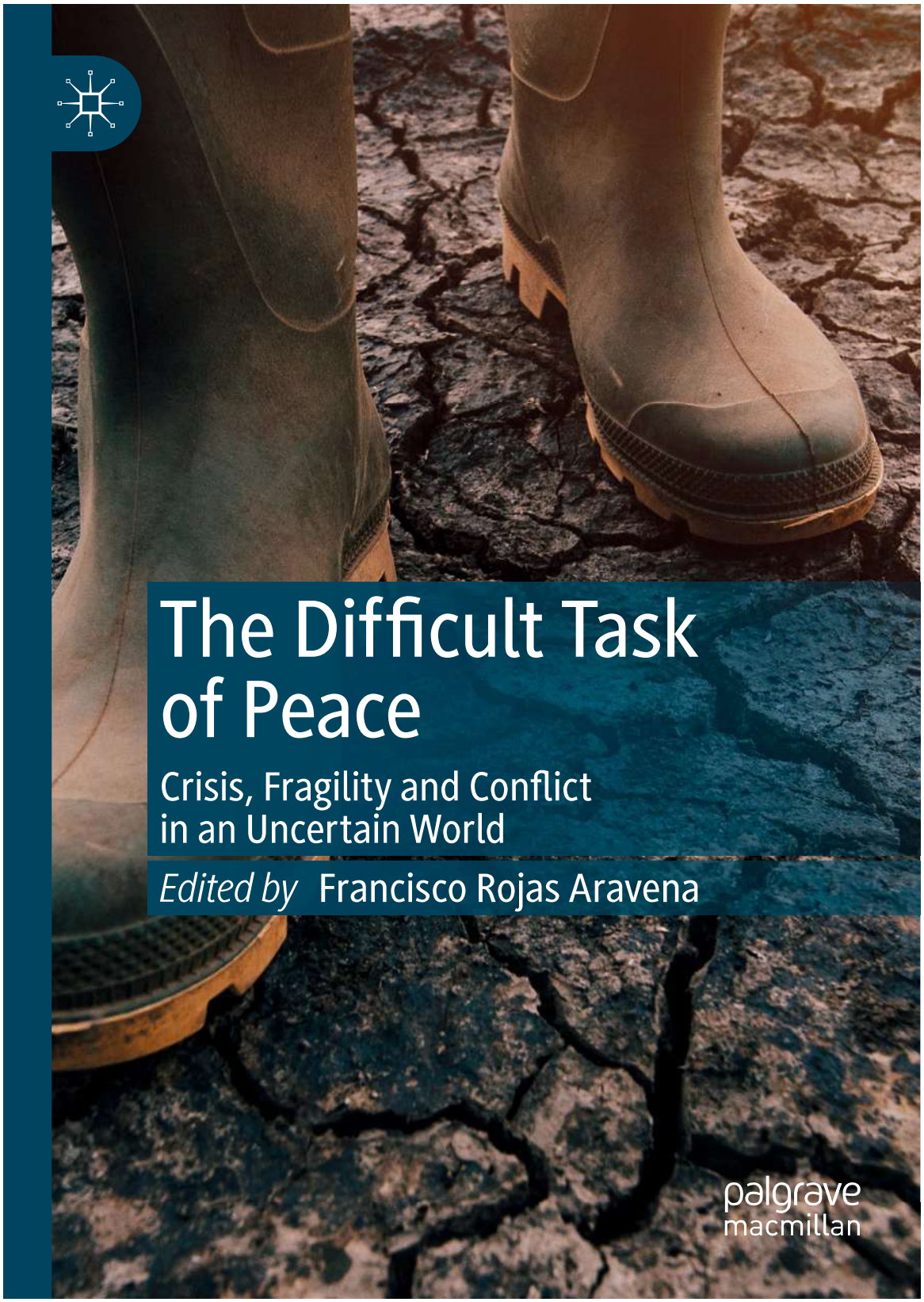
The Difficult Task of Peace
Crisis, Fragility and Conflict in an Uncertain World
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Prospects of Peace and Conflict in the Middle East in the Twenty-First Century

Amr Abdalla, Lilya Akay, and Zeynya Shikur

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has witnessed numerous conflicts in the recent decades. In recent years, the region also witnessed shifting dynamics that led to new patterns of conflict, in addition to what appears to be constant types of conflicts. In this research we will examine the numerous catalysts for conflict within the MENA region, as well as prospects for peace. We will look at the conflict-inducing factors from a twofold perspective.

First, those factors which have been present through so many generations that they can be considered as "constant dynamics" which continually influence conflict and instability in the region. These constant dynamics range from issues such as the identity crisis of Islam in the modern political and social world, particularly when that identity leads to violent extremism. Further constant dynamics include gender injustices and a tremendous growth of the youth population in the MENA region as whole, the

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continued exploitation of resources in the region, and even the continued issues of authoritarian rule, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All of these dynamics have gripped the region for decades—even to this day causing some of the worst atrocities and loss of life the world has ever experienced.

Second, we will look at those conflict-inducing factors which are more transient in nature, referred to as "shifting dynamics". These are factors which have recently come into play, or are more important now than ever to address, such as climate change and water shortage, and have begun to have tremendous impact on new conflict and instability of the region arising. These shifting dynamics are also largely influenced by the constant dynamics. For example, the Arab Spring, a movement led largely by the ever-growing youth population, was an attempt to transfer control from authoritarian regimes into democracies. Furthermore, rising terrorist groups, such as Islamic State (IS), have in recent years emerged with devastating effect, having served to destabilize the region in the name of Islam, out of misguided, uneducated understandings of the true ideals of Islam.

Finally, we will examine the prospects for peace within the MENA region, given the nature and dynamics of the conflict-inducing factors. The ability to attain peace within the region will fall mostly on the countries involved to find a way to integrate the numerous catalysts for conflict in a new, modern approach. This means, in particular, that a trickle-down approach of policy will not suffice, as it has failed in the past repeatedly. There must be a grassroots approach that considers the needs of civil society, within each country itself and the MENA region as a whole, which is most harshly affected by conflict and the dynamics which induce it. Finally, it is pivotal that various forms of modern technology be quickly invested in and implemented in order to positively affect issues ranging from violent extremism, to water shortages, to climate change.

Constant Conflict-Inducing Dynamics

Youth Bulge Coupled With Low Rates of Development

The MENA countries are characterized by a youth bulge, which in itself could bring prosperity and development to the countries—if the structures would provide the right education, skills, and job opportunities (Roudi 2011). However, if relevant structures are not designed in a constructive way, the youth bulge is a factor influencing conflict. Often, root

causes to conflicts are unemployment, poverty, social unrest, urbanization, and economic recession, which get highly influenced by the demographic factor. Countries that have a population of youth making up more than 35 percent of adult population have a 150 percent increased risk of engaging in armed conflict than do countries that have a ratio similar to that in developed countries (LaGraffe 2012).

More than 50 percent of the population is below 25 years in most of the MENA countries (ibid.). The three MENA countries with the highest expected increase in youth population until 2025 are Palestine, Yemen, and Iraq (UN 2005). In numbers, Egypt is the country that is expected to have the most youth in 2025, with 17,862,000 people in the age range of 15–24 years (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2007). The peak of the youth bulge is expected in 2030, with 94 million being in the range of 15–24 years in the MENA region (Roudi 2011).

The unemployment rate of the MENA region is among the highest in the world, with 26 percent of the youth being without work, due to a combination of skill mismatches, the increasing number of new entrants to the job market, and more female entrants. University graduates are especially affected by unemployment (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2007). A symbol for the frustration of unemployment in the Middle East is Mohammed Bouazizi, the fruit vendor who set himself on fire in Tunisia, leading to the Tunisian Revolution (Roudi 2011). Also the uprisings in Egypt were influenced by a young, jobless population that could take part in the protests at low opportunity-costs (LaGraffe 2012). Unemployment leads to an increase in poverty, which in turn poses a challenge of increased frustration for young men who cannot afford to get married. Lastly, one should also not forget the challenges that the youth bulge will pose when aging, especially when it comes to healthcare and social security (Fuller 2004).

Identity Formation Especially About the Position of Islam in Modern Times, in Public and Political Spheres

John Burton defined identity as one of the crucial basic human needs that, if denied, can lead to conflict. One big element shaping identity is one's beliefs and religion. "Who am I?" questions can lead to identity dilemmas, for instance with recognizing differences between oneself and others, or with issues of agency, recognizing that one can actively construct one's identity but also is constructed by events in one's environment (Schwab 2013). Internationally, Muslim countries and Muslims are under increased

pressure since 9/11, and the Muslim youth tends to split into opposites when defining Islam of the twenty-first century. Though there are aspects of Western culture that are attractive to young people from the MENA, in reality however, the benefits are not attainable for most but the wealthy and the elite who have the financial capabilities to live a Western lifestyle. Hence, many young people turn into the opposite direction, often out of protest, strongly rejecting Western values, claiming that they threaten indigenous values and turning toward fundamental Islam (Fuller 2004). The current circumstances for Muslims could possibly lead to identity dilemmas. Also, religion does not only shape one's identity, but also gives purpose, a direction, and holds society together (Dingley 2011)—aspects that are crucial in times of political and social unrest, especially when paired with youth frustrated by limited future outlooks. In the Middle East, Islam is not just a private practice, but also draws into the public and political spheres—the resulting critique from the secular West puts even more pressure on Muslims.

Violent Extremism in the Name of Islam

Violent extremism in the name of Islam is at its peak in the Middle East with the emergence of ISIS. However, this is not a new phenomenon in the region. As mentioned above, many young people in the MENA region choose to practice a more fundamental version of Islam. This factor combined with the general frustration of the youth bulge can lead to violent extremism in the name of Islam (Fuller 2004).

Especially unemployment and the inability to get married lead to frustration, which in turn makes the youth more prone to radicalization and Islamic resurgence—especially of young college graduates (LaGraffe 2012). Joining violent extremism is one possible resort to flee poor living conditions because it not only gives a preoccupation but also delivers income, as in the case of ISIS. Unmarried women who join are offered free housing and food and a monthly allowance. When a couple gets married, they are given a house and gifts (Hoyle et al. 2015). Most of the foreign fighters joining ISIS arise from the MENA region, with the majority coming from Tunisia. In the end of 2015, it was reported that 6000 fighters went from Tunisia alone to Syria, 2500 from Saudi Arabia, 2100 from Turkey, and 2000 from Jordan (Barrett et al. 2015).

Another reason for joining Islamist militancy is to resist United States (US) and Western policy in the MENA region, and more broadly the

Muslim world. A few examples of points of resistance being, the support of Israel, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the manipulation of oil resources in the region (Business Monitor International 2012). Related to this point, and from an ideological standpoint, "the youth are driven towards militancy and violence under the conviction that they are fulfilling their religious duty to restore to Islam its lost glory. They believe that restoring such glory has to go through a reciprocal violent struggle against the forces that violently stand in their way of realizing their Islamic utopia on earth, namely, the secular western powers of the world and their allies ruling regimes in the Arab and Muslim world" (Abdalla 2016). Addressing this core element of violent extremism in the name of Islam is a prerequisite to any efforts toward deradicalization of youth in the region and beyond.

Gender Injustices

The labor market in MENA is characterized by a share of only 25.2 percent women. In politics, women are also underrepresented, having only 7 percent of seats in parliament. Due to the culture in the MENA region, the role of the female is still domestic, whereas the man is earning the money. Also legal factors contribute to gender injustices, for example, in many MENA countries women need permission from their legal, male guardian if they, for example, want to apply for a passport, travel, or marry—restricting women's autonomy (WB 2013). Sexual harassment is another great struggle, limiting women's free movements outside the house. One needs to only think of the women being assaulted on Tahrir Square during the protests. In fact, a 2013 United Nations study revealed that 99.3 percent of Egyptian women and girls have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime. The only country scoring worse is Afghanistan (UNFPA Egypt 2013).

Moreover, gender-based violence poses a challenge that handicaps women's lives. Gender-based violence can come in different forms, from domestic violence to female genital mutilation, early marriages, and honor killings. Especially regarding domestic violence, many men refer to the Quran, allegedly legitimizing their violence against women.

Gender injustice in the Middle East is not only coming from inside the country, but Muslim women are also in the center of Western critics, claiming that Muslim countries are incapable of incorporating gender-egalitarian structures. Western feminists want to "save the Muslim

woman", thinking that it is Islam that is oppressive to women. One legitimation used for the war in Afghanistan was to "liberate the Afghan women". However, Westerners wanting to save Muslim women from "something" is a form of discrimination in itself as it implies a superiority of Western women's lifestyles over women from the Middle East. Muslim women have been tackling gender issues in their communities themselves, looking for change (Abu-Lughod 2013). Hence, there is still a long way to go to eradicate the gender gap in the Middle East to achieve democracy and positive peace, without structures that are harming half of the population.

Foreign Interference in Order to Ensure Access to Mineral Sources

In the twenty-first century, most conflicts are fueled by controlling the access to valuable resources of a country. Though of course other factors such as hostilities, ideologies, and religion play a highly significant role as well, one should not overlook the driving factor of resource control. Oil and gas are of particularly high value because there is still no substitute for these resources. Oil determines a country's well-being, national security, and international power, according to Robert Ebel (Klare 2015). For the MENA region, oil is also of utmost importance as its high prices lead to increased investment into the region, giving it economic importance (BMI 2012).

The Middle East has about half of the world's known oil reserves. Saudi Arabia alone has a share of about 16 percent and Iran of about 9 percent of the world's oil reserves (Oil and gas in the Middle East 2014). The region is very rich in natural resources in general. Not only does it have crude oil and gas reserves, but also non-fuel minerals and non-mineral resources (Al-Rawashdeh et al. 2013). Energy-exporting countries, and the events that happen in them, are under public surveillance as the importing countries are dependent on the energy supplies, which could possibly be affected by unusual events. Therefore, foreign interference, such as direct intervention, sending of arms, or military advisers, or economic assistance, in oil- or gas-exporting countries is much more likely to happen than in any other country (Klare 2015). Jeff D. Colgan remarks that there is no other factor that plays such a huge role in leading to international conflict than oil does. Though denied by the US, critics of the US-led war in Iraq are condemning the US for shedding blood for oil in the wars of 1991 and 2003 (Colgan 2013). Moreover, ISIS is controlling

Syria's oil fields and fighting for control of Iraq's oil field region. ISIS would not be able to sustain itself without the oil which is financing the group, paying for the fighters, and enabling the militants to acquire weapons (Klare 2015).

The Palestinian/Israeli Conflict

The Palestinian/Israeli conflict continues to bring instability not only to the Palestinian/Israeli land but to the whole MENA region. Assaults are not only coming from the Israeli side with, amongst others, demolishing Palestinian houses, building more settler homes, and of course the recent 50-day war of 2014, but also from the Palestinian side with "intifada-style acts of terror" against Israelis (Rabbi 2013).

However, the conflict is not limited to the Palestinian/Israeli land. The conflict has an impact on the whole region. The surrounding countries, who can relate to the Palestinians, do not recognize Israel as a country, especially not until it returns to its 1967 borders (Klein 2015). Though most of the MENA countries have reached a cold peace with Israel, Iran likes to position itself as the leader of anti-Israeli forces in the region (BMI 2012).

The Palestinian/Israeli conflict is also leading to increased fundamentalism on both sides. As the situation grows ever worse in Gaza and the West Bank, and the Palestinian Authority remains unable to stop settlements, religious fundamentalism is gaining grounds among groups of Jewish settlers who demonstrate little regard to the legitimacy of Palestinians, who in turn feel hopeless as the Palestinian Authority is unable to protect their rights or satisfy their needs for dignity and self-respect. Incursions by settlers on West Bank territories and maltreatment of Palestinians by the occupying forces result in growing militant fundamentalism and violent reactions by militant Palestinian groups—a vicious circle (Rabbi 2013).

Authoritarianism

One of the biggest questions for the MENA region is whether the region can continue resisting democracy. With the exception of Israel, Turkey, and Lebanon, all countries in the MENA region are ruled by monarchies or by authoritarian presidents. In 2009, mass uprisings started in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Iran, Syria, and Libya, leading to increased

collapse of authoritarianism but also to increased security threats (Salamey and Pearson 2012).

The system of oppressing opposition and increased corruption added to the frustration of the public, up to the point where the public started to rebel. Before the start of the Arab Spring, most of the countries in the MENA did not have a history of revolting against the regimes, except for Iran (BMI 2012). Though, when a revolt appeared, the regimes were always able to stop them forcefully (Salamey and Pearson 2012). One should also note that not every country in the region is prone to experiencing uprisings. Most of the Gulf states, such as Qatar and the UAE, are much more unlikely to undergo mass unrest due to the lesser degree of public frustration as wealth and living standards are higher (BMI 2012). There are many theories on why authoritarianism is so persistent in the region. Amongst others, "rentierism" (Luciani 2009; Richards and Waterbury 2007), a weak middle class (Kamrava 2002), the gender gap (Moghadam 2012), predominant suspicion toward Western modernization (Sonn 2012), and the lack of economic development and global economic integration (Bellin 2002) have been stated as getting in the way of democratization (Salamey and Pearson 2012).

Unfortunately, the uprisings in the MENA region that seemed promising at first, have not in most cases reached their goal of democracy and enhanced living conditions. Only in Tunisia does it seem that one can expect an establishment of democracy in the near future. In contrast, one only needs to look at Syria to see how persistently and forcefully regimes can repress mass uprisings. What started with street protests turned into civil war with hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees. In fact, the United Nations described the Syrian War as the worst humanitarian disaster since Rwanda in 1994. Unfortunately, today, the establishment of democracy in Syria seems very unlikely due to the destruction and fragmentation of the country (Heydemann 2013).

Shifting Conflict-Inducing Dynamics

Generational Conflicts and the Trend Among Older Generations to Cling to Power

The Middle East has one of the largest youth populations in the world where "youths under the age of 24 now make up 50%–65% of the population" (Graham 2003). At the same time, youth are gaining stronger

influence through new and social media venues. They are capable of expressing and sharing views on public and political affairs using their social media accounts and forums. Such methods are considered unconventional and at times perceived with suspicion by formal authorities as they tend to be used to criticize the aging political establishment for its inefficiency or incapability of coping with the challenges of the time. While these new venues opened a space for youth to express themselves, at the same time it has been widening the misunderstanding with the older ruling generations. As will be explained below, the use of social and new media contributed significantly to propelling the Arab Spring revolutions in several Arab countries. This has convoluted the sense of alienation and gap between the older and younger generations.

The Arab Spring Is Not Over!

The revolutions of 2010 and 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain have taken various directions, with several of them descending into violence and disarray. Libya, Syria, and Yemen have suffered from severe violence, foreign interference, forced migration, sectarianism, and an uncertain future. The other three countries continue to grapple with seeking direction and a path to stability, while also suffering from occasional violence and terrorism.

The grim picture in most countries of the Arab Spring reflects the surfacing of tensions and inner conflicts which have been suppressed for a long time. Several grievances and contradictions due to ethnic, class, and religious differences have been controlled or suppressed by authoritarian regimes for decades. The Arab Spring allowed for those grievances to be expressed and to challenge the regimes that have suppressed them for such a long time. But the Arab Spring did not necessarily resolve the contradictions within these grievances, or offer them satisfaction. For example, the masses on the streets of Arab capitals during the Arab Spring represented liberals, religious groups, and people from all walks of life and socioeconomic classes. At the same time, and five years after, the differences and tensions among these groups have not been settled as democratic pluralistic institutions have not been given a chance to develop or have been thwarted by foreign interference or counter-revolutions by the old guard.

However, while violence and confusion continue to dominate the scene in Arab Spring countries, one can see and observe changes that are taking place. Primarily through new and social media, large segments especially

of younger populations continue to bring to the surface their grievances, and argue their differences at unprecedented levels. It is common now in Arab Spring countries to refer to the revolutions of 2010/2011 as points of departure for new standards of human and citizen rights.

It may be true that evidence on the ground does not corroborate to indicate with any confidence that the Arab Spring is not over. Autocratic regimes and failed states seem to be the ones present on the scene, and violence and violations of human rights are reaching new highs. Yet, history shows that revolutions do not follow a linear trajectory from "bad" to "good". Instead, every major revolution in the world had its own setbacks, and its share of counter and reactionary revolutions until new modes of polity and socioeconomic systems emerged and persisted. It is perhaps not science that can prove at this point that the Arab Spring is not over; it is more of the intuition of being in tune with and aware of the subtle changes that are persisting despite chaos and disillusion.

The Changing Notion of State Sovereignty

Sovereignty is an evolving as well as disputed concept (Gause 1992). The Westphalian notion of state sovereignty that is grounded on the idea of noninterference by external actors in the domestic affairs of other states has undergone transformation over the last couple of decades as its importance in regulating the behavior and interaction of the international community continues. One such transformation is the understanding of sovereignty as being conditional in that states will remain sovereign if they live up to their responsibilities to their citizens as well as the international community (Etzioni 2005/2006). As such, the Post–Cold War era witnessed an increase in intervention by the international community in the affairs of states within the framework of the now popular "humanitarian intervention".

The concept has also undergone transformation in the Middle East, though from a different perspective as sovereignty of the region's countries is challenged by non-state actors. In recent years, three factors have contributed to this transformation of the notion of sovereignty in the Middle East.

First, the emergence of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, and more recently the IS, led to the weakening of the sovereignty of states as these groups managed to control territories in the region. Until recently, IS controlled "to varying degrees, almost half of northern Syria and more than one third

of northwestern Iraq" (Schmid 2015), where it's estimated that more than 10 million people live under its control (Nebehay 2015). The group also operates in the Libyan cities of Benghazi, Sirte, and Tripoli, and has also announced its plan of occupying territory in Algeria, Sinai, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen (Zelin 2015) as part of its plan to establish a Caliphate in the region. The group openly rejects the existing global state system by claiming that it is against the Islamic way of governance. Consequently, they demolished the boundary between Iraq and Syria (Mechan 2015).

Second, the day-to-day increase of migrants illegally crossing borders of the countries of the region has implication on sovereignty of the states of the Middle East as it goes against states territorial rights. This has led to states compromising their right to "dictate the terms regarding who can legitimately enter their territory, how long entrants can stay, and can choose to dictate conditions of the visit" (Gilligan 2012).

Third, the existence and activities of a number of private military and security companies that operate within an opaque legal and political framework is also undermining the notion of state sovereignty in the region. This fact is more evident in Iraq than anywhere else in the region where these companies openly operate against the laws and regulations of the Iraq state (Risen 2014).

The Shifting Alliances and Greater Influence of Regional Powers Such As Iran and Turkey

The geopolitical events in the Middle East since the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War of 1991 led to major shifts in regional and international alliances and influences. Turkey emerged in the last 20 years as a major economic power in the region and in the world. This was accompanied by the ascension to power of its Islamically leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP). The leadership of the AKP has adopted a policy of engagement with the rest of the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East. Turkish influences, not only politically, but also economically and culturally, have grown rapidly in the last two decades in most Arab countries. Turkish stands against Israeli policies of occupation and hostility to Palestinians gained support and admiration across the Arab world. However, the events in Syria have forced new alliances and a new military role for Turkey, which seems to have alienated it within some circles in the Arab World. Simply put, Turkey's relationship with the Arab world is no longer one based on admiration of their progress and cultural influence; that relationship is now "complicated".

In a similar vein, Iran's role in the Arab World has grown more influential since the ousting of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the war in Syria. The sectarian Shia camaraderie has forced negative and sometimes hostile reactions from Sunni Arab States. The Saudi/Iranian conflict and competition to win the war in Syria have forced other nations to support one camp or the other, with heightening sectarian violence and propaganda on both sides. International actors are also following suit in supporting one camp or the other, with the Russians supporting the Iran/Syria alliance, while the US supporting the Saudi camp and its allies. The same can be said about the Iranian support to one Shia faction in Yemen, while the Saudi and their Arab allies are supporting other groups. In the media, the exchange of insults and negative propaganda between Saudi and Iranian-backed stations can be seen on satellite TV across the Arab World. Those stations are invoking sectarian hatred and in the process rallying support for the political and military actions of either camp.

Climate Change and Its Effects on Resources and Migration

The Middle East is endangered by marked climatic stress that is predicted to be exacerbated in the coming years. The current pressure of climate change in the region is manifested in the form of "repeated droughts, soil degradation, floods and falling agricultural output" (Wondon and Liverani 2015). The region is "particularly vulnerable to climate change due to its already sparse water resources, the high levels of aridity, and the long coastal stretch" (Farajallah 2012). The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that most of the MENA region is expected to "become hotter and drier in the coming decades" (World Bank 2016).

According to reports, this change will have a substantial impact on resources in the region. Currently, the Middle East faces one of the worst water shortages in the world. Climate change and the related rise in temperature is predicted to exacerbate this problem (World Bank 2015). By 2025 it's estimated that 80–100 million more people will be affected by water shortage (ibid), and among the 33 countries that are predicted to face "extremely high water stress" by 2040, 14 are Middle Eastern countries (Maddocks et al. 2015). Severe weather events such as droughts, floods, and infrequent rainfall are predicted to seriously affect water supply and agricultural productions in the region (Campbell and Goddard 2015).

Migration has been one way of dealing with climatic extremes globally for a long time (Brown 2008) even though the link between the two is

complex. In 1990 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted migration to be one of the utmost impacts of climate change and estimated that by 2050, 150 million people could be displaced by climate change–associated incidents, including water shortage and desertification (Shamsuddoha and Chowdhury 2009). In the present day, experts claim that climate change has already impacted migration patterns in some parts of Northern Africa and the Sahel region as overall climate change–induced erosion and shortage of water are contributing to movement of people in the region (Baker 2015). According to a report by the World Bank, migration has become a "legitimate form of adaptation to climate change" in the region (Campbell and Goddard 2015). Its impact on the agrarian population of the region is becoming visible as rural-urban migration is becoming widespread in the region (ibid).

Migration Trends in the Middle East: Source, Destination, and Transit

According to a report of the International Organization for Migration, migration patterns and dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa are "complex in nature, encompassing movements within, from, through, and to the region" (IOM 2015). Most countries in the Middle East serve as origin, destination, and transit countries for international and regional migrants.

Currently, the conflicts and instabilities in the Middle East, particularly the crisis in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, and the resurgence of conflict in Iraq, in addition to the long-standing Palestine-Israel conflict, have pushed several hundreds of thousands of migrants out of their country. Those migrants who are forced to leave their homes due to conflict mostly go to neighboring countries. For instance, Syrians have migrated to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan in the millions to escape the conflict in their country, while Libyans went to Tunisia and Egypt to achieve the same (de Haas 2014). Furthermore, according to a UNHCR report, more than a million people reached Europe by crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, with Syrians accounting for 50 percent of all the arrivals (UNHCR 2015). In addition, high rates of unemployment among the youth and perceived greener pastures coupled with other various factors have driven thousands of migrants from the region to chase better opportunities in Europe as well as Gulf Countries. Thousands of Egyptians, Yemenis, and Palestinians, among others, travel as labor migrants to the Gulf countries every year in

search of employment opportunities. The region also serves as a transit point to Europe for thousands of migrants from the sub-Saharan region and countries of South East Asia. In addition, countries like Libya which were previously considered as destination countries for migrants from the region and beyond have now become transit countries due to the insecurity in the country (Chamie 2015). Due to the continued violence and associated economic failure of the migrant origin countries, migration is predicated to remain a problem and even get worse in the region in the coming years (Koser 2015).

Shifting Regional Linkages

North Africa/Sahel (Increased Criminality, Violent Extremism, Arms, Drugs, and Human Trafficking)

The Arab Spring and the eventual weakening of some states in North Africa contributed to the increase of criminal networks in the region including networks for the smuggling of arms, drugs, and people. Some of these criminal networks are operated by extremist groups to finance their terrorist movements in the region and beyond. The political and security crisis in Libya, and in the early days of the Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia, resulted in loosening of law enforcement, which contributed to North Africa's becoming a base for the operations of criminal networks in and outside of the region (Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2015).

The weapons and ammunition that surfaced in the region after the fall of the Gadhafi regime in Libya has been bolstering terrorist movements in the Sahel region and some have ended up fueling conflicts in some countries of the region such as Syria and Palestine. Similarly, the political instability of the region has worsened the vulnerability of MENA to illicit drug trafficking (IDPC 2016) as the region offers the opportune location as a mid-way between Europe and Latin America.

Illegal trafficking of persons and smuggling of migrants are also widespread in this part of the world. As the region is dominated by a set of ungoverned spaces with porous borders, human trafficking has become a "lucrative business activity in the Sahel and other regions of North and East Africa due to a dearth of other economic opportunities" (Schäfer 2015). Most trafficked people are economic migrants mainly from sub-Saharan Africa travelling to Europe (UNODC 2015). Victims go through an appalling experience as they are "often detained at random in

the North African transit countries and, in some cases, held in camps and prisons alongside traffickers and other criminals", among other terrible experiences (Schäfer 2015). North African countries are also used by transnational criminal organizations and networks as key routes for transit and boarding in the trafficking of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa as well as Middle Eastern migrants travelling to Europe (Global Initiative 2014).

Some of these organized criminal networks are used by extremist groups to support their activities. For instance, rebel groups linked to al-Qaeda in Mali finance their activities almost totally by human and drug trafficking in the Sahel region. Among others, these groups fund their activities by kidnapping for ransom and by giving protection to drug and arms smugglers (Banco 2015).

These illegal networks in the region also contribute to shaping the political balance of the countries in the region. Some political elites in the region rely on the money from these networks to levy the support of the population during election season, for instance. As noted by the UN Secretary General in 2013, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime "contribute to undermining the authority of states, their security and stability, governance, social and economic development, and the rule of law," particularly in the Sahel and West Africa (UNSC 2013).

Nile Basin (Increased Tension Over Water Resources)

Water is very much an issue of human survival, especially nowadays when about one-third of the global population lacks access to water (Rahman 2011). As such, water management is a delicate issue in international affairs (Freitas 2013). This is more visible than ever in the Nile Basin region where developing new dynamics of sharing of the Nile River are being redefined among countries sharing the River.

Labeled "Gift of the Nile" by the Greek historian Herodotus, Egypt has for long considered and used the Nile River to define its identity and survival; "Egypt is the Nile and the Nile is Egypt". On this basis, Egypt has over the years initiated, signed, and implemented a number of treaties with one riparian state, Sudan, to ensure its full-fledged rights over the Nile River. It has made itself the deciding authority over any activity related to the utilization of the Nile thus establishing itself as the unchallenged "hegemon" of the Nile River Basin (ibid). However, over the course of the past decade, Egypt's hegemony has been greatly challenged by lower riparian states of the Nile River. The staggering population growth of the lower riparian states, climate change, and the need for

development pushed the upper riparian states to contest the dominance of Egypt in the Nile Basin. Due to this, tension exists between the lower and upper riparian states and especially between Egypt and Ethiopia. A bold move was the initiation and then thereof the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam of Ethiopia over the Nile despite the contest by the government in Cairo. This move by Ethiopia also paved a way for other countries in the basin to make use of, develop, and undertake their particular development goals. However, this has also led to an escalation of tension, as per prediction of experts, the water of Nile will likely become minimized in the future due to the unprecedented increase in pollution and the effects of global warming. This tension, according to some experts, will likely escalate to war in the future between Ethiopia and Egypt (Rahman 2011).

The Mediterranean (The New Graveyard Between Europe, Africa, and the Middle East)

In 2015, the world witnessed one of the most pressing maritime migration crises in decades mainly due to the arrival of more than one million migrants to Europe from the MENA region and sub-Saharan Africa. In 2015 hundreds of thousands of migrants reached Europe by crossing the Mediterranean to Greece or Italy while an estimated 3770 died at sea (IOM 2016a). The crisis has persisted as the first two months of 2016 witnessed the arrival of about 135,000 people in Europe via the Mediterranean with more than 400 people perishing at sea (ibid). Migrants from the Middle East try to enter Europe through three main migration routes across the Mediterranean (Cummings et al. 2015): the Central Mediterranean (through Libya, Egypt, or Tunisia to Italy), the Eastern Mediterranean (through Turkey, Bulgaria, and Cyprus to Greece), and the Western Balkans ("enter through Greece and proceed towards Hungary") (IOM 2016b). The journey is characterized as being extremely perilous as it's often organized by criminal networks illegally. Migrants are subject to harsh conditions where "smugglers are ready to pack ever greater numbers onto boats" (Parkers 2014) which often end up sinking. Experts predict that the problem will remain with us for the years to come as the drivers of migration in the Mediterranean will not decrease any time soon.

Prospects for Peace

Regional Integration Across Nations and States

Since the time countries in the region have been struggling to gain independence from foreign occupation and colonization in the middle of the twentieth century, some political leaders strived to achieve a form of integration across Arab nations. The efforts of Nasser of Egypt were particularly significant at that time. However, such efforts seemed to fail time after time because they tended to start at the political level with an expectation that unification of integration at the top political level will trickle down to the rest of the social and economic organs of the Arab societies. The unification project between Egypt and Syria (1958–1961) is a good example of such failing effort.

In the twenty-first century, the region is in more dire need of such integration to address the myriad of challenges addressed in this research, and beyond. However, the ways of the 1950s and 1960s will not succeed, as much as they did not half a century ago. Integration across Arab nations will have to be implemented with a more modern, holistic approach.

In its significant report on Arab integration in the twenty-first century (ESCWA 2014a), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Africa (ESCWA) highlighted the following:

- The cultural, linguistic, religious and historical foundation for integration in the Arab region is among the strongest in the world.
- Over and over again, and despite political fragmentation and conflicts among ruling regimes, people of the region have continued to strengthen their bond and cooperation. The new advances in communication and movement of people and goods allowed for a wider unofficial integration.[1]
- Efforts for integration in the twenty-first century must benefit from the failing lessons of the past, but not be hindered by them.
- A comprehensive approach to integration must address social, cultural, religious, social, economic, governance, and political aspects.
- Gradual steps toward integration of people in terms of easing movement across borders and expanding communication would be followed by larger economic and political steps.

A strategic regional integration approach is critical to addressing the multiplicity of challenges facing the region. Hardly any of these challenges is restricted within a nation-state boundary. Almost all of them are of transnational nature and therefore it is imperative to address them in an integrative manner.

Control of Arms Trade (Especially Small Arms)

The region suffers from a large influx of illegal movement of small and mid-size weapons especially after the fall of the Ghaddafi regime in Libya. Much of his arsenal has been transferring across the desert to Egypt and the Sahel region, leading to an increase in violent extremist activities, human trafficking, and illegal migration.

In addition, the region has been the largest importer of arms manufactured in industrialized countries. "Over the last decade, the Middle East has become a focal point of the world arms buildup. Each year, the regional arsenal grows, as the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain and others ship billions of dollars worth of weapons to the countries there [….] Today, the region receives over half of all arms deliveries to the Third World, and more than a quarter of all world arms shipments" (Stroke and James 2017). The availability of such arms in the region, coupled with their accessibility to terrorist organizations, organized crime networks, and regimes engaged both in intra- and international armed conflicts is leading to destruction and derailment of development efforts. The regional integration efforts suggested above must concentrate on developing a comprehensive multidimensional approach to reduce the flow of arms in the region.

Development of Models of Renewable Resources

We have seen above that the MENA region is the world's biggest exporter of fossil fuel energy. At the same time, we have indicated that the MENA region is strongly affected by climate change and that people in the region will be suffering from a drier and hotter climate and water shortage in the decades to come. We know that fossil fuels are finite and that there will be ever-greater demand for energy in the future. Compared to 2009, the MENA region will have a 70 percent increase in demand for energy supplies until 2035, an above-average increase compared to the worldwide demand (Jalilvand 2012). Therefore, the MENA region should start to

think of strategies on how to cope with the energy demand challenges of the future.

At the same time, one significant contributor to the climate change is fossil fuel. Though the MENA region is and will suffer severely from climate change in the future, it will continue to significantly contribute to the climate change if it does not change its energy supplies. Compared to 2010, until 2035, the MENA will have a 47 percent increase in energy-related greenhouse gas emissions, whereas the world average increase lies at "just" 20 percent. Therefore, it only seems natural that the MENA region should start transforming its energy supply from fossil fuel to renewable resources. Even though the MENA region holds the greatest potential for renewable resources worldwide, in 2012, it only supplied 1 percent of its energy with renewable resources.

Some of the consequences of climate change will be agricultural loss, negative effects on health and increase in poverty. Again, those in society who already are worse off will be the ones who will be most affected (ibid). In essence, climate change will result in increased frustration, which in turn will lead to the negative effects we have discussed above, such as violent extremism. Hence, a transformation to renewable resources will be of utmost benefit for the region, economically, socially, and environmentally, and therewith will be a contribution to peace and conflict prevention. Also on an international level, renewable resources contribute to conflict prevention. A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change is not only of concern for the MENA region but for countries worldwide.

Fortunately, the region has already started to invest into renewable energy sources. Especially solar power seems to be a key driver, but wind energy also has high potential, for example, in the case of Jordan. Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, for example, aim at supplying 10 percent of their energy demand with renewable resources by 2020, a challenging target that might require international expertise, especially in the form of qualified engineers (Hochstrasser 2015).

Promotion of Successful Deradicalization Models From Within Islamic Experiences

The structural challenges facing the region contribute to the rise of violent extremism in the name of Islam. Addressing the structural challenges such as environmental issues, good governance, gender inequalities, and flow of

arms, as discussed in this research, must be included in the priorities of governments and civil societies. Those issues are problematic on their own as explained. They, in addition, contribute as push factors for violent extremism committed in the name of Islam. However important it is to tackle those issues on their own merit, such efforts will be fruitless in addressing violent extremism unless they are coupled with a foundational deradicalization effort based in Islamic sources.

> A Doctrine Revision approach would strike straight into the heart of radicalization in the Muslim context. It has the potential to transform the hearts and minds of proponents of violence in the name of Islam, and to prevent more Muslim youth from joining violent doctrines and groups. Addressing the violent doctrine within Islamic circles may reduce the tendency towards opting for the use of violence in the name of Islam, but would not be useful without addressing the wider sociopolitical and developmental grievance factors (poverty, unemployment, inequality, illiteracy, bad governance, etc.). It is, therefore, imperative to develop multi-pronged policies to address both the doctrinal and grievance factors. (Abdalla 2016)

Addressing Gender Inequalities and Injustices

In Islam, the sexes complement each other, and authentic Islam, in contrast to "pseudo-Islam", is emancipatory; many Muslim feminists stress the emancipatory elements of the Quran, and claim that they have been nullified by patriarchy and male interpretation. Inglehart and Norris noted that democracies cannot be sustainably established in the MENA countries as long as there is still a gap in gender equality and sexual liberation (Moghadam 2013). Though the MENA countries have made promising advances in reducing gender injustices in the region, especially with access to education and healthcare, there is still a significant gender gap. Generally, more girls attend primary school, and in some MENA countries the enrollment rate of women at university is higher than of men, but many women still struggle with illiteracy and access to equal opportunities in the public sphere.

Multidisciplinary Education for Nonviolence and Peaceful Approaches to Conflicts

We have seen above that the MENA region is challenged by several significant factors that have led to violent conflict in the region. A nonviolent,

multidisciplinary approach to conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and conflict prevention is needed in order to tackle the challenges holistically.

According to Johan Galtung, there are three types of violence, direct, structural, and cultural violence, which are also interrelated (Galtung 2010). A society will only have achieved positive peace when all three forms of violence are abolished. In the MENA region, the youth is especially frustrated and is easy prey for violent radicalization. Hence, nonviolence education needs to be particularly targeted at the youth. This could be in the forms of workshops. Teaching nonviolent dialogue techniques, for example, nonviolent communication and nonviolent resistance methods, such as strict nonviolent protests or civil disobedience seem to be appropriate methods, too. Simultaneously, other peaceful conflict resolution and conflict transformation approaches need to be applied.

In the MENA region, a focus on peacebuilding methods seems especially valuable in order to tackle the root causes of the conflict. Peacebuilding aims at transforming structural violence into structures enhancing peace and security—a long-term project. Here, development, human rights, democratization, civil society, and reconstruction are of utmost importance. Amongst others, development of good governance, the creation of a political framework for long-term peace and of structures that foster equality should build the focal points. Structural change can also be achieved by strengthening civil society, that part of the population that is affected the most by violent conflict (Schirch 2008). Empowering civil society can help in promoting tolerance and cooperation (Dukes 1999), within and across cultures (Bachler 2003), and can aid in the development of effective public policy.

Note

1. "[T]he common heritage, language and history of the Arab people are irrepressible forces. They survived their repudiation by modernizing nation-States just as they resisted elimination by colonial powers. They live on in the minds, hearts and memory of the Arab peoples who do not submit to artificial borders and barriers, and they have rebounded from official denial and suppression." ESCWA. 2014b. Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative—Summary. Available at: http://css.escwa.org.lb/OES/Docs/ACI_Summary_EN.pdf [Accessed 25 March 2018].

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