assimilate Israel as a viable member of that new regional order. The then national security adviser to the president Bush, and later the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, wrote an article[197] entitled "Transforming the Middle East" comparing the transformation of Europe by the US after the WWII with the current situation in the Middle East, as the ideological component represented a cornerstone of this new vision for the region. As President Bush said in a speech: "The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life"[198]. Hence, the Bush administration worked to propagate democratic values across the region to replace previous ideologies, as a bases for the New Middle East, starting with "transformed Iraq as the key element of a very different Middle East in which the ideologies of hate will not flourish".[199]

Various parties inside the region have attempted to impose alternate orders on the Middle East based on ideology. A Middle East coalition led by Iran and included Syria, Hizballah, and Hamas, as well as a number of Iraqi forces, attempted to eject US influence and join a broad regional alliance opposed to the US and at war with Israel. Iran was unable to conceal its Shi'i identity, resulting in Sunni–Shi'i tensions in Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, and a Sunni backlash against Iran. Iran's attempt to take a

---

[197] Condoleezza Rice, "Transforming the Middle East", **The Washington Post**, August 7, 2003, https://wapo.st/389SfRO (4 May 2021).

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

leadership role in the Arab world, similar to Egypt's in the 1960s, became mired in Arab–Persian tensions. After the Arab uprisings, the Ideology of Islamism tried to substitute the Arab Nationalism, in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and elsewhere. Vying for hegemony across the region, the different political Islamic parties and militias alike tried to impose their vision of Islam in governance, supported by various regional actors, that resulted in an era of extended ideological wars, and proxy wars on the ground, that still believed to shape the future of the Middle East for years to come.

In the absence of a dominant ideology that can unite the region, in parallel with the absence of the ability to establish a viable political and economic institutions that can pave the way to a solid regionalism, vying for the dominance and hegemony over the power vacuums across the region will continue, that can lead to the rise of the use of hard power and armed interventions at the midst of liquidity of coalitions and the centrality of Islam and its interpretation over the coalition-making process in the whole Middle East.

4.3. Rise of Armed Interventions and Use of Hard Power

Since the American-led occupation of Iraq, the region has witnessed a rising number of conflicts and armed interventions, with an escalation in the number of militias from different factions, sects and races. The Arab uprisings, from the other hand, led to the collapse of the state authority in some countries of the region, that is already considered as one of the most volatile areas in the world. Historically, the Israeli occupation of Arab lands since 1948 put the whole Middle East on a state of alert; as Israel continued to occupy Arab lands from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine since its 1967 aggression, and attacked the Iraqi nuclear plant in 1981. The proliferation of armed militias after the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the Syrian civil war and the Yemeni revolution since 2011 add new security threats to the already volatile map. In this section we will follow a more quantitative method to support our argument, tracing the rise of armed interventions and use of hard power by various actors, state and non-state ones in the region.

The end of the World War II in 1948, and the declaration of Israeli independent in 1948, they both mark the beginning of conflicts in the middle East, that has been considered as a place afflicted with struggle and confrontation, with the most distinguished of these conflicts being the Arab-Israeli wars, the Iran-Iraq war, and the first (1991) and second (2003) Gulf Wars. These have been joined by conflicts and civil wars in Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Jordan, Oman, Yemen, and Lebanon, in addition to border disputes which include those of Egypt and Libya, Jordan and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, Iraq and Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and others. Many of those conflicts are the result of colonial legacies and the fragility of the countries that emerged in their wake. Competing ideologies, ethnic and religious tensions, competition between regional powers, and the rise of autocratic states are all among plausible reasons for the proliferation of battles inside the region.[200]

In addition to these conflict zones, the Iranian reemergence with Islamic Shiite identity after the 1979 revolution added another threat to the region from its core. Recent attacks on the rich Gulf countries from Iran and its proxies represents another major threat to the stability of the Middle east. Suffering from US sanctions on oil exports and different severe measures, Iran conducted a series of escalation and provocations in its western neighborhood intended to inflict heavy toll on Gulf states allied with America. Tehran and its allied militia in Yemen launched calibrated, although deniable, rocket attacks on strategic facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Its navy also committed number of harassments in the strait of Hormuz against Western and Gulf countries' interests, along with the seizure of oil tankers to emphasize its ability to disrupt its neighbors' oil exports if its own exports had been sanctioned.

There were no casualties in the early stages of this counter-pressure campaign, and global reactions were geared toward de-escalation, in part due to widespread skepticism of the Trump administration and the fear of an unintended escalation that may slide into all-out war. The US was hesitant to begin a new operation in the Middle East, which US

---

[200] Mora Deitch and Carmit Valensi, "Violent Conflicts in the Middle East: A Quantitative Perspective", **INSS Research Forum**, Strategic Assessment, Volume 23, No. 1, January 2020, p. 21.

President Donald Trump considered as unnecessary ingesting, reflecting a growing consensus in Washington. Shiite militias' terror campaign culminated in September 2019 with spectacular drone and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil refining complex and the Khurais oilfield.[201]

The Arab Peninsula was traditionally considered as a safe area, after the Saudi family controlled most of its core, as Riyadh fulfilled the hegemonic stability over the region, as being the core and the leader of a sub-regional system of its own. But the latest escalation with Tehran proved that even the eastern region of the Arab Peninsula is not safe. The eastern coast of the Peninsula is considered as the core of the region's wealth and prestige, while the southern parts became volatile as well after the Operation Decisive Storm led by Saudi Arabia, and the counter attacks from the Houthis that made Yemen as a launching pad to threaten the religious core of Saudi Arabia, where the holly places of Mecca and Medina are located.

While the current trend of armed confrontations in the region refer to an increasing pattern of proxy wars rather than conventional ones, the situation can escalate rapidly into full confrontation between states, especially in the case of a major US retreatment from the Gulf. On the next table we can see figures depict a peak in state-based disputes between 1979 and 1988, followed by a drop in the number of conflicts overall. This downward trend has reversed after 2011, and 2019 is the first year since 2007 that the number of state-based disputes has decreased. At the same time, the total number of state-based conflicts has stabilized at a higher level than ever before in the last five years. Interstate conflict is still a rare occurrence. In the Middle East, there were ten state-based conflicts in 2019. (1 interstate war, 5 civil wars, and 4 internationalized civil wars). This is a decline from 2018, when there were 12 state-based conflicts, the most since 1946. 2018 was the first year in the Middle East since 1991 that there was a confrontation between two states (Iran and Israel). This was not a direct combat between the two countries (as was the case during the Iran-

---

[201] Nigel Gould-Davies, **Strategic Survey 2020: The Annual Assessment of Geopolitics**, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, 2020, p. 265.

Iraq war), but it did occur in Syria, when both governments assaulted each other's positions. In 2019, the fighting continued, with all assaults in Syria being documented, as in 2018.[202]
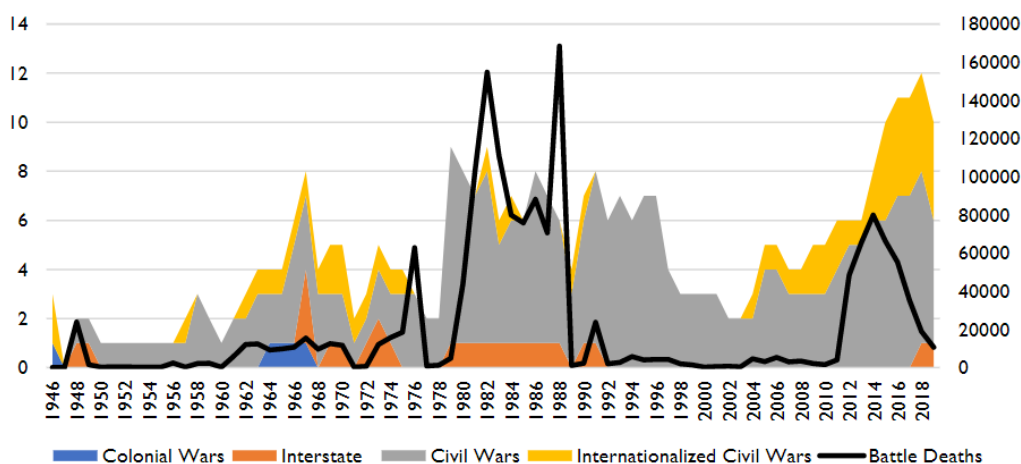
Figure 1: Battle deaths and state-based conflicts in the Middle East, by conflict type, 1946–2019
Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Database, UCDP Battle Death Database (Petterson & Öberg 2020) and Lacina and Gleditsch Battle Death Database

Graph (4.1): Battle deaths and state-based conflicts in the Middle East, by conflict type, 1946–2019[203]

In the Middle East, there were seven states with active armed conflicts in 2020, among them were Egypt (low-intensity, subnational armed conflict), Iraq (low-intensity, subnational armed war), Israel (internationalized civil war) (low-intensity, extra-state armed conflict), Syria (internationalized civil war), Libya (internationalized civil war), and Turkey (low-intensity extra-state and subnational armed conflict), Yemen (conflict) and (major internationalized civil war). All of the armed battles have one thing in common:

---

[202] Júlia Palik et al, "Conflict Trends in the Middle East 1989–2019", **Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)**, 2020, p. 9.

[203] Ibid.

There were fewer fatalities in 2020 than in 2019, and total conflict-related fatalities in the region have reduced by almost 70 per cent since 2017.[204]

The Yemeni conflict represents a new epicenter of conflict and proxy war between mainly Saudi Arabia and Iran. As mentioned earlier in this study, the rising role of the UAE is better illustrated in the Yemeni conflict that is considered one of the main dominance vacuums for Abu-Dhabi from one side, and a leverage for a power projection and maximizing its importance and as a tool for enacting its web of coalitions in the region at the same time. The Yemeni conflict is considered a dangerous conflict zone that can be turned into a long-term attrition war for the Arab Peninsula and a conflict zone that can escalate into a full-scale confrontation with Iran. The main problem of Yemen is not only the good governance, but also the low rate of education, access to healthcare systems, the welfare of its populations, and also the proliferation of extremist movements from both sides, Sunni and Shiite at the same time. The presence of Al-Qaeda and affiliates of Islamic State terrorist organization adds to the dilemma of Yemen, as its rigged geography offers a suitable heaven for recruitment and waging operation on the neighboring states in the strategic waterway and the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb.

AREAS OF CONTROL AND CONFLICT IN YEMEN, MAY 2020

---
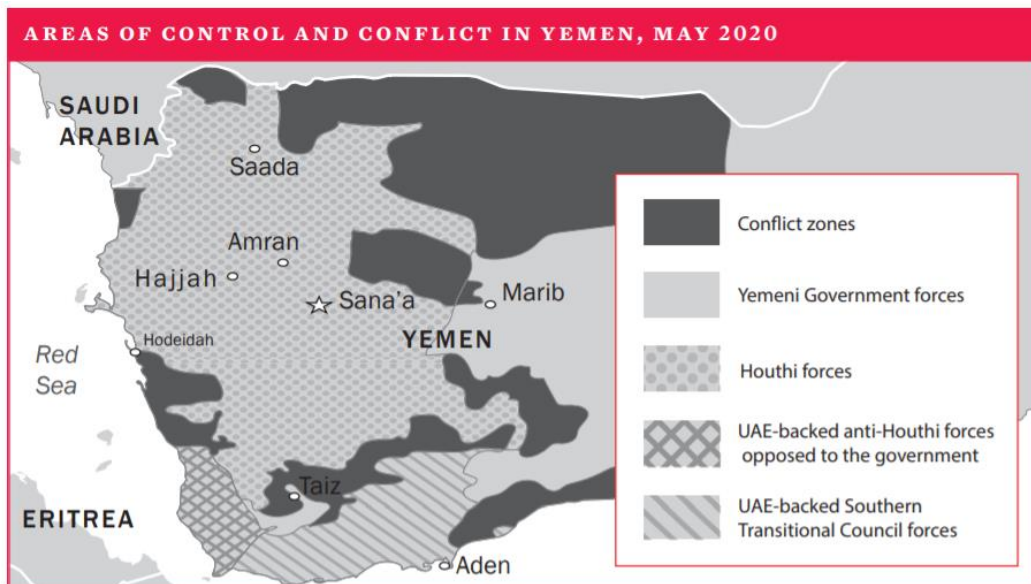
[204] **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute SIPRI, "**Yearbook Summary 2021", p. 8.

Map (4.1): Areas of Control and Conflict zones in Yemen[205].

Since 2011, percentage of people living close to conflict zone soared from around 6% in 2007 into 20% at the inception of the Arab uprisings in 2011, as one study shows. The increase in conflict exposure in the Middle East, especially in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. However, it provides an unsettling assessment of the level to which the people of these countries have been exposed to combat in close proximity to their homes as close at 60 kilometers. Furthermore, because of the enormous macroeconomic, trade, and displacement spillovers on neighboring nations, as well as the region's geopolitics, these conflicts are likely to have far-reaching welfare repercussions for the region. Addressing conflict's long-term, multi-generational repercussions becomes more important as more people are exposed to it. Infrastructure can be rebuilt, but to recover human capital and economic potential, concerted and long-term investments are required.[206]

DEFENCE BUDGET (Constant 2015 US dollars) — **ACTIVE MILITARY PERSONNEL**

	Global ranking				Global ranking		
	1999	2009	2019		1999	2009	2019
Turkey*	9	22	25		2	10	15
Saudi Arabia	4	5	3		37	26	19
Iran*	13	24	18		10	9	7
UAE**	24	19	15		65	64	57
Israel	22	13	14		62	29	30
Egypt	20	26	33		12	11	10
Iraq	61	35	16		49	8	25

US$bn — Thousands

* 1999 defence budget values for Iran and Turkey are estimates, and may be distorted by high inflation rates in these countries ■1999 ■2009 ■2019
** No 2009 data available for UAE. 2010 data is therefore used in place of 2009 data

---

[205] Ibid, p. 9.

[206] Paul Corralnandini Krishnan, "One in five people in the Middle East and North Africa now live in close proximity to conflict", **World Bank**, MARCH 23, 2020, https://bit.ly/3BjnS7P (6 March 2021).

Graph (4.2): Defense Budget and Active Military Personnel in Main Actors in the Middle East[207]

As a result of abovementioned security challenges, the Middle Eastern countries become among the top list of the states on the military expenditure, as the region is considered one of the most volatile regions in the world. Among the top 40 of highest military expenditure in 2020, there were 10 states from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region[208], as the Middle East is still on the top of world regions concerning military expenditure since the 1990 until today (graph 4.3).
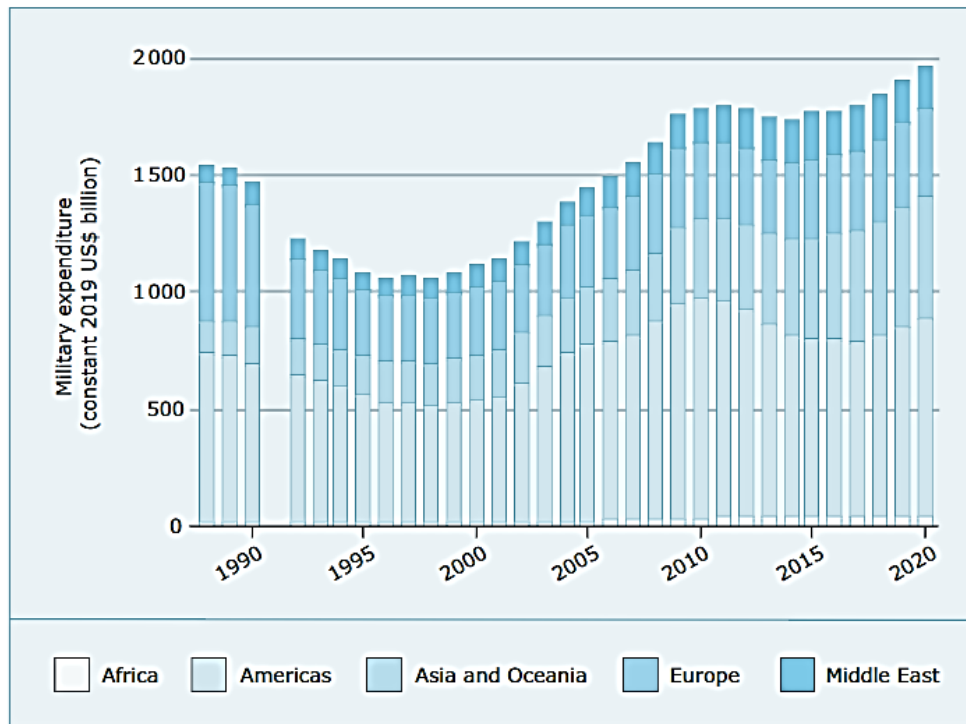
Graph (4.3): Military Expenditure of World Regions (1990-2020).[209]

---

[207] Nigel Gould-Davies, Op. cit., p. 268.

[208] Diego lopes da Silva et al, "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2020", **SIPRI Fact Sheet**, April 2021, p.2.

[209] Ibid, p. 1.

The region was almost on the brink of an armed confrontation after the US killed one of Iran's most senior military figures, Revolutionary Guard Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani, in addition to Iraq militia leader Abu Mahadi al-Muhandis in Baghdad, as Iran responded by carrying out a ballistic missile attack on air bases housing US forces in Iraq, in retaliation for Soleimani's killing.[210] At that point America restrained from responding militarily, and decided not to expand the confrontation with Iran, as the whole region was on a state of alert fearing any further escalation from Iran. Until now, the American troops' deployment makes a security assurance for the Gulf countries, although the United States has long tried to put an end to what President Biden calls the "endless wars" in the Middle East. After the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iraq's turn has come, after Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's visit to the White House in 21 of July 2021 and his talks with President Joe Biden, it was announced that all US combat forces would withdraw from Iraq by the end of this year (2021) in the framework of the "US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue".[211]

The accelerated withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, as the US and its allies increasingly turn their attention to the Asia-Pacific region and the South China Sea, sends worrying signals and put new challenges for the region, as the US interest in the Middle East as whole is in decline due to the newfound gas fields that put America on the top of world energy exporters. The anticipated American withdrawal from Iraq will leave only American military existence in the Gulf region, forcing Gulf countries to cement their coalition with Israel that threatened in many occasions to direct a military strike against Iran, in a balancing act against Tehran. The Council of Arab and African States bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden is also intended to dismantle Iranian web of militias in the region, and to reduce its ability to project its power in the waterways around the Arab Peninsula, as the aforementioned council will form a new framework of cooperation

---

[210] **BBC**, "Iran attack: US troops targeted with ballistic missiles", 8 January 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51028954 (7 March 2020)

[211] **Al-Monitor**, "Intel: US to announce agreement to pull 'combat troops' from Iraq", 23 July 2021, https://bit.ly/2WrmfG2 (28 August 2021).

between Egypt and the Gulf countries to counter the Iranian existence in the strategic waterways of the Horn of Africa.
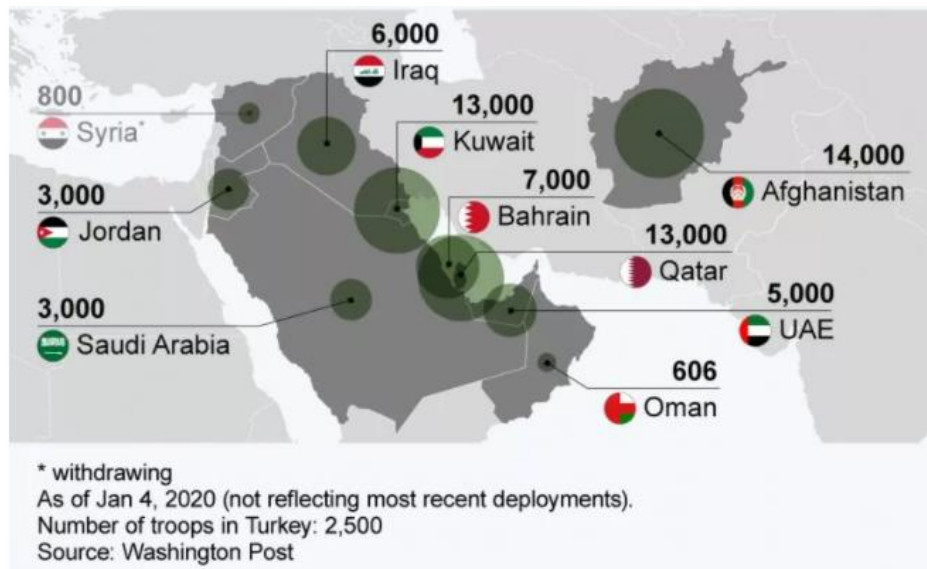
Map (4.2): Deployment of American Troops in the Middle East[212]

However, an American commitment on the long term for the security of the region is not forever guaranteed; as many scholars and researchers have argued that America is in a state of relative material decline, and that it is necessary to abandon its long-standing grand strategy of "deep engagement" and replace it with one of "retrenchment," which is defined as "a policy of retracting grand strategic commitments in response to decline"[213]. Retrenchment, on the other hand, is not a one-size-fits-all grand strategy; there are several

---

[212] **Newsweek**, "Where Are U.S. Troops Near Iran? Tens of Thousands of American Soldiers Are in Middle East, Afghanistan", 1 June 2020, https://bit.ly/3nDseSK (2 December 2020).

[213] Paul MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, "Graceful Decline: The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment," **International Security** 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011), p. 11.

degrees of retrenchment, ranging from internal retrenchment to redistribution and redeployment to outright withdrawal.[214]

A complete American withdrawal from the region will represent a game changer for the regional security order, and hence could lead to a rise in the pace of armed confrontation between regional rivalries in the Middle East. The volatile areas of the Middle East, namely: around the Israeli borders; Libyan, Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, the Gulf region, the Horn of Africa and Iraq, all represent a challenge and peace of the region. The continuation of competitiveness over ideas and values in the region will add to the instability factors, and will increase the chance of the intensification of armed conflicts and proxy wars, and the proliferation of armed militias based on religion or race in the whole Middle East.

4.4. Centrality of Islam Interpretation in Coalition Building

As mentioned in the previous chapters, religion and its various interpretations represent a point of contention for various regimes and religious-based movements alike. Some see the area as a quintessential Hobbesian environment, characterized by calculating self-interest. Others see it as a space where states join forces with players who share their sectarian, ethnic, or ideological identities. Even though not all explanations in the latter category accept simplistic concepts of long-standing religious conflict. Different coalitions and axes of the Middle East can be related to one sect or another, as Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian opposition groups and militias alike are labeled as Sunnis in International Relations literature. Whereas, Iran, Assad regime, Hezbollah and Houthis in Yemen are considered as Shiite, and this division represents today's main fault line of the region. Identity related issues have been increasingly prominent in general international relations (IR) literature, owing in part to contributions originating from Middle Eastern studies. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, "identity" has largely supplanted "ideology" as an

---

[214] Albert B. Wolf, "Strategies of retrenchment: rethinking America's commitments to the Middle East", **Comparative Strategy**, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020, 39:1, 94-100, p.1.

analytical framework in Middle East studies. Political ideologies are frequently regarded narrowly as systems of ideas guiding elite perceptions or as forms of "soft power" when they are deemed essential.[215]

Therefore, religious texts and its different interpretations, the original and secondary scripters[216] and its explanations as well, prophecies and their clarifications, religious and sectarian ideas, historical assumptions, all play major role in the formation of the perception and the political imagination and culture of different factions in the region. Therefore, the control over religious institutions and the interpretation of religious scriptures and their application in public spheres are widely contested from different countries and axes in the Middle East in specific and in the Muslim World as general. The "renovation of religious speech" became a common phrase in media outlets and by political leaders as well.

Saudi Arabia, for example, is witnessing a major overhaul of its religious identity led by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who publicly, though covertly, criticized the traditional religious practice of Wahhabism and Salafism, as he vowed in a televised statements that to return the country to "moderate Islam" and asked for international help to transform the hardline kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and attracts investors, saying the ultra-conservative state had been "not normal" for the past 30 years, blaming rigid doctrines that have governed society in response to the Iranian revolution, which successive leaders "didn't know how to deal with", adding that: "honestly we won't

---

[215] Ewan Stein, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal", **American Political Science Association**, Politics symposium, July 2017 p. 676.

[216] Original scriptures are those of the Holy Books that have been revealed directly from God in different religions, while the secondary texts are those of the prophets, scholars and the interpretations of them, like the Hadith (saying or work of the prophet Muhammad) with its different sources and narrators, etc.

waste other 30 years of our life combating extremist thoughts, we will destroy them now and immediately".[217]

On the same front of combating the rise of Islamism, the tactical alliance between Muhammad Bin Zayed (M.B.Z.) and Mohammed bin Salman, helped the Egyptian military depose the elected Islamist president Muhammad Morsi, in 2013, and to continue his campaign to resist Islamists' rise in the region he went into civil war in Libya in 2015, arming their opponents with defying an embargo by the United Nations. He also fortified his foothold in Somalia against the al-Shabab militia, taking advantage of his country's commercial ports to become a Horn of Africa power broker. He joined the Saudi-led war in Yemen to combat the Houthi militia, backed by Iran. Houthis is also considered an Islamist movement following the Shiite sect, with same objectives to overthrow the corrupt regimes and to resist the American influence in the region, and to install a religious Islamist government. Muhammad bin Zayed also broke an old tradition in 2017 by orchestrating an aggressive embargo against Qatar, his neighbor in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). All of this was done to counter what he viewed as an impending Islamist threat. He appears to feel that the Middle East's only options are a more restrictive regime or absolute disaster. On the internal front, he has repressed the Muslim Brotherhood and constructed a hypermodern surveillance state in which everyone is watched for any hint of Islamist sympathies.[218]

Though small in size and in terms of population and other geostrategic measures, the UAE oversees more than $1.3 trillion in sovereign wealth funds, and commands a military that is better equipped and trained than any in the region apart from Israel. M.B.Z. told a visiting United States delegation in 2004 that "we are having a culture war with the Muslim Brotherhood in this country," according to a cable made public by WikiLeaks. He was also working on a far more ambitious project: building a state that would show up the entire

---

[217] **The Guardian**, "I will return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam, says crown prince", 14 October 2017, https://cutt.ly/gWsNq2C (2 June 2020)

[218] Robert F. Worth, op. cit.

Islamist movement by succeeding where it had failed. Instead of an Islamist-tolerated democracy — like Turkey's — he would build its opposite, a socially liberal autocracy, much as Lee Kuan Yew did in Singapore in the 1960s and '70s.[219]

The Bush administration's discourse of democracy promotion, as well as its effects, such as the formation of sectarian political parties in Iraq and Hamas' electoral victory in Gaza, alarmed M.B.Z. M.B.Z. identified a freedom agenda in Obama's momentous Cairo speech in 2009, when he called for a "new beginning" between the US and Muslims around the world. After the speech, he informed a US envoy that he feared it "raises the bar of expectations in the Arab world." According to a cable made public by WikiLeaks, M.B.Z. told a US ambassador, James Jeffrey, in 2005 that Wahhabism was his main worry. He thought the Saudi royal family was incompetent, but feared that an ISIS-style Wahhabi theocracy would be the alternative in such a very conservative society. "Anyone who replaced the Al Saud would be a nightmare," he said, according to Jeffrey. "We have to assist them in assisting themselves." The National Democratic Institute, based in the United States, and other foreign foundations that backed democratic institutions were forced to close their Dubai headquarters in 2012.[220]

The struggle over interpretation of Islam and its role in public spheres extends to Egypt, one of the most apparent examples of this contestation. Al-Azhar, as the formal institution that oversee religious affairs of Islam in the country, went through intellectual struggle with both political Islamism, Salafis (and Wahhabis), liberals and the current governing political leadership led by President al Sisi. The controversy revolves around political, social and modern interpretation of Islam over winning the hearts and minds of the Egyptians and beyond in the Muslim World. While the apparent title is region, but the core reason is political, after Islamists managed to win grass root constituency votes via their slogans of good governance and the restoration of the historical Islamic glory and a just, humble and honor leadership. After years of dictatorship and corrupt regimes over the Arab World,

---

[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid.

most people become sympathizers with Islamist, especially after being incarcerated and tortured as a result of their quest for a better life for the poor and needy. Hence, their popularity was on the rise on most of the Arab World that witnessed elections, either in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, or Palestine.

Winning sliding victory with sweeping majority in the first free election occurred in Egypt for the parliament after the 2011 revolution, with 76% of votes for Islamists with their different orientations and currents, represented a threat for the military institution that ruled Egypt since 1952. Therefore, regaining the control over the public sphere was essential for the military to dismantle the Islamists source of power, followed by a campaign to demonize the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist organization in order to prevent their ideology from more spread among the Egyptian public. The military regime that took over the power since July 2013 started to disseminate an alternative point of view for the current trends of religion interpretation through its plethora of satellite channels that was established with Emirati finance in general, with televised programs that demonize Islamism either in Egypt or elsewhere. Wahhabis for example, was a target of sever criticize from these programs, in line with the abovementioned policy of M.B.Z. against the Wahhabi institution in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

On the social level, the Egyptian government seized thousands of independent mosques and hundreds of charities with ties to Islamist movements after the 2013 coup. The intention was clear: to dismantle the social network tools of the Islamists in order to prevent them from using these institutions as a tool for massing popularity that can be used in case of any social unrest, elections, or public mobilization against the regime. Sisi's 2015 speech urging for a religious revolution, was delivered in front of an audience of senior religious scholars. Sisi has lectured religious leaders on issues related to religious thought and extremism, and even about divorce in modern life. This has led to a political contestation over control of the religious establishment. The resulting outcomes not only affect the

reforms on Egyptian society to date but also amount to a struggle for control of religious institutions.[221]

Sisi exhorted men of religion in the official institution to abandon their obscurantist obsession on texts and instead put themselves at the service of state interests in public addresses at religious events. On one instance, Sisi publicly chastised Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand Imam of Al-Azhar, for misunderstanding the point. Sisi presents his calls for religious reform in Egyptian politics and the public sphere as being about modernity, tolerance, interfaith relations, and combating extremism, but they appear to be fundamentally related to who wields authority, in a sense that al-Azhar and the religious establishment as a whole should accept his leadership and visions of reform. Sisi's religious changes, on the other side, have aided his political goals: Taking control of all institutions, eradicating the Muslim Brotherhood's influence, and projecting his image in the West as the hoped-for Islamic reformer.[222]

The acceptance of the West to the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Obama era represented a shock to the dictatorships in the region, as the Islamic movement managed to appease the West and to paint a moderate image about itself as an imitation to the Turkish AK Party, a movement that can combine religious conservativeness with believing in democratic and peaceful solution for the historical problems of the region. Over the Arab World, there were an alliance that worked in coordination to expel Islamists from governance, the latest efforts were in Tunisia, after the constitutional coup committed by Tunisian President Kais Saied against Al-Nahda Movement by dissolving the parliament and the acquisition of all authorities in his hand. Sisi's government also managed to put Dar al-Ifta, the institution responsible for issuing Fatwa (religious verdict) under his authority, as the Egyptian Parliament approved a bill putting the religious institution under the

---

[221] Nathan J. Brown and Michele Dunne, **Who Will Speak for Islam in Egypt—And Who Will Listen**? in: Frederic Wehrey, ed., Islamic Institutions in Arab States: Mapping the Dynamics of Control, Co-option, and Contention, **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, 2021, pp. 91-93.

[222] Ibid, p. 103 – 106.

authority of the prime minister, meaning that the fatwa oversight authority will be outside the orbit of Al-Azhar.[223]

Therefore, different interpretation of Islam and its relation to public sphere and governance, in addition to its relation to governments, movements, non-state actors across the region is believed to shape the future of the region and its web of coalitions in the near future, as the war of thoughts and intellectual aspects goes beyond soft power, but rather, it exceeds that into the intervention in internal affairs of states, as the various actors work to dismantle the authority and the legitimacy of their opponents, as seen in the efforts of different actors to topple governments in the Arab world and in Turkey as well, by financing and helping by their propaganda tools, like the case of the failed coup in Turkey in 2016, when the Egyptian, Saudi and Emeriti satellite channels hailed the coup in Turkey and the actions of a minority inside the Turkish army to topple the democratically elected President Erdogan, in what seemed to be a coordinated efforts to praise the movement and to demonize the AK Party government in the region.

The competition for dominance over the interpretation of Islam reached new levels when a conference held in Chechnya under the banner of: Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah (People of Prophet's Path and the Consensus) Conference or the International Conference of Muslim Scholars known as: The Chechnya Conference hosted by the city of Grozny, the capital of the Republic of Chechnya on August 25, 2016, under the title: "Who are the Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah? And the impact of deviation from it on reality," in the presence of the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayeb, and a gathering of muftis, and more than two hundred Muslim scholars from around the world, under the auspices of the Chechen President Ramzan Ahmed Kadyrov. The conference appeared to be directed toward the exclusion of Salafis and the Saudi religious institution, and its Wahhabi doctrine, as it excluded their thought in creed from the right path of Islam, in its final remarks.

---

[223] Sarah Feuer, "New Egyptian Legislation Aims to Reduce Al-Azhar's Authority", **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**, 20 August 2020, https://cutt.ly/VWfv4Nb (29 August 2021).

According to its organizers, this conference is considered an "important turning point to correct the deviation that affected the concept of "Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'a", following the attempts of extremists to hijack this title, restricting it to themselves and excluding other people from it". The concluding remarks of the conference determined that authentic Sunni Islam is not a militant religion that preaches violence, but rather a religion characterized by inclusion and tolerance towards the "other".[224]

Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the main ramifications and effects of the current geopolitical transformation in the Middle East, as we spotted four main repercussions of these transformations. The first one was the liquidity of coalitions, as we seen in the last few years that the network of coalitions in the region is changing in a fast pace, as the UAE maybe considered as one of the main balancing actors in the region, with its active foreign policy and wealth that granted it a long reach for financing and enacting new coalitions and web of operators and agents across the region. The Abu Dhabi move towards closer relations with Israel represented a new chapter in regional coalitions, as this move, with the inclusion of other Gulf states to join the Abrahamic Accord, and its bold endeavor to join strategic projects with Israel in the field of energy, weapons manufacturing and coordination in regional armed and reconnaissance efforts like their cooperation in Yemen's Socotra Island, and elsewhere.

With the continuous failed attempts to forge a viable regional institution on political, economy or social level, the ideological aspect took the lead, and became the main umbrella for coalitions and alliances in the region, and at the core of it is the common interpretation of Islam as a base for alignment, while tactical and interest-based coalition became second in importance for these coalitions, that is generally marked by being liquid and short-term ones. The less the political and social stability, the more the armed

---

[224] Barak, Michael, "The Grozny Conference in Chechnya – Is the Salafi Movement a Rotten Fruit of Sunni Islam?", **International Institute for Counter-Terrorism**, 9 November 2016, https://cutt.ly/KWfT8H5 (29 August 2021).

interventions occurred across the region, and after the retrenchment policies of the US and its retreat from the region in battle zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, the regional actors started to carry the burden of regional stability be military interventions in war zone in and around the Middle East, in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia.

As part of the ideological war and the quest for an alternative cementing umbrella for the region, the regional actors were continually vying for imposing their own interpretation for Islam in public spheres, after the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the rise of Islamism and its impact on the stability of oppressive regimes around the Arab world and the Middle East. The war was on twofold: one of it is to demonize Islamists and their policies, slogans and political practices, and the other is to promote their version of Islam that is static and has no say in public affairs, especially in relation to governance and the relation to state and power. In this contexts, various regional actors allied together in order to propagate their version of Islam, be it Sunni, Shiite or political one. The three main axes of the region used their wealth and media arsenal in order to reshape the religious convictions of their constituency, as a tool to pacify the internal front and to hedge away the regional spillover of ideas and practices related to the ongoing democratization process after the Arab Spring, and the disruption of social activism.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARDS A NATURAL ALLIANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction

As mentioned in the theoretical part, in the first chapter of this study, the Natural Alliances and coalitions are those occurred within the same ideational and civilizational set of values with commonality in history and culture, and the Middle East (in addition to north Africa) is regarded as an almost homogenous area in relation to the abovementioned criteria. While there are many impediments to reaching Natural Alliance and a sound regionalism in the Middle East, we will try in this chapter to provide a normative view to the region in light of its deeply rooted problems concerning political, economic, social and religious factors related to a better and stable alliance in the region.

Natural alliances entail hypothesizing commonalities in political culture and narratives about how the world works or should work, in addition to the shared sense of common past shared by states. These commonalities tend to adapt to the changing landscape by constantly reconstructing the identities of natural allies who attempt to tell or recreate history in order to better face the present and adjust to the future, in a collective manner. Existing linkages and institutions that help to normalize the relationship between them enable the alliance to self-sustain and grow over time. As a result, a Natural Alliance is more resilient and is more likely to withstand exogenous shocks, even if they may have a short-term impact. It does not eliminate arguments and tensions, but it does minimize the chances of misunderstandings over time.[225]

Power considerations, economic links, and realpolitik are not always and primarily driven by pragmatic approaches to international affairs. Indeed, commonalities in political culture and created identity can be used as a strategic asset to improve coordination and predictability among allies. Increased knowledge of these commonalities in political culture

---

[225] Jeremy Ghez, *Alliances in the 21st Century*, p. 9.

can aid allies in maintaining a high level of cohesiveness and better coordinating their responses, resulting in the establishment of "Natural Alliances."[226]

	Alignment Variable	Best Fit	Puzzles
Balance of Power	The international distribution of power	WWI alignments NATO creation Cold War European Union institutional crisis	European Project NATO persistence and expansion after the Cold War Repetitive alignment patterns in Europe Lasting peace between the United States and Europe
Democratic Peace Theory	Regime type	European Construction NATO creation, expansion and resilience U.S.-Japan strategic alliance Greater Middle East Project under the George W. Bush Administration	Resilience of Bretton Woods institutions Tensions between Turkey and the European Union European institutional crisis The 2008 Georgia Russian War

---

[226] Ibid.

			First Gulf War
Clashes of Civilization	Kinship	The wars in the Balkans of the 1990s The Global War on Terror Tensions between Russia and the European Union	Second Gulf War Sunni-Shiite Violence Initial approval of the war in Afghanistan Turkey as a member of NATO
Natural Alliance	Construct ed Identity	NATO creation, expansion and resilience Repetitive Alignment patterns: WWI, WW2, Cold War European Construction European Institutional Crisis Europe and Turkey	

Table (5.1): Competing Explanations for State Alignments[227]

In absence of Natural Alliance, different counties tend to behave in different patterns according to their own interpretation of threat, especially weaker states who tend to protect itself and preserve its survival in a chaotic regional environment. If the small neighboring countries failed to find a viable order out of this chaos, they tend to bandwagon with the stronger, and we have witnessed cases like that in the Middle East.

In this chapter we will (re)categorize the coalitions in the Middle East, as tactical, historical and natural, according to the commonalities in political culture, shared values and their views of the relation between religion and governance and their attitudes towards

---

[227] Jeremy J. Ghez, "The Enduring Partnership? The Trans-Atlantic Community as a Natural Alliance",
   RAND Corporation, USA, 2010, p.18

democracy and the application of Islamic law. We will depend on both the political rhetoric of their leaders the outcomes of their foreign policy decisions, and to the public polls related to political issues, conducted in some states in the Middle East. We will first analyze some surveys and polls and then will try to categorize the current coalitions in the region.

5.1. Political Culture of the Middle East

It is difficult to describe the whole region as homogeneous in political culture, even though most of its states are part of the Muslim world and its heritage. Being inside one civilization entails rapprochement in ideas and values, but when it comes to politics, it differs according to each state's experiment and its location and proximity to other cultures and civilizations. Some scholars argue that the Arab World is doomed to authoritarianism, or "Arab exceptionalism" or "enduring authoritarianism," as it is known. Such an assumption assumes that the Arab world is doomed to totalitarian rule and ignores the region's diverse political culture, both formal and informal.

One of the main reasons for the persistence of this assumption, which includes recent pronouncements about the Arab Spring's alleged "failure," is that those who make it appear to be addressing the region solely from the top down. When looking at political processes from the top down, it is clear that non-democratic political systems persist in the majority of Arab countries. These political systems, on the other hand, conceal internal forces that are growing across the area and pushing against the status quo. As a result, when considering political culture in the Arab world, one must look outside the prevailing regimes' internal dynamics. This dispels some known myths about the region's political engagement being stagnant[228].

---

[228] Lina Khatib, "Political Culture in the Arab World: Assumptions and Complexities", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, **Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean**, Mediterranean Dialogue Series no. 34, January 2021, p.1.

The Arab World, which is overlapping with the Middle East in its core, is fighting other models of governance from the region, like those of Iran, Israel and Turkey. Those political models are challenging the stagnant model of Arab dictatorships, while the Arab Spring gave a further push for a better governance in the Middle East. The cross-regional uprisings that erupted for freedoms, dignity and social justice, proved that the underlying political culture of the Arabs is not an exceptionalism comparing to other parts of the world, but rather, they yearn for a better life condition starting from the reform of their political systems. In this part we will try to analyze polls and surveys concerning the political culture in the Middle East comparing to other parts of the world. In the next part we will show some polls related to the political culture of the Middle East, concerning some issues, mainly like democracy, good governance, powerful leaders, dictatorship, among some other things.

5.1.1. Demand for Democracy in the Middle East

We have to put in mind that the term Democracy doesn't necessarily resonate in the Arab world as it does in the West. Instead, a good governance is more rooted in the political culture of the Muslim world in general, as they make a benchmark of it in the early years of Islam of "The Rightly Guided Caliphate". The short-lived experiments of democracy in the Arab World, either in Egypt between 2011-2013, Tunisia after its 2011 revolution until the constitutional coup made by president Kais Saied, and the quota sectarian democracy in Lebanon since The Taif Agreement of 1989,

Furthermore, some argue that there was no demand for democracy across the Arab world, even with the ignition of the Arab Spring. In addition, they argue that the wave of uprising in the Arab world can't be compared to rapid and complete collapse that we saw in Eastern Europe in 1989 with the fall of communism, and those who are victorious will not be clearly democratic, and those who are democratic will not be clearly liberal. Many of the Arab Spring related era illusions may be traced back to the 1979 Iranian Revolution and, subsequently, the 2009 Green Movement in Iran, when a small movement that was quickly

suppressed by the regime was widely interpreted as tremendous resistance and widespread support for liberalization.[229]

Many of the current components of political culture of the Middle East can be traced back to the history of Islam, as some religious scholars put the rules and bases for politics in the religion, while some legitimized oppressive practice and using excessive force against opposing factions or political movements that criticize the current ruling leader, especially in the Salafi and Wahhabi currents, what led to the solidification of autocracy and dictatorship in the name of religion. As a result, the political culture in the Arab Peninsula for example may differ from those of other Middle Eastern and North African countries. In the next section we will show some polls about different political notions and terms, and people's attitudes about it.
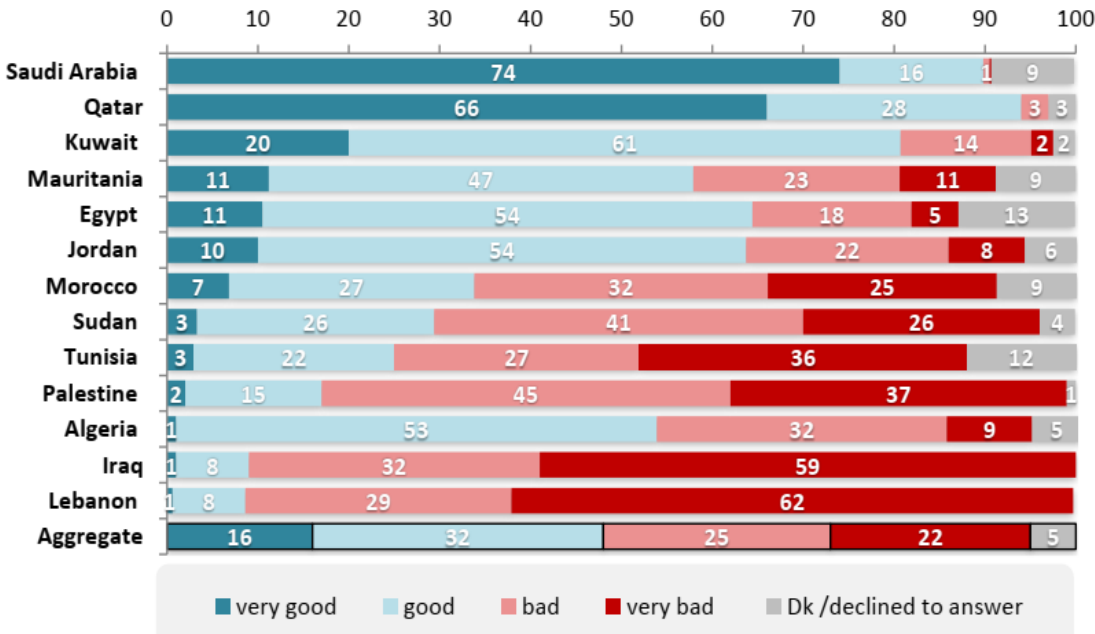
Graph (5.1): Respondents 'assessment of political situation in their countries in 2019,2020[230]

---

[229] See for example: George Friedman, "Re-Examining the Arab Spring", **Stratfor World View**, 15 August 2011, https://bit.ly/3gXC12T (4 September 2021).

Graph (5.1) shows that the satisfaction of political situations doesn't necessarily requires democracy, but rather, a welfare state and better life conditions is more required than democracy, especially in Gulf state of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait. While more democratic countries, according to the democracy index[231], like Tunisia, Lebanon, there is little satisfaction with their political situations. Hence, a formula of good governance and welfare state both are required from the people of the region, as failing in delivering good life condition doesn't entail public approval, what highlights the need for a more developmental approach beside democracy.
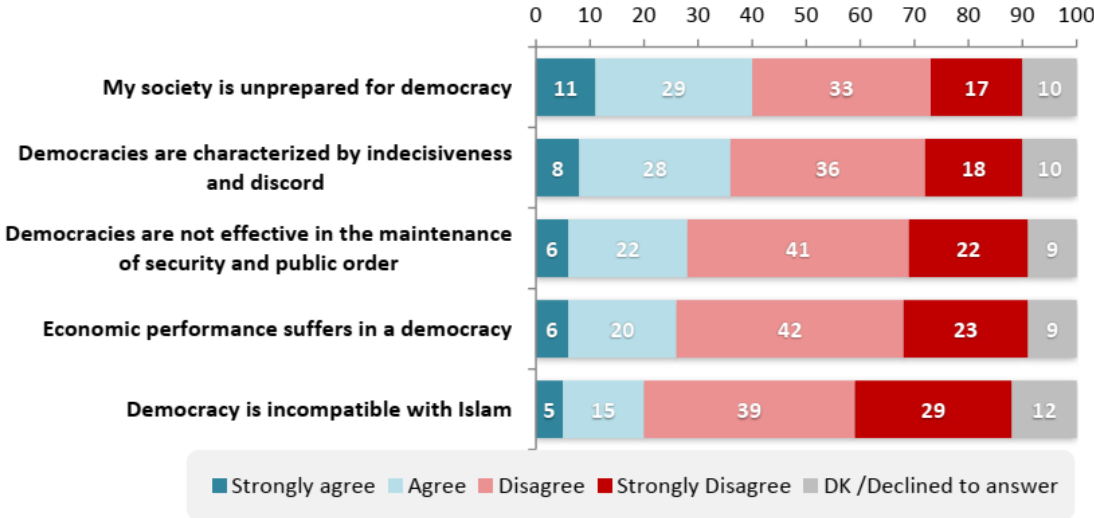
[230] **Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies**, "The 2019-20 Arab Opinion Index", Doha, Qatar, 16 November 2020, p.5, (from https://bit.ly/3jMPRXO). The 2019-2020 Arab Opinion Index is the seventh in a series of annual public opinion surveys conducted in 13 Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania. It is based on the findings of face-to-face interviews conducted with 28,288 individual respondents in 13 Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania.

[231] See (map 2.1) of this study.

Graph (5.2): Supporters and opponents of some statements about the democratic political system[232]

According to the Arab Opinion Index (AOI), a majority of the public favors the democratic system, with 76 percent in favor and only 17 percent opposed. When asked to compare democracy to other systems (such as authoritarian regimes, representative democracies where electoral competition is limited to either Islamist or non-Islamist/secular political parties, or theocracies), the majority of respondents (74 percent consensus) believe that democracy is the most appropriate system of governance for their home countries. That polls reveal that the Arab people of the Middle East have some demand for democracy, while others may compare it to a strong leader as favorable choice. The experiment of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt gave the impression that a political party/movement can't wield power without fully controlling the security institution, hence their choice of a reformist party must be proceeded first by structural reforms, on the same way Turkey did since 2002.[233]

---

[232] Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Op. cit., p.17.

[233] Personal impressions of the writer, as he surveyed plenty of ordinary people and scholars alike from Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, as even the people who put their bets on the Muslim Brotherhood, hopping that they are the strongest and most organized movement in Egypt, hence can dismantle the web of corruption in Egypt, especially in the security institutions. But after the 2013 coup, their impressions were that they are unable alone to dismantle the corruption web and therefore most ordinary people refused to revolt again to bring them back to power, at heavy cost as they did in 2011 revolution.

Widespread Support for Democracy, Religious Freedom

Median % of Muslims who ...

	Prefer democracy over strong leader	Say religious freedom is a good thing**
Sub-Saharan Africa*	72	94
Southeast Asia	64	93
Southern-Eastern Europe	58	95
Middle East-North Africa	55	85
Central Asia	52	92
South Asia	45	97

*Data for all countries except Niger from "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa."
**Medians show Muslims who say non-Muslims in their country are very free to practice their religion and consider this a good thing.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q10, Q11 and Q14.

Table (5.2): Support of Democracy and Religious freedoms[234]

In table (5.2) we see a slight support for Democracy over strong leader in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as people when given a choice between a leader with a strong hand or a democratic system of government, most people choose democracy by 55%. That also give us important hints about the role of strong leaders across the region, especially in the events of turmoil, as some (45%) favor it over democracy, as part of the political culture of the region. On relation to freedoms, people in the region are widely embracing religious freedoms, while many even want religion to play a prominent role in

---

[234] James Bell, ed., *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, p.32. The social and political opinions of Muslims around the world are examined in this research. It is based on Pew Research Center public opinion polls performed between 2008 and 2012 in 39 nations and territories across three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. The surveys included more than 38,000 face-to-face interviews in more than 80 languages and dialects, and they covered every country with more than 10 million Muslims except a few (China, India, Saudi Arabia, and Syria), where political sensitivities or security concerns prevented Muslim opinion research.

politics, as the Middle East and North Africa (65%) say religious leaders should have at least some influence over political matters.
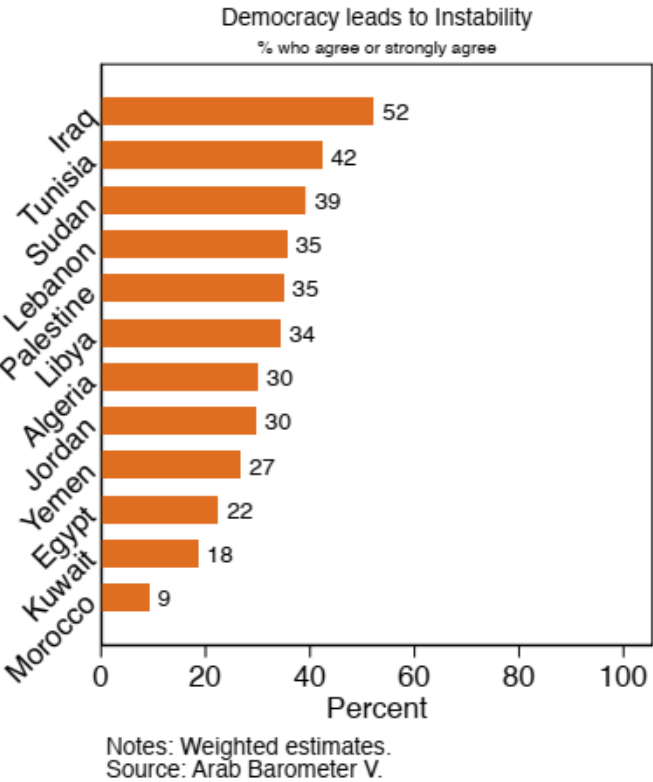
Graph (5.3): Opinion About relation between Democracy and Stability[235]

In the (graph 5.3) almost majority of surveyed have positive vision about the relation between democracy and stability, the only exception is Iraq, where 52% of respondent believe the opposite, maybe due to their version of distorted sectarian democracy and the interference of Iran that led to the uprising that erupted in many cities of Iraq against the government supported by Iran in 2019. On the other hand, majorities in six of the seven largely Middle Eastern countries surveyed say democracy, rather than a strong leader, can best solve their country's problems. At least six-in-ten in Egypt (64%), Lebanon (62%), and

---

[235] Michael Robbins, "What Arab Publics Think?" **Arab Barometer**, 28 January, 2020, p.32, https://bit.ly/2YjQ3VV (5 September 2021).

Turkey (61%), while agreed 59% in Jordan and 56% in the Palestinian territories on the same principle. In comparison to previous years (2007-2011), the figures are rising in the whole surveyed states in the Middle East, as shown in (Table 5.2). Despite these results, strong leader still enjoying considerable popularity across the region.[236]

	% Democracy		
	2007	**2011**	*Change*
	%	%	
Palest. ter.	36	56	+20
Egypt	50	64	+14
Indonesia	48	60	+12
Jordan	52	59	+7
Turkey	55	61	+6
Pakistan	33	36	+3
Lebanon	60	62	+2

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q57.

Table (5.3): More choose Democracy Over Strong Leader [237]

---

[236] Andrew Kohut, "Obama's Challenge in the Muslim World: Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image",
  Pew Global Attitudes Project, 17 May 2011, p. 21.

[237] Ibid.

Democratic Government vs. Strong Leader

	Strong leader	Democratic government
Egypt	34	64
Lebanon	37	62
Turkey	30	61
Indonesia	36	60
Jordan	34	59
Palest. ter.	43	56
Pakistan	51	36
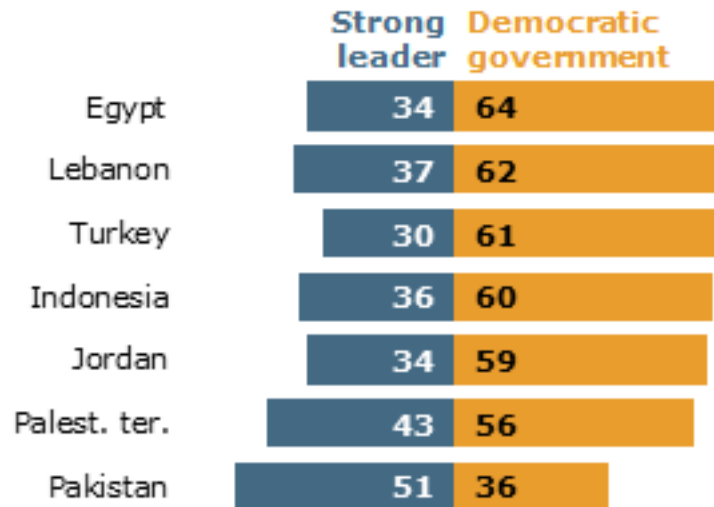
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q57.

Graph (5.4): Democratic Governance Vs Strong Leader[238]

According to the abovementioned figures, there is a growing awareness among the people of the region in regard to the role of a strong leader comparing to a democratic system, as the fascination with strong leaders goes back to historical heroic stories which is deeply rooted in the collective imagination and consciousness of the people in the region, as we see in the anticipation of the Savior or the Messiah in Christian/Jewish Biblical scriptures, or Al-Mahdi in both Sunni and Shiite sects as well, who will come at the end of time to spread justice across the world. Divine scriptures are respected over the region, but this poll shows that the awareness of a viable political and social system become more important than the model of the all-time charismatic leader since the rise of Jamal Abdul Nasser as a powerful officer to power in Egypt.

---

[238] Andrew Kohut, Op. cit., p.21.

5.1.2. Turkish Model

In the scope of the political culture of the region, there is one important development that occurred in Turkey, as the AK Party started to make a synthesis between democracy and political conservatism that puts Islamic values in its consideration. This model was lucrative for many in the region, especially the Islamists in Morocco, Tunisia, and with lesser degree in Egypt, but it generally answers an important question about the relation of Islam and Modernism. The Turkish model of governance proved lucrative also to Salafi movements, as they saw the outcomes and effects of the AK Party policies on the ground, especially the benign role they played to tame what was historically considered as an extremist model of Secularism.[239]

The importance of this model is that it represents the missing link between Islamism and Modernity, with adoption of democratic values, with a conservative leaning emanating from the local political culture of Turkey and the Muslim World as well. Historically, Islamists used to rebuff democracy as blasphemy, while the Turkish synthesis transformed it into a more plausible practice for Islamist. Furthermore, the importance of the Turkish experiment for the Muslim World is that it reached power from one hand, and was a successful story from the other, in economic, political and social terms, when put in a comparative framework with its predecessor political parties.

The experiment also brought about a powerful leadership, something which is deeply admired in the regional Middle Eastern culture, as it is possible to argue that the main three discourses of the Party, conservative democracy, Islamic civilization, and the native-national (yerli-milli) which represent the movement's responses to challenges over the past fifteen years, cab be attributed also to pragmatic and strong leadership. The AK Party's

---

[239] Personal impressions through interviews and conversations with various Salafi leaders, especially in Egypt, as they see the Ak Party leaders as "sincere" and devout Muslims that move according to their ability to change into a "better governance" from their point of view.

political ideology, from the other hand, is a mix between various ideological currents of Ottoman-Turkish modernization: Islamism, nationalism, Westernism, and Ottomanism.[240]

This blend is very much related to different ideological struggle across the MENA region about the identity politics and the cultural orientation of different peoples and races across the region. The identity question goes back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of different national identities that tie themselves to different types of civilization from the Mediterranean to the Arab Peninsula, across the Fertile Crescent. The successful formula of the AK Party can be imitated in various countries in the region that is still having troubles mixing between different local, regional and universal norms and ideas.

Appealing to the ballot boxes as a neutral means in a level-playground political environment, with a bigger picture of a secularist political system can be a silver bullet to many of the region's deeply-rooted problems. The notion of Conservative Democracy, brough about by the AK Party, was trying to find the lost synthesis between conservative Islamism and democracy. The AK Party's early notion of "conservative democracy" envisioned the political arena as a place for reconciliation. It saw diversity as a source of richness and governmental authority as coming from the "national will." Furthermore, this viewpoint suggested that Turkish politics should be based on values of reconciliation, tolerance, and integration, rather than confrontation, conflict, and polarization.[241]

That ethical, unitarian, and civilized notion can be traced back to the Islamic heritage, but in a modern formula. Many current religious scholars are forbidden partisan politics and the establishment of political parties, labeling it as a dividing force not the other way around, hence the made several Fatwas forbidding the establishment of political parties, in several Gulf counties. The political culture of this region is basically dependent on the Islamic heritage of Salafism and Wahhabism. Hence, the positive example of the AK Party,

---

[240] Kiliç B. Kanat and Burhanettin Duran, Ed., "Ak Party Years in Turkey: Domestic and Foreign Policy", **SETA**, Turkey, 1st ed.,2020, p.8,9.

[241] Ibid, p.11.

even in its evolutional level, can be a base for other more conservative political cultures in the MENA region.

In general, the Turkish model of governance is lucrative for many in the region, and the popular trends prefer to imitate the Turkish experiment, especially at the onset of the Arab Spring. In a poll run by YouGov in 2012, respondents from around the Arab world were asked what form of political system would be ideal for Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, three nations whose governments were deposed during the Arab revolutions, three-quarters of Arab respondents feel the Turkish political system would be a "good model" for the "new Arab states" to follow. The "Saudi model" polled in the single digits, although it was still ahead of the "American model".[242]

The top three reasons cited were: 1) cultural affiliation: respondents cited Turkey as being very close to the Arab world in terms of culture, religion, and traditions; 2) international respect: supporters of the Turkish model argued that the Eurasian republic's political system has earned international respect; and 3) the role of religion, implying that the Turkish model involves Islam in political decision-making. Surprisingly, just around a quarter of Turkey's Arab supporters listed democracy as a motivation for wanting the country's system to be implemented in the Arab world[243]. From the other hand, there is a majority of people in the region, from at least six countries, favored better trade relations with Turkey (graph 5.6).

Turkish model calls for a modern Islamic perspective of politics and governance, with acceptance of secularism in the sense that it acts as a neutral framework for practicing politics with respect of individual freedoms in the pubic spheres in accordance with law and regulations. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that "the state should have an equal distance from all religious faiths… This is laicism". The ex- Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said that "Secularism will feature in the new constitution we draft as a principle

---

[242] Robert M. Danin, "Surprising Arab Views of the "Turkish Model"", **Council on Foreign Relations**,
  21 March 2013, https://on.cfr.org/3BM6qt2 (5 September 2021).

[243] Ibid.

that guarantees citizens' freedom of religion and faith and that ensures the state is in an equal distance from all faith groups".[244]

On foreign policy, Ankara's attitude towards the regional and international issues gained the approval from most Arabs in the Mena region, as 58% of the respondents said it has a positive or positive to some extent (see graph 5.7), as it topped various other international or regional powers like the US, Russia, France, Germany, China, Iran. According to a poll conducted by Arab Barometer in 2020, Turkey was also one of the least feared among regional and international powers in the region, mainly the US, Russia, France, China, Germany, Israel, Iran, and even neighboring Arab countries (Table 5.4). The moral-based Turkish foreign policy represents a new page in the history of Ankara attitude towards the Arab region.

Between 2008 and 2015, Turkish foreign policy activities, notably in the Middle East, were dominated by significant normative and moral considerations. Turkey began to pursue a transformational regional policy amid the revolutionary changes taking place in the Middle East as a result of the Arab Spring. Turkey's top foreign policy goal from the start of the region's revolutions until the middle of 2015 was to establish a new regional order, with Turkey playing a leading role in developing representative democracy and regionalism. Turkey's decision to take the lead reflected the country's resolve to help remove the imprint of external actors in the region and replace it with new power blocs aligned with the interests of an AK Party-led Turkey.[245]

---

[244] **Middle East Eye**, "Erdogan Says Changes to Constitution Would Not Threaten Turkish Secularism", 27 April 2016, https://bit.ly/3BD6ScN (3 September 2021).

[245] H. Tarık Oğuzlu, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order", **All Azimuth** V9, N1, 2020, p.134.

Economic Relations with Turkey
% prefering stronger relations

Country	Percent
Jordan	81
Palestine	73
Sudan	72
Yemen	59
Morocco	58
Tunisia	57
Algeria	50
Iraq	47
Lebanon	44
Libya	29
Egypt	15

Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.
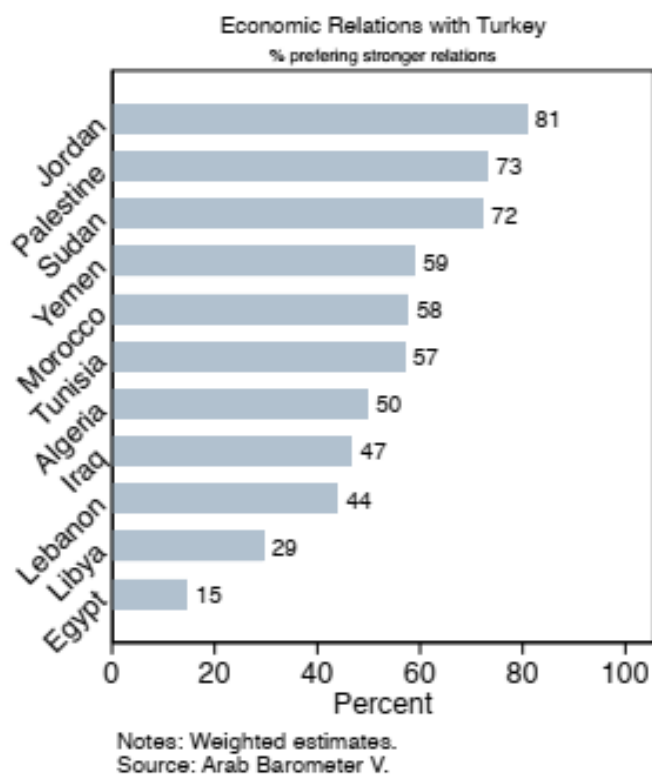
Graph (5.5): Support for Economic Relations with Turkey[246]

As part of its regional and global mission, Turkey emphasizes the importance of transparency, diversity, debate, and inclusive policies in dealing with widespread threats, ranging from terrorism, islamophobia to ethnic or religious hatred, discrimination, and extremism. As an heir to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey found itself obliged to interfere in the regional struggles, especially those emanating from religious false interpretations. With this approach, Turkey aimed at taking the lead in efforts to promote mutual tolerance and shared values among people of many cultures and religions. Turkey and Spain are co-sponsoring the UN Alliance of Civilizations initiative, which is a solid reaction to scenarios based on the so-called clash of civilizations.[247]

---

[246] Michael Robbins, *What Arab Publics Think*? p.13.

[247] **Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "**Turkey's Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy", https://bit.ly/3rkOIsI (8 September 2021).

From other hand, Turkey added a new important factor in its foreign policy criteria, which is the humanitarian dimension. The Turkish development and humanitarian aid projects reflect Turkey's human-centered state tradition. In 2016, Istanbul hosted the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit. Turkey is one of the world's greatest humanitarian donors and generous country in terms of humanitarian spending per capita. At the same time, Turkey is the world's leading refugee-hosting country. It is home to over than 4 million externally displaced people, with 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection. Turkey has spent more than 40 billion dollars on Syrian aid and services.

The multi-dimensional role of Ankara's foreign policy earned it enemies across the region, as this moral-based foreign policy that is building a new paradigm in the regional politics put Middle East governments in a comparative context that led to the conflict of models which started to heat up. Opponents knew that when Ankara decides to return back to the Middle East, it came to lead, in light of its geostrategic and historical weight, which resulted in tactical alliances with its enemy in the region in order to balance against its rise, as they perceived it as a direct threat to other tradition dictatorial models around the region, as we will discuss later at this study.

5.1.3. Iran's Model

Other factors related to political culture of the region and hence related to the search for a viable formula for alliances and coalitions, is the Shiite sphere of influence. Therefore, we will analyze the Iranian Shiite model of governance and its ideological pillars. As mentioned earlier in this study, the competition over winning minds and hearts of the people of the region is part of the bigger picture of hegemony and influence, and the imposition of a certain political culture over its population and beyond. Although the Shiite sect is not new to the region, the formula enacted by Iranian spiritual leaders since 1979 was a combination of religious creed and a populist rebellion in a context of a revolutionary ideology supported by prophesies.

Hence, Iran was considered as a revisionist power in relation to the international and regional system, defying the American hegemony across the Middle East and elsewhere. The reputation of the Islamic Republic was built upon the refusal of injustice and the rebellion against the oppressors, and that the blood (represents the victim) will victory over the sword (represents the oppressor). But when put into test, Iran proved, especially in Syria and Iraq, that its sectarian ambition exceeds its declared set of values, and it allied with Russia, which is a more oppressor country in terms of human rights and even its record in treating Muslims either in its own county or abroad.

Country of threat / Country	Israel	America	Iran	Neighboring Arab countries	Arab states	France	Turkey	Other states	European states	Non-Arab neighboring or regional states	Armed semi-state groups	Don't know/refuse to answer	There is no source of threat	Total
Jordan	51	12	7	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	18	100
Tunisia	11	11	0	14	19	0	1	0	1	0	0	43	0	100
Algeria	11	2	0	1	1	61	0	0	0	0	0	14	10	100
KSA	4	3	39	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	38	10	100
Sudan	24	37	6	15	2	0	0	1	0	4	0	7	4	100
Iraq	6	31	50	3	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5	0	100
Palestine	81	13	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	100
Kuwait	23	25	34	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	6	8	100
Lebanon	48	17	19	5	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	4	2	100
Egypt	25	10	4	14	17	0	18	2	0	0	0	4	6	100
Morocco	3	3	1	20	2	2	0	1	2	0	5	24	37	100
Mauritania	13	12	2	5	3	3	0	2	0	2	0	58	0	100
Qatar	3	7	9	55	0	0	0.3	0.3	0	0	0	10	15	100
Average	23	14	13	11	4	5	2	1	0	0	0	18	9	100

Table (5.4): People's Perception of Threatening Country[248]

Generally, the views about Iran are in the decline, as the popularity of the Islamic Republic faded in the region after its double standard towards the Arab Spring and its support for the oppressive regime in Syria, as the next graph will show. Since 2013, Iran's favorability has declined from a third to a quarter across MENA. In Lebanon, two-thirds of Shiite want stronger relations compared with 44% of Christians & 16% of Sunnis. The reputation of Iran and its satellite militias across the region has declined since their disruptive role it played in the Arab Spring hot spots in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, that

---

[248] Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Op. cit., p.7.

contradicted with its political rhetoric as a defender of people's right against oppressive regimes, in the scope of its wider historical contexts of rivalry with Sunni Islam.

Economic Relations with Iran

% prefering stronger relations

Country	Percent
Lebanon	37
Palestine	34
Iraq	33
Tunisia	31
Sudan	31
Jordan	25
Algeria	20
Yemen	18
Morocco	18
Libya	14
Kuwait	10
Egypt	7

Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.
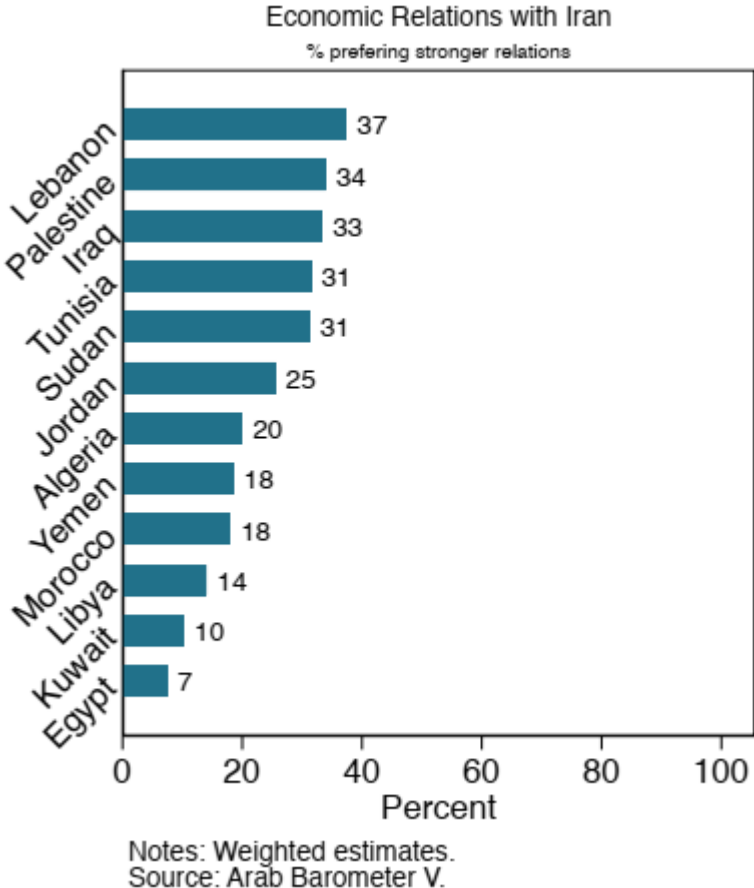
Graph (5.6): Favoring Economic Relations with Iran[249]

Also, the Iranian foreign policy in previous years granted it the suspicious and negative opinion of the Arab people toward its intentions. Although Iran is called an Islamic republic, but in its constitution says in article 12 that "The official religion of Iran is Islam, and the doctrine is the Twelver Ja'fari school of thought, and this article remains forever unchangeable"[250], while article 107 describes the Iranian revolution as an "international

---

[249] Michael Robbins, *What Arab Publics Think*? Op. cit., p.13.

[250] **Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs** official website, "The Iranian Constitution", https://ar.mfa.ir/portal/viewpage/3984 (8 September 2021).

Islamic" one, not only a local revolution, whereas the article 115 stipulates that the president must be "fully believing in the principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official doctrine of the country". The dangerous of the Iranian model, as the people of the region see it, is that is a revenge-borne ideology that is based on the revival of the historic rivalry on religious bases, what makes it breeds new kind of ignorant enthusiastic extremists who kill on identity for fulfilling a religious duty.

From the other hand, Iran is also trying to force its universal view for religion on the Middle East, as its ontological and commonalities in political culture and shared values is emanated from the Shiite doctrine, hence, is eager to export its revolution to the Sunni regions of the Middle East. The Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei even considered the Arab Spring as part of the imposition of its values on the region, and in his address, during Friday prayers at Tehran University in Iran's capital, he said that people are witnessing the reverberations of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, adding that: "The awakening of the Islamic Egyptian people is an Islamic liberation movement and I, in the name of the Iranian government, salute the Egyptian people and the Tunisian people"[251]. However, when the Arab Spring reached Syria, he described it as "a war between Islam and disbelief"; justifying the actions of Bashar Al-Assad in killing his people, urging Iranian to fight with Syrian regime, and saying: "The door for martyrdom, which was closed by the end of the Iranian-Iraqi war, is now open in Syria… Youth have persistently called for going to the battlefield in Syria, where Islam is fighting kufr (disbelief) as was the case during the Iranian-Iraqi war".[252]

---

[251] **Aljazeera.net**, "Khamenei hails 'Islamic' uprisings", 4 February 2011, (3 September 2021) https://bit.ly/**3tdotVL.**

[252] **Anadolu Agency**, "Islam fighting disbelief in Syria: Iran's Khamenei", 25 February 2016, https://bit.ly/3kPBQb5 (3 September 2021).
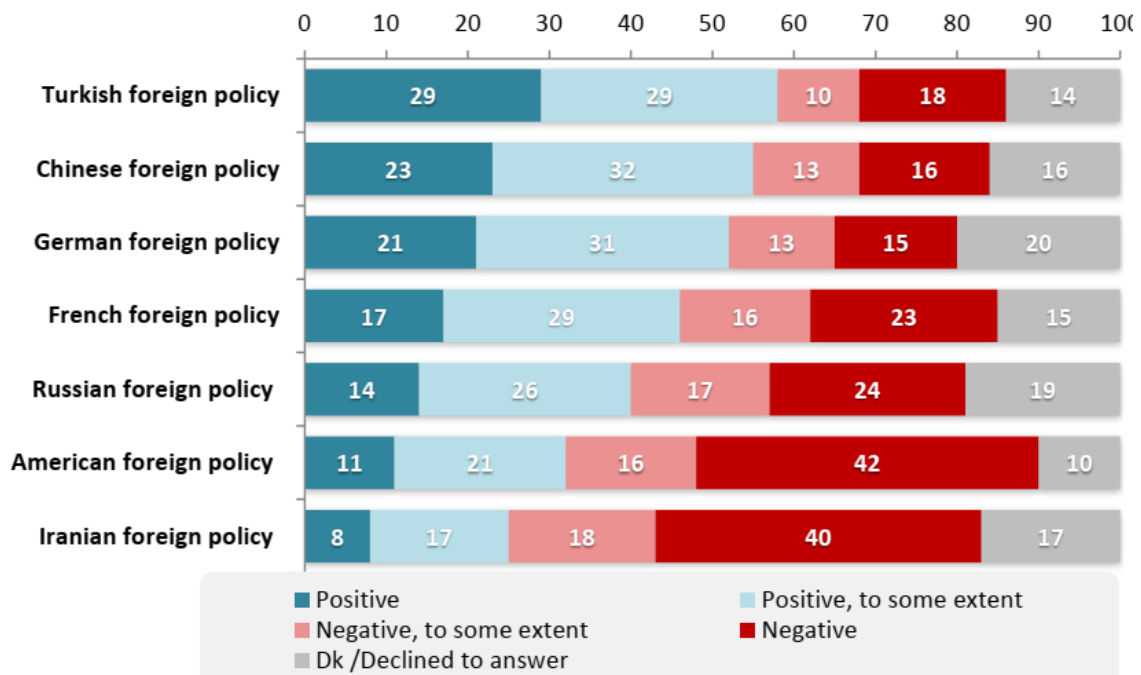
Graph (5.7): Foreign Policy Assessment from the Popole of MENA[253]

58% of the respondents also had negative views of Iran's foreign policy in MENA region, although there are some countries that are not directly affected by Iran's policies in the abovementioned poll[254]. The whole Nile Valley, the Maghreb region, Pakistan and Afghanistan are all countries that have no direct or indirect conflict with Iran, as Tehran's sphere of influence is concentrated at the Levant, the Arab Peninsula and the western areas of Afghanistan. However, the Shiite rhetoric disseminated from its soft power apparatuses are going beyond its area of influence, as the Sunni-Shiite struggle is heating up all over the Muslim World. The propagation of the Iranian model is also dependent on the status of its economy; as Tehran's currency deteriorated steadily at the last few years as a result of the US-led sanctions over its nuclear project, which is another reason for fearing of the Iranian model.

---

[253] **Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies**, *The 2019-20 Arab Opinion Index*, p. 48.

[254] The Arab Barometer was conducted with 28,288 individual respondents in 13 Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania.
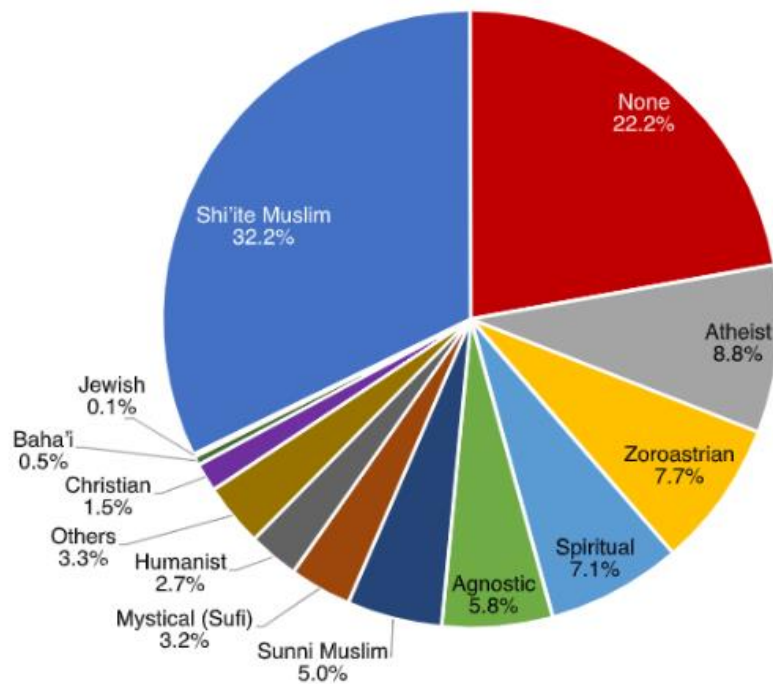
Graph (5.8): Religious Affiliation in Iran[255]

Internal consistency in Iran is important as well in order to continue the propagation of its model across the region. However, the political culture of the Iranian people has changed dramatically in the past few years as a result of their government's internal and external policies. Surveys from inside Iran reveal a retreat of the role of religion in the political culture, in addition to a wave of disbelieving in the objectives of the Iranian Revolution itself. As only 32% identified themselves as Shiite in Iran, while 22.2% said they are not affiliated to any religion, whereas 8.8% said they are atheist (Graph 5.8).

---

[255] Ammar Maleki and Pooyan Tamimi Arab, "Iranians' attitudes Toward Religion: A 2020 survey Report"**, The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (Gamaan),** August 2020, The Netherlands, p.1. The survey titled "Iranians' attitudes toward religion" was conducted from June 6to 21, 2020. Over 50 thousand respondents were surveyed, around 90% of whom lived in Iran.

How have your religious (or non-religious) beliefs changed during your lifetime?

	I went from being religious to non-religious	My belief/faith has not changed much	I became religious after being non-religious	I went from one religious orientation to another religious orientation
50-year-old +	41.1%	47.5%	5.4%	6.0%
30- to 49-year-old	46.0%	40.8%	6.9%	6.4%
20- to 29-year-old	51.8%	38.9%	4.7%	4.7%
Urban	48.3%	41.6%	4.9%	5.2%
Rural	41.1%	41.0%	10.1%	7.9%
University educated	51.0%	38.7%	5.1%	5.1%
Non-university educated	45.2%	42.5%	6.3%	6.0%
Man	49.9%	36.4%	7.2%	6.6%
Woman	43.4%	47.2%	4.5%	4.9%
Total	46.8%	41.4%	5.9%	5.8%

■ I went from being religious to non-religious
■ My belief/faith has not changed much
■ I became religious after being non-religious
■ I went from one religious orientation to another religious orientation

Survey June 2020
GAMAAN.org

Graph (5.9): Change in Religious Beliefs During Lifetime[256]

The abovementioned figures show that Iran is undergoing a broad process of secularization, which is known to promote religious pluralism. The overwhelming majority, 90 percent, said they came from religious families who believed or practiced religion. However, 47% claimed they had lost their faith during their lives, and 6% indicated they had switched from one religious' inclination to another. Younger respondents reported higher degrees of irreligiosity and Christian conversion than older respondents. This generational change may affect the future of Iran's theological regime and the consistency of its ideological and religious message in internal and external affairs as well.

---

[256] Ibid, p. 7.

5.1.4. Revisionist Vs Reactionist Trends in The Middle East

On the political culture level, there are two main trends that vie for influence over ideas, norms and values in the scope of political rivalry across the region: the Revisionist camp, that includes Islamists (with different variations), Liberals, and Revolutionary Socialists, as they want to make a top-down change to the whole course of political orientation of their countries' internal and external politics, while the Reactionary camp wants to preserve the status-quo in relation to the political system, political culture, the internal and external balance of power, that camp includes Monarchists, Authoritarian military-based dictatorships and tribal-based political systems.

As mentioned earlier in this study, there is a demand for democracy in the Middle East and the overlapping Arab World, but they may prefer a tailored type of democracy close to the Turkish Conservative Democracy; that combines strong leader with preservation of current patterns of socio-political fabric of state controlled by strong tribe or other loyalties (military bond for example) that can preserve the cohesion of the state and preserve the balance of power between different religious, sectarian or tribal rivalries inside the state. Analyzing the outcomes of the above-mentioned popular trends in sociopolitical and religious matters lead to the argument that there is no demand for Liberal Democracy, but a popular-based consensus that respects the exceptionality of the Arab and Muslim culture.

Aside from the two models of Turkey and Iran in the Middle East, most of the states in the region are non-democratic or people grappling with reactionary regimes for applying demands of the Arab Spring, (Bread, Liberty, Dignity and Social Justice), in countries except for the Arab Peninsula. People in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, for example, are satisfying with their political conditions (see Graph 5.1), while this satisfaction maybe related to the welfare system of these countries and their relatively high household income, comparing to other subregions in MENA (see Graph 5.10). The change in economic situations, due to the lack of demand for oil or its depletion on short run, may affect the levels of political satisfaction over next decades, reversing the current pattern of stability,

as the Gulf countries, which are mostly oil-dependent, are preparing themselves to the post-oil era.
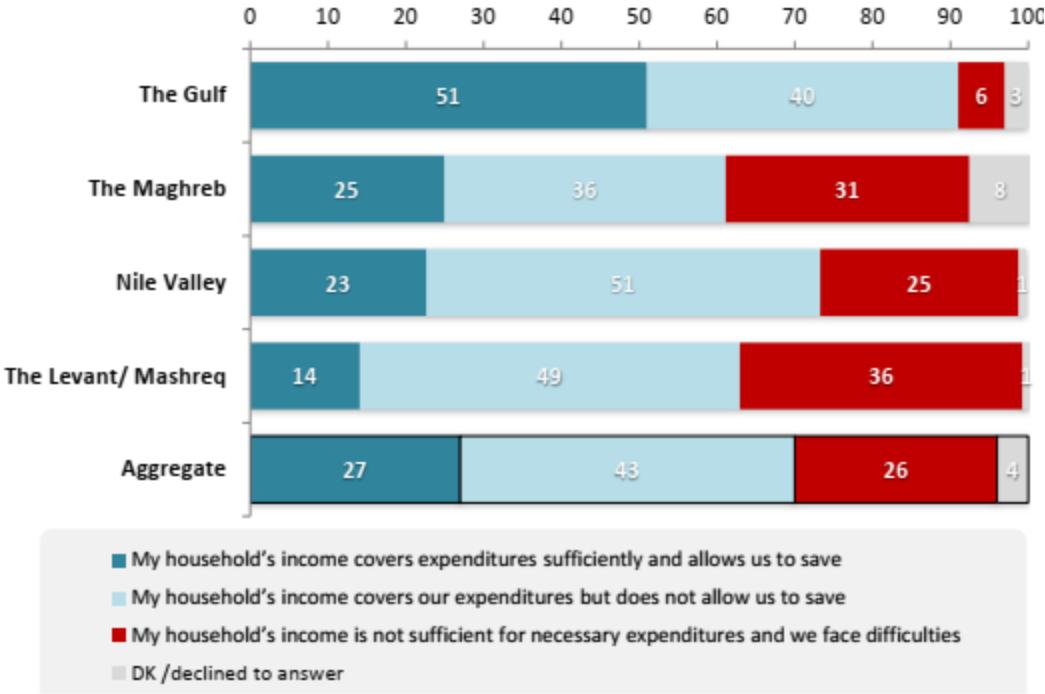
Graph (5.10): Self-Reported Household Income by Region[257]

With the retreat from supporting Salafi and Wahhabi currents from Gulf regimes, as expected from the current rhetoric about religious patterns across the region, it is expected that the region may witness an overhaul transformation in terms of ideology and values in the area of religion and its relation to governance. The expansion of economic austerity measures in the Gulf, from other hand, may also dries the wells of finance for Islamism across the Middle East. The structural reforms adopted by the new Saudi leadership may contribute, on the long run, to limiting the spread of extremist thought the region. It is true that the currents of political Islam are capable of mutating, adapting and reappearing in various forms, but many indicators confirm the decline of its influence and prestige, at least on the medium term.

---

[257] Arab Barometer, Oc. Cit., p.2.

The post-oil era in the Middle East may provide as well opportunities for adopting more diverse economies, more contemporary political projects, and living in a region less vulnerable to interference from outside powers. The exploitation of shale oil and gas, especially in the United States, has led to a significant increase in supply, and the shift to alternative energy sources such as expansion in electric cars and other means of transportation will reduce demand, and consequently oil will lose a large part of its market value, and it will also lose its impact on international relations. As a result, the strategic importance of the Middle East will decrease, and we have seen the harbingers of that in recent years.[258]

In addition, Turkey is now considering rapprochement with other regional powers in order to mitigate the negative economic effects of this regional proxy war from one hand, and to enhance its web of coalition in the Eastern Mediterranean and the whole region, from the other. In order to mature this move, Ankara decided to close number of effective opposition satellite programs related to the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey, as a gesture of good intention with Egypt and other actors in the Middle East.

After years of political and media activism in exile, the Egyptian opposition groups in Turkey, by their different orientations, failed to instigate a second wave of revolution in their home land, or even to make a transformational pattern in political culture or political ideologies, although of their ability to extend their media reach and popularity comparing to other government-sponsored satellite programs running from Cairo. Al-Sharq and Mekamelen satellite channels, as the first is owned and managed by the self-exiled Egyptian opposition leader Ayman Nour, and the other is managed by faction of the Muslim Brotherhood, came at advanced ranking in news channel classification across the whole Arab region, winning over all other Egyptian-based or Emirati-based satellite

---

[258] Gilles Kepel, **Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West**, Columbia University Press, New York, 2020, p. 321.

channels, according to a specialized report issued by Global Market Research and Public Opinion Specialist (IPSOS)[259].

This regional reach came with little activism outcomes, even though with the support of some elite defections, and the help of whistle-blower actor and contractor Muhammad Ali, who exposed internal corruption from the inner circles of El-Sisi regime, although he managed to stir some protests across Cairo, but the overall outcome of the opposition in Turkey was directing sever criticism for the regime but without presenting an alternative path or solutions to the deeply-rooted social, economic, cultural and political problems of wider region or for Egypt itself. The lack of elite political imagination and their lack of consistency, in addition to their inability to produce normative solutions and their collective attitude towards the rule of military dictatorship revealed an intellectual and structural defect of the Revisionist camp across the region.

The next poll (Table 5.5) reveals that the main motives for Arab uprising in 2011 were those against corruption, dictatorship and for economic and related issues, while democracy, dignity, justice and equality for example were at the end of the list. That reveal to some extend that the demand for change was for welfare conditions and not as a result of deep change in the philosophical, ontological or epistemological orientations or even for a value-based change. For those reasons, some argue that the Arab uprisings were not revolutions, but rather an anger-based disturbance without a compass leading them for structural change in the class system or the hierarchy of the social order.

---

[259] **Rassd.net**, "Opposition channels are top watched", 4 May 2017, https://rassd.net/205878.htm (8 September 2017).

Order of responses	First most important reason			Second most important reason		
	2020/ 2019	2018/ 2017	2016	2020/ 2019	2018/ 2017	2016
Against corruption	31	21	25	14	11	6
Due to poor economic conditions	16	20	18	17	17	14
Against dictatorship	16	14	20	11	9	9
For political freedoms	6	8	10	7	8	7
To end oppression	6	8	5	12	14	15
For justice and equality	4	5	3	10	12	11
For democracy	3	4	4	8	8	9
For dignity	4	4	4	8	9	9
Other	1	3	3	1	1	1
don't know, decline to respond	13	13	7	0	0	0
No other choice	0	0	0	12	13	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table (5.5): Main Two Reasons For 2011 Uprisings[260]

In this regard, the Arab uprisings can't be considered as neither social nor political revolutions according to its outcomes. The so-called "great revolutions" are social revolutions that result in major societal change in both class relations and regime type, whereas political revolutions result in a change in political regime rather than class relations. Political revolutions succeed in establishing a new political regime with new institutions, ideals, and methods for organizing political will and rallying the masses, as well as new methods for controlling the opposition. Skocpol also make the distinction between both, as: "Political revolutions transform state structures but not social structures, and they are not necessarily accomplished through class conflict".[261]

---

[260] Michael Robbins, *What Arab Publics Think*? Op. cit., p.24.

[261] Derya Göçer Akder, "Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings: The Lessons from the Middle East", **Ortadoğu Etütleri**, Volume 4, No 2, January 2013, p. 97,98. See also: T Skocpol, **States and Social Revolutions: a comparative analysis of France, Russia and China**, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 4.

The Revisionist camp, with its diversifications, failed to introduce a coherent and consistent new vision for the political, economic and social problems of their countries, while the Reactionist camp used their accumulated wealth for establishing media outlets that propagate the vision of stability verses unguaranteed change, while in the same time intentionally raised the cost of change on both individuals and the whole community, in terms of delivering security, electricity and other minimal services provided by state as a collective punishment for the society for their will of change in Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen.

5.2. Tactical Coalitions in the Middle East

Tactical coalitions are a temporary preparation from state to handle an eminent threat or pressing issue, as it differs from historical alliance by lacking the continuity and core commonalities in values and norms. They are useful and frequently opportunistic because they enable states to deal with a pressing or urgent issues. Leaders frequently justify their actions by citing local realities and realpolitik imperatives. The tactical alliance can be sustained if there is a strong geopolitical interest or if a common threat to both countries' survival is identified. However, if the interest changes or is redefined, or if the threat goes away, the alliance will not be able to continue. In reality, the paradox of tactical alliances is that, even though they serve as catalysts for tensions, they do not rule out rapprochement between members of opposing coalitions or the prospect of an alliance's rapid disintegration.[262]

Rather than consolidation the current coalitions, small states may decide to embark on tactical alliance, and ally with the aggressor or bandwagoning with him in the absence of a valid regional order or a clear hegemon or effective regional power in its web of balancing alliance. If small states found that its coalition is lacking effectiveness or deterrence, it may jump out and joining the most powerful, even if he was the aggressor, fearing of being victim of giants' stampede. Tactical coalitions between small Gulf states and Israel are an

---

[262] Jeremy J. Ghez, *The Enduring Partnership?* p.90.

example of that situation, as in the case of a war eruption between Iran and Saudi Arabia, they will be victim of this rivalry in terms of political, economic and social levels. They, instead, chose to ally with their historical enemy in the region in hope of waging a preemptive strike against him that cripple its abilities to hurt their strategic interests.

Some scholars differentiate between the application of Balance of Power theory on international powers and the Third World. Steven R. David for example makes this differentiation in his theory of Omni-balancing, he argues that the most widely used theory in international politics, the balance of power, is particularly unsuitable for explaining Third World alignments because it ignores the Third World's unique characteristics. Understanding the Third World is and will be crucial to understanding the course of international politics, necessitating the development of a theory that takes such traits into account. It deviates from the balance of power model to explain Third World alignment decisions as a result of the requirement for Third World leaders to counter *all* threats. As a result, whereas balance of power focuses on the state's need to counter threats from other states, Omni-balancing considers both internal and external threats to the *leadership*, and as a result, it fundamentally alters our understanding of why Third World leaders align as they do, as well as providing insights into a wide range of Third World behavior.[263]

Therefore, for a better understanding for the regime behaviors in the Middle East we have to put in mind their leaders' tendencies towards balancing against their own people as part of the Omni-balancing theory. The logical calculation of Third World leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power is the most potent factor of Third World alignment behavior. This is due to the Third World's unstable, risky, and frequently lethal political environment on both the international and domestic levels[264]. On the other hand, the Omni-balancing relationship between the Gulf

---

[263] Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment", **World Politics**, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991), p.233.

[264] Ibid, p.25.

countries with the US is a clear example of such a dependent relationship with a hegemon that can protect them from internal and external threats as well.

However, as the US is showing tendencies toward retrenchment and withdrawal from the Middle East, small states start to search for a new hegemon to bandwagon with. Abu Dhabi is now making an extended alliance with Israel in different strategic and military projects, in addition to intelligence-based projects in Red Sea Island of Socotra and elsewhere, and in spying projects like Pegasus software, the Israeli program that the UAE and other countries in the region used to spy through it on their oppositions.[265] While activists around the world started to acknowledge and condemn the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian and boycotting it in different areas around the world, Abu Dhabi started to lean towards Tel Aviv in search for new coalitions in the region, running against the popular attitude of the people in the Pan-Arab region.

On the other hand, the UAE is also preserving good trade relations with Iran, which have a considerable delegation and businessmen in the UAE, especially in Dubai, while it joined Saudi Arabia and other states to boycott Qatar, on the pretext that, among other reasons, Doha has deep relations with Iran. In addition to the bandwagoning with Israel, the UAE with its fragile economic model that is based on peace, stability, and a free trade with openness to the world economy, started to build its military capabilities even by importing or manufacturing high quality and modern weapons and gears, that granted it an important status in the regional military campaigns against ISIS and extremist movements around the Horn of Africa and Sahel regions.

In light of the American withdrawal from the region, France emerged as one of the most important international powers that began to engage in regional conflicts, whether in Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa or the Sahel, where it launched several missions to combat rebel groups in order to extend its control over its traditional areas of influence in Central Africa. As part of the UAE's search for diversifying and modernizing

---

[265] **TRT World**, "The role of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the Pegasus spyware saga", 2 August 2021, https://bit.ly/3zUsMI6 (9 September 2021).

its network of alliances, it has concluded advanced military partnerships with France to house elements of its army on its soil and import advanced weapons from it, in addition to participating with it in counter-terrorism operations. Egypt, which the United States refused to sell advanced F-35 aircraft, also went to search for other military partnerships with France and Russia, despite the strategic relationship between Egypt and the United States. Egypt has modernized its aircraft fleet, the backbone of which is the F-16, with advanced generations of the French Rafale, in addition to the Russian MiG and Sukhoi. Hence, the American withdrawal from the region, and the arrival of President Biden to the White House, contributed significantly to changing the network of tactical alliances in the region.

In this context, Israel transformed itself from being an arch enemy for the countries of the region, into a model for defiance and challenge for the whole regional order, although of being a small state with limited population, comparing to its neighbors. Therefore, the Israeli model represents a threat for the very model of Natural Alliance, as it proves the opposite in a practical fashion: it managed, over time, to make its own regional sphere of influence with its core in Tel Aviv, as being a hub for energy trade and a center for the coalition against Iran. The tactical alliance between Israel and Egypt in the field of energy, started since Mubarak era, when the two countries started cooperation in the gas industry, as Egypt exported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to Tel Aviv, and continued today in the form of the Cairo-based East Mediterranean Gas Forum, that include other Egypt's tactical coalition with Greece and Cyprus, as some analysts described it as a cooperation in the shadow of competition.[266]

The liquidity of coalitions in the region, as mentioned earlier in this study in the context of the absence of regional security order, paved the way for the tactical nature of coalitions, as states are scrambling to secure their national interests from one hand, and the survival of the ruling elite on the other hand. All states are looking either inside or outside of their borders for securing the dominance vacuums, as these vacuums are occurred within and out

---

[266] Gabriel Mitchell, "The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum: Cooperation in the Shadow of Competition", **The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies**, September 2020, p. 9.

of the geographical borders of fragile states in the Middle East. The areas that starts from the western desert in Egypt and extended to Sinai Peninsula to Gaza strip and the contested territories in northern and eastern Syria, to the western Iraqi provinces of the Sunni majority where ISIS used to exploit, moving towards the areas in the northern eastern governorates in Saudi Arabia as Iran sees as a potential areas for influence and stirring sectarian unrest, to the western southern areas of Saudi Arabia where the Houthis are active in threatening strategic and populated areas, reaching to the Holly places of Mecca and Medina, to the region of the Horn of Africa and the whole Yemen, ending with the strait of Hormuz. Regional powers are launching preemptive strikes trying to move their security line beyond their borders, and enacting new tactical alliances with local militias in the contested areas of the region.

Even the formal umbrella of the Arab League is having power struggle under its roof; with a continues state of balancing and bargaining, in a way that reflexes relative weights and interests of different blocks inside the regional organization. While this may seem normal in collective foreign policy making bodies that is trying to reach a common vision for the organization, like the European Union for example, this shouldn't be the case in collective security and defense for Arab States. The Arab League failed in the most dangerous junctures of its history to evade member states intra-disputes over border demarcation, like the cases of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the dispute between Morocco and Algeria that led to the Sand War in 1963, or the Egyptian Sudanese conflict over the Halaib Triangle since 1950s, and the Egyptian Libyan war of July 1977, in addition to other smaller inter-states disputes across the region.

The only clear example of rapprochement in a unity based on ideologies, values and commonality in history and political vision and culture, was the unity between Egypt and Syrian in that started in 22 February 1958 and ended abruptly in 28 September 1961after a military coup in Syria. although of commonality in the ideas of unity and Pan Arabism, and the common destiny and enemy as well, the two countries failed in their unity and needed a defeat for both from Israel to rejoin ranks and make a military coalition in October War of

193

1973. Despite the unity in military efforts, the two sided failed to preserve this unity that turned into sever enmity after the Camp David Accord of 1979.

The hierarchical defect of the Arab League, from the other hand, prevented it also from taking any vital decisions in relation to major social unrest in the Arab region. The Arab League was taken by surprise due to these developments and chose the path of silence and ignoring the "Arab Spring" as a whole while pointing to the core themes of the Arabs' and Israelis' longstanding concerns, as if it was established only for that cause. The Amman Summit in 2017 came to a conclusion without any major announcements after six years of the "Arab Spring". It did, however, provide an essential insight into Arab regimes' newest attempts to define their ideas and policies in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Arab leaders were eager to speak out against Israel's occupation and settlement growth on occupied Palestinian land, as well as to express their support for the Palestinian cause, while completely ignoring the revolutions and the need to help in the democratic transition process occurred out of its headquarter in Cairo.[267]

The example of the Arab League supports the argument that there is no consistence coalition pattern in the region, even inside the Gulf Cooperation Council itself after the Gulf Crisis that took place in 5 June 2017. Even after the reconciliation in Al-Ula Summit in 5 January 2021, the more fundamental issues have remained unresolved. In truth, the Gulf crisis came to a conclusion as a result of uncontrollable events rather than by addressing and resolving the problems that generated it in the first place.[268] The two examples of the abovementioned regional organizations open the door for a question about if there even a Historical Coalition in the Middle East or the overlapping area of the Arab World?

---

[267] Ulger & Hammoura, "The Arab League: From Establishment to Failure", **Social and Legal Studies journal**, Vol 4 (1) 2018, p.46,47.

[268] Marwan Kabalan, "The Al-Ula GCC Summit: An End to Gulf Rivalry or Just Another Truce**?",** **Insight Turkey**, 2021 Vol. 23 / No. 1 / p. 58.

5.3. Historical Coalitions in the Middle East

Historical coalitions are long-term collaborations that endure despite significant breaks in the international system or structural changes. Its structural characteristics, which outlast time-specific contingencies, allow allies to maintain cooperation by relying on prior triumphs as focal points to justify new collaborations. Because of the uncertainty regarding international prospects, the "shadow of the future" weighs in on a historic alliance, making it an appealing instrument to hedge against a variety of possibilities. Historical allies are more likely to tolerate short-term compromises that aren't totally aligned with national goals in the hopes of gaining rewards in the long run. Another distinction to be made is that historical alliances rely solely on a sense of shared history, or historical alliances that also rely on an institutional dimension, such as commonalities of regime types.[269]

In this regard, the historical alliance in the Middle East can be applied on the Arab Peninsula monarchs in the scope of the GCC, as they share history and culture as well, while defining them as Natural Alliance was challenged by the Gulf Crisis and other impediments of full harmony in their foreign policy making and outcomes. Although all of them are monarchies, despite different title like King, Emir, Sultan, etc. with different underlying layers of governance, there is disagreement on some ontological views of the world in terms of religion, governance and even whom they may ally with. Sultanate of Oman, for example, has its different set of values and norms, as being heir of the historical Omani Empire, that extended from the western shores of Iran into the Madagascar Island. With its distinctive location at the south eastern tip of the peninsula, it upgraded a different set of religious beliefs and has its own interpretation of Islam and its relation to governance, according to their Ibadhi sect. Oman is also preserving its own distinctive foreign policy in comparison to those of Saudi, Emirati and Bahraini ones, as it is trying to have balanced relations with its neighbors in and across the Persian Gulf.

[269] Jeremy Ghez, *the Enduring Partnership*, p. 95.
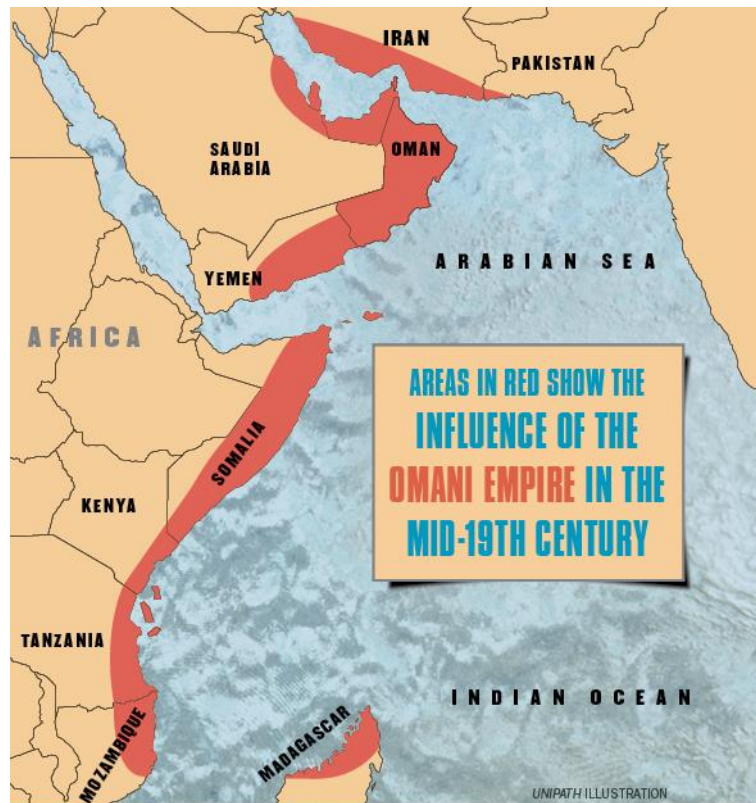
Map (5.1): Omani Empire in the mid-19ᵗʰ Century[270]

Qatar, from the other hand, has its own foreign policy, which is more aligned with Turkey in regional and international politics. The model of Qatar in the Middle East can be analyzed in the scope of the Arab united vision before Camp David peace agreement's Era, with a more unitary policy towards the collective action within the Muslim World, while it established and brought foreign institution that promote good governance, while depending on attracting well educated activists and researchers to join its indigenous institutions of mass media and political science research centers. For the better use of its wealth, Qatar follows scientific methods even in relation to humanitarian science, that made a mixed formula of unitarian Arabism with full regard to the Islamic aspect, while trying to incorporate Islamists in the regional politics. This formula depends more **Uni Path**

---

[270] **Uni Path Magazine**, "The Importance of Sea Power", 11 February 2019, https://unipath-magazine.com/the-importance-of-sea-power/ (5 September 2021).

Magazine, "The Importance of Sea Power", 11 February 2019, (5 September 2021) https://unipath-magazine.com/the-importance-of-sea-power/.on Natural Alliance in the region, with overlaps with the Turkish vision of the AK Party, which resulted in a rapprochement in viewpoints about different regional issues. Its mutual economic interests with Iran in the common gas field of The South Pars/North Dome, plus its ontological unitarian view in relation to Islamism, granted it a balanced vision about Iran and its role in the region.

The whole GCC countries are allied with the US, as there are multiple military bases and facilities that service the American army for its combat and reconnaissance operation (see Graph5.11), in addition to the linkage of their oil-based economies revenues with the US dollar. Since their independence, the Gulf countries replaced the collapsed Ottoman and British Empires with the American partnership, as the US guaranties their regimes survival in return for the continued flow of oil from the region. That kind of dependency allowed the Gulf countries to enjoy great extent of stability and prosperity for decades, hence avoided enacting other shapes of coalitions. Any American retreat from the region would enormously affects the current pattern of alliances across the Arab peninsula. The Decisiveness Storm operation is an example of the cost regional states may have incurred to preserve stability and balance in the peninsula.
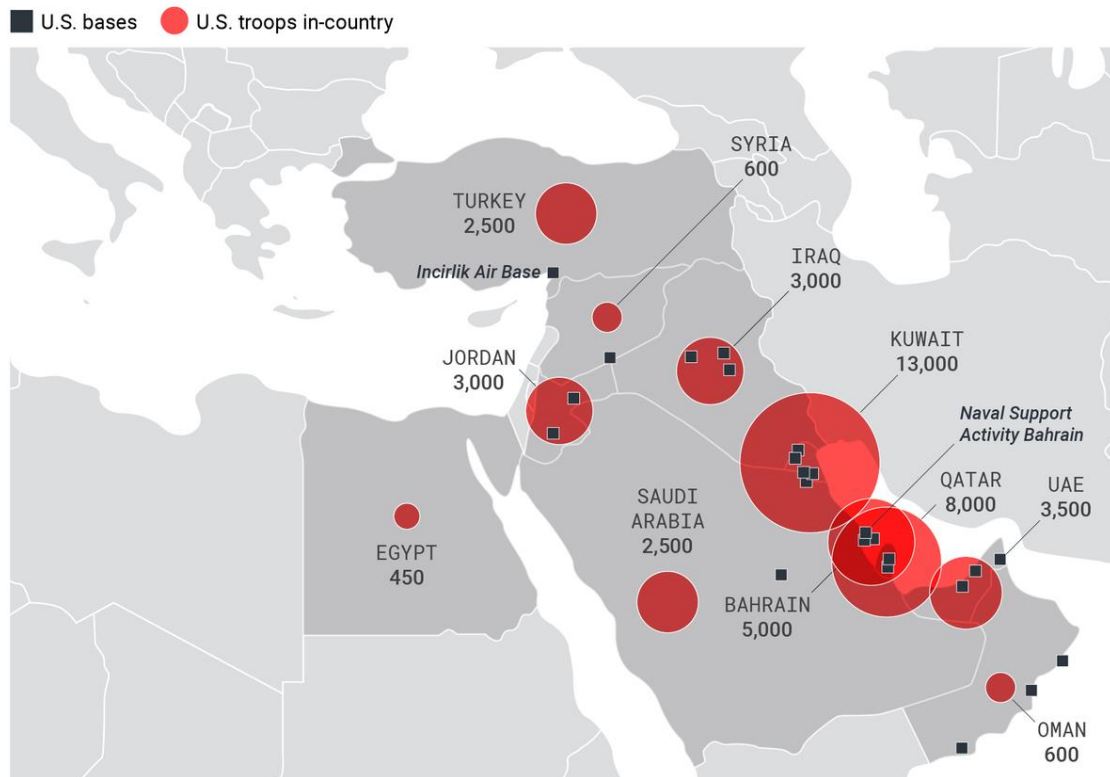
Graph (5.11): US Troops and Bases in the Middle East[271]

Although the Arab peninsula might be considered as a homogenous region in relation to history and culture, it lacks the resemblance in political culture and political systems alike. Kuwait for example with its semi-democratic model, that run multiple representative elections and has a viable parliamentary activity, with its assimilation of the Islamic movements inside its political system, and also has balanced relationship with the Shiite sect even within its population or with Iran. Hence, its visions and set of values can be differentiated from most political systems and cultures in the peninsula. Kuwait is also having a shared historical commonality with other Gulf state, as it considers Saudi Arabia as its strategic depth for defense against both Iraq and Iran.

---

[271] Mike Sweeney, **A Plan for U.S. Withdrawal from The Middle East**, Defense Priorities, December 2020, p.2.

The Yemeni historical activism towards the establishment of a republic makes also a threatening model for other monarchies, with its dense population, comparing to its neighbors, and being as a center of struggle between republicans and monarchies in the region in the 1950s and 60s. Until the present day, Yemen represents a challenge and liability, not an asset, for the collective security of the Arab peninsula, with its sectarian militias backed by Iran, and its Zaydi religious doctrine, and being as a headquarter for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), with a tangled web of tribal and extremist complexities.

Therefore, geographical proximity doesn't necessarily yield rapprochement in political culture or convergence in constructive identity. This case can also be applied upon Egypt and its neighbors, mainly Sudan and Libya. As mentioned before, the unity between Egypt and Syria has failed, although the Levant used to be, in different periods of post-Islamic history, as part of the greater Egyptian influence since Tulunid State (872-904 AD). The resemblance between the two countries in politics, the role of military, their common enemy in 1973 war, production of culture and literature, being as Mediterranean countries, and cradle of old civilizations in the region, entail them to an upgraded level of rapprochement. The Omni-balancing theory, that argue that third world state leaders have a threat perception from the outside and inside of their own countries, may explain why unity projects failed across the Middle East and the Arab World, as regime survival and personal traits of a leader play a significant role in enacting different types of coalitions.

While the behavior of the consecutive Egyptian regimes since Camp David peace accord led to, among other reasons, the disruption of the Arab Nationalism, then the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait added a more disruption for the Arab collective actions towards the regional security and threat perception. The American invasion of Iraq unleashed the Iranian influence in the region and allowed it to increase sectarianism in the whole Middle East, while the Arab Spring was a de-facto end for the old regional order. The Omni-balancing, according to the theory, applies on leaders who are weak and illegitimate. Domestic dangers to a government, in this case, can also push its leaders to pursue an appeasement policy, in which they collaborate with secondary opponents in order to divert resources

away from key adversaries. The threatened leadership aligns with one threat to confront the other in this fashion. Because many Third World leaders' primary purpose is to stay in power, they occasionally make alignment decisions to protect themselves at the expense of state interests.[272]

Weakness and illegitimacy of governments and their leader around the Middle East makes even historical alliances harder, while Natural Alliances became impossible, as leaders seek tactical, fragile and liquid coalitions, while their dependency on international or regional hegemon become more convenient for the survival of their regime, as the cases of Bashar al Assad regime in Syria who brought foreign and regional powers to occupy vast areas of his own country in order to survive against the wrath of his people, and sacrificed with his country's wealth and sovereignty to continue and his oligarchic Alawite elite in power. El Sisi regime in Egypt, on the other hand, collaborated with foreign powers from the Gulf to suppress a popular revolution and a democratic transition process in order to seize power, and continued since 2013 coup to consolidate his military dictatorship on the expense of his country's economic prosperity, although he warned before the coup that if the military interfered in political path, that would hinder progress in Egypt for about 40 years.[273]

Hence, coalitions in these cases are not based upon national interest, but rather relies on the survival of the leader, his regime and supporting elites. Even if the people of the Middle East and the greater MENA region demands democratic transition or even a greater coalition within a framework of natural alliance, dictatorship will be an impediment to that goal, as it work in collaboration with its likes in the regional order to make coalitions that aim for the survival of their regimes as their prime and height priority, while the national interest will take a back seat in their foreign policy making, and will always squander their national wealth on eternal wars and foreign interventions to suppress people demands for

---

[272] Steven R. David, *Explaining Third World Alignment*, p.236.

[273] **Russia Today**, "Sisi confirms the impossibility of the Egyptian army to take to the street without a coup against Morsi", 11 May 2013, https://bit.ly/3hmSIET (7 September 2021).

change or regional unity fearing its spill over to their own peripheries, what explain a long period of rivalries between neighboring countries just as a result of a companion of leadership between dictators around the region.

5.4. Towards a Natural alliance in the Middle East:

Natural alliances are a step further than historical relationships in terms of rationality. As Jeremy Ghez argues, it proposes that commonalities in political culture and identity play a role in explaining the durability of certain alliances. The distinction between a historical and a Natural Alliance may seem minor, yet it is crucial. Natural allies have an extra mechanism to coordinate and preserve their relationship since they share a common political culture and identity—potentially in addition to a shared sense of history. The actors' perceptions of generally accepted standards and norms are unconditionally broadened to the point that reciprocity becomes diffuse and simpler to maintain.

As a result, scenarios involving conflict or strain amongst natural allies have a substantially lower probability. Because they are acknowledged, where commonalities in political culture and identity play an important role. In other words, both parties in a coalition must accept a natural partnership as such. The process is as much about commonalities as it is about a shared constructed identity that emerges from initial political culture similarities and an accumulation process that impacts all identities involved.[274]

The political culture of the Middle East and the greater MENA region, as above-mentioned in previous parts, implies that a positive rapprochement towards a Natural Alliance is possible. A shared history, identity, culture and religion may lead to a kind of alliance that doesn't prevent the occurrence of disagreements or even certain level of rivalry over some issues, like the coalition between the US and Europe for example. However, a natural coalition within the Muslim World can lead to a better level of stability and security in global affairs generally and in the Middle East in specific. The upgrade of the politics - its awareness and participation - across the region to a universal level will

---

[274] Jeremy Ghez, *the Enduring Partnership*, Oc. Cit., p. 96.

even result in a better alliance with the West, in cases ranges from regional security to human rights and reducing poverty. The normalization of politics and economy in an advanced successful Regionalism will reverse the current state of failure on the socioeconomic levels, and will contribute to the stability of the Middle East and its sub-regions.

The agreement from the people of the region on the demands for democracy and good governance, while considering the Turkish model as an example that can be imitated on the local levels through MENA, and the desire to combat corruption and despotism, are all ample reasons for the change into a normative model of governance that may lead to a natural coalition on its regional level, and a good governance on the local levels. Tactical alliances, or even historical ones, in addition to foreign policy making that favor only the interest of a leader or a ruling elite that lack legitimacy, will continue to hinder regional and international efforts to bring stability to the Middle East. The example of Muslim countries that goes out of its Natural Alliances to be incorporated in an alien coalition was doomed failure, as the historical facts show.

For example, Turkey is a very unusual partner in the current geopolitical environment when it comes to its connections with Western security and economic systems. It is a country with strong historical ties to Europe and the United States, particularly as a result of its NATO membership and Cold War engagement. However, in terms of political culture and reactions to current international events, Turkey and other Muslim countries have more in common than other trans-Atlantic countries. Turkey and the US have frequently claimed that Ankara is a Middle East bridge and that its historical ties to the West are a strategic asset for Ankara to gain leverage in a particularly complex region.[275]

The Western-Turkish relations can amply fit to a historical coalition, as the relation between the two sides since the end of the World War II proved to be beneficial for both sides, but when it comes to cultural or religious issues, the differences arise, and even being

---

[275] Jeremy Ghez, *the Enduring Partnership*, p.188.

part of the security structure of the Western alliance of the NATO, Ankara was denied the technology transfer or importing advanced defense systems from the West. Being democratic also doesn't entail you a seat in the Western Natural Alliance, even according to the Democratic Peace Theory. Being democratic may prevent you from waging a war against another democratic country, but doesn't qualify you to be part of its common constructed identity and shared values.

The West, and especially after September 11th attacks, called for a democratic change for the Muslim World, as the only way to prevent radicalization and extremism in the name of religion. On May 9, 2003, at the University of South Carolina, President Bush delivered a historic address in which he declared America's steadfast commitment to democracy and freedom in the Middle East as a crucial goal of the war on terror:

We support the advance of freedom in the Middle East, because it is our founding principle, and because it is in our national interest. The hateful ideology of terrorism is shaped and nurtured and protected by oppressive regimes. Free nations, in contrast, encourage creativity and tolerance and enterprise. And in those free nations, the appeal of extremism withers away. Free governments do not build weapons of mass destruction for the purpose of mass terror. Over time the expansion of liberty throughout the world is the best guarantee of security throughout the world. Freedom is the way to peace.[276]

But when Turkey refused to cooperate with the US in invading Iraq in 2003, William Burns, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs at that time, said that "democracy in Turkey had actually hampered US foreign-policy goals, and that democracy in the rest of the Muslim world would make it more difficult for the US to pursue its interests"[277]. In Egypt, after the first democratically elected government in the history of the

---

[276] **The White House**, "President Bush Presses for Peace in the Middle East", 9 May 2003, https://bit.ly/3nrK7F2 (13 September 2021).

[277] Muqtedar Khan, "Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of U.S. Policy", **Brookings**, 1 September 2003, https://brook.gs/2XeJfZn (13 September 2021).

state, Obama said that Egypt neither an enemy nor an ally[278], only when Cairo started to act independently and represented the demands of its own people.

The lesson learned is that spreading democracy in the Muslim World is conditioned by copping with the interests of the West. Here, the West means that imagined set of values and constructed identity represented by number of states in a Natural Alliance within the Western Civilization. Later on, the West gave a blind eye to the military coup that toppled the democratically elected president and destroyed the whole democratic experience in Egypt in 2013, while president Trump descried al Sisi, later on, as "my favorite dictator"[279]. Turkey, on the other hand, stood up against the coup in Egypt and called for the restoration of democracy. Turkey had both material and normative incentives in its strong negative reaction to Egypt's coup d'état, as it stood to lose a crucial partner in the region. The country's signaling was mostly bundled inside the normative framework, which centered on the voting box in terms of democracy and the illegitimacy of a military takeover. The Turkish government used a variety of methods to send a negative message to the coup regime, including speeches, diplomatic actions, financial sanctions, protests, and conferences.[280]

Even after decades of partnership between Egypt and the US since Camp David peace accord in 1979, that didn't qualify Cairo even to be in a historical alliance pattern or strategic partnership with Washington, as the US refused to sell Egypt its most advanced fifth generation air fighter, the F35, while it gave it to Israel. Turkey, that is considered part of the NATO, was also denied buying the advanced Patriot missile defense system from the

---

[278] **Reuters**, "Obama: Egypt Neither Enemy nor Ally", 13 September 2012, https://reut.rs/3htq310 (3 March 2021).

[279] **The Wall Street Journal**, "Trump, Awaiting Egyptian Counterpart at Summit, Called Out for 'My Favorite Dictator'", 13 September 2019, (13 September 2021) https://on.wsj.com/3k3O2FH.

[280] Mehmet Yegin, "Turkey's reaction to the coup in Egypt in comparison with the US and Israel", **Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies**, 2016, 18:4, p. 410, 411.

West, including technology transfer and joint production terms[281]. Turkey, the European Union, and the United States form a triangular situation that is particularly instructive for the difference between types of coalitions. Turkey and the US regard their relationship as *historically* and *tactically* warranted. Some members of the European Union do not dispute this argument, but instead, cite their shared manufactured *identity* as a reason to deny Turkey membership into the European Union. Previous models of alignments have rarely taken into account these miscalculations and divergent interpretations of the relationships by the many individuals involved.[282]

The previously mentioned geopolitical transformations that occurred in the Middle East can enormously affect the future of the region, especially in the case of a considerable retreat of the US from the region, as regional powers, as that time, will be forced to agree upon a new guarantee for de-escalation and a mechanism for mitigating struggles and combating security threats to the whole region. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the negotiated withdrawal from Iraq, and the move of the US pulling out its missile defense systems from Saudi Arabia, are all indications that Washington, after being less dependent on the Middle East oil, became less interested in expending more resources for the security of the region.

When Biden's administration decided to pull its Patriot Missiles defense systems from Saudi Arabia[283], there were speculations that Washington is reconsidering its deployment plans in the Middle East. Some voices raised the argument that there is no feasibility from the continuation of the US military existence in the Gulf, amid conversations about force reductions and the complete American withdrawal from the Middle East. There are arguments predicting that there will be additional instability in the years ahead, as the underlying incentives for the Arab Spring weren't fully addressed, while the Iranian missile

[281] **Reuters**, "Turkey says U.S. offering Patriot missiles if S-400 not operated", 10 March 2020, https://reut.rs/3A7TBZy (13 September 2021).

[282] Jeremy Ghez, *the Enduring Partnership*, p.17.

[283] **Voice of America**, "US Pulls Missile Defenses in Saudi Arabia Amid Yemen Attacks", 11 September 2021, https://bit.ly/394QwgM (13 September 2021).

attacks in retaliation of the death of Qassem Soleimani allow Tehran to increasingly contest U.S. presence in the region, and therefore suggesting relocation of the US troops away from the reach of Iran and its provocations in the Straits of Hormuz to Jordan and Oman, and return to a role as offshore balancer.[284]

The recede of the American interest in the Middle East and its status in the US foreign policy will put the regional powers in the Middle east between two choices: everlasting chaos or everlasting cooperation. A successful cooperation model needs ideological, institutional and developmental transformation that reflexes the necessities resulted from the geopolitical transformations in the region. A rapprochement between regional powers in the Middle East, after years of attrition wars on material and moral levels, would put an end to the current case of chaos and madness of proxy wars that fight wind mills; be them are achieving full hegemony, the victory over the other sect or ethnicity, or the annihilation of adversaries and opponents that hold different religious interpretations, will lead at the end to a lose-lose situation for all.

---

[284] Mike Sweeney, Op. cit.

CONCLUSION

The geopolitical changes that occurred in the Middle East in the last two decades still have great impact on the process of coalition building across the region, with political, religious and security repercussions. The transformations resulting from the Arab Spring led to religious and political debates on the role fo religion in public sphere, while the fall of regimes and collapse of states, and the spread of armed militias backed by regional powers and international interventions with multiple goals, resulted in a sever compition across tradational and rising regional acrots. In the same time, the roots and foundations from which those revolutions erupted have not yet been addressed, as authoritarian regimes that survived the waves of the Arab Spring resort even to more violence, in order to suppress people activism, what resulted in more repression and hence more instability and the lack of intended social justice. The demands of freedom, dignity, justice, and the availability of the basic needs of citizens were not even partially satisfied, what prepars the region for more waves of instability, given the added economical effects of Covid19 and the Russian war on Ukraine.

The findings of this thesis shows that the local, regional and international factors affect the stability of the region, that lacks for a regional order or a security architecture that can help in solving its security problem, or at least mitigate its disputes. The disagreement on the role of religion in public spheres and on the shape of good governance led to the plorifiration of conflicts and non-state actors that operate according to the different and even conflicting ideologies, in a mosaic-like map of various sectarian and racial groups that are supported by international or regional actors that are vying for hegemony and influence across the regional (dis)order.

Since the major events that struck the region - since Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait; the American-led invasion of Iraq; and the outbreak of the Arab revolutions-dominance and power vacuums have emerged in different parts of the Middle East, and in

light of the state of competition for regional hegemony, the major regional actors have worked to fill those voids in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and in the Horn of Africa, where these forces worked to extend their influence and dominance over these vacuums through proxy wars and the financing and arming of groups and militias ideologically similar to them, creating a state of regional competition that has become a stone's throw away from slipping into wars of attrition by proxy.

The different interpretations of religion, its role in the public sphere and its relationship to governance and power have also led to ideological wars to win over hearts and minds of the people of the Middle East and North Africa. Each party has worked to establish soft power broadcasting means such as channels, newspapers, websites, and research centers in order to disseminate their interpretations of religion and its relationship with the state, each according to its interests and objectives of its internal and external policies, and to achieve its control over the public sphere inside its country and to prevent religious groups from imposing their religious interpretations. Then, the conflict began over the interpretation of religion even between the institutions of the one state, as we saw in the Egyptian case in the form of the conflict between the presidency and the official religious institution in the country, Al-Azhar and its Grand Imam.

The energy transformations in the region have also had a significant impact on fueling conflicts, competing for influence and dominance, and building new alliances, mostly tactical and temporary, as an inevitable result of the collapse of the regional system and the lack of forces that can establish a hegemonic stability. The shifts in the demand for energy from oil to natural gas and from natural gas to clean and renewable energy, in addition to the expansion of the production of electric cars and the increasing reliance on nuclear reactors to generate electric power in number of countries in the world, all of which would lead to shifts in the patterns of supply and demand, and then it will directly affect the budgets of mainly Gulf countries that rely solely on energy sector in their economy. The launch of new wave of normalization and peace accords with Israel, from some Gulf countries - in the fields of energy, armaments, and industries based on gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean, and Gas liquefaction and the establishment of energy transmission

pipeline companies, as well as participation in the establishment of highly profitable exploration companies - all led to changes in the patterns of alliances in the region, and resulted in the dominance of the tactical nature over the historical and natural alliances in the Middle East.

All of these transformations led to fluidity in rapidly shifting and fragile alliances, in addition to the spread of armed interventions, the use of hard power and the expansion of military production with the aim of domination and control on the one hand, and with the aim of profitability and achieving national security for countries on the other hand. In addition, there were a collapse of the ideological umbrellas of alliances in the region, such as alliances based on Arab nationalism, while there was a rivalry over the centrality of Islam and its interpretations with regard to the role of religion in the public sphere and its relationship to the state and politics. These interpretations have become one of the most important axes of conflict and the formation of alliances in the region, in light of three main alliances in the Middle East, namely the Saudi axis, the Iranian axis, the Turkish axis, and their different definitions of the axis of moderation, the axis of resistance, and the axis of moderate resistance, and the intersection of them in the context of the Sunni-Shiite competition.

The study also concluded to the importance of the approach of political culture in understanding the nature of regional alliances, and that ideas, values and identity are all essential factors in forming alliances. In that regard, the study used quantitative methods to measure and frame the most important pillars of political culture in the region, and peoples' attitudes towards issues of democracy, tyranny, good governance, economic well-being, their views on parties and elites, the relationship of religion to politics, the attitude of peoples towards the Arab Spring, and other indicators of measuring political culture. The study concluded that there is a popular demand in the Middle East and North Africa in general for democracy and good governance, while there was a general admiration for the Turkish political model and a desire to emulate it in the countries where opinion polls were conducted. Coalitions in the region and dividing them on the basis of tactical, historical and natural alliances, was very helpful in categorizing the current web of coalitions. The study

concludes with an attempt to build a normative framework for natural alliances in the Middle East that is based on commonality in the political culture and collective identities and shared ideas, values and political ethics.

Among the recommendations that can be intoruced by this study are:

1. For effective alliances in the Middle East region, the nucleus of which must be the commonality in culture, values, identity and ideas; as these pillars make the partnership natural and bring harmony and positive dynamic interaction to those alliances, which must be supported by building institutions that regulate the processes of competition within that alliance, and mitigate the effects of economic conflicts and trade rivalry that take place even within a single civilization.

2. The adoption of successful political experiences in the region, such as the Turkish model based on secularism that is reconciled with religious identities, as well as on democratic competition in the electoral field and respect for political pluralism.

3. The conservative Democracy model presented by Turkey also fits to be an appropriate formula for the Middle East in view of its religious specificities.

4. The dire need for establishing an effective institutional supranational framework that strengthens alliances and regulates competition, that require from states to concede some of their sovereignty to new supra-international organizations (or ammending the current ones) in order to conduct fair arbitration processes and an effective organization of the alliance.

5. The need for collective efforts to establish a developmental model; since the most chronic problems facing the Middle East are development-related ones; as only democratization by itself can't afford a magic wand for success, as the Tunisian model shows us, whereas the existence of a consensual constitution and the presence of political institutions operating within a democratic framework does not necessarily guarantee progress in economic and

development-related aspects, and thus there is much work needed to find a cross-border developmental model for the region.

6. Cross-border upgrade of the elite-producing institutions within an enhanced political culture and the rapproachment of political ideas related to good governance and the collective secuirty and interests of the states involved in a Natural Alliance accros the region and beyond.

References

Aarts, Paul, "The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism**?", Third World Quarterly**, 20, no.5 (October 1999.).

Abi-Aad, Naji, Petroleum Pipeline Security in the Middle East, **The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut**, December, 2021, p.4.

Ahmed, Naveed, "Iran's 'Forward Defense' Doctrine Missile and Space Programs", **International Institute of Iranian Studies**, 11 October 2020, https://bit.ly/3v4kiLh (20 April 2021).

Akder, Derya Göçer, "Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings: The Lessons from the Middle East"**, Ortadoğu Etütleri**, Volume 4, No 2, January 2013.

Aksoy, Hürcan Aslı, "Excursus: Turkey's Military Engagement Abroad", **Centre for Applied Turkish Studies**, December 16, 2020, https://bit.ly/3rW6Sku (5 April 2021).

al Zawahiri, Ayman, **Knights Under the Prophet's Flag**, al Sahab foundation, 1st edition, July 2001.

Al-Ahram newspaper, "Al-Arian attacks the Emirates because of the Egyptian detainees and says: You will be slaves by the Persians ... and a tsunami coming from Iran", 17 June 2013, https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/360462.aspx (30 May 2020).

Al-Araby newspaper, "Among the WikiLeaks papers... What bin Zayed fears that the Emiratis will know and stone him (2/3)", 12 July 2017, https://cutt.ly/2mdgODE (15 March 2020).

Al-Hurra, "Libya's battles: "Al-Wefaq" publishes a video of "Emirati officers" and accuses them of operating Haftar's air system", 9 June 2020, https://cutt.ly/knB19pZ (9 December 2020).

Aljazeera.net, "Al-Khadim and Al-Jafra ... Know the Emirati military bases in Libya", 7th January 2020, https://bit.ly/3gmXpx8 (8th June 2020)

Aljazeera.net, "Articles of the Arab Peace Initiative", October 3rd, 2004, https://cutt.ly/gnGgdND (7 May 2020)

Aljazeera.net, Israel begins exporting natural gas to Egypt, 15 Jan 2020, https://bit.ly/3rgnlRF (11 April 2022).

Aljazeera.net, "Israeli-Emirati cooperation in anti-aircraft technology", https://cutt.ly/sbW3jMJ (5 June 2021).

Aljazeera.net, "Khamenei hails 'Islamic' uprisings", 4 February 2011, https://bit.ly/3tdotVL (3 September 2021).

Aljazeera.net, "Khartoum Conference 1967: The Three No's Summit", 29 August 2016, https://cutt.ly/xnFvpKf (12 January 2020).

Alkhateeb, Haitham M., Ed., **Qatar: Political, Economic, And Social Issues**, Nova Science Publishers, 2019.

Allagui, Ilhem and Akdenizl, Banu, "The Gulf Information War and the Role of Media and Communication Technologies**", International Journal of Communication**, 13, University of South California, 2019, vol. 13, 2019.

Al-Masry Alyoum newspaper, "Sawiris: If the Muslim Brotherhood applies the Turkish model, I will be the first to say, "Long live Islam"", 24th May 2011, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/133917 (1 August 2021)

Al-Monitor, "Intel: US to announce agreement to pull 'combat troops' from Iraq", 23 July 2021, https://bit.ly/2WrmfG2 (28 August 2021).

Al-Sanawy, Abdullah, "The Egyptian role was not an invention", Al-Shorouk newspaper, 17 June 2020, https://bit.ly/3etWBVj (4 December 2020).

Al-Youm Al-Sabea, "Map of Egyptian Workers Abroad", 5 April 2021, https://bit.ly/3yupidT (28 August 2021).

al Zawawy, Muhammad Soliman, "In Pursuit of Democracy: A War of Paradigms on the Libyan Front", **ORSAM**, January 7th 2020, https://bit.ly/33s1kqc (15 March 2021).

Alzawawy, Muhammad Soliman, What Biden May Bring to the Eastern Mediterranean Region, **Insight Turkey**, 2021, Vol. 23 / No. 1 / pp. 23-34.

American Department of Defense, **Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms**, Joint Publication 1-02, April 2001.

Amour, P. O. (ed.), **The Regional Order in the Gulf Region and the Middle East**, Palgrave, 1st edition, Switzerland, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45465-4_5

Anadolu Agency, "Arab-African alliance announced in Riyadh", 6 January 2020, https://bit.ly/3wdIlJ0 (12 May 2021).

Anadolu Agency, "Islam fighting disbelief in Syria: Iran's Khamenei", 25 February 2016, https://bit.ly/3kPBQb5 (3 September 2021).

Anadolu Agency, "Spending fortune to weaponize Haftar", 20 May 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/info/infographic/18701 (5 April 2021).

Anadolu Agency, "Turkey exports $950M of defense, aerospace products" in Jan-April, 6 May 2021, https://bit.ly/3v7lSMl (10 May 2021).

Anadolu Agency, "UAE-based Black Shield recruits mercenaries in region", https://bit.ly/3uYIMWk (20th September 2020,)

Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, "the 2019-20 Arab Opinion Index", Doha, Qatar, 16 November 2020, p.5, (3 March 2021) https://bit.ly/3jMPRXO.

Arab League formal website, "The Decision of Establishing the Arab Security and Peace Council", 13th of January, 2005, https://bit.ly/2Ku7wnR (2 March 2021).

Arabian Aerospace, "MoU marks new era of cooperation between UAE and Israel", 12 March 2021, https://bit.ly/3rpZSwE (2 March 2021).

Aras, Bülent & Yorulmazlar, Emirhan, "State, region and order: geopolitics of the Arab Spring", **Third World Quarterly**, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1205442

Asharq Al-Awsat, Israeli Gas to Be Pumped to Syria and Lebanon through Arab Pipeline to Curb Iran's Influence, 27 October, 2021, https://bit.ly/3NTTAQ6 (11 April 2022).

Bagdonas, Özlem Demirtaş, "A Shift of Axis in Turkish Foreign Policy or A Marketing Strategy?" **Turkish Journal of Politics**, Vol. 3, No. 2 Winter 2012.

Barak, Michael, "The Grozny Conference in Chechnya – Is the Salafi Movement a Rotten Fruit of Sunni Islam?", **International Institute for Counter-Terrorism**, 9 November 2016, https://cutt.ly/KWfT8H5 (29 August 2021).

Barkin, J. Samuel, **Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory**, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2010.

Barkey, Henri J., **US pipeline withdrawal marks new chapter in Eastern Mediterranean**, Ekathimerini Greek newspaper, 7 Feb. 2022, https://bit.ly/37EAkoZ (12 April 2022).

Barnes-Dacey, Julien, "The Middle East's New Battle Lines", **European Council on Foreign Relations**, May 2018, Issue # 259.

Barnett, Michael N., "Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System", **International Organization**, MIT Press, Vol. 49, No. 3, Summer, 1995.

BBC Arabic, "A brief about Khairat al Shater", March 31, 2012, https://cutt.ly/Xn6bwR3 (6 July 2020)

BBC, "Iran attack: US troops targeted with ballistic missiles", 8 January 2020, https://bbc.in/3FBPKWv (7 March 2020).

BBC, "Iraq war illegal, says Annan", 16 September, 2004, https://bbc.in/3JkGibN (8 April 2022).

Bell, James, ed., "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society", **Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life**, April 30, 2013.

Ben-Dor, Gabriel, "Political Culture Approach to Middle East Politics", **International Journal of Middle East Studies**. 8 (1977).

Bergesen, Albert J. and Suter, Christian, "The Return of Geopolitics", **World Society Studies**, the World Society Foundation Zurich, Switzerland, 2018.

Bladen, Christopher, "Alliance and Integration," in Julian R. Friedman, Christopher Bladen, and Steven Rosen, **Alliance in International Politics** (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970).

Brown, Nathan J. and Dunne, Michele, "Who Will Speak for Islam in Egypt—And Who Will Listen?" in: Frederic Wehrey, ed., "Islamic Institutions in Arab States: Mapping the Dynamics of Control, Co-option, and Contention", **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, 2021.

Buzan, Barry and Wæver, Ole, **Regions and Powers the Structure of International Security**, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2003.

Buzan, Barry, **Regional security complex theory in the post-cold war world**, Theories of new regionalism, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003.

Campo, Juan E., **Encyclopedia of Islam**, Facts on File publishing house, first edition, New York, 2009.

Chun, Chae-Sung, "Theoretical Approaches to Alliance: Implications on the R.O.K.-U.S. Alliance", **Journal of International and Area Studies** 71, Volume 7, Number 2, 2000.

CIA, National Foreign Assessment Center, "Iran: Exporting the Revolution, An Intelligence assessment", 27 April, 2006, on: https://bit.ly/3A0nz1G

Da silva, Diego lopes et al, "Trends in World Military Expenditure", 2020, **SIPRI Fact Sheet**, April 2021.

Dalrymple, R., (1987), "**The Pacific Basin: Alliances, Trade and Bases**", Australian Foreign Affairs Record, vol. 58, n°3.

Danin, Robert M., "Surprising Arab Views of the "Turkish Model"", **Council on Foreign Relations**, 21 March 2013, https://on.cfr.org/3BM6qt2 (5 September 2021)

David, Steven R., "Explaining Third World Alignment", **World Politics**, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991).

Dayan, Maj. Gen. (res.) Uzi, "Israel's Critical Requirements for Defensible Borders", **Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs**, 2014, https://jcpa.org/pdf/DB_web.pdf (January 23rd, 2021)

Deitch, Mora and Valensi, Carmit, "Violent Conflicts in the Middle East: A Quantitative Perspective", **INSS Research Forum**, Strategic Assessment, Volume 23, No. 1, January 2020.

Deudney, Daniel H., Geopolitics, **Britannica**, https://www.britannica.com/topic/geopolitics (8 April 2002).

Dodds, Klaus, **Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction**, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Dorsey, James M., "Reshaping the Middle East: UAE Leads the Counter-revolution", **Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS),** No. 200/2014, 14 October 2014.

Dugin, Alexander, **The Fourth Political Theory**, Publisher: Eurasian Movement, 2012, 264 pages.

Egypt Independent, "Arab League condemns Houthi attack against Mecca", May 21, 2019, https://bit.ly/2SeGqFB (9 March 2020).

Encyclopedia Britannica, "Coalition", (5 December 2021), https://www.britannica.com/topic/coalition

Evans, Graham and Neumham, Jeffrey, **The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations**, Penguin Books, 1998.

Farhi, Farideh, "Deterring Iran after the Nuclear Deal, second chapter: Iranian Power Projection Strategy and Goals", **Center for Strategic and International Studies** (CSIS), Mar. 1, 2017.

Farouk, Yasmine, "The Middle East Strategic Alliance Has a Long Way to Go", **Carnegie Middle East Center**, February 2019.

Fawcett, Louise, "States and sovereignty in the Middle East: myths and realities", **International Affairs**, Volume 93, Issue 4, July 2017, p. 789, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix122 (5 March 2020).

Fedder, Edwin H., "The Concept of Alliance", **International Studies Quarterly**, Volume 12, Issue 1, March 1968, Pages 65–86, https://doi.org/10.2307/3013558.

Felsch, Maximilian, "The Arab regional system after the Arab uprisings: Reaching hegemonic stability?" **Orient**, 2018, 59. 16-24, https://bit.ly/31Ll9FD (3 May 2021)

Feuer, Sarah, "New Egyptian Legislation Aims to Reduce Al-Azhar's Authority", **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**, 20 August 2020, https://cutt.ly/VWfv4Nb (29 August 2021).

Flint, Colin, **Introduction to Geopolitics**, Routledge, first edition 2006.

Friedman, George, "Re-Examining the Arab Spring", **Stratfor World View**, 15 August 2011, https://bit.ly/3gXC12T (4 September 2021).

Friedman, Julian R., Christopher Bladen, and Steven J. Rosen, eds. **Alliance in international politics**. Allyn and Bacon, 1970.

Gardner, Frank, "How the UAE emerged as a regional powerhouse", **BBC**, 22nd September 2020, https://bbc.in/3DBhn2a (28th January 2021).

Ghamdi, Gen. Misfer Saleh, "Iran's Influence in the Red Sea Targets and Outcomes", **Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies**, Journal for Iranian Studies, Year 2, issue 5, Dec. 2017.

Ghez, Jeremy J., "The Enduring Partnership? The Trans-Atlantic Community as a Natural Alliance", **RAND Corporation**, USA, 2010.

Ghez, Jeremy, "Alliances in the 21st Century: Implications for the US-European partnership", **Rand Corporation**, 2011.

Gould-Davies, Nigel, "Strategic Survey 2020: The Annual Assessment of Geopolitics", **The International Institute for Strategic Studies**, Routledge, 2020.

Gulf International Forum, "The Eastern Mediterranean: The UAE's New Frontier", https://bit.ly/3geGmxo (20th December 2020).

Guzzinin, Stefano, "The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?", **Cambridge studies in international relations**: 124, First edition, 2012.

Hacaoglu, Selcan, "Mapping the Turkish Military's Expanding Footprint: QuickTake", **Bloomberg**, Dec 24 2020, https://bit.ly/3jkVXy1 (27 August 2021).

Halliday, Fred, **The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology**, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1st Ed, 2005.

Harkavy, Robert E., **Strategic Basing and the Great Powers**, 1200-2000, New York, NY: Routledg, (2007).

Harknett, Richard J., and VanDenBerg, Jeffrey A., "Alignment Theory and Interrelated Threats: Jordan and The Persian Gulf Crisis." **Security Studies** 6.3 (1997).

Harmer, Christopher, "Iranian naval and maritime strategy", Institute for the Study of War, **Middle East Security Report** 12, 2013.

Hassan, Shamir, **Turkey's Israel Policy since 1945**, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Published by: Indian History Congress, Vol. 69 (2008).

Haugo, Lars, "Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan: A change in international orientation?" in: Rahat Shah, Wang Li. (2020) "Rationales behind Pakistan–Turkey relations since September 11, 2001". **The Round Table**, 109:5.

Henderson, Simon, "UAE Wealth Fund to Buy Share of Israeli Gas Field", The **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**, https://cutt.ly/tbBTh8I (17th of May 2021)

Hochberg, Leonard and Sloan, Geoffrey, "Mackinder's Geopolitical Perspective Revisited**", Foreign Policy Research Institute,** August 17, 2017

Holbraad, Carsten. **Middle Powers in International Politics**. London: Macmillan, 1984.

Holmes, Peter, Editor, **The Penguin Dictionary of Politics and Government**, Third Edition, 2004, Bloomsbury References.

Holsti, Ole R., P. Terrence Hopmann, and John D. Sullivan. "Unity and disintegration in international alliances": **Comparative studies**. New York: Wiley, 1973.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, The Iranian Constitution, https://ar.mfa.ir/portal/viewpage/3984 (8 September 2021).

Johnson, Henry, "This Map Explains the Saudi-Iran Proxy War", **Foreign Policy Magazine**, January 6, 2016, https://cutt.ly/snBR3Fj (15 May 2021).

Jones, Bruce, ed., "The new geopolitics of the middle east: America's role in a changing region", A **Brookings** interview, January 2019.

Kabalan, Marwan, "The Al-Ula GCC Summit: An End to Gulf Rivalry or Just Another Truce?", **Insight Turkey**, 2021 Vol. 23 / No. 1.

Kanat, Kiliç B. and Duran, Burhanettin, Ed., "Ak Party Years in Turkey: Domestic and Foreign Policy", **SETA**, Turkey, 1st ed.,2020.

Kann, R., "Alliances Versus Ententes", **World Politics**, 28(4), 1976, pp. 612-615. doi:10.2307/2010069.

Katz, Brian, "Axis Rising: Iran's Evolving Regional Strategy & Non-State Partnerships in the Middle East", **CSIS** Briefs, October 2018, p. 1, https://cutt.ly/Nmep7Pa (22 April 2020).

Katzenstein, J. Peter. 1997. "Introduction: Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective." In **Network Power: Japan and Asia**, edited by J. Peter Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, 1–47. Ithaca N.Y: Cornell University Press.

Kaye, Dalia Dassa, Nader, Alireza, Roshan, Parisa, "Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry", **RAND** Corporation, 2011, 1st edition.

Kepel, Gilles, **Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West**, Columbia University Press, New York, 2020.

Kessler, Oren, Trading Peace in Egypt and Israel: How QIZs Could Save the Middle East, **Foreign Affairs**, August 23, 2015, https://fam.ag/3rfbvqX (11 April 2022)

Khan, Muqtedar, "Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of U.S. Policy", **Brookings**, 1 September 2003, https://brook.gs/2XeJfZn (13 September 2021).

Khatib, Lina, "Political Culture in the Arab World: Assumptions and Complexities", **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung**, Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean, Mediterranean Dialogue Series no. 34, January 2021.

Kirkpatrick, David D., "Recordings Suggest Emirates and Egyptian Military Pushed Ousting of Morsi", the **New York Times**, March 1, 2015, https://nyti.ms/3mXODL4 (3 March 2020).

Kirkpatrick, David D., "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler Isn't M.B.S. It's M.B.Z.", The **New York Times**, June 2, 2019, https://nyti.ms/3jCICRY (3 March 2020).

Kishi, Roudabeh and De Bruijne, Kars, "Special Focus On Coalition Forces In The Middle East", **Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED),** 31 July 2018, Https://Bit.Ly/3firytf (9 August 2021).

Kissinger, Henry A., "A Path Out of the Middle East Collapse", the **Wall Street Journal**, October 16, 2015, https://cutt.ly/VnDm3Op (15 March 2020).

Kohut, Andrew, "Obama's Challenge in the Muslim World: Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image", **Pew Global Attitudes Project**, 17 May 2011.

Krishnan, Paul Corralnandini, "One in five people in the Middle East and North Africa now live in close proximity to conflict", the **World Bank**, March 23, 2020, https://bit.ly/3BjnS7P (6 March 2021).

Lappin, Yaakov, "Dubai conference highlights online security, cooperation with Israel on cyber defense", **Jewish News Syndicate**, https://cutt.ly/Sbj7Gh5 (20 April 2021).

Lecha, Eduard Soler i, "Liquid Alliances in The Middle East", notes internacionals CIDOB 169, **Barcelona Centre for International Affairs**, March 2017.

Lund, Aron, "Stand Together or Fall Apart: The Russian–Iranian Alliance in Syria," **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, (CEIP) Syria in Crisis, 31 May 2016. http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=63699 (20 April 2020),

Lynch, Marc, The Middle East Power Vacuum, **Foreign Policy**, 25th October, 2013, https://bit.ly/3DEgmXb (28th January 2021).

MacDonald, Paul and M. Parent, Joseph, "Graceful Decline: The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment," **International Security** 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011).

Maleki, Ammar and Tamimi, Pooyan, "Arab, Iranians' attitudes Toward Religion: A 2020survey Report, **The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran** (Gamaan), August 2020, The Netherlands.

Mashino, Ito, **UAE and Saudi Arabia Lead the Decarbonization of the Middle East**, Mitsui & Co. Global Strategic Studies Institute, Monthly Report December 2021

Mead, Walter Russell, "The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers", **Foreign Affairs**, May/June 2014, https://fam.ag/3nDf8oO, (23 March 2021).

Mearsheimer, John J., **The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities,** (Henry L. Stimson Letures), October 8, 2019.

Middle East Eye, "Erdogan says changes to constitution would not threaten Turkish secularism", 27 April 2016, https://bit.ly/3BD6ScN (3 September 2021).

Milan, Francesco F., and Tabrizi, Aniseh Bassiri, "Armed, Unmanned, And in High Demand: The Drivers Behind Combat Drones Proliferation in The Middle East", **Small Wars & Insurgencies**, 31.4 (2020).

Miles, Hugh, "The Al Jazeera Effect", **Foreign Policy Magazine**, 9 February 2011, https://bit.ly/3nAvhLL (20 April 2020).

Mitchell, Gabriel, "The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum: Cooperation in the Shadow of Competition", **The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies**, September 2020.

Newsweek, "Where Are U.S. Troops Near Iran? Tens of Thousands of American Soldiers Are in Middle East, Afghanistan", 1 June 2020, https://bit.ly/3KlLyh1 (2 December 2020).

Nicos, Panayiotides. "Is The 'Arab Spring' Israel's Winter? Strategic Instability in The Middle East". **International Journal on World Peace**, vol. 29, no. 1, 2012, pp. 21–40. https://bit.ly/3tCy5Mb (28 July 2021).

Oğuzlu, H. Tarık, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order", **All Azimuth** V9, N1, 2020.

Oligie, Clement Ndidi, Why Russia is involved in the Syrian Civil War: One Issue, Many Views, **Relationes Internationales, Audri**, Vol. 12, no 1/2019, pp. 101,102.

Osgood, Robert E., **Alliances and American Foreign Policy** (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).

Ottaway, David and Ottaway, Marina, **A Tale of Four Worlds: The Arab Region After the Uprisings**, Oxford University Press, New York, First Edition, 2019.

Panagiotis, Saviolakis I. and Georgia, Pazarzi, Transportation of Energy Resources in the Middle East and Central Asia, **International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy**, Vol. 3, Special Issue, 2013, pp.127-139.

Palik, Júlia et al, "Conflict Trends in the Middle East 1989–2019", **Peace Research Institute Oslo** (PRIO), 2020.

Rabinovitch, Ari, Israel's Tamar group to sell gas to Egypt via pipeline, **Reuters**, 18 March 2015, https://reut.rs/3jsi1Gh (11 April 2022).

Rassd.net, "Opposition channels are top watched", 4 May 2017, https://rassd.net/205878.htm (8 September 2017).

Reuters, "Obama: Egypt neither enemy nor ally", 13 September 2012, https://reut.rs/3htq310 (3 March 2021).

Reuters, "Turkey says U.S. offering Patriot missiles if S-400 not operated", 10 March 2020, https://reut.rs/3A7TBZy (13 September 2021).

Rhamey, J. Patrick et al, "Order and Disorder Across Geopolitical Space: The Effect of Declining Dominance on Interstate Conflict", Journal of International Relations and Development, June 2014, p: 383, DOI: 10.1057/jird.2014.3.

Rice, Condoleezza, "Transforming the Middle East", the **Washington Post**, August 7, 2003, https://wapo.st/389SfRO (4 May 2021).

Robbins, Michael, "What Arab Publics Think?" **Arab Barometer**, 28 January, 2020, p.32, https://bit.ly/2YjQ3VV (5 September 2021).

Russett, Bruce M. 1970. **International Regions and International Systems**. Chicago: Rand-McNally.

Russia Today, "Sisi confirms the impossibility of the Egyptian army to take to the street without a coup against Morsi", 11 May 2013, https://bit.ly/3hmSIET (7 September 2021).

Ryan, Curtis R., "Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East", in: Lynch, Marc and Jamal, Amaney, "Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East", **The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS),** New York, March 2019.

Salloukh, Bassel F., "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East", **The International Spectator**, Vol. 48, No. 2, June 2013.

Sever, Ayşegül, "Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East", **E-International Relations**, ISSN 2053-8626, 12th October 2018.

Shabaneh, Ghassan, "Operation Decisive Storm: Objectives and Hurdles", **Aljazeera Center for Studies,** 12 April 2015, https://bit.ly/3t8DSqz (4 March 2020).

Sim, Li-Chen, **Renewable power policies in the Arab Gulf states**, Middle East Institute, February 8, 2022, https://bit.ly/376lOXd (8 April 2022).

Skocpol, Theda, **States and Social Revolutions: a comparative analysis of France, Russia and China**, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Snyder, Glenn H., 1990. "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut", **Journal of International Affairs,** 44 (1).

Stein, Ewan, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal", **American Political Science Association**, Politics symposium, July 2017.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Fact Sheet, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2018", March 2019, https://bit.ly/3KnMTUE (20 May 2020)

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Yearbook 2021 Summary, 2021.

Stone, Mike, "UAE signs deal with U.S. to buy 50 F-35 jets and up to 18 drones: sources", **Reuters**, https://reut.rs/3l2nHYf (28th January 2021).

Stratfor, "The Middle Eastern Competition for Influence", Sep 1, 2015, https://cutt.ly/BnDWoVL (7 April 2020).

Sweeney, Mike, "A Plan for U.S. Withdrawal from The Middle East", **Defense Priorities**, December 2020.

Telci, Ismail Numan and Horoz, Tuba Öztürk, "Military Bases in the Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates", **Insight Turkey**, Vol. 20, No. 2, Spring 2018.

The Arab Weekly, "The fall of al-Watiya base ushers an era of permanent Turkish presence in western Libya", 19/05/2020, https://cutt.ly/VnPPQN0 (21 September, 2020)

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for 2019, "The retreat of global democracy stopped in 2018", 8 January 2019, https://econ.st/328tbuS, (17 March 2021).

The Global Coalition official website, https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/ (9 August 2021).

The Guardian, "I will return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam, says crown prince", 14 October 2017, https://cutt.ly/gWsNq2C (2 June 2020).

The US Ministry of State, "The Abraham Accords Declaration", https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/ (March 20, 2020).

The Wall Street Journal, "Trump, Awaiting Egyptian Counterpart at Summit, Called Out for 'My Favorite Dictator'", 13 September 2019, https://on.wsj.com/3k3O2FH (13 September 2021).

The White House, "President Bush Presses for Peace in the Middle East", 9 May 2003, https://bit.ly/3nrK7F2 (13 September 2021).

Toynbee, Arnold Joseph, **A study of history, Geneses of Civilizations**, Volume 2, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford University Press, 1934.

TRT World, "The role of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the Pegasus spyware saga", 2 August 2021, https://bit.ly/3zUsMI6 (9 September 2021).

 TRT World, "What is the UAE doing on the Yemeni island of Socotra?", 1 September 2020, https://cutt.ly/EbB0o4C (17th May 2020).

Tunis Declaration of League of Arab States, 2004, issued at the 16th session of the Arab Summit, 22-23 May, Tunis https://bit.ly/33HZUHR (15 March 2021).

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, "Middle East Peace Process", https://bit.ly/3nAyElC (12May 2020).

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkey's Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy", https://bit.ly/3FFBrQC (8 September 2021).

Ulger & Hammoura, "The Arab League: From Establishment to Failure", **Social and Legal Studies journal**, Vol 4 (1) 2018.

Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, "Qatar and The Arab Spring: Policy Drivers and Regional Implications", **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, 2014.

Uni Path Magazine, "The Importance of Sea Power", 11 February 2019, https://bit.ly/33I0sxp (5 September 2021).

US department of State official website, "The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)", 20 January 2001, https://bit.ly/327H5xg (4 April 2020).

Voice of America, "US Pulls Missile Defenses in Saudi Arabia Amid Yemen Attacks", 11 September 2021, https://bit.ly/394QwgM (13 September 2021).

Walt, Stephen M., "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", **International Security,** Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985).

Walt, Stephen M., "Taming American Power", **Foreign Affairs**, (September–October 2005), on: https://cutt.ly/0nPCLao (15 March 2020).

Walt, Stephen M**. The Origins of Alliances**. Cornell University Press, 2013.

Waltz, Kenneth, **Theory of International Politics**, Addison-Wesley Publishing
Company, California, 1979.

Ward, Michael Don, "Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics", **Monograph Series in
World Affairs** Vol. 19, Denver, Graduate School of International Studies,
University of Denver, 1982.

Wolf, Albert B., "Strategies of Retrenchment: Rethinking America's Commitments to
The Middle East", **Comparative Strategy**, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020,
39:1, 94-100, DOI: 10.1080/01495933.2020.1702356.

Worth, Robert F., "Mohammed bin Zayed's Dark Vision of the Middle East's Future",
The New York Times, July 14, 2020, https://cutt.ly/6keLM19 (30th January
2021).

Yaari, Ehud, "Iran's Ambitions in the Levant: Why It's Building Two Land Corridors
to the Mediterranean", **Foreign Affairs**, May 1, 2017, https://fam.ag/38Ajxku
(4 March 2020).

Yahya, Maha, "The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and
Iraq", **Carnegie Middle East Center**, 30 June 2017, https://bit.ly/3mRqJ3N (4
June 2020).

Yalçın, Hasan Basri, "The Concept of "Middle Power" and the Recent Turkish Foreign
Policy Activism", **Afro Eurasian Studies**, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring 2012, 195-
213.

Yegin, Mehmet, "Turkey's reaction to the coup in Egypt in comparison with the US
and Israel", **Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies**, 2016, 18:4.

Yeşilbursa, Behçet Kemal, "CENTO: the forgotten alliance in the Middle East" (1959-
1979), **Middle Eastern Studies**, (2020), 56:6, p. 868, DOI:
10.1080/00263206.2020.1755841

Yeşiltaş, Murat, "Deciphering Turkey's Assertive Military and Defense Strategy",
Insight Turkey 22.3 (2020).

Yeşiltaş, Murat, "The Rise of Turkey's 'Military Activism': The Causes, Context and Strategic Implications", in: "Ak Party Years in Turkey: Domestic and Foreign Policy", Kiliç b. Kanat, Burhanettin Duran, editors, **SETA** Publications 69, 2020.

Yıldırım, Özgür, "The Attitude of Egypt Towards Baghdad Pact", Tarih ve Günce Atatürk ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi Dergisi, **Journal of Atatürk and the History of Turkish Republic**, I/3, (2018Yaz).

SHORT CV

MA in Political Science, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Euro-Mediterranean Studies, Thesis Title: Security Issues in Turkish European Relations and Its Impact on Eastern Mediterranean. BA, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Egypt. I worked as a Lecturer at Middle East Institute, Sakarya University, Turkey (February 2016-date). I also worked as a Head of International Relation Unit, Arab Center for Humanitarian Studies, Cairo, Egypt (2009 – 2016), Freelance Researcher at Al-Bayan Center for Research and Studies, Saudi Arabia, (2011-2018), Researcher at Qiraat African magazine, a peer reviewed Quarterly refereed journal, Egypt, (2013-2019), and a Researcher at Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic Studies, Istanbul, Turkey (2016-2019). Some of my publications are (Book chapter): **Contemporary trends in Egyptian intellectual movements** (in English), The Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Muslim Socio-Political Thought, pp: 367- 398, (Book Chapter): **Development of Salafi Political Thought: Their Concept of Political Power in Modern Political Systems** (in Arabic), in: Riyadh Al-Musibli, editor, **Salafism: Its Transformations and Future**, Arab and International Relations Forum, Doha, Qatar, 2020, pp. 105-122. **(**Book Chapter**) Basic Dynamics and Consequences of US Eastern Mediterranean Policy** (in Turkish), Book chapter in: Ismael Numan Telci, Editor, **Uluslararası Siyasette Doğu Akdeniz (Eastern Mediterranean in International Politics)**, Ortadoğu Yayınlarının, 2020, pp: 283-302. **(**Book**) Sea of Fire: Rise of Struggle Catalysts in the Eastern Mediterranean** (in Arabic); published by Al Bayan Center for Research and Studies, Saudi Arabia 2015, 257 pages, ISBN: 978-603-8101-66-7. **(**Book**) Islamist in Egypt: Readings in their Classifications, Doctrines and Practice** (in Arabic); published by Al Masry Center for Studies and Informational Masry Al Youm Corporation, 2013. **(**Book**) A New Turkey in a New world: Dimensions of the Regional Turkish Influence** (in Arabic); published by the Arab Center for Humanitarian Studies, Cairo, 2010. **(**Book**) National Security of Egypt and the Transformation of the Regional Environment after the Arab Spring** (in Arabic)**,** 2013; published by the Arab Center for Humanitarian Studies, Cairo, Egypt.