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EMERGING SCHOLARSHIP ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

Moving from the Periphery

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Foreword

Emerging Scholarship on the Middle East and Central Asia: Moving from the Periphery deals with a range of issues affecting contemporary Middle Eastern and Central Asian societies at subnational, national, regional, and international levels. It provides a refreshing approach to tackling these issues and unpacking their complexities in ways which are more discernible to a wide spectrum of readers. Its coverage involves a discussion of trends and developments, specifically focusing on the factor of transition that has beset both of these interconnected regions and the way in which these transitions have been understood and unpacked by academics. It provides us with enriching perspectives about how geopolitics, religion, security, ethno-nationalism, as well as humanitarian and economic issues, have come together to shape the regions' current landscapes, while exploring the possibility of new scholarly interventions. The volume's approach is multidisciplinary, with an intellectual diversity underpinning its discussions. It casts a fresh look at not only the Afghan and Syrian conflicts, Iranian nationalism, and the situation of Afghan migrants in Iran, but also the question of Kurdish nationalist aspirations and the main indicators that are set to affect the future of the Persian Gulf, and the wider region.

Another important feature of the volume is that it is the product of the initiative and labor of the graduate scholars of our academic unit, the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (the Middle East and Central Asia), ANU. Based on a conference, the book contains a number of chapters which are authored by graduate students, and edited by PhD scholars from CAIS. The main objective of the initiative has been to enable CAIS graduate students and those of other Australian universities whose research is primarily focused on different aspects of the Middle East and Central Asia, to showcase their research projects and outputs. It is gratifying to see that their contributions

are also complemented by several scholars from outside CAIS, the ANU, and even Australia. This collection of expertise and insights has indeed enriched the book. The contributors very aptly and thoughtfully highlight the varying realities that are peculiar to the Middle Eastern and Central Asian regions on the one hand, and that can have wider implications for the study of other parts of the world on the other, especially in the context of a dynamically changing world situation.

While no one is in a position to predict with any degree of certainty what the future holds for the two resourceful and strategically important regions of the Middle East and Central Asia in general, and their individual constituent states in particular, the contributors of this book provide sufficient analytical perspectives to enable us to work out some of the broad trends that could influence their directions in the foreseeable future. Whatever the ultimate outcome, these scholarly essays deserve close reading by academics, students, policymakers, and commentators. I congratulate all the contributors and the editors of the book. Without their tireless efforts, dedication, and perseverance, this piece of work would not have become a reality.

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Australian National University

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The production of this book was a collaborative effort to which all three editors have equally contributed. The editors' names, where they appear, are listed in alphabetical order.

Introduction

Alternative Frameworks: Accounting for the Overlooked

Katlyn Quenzer and Maria Syed

Although history is replete with social movements and revolutions that have toppled ruling regimes, the 2011 upheaval in the Middle East took the world by surprise. In retrospect, all of the likely catalysts for social unrest—rising inflation, high unemployment, a burgeoning youth population, and repressive social and political structures—were in place. Nonetheless, few, if any, were able to predict the almost total collapse of political order, leaving us to question what gaps might have been present in the extant scholarship on the region. Prior to the Arab Spring, the theoretical debate remained mired within a framework of "durable authoritarianism," in which it was broadly assumed that the ruling regimes were there to stay.[1]

From December 2010 onwards, as the world bore witness to the growing agency of people of the Middle East, scholars employed a framework that foregrounded revolutionary movements and popular uprisings, in order to study the transitions taking place.[2] This framework sought to account for the failures of authoritarian leaders and the subsequent uprisings against their rule. Nonetheless, as it became evident that, in most cases, the high hopes for revolutionary change would not be realized, scholars were forced to consider alternative explanations, largely underscoring the resilience of authoritarianism.[3] Shifts in scholarly discourse mirrored shifts in the political sphere. However, there was not necessarily any comprehensive investigation of why such shifts were taking place. There are important events, social factors, individuals, and ideas that have gone largely unexplored in scholarship on the region, which includes Central Asia.

Gaps in the scholarship of the Middle East and Central Asia necessitate a revisiting of analytical and theoretical frameworks that dominate academic fields related to the study of this region and its history, politics, religions,

peoples, and cultures. Given that acquisition of knowledge often remains dependent on the conceptual frameworks that are employed, it is important to explore and understand what has been left out of these frameworks. These conceptual frameworks are not simply tools that can be employed and discarded at will. Rather, they help shape the way we think. By simplifying and abstracting, sifting and screening out, conceptual frameworks that might have seemed useful in charting a course through complex ideas can come to limit and stultify scholarship.[4] With the passage of time, these concepts and frameworks become ordering principles, so much so that their colloquial use as metaphors and analogies become common sense wisdom. Such practices discourage information that cannot be accessed through existing mechanisms, thereby restricting knowledge, and creating conceptual jails that can limit understandings.

If left uncontested, these conceptual frameworks have far-reaching and concrete ramifications, not least in day-to-day life. In the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States, and subsequent developments across the Middle East and Central Asia, the region is often perceived to be a place that has independently given birth to extremism, terrorism, instability, and conflict. However, failing to recognize the implications of such flawed perceptions results in the spread of misinformation, giving rise to unrest within the region and elsewhere. At the policy level, the Trump Administration's 2017 executive order that barred people from Muslim-majority countries—Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen—from travelling to the United States, underscores the need for doing away with opprobrium that is based on misinformed judgments. The array of challenges confronting the region demands a better framework, or series of frameworks, that can account for the intricacies and nuances—no matter how counterintuitive it seems—in order to complicate and complexify our understandings. New frameworks also have the potential to provide new strategies, if adopted at the policy level.

Dealing with a variety of subjects, scholars from a diverse array of disciplinary backgrounds provide a critique of scholarship on the Middle East and Central Asia. Probing the subject matter, the contributors argue that existing frameworks do not provide satisfactory explanations, but instead produce a uniform reading of society that focuses on centralized forces within, while neglecting counterforces and the contributions of individuals and groups who actively resist, or in some case support, the state-imposed political, social, and economic order. More often than not, the narrow focus of current frameworks overlooks local conditions and distinctive features specific to each society. Rather than drawing broad paradigms that juxtapose East and West, Islam and modernity, or authoritarianism and democracy, the authors in this book argue for more nuanced classifications.

This book sits within an emerging body of literature on the Middle East and Central Asia that has begun to challenge long-standing frameworks and theories that have traditionally dominated scholarship of the region. It suggests new ways of understanding and undertaking scholarship on a politically critical region of the world. What is significant about the works included is that the authors have undertaken their research in close touch with the political and social realities on the ground, and with an awareness of ongoing changes in the region. Ultimately, they suggest that any new frameworks developed must provide a contextually grounded approach that is sensitive to the intricacies and complexities of the region. Each author takes a different approach in asking how future scholarship might respond to developments in the Middle East and Central Asia.

This book grew out of a postgraduate and early career researcher conference held at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University. The theme of the conference was *A New Agenda: Debating the Middle East and Central Asia.* The majority of chapters are derived from conference proceedings, while additional, equally thought-provoking papers have been selected, in order to make the book as inclusive, balanced, and rich as possible. Working out of their specific disciplines, the contributing authors have drawn on a vast expertise in their subject and area of concern. Several case studies offer in-depth analysis of country-specific issues. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan all make an appearance. In contrast to the narrow-scope and detailed analysis provided by such case studies, other chapters provide a macro reading of the broader Middle East and Central Asia region, and the role of extra-regional powers in the political space of the Middle East and Central Asia. Chapters pertaining to topical subjects such as the Syrian conflict, the threat to regional security from Afghanistan, and the problem of falling oil revenues in Saudi Arabia, offer something to those who seek novel explanations of contemporary events. Themes that have long been the subject of scholarly debate, including the intersection of political Islam and democracy and the role of ethnonationalism in regional politics, are given new, critical attention in this book. Collectively, these diverse chapters provide a new lens through which we can view and begin to understand the Middle Eastern and Central Asian region.

The contributing authors bring extensive fieldwork experience to bear on their topics of expertise. Given the general limitations and restrictions imposed on researchers working in the region, these accounts are highly valuable, providing interesting insights into a part of the world that is often poorly understood. This book approaches the region from various disciplinary angles. Author expertise includes anthropology, art theory, international relations, and political economy, providing an excitingly diverse compilation of scholarship.

In chapter 1, Matthew Gray suggests that gaps remain in the scholarship of the Gulf subregion—largely as a result of the failure to heed subtle changes in the Gulf kingdoms that have come about as a result of increasing contact with the globalized world, growing economic complexities, and the progressive rise of social actors and forces—and that there is a need for "more development and refinement" of analysis. Gray provides a critical overview of the literature on a largely neglected subregion of the Middle East, exploring the trajectory of scholarship on the Gulf in recent decades. He shows that area studies have, on the whole, failed to utilize the sort of cross-cutting, multidisciplinary techniques that are needed to breathe vitality into the scholarship. In general, the realm of area studies, while borrowing heavily from the more traditional academic disciplines, has contributed very little in return (the notable exception being rentier state theory). Scholarship on the subregion, Gray argues, can benefit from a synthesis of macro- and micro levels of analysis, as well as an undertaking of both cross-regional and theoretical studies.

In the wake of declining oil revenues since mid-2014 and the ensuing speculation that Saudi Arabia would see a decline in its national power, in chapter 2 Maria Syed explores whether an assessment of power based exclusively on resource endowment holds any merit. Putting forth a three-pronged framework of national power—power as resources, power as influence, and power as performance—Syed argues that national power is a much broader concept than suggested by any single-factor analysis. Only a broad-based analysis that is mindful of developments at home and abroad, and that acknowledges the interplay between such developments, as well as measures taken by the state to address them, can provide a comprehensive picture of national power.

In chapter 3, Elisabeth Yarbakhsh reflects on traditional notions of nationalism in Iran. Through her case study of Afghan refugees in the city of Shiraz, she illustrates how scholarship on Iranian nationalism can benefit from what she calls a "marginal approach." This approach implements novel notions of nationalism that account for the periphery. Contrary to elite perceptions of nation, where the identity of ordinary people is determined by those at the top, Yarbakhsh argues that the marginalized "are integral participants in the making of the nation and the construction of national identity."

Modernization theory may once have sounded the death knell for ethnicity and religion in the nation-state, however, in chapter 4, William Gourlay argues that this is not necessarily the case in Turkey today. His study demonstrates how the Kemalist model—a manifestation of modernization—has been challenged by various political forces: first by the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP), a mainstream political party with an Islamist agenda, and more recently by the *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP), an organization that began as an

ethno-nationalist political party and has since evolved into one that is sensitive to and inclusive of diverse ethnic and religious segments of society. The HDP has thus emerged as a third way: a new political force in Turkey and a model that can potentially be replicated across the region.

In chapter 5, Harout Akdedian delivers an analysis of the ongoing conflict in Syria and explains why the current analytical framework of state formation theory—often implemented to account for the origin and intractability of the Syrian conflict—remains insufficient and inconclusive. Akdedian argues that while this theory helped to explain the regime's ability to consolidate power through violence and authoritarianism, if employed within the context of the current crisis, it leaves us with "dominant explanatory narratives" that are not only insufficient, but also exclusive of local factors at play. He argues that analyses of the current conflict would benefit from a more localized focus that demonstrates the breakdown of the superstructure of state and exposes power held at the local level, or in "localities." Given the power of localities, Akdedian makes the case for the development of conceptual tools that account for power at the local, rather than state level in post-2011 Syria.

In chapter 6, Sam Bowker questions why the dynamic and rich character of "Islamic art" has been presented in a monolithic and reductionist manner—as a thing of the past, "located a long time ago in a place far, far away." He draws comparisons between Islamic art on the one hand and Indigenous art in Australia on the other, in terms of the way in which they are curated, experienced, and studied. Both Islamic and Indigenous art are seen with an external lens, imposed from outside and largely impervious to local conditions. Contrary to general perception, however, Middle Eastern and Central Asian art is sensitive and responsive to the political and social challenges of its surroundings; and therefore, can only be understood in the complex political and social context in which it arises. Although often a representation of realities on the ground, Bowker points out that art's capacity to act as an agent of social and political change is questionable. What such art accomplishes though, is emphasizing "the dynamic political tensions of the twentieth century."

Azam Isabaev sets out to explore perceptions and constructions of the Afghan security threat from the perspectives of both regional states and Western policymakers and scholars. Through a comparative analysis of Tajik and Uzbek official narrative and Western discourse, both official and scholarly, Isabaev highlights the inherent discrepancies among these viewpoints. While Tajik and Uzbek official discourse focuses on exogenous factors, Western discourse holds that underlying domestic and political considerations, in these Central Asian States, is responsible for exaggerating the Afghan threat. Isabaev suggests that a balanced approach, that supplements rather than supplants, would more accurately demonstrate the extent to which there is, in fact, an "Afghan threat."

In the final chapter, Ian Nelson explores what he sees as unnecessary apprehension on the part of Western states and institutions toward China's involvement in the Middle East. Examining China's involvement in the Middle East since the 1970s, when it became a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, Nelson discusses its present role and any potential future role in the Middle East, particularly in regards to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the question of Iranian nuclear nonproliferation. He argues that a negative discourse promoted by Western media, policymakers, and scholars, has acted to inhibit opportunities for China to play a positive role in the region, as a global power that could bring a more balanced approach to seemingly intractable problems.

Collectively, the authors in this book emphasize the necessity of understanding the social and political nuances of the Middle East and Central Asia. Perhaps more importantly still, they remind us that such nuances must be taken into account when developing new frameworks that might be applied to scholarship on the region. They show that what is often perceived to be clear—a matter of right or wrong; good or bad—is in fact uncertain and hedged by contingencies. In the past, theoretical frameworks such as state formation theory, modernization theory, rentier state theory, and elite constructions of nationalism, have enriched our understandings of the region and have shined a light on the actions and intentions of the region's political architects and social elites, but they have also left much to be desired in regards to the local level. In this book, the reader is offered exciting glimpses of new directions in the scholarship of the Middle East and Central Asia. This is scholarship that looks to the individuals, groups, and political entities that have, in the past, gone unrecognized and overlooked; it rejects the simple answers that have elided the complexities of the region; and takes risks in predicting future directions of scholarly enquiry in an area of the world that is undergoing rapid and often unpredictable social and political changes. In doing so, this book offers to readers—academic and otherwise—an investigation of that which has existed on the sidelines, but has largely failed to attain its due place, yielding the possibility of new frameworks for future scholarship on the region and beyond.

NOTES

1. Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Raymond Hinnebusch, "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique," *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2006): 373–95;

Michelle Pace and Francesco Cavatorta, "The Arab Uprisings in Theoretical Perspective—An Introduction," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (2012): 125–38.

2. For example, Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: from 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012): 95–113; Fawaz A. Gerges, ed., *The New Middle East: Protests and Revolutions in the Arab World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Mark Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).

3. For example, Sean L. Yom and F. Gregory Gause III, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 4 (2012): 74–88; Steve Hess, "Sources of Authoritarian Resilience in Regional Protest Waves: The Post-Communist Colour Revolutions and 2011 Arab Uprisings," *Government and Opposition* 51, no. 1 (2016): 1–29; Frédéric Volpi, "Algeria Versus the Arab Spring," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2013): 104–15.

4. For information on simplification and abstraction in this context see, Duncan Snidal, "The Game Theory of International Politics," *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985): 28.

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Chapter 1

Emerging Trends and Debates in Gulf Studies

Matthew Gray

Perhaps because the political, social, security, and other landscapes of the Middle East are so complex and diverse, within the corpus of scholarly literature on the region there has long been a subset constituting "Gulf studies."[1] This work typically covers the subregion that includes the Gulf monarchies—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—plus Iraq and Iran, and sometimes with Yemen included as well. As arbitrary and clumsy as most geopolitical area definitions might be, the Gulf does have a case for being treated as a distinct region or subregion: the eight states that usually are seen to constitute it all have littoral boundaries on the body of water most commonly referred to as the Persian Gulf;[2] there are a unique and specific set of geopolitical dynamics linking these states; natural boundaries have historically separated the area from other parts of the Middle East;[3] and the societies that surround the Gulf's waters have long been linked by trade, cultural, religious, and other ties.[4]

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the state of the literature on the Gulf, the forces and trends shaping it, and current directions in the research, and to offer some speculative thoughts on where scholarly work on the subregion may be headed. It is not intended as a comprehensive audit of the literature, but merely as a survey of some of the broader trends and dynamics in the region, and an examination of the conceptual, analytical, and theoretical contributions that scholars have proffered toward enhancing understanding of the region. It is an appropriate time to undertake this task, as in recent years there has been a sharp rise in interest in the Gulf States, and considerable new material published on it.

1

A "GULF MOMENT" IN MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES?

By most measures the Gulf is going through a period of resurgent interest among scholars, as well as with policymakers. The interests of the latter—geopolitical stability, energy security, terrorism, and others—make their interest understandable: concerns about the future of Iraq, world oil security, the rise of China, the Gulf's links to international terrorism, and the growing economic power of the subregion have all been features of the post-Cold War world and especially since the initial years of this century. Many of these dynamics are driving scholars' research agendas too. This has meant that both the sheer number of scholarly works on the Gulf has risen, but more importantly, the quality and sophistication of scholarship has improved greatly. As such, there arguably is a "Gulf moment" in Middle Eastern studies at present.

That said, this is not the first time that such a claim has been made. Although there are scant "classic" texts on the Gulf, and interest in the subregion among US scholars in particular was slow to emerge,[5] there was a boom in interest in the region in the 1970s and early 1980s, after several smaller monarchies became independent states in 1971, and as a result of the 1970s oil embargo, the rise in arms sales to the subregion, and the 1978–79 Iranian revolution.[6] The 1970s—the first "Gulf moment" in Middle Eastern studies—saw seminal works by key scholars such as Rosemarie Zahlan (history),[7] J. B. Kelly (history, especially the British role in the Arabian peninsula),[8] Hanna Batatu (Iraqi history),[9] John Duke Anthony (security and strategy),[10] Emile Nakhleh (Bahrain and Qatar),[11] William B. Quandt (the US role in the Gulf, international relations),[12] J. E. Peterson,[13] and others. This is quite separate to the extensive work that was done on Iran before and during the 1970s, and of course after the revolution, by scholars including Peter Avery, Nikki Keddie, R. K. Ramazani, and a range of others.[14] The late 1970s also saw various attempts to theorize the politics of the Gulf: Fred Halliday's attempt at a Marxist explanation of the Arabian Peninsula;[15] Michael Hudson examining Arab regimes' legitimacy;[16] and Hussein Mahdavy, who in 1970 created the concept of the "rentier state."[17] The 1980s and 1990s were arguably a quieter time for Gulf scholarship, even if many seminal works did appear in those decades. However, the focus was elsewhere, given the Lebanese civil wars of 1975–91, events in the Arab–Israeli arena, and other key occurrences. The study of Egypt in particular remained strong into the 1980s, and while Iran remained of great interest after its revolution, the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq War, and the low oil prices of the period roughly 1984–2003, made wider Gulf studies perhaps appear less urgent.

What has created the current, second "Gulf moment" is both the environment of the Gulf itself, and a renewed interest in the region by scholars and

a greater ability to undertake a new wave of more sophisticated scholarship on the subregion, especially detailed fieldwork. First, a range of events since 2001 have been crucial in raising interest in the subregion: most important among these are the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, the 2003 Iraq War, the instability in post-Saddam Iraq, and the controversy after 2002 over Iran's nuclear program. It is no exaggeration to say that these events have focused world attention on the Gulf to an extent never seen before.

Just as important as these major events, if more subtle, is the transformation of the Gulf, and its rise relative to the republics.[18] While the republics were once touted as the pacesetters in Middle Eastern politics and development, their political stagnation and tortuous experiments in economic liberalization after the 1980s, along with a relative decline in the regional importance of the Arab–Israeli conflict after the 1978 Camp David Accords, marked a period that was at best a quiet one for these states—Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and others—and at worse marked a period of rapid population growth, urbanization, and deteriorating social services that dashed many of the republican leaders' promises for the future. Power, following wealth, shifted from the republics to the (Gulf) monarchies in the 1990s, as the latter, having learned from the oil booms of the 1970s and early 1980s, invested more of their wealth, developed their economies, and selectively opened their doors to globalization, to a large extent doing all this at their own pace and on their own terms. More mature leaderships, thinking in the longer term, have recognized that the energy rents at their disposal can be traded for political legitimacy, or at least the tolerance of their societies. They have therefore invested in careful, state-led development projects, national branding strategies, economic diversification strategies, and greater social capital through enhanced education, health, and other human services. It has been a very different dynamic to the republics, who chose economic liberalization and cruder forms of authoritarianism, as the path to legitimization; a strategy that delivered far poorer outcomes for regimes, not to mention the people affected by these policies and actions, as became evident by the fact that the post-2010 Arab uprisings were most intense in the republics of the Middle East, unseating several leaders but none of the Gulf's monarchs.

All these dynamics have influenced the nature and scope of scholarship on the Gulf since the early 2000s. Major events have provided an urgency to greater understanding of key states such as Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the globalization of the smaller Gulf States, and their increased openness and the greater ease with which scholars have been able to conduct field research in these states, has allowed more detailed work to be undertaken on Dubai, Bahrain, and more recently Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the others. While some older works on the Gulf were well-grounded

in fieldwork,[19] around 2010 several key books appeared that had benefited from their authors' experiences living and researching in a Gulf state.[20] This has occurred at the same time as some of the republics have been either too dangerous to conduct research in (the case for much of Iraq since 2003, and Syria since 2012), or have become noticeably less friendly toward foreign researchers (in particular, Egypt since 2013).

THE STATE OF THE GULF LITERATURE

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in both the sheer volume, and the complexity and sophistication, of work on the Gulf. This does not mean that the material does not contain substantial gaps, and explanations that warrant further and deeper exploration, but it is notable nonetheless that greater scholarly attention has turned to the subregion. The first "Gulf moment" produced some good works, including country studies,[21] comparative subregional works, works on the 1978–79 Iranian revolution,[22] and not surprisingly, pieces on major events such as the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq War and the 1990–91 Gulf War.[23] The 1980s also saw a rise in works on US policy in the Gulf, as arms sales increased and following the greater US military role in the region (after the Carter Doctrine led to the formation of a rapid deployment force that in turn became US Central Command [CENTCOM], and given the reflagging of Kuwaiti commercial shipping late in the Iran–Iraq War, the 1987 US shelling of two Iranian oil platforms, and the 1988 US shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655).

This type of literature continues to be produced to the present day, although the sophistication of at least some of it has improved. Broadly, the research as it currently stands falls into four main types: subregion-wide studies of a particular dynamic or phenomenon; comparative works on a theme or dynamic; country studies; and works on the subregion's relations with the outside world or specific external actors.

The subregion-wide studies began most commonly as a survey of the Gulf region; they typically had a foundation in political science, or occasionally modern history or economics. Particularly common were works on foreign policymaking in the region, or the US role (more on which shortly). There were some, however, that focused on the Gulf region's political dynamics or political economy, or other predominantly domestic dynamics.[24] Such works usually had sound statistical or qualitative methodologies underlying them, but were often of limited theoretical utility, although it was in the 1980s that rentier state theory gained prominence as an explanation in Gulf studies, led by the work done by Giacomo Luciani and Hazem Beblawi.[25] The Gulf literature has since evolved to include, in the more recent, second "Gulf moment,"

more nuanced subregion-wide studies, often with unique approaches or more sophisticated theoretical arguments. Among many good recent works are those by Anoush Ehteshami on geopolitics and globalization;[26] Sean Foley, melding history and contemporary societal dynamics into a new narrative on the Gulf;[27] Benjamin Smith's work on Orientalism, culture, and economics;[28] Kristian Ulrichsen's work on new ways of approaching Gulf security;[29] and new work on social dynamics.[30] There is also a range of edited works on the Gulf, with a number of works appearing within the last decade offering collections of pieces on the Gulf subregion or the Arab Gulf States.[31]

Since these works often choose to focus on a particular dynamic or category of inquiry, they are related to the second body of scholarship on the region that focused on comparative studies. These are often the most insightful theoretical contributions to the field, for example, even in the previous "Gulf moment," Jill Crystal's comparison of Kuwait and Qatar was a masterpiece, shedding light on two understudied states, providing new historical perspectives on their political economies, and adding greatly to the then-emergent rentier state literature.[32] More recently, comparative works such as those by Pete W. Moore, contrasting Jordan and Kuwait, and Michael Herb's examination of parliamentary dynamics in the UAE and Kuwait, have been illuminating.[33]

As a third category of works, some approaches, rather than being comparative, are in-depth studies of a particular Gulf state, examining it either in and of itself, or occasionally linking it to a theoretical approach. These books are numerous, and vary markedly both in their quality and in their approach. Their value lies first of all in the depth that they—the good ones—can bring to an understanding of a particular state. Several of them are firmly grounded in factual data, often supported by extensive fieldwork or even by the author having lived in the particular state for some years. Many country studies have a particular approach, too, whether founded in modern history, political science, political economy, international relations, or other fields, which can link the study to a wider body of theoretical work, and in turn add country-specific data and concepts to a corpus of theoretical literature. Some particularly good work has been done on Kuwait,[34] and more recently Saudi Arabia.[35] Most Gulf States now have several books on them; in recent years the UAE and Qatar have gained increasing attention,[36] as their regional and global roles have grown so dramatically. Somewhat surprisingly, since it is a country with a fascinating history and political culture, and not a difficult one in which to conduct research, there are only a couple of good recent book-length works on Oman[37]—although there are a range of older pieces on Omani history in particular.

Finally, a fourth main body of recent work on the Gulf is that dealing with its international dimension, including the security environment of the

Gulf itself, and relations between Gulf States and external powers. Here too, there is a range of material. Highlighting one of the issues in research and analysis on the international politics of the Gulf is the fact that such material varies greatly, not only in quality but also in style and target audience: some, especially analyses by think tanks and policy bodies, are often centered on a US foreign policy approach or includes policy-oriented recommendations; other material, mostly by academics, attempts a more theoretical explanatory style. One of these varying approaches is not necessarily inherently better than the other, but overall the corpus of such literature is weakened by the fact that few works successfully cross the divide between the two. There are remarkably few pieces that, in the one work, provide something that is analytically sophisticated, policy-relevant, and well-grounded in theory. This is despite the fact that the authors often *have* crossed this divide personally: many think tank researchers are graduates of doctoral programs, and increasingly, many academics, including those writing on the Gulf's international relations, have experience in government, business, or other nonacademic spheres.

While occasional material is proving more sophisticated and better contextualized than in the past, the Middle East in general remains under-examined in international relations scholarship, and area studies specialists focused on the Gulf have produced only occasional gems on international relations theory. The more linear and idiographic propensity of this work, which Fred Lawson complained about some years ago,[38] remains; many foreign policy studies fail to comprehensively explain all the layers of influence that shape foreign policymaking, or are simplistic in their causal assumptions or the resulting analysis. This said, the challenge for scholars, at least those looking to make solid theoretical contributions, is that the main international relations theoretical approaches simply do not fit well for Middle Eastern case studies. Realist arguments are commonly found, but many—especially those targeting a policy-oriented audience or focused on a descriptive or analytical examination of regional security trends—neglect mention of identity, cultural power, soft power, and other concepts. Without sufficient attention to foreign policymaking, moreover, such studies may fail to acknowledge the domestic imperatives that so dominate many states' security thinking. Liberal institutionalism fares poorly in the Middle East because of the enduring tensions, economic disparities, and lack of security and economic architecture in the region. Some attempts are being made to bring constructivist approaches to the Middle East, such as that by Michael Barnett,[39] but quality works are few and far between,[40] even as constructivism has become a popular explanation in international relations theory. In a similar vein, critical international relations scholarship on the Middle East, including the Gulf, has been fairly limited; there is a wealth of material examining Orientalism or incorporating

critiques of it, but comparatively little beyond this and the postcolonial literature that grew in large part from Edward Said's ideas.

WHAT IS CHANGING (AND NOT CHANGING) IN THE GULF?

From the above, it is evident that although the latest "Gulf moment" has secured the region more scholarly and popular attention in recent years, and added some notable works to the previous paucity of quality research on the Gulf, substantial gaps remain in the scholarship on the Gulf. However, the Gulf has changed—transformed, in fact—in the past couple of decades, and scholarship still seems to have not fully grasped this fact; certainly, it is yet to construct sufficiently detailed and sophisticated explanations for a subregion that is now increasingly globalized, economically complex, progressively engaging with the outside world on its own terms, and which is marked by stronger societal agency and new streams of social and political activism. The Gulf States are very different places to what they were just a couple of decades ago, and their place in the world has changed just as markedly, as indeed has the world itself. The Gulf has long been important for its energy resources, with around 60 percent of the world's proven conventional oil reserves located in and around the area, and increasingly its gas reserves are important too. This is not something that is about to change, despite the rise in unconventional oil and gas in other parts of the world, and so the Gulf will continue to occupy geostrategic and geo-economic thinking for some decades to come, even by virtue of its energy reserves alone. Geostrategic competition, international security, and the fight against terrorism may shift their features or focus in the future, but the role of the Gulf in these dynamics, and the calculations surrounding them, is not likely to decline much. Energy is also integral to the relative stability and the enormous wealth of the subregion: despite the global financial crisis of 2008, the Arab uprisings after late 2010, the turmoil in several Arab states since then, and now a period of sustained low oil prices, the Gulf States' economies witnessed an economic boom from the early 2000s until 2014 or so, which allowed them, with strong state sponsorship, to become both wealthy and increasingly globalized, the latter in large part on their own terms.

In the past twenty to twenty-five years, and especially since the oil boom of the 2000s, the Arab Gulf States have transformed their economies, and with this change have come substantial social, technological, cultural, and diplomatic changes. Although it was Bahrain that first sought to diversify and develop its economy away from oil in the 1970s,[41] Dubai is perhaps the most obvious example of the transformation of the 1990s and 2000s. Its overall

gross domestic product (GDP) has increased around sevenfold since 1990.[42] It has become a household name in the West: It hosted 10.6 million tourists in 2012,[43] and at April 2016, it was the third-busiest airport in the world.[44] It has sought foreign investment and trade, and created a range of free trade zones. In so doing, it has even given its name to a specific "Dubai model" of development, which attributes Dubai's sudden emergence as a rich, diverse commercial hub to, among other factors, its service sector focus; bypassing of industrialization; business- and investment-friendliness; rapid decision-making processes; and transit and entrepôt strategies.[45] Other Arab Gulf States have made similarly important reforms. Beyond Bahrain, as mentioned, Qatar, through a clever policy of investing in natural gas development, is now the wealthiest country on earth per capita, and like Dubai is actively seeking investment, economic diversification, and new trade links. Saudi Arabia, the largest of the six states, has been hobbled by its size and the strong social conservatism in its political culture, but it too has made significant reforms to its economy, and is promising quite dramatic change with its Vision 2030 plan,[46] announced in April 2016, and aimed at diversifying and expanding the economy. The other Gulf economies have made important strides in economic reform and development as well.

The Gulf States are also changing in other ways. Most, but especially Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and to some extent Saudi Arabia, are adopting strategies to build a national image abroad and respond to globalization on their own terms. The smaller sheikhdoms have given priority to their airlines (Emirates, Etihad, and Qatar Airways, respectively) partly for economic reasons but also as brands that symbolize their openness to other cultures, economic change, and globalization. Dubai has encouraged filmmakers to set movies there, famous restaurateurs to open shop, and cruise ships to call at its port. Bahrain and Abu Dhabi host annual Formula One grand prix races. Qatar hosted the 2006 Asian Games, won hosting rights for the 2022 Soccer World Cup, and wants to host a summer Olympic Games. Most of the region is building new tourism infrastructure and facilities for major events. Some, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are also trying to play more active diplomatic and even strategic roles: Qatar sent aircraft and specialist military personnel to support the NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011 and has been prominent in Israeli–Palestinian dynamics. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been active supporters of rebels (albeit different rebel groups) in the current Syrian civil war.

These changes have both reflected wider social and cultural change and brought about societal-level changes. Social change is a gradual process, but can have profound impacts on politics, political culture, and state–society relations. The fact that women represent a majority of university graduates in the Gulf, and that younger and middle-aged women are now on average better educated than their male counterparts, is one example. Both the economic

role and the social expectations of women are likely to change if this trend continues; indeed, there already is evidence of women seeking new and greater social and economic roles, even if political structures, tradition, and other dynamics also act to constrain these ambitions.[47] Another is the rapid population growth in the Gulf States: even though population growth rates have fallen in the region in the past couple of decades, in the 2000s, five of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states had growth rates of three percent or higher; only Oman was lower, at 1.89 percent, while Qatar's was over 10 percent.[48] At a growth rate of 3 percent per annum, population will double every 23.3 years. Economic growth rates, even during the oil booms of 2003–14, simply could not create jobs for all the new entrants into the labor force,[49] and there is little reason to believe that this will change in the future unless the Gulf economies are dramatically restructured or the expectations of the population about wages and employment opportunities alters dramatically.

Social and societal forces and actors are also increasingly asserting their agency; studies that treat the state as a simple authoritarian presence, and society as a passive or apolitical recipient of rents, are at greater risk than ever of being seen as reductionist, or simply irrelevant. There remain too few works on the Gulf that examine societal actors and forces and their actions in public and virtual spaces. This is to some extent understandable, since the complexity of societal agency and the opportunities for expression (especially online and through cultural production) have risen sharply only in recent decades. However, groups and actors such as nongovernmental agencies and companies, and social forces such as youth and women, are increasingly expressing political or social views through film, humor, art, poetry, and other means. They always have, but arguably states have allowed them greater freedom to do so in recent years, as leaderships have sought to liberalize public space a little more and as they have realized the difficulty—the futility, even—of trying to suppress online media, which has been a key outlet through which society has raised these voices.

Having noted all of this, it is important also to recall what has not changed in the Gulf, or what has changed only marginally. Perhaps most importantly, for all the changes to the political landscape and with all the economic imperatives facing Gulf States, at a fundamental level the Gulf's state–society relationship is still a rentier one. They are "late" rentier,[50] in that rents are a mechanism rather than a structural explanation for the nature of the state itself, and the state is far more nuanced and society far more sophisticated than earlier rentier state theory had argued, but they are rentier nonetheless, in that the Gulf States are at their core "allocative" (meaning they distribute rents to society rather than taxing and redistributing domestically produced wealth). This money comes with conditions, including above all that societal forces and individuals not reject the basic legitimacy or authority of the state.

The state can still be brutal in suppressing opposition, where it feels this is necessary. In this sense, the Gulf States remain authoritarian and undemocratic, even if they are permitting *some* new political activities by society and creating new political institutions from time to time. Such change is important for the dynamics that it reflects and creates, but it ultimately is a pluralization of an extant authoritarian structure rather than democratization or any deep form of political liberalization.[51] Related to rentierism and the authoritarian structure of the region is that the Gulf States have long been, and remain, state capitalist in nature. This may be a "new,"[52] more entrepreneurial[53] form of state capitalism, but the state retains control over oil and gas and other areas of the economy that it considers strategic, while also being strongly regulatory. This is important both for the power it provides the state at home and, related to this, by allowing states to liberalize the economy and open the political economy to globalization on their own terms.[54]

At the regional level, the specifics of the security environment have changed. In recent years, for example, the strategic rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has become more overt. Iraq has struggled with stability, and at the time of writing (May 2016) there was a substantial body of opposition to the government in Baghdad, posing a serious risk to the state. The post-2010 Arab uprisings and the civil conflicts that came in the wake of protests in some states also have had a profound effect on the Gulf. At the same time, since 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has brought a new, non-state security threat to the region and sharply reordered the dynamics of the Syrian civil war and Iraq. However, although these dynamics are new, or markedly different to the security setting of even a few years ago, three fundamental things remain the same about the Gulf over the longer term. First, the Gulf States are caught in regional rivalries, either as regional powers or small states; the crisis between Qatar and a Saudi-led group of Arab states that began in June 2017 is an example, with the latter seeking to rein in Qatar's regional ambitions and restrict its foreign policy autonomy. They also lack the security architecture to resolve these rivalries and build stability among the states; and the subregion remains deeply penetrated by external actors. The development and stability that the Arab Gulf States have (largely) experienced in the past few decades is the result of oil wealth and conservative state–society dynamics. Stability has happened *despite* the subregional setting, not because of it.

GAPS IN GULF STUDIES

The discussion above makes evident some of the areas of weakness in current scholarly literature, and points to the likely areas of emerging research

focus. The key ones, to reiterate, include the continued focus on descriptive and analytical pieces rather than theoretical ones; the ongoing challenge for researchers of being both cutting-edge in their scholarly contributions and relevant to policymakers; the limited number of studies that are genuinely both cross-disciplinary and which comparatively examine all of the Gulf States, or at least the maximum that the approach will permit; and the hesitation with which Gulf studies seems to have embraced some of the changes in the region. However, several broad weaknesses in the literature, based on problems with its links to disciplines, are worth reiterating and explaining in more detail.

The first is the set of problems with how Gulf studies, as a branch of area studies, relates to the disciplinary approaches and methodologies that it uses. Area studies is multidisciplinary by definition and nature, but most work in the field is embedded in one or more "traditional" disciplines, deploying the tools and methodologies of those disciplines and drawing on their traditions and agreed approaches. This means that many of the same issues arise as in those disciplines; in political science, for example, there is a chasm between work using qualitative and quantitative approaches, with few that successfully bridge the divide—although a handful do.[55] More specifically, while political science and international relations routinely use cross-regional comparative case studies in major works, Middle Eastern area studies specialists, including those focused on the Gulf, are far less likely to do so. In fact, there is a poverty of cross-regional comparative work using a Gulf state as one of the focused case studies. This is a problem because it means that Gulf studies, and for that matter Middle Eastern studies, has offered less than might be expected to the disciplines that it commonly uses; rentier state theory is one of the few examples where Middle Eastern studies, focused on the Gulf, has created a concept that has been tested and argued extensively by scholars looking at other parts of the world.

These problems highlight a contrast in Gulf studies: it has a propensity to follow some of the methodologies of certain disciplines, but not necessarily some of their approaches. It also shares one of the weaknesses of the social sciences more generally (although it is a problem particularly acute to area studies), that being, the limited breaches and connections made by scholars across the divide between macro-level and micro-level approaches and cases. Political scientists, economists, and others often examine countries or a subregion like the Gulf from a macro level, looking for national-level dynamics or interrogating evidence on a large scale and seeking to create explanatory and predictive models for dynamics at such a level. Anthropologists, linguists, and cultural studies specialists, among others, are more likely to examine things at a micro level, looking for smaller, more detailed (and often qualitative) evidence or using a smaller number of in-depth case

studies. Sociologists and historians can be found doing either, but like their counterparts from other disciplines, rarely do they put both together. This is unfortunate, because there are strengths and weaknesses to both approaches: macro-level studies can provide very broad understandings of dynamics and trends, but at the risk of reductionist or generalized conclusions; micro-level studies, conversely, can provide depth and detail, but some of this may not extrapolate to the macro level.

Finally, also a wider issue with area studies, but a particularly acute one in Middle Eastern studies and Gulf studies, is the enduring idea, whether stated or implied, that there is something exceptional about the region being investigated. Again from a political science perspective, an example of this is the limited use of key international relations theories to explain the Gulf, and the paucity of cross-regional case studies used to interrogate and support key international relations explanations. Gulf studies most commonly uses a realist approach and its variants, or is simply more descriptive and analytical than theoretical in nature, despite, as noted, the potential for far greater use of constructivist and critical arguments.[56] Gulf specialists may claim (indeed they do, from time to time) that the area needs to be understood and examined from its own perspectives and points of departure. Perhaps there also is some basis to the claim of exceptionalism given that international relations theorists, when looking for globally applicable arguments, seem reluctant to choose the Gulf as a case study. While it is not the fault of area studies specialists alone that the Gulf remains poorly linked to the main international relations theoretical debates, it is unfortunate.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION: SOME LIKELY TRENDS IN GULF STUDIES

To a certain extent, Gulf studies in the coming years will be shaped by two key factors: trends in the disciplines with which it is most closely linked; and trends within the region itself. That should not be surprising. However, it also has some "catch up" to do. There are the gaps in scholarship already discussed, which will likely be filled—or some progress made toward filling them, at any rate—in the years ahead. As a multi- and cross-disciplinary field, moreover, Gulf studies will have to work to more effectively and seamlessly marry several disciplines with regional case studies. This is a more challenging dilemma, requiring as it does a breadth of expertise combined with a depth of area studies knowledge. Many disciplines demarcate themselves from others with jealousy, which makes it quite difficult for many researchers to not only find suitable publishing outlets, but also to access appropriate grants bodies and programs. Despite such challenges,

however, the rise in the economic power of the Gulf, its continued strategic importance, and its rapid pace of social change mean that studies focused on the subregion will continue to be both tempting projects for researchers, and in demand among scholars and (when framed and pitched appropriately) policymakers. To this end, several areas of research and trends within these areas seem likely.

In understanding Gulf societies and social forces, much remains to be done. Perhaps because of the macro-level, and often state-centered, nature of rentier state theory, which since the end of the 1980s has dominated the study of Gulf politics more than any other explanation, societies and social change remain under-examined, and often, too little is assumed of societal forces' roles in politics. Likely in the coming years are more works on social change, especially at the micro-level approach, but perhaps, optimistically, some of these will link better to macro-level dynamics and explanations. Already several scholars are working on such approaches. Such work will introduce a more detailed and nuanced understanding of social actors and forces that have previously not been examined very closely. The body of work on women[57] and foreign workers[58] in the Gulf has grown in recent years, and will continue to do so. More work is warranted on businesspeople, youth, cultural producers, and others. Further, the avenues through which these groups and forces engage in debate and activism remain under-explored. While the politics of new media and online spaces have been gaining a great deal of attention, far less has been paid to, for example, the roles of political humor, conspiracy theories, and artistic expression. These avenues of discourse matter, both because conventional media remain tightly state-controlled and because of the inherent opacity that such avenues afford their author; a joke can be "hypothetical," a conspiracy theory deniable, and a piece of art open to multiple interpretations. That may appear to weaken them, but it is also a source of their (albeit informal and discreet) power.

Related to the study of societies, there are a range of forces that will shape the prospects, perspectives, and desires of Gulf societies in the future. The region faces significant socioeconomic challenges such as high population growth rates, insufficient levels of new job creation, climate change risks, long-term water insecurity, and various other pressures from a young and rising population. At present, the examination of such challenges is being done, disproportionately, by think tank and business researchers;[59] although there are exceptions, such as the growing body of work on food security.[60] These issues have a direct bearing on the future of dynamics that scholars are observing closely; on state–society relations, social harmony, economic development, and regional stability. More work on them by academic authors, including a better linking of them to theory, would improve the state of scholarship on such topics.

At the international level, the Gulf's important regional and global role means that both international relations and security studies works on the sub-region will continue. First, and perhaps most fundamentally, there is scope for more work on the Gulf States' relations with other Middle Eastern states, especially on how this has been shaped and influenced by the post-2010 Arab uprisings—although the best pieces are not likely to appear for some time, only once the conflicts that have emerged from the uprisings are over, or their outcomes clearer. Certain of these dynamics are both new and highly important to the future of the Middle East, however, such as the Gulf's role in the Syrian civil war, the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, and the strategic shape of the Gulf after the Iranian nuclear agreement. Second, there is a need for better and more sophisticated studies on the Gulf's relations with other states beyond the region; not just with China, of course, some of which is already appearing, but with other emerging powers such as India, with a newly assertive Russia, with the states of Central Asia, and others. Finally, better theoretical work on the international relations of the Gulf is needed, as already discussed. This is likely to come as both international relations theories develop—especially constructivism, which has considerable potential in explaining the Gulf—and as Gulf studies scholars start to look for better explanatory frameworks for the subregion's security outlook, strategic culture, and foreign relations.

Along with these emerging trends, some of the theoretical work on the Gulf remains valid but needs further development and refinement. Rentier state theory is a particular example, where this very promising explanation about how energy rents shape politics is likely to remain current and popular as an approach, but where further depth is likely in coming works on it. Moreover, other concepts that link to rentierism urgently need more work. Business–government relations, including greater nuance about the nature of Gulf state capitalism, is an area that will likely prove fertile ground for new ideas that impact rentier arguments. More sophisticated explanations in transitology is also likely, in the rentier setting, and would add detail to the ideas that sustain rentier discourses: the observation that rents inhibit democratic development may have some basic validity, but the diversity of political freedoms, institutional development, and media policies in the Gulf suggest that much more than rents are a force in shaping political culture and the propensity of states to allow society greater political freedoms—and that rents alone are an insufficient mechanism to eradicate societal urges for a louder political voice. Finally, the international relations element of rentierism remains very much under-examined: it is likely that foreign policy is closely linked to rents and rentierism, but only a lot more work on this dynamic will enlighten observers about the scope and nature of these links.

There is a great deal of exciting new work coming out on the Gulf. None of the above is meant to suggest any type of "crisis" or failing in Gulf studies, but rather, it is intended to explain the extant limitations and gaps in the work that does exist. Recent works on Gulf cityscapes, explanations for economic policies, national branding strategies, gender, cosmopolitanism (both Muslim and secular), and a range of other topics suggest exciting new work will appear in the near future, highlighting how profoundly, if at times gradually, the Gulf subregion is changing, and giving scholars and other observers new ways of seeing and explaining this exciting and increasingly important area of the world.

NOTES

1. This chapter was drafted when the author was on sabbatical from the Australian National University (ANU) and attached to the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia (IASA) at the University of Tokyo, Japan. The author wishes to express his deep thanks to both Professor Amin Saikal at the Centre for Arab & Islamic Studies at ANU, and Professor Eiji Nagasawa at IASA, for their support in making the sabbatical possible.

2. There is, of course, a fiercely contested argument over the terminology that should be used for the body of water known most commonly as "the Persian Gulf," sometimes as "the Arabian Gulf," occasionally in the past by other names, and sometimes simply as "the Gulf." On the issue, see C. Edmund Bosworth, "The Nomenclature of the Persian Gulf," in *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey*, ed. Alvin J. Cottrell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xvii–xxxvi. It is a somewhat silly debate. Here the term "the Persian Gulf" is used simply because that has historically been the more commonly adopted term, with "the Gulf" appearing as a shortened form of this.

3. As described by Lawrence G. Potter, introduction to *The Persian Gulf in History*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

4. See David Commins, *The Gulf States: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); most relevant for this point are pages 1–31 (Chapters 1–2), but much of the book supports this claim of deep and enduring intra-Gulf linkages.

5. Rosemarie Said Zahlan, "Gulf Studies in the United States," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1980): 90.

6. Emile A. Nakhleh, "State of the Art: Persian Gulf Studies," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 11, no. 2 (1977): 31.

7. Examples of Rosemarie Said Zahlan's key works include *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History of the Trucial States* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978); *The Creation of Qatar* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); and *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

8. His seminal work is perhaps J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), but he was a prolific author of articles and papers as well, including through the 1970s and 1980s.

9. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

10. For example, John Duke Anthony, *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1975).

11. Most famously Emile Nakhleh, *Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1976).

12. Among his many works, a key one on the Gulf was William B. Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1981).

13. A prolific author, but see for example J. E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) and J. E. Peterson, *The Arab Gulf States: Steps toward Political Participation* (New York: Praeger, with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1988).

14. To mention just a few of this enormous list of books on Iran from that period: Leonard Binder, *Iran: Political Development in a Changing Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (London: Benn, 1965); Charles Issawi, *Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971); R. K. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941–1973* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1975); and Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* (London: Cass, 1980).

15. Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans: A Political Survey of Instability in the Arab World* (London: Vintage, 1975).

16. Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

17. Hussein Mahdavy, "The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M. A. Cook (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 428–67.

18. On this see Matthew Gray, "A Tale of Two Middle Easts: Change and Stasis in the Arab World," *Griffith Asia Quarterly* 1, no. 2/3 (2013): 51–76.

19. As just a couple of examples: Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

20. Again as just a couple of examples: Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) and Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (London: Hurst, 2009). Both works benefited greatly from their authors' sustained periods living in Saudi Arabia and Oman respectively.

21. For example, on Saudi Arabia, Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'ud* (London: Harper Collins, 1982), plus Rosemarie Said Zahlan's works on the UAE and Qatar, and various of the works on Iran already noted.

22. Some of the books published shortly after the 1978–79 revolution include: Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and a little later, the excellent work by Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

23. There are too many to list here: the Iran–Iraq War, the 1990–91 Gulf War, and the US role in the region have all been examined in enormous detail by scholars. Some works are detailed and assessed in the excellent review article on Gulf international relations literature by Fred H. Lawson, "From Here We Begin: A Survey of Scholarship on the International Relations of the Gulf," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 337–57.

24. As a few examples: Hazem Beblawi, *The Arab Gulf Economy in a Turbulent Age* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994); and works by Herb, Peterson and Zahlan, cited above.

25. See especially Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State: Nation, State, and the Integration of the Arab World* (London: Croom Helm, 1987). They also discussed the idea in Giacomo Luciani, ed., *The Arab State* (London: Routledge, 1990).

26. Anoushirivan Ehteshami, *Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules* (London: Routledge, 2007).

27. Sean Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010).

28. Benjamin Smith, *Market Orientalism: Cultural Economy and the Arab Gulf States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

29. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (London: Hurst, 2011).

30. For example, Alanoud Alsharekh, ed., *The Gulf Family: Kinship Policies and Modernity* (London: Saqi, with the Middle East Institute at SOAS, 2007).

31. Among many good ones published in recent years are: David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen, eds., *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Mehran Kamrava, ed., *The Political Economy of the Persian Gulf* (London: Hurst, 2012); Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf in History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf* (London: Hurst, 2013); and Mary Ann Tétreault, Gwenn Okruhlik, and Andrzej Kapiszewski, eds., *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2011).

32. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf.*

33. Pete W. Moore, *Doing Business in the Middle East: Politics and Economic Crisis in Jordan and Kuwait* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Michael Herb, *The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

34. In fact, book-length studies on Kuwait date back to the earlier "Gulf moment"; examples of good works are Jill Crystal, *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait: Dependency and Class in a Rentier State* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993); and Mary Ann Tétreault, *Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Other books such as those mentioned by Michael Herb and Pete W. Moore have also had a focus on Kuwait, if not exclusively so.

35. As a few among many examples: Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*; Toby Craig Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Tim Niblock, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia,* with Monica Malik (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

36. On the UAE, Christopher M. Davidson's books led the renewed interest in that state: see his *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (London: Hurst, 2008); and *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (London: Hurst, 2009). Also excellent is Andrea B. Rugh, *The Political Culture of Leadership in the United Arab Emirates* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On Qatar, see Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Matthew Gray, *Qatar: Politics and the Challenges of Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013); and David Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City-State* (London: Hurst, 2016).

37. Those two being: Valeri, *Oman*, and the excellent new history by Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

38. Lawson, "From Here We Begin," 338.

39. Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

40. There are exceptions. An excellent recent work, for example, which relies heavily on identities and constructivism, is Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

41. Robert Looney, "The Omani and Bahraini Paths to Development: Rare and Contrasting Oil-based Economic Success Stories," *Research Paper No. 2009/38* (Helsinki: United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, June 2009).

42. "United Arab Emirates GDP," *Trading Economics*, accessed June 13, 2016, http://www.tradingeconomics.com/united-arab-emirates/gdp.

43. Simeon Kerr and Camilla Hall, "Dubai Relies on Air Links to Double Tourists to 20m by End-decade," *Financial Times,* May 8, 2013, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/18f6209c-b7ca-11e2-bd62-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2gLUhsXzR.

44. "Year to Date Passenger Traffic," *Airports Council International*, accessed June 6, 2016, http://www.aci.aero/Data-Centre/Monthly-Traffic-Data/Passenger-Summary/Year-to-date.

45. Martin Hvidt, "The Dubai Model: An Outline of Key Development-Process Elements in Dubai," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 3 (2009): 397–418.

46. On the plan, see "Saudi 2030 Vision," Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, accessed June 5, 2016, http://vision2030.gov.sa/.

47. Wanda Krause, "Gender and Participation in the Arab Gulf," *Research Paper Number 4, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States* (London: London School of Economics, September 2009), especially pages 7–15; also Sean Foley, "All I Want is Equality with Girls: Gender and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century Gulf," *Middle Eastern Review of International Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2010): 21–37.

48. Melani Cammett, Ishac Diwan, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 4th ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2015), 128–29. The GCC is a bloc of six oil-rich Gulf monarchies: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. It was formed in 1981, as a counter to the strength and influence of Iran and Iraq in the Gulf, although its focus has shifted at various times between its economic priorities and its security ones.

49. For an analysis of this see World Bank, *Gulf Cooperation Council Countries: Enhancing Economic Outcomes in an Uncertain Global Economy* (Washington: World Bank Middle East and Central Asia Department, 2011), 4–8.

50. Matthew Gray, "A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," *Center for International and Regional Studies Occasional Paper No. 7* (Doha: Georgetown University, 2011), https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558291/CIRSOccasionalPaper7MatthewGray2011.pdf?sequence=5#_ga=1.233818198.956461665.1465118200.

51. This idea is strongly along the lines of that in Daniel Brumberg, "Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002): 56–68.

52. The term "new state capitalism" was coined to describe this dynamic, including in the Gulf; see Ian Bremmer, *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War Between States and Corporations?* (New York: Portfolio, 2010).

53. A similar concept, termed "entrepreneurial state capitalism" and using the case of Qatar, is found in Gray, *Qatar*, see especially pages 10–11, 64–70, and 105–09.

54. On this and other general sources of new state capitalism see Bremmer, *The End of the Free Market*; Joshua Kurlantzick, *State Capitalism: How the Return of Statism is Transforming the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially pages 64–92.

55. Such as Michael L. Ross' and Justin Gengler's works: as examples, see Michael L. Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); and Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

56. Again there are exceptions to this, including the work of Barnett and others using constructivism, and some pieces that have a critical international relations approach.

57. A couple of these include Jane Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women: Generations of Change* (London: Hurst, 2010); and Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi, 2001).

58. In particular Andrew M. Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); and Mehran

Kamrava and Zahra Babar, eds., *Migrant Labor in the Persian Gulf* (London: Hurst, 2012).

59. As a couple of examples see Economist Intelligence Unit's reporting, for example *The GCC in 2020: Resources for the Future* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010), http://graphics.eiu.com/upload/eb/GCC_in_2020_Resources_WEB.pdf; and Chatham House's similarly excellent work, for example *Political and Economic Scenarios for the GCC* (London: Chatham House, May 2012), https://www.chatham-house.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Middle%20East/0512gcc_sum-marytwo.pdf. There are exceptions, of course, where universities provide exceptional policy-relevant material on the Gulf, such as the extensive set of papers published by the *Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States* at the LSE; for the list of papers, accessed February 14, 2017, see http://www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/kuwait/research/papers/Research-papers.aspx.

60. These usually cover the entire Middle East, not just the Gulf, but include considerable detail on the Gulf because of its prominence in food security debates and issues. Examples include Zahra Babar and Suzi Mirgani, eds., *Food Security in the Middle East* (London: Hurst, 2014); and Eckart Woertz, *Oil for Food: The Global Food Crisis and the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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Chapter 2

Impending Decline?

A Reassessment of Saudi Power

Maria Syed

Saudi Arabia's ability to emerge apparently unscathed from the regional wave of social unrest during the Arab Spring was underwritten only by an extravagant economic package offered by King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. Valued at US$130 billion, it promised a significant boost in salaries, job opportunities, unemployment allowances, and new housing.[1] In the previous years, the Kingdom had generated oil revenue to the tune of US$400 billion in foreign exchange reserves, and could comfortably afford a steady increase in its annual budget.[2] In the past, oil riches have enabled Saudi Arabia to procure for itself development, political stability, and prestige. However, volatile oil price trends observed since mid-2014 have resulted in shrunken revenues, huge budget deficits, and falling foreign exchange reserves. As oil revenues drop, the possibility of buying off political stability seems less convincing. In this context, Saudi Arabia's future is uncertain, and there has been growing speculation that Saudi Arabia will see a decline in its national power. I define national power, in accordance with Frederick Hartmann, as "the strength or capacity a sovereign nation-state can use to achieve its national interests."[3]

Extant analysis is based on an approach that remains largely limited to the confines of oil revenues and national income, focusing predominantly on a single factor for estimation of national power. This approach is misleading. Although resource endowment constitutes an important element of national power, national power is more than simply resource endowment. It incorporates military power, human resources, and industrial capacity. Apart from declining revenues, Saudi Arabia is confronted with an array of additional challenges that may undermine its national power: the regional balance is clearly shifting in Iran's favor; the Yemeni civil war—that began in 2015— has cast a long shadow, as it stretches on indefinitely while placing a heavy

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toll on the Saudi exchequer's pocket; and acts of terrorism speak to significant regional pressures and fault lines. Against such a backdrop, it is prudent that the framework of national power is broadened to account for internal and external challenges, and interplay among these developments.

This chapter draws a profile of Saudi national power, taking into account the range of challenges that are confronting Saudi Arabia and examining the Kingdom's capacity to meet these challenges. It recommends a conceptual framework that shifts from one that focuses exclusively on a single-factor analysis, to one that comprises three interrelated and mutually reinforcing components—power as resources, power as influence, and power as performance.[4] By drawing on these three interrelated components of national power, and taking into consideration countermeasures taken by Saudi Arabia to offset declining power, I will demonstrate how future scholarship on Saudi Arabia, and indeed the concept of national power in general, can benefit from such a broad-based analysis.

POWER AS RESOURCES

Resources—the means available to a state—have long dominated the concept of national power. Traditionally, power was understood in terms of military capacity. This view, however, changed substantially after the oil embargo imposed by militarily weak oil producing countries on militarily superior countries during the 1970s. As a result, scholars have considered several resources available to a state as a way of measuring national power. In order to do away with a resource bias that may arise from focusing on a single indicator, some notable scholars, as noted below, have taken an aggregate approach to national power, computing a sum total of a number of important resources. From single factor indicators, to multivariable analysis and an aggregate sum of these indicators,[5] this approach has allowed scholars to carry out comparative analyses between countries. While, with the help of these indicators, this approach helps measure the exact power of the state, there has been no consensus as to which indicators should be included.[6] The Correlates of War (COW) project employs a composite indicator of national capability (CINC) that has three general dimensions: demographic, industrial, and military capabilities.[7] By way of contrast, Hans J. Morgenthau enumerates six elements of national power: geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, population, and national character.[8] Notwithstanding the lack of consensus on which elements to include, the present study explores resource endowment, military strength, and population trends of Saudi Arabia in order to assess its national power. The reasons for assessing these factors will become clear within the following sections.

Resource Endowment

Oil revenue has a direct and positive correlation with the national income and economic growth of the Saudi Kingdom. Nearly all economic activity in Saudi Arabia is inextricably tied to oil. From the 1970s onwards, high oil prices have enabled Saudi Arabia to pursue a high level of development, procure large defense supplies, and provide aid to other countries. Oil revenue was on average 80 percent of the total revenue earned during 1970–2009.[9] This high dependency on oil can be gauged by the fact that oil accounts for half of Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product (GDP), 85 percent of its earnings,[10] and 75 percent of the total revenues earned by the Saudi government. All aspects of socioeconomic and political life rely on the oil sector. Aided by its oil revenues, Saudi Arabia has been able to buy off political stability and secure a regional and global stature. As such, it could be said that the Kingdom's political interests are dependent on oil revenues.

Oil prices plummeted to an unprecedented level in mid-2014, dropping to nearly half the price in the span of just a few months.[11] This was a result of a global shift to other forms and sources of energy, and a drastic drop in oil imports by the United States, with a reduction of nearly 50,000 barrels from 2013 to 2014, due to the development of new horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing technologies, enabling previously inaccessible oil and gas reserves to be utilized—a process often referred to as the "Shale Revolution," in a nod to its far-reaching and indeed, revolutionary impacts.[12] Consequently, Saudi Arabia saw a budget deficit and a rapid drop in its foreign exchange reserves. In 2015, it ran into a huge budget deficit of US$98 billion.[13] This was equivalent to 15 percent of its GDP, and was in stark contrast to the budget surplus of 12 percent of GDP experienced by the Kingdom in 2012.[14] As a result, Saudi Arabia was compelled to spend from its foreign exchange reserves. Saudi foreign assets slumped from US$740 billion in September 2014 to US$654.5 billion in August 2015, and further to US$572 billion by May 2016. The GDP growth rate also declined from 3.6 percent in 2014 to reportedly 1 percent in 2016.[15] Government cuts to spending have had an impact on the economy. The most severely affected sector was construction, as state-funded projects have declined. Jobs in the construction sector have been lost, with the largest impact felt among expat workers.

Following these developments, many predicted a requiem for Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom was declared a "declining power."[16] In *Foreign Policy*, John Hannah gave a damning assessment of Saudi Arabia's trajectory:

> As if there weren't already enough problems to worry about in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia might be headed for trouble. From plummeting oil prices to foreign-policy missteps to growing tensions with Iran, a confluence of recent events is mounting to pose some serious challenges for the Saudi regime.

> If not properly managed, these events could eventually coalesce into a perfect
> storm that significantly increases the risk of instability within the kingdom, with
> untold consequences for global oil markets and security in the Middle East.[17]

Others predicted that it would not be long before the Kingdom runs dry.
"If the oil futures market is correct," wrote Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in a
2015 article, "Saudi Arabia will start running into trouble within two years.
It will be in existential crisis by the end of the decade."[18] The International
Monetary Fund (IMF) was equally pessimistic, warning in October 2015 that
Saudi Arabia may run into serious trouble, exhausting its financial assets,
if the government did not change its spending pattern. The IMF provided
estimated figures for budget deficits: 13 percent of the GDP in 2016 and
10 percent in 2017.[19] It is reported that oil producing countries, including
Saudi Arabia, would need a price of US$100 per barrel, in order to run their
economies as they were prior to 2014.[20] While oil may well be the backbone
of Saudi national power, there are other elements that come into play. Indeed,
an exclusive focus on oil as a measure of national power is misleading.

Military Strength

A notable indicator of national power is military strength. Military strength is
a product of a number of elements including level of spending, arms inventory,
and size of armed forces, coupled with capability. Saudi Arabia's military
spending has been high since the 1980s.[21] In the past few years, however, it
has reached new heights. Saudi Arabia has one of the largest defense budgets
in the world, smaller only than that of the United States and China. Accord-
ing to the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI), with
a total of US$87.2 billion defense spending, Saudi Arabia has become the
world's third-largest military spender.[22] The Information Handling Services'
(IHS) Jane 360 Global Defense Trade Report revealed that Saudi Arabia had,
in 2015, become the world's largest arms importer, replacing India, with a
surge of 54 percent from the previous year.[23] SIPRI reports that the period
2011–15 saw a surge of 275 percent over the period 2006–10.[24] This mas-
sive Saudi military spending is justified by the perceived Iranian threat that
has only increased with the passage of time. Although fear about Iran is not
entirely misplaced, Iranian conventional military capability is no match to the
state-of-the-art weaponry of the Kingdom, as most of Iran's arms inventory
dates back to the 1970s.[25]

Traditionally, Saudi Arabia has been a buyer of arms from the United
States. The United States sold arms worth US$85 billion to Saudi Arabia
between 1950 and 2011, making it the biggest buyer of US arms ever.[26] In the
event of a deterioration of relations with the United States, a situation I will

discuss further below, it would be uncertain whether the United States will continue to provide security guarantees and arms to Saudi Arabia. This puts the Saudi Kingdom in a precarious situation, as it only meets 2 percent of its defense needs from domestic sources. However, a more fundamental question is how much longer Saudi Arabia can sustain such high defense spending, given that oil revenues are on the slide.

Intangibles, such as war-fighting capacity and success rate on the battle ground are equally significant in determining the military prowess of a country. In terms of military strength, Saudi Arabia's military ranks twenty-fourth in the world, three spots below Iran.[27] Nonetheless, Saudi forces do not have a reputation for war-fighting capacity. Unlike other Arab forces, Saudi Arabia has not been a front-line state and lacks extensive military experience. Its limited contribution to the 1990–91 Gulf War did not show a praiseworthy performance,[28] and its dependency on the United States for security is well-known. One reason for the under-performance of the Saudi armed forces is the level of mistrust expressed by the Saudi regime. The regime's anxiety stems from the history of coups d'état that have seen the overthrow of a number of monarchies in the region. However, the resulting absence of joint command and joint operations leads to reduced effectiveness of the armed forces.

Population Trends

Although population constitutes one of the elements of national power, it is a double-edged sword that can work for or against the national interest. The reason being that an increasing population puts increasing pressure on government and on resources. Population size only matters, in terms of national power, if inhabitants are effectively contributing toward the development and progress of a country.

The Saudi population has grown exponentially in a very short period of time, from a population of just over four million people in 1960, to 32.276 million in 2016.[29] Expatriates constitute about one-third of the total population with an estimated figure of 10,976,854.[30] Saudi Arabia also has a large youth population. The projected rate of growth of the youth population as a percentage of the total population is 20 percent. This is an alarming rate even for a resource-rich state like Saudi Arabia. As a result of population growth, the demand for jobs has grown. According to the World Bank, the general unemployment level stands at 5.6 percent. Meanwhile, the youth unemployment rate is 30 percent and is expected to grow as the youth population grows in the near future.[31] Saudi Arabia like other Gulf countries lacks skilled and professional manpower and, as a result, has a high dependence on foreign labor. The proportion of foreign workers is significant, accounting for 10.1 million of the total population in 2014.[32]

Given the patrimonial nature of Saudi society, the population is a huge burden on the economy. Saudi Arabia is still a long way from developing and utilizing its human resources. A major reason behind the underdevelopment of human resources is the high dependence on oil. Until now it has mostly been the Saudi government that has served the Saudi people, due to a rentier bargain made with society.[33] Given the financial constraints, the state will find it increasingly difficult to provide for the growing population. Some cultural and social trends have also restricted the optimal utilization of the local labor force, such as restrictions on female labor and the stigma attached to certain jobs such as manual or low-paid jobs. There is also a mismatch between educational programs offered at the higher level and the requirements of the economy.

The Saudi government scheme for "Saudization,"[34] launched in 2011, was designed to replace foreign laborers with Saudi nationals. It has not, however, paid dividends, as foreign labor has steadily increased. Any large-scale and rapid expulsion of foreign labor will put Saudi Arabia in a critical position with respect to those countries that are reliant on remittances. The presence of foreign laborers means that other countries have a stake in the economic prosperity and political stability of the Kingdom. With that removed, Saudi Arabia would not be able to leverage its ties with these countries.

It appears that a lot is riding on oil revenues for Saudi Arabia, be it economic well-being, military strength, or social welfare—all of which contribute toward political stability in general. It may seem unlikely that a crisis is imminent for Saudi Arabia, however, as the Director of the IMF's Central Asia and Middle East Department, Masood Ahmed, suggested, "if the government doesn't develop sustainable non-oil revenue over the next 5 to 10 years then of course, they're in big trouble."[35] Saudi Arabia is understood to have earned huge surplus budgets in the decade preceding 2014 and can sustain falling revenues for some time due to its "reserve accumulation." However, things for the Kingdom can only be improved if the economy goes through major structural reforms, essentially privatization measures and diversification of the economy. Such measures would reduce the dependence on oil as the single most important source of revenue. As discussed below, the regime has already taken practical steps toward this end. However, the catch-22 for Saudi Arabia is the time frame; hence, it must make effective use of both time and resources.

POWER AS INFLUENCE

The concept of power as resources lacks depth, as it fails to explain how possession of resources translates into power over others. This correlation of cause and effect was first explored by Robert Dahl with his most commonly cited definition of power, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get

B to do something that B would not otherwise do."[36] A "power as influence"
approach examines whether a state is able to influence the behavior of other
states or mold an outcome according to its desires. It looks at the process
that brings out the desired outcome. However, it is rare that this outcome
is linear, as the other state resists such endeavors. Power, in this particular
instance, depends upon "interaction among countries."[37] Influence does not
have to come through coercive measures but is exercised in a number of
ways through multiple channels. However, it should be noted that power as
influence is underwritten by resources, and therefore is closely tied to how a
state utilizes its resource base into effective power. Presently, Saudi Arabia is
confronted with many external challenges emanating from both its adversar-
ies and allies. What follows is an analysis of Saudi Arabia's ambitions vis-
à-vis its rivals and regional and extra-regional allies, as well as its ability to
effectively manipulate the religious domain for political purposes.

Rivalry with Iran

Since the 1978–79 Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia and Iran have actively com-
peted for regional dominance, and have striven to influence regional dynamics
in their favor—supporting sectarian groups and insurgent movements, militias,
regimes, and their respective allies. The two have played out their rivalry by
proxy, in conflicts across a number of countries in the region, including Lebanon
and Palestine, and in more recent years in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The regional
balance of power seems to be shifting in Iran's favor. A statement by Moham-
mad Sadeq al-Hosseini, a former adviser to Iranian President Seyyed Mohammad
Khatami, aptly sums up the state of affairs in the Middle East, "Iran has de facto
control over four capitals," by which it is understood he means Beirut, Damascus,
Baghdad, and Sanaa. Iranian strongholds in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen,
and a fear of Iran's rise to power has caused much anxiety in Saudi Arabia. While
Saudi Arabia may be on the back foot in these countries for the time being, it will
be a long time before its regional clout is seriously undermined, and Iran can be
declared the undisputed regional power. Furthermore, despite the tensions, it is
highly unlikely that either Iran or Saudi Arabia would choose to escalate the sim-
mering conflict to direct confrontation. This tacit agreement of nonconfrontation
is guided by practical considerations. A protracted war would undercut either
country's capacity to fight, due to certain severe reduction in oil revenues, on
which both countries are heavily dependent.

Quagmire in Yemen

Yemen is significant for Saudi Arabia in its regional rivalry with Iran, mostly
as a result of its geographical proximity. The Saudi offensive in Yemen has

proven a quagmire from which the Kingdom cannot seem to extricate itself. Since launching military action in March 2015, Saudi Arabia has not made any meaningful gains. Well into 2017 the Iranian-backed Houthis along with Ali Abdullah Saleh had maintained a stronghold in Sanaa and the north, with state institutions, including the Central Bank of Yemen under their complete control. As the war drags on indecisively, Saudi ambitions in Yemen may not see the daylight, leaving it to contend with the South only. An arrangement similar to the pre-1990 division between north and south may transpire. Some claim that the de facto partition has already taken place with the Houthis in Sanaa in the north and Saudi Arabia in the south and in control of the strategically significant Bab-al-Mandeb straits.[38] Any Iranian presence in the north will keep the Saudis on edge. Even so, the south may not fall completely under Saudi control, as the common Yemeni citizen has started resenting the Kingdom.[39]

In general, instability in any area across the Middle East has worked in favor of extremist elements. Al-Qaeda reportedly has a presence in the province of Hadramaut in Yemen. Given the geographical proximity, lawlessness in Yemen would not serve Saudi interests in the long run and, indeed, would pose a clear danger to the stability of the Kingdom.

Regional Alliances

States become part of alliances and security blocs in order to check and offset the power of adversaries. In the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Gulf was not a bastion of unity. The Gulf alliance was marked with conflicting policies. Fissures were clearly evident between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. However, in the face of a lack of assistance by the United States and growing disquiet about the US role in the region, dissension gave way to cooperation. A number of incidents have made Gulf States question the continued commitment of their traditional ally, the United States. Foremost among these was the abrupt abandonment of Hosni Mubarak, symbolizing changed policy in Washington vis-à-vis the monarchies; the premature US withdrawal from Iraq, giving way to Iranian influence there; the failure to contain Bashar al-Assad in Syria even when the so-called red line was crossed;[40] and, not least, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached with Iran in June 2015, and put into effect from January 2016.[41] It was this feeling of desertion by the United States that made the Gulf countries, with the exception of Oman, come together under the leadership of Saudi Arabia in its venture in Yemen. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have invested the most in the military venture, however, Qatar and Bahrain, along with Sudan and Egypt, have made troop contributions. Ultimately, this alliance is driven more by necessity than genuine consensus.

Saudi Arabia formed a thirty-four-country alliance, the Islamic Military Alliance (IMA), to fight terrorism in December 2015, with itself in the lead and a joint operations center based in Riyadh to coordinate its military operations. The alliance included not only the Gulf States (less Oman) but also some other regional heavy-weights such as Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan. Significantly, it stretched far beyond the region, to South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, being envisaged as an alliance of the Muslim World against terror. The absence of Iraq, Syria, and Iran, however, indicated that this was a show of power by Saudi Arabia and an effort to further isolate Iran. It was followed-up by some flexing of muscles by Saudi Arabia by way of the large military exercise termed "North Thunder," that was held over February and March 2016, involving 21 countries, as many as 35,000 troops, and the pooling of military resources and equipment.

Iran has condemned the Saudi-led alliance on grounds of instigating instability across the region. One of the commanders of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) disclosed that, in response, Iran has formed a Shiʿa Liberation Army, composed of a variety of nationalities including Iraqis, Afghans, and Lebanese.[42] Iran is not the only one seeking to establish a Shiʿa alliance. Iraq is also actively working to the same goal. High-ranking delegations from Yemen and Syria visited Iraq during August 2016 to discuss such cooperation.[43] These moves are indicative of a sectarian strife that will only strengthen with the passage of time, causing instability that is in no one's interests. It would seem prudent for Saudi Arabia to rethink its sectarian approach to the region before the sectarian genie is completely out of the bottle.

One of the ordering principles of international politics is political expediency on part of the states as dictated by their national interests.[44] The possibility of the Gulf States warming up to Iran cannot be entirely dismissed if Saudi Arabia is sidelined by the United States, and Iran emerges as a de facto regional power. As Yoel Guzansky notes in his study of the impact of the Iranian nuclear agreement on Saudi Arabia, if the Americans were to see an improvement in their ties with Iran, the Gulf would have to rethink its approach toward Iran.[45]

While Saudi Arabia and Egypt are cooperating on Yemen and in a limited number of other spheres, the two states undoubtedly have their differences. Saudi Arabia's expectations of Egypt are not being met. With a contribution of just eight hundred soldiers, Egypt's role in the Yemeni venture has remained a token affair. The two have not been on the same page on various issues such as Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, Libya, and Russia.[46] Egypt welcomed the 2015 P5+1 negotiations with Iran and expressed its willingness to import oil from Iran even before the deal was reached. Furthermore, Egypt has no issues with Russian involvement in Syria. Both these foreign policy

stances—on Iran and Russia—do not sit well with Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Egypt has not felt comfortable with Saudi's softer stance vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood across the region. Saudi Arabia has poured a considerable sum of money into Egypt after the takeover by President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, but funds were temporarily cut off in 2015. Saudi Arabia, however, cannot afford to lose Egypt, as it is needed both politically and militarily. This explains the Cairo Declaration signed in July 2015 that facilitates closer cooperation between the two countries. Egypt out of its need for economic assistance will tag along with the Kingdom. Nevertheless, it will try to retain a certain degree of independence in foreign policy decisions, as has been shown on various issues.

The Saudi alliance with Turkey is possibly on even shakier ground. Saudi Arabia and Turkey have been working in close cooperation with each other since the onset of the Syrian conflict. Mutual visits were paid by heads of the states complemented by the signing of the Strategic Cooperation Agreement that would see close economic and military cooperation, indicating that the two have developed a good working relationship. Turkey, with the second-largest armed forces in NATO and a significant and sophisticated defense industry, was seen as a useful ally. The two countries had common interests in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, along with a shared criticism of Russia and growing disenchantment with the United States. However, Turkey no longer seems to be a safe bet for the Kingdom, as it warms up to Saudi Arabia's regional adversaries. After the attempted coup against the Erdoğan government in July 2016, Turkey has shifted decidedly in some of its foreign policy positions. The Erdoğan government sought to differentiate true friends from avowed ones, taking note of the reaction of other states to the coup. It did not fail to notice who swiftly denounced the actions of the anti-government forces and who waited until the dust had settled to do so. Saudi Arabia was among those who took an extended period to make any statements condemning the organizers of the coup, while Iran and Russia earned Turkey's goodwill by swiftly denouncing the opposition. It was not long before the Iranian foreign minister visited Turkey, with Syria forming the topic of their discussion. The fear of the emergence of a Kurdish state also provides common ground for further cooperation between Iran and Turkey. While Saudi Arabia and Turkey have publicly reiterated their commitment to the alliance and affirmed common positions on a number of issues, Turkey has visibly grown distant from the Kingdom.[47]

Pakistan, another traditional ally of Saudi Arabia has tried to distance itself from the Kingdom. In 2015, it refused to join the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, after the Pakistani Parliament voted against it with an overwhelming majority, in accordance with strong public opinion against any such cooperation. Since Saudi Arabia has bailed Pakistan out financially in times of

crisis,[48] Pakistan felt compelled and obliged to return the favor. It therefore joined other Saudi initiatives, such as the IMA and North Thunder. However, it is questionable how far Islamabad will go to help the Saudi Kingdom, considering its already-stretched military commitments at home and a permanent foreign policy stance of not being party to inter-Muslim conflict.

Saudi Arabia and the United States: Shared Interests or Growing Divisions?

The United States, a traditional ally of the Kingdom, has not been courting Riyadh as it used to. In the waning days of the Obama administration, the cracks in the partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia became evident. In September 2016 the US Congress overrode a veto by President Obama to allow families of the victims of 9/11 to sue the Saudi government. Another bipartisan resolution introduced the same year in both houses called for blocking the sale of arms to the Kingdom on grounds of human rights violations in Yemen; there is growing criticism of the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen as a result of the seemingly indiscriminate killing of civilians. Such scrutiny of the US–Saudi partnership is unprecedented in the history of bilateral ties.[49] Critics within the United States question partnership with the Kingdom, as there is little common ground between the two nations.[50]

Saudi Arabia had grown disenchanted with the United States even before these developments took place. It was not satisfied with the lack of serious American commitment to resolving the Syrian crisis. For this reason, Saudi Arabia launched its military venture in Yemen without prior consultation with its traditional ally—the United States (although the United States and the United Kingdom have provided the Saudis and the coalition with intelligence and logistics). US interests have certainly shifted over time as the regional dynamics have changed. With self-sufficiency in energy, the United States does not appear as dependent as it once was on the Kingdom. Since the US pivot to Asia, under President Obama, the Middle East has become less of a priority commitment.[51] While the United States is clearly growing distant, Russia's increasing closeness to Iran is a cause of serious concern for Saudi Arabia. In August 2016, Russia was granted permission to station its bombers in Iran to conduct operations in Syria. Russia's presence in the region and its alliance with Iran naturally makes Saudi Arabia uneasy.

Gregory Gause argues that, in the case of the United States and Saudi Arabia, "more unites the two than divides them."[52] Shared interests will therefore compel them to retain ties. In fact, military sales have been one of the few reasons for the United Sates to maintain the relationship for over half a century.[53] The United States is not prepared to harm the interests of its arms industry by constraining arms supplies to the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia is mindful of this;

it knows that the arms industry generates jobs, which in turn earns it political support from within the United States. Saudi Arabia can purchase arms from elsewhere, making the United States the more vulnerable one in this bargain. Additionally, one of the stated interests of the United States in maintaining ties with Saudi Arabia has also been supply of energy to the global market.[54] Lastly, Saudi Arabia's revered position in the Muslim World, as the de facto leader of the Sunni majority, compels the United States to retain this relationship.

Challenges to Saudi Religious Influence in the Muslim World

Saudi Arabia has used two instruments in pursuit of its interests: Islam and money.[55] Although religion does not ordinarily constitute a source of national power, the case of Saudi Arabia is unique. As custodians of the two holiest places in Islam, Saudi Arabia derives its legitimacy, both at home and abroad, from religion. The Kingdom has long taken it upon itself to champion the Muslim cause. Since the 1960s, initially as a reaction to pan-Arabism, Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in endorsing its religious leadership across the Muslim World. This has been carried out through the export of Wahhabi ideology and support of Salafi/Wahhabi religious groups and institutions. After the Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia and Iran have both made claims for leadership of the Muslim World and have employed sectarianism as a political instrument.

In recent years, a war of words erupted between Iran and the Kingdom over the 2015 Hajj stampede incident that resulted in over 2000 deaths, including hundreds of Iranian nationals. Iran has criticized the Saudi regime for its failure in managing the holy occasion of the Hajj, thereby undermining Saudi legitimacy.[56]

Another challenge to Saudi religious legitimacy and influence has surfaced with a 2016 international conference in Chechnya, that brought together hundreds of Muslim clerics in a stand against militant Islamism. The conference participants were unanimous in opposing the particular form of Salafi ideology that is endorsed by Saudi Arabia.[57] Hailing from various schools of jurisprudence within the Sunni sect, including Sufism, and representing thirty countries, delegates represented a broad-based opposition to Salafism. The Medina terrorist incident on July 4, 2016, also emerged as a challenge to the Saudi regime and its claim to be the custodians of the Holy Mosques.

POWER AS NATIONAL PERFORMANCE

A state's ability to influence others is also a function of its domestic performance. This useful addition to the concept of national power is introduced by

Lewis W. Snider, who suggests that a state's ability to pursue its goals with regard to the outside world is largely a function of its internal strength.[58] That is to say, a state's relations with its own society enable it to be more effective in pursuit of its external objectives. This concept determines internal capacity and political strength of the state, by considering how efficiently a state adjusts its domestic social structures in response to external shocks.[59] Snider defines national power as the "capacity of the state to penetrate society, to extract resources from the population, and to mobilize and redirect them to serve state objectives."[60] Penetration implies that the state is in a position to influence society, without resorting to repression in order to redirect the domestic resources for political purposes. States that have a higher ability to penetrate society will be able to sustain systemic pressures and vice versa. A higher penetrative capacity is therefore critically desired for national power. This concept explores social and political stability in the society. These become all the more important when a state is not granted a mandate to make and enforce policies on behalf of its society, such as when it lacks political legitimacy. Such a measure has great merit, as it sees states not only as geographical entities, but also as active social structures that help calculate the national performance of a country.[61]

Demands have long been made in Saudi society for political inclusion, social and religious freedom, economic inclusiveness, government accountability, and an independent judiciary. These demands surface from time to time as appeals, petitions, and protocols and at other times through criticism, protests, and open defiance. The Saudi regime has suppressed the diverse character of the Saudi society.[62] The regime, in conjunction with religious authorities, defines the religious practices of its people and has the first and the last word on theological, moral, and social issues. A Shiʿa–Sunni divide is manifest. Being a minority, the Shiʿas are subjected to differential treatment;[63] a prominent example was the Shiʿa cleric, Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, who was executed in 2016. Hala al-Dosari warns against this and states that "Saudis are treading a dangerous line," one that the regime will almost certainly be unable to sustain in the long run.[64]

The threat to internal order comes not only from discontented Shiʿas but also Sunnis who are not Salafis and from extremist elements who have misgivings about the regime's connection with the West.[65] In 2014, the so-called Islamic State (IS) vowed to take control of the two Holy Mosques located in Saudi Arabia and oust the Saudi royal family from power. IS has further targeted many Shiʿa mosques in Saudi Arabia. A spate of terrorist incidents in 2015 and 2016 has rocked the Kingdom. In July 2016, three simultaneous terrorist incidents occurred. The one taking place in front of the Prophet's mosque in Medina was particularly distressing, because of the connection Muslims across the world have to the holy site. The recent trend of violence

has serious implications for the stability of the Saudi Kingdom in the long run.

Women have also challenged the prevailing social structure in Saudi Arabia. Although King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz relaxed a number of rules regarding women, such as easing restrictions on women to pursue education and work in certain fields, allowing the appointment of a woman minister, and granting women permission to join the *Shura* Council, many restrictions remain. The perseverance of the institution of male guardianship, the prohibition on driving, and the ban on travelling abroad all indicate that the status of women has much room for improvement.[66] Social media space, where restrictions on freedom of expression are defied from time to time, particularly after the Arab Spring, is also a potential threat to the political order. The regime has taken measures to contain this threat, passing laws that criminalize any criticism of the regime and extending power of the Interior Ministry to try offenders without any judicial oversight.[67] But, completely controlling the virtual platforms is beyond the capacity of any government and can create new pockets of social discontent.

The Saudi regime's grip on society remains firm. However, there are many areas where the grip of the regime might slip, as demands for change become a formidable force. Saudi Arabia's policy of dividing society along regional, sectarian, ideological, gender, and political lines has worked in favor of the regime. It has prevented the opposition from forming a united front. If this changes, and the opposition is able to come together more effectively, it will have a cumulative effect on the Kingdom and subsequently on national power.

COUNTERMEASURES BY SAUDI ARABIA

As a response to financial constraints, Saudi Arabia launched the Vision 2030 in April 2016, with the aim of instituting some major reforms. Among other measures, these reforms include: moving the economy away from oil dependency through diversification and raising non-oil revenues; cutting public spending through a cut in subsidies; undergoing rigorous privatization measures; stimulating massive investment at home and abroad; and turning the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (ARAMCO) into a public body.[68] The Saudi Vision 2030 is highly ambitious. As such, its capacity to achieve all its goals is doubtful.

In the wake of declining revenues, the Saudi government has tightened its purse strings. It has announced a cut to spending in order to reduce the budget deficit. Subsidies have, since 2015, been slashed in water, electricity, and petroleum, and there are plans for further reductions in the coming years.[69]

In September 2016, the government cut down on perks to state officials and allowances of public workers, while instituting a 20 percent reduction to ministerial wages. The government also plans to cut down on US$20 billion worth of projects and reduce the budget of various ministries by a quarter.[70] Experts believe that reduced spending may undermine confidence in the economy and set in motion an economic recession.[71] Consumer spending has already been affected. Cuts to subsidies have a political implication for Saudi Arabia and may trigger social unrest in the country.[72]

With its welfare program gone, the Saudi regime may find itself faced with a disgruntled populace. Unable to achieve the goals of its Vision 2030, domestic challenges may become more pressing, ultimately threatening the stability of the Kingdom.

As part of the Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia plans to meet 50 percent of its defense needs at home by developing an indigenous defense industry. This will serve many purposes: boosting the local economy; providing jobs; and, most importantly, reducing reliance on foreign suppliers. Saudi Arabia has plans to launch a government-owned military holding company that will work for developing an indigenous military industry. However, any indigenous military defense industry will take years or possibly decades, to fully develop and meet local defense needs. In the near future, Saudi Arabia will continue to rely on arms imports and borrowed defense.

On the societal front, a law passed in April 2016 has ordered the religious police force (Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) to not treat people in a harsh manner.[73] Nevertheless, the strict religious code remains intact, making it unlikely that social demands can be met. In fact, this apparent easing of harsh Saudi religious laws is seen as part of the reforms to lure in foreign investors. Such cosmetic reforms have been undertaken before in the recent past in the early 2000s and have not brought any meaningful change.[74]

CONCLUSION

National power, in this chapter, is seen to be a function of three components: resources available; ability to influence outcomes; and national performance. This three-pronged approach provides a comprehensive account of the national power of Saudi Arabia, and helps draw a detailed power profile of the Kingdom. While oil certainly forms a key element of Saudi national power, a review of Saudi national power across various spheres indicates that, despite the falling oil revenues, the regime has, for now, got the situation under control. The Saudi regime is fully aware of the impending economic crisis, and Vision 2030 seems to be its response. However, many pressure

points remain that can work against the Kingdom. Indeed, there are multiple contingencies before Vision 2030 sees daylight.

Saudi Arabia has a limited timeframe—a window of just ten years—before the financial crisis becomes serious. The paradox for Saudi Arabia is that if it seriously commits to economic reforms and cuts down on welfare programs, the demands for social and political reforms will only gain strength, threatening the political survival of the regime. The Kingdom's ability to meet external challenges will also depend on domestic stability. At the moment, no visible political change in state–society relations is in the offing.

On the external front, Saudi influence over regional developments has not been completely undermined. While tensions persist between the Kingdom and Iran, the two are unlikely to escalate matters to direct confrontation. Saudi Arabia has always taken a pragmatic approach to its foreign policy. When political, strategic, and economic interests have dictated, it has conveniently changed its position and worked alongside its rivals. It should therefore not come as a surprise if the Kingdom changes its position with regards to Iran, from one of conflict to one of cooperation. Yemen will prove decisive in charting a course for Saudi policy vis-à-vis Iran. Saudi Arabia considers Yemen as its backyard; it will not give up on Yemen easily. Allies may fall out of sync with Saudi Arabia following the rule of political expediency. Apart from Turkey, other regional allies, however, will not completely abandon the Kingdom but will continue to work with it while retaining a certain degree of independence.

The case of Saudi Arabia shows that national power is much more than a simple calculation and analysis of resource endowment. Indeed, resource endowment is just one factor among many. While scholarship on national power has heavily focused on power as resources and power as influence, it has failed to give due attention to power as national performance. It is this element that reveals the inner-workings of state–society relations, and the capacity of the state to channel societal forces in pursuit of national interests. State–society relations can be an Achilles heel, particularly in societies where political institutions lack legitimacy and states rely on rentierism.

It would be a mistake to suggest that any single dimension of national power holds more significance than the others. The three dimensions of power are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. As such, any given state needs to carefully balance all three elements. The dynamic character of international politics—shifting patterns of alliances, changing threat perceptions, and regional and global developments—creates a complex situation in which states must manage the various constitutive parts of national power. At the same time, a state needs to remain fully vigilant of and sensitive to the domestic situation whether the developing of dwindling material capabilities, or matters of social and political instability that may cause turmoil.

Domestic unrest can undermine state power in addressing external challenges and vice versa. While sustaining external shocks, a state must continue to provide for society's needs. The provision of services by the state cannot reasonably be suspended. All states—according to their capacity—devise strategies to tackle challenges that may arise internally or externally, suggesting that analysis of national power must take into consideration measures and countermeasures taken by the state to offset real or perceived, present or future, declines in power. A true measurement of national power is based on an interactive mechanism between the various challenges that arise and the state's capacity to address these challenges.

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Chapter 3

Iranian Nationalism from its (Afghan) Margins

Elisabeth Yarbakhsh

The story of the origins of Iranian nationalism is written as one of a growing sense of national self-hood among political and intellectual elites during the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906–11, coming at the crumbling end of the Qajar period (1796–1925), is often singled out as the moment at which the idea of Iran coalesced and nationalism emerged as a significant factor within the arena of Iranian politics.[1] Since that time different actors have sought to harness the idea of the nation to diverse ideological ends, such that to the present day Iranian nationalism continues to be variously constructed and bitterly contested.[2]

Like most stories of nationalism, the Iranian story is one that remains very much focused on elite constructions. Indeed, the broader scholarship on nationalism has devoted considerable attention to the central role elites play in the production and reproduction of the nation, while relatively little has been said about "the ordinary people who are the presumed targets of this identity engineering."[3] I would suggest that "ordinary people" are not merely targets of identity engineering, but are integral participants in the making of the nation and the construction of national identity. In the case of Iran, "ordinary" Afghan migrants carry the border with them and, in their interactions with "ordinary" Iranian citizens, mark the limits of the Iranian nation.

I seek to approach the question of nationalism from a perspective that is simultaneously located within the nation and outside it. As such, I see this chapter as comprising an act of scrawling in the margins of dominant narratives of Iranian nationalism. By scrawling in the margins, I am not attempting to overthrow, or even to seriously challenge, existing narratives, but rather to offer a different perspective—one that is from the margins and speaks to the experience of marginality within Iranian society. In doing so, I suggest that

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marginality itself has something important to say about the ways in which the nation is imagined and celebrated.

Threading through this discussion of nationalism and migration is a multifaceted ethnographic vignette which revolves around (without being restricted to) the experiences of a family of Afghan refugees living in the suburban precinct of Astane in the Iranian city of Shiraz.[4] Focusing on points of contact and interaction with Iranian citizens, I take a flexible life-history approach in order to capture changing political and personal circumstances over a period of more than three decades. Ultimately this ethnographic encounter highlights the marginal position of Afghan migrants within the imaginary of the Iranian nation. Ethnographic techniques are peculiarly suited to getting at the marginal.[5] In re-scaling the discussion of nationalism away from the state and toward social factors—in the process, capturing the ordinary, everyday processes of nation-making in the relationships between citizens and migrants—I seek to create a space for voices that are not ordinarily heard. Through ethnographic techniques, Afghan migrants and Iranian citizens resident in the city of Shiraz engage with and speak back to what I identify as two sometimes competing narratives of Iranian nationalism.

FINDING THE MARGINS

Elham reaches across the passenger seat and slides a steering lock across the wheel. She has parked the car as close to the wall as she can, turning the side mirrors in and leaving just enough room for another vehicle to inch past on the narrow street. Stepping back, she looks critically over the shiny white veneer of the new model Peugeot, a favored vehicle of the Iranian middle classes and as ubiquitous today on the streets of Shiraz as was, not long ago, the Iranian-manufactured Paykan. Evidently something still looks wrong with the picture and Elham leans back in, unhooking the dangling *faravahar* from the rear vision mirror and slipping it into her pocket. "Perhaps we should have caught a taxi," she mutters.

The winged figure of the faravahar is perhaps the best known and most easily recognizable of the elaborate stonework reliefs that adorn the ancient Achaemenid ruins of Persepolis. Despite its connection to a minute Zoroastrian religious minority in Iran, it has emerged as a popular and intensely nationalist symbol. When I press Elham as to why she removed it from view when we parked the car in Astane, she smiles ruefully. "I just figured it for more of a *van yakad* neighbourhood," she shrugs, referring, in a disarmingly light-hearted manner, to the Quranic prayer that is said to protect an individual from the evil eye.

Elham grew up only a short distance from the shrine precinct of Astane and Shah Cheragh, but like many *Shirazi* with the means to do so, she has gradually migrated northward and now lives on the very northern outskirts of the city.[6] Years have passed since she has found reason to visit the shrines of her childhood. "My grandmother used to do *ziarat* every Sunday. All the women went. They would cry and pray to the saint. With a bit of luck they would forget I was there and I could slip out and play."[7]

Today, our visit has little to do with worship or supplication. Elham, knowing my interest in the issues facing Afghan refugees in Iran, has arranged for me to meet the woman she employs as a house cleaner in the frantic weeks before the Iranian New Year. Leaving the car, we head away from the shrine that looms large as an orienting feature of the neighborhood and, following a bewildering set of directions recorded by Elham on the back of a receipt, head deep into a maze of narrow lanes.

Fahima's door is set just below street level and I have to bend to enter the dark, sloping, tunnel-like entrance. Around a corner and through a curtain, the claustrophobic space opens to a sun-lit courtyard. Four families live here, all hailing from the same village in northwestern Afghanistan and all related by way of blood or marriage. Each family occupies living quarters on one edge of the shared space of the courtyard.

Fahima is guardedly friendly and, on that initial visit, the conversation sputters along, stopping and starting over multiple glasses of overly sweet green tea. I can't help but wonder what subtle pressures of obligation have been applied that Fahima is willing to share with me the details of a life that has touched tragedy and disaster on numerous occasions. On that first day I was offered only the sketchiest outline. Despite the brevity of the narration and the paucity of detail, it was enough to convince me that here was a story that could begin to capture the way in which shifting notions of Iranian identity have been experienced by those who exist at, and represent, the margins of the nation.

NARRATIVES OF NATIONHOOD

Before considering the ways in which nationalism is experienced in the domain of the everyday I want to turn briefly to elite-driven narratives of nationalism that have long dominated scholarship on Iranian identity. Most commentators identify two major strands of Iranian national identity: a Perso-Iranian strand and an Islamic strand. Historically prominent is a nationalist narrative that draws on Iran's ancient past and is, as Alam Saleh and James Worrall point out, "almost entirely Persian" in its construction.[8] In the context of the Iranian Revolution this Persian nationalism was suppressed, with Islam

emerging as the dominant theme in a discourse of identity that shifted from being a burgeoning counter-narrative in the 1970s to a state-sanctioned vision of selfhood in the early Islamic Republic. Today both of these narratives continue to circulate within Iranian society.

Animating the Past

Under the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–41) the idea of Persian culture came to be institutionalized and heavily circumscribed. *Farhang* (culture) was constructed as a distinct domain of human experience, and Iran's pre-Islamic (and para-Islamic) history was glorified and become a "normative ideal cultivated through the disciplining of bodies and minds."[9] As such, alternative markers of Iranian-ness were violently suppressed and the people of Iran were forced to adhere to a vision of national identity that celebrated a heavily mythologized "Aryan" past, even as it embraced the trappings of a modern future. In this construction of "Persian-supremacy" Iran came to be imaginatively linked to Europe and its perceived technological, military, economic, and cultural successes.

With the ascension of Mohammad Reza Shah to the throne, the elevation of Iran's Achaemenid history within a state-sanctioned narrative of identity continued. The leveraging of the ancient past in the service of contemporary politics culminated in the 1971 celebration of what the Shah—with some creative reconfiguring of both the calendar and dynastic history—declared to be the 2,500-year anniversary of the Persian Empire.[10] This was a spectacle intended first and foremost as "a show of glamour and power to other nation-states, authenticating Iran as a modern state with ancient origins."[11] The event was the highpoint of a carefully constructed narrative that linked Iranian identity to a heavily mythologized past. At the same time, it saw the emergence and consolidation of a popular counter-narrative rooted in Islam, eventually producing a groundswell of support for the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and, subsequently, the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

Today, the Achaemenid past is once again animated to political ends, not only as a persuasive counter-narrative to Islamist visions of Iranian self-hood but, significantly, by diverse factions among the ruling elite who seek popular legitimacy by way of reference to Iran's pre-Islamic history.

Nation and Revolution

In the decade or so prior to the 1978–79 revolution new forms of what might be thought of as "Shiʿa nationalism" had come to be articulated in answer to the Pahlavi imaginary of a Western-oriented Persian identity that drew on a 2,500-year plus history to legitimize the crown's authoritarian rule. Islam was,

as a result, tightly woven into the revolutionary story that Iranians told (and continue to tell) themselves *about* themselves. Influential thinkers, such as Ali Shariati (1933–77), laid the groundwork for the revolution, calling for an Islamically grounded form of modern (that is to say, European-style) nationalism that was "free from chains" and would allow Iran to achieve "cultural, moral, and administrative independence."[12] The nationalism promoted by Shariati and his peers answered back to the Pahlavi construct of identity that drew on Persian history and myth in order to validate the dictatorship of the monarch.

The narrative of Islamic, and more specifically Shiʿa, identity continued to dominate throughout the Khomeini decade (1979–89).[13] Narratives of Islamic identity are most often seen to comprise an anti-nationalist trend and therefore can be understood as an absence or suppression of Iranian national identity in the context of Khomeini's elevation of the *ummah* and his vision of exporting the revolution across borders.[14] Further, in a number of scholarly accounts Khomeini himself is identified as virulently anti-nationalist, a political figure whose revolutionary zeal birthed the rise of a universalist ideal of radical Islam at the expense of a sense of national Iranian self-hood.[15] This particular understanding of Khomeini and the revolution in which he emerged as the leading figure, accords with theories of nationalism that locate its origins in eighteenth-century Europe and see it as intrinsically linked to a post-enlightenment project of secularism. In this formulation, nationalism is seen to reemerge in the post-Khomeini era, breaking free from the shackles of Islamism.

The "second-coming" of nationalism is sometimes traced precisely to then President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to the ruins of Persepolis in April 1991,[16] or earlier, to the unsatisfactory peace made with Iraq after eight protracted years of bloody warfare,[17] or to the death of Khomeini in June 1989 and the emergence of a pragmatic conservatism that saw the instigation of "a process of 'rationalization' of the regime."[18] For all Khomeini's professed distrust of nationalism,[19] the revolution was an *Iranian* Revolution—drawing together diverse actors under the rubric of the nation—before it was an *Islamic* Revolution.[20] As such, the Perso-Iranian character of postrevolutionary Iran remained prominent, even as powerful political actors sought to downplay its significance vis-à-vis a universalist Islam.

The notion that there are two distinct and mutually exclusive forms of nationalism acts to reinforce fault lines within Iranian society, separating out supporters of the theocratic regime, for instance, from its detractors, or the politically conservative from the reformist, or for that matter, urban from rural, and postrevolutionary generations from prerevolutionary. However, national identities are never entirely "consistent, stable and immutable," but rather should be understood as "dynamic, fragile, 'vulnerable' and often incoherent."[21] A more nuanced approach, and one that I utilize in this chapter,

recognizes the ongoing salience of the nation to the Iranian imagination even as Islam has variously moved to, and receded from, the forefront of a discourse of national identity.

Religion was not, at the time of the revolution, an entirely novel source of identity formation in Iran. Shiʿism had been integral to the project of constructing a cohesive identity against the external Sunni other since as early as the sixteenth century, when it became the official state religion of Safavid Persia. Nor, in the revolutionary period, did it completely displace other ways of thinking about the Iranian self. Haggay Ram points to continuities between pre- and postrevolutionary Iran in terms of national identity construction by respective political elites.[22] Highlighting the way in which these different narratives function in contemporary Iran is not to imply that they are mutually exclusive. Any individual Iranian may call on one or more of these narratives at any particular time. Indeed, the Iranian state prioritizes different narratives of nationalism in various circumstances and for diverse purposes. In this chapter I look to how these narratives function as the building blocks of national identity, not by analyzing the discourse itself but by examining the way in which an often-overlooked segment of Iranian society experiences and interacts with this discourse.

CROSSING BORDERS

Fahima doesn't know exactly how the decision to leave Afghanistan was reached. "There must have been some discussion," she frowns. "No. The first I remember of it was the bus trip to Herat. I vomited the whole way. Everybody thought the poor village girl had motion sickness but it was something else," Fahima laughs, her hand hovering over her abdomen to indicate what the something else was. She has already told me about the baby boy buried in her first year in Iran and how she felt then that she was burying some last link to her homeland. "In Herat we ate *bolani*[23] and my husband told me that we would be leaving for Iran in the morning. He told me not to cry. That my sister and her husband would be joining us soon and, in any case, we would be back in Afghanistan in the spring." That was in 1980. Khodadad and Fahima were part of a massive exodus, many millions strong, fleeing the country in search of a safe haven beyond the reach of the Soviet army. It would be fourteen years before they returned, briefly, to Afghanistan. By then, Fahima's mother had died and her father had remarried, breaking off contact with his older children. Much of the rest of the family was dispersed, including Fahima's older sister, who never did make it to Iran but years later relocated to Pakistan, where she died in a border camp under circumstances that, to Fahima's way of thinking, have never been satisfactorily explained.

Afghans have an established history of cross-border migration to Iran dating back centuries. However since the 1970s there has been a dramatic intensification of such movement, initially in response to the dual push and pull forces of drought in Afghanistan and the Middle East oil boom and then, more insistently, by the desire to escape the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.[24] The 1979 invasion by Soviet forces, intended to prop-up a rapidly crumbling Soviet-aligned government in Kabul, precipitated the flight of up to six million Afghans, almost half of whom entered Iran over the following decade.[25]

Elham reminisces about the early postrevolutionary period and some of the first Afghan refugees who, during that period, made their way to Shiraz.

> At that time, it seemed like all of Iran was being shaken up and rearranged. Poor people were moving from the country to the city; rich people were disappearing and you couldn't know if they'd migrated to America or been taken away by revolutionaries. Everywhere you looked there were new faces and even the faces you knew were changed [by the revolution]. Afghans were just another piece of that puzzle.

She goes on to describe the circumstances facing local Afghan migrants in those early years.

> There was an Afghan family who moved in around the corner from us. I think he must have had two wives because there were eight or nine children all barefoot and hungry. By then all sorts of luxuries and even basic items had disappeared from the shops, but even with war we weren't hungry like those Afghan kids.

Elham recalls a teacher in her high school explaining the religious obligation on Iranians to support their fellow Muslims in the struggle against the Russian infidels, "all the while, this Afghan girl sat at her desk crying. It was really awkward and not long after that she stopped coming to school. I heard she got married and they went back to Afghanistan."

AN OPEN DOOR

The initial response of the Iranian government to unprecedented cross-border movement can perhaps best be described as "open door."[26] At the time of the Soviet invasion, in December 1979, the revolution in neighboring Iran was still, to a large extent, playing out toward its conclusion in the Islamic Republic and the consolidation of power to the Islamist pro-Khomeini faction. The Iranian government's willingness to welcome Afghans in flight from the Soviet invaders, must be understood in both ideological and pragmatic terms.

An open-door policy had the effect of upholding the new government's Islamic credentials. Importantly, it spoke also to pressing domestic concerns. At the time, the Iranian government was engaged in a bloody struggle against left-wing ideologues with whom it had formerly been allied against the Shah—further motivation to accept refugees in flight from a communist government. Later, Afghan refugees played a role in supporting the Iranian economy during the devastating eight-year war with Iraq.[27]

On one of my last visits to Fahima's home, just weeks before I leave Iran, I am surprised to find her husband Khodadad seated on the steps, smoking a cigarette and nursing a glass of tea. He has the haunted look of a drug addict and sits slumped against the wall like a man defeated by life. Fahima appears ill at ease and the conversation, which on other occasions has flowed easily, becomes stilted, making me wonder whether she has in fact told her husband about me and whether he is happy for his family's history to be laid bare in this manner. He sits outside the room and makes no contribution until we move on to talking about Khomeini, at which point he calls out a comment too brief and quickly spoken for me to catch the import of. "He wants me to show you a picture of the Imam." She reaches up to a shelf on the wall above their small box-like television and pulls down a small black and white print, one of the familiar photos of Khomeini, in a patterned cardboard frame. "He says to tell you that Khomeini is our *marjaʿ* (religious guide)." Evidently my response to this revelation lacks the requisite enthusiasm, as Khodadad comes to the doorway and launches into a monologue,

> Khomeini told us that there are no borders in Islam and we believed him. At first it was like coming to our own country. To our own home. The Iranian was my brother and we were equal before God and the law. But Iranians no longer care for Khomeini. Today, in their eyes I am worse than an unbeliever. Less than a dog. I know this. I am called this [a dog] every day.

Khomeini was, and indeed remains, a deeply revered figure for many Shiʿa Afghans. Throughout the 1980s the Islamic Republic was seen as a haven, and Afghan migrants were among those who willingly embraced Khomeini's Islamist vision.

Khomeini, prior to and following his return to Iran, roundly rejected what he saw as a decadent, indulgent, and ultimately oppressive Pahlavi nationalism, instead articulating a vision of pan-Islamism that caused ripples of disquiet in the region and beyond.[28] Pointing to the revolutionary potential and universal nature of Islam, Khomeini is cited as saying, "Not only does Islam refuse to recognize any difference between Muslim countries, it is the champion of all oppressed people."[29] Such statements if not held in memory are certainly recalled in essence by Afghan refugees residing in Iran today.

Khomeini's various declarations on the universality of Islam and the responsibility of Iran toward all Muslims in all places is held up as evidence of early goodwill or, less glowingly, of the divide between the words of the "Imam" and the practices of today's Islamic Republic.

I meet Zahra at the Astane shrine, surrounded by Afghan children, schoolbooks spread out before them on the patterned carpet. An intensely religious Iranian, she is broadly supportive of her government, but is nonetheless unconcerned by the knowledge that her informal school contravenes the spirit of an official policy of encouraging voluntary repatriation. Her motivation to educate a small group of Afghan children from the neighborhood is simple, "I felt sorry for them." Zahra doesn't refer to systemic problems facing Afghan children in Iran, including unresolved residency status and exclusionary policies that deny Afghans access to education, housing, health care, and employment, instead pointing to symptomatic problems associated with long-term displacement including family violence and drug addiction. Notwithstanding the relationships formed with these children Zahra views Afghans through the dominant nexus of a "refugee problem"—one which can only be solved by the return of displaced Afghans to Afghanistan. "They are our fellow Muslims and it was right that we opened our doors to them," she explains, "But now the aggressor [the Soviet Union] has been defeated, we must secure our borders against these threats."

Between 1979 and 1992 the vast majority of Afghans entering Iran were issued blue cards, indicating their status as *mohajerin*.[30] *Mohajer* is an Arabic term which is often translated simply as migrant, but which carries with it a whole cache of meaning and which, for Muslims, recalls the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in order to escape persecution. A mohajer is understood to have gone into exile for religious reasons where a "regime in power does not allow the free expression of Islam."[31] The one who welcomes the mohajer is therefore performing a valuable religious act. With a blue card in hand Afghan mohajerin were granted permission to remain in Iran indefinitely and a minimum of restrictions, generally relating to employment, were placed on their residency.[32]

AN AFGHAN-FREE ZONE?

The end of the Iran–Iraq war in 1988, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, and the death of Khomeini in June of the same year marked the beginning of a shift in Iranian attitudes toward Afghan migrants and refugees. In response to growing domestic, social, and economic concerns immigration policy from the early 1990s was reoriented to the prevention of entry of new Afghan refugees and the repatriation of Afghans living

in Iran. Since then there have been a number of mass-deportation campaigns, along with collaborative efforts between Iran and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Iran and successive Afghan governments, to implement (largely unsuccessful) programs of repatriation.

"Of course, in those early days there was suffering, but when we moved to Shiraz things started looking better. It felt like a new beginning. My husband had a steady job and in a year or two was promoted to foreman." Fahima tells me, in some detail, of the pride she felt in seeing her eldest daughter, Nazanin, begin school. In 1994, the life that the family was beginning to build in Iran fell apart. Fahima disputes the notion that it was a voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan, claiming that they were forcibly deported in the context of a bitter workplace argument. "Everything was destroyed. There was nothing left for us in Afghanistan."

Their return journey to Iran, after eight months of precarious living in Herat, was fraught with complexity and danger. At the border a series of misadventures caused the family to be inadvertently separated. Fahima, along with the two older children, Nazanin and Amir, made her way circuitously back to Shiraz where she expected to find her husband already waiting. In the meantime, Khodadad was picked up by border guards and severely beaten, before both he and their youngest daughter Golshan were sent back to Afghanistan. Fahima pauses when she tells this story, the pain of it still raw. Twenty years later the events of that period—and especially the death of three-year-old Golshan, struck down by a sudden, vicious illness on the Iran–Afghan border—continue to reverberate. Khodadad seeks doubtful comfort from the grief in an opium addiction. Fahima, meanwhile, mourns the loss of her daughter, the husband she once knew, and the life they might have lived.

Since 1993 Afghans migrating to Iran have been downgraded from mohajerin to *panahandegan*. While the former had honorable connotations, the latter has a pejorative nuance, suggesting impoverishment.[33] Afghan panahandegan are issued only temporary registration cards and are subject to various arbitrary restrictions. Furthermore, Iranian officials have instituted a project of encouraging voluntary repatriation though the gradual withdrawal of the broad rights that had earlier been extended to Afghans and the institution of a kind of low-level harassment. Over a period of more than a decade, subsidies for health care, primary and secondary education, transport, fuel, and basic food items have been gradually removed, resulting in a steady increase of costs for some of the most economically marginalized within the Iranian economy. Afghan refugees have been (variably) subject to restrictions on opening bank accounts, running businesses, seeking employment, and owning property.

"When I came back to Iran," Fahima explains, "Everything had changed." Perhaps most significantly for the family, Nazanin and Amir were prohibited

from attending school under a ruling that has, with uneven application, denied Afghans education in Iranian state schools. For several years Nazanin accompanied her mother as she cleaned houses in the wealthier Northern suburbs of Shiraz. Amir, in the meantime, worked in the bazaar—initially pushing heavy wooden trolleys of produce from warehouse to shop front, and eventually finding steady work with an Iranian store owner who was prepared to flout the restrictive policies on Afghan employment for the sake of a reliable (and considerably cheaper) employee. The family had difficulty renting accommodation and was forced to move nine times in a period of five years. "No landlord will rent to Afghans above Iranians. We have been lucky now that we could [pool resources] with the other families from our village [in Afghanistan]." Fahima waves her hand around, indicating the dilapidated state of the home in which they live.

Since 2002 there has been an increasing implementation of what are effectively Afghan-free zones. Such zones constitute entire provinces, cities, or urban spaces from which Afghans are prohibited from residing in or even visiting.[34] This spatial exclusion of Afghans, their *othering*, acts to demarcate the Iranian *self,* thereby contributing to the formation of an Iranian national identity.

From the early 1990s onward there has been renewed interest in the legacy of pre-Islamic Iran and its real and imagined contributions to the world of Islam and beyond. While some aspects of this have represented a popular revolt against the insistent Islamicization of all aspects of life in the Islamic Republic, Ali Ansari points to the way in which the state has actively sought to harness a narrative of Perso-Iranian nationalism to its own ends.[35] In 2011, in a remarkable echo of the Shah's 1971 celebration, an elaborate New Year event was planned at Persepolis, involving multiple heads of state and historical reenactments. While President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad eventually caved to pressure presumed to have emanated from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and relocated the event to Tehran, the Achaemenid past was redeployed by Ahmadinejad and his controversial adviser, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, in a populist bid to distance the elected administration from the unelected clerical leadership.[36]

The implementation of exclusionary policies toward refugees has coincided with the foregrounding of a Perso-Iranian identity in place of Islam within the story of national self-hood. For Khodadad and Fahima changing narratives around Iranian identity saw their position at the edges of Iranian society become increasingly precarious. A shift in emphasis from the shared Islamic identity of Iranians and Afghans, during the Khomeini decade, to a resurgent Iranian nationalist identity drawing on pre-Islamic motifs and mythologies, in the post-Khomeini era acted to sharpen Iran's borders in a process that was felt acutely by Iran's Afghan refugees. This sharpening of borders further points to the way in which Afghans resident in Iran mark out the margins of the nation.

IRAN'S AFGHAN MARGINS

In this section I want to briefly turn to the idea that Afghans carry the border with them, such that Afghan refugees living in the Iranian city of Shiraz enact and reenact the border in their interactions with Iranian citizens. When Iranians think beyond national borders they almost invariably think to the west—to the Arab countries of the Gulf and beyond, to Turkey or, indeed, to that amorphous imaginary the "West" itself.[37] All of these have, at various times and in specific circumstances, been constructed as other to the Iranian self. Scholarship on Iranian nationalism frequently looks to these others while overlooking *other* others both within and outside Iran's territorial borders.[38] Rarely do thoughts turn eastward, and Afghanistan—sharing a border with Iran's eastern provinces—can be thought of as both territorially and imaginatively marginal. Despite its significant shared history with Iran, Afghanistan is seen to have little to say to or about Iranian nationalism.

Elham admits that she gleans most of her knowledge about contemporary Afghanistan from Western news sources. Like a great many Iranians, her concerns about Afghanistan mirror those aired on the BBC and Voice of America, including the treatment of women, the relative unavailability of education and health care, the prominence of tribal warlords, and the prevalence of opium. Afghanistan is popularly represented as a dangerous and disorderly space. If thought of at all, Afghanistan is posited as an other to Iran—a reminder of a distant past out of which Iran has emerged or a threat of the unhappy future into which, by bad fortune, bad management, or the conspiracy of enemies, Iran might yet fall.

The approximately 600 mile-long border (almost 1,000 kilometers) between Iran and Afghanistan was established in the nineteenth century and has, with the exception of some minor skirmishes relating to water supply in the vicinity of the Helmand River Delta, gone largely unchallenged.[39] Historical fluctuations that saw whole provinces and cities passed back and forth between Afghan and Iranian rule have not translated into contemporary territorial disputes. However, the border itself variously moves into and out of focus.

Borders are not merely lines on the ground but are manifestations of social practice and discourse, constructed by way of narratives that bind people together in the imaginary of common experience, history, and memory. This understanding of borders allows us to locate multiple border sites that are complicit in the imaginative construction of self and other. The border between Afghans and Iranians is not comprised solely of an international boundary between two sovereign states but is produced and reproduced in everyday interactions between individuals. Further, it is in the context of these boundaries that collective identities are formed. Identities are often

discursively represented in terms of a distinction between self and other; boundaries therefore constitute part of what Anssi Paasi calls "the 'discursive landscape' of social power."[40] Importantly, this discursive landscape is "not limited to border areas, but extends into society and its social and cultural practices, wherever it is produced and reproduced."[41]

Throughout the period of the Islamic Republic, the Iran–Afghanistan border has, from the Iranian perspective, shifted from being a point of contact between two states enmeshed within the imaginary of an Islamic "world," to a mark of the outer limits of the Iranian nation. Afghans, resident inside Iran, come to represent this border. Iran is "not Afghanistan," as Zahra puts it when commenting on what she describes as the relatively more "progressive" form of Islam practiced in Iran. Elham's friend Mina expands on this idea,

> The problem is this Taliban mentality they [Afghan refugees] have. The men beat their wives and sell their daughters [in marriage]. We [Iranians] have our own Islamic fundamentalists. Thank God, though, that our country has never sunk to the depths of Afghanistan . . . God willing, we never do.

The idea that Afghan refugees mark out what is *not* Iranian (and, therefore, what is not Iran) is remarkably prevalent. On one occasion Fahima's son, Amir, articulates the way in which this distinction comes to be experienced by Afghans in Iran, "to Iranians, Afghanistan is everything that is ugly and bad in Iran, and none of the good. Not just Afghanistan, either but us Afghans." Amir's friend, Gol Muhammad, picks up this same theme of Afghan otherness, "Iranians think of us as a people with no history, no culture." As the conversation swings around to questions of cultural identity—taking in the Achaemenid ruins of Persepolis and the destroyed Buddah's of Bamiyan—the way in which a nationalism tied up with historical monuments impacts upon those excluded from the narrative of nationhood, is brought into stark relief. "What are stone monuments to us when everything has been destroyed? Here they call us animals and heap all the wrongs of the Taliban on our backs. Iranians preserve their old stones in museums and speak proudly of them, but they crush us under their feet."

A MARGINAL APPROACH

In this chapter I have called on notions of marginality in two distinct ways. First, I have looked at how ideas of the nation act to render certain people and groups of people marginal. In Iran this process is laid bare in dramatically shifting narratives of nationhood that have seen policies, practices, and attitudes toward Afghan refugees take different form within a relatively short

period of time. Secondly, I have pointed to the way in which Afghan marginality speaks back to the nation. Afghans in Iran are represented as other and therefore make real and present in everyday life the border between Iran and Afghanistan.

I have traced these processes using ethnographic techniques and allowing multiple, often marginal, voices to speak to the issues around Afghan marginality in Iran. I propose that there is place for new forms of scholarship that move away from dominant discourses of nationalism emanating from the political and social elite, in order to capture other more fleeting experiences of the nation. Indeed, as Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson point out, "much can be learnt about the centers of power by focusing on their peripheries."[42] A "marginal approach," drawing on disciplinary methods less commonly used in studies of nationalism and providing space for voices rarely heard in this scholarship, allows us to recognize nationalism as a project that is always variously applied and experienced.

NOTES

1. See for example Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Refashioning Iran: Language and Culture During the Constitutional Revolution," *Iranian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1990): 77–101; Homayoun Katouzian, "Nationalist Trends in Iran, 1921–1926," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 4 (1979): 533–51; and Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964).

2. Both Shabnam Holliday and Ali Mozaffari have recently produced volumes exploring this contestation. Shabnam Holliday, *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Ali Mozaffari, *Forming National Identity in Iran: The Idea of Homeland Derived from Ancient Persian and Islamic Imaginations of Place* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

3. Jon E. Fox, "From National Inclusion to Economic Exclusion: Ethnic Hungarian Labour Migration to Hungary," *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 1 (2007): 78.

4. Ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken in the city of Shiraz between February and October 2014. Quotes attributed to (in order of appearance) Elham, Fahima, Khodadad, Zahra, Mina, Amir, and Gol Muhammad were recorded over a number of interviews and have been translated by the author with the assistance of Abbas Yarbakhsh. All the names provided are pseudonyms on request of the participants.

5. For more on marginality and ethnography see Sarah Green, *Notes from the Balkans: Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Josh Packard, "'I'm Gonna Show You What it's Really Like Out Here': The Power and Limitation of Participatory Visual Methods," *Visual Studies* 23, no. 1 (2008): 63–77.

6. The –i suffix attached to a place name indicates the inhabitants of that place. Thus, *Shirazi*, denotes the people of Shiraz, *Tehrani* the people of Tehran, etc. In the

course of my research I found that the term *Shirazi* implies a degree of belonging that goes beyond mere residence in the city.

7. The term *ziarat* is taken from the Arabic for "visit" and denotes pilgrimage to a holy site.

8. Alam Saleh and James Worrall, "Between Darius and Khomeini: Exploring Iran's National Identity Problematique," *National Identities* 17, no. 1 (2014): 73–97.

9. Setrag Manoukian, *City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, History and Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 24.

10. Nikki Keddie describes the "vastly wasteful" 1971 celebrations in Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 224.

11. Ali Mozaffari, "The Problem of a Site Museum for Pasargadae World Heritage Site (Iran)," *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 4, no. 1 (2012): 48.

12. Mehmet Talha Paşaoğlu, "Nationalist Hegemony Over Islamist Dreams in Iran and Pakistan: Who Were Shariati and Maududi?" *Asian Politics & Policy* 5, no. 1 (2013): 114. It should be noted that this is not, in fact, a direct quote (or translation) of Shariati's words but rather Paşaoğlu's interpretation of Shariati's scholarship.

13. Holliday contrasts Islamiyat and Iraniyat narratives of identity in *Defining Iran*.

14. For more on this see Hamid Ahmadi, "Unity within Diversity: Foundations and Dynamics of National Identity in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–13.

15. See for example Saleh and Worrall, "Between Darius and Khomeini"; and Saeid Zahed, "Iranian National Identity in the Context of Globalization: Dialogue or Resistance?" CSGR Working Paper 162/05 (Coventry: Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, 2004).

16. As noted by Fariba Adelkhah, *The Thousand and One Borders of Iran: Travel and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 27.

17. As suggested by Ali Ansari, "Iranian Nationalism Rediscovered," *Middle East Institute,* January 29, 2009, http://www.mei.edu/content/iranian-nationalism-rediscovered.

18. Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 143.

19. See the chapter "Khomeinist Iran," in *Defiant Dictatorships*, ed. Paul Brooker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 145–62.

20. In Mehran Kamrava, *Revolution in Iran: The Roots of Turmoil* (New York: Routledge, 2016), the author looks more closely at some of the causes of revolution in Iran; also Jahangir Amuzegar, *Dynamics of the Iranian Revolution: The Pahlavis' Triumph and Tragedy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 5, the author proposes that in addition to the cultural (i.e., religious) revolution, Iran experienced simultaneous political, social, and economic revolutions.

21. Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," *Discourse & Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 154.

22. See Haggay Ram, "Exporting Iran's Islamic Revolution: Steering a Path Between Pan-Islam and Nationalism," in *Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle*

East, eds. Efraim Inbar and Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (London: Routledge, 1997), 7–24.

23. *Bolani* is a type of stuffed flat bread popular in Afghanistan.

24. See Mamiko Saito, "Searching for My Homeland: Dilemmas between Borders, Experiences of Young Afghans Returning 'Home' from Pakistan and Iran," *AREU* (Kabul: The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009) accessed June 26, 2017, https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/932E-Experiences-Of-Young-Afghans-Returning-Home-SP-2009-web.pdf.

25. For more on the precipitating factors to the Afghan exodus see Omid Vafa, "Refugees in Iran and International Security," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, CA, 2006, accessed June 26, 2017, http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/9/8/4/2/p98424_index.html?type=info&PHPSESSID=13rvvno0kj1b4j58tbc3hntmo2.

26. Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi et al., "Second-generation Afghans in Iran: Integration, Identity and Return," *AREU* (Kabul: The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008), 4–5, accessed June 26, 2017, https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/823E-Second-Generation-Afghans-in-Iran-CS-2008.pdf.

27. As described by Elaine Stigter, "Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran," *AREU* (Kabul: The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2005), accessed June 26, 2017, https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/504E-Migration-from-Faryab-to-Iran-CS-web.pdf.

28. As described by Michael R. Brett-Crowther, "Iran and Iraq at War: The Effect on Development," *The Round Table* 71, no. 281 (1981): 61–69.

29. This statement was taken from a speech made by Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran in 1980 and recorded in Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 286.

30. See Abbasi-Shavazi et al., "Second-generation Afghans in Iran."

31. Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, "The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan: An Ambiguous Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, no. 2 (1988): 145.

32. See Abbasi-Shavazi et al., "Second-generation Afghans in Iran."

33. See Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi et al., "Return to Afghanistan? A Study of Afghans Living in Tehran," *AREU* (Kabul: The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2005), accessed June 26, 2017, https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/514E-Return-to-Afghanistan-CS-web1.pdf.

34. As described in a report by Justice for Iran, "Iran: An Afghan Free Zone?!" *Justice for Iran,* June 6, 2012, http://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Iran-anAfghanFreeZone-EN.pdf.

35. Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

36. This incident is described in detail by Abbas Milani, "Is Ahmadinejad Islamic Enough for Iran?" *Foreign Policy,* April 29, 2011, http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/04/29/is-ahmadinejad-islamic-enough-for-iran-2/.

37. For more on Iran's relationship to its *Others* see Sanam Vakil, "Iran: Balancing East against West," *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2006): 51–65.

38. See for example Mehrdad Kia, "Persian Nationalism and the Campaign for Language Purification," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (1998): 9–36; Keddie,

Modern Iran; and Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, *In a Persian Mirror: Images of the West and Westerners in Iranian Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

39. The Iran-Afghanistan border is 572 miles (921 kilometers) long. Tensions around water supply to the Helmand River Delta are described by A. H. H. Abidi, "Irano-Afghan Dispute over the Helmand Waters," *International Studies* 16 (1997): 357–78.

40. Anssi Paasi, "Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows," *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (1998): 84.

41. Ibid.

42. Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), xiii.

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Chapter 4

Between (Ethno-)Nationalism and Political Islam

The Kurdish Movement as a "Third Way" in Turkey

William Gourlay

Modernization theory once predicted the demise of ethnicity and religion as societal identity markers. In recent decades, however, scholars have viewed nationalism and political Islam as the dominant forces in the modern Middle East. This chapter examines the Kurds in modern Turkey. It takes account of how the competing—and sometimes overlapping—factors of nationalism, ethnicity, and political Islam have shaped Turkey's political trajectory and the Kurds' experience within it. Kemalism—Turkey's foundational ideology—sought to curtail religious and ethnic diversity. In this it echoed modernization theory. It was touted as a model that could be applied across the Islamic world. From the mid-twentieth century, however, ethnicity and religion resurfaced as important political rallying points in Turkey and elsewhere; scholarship grappled with how emergent ethnic and Islamic voices could be accommodated within modern democratic polities across the Islamic world. Meanwhile, burgeoning Kurdish and Islamic political movements in Turkey called into question the tenets of the Kemalist model.

This chapter focuses on these two political movements and their impacts on Turkey's political landscape. From 2002, the ascent of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP), a party with an avowedly Islamic sensibility, saw the emergence of another model, this one marrying Islamic observance with democratic legitimacy. Like the Kemalist model before it, this model was theoretically replicable across the region. AKP rule, initially at least, saw a shift in national dialogue such that ethnicity was more openly debated, allowing the Kurdish movement to operate more freely and, to a degree, enter the political mainstream.

In recent years, however, the AKP government has grown more authoritarian, adopting some of the illiberal trappings of its Kemalist predecessors. In the general election of June 2015, the pro-Kurdish *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP) emerged as a liberal political alternative, moving beyond the ethno-nationalist roots of the Kurdish movement in Turkey to embrace diverse candidates and constituents while also taking account of the electorate's Islamic sensibilities. This chapter illustrates the Kurdish movement's charting of a course between (ethno-) nationalism and political Islam to create a political model that, prior to the recent constriction of political spaces, may have represented a viable alternative for Turkey.

NATION-BUILDING, KEMALISM, AND THE PLACE OF ETHNICITY

The system of nation-states does not have a long history, particularly in the Middle East. It was only after 1923 that the state of Turkey assumed its current form, emerging from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Post-Ottoman Turkey immediately set about nation-building, engineering a society to facilitate the founding elite's ultimate aspiration: modernization. Where Islam had once been an important political marker, nationalism, in the form of a homogenous ethnic ("Turkish") identity, now became the hegemonic discourse. The nation-building experience of modern Turkey can be seen as a morality tale, where the rationality of the founding elites triumphed over the retrograde forces of tradition, such that modernization was instituted for the benefit of the citizens.[1] Turkey came to be seen as a successful example of nation-building and by extension the ideology on which it was built; Kemalism was seen as a model of considerable merit due to its pro-Western orientation and emphasis on secularism.

Nation-building doesn't always receive such a glowing endorsement. James C. Scott sees nation-building through the prism of "high modernism," an aspiration to the administrative ordering of society from the top down, but one that often has negative consequences. For Scott, "high modernism" involves the unrestrained use of state power as an instrument to mold society into an ideal form, emphasizing administrative order but overlooking practical realities at a local level.[2] As such, it is imposed on society. It may be undertaken with the best intentions but nation-building can result in a develop-at-all-costs approach that disdains the demands of the people. Indeed, in Turkey, governance has been characterized as "high politics," the upholding of particular visions rather than dealing with the day-to-day concerns of society.[3]

In the early years of the Republic of Turkey, the Kemalist administration decreed all citizens to be Turkish, ignoring the ethnicity of the Kurds who lived in the southeast, and deploying the instruments of state—educational system, administrative bureaucracy, and, when necessary, military—to extinguish all manifestations of Kurdishness. The very fact of the Kurdish presence was, for decades, denied.[4] The state thus manipulated ethnic identity, attempting to forge and maintain the national unity it deemed essential to allow the achievement of its policy objectives. Here was an example of Scott's high modernism: the use of state power to render society ethnically homogenous in order to foster the requisite cohesion that would allow modernization to succeed.

A critical weakness of top-down, high modernist approaches is that local knowledge is disregarded, thereby preventing the incorporation or fine-tuning of incidental particularities into projects to make them applicable across diverse political or physical terrains.[5] Nation-building is thus rarely consultative or consensual at the micro level. In Turkey, in the case of the Kurds, nation-building not only failed to incorporate local knowledge it also paid no heed to Kurdish demands for self-determination. Indeed, for decades Turkey attempted to deny the very existence of Kurds within its boundaries, insisting that they were "mountain Turks" who had forgotten their language. This is in contrast to Iran and Iraq, states generally thought of as less democratically inclined. While they may not have accommodated Kurdish political demands, neither Iran nor Iraq attempted to deny Kurdish ethnic identity. The Kemalist vision at the heart of the state in Turkey held that ethnic unity, or uniformity, was essential, thus any acknowledgement of ethnic diversity would lead to state collapse. In such circumstances, repression of Kurdish identity received state imprimatur.

It is no coincidence that Kurdish ethnicity became politicized as the states of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria were established. These fledgling regimes saw the Kurds' attempts at self-determination as counter to state interests.[6] The repression of Kurdish identity in Turkey accords with a high modernist nation-building aspiration in that it was intended to ensure a cohesive society. Martin van Bruinessen maintains that it was entirely counterproductive.[7] Particularly after the coup of 1980, the military regime's increased repressive measures, including outlawing the Kurdish language, actually exacerbated societal tensions and heightened ethno-nationalist sentiments among the Kurds. State initiatives eliminated the liberal and democratic voices within the Kurdish political movement. In these circumstances, radical elements were able to prevail, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) came to dominate the Kurdish political sphere.

Embarking on a military campaign, that from the mid-1980s included terror tactics, the PKK espoused a radical Marxist-Leninist agenda that, at least

initially, pursued the creation of a separate Kurdish state. As such, the high modernist pursuit of a cohesive, unified society in the Republic of Turkey, which had ignored local demands from the Kurds, failed and the PKK called into question the very legitimacy of the state itself. At this point Turkish nationalists and the military, entrusted as guardians of the Kemalist vision, doubled down, attempting with increased urgency to eliminate all manifestations of Kurdish identity and political consciousness. This in turn only heightened Kurdish resolve to assert a presence and to call for recognition. Thus, Turkey's ongoing "Kurdish Question," which had its roots in the high modernist vision of ethnic homogeneity espoused by the state's Kemalist founders, remains unresolved over thirty years since the PKK's first military forays.

Whether the PKK agenda *really* imperiled the state of Turkey is a moot point, but the Kurdish political struggle in Turkey, and elsewhere, illustrates the impracticability of using nationalism as a means to national cohesion in a region with as much ethnic and religious diversity as the Middle East. Observers of the post-Ottoman realm have long detailed the imperatives of Middle Eastern regimes to consolidate their sociopolitical orders through the forging of collective, homogenized ethnic identities.[8] Many singled out Kemalist Turkey for praise, arguing that it provided a "model" for the broader Middle East.[9] For a long time, states—and political scientists—imagined ethnicity as an anachronism, a vestigial curiosity, that would inevitably wither and disappear as social and political circumstances changed in the transition to modernity.[10] In the long run, however, ethnicity has proven resilient as a factor in society and politics across the region, as the continuing presence of the Kurds and their political struggle make abundantly clear.

EXAMINING THE COMPATIBILITY OF ISLAM AND MODERNITY

Bernard Lewis, in his landmark study of modern Turkey, a country of some considerable ethnic diversity,[11] pays scant attention to ethnicity, or at least to any ethnicity other than Turkishness. He focuses more closely on religion, or more specifically on the Turkish elite's outright rejection of Islamic influence. Historically, the Turks, more than any other people, Lewis argues, had gone further in "sinking their separate identity" in Islam, and it was only after quelling Islamic identity that conceptions of nation and fatherland took hold.[12] It is certainly true that the founding Kemalist elites of the Republic of Turkey sought to corral Islam; their new order was nationalist as well as staunchly secular, seeking to nullify Islam as a rallying point and source of political authority. The Kemalist nation-building project, at a core level,

assumed an Orientalist position on Islam, viewing it as a reactionary force that would obstruct the transition to modernity.[13] The Kemalist approach toward Kurdish society, with its tribal affiliations, was similar, viewing it as an impediment to modernization, thus legitimizing state-led attempts to smother Kurdish identity.

Top-down nation-building projects that sought to marginalize religion and impose blanket secularism, however, fell into the same trap as those endeavoring to impose ethnic homogeneity: failing to absorb local knowledge that might make them broadly applicable; and taking no account of local demands, or of the tenacity of local custom, belief, and daily practice. Modernization theory looked upon ethnicity as a remnant that would wither. In similar vein, it was believed that religion would succumb to the rationality that was an integral part of modern society. On this it was wrong, too.

In Turkey, as elsewhere in the Middle East, religious impulses withstood state-driven secularizing missions, and in the second half of the twentieth century Islamist currents entered the realm of politics. After the general elections of 1995, the Islamist *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) was able to form a ruling coalition. At this point, the military, asserting its status as "guardian" of the Kemalist project and fearing an Islamist takeover, stepped in, as it had several times before, deposing the Refah government in a soft coup in early 1997. Kemalist discourse regarded Islamism, alongside Kurdish nationalism, as an internal threat, thus it granted the military authority to undertake such illiberal practices as the removal of elected governments in the name of protecting the state.

Nonetheless, just as the Kemalist attempt at ethnic homogenization did not quell Kurdish identity, the secularization of the political order did not quell religious impulses within the Turkish electorate. In 2002 the AKP, which had evolved out of the ashes of the previously deposed Refah, came into power. While not espousing an explicitly Islamist program, the leaders of the party, Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, were openly pious and made no secret of seeing Islam as a guiding moral code if not a political model. Gül and Erdoğan argued that their party was not Islamist, rather it was a conservative democratic party.[14] The support base of the AKP, nonetheless, included Turkey's religiously observant masses who had previously been largely voiceless in the political sphere. As such, the AKP was the first party in Turkey of an overt Islamic coloring to win government through democratic elections without having to form a coalition.[15]

In particular, the electorate celebrated Erdoğan as someone who had risen to prominence from a humble background.[16] A central figure in the AKP's continuing political ascendancy, Erdoğan was seen to embody the empowerment of the working classes who had traditionally been excluded from the corridors of power in the Kemalist system. The AKP was seen as "humble"

and "authentic," and Erdoğan as "one of the people,"[17] bringing the common touch to politics thus providing a welcome alternative to the top-down Kemalist approach that had long dominated.

Once in power, the AKP government did not initially prove to be reactionary or regressive, something Kemalist depictions of Islamist-inspired politicians had warned about. Nor did it seek to implement an Islamist agenda. On the contrary, the AKP administration in its early years embarked on a program more progressive and pro-Western than those of earlier governments; in so doing it won praise for its reforms and liberal-democratic policies.[18] Kemalism's star had faded due to its increasingly authoritarian and illiberal tendencies; meanwhile, the AKP, with its blend of piety, street smarts and neoliberal reform, came to be the alternative model deemed worthy of attention. Where pundits had previously espoused Kemalism as the model du jour in an environment where secularism and nationalism were regarded as the essential cohesive forces for the nation-states of the Middle East, they now proffered the AKP's "Turkish model"—Islamic impulses reconciled with democracy—as a replicable template for a region where it was recognized that Islam could no longer be excluded from the political arena. Enthusiasm for such a model was boosted by the fact that the AKP successfully curbed the military's influence in politics, something that plagued countries across the region. It also deviated from its predecessors in reaching out to its neighbors and engaging them at the diplomatic and economic levels.[19] Members of the AKP, after Turkey's 2011 general election, implicitly alluded to Turkey's role as regional leader and exemplar, casting theirs as a victory for Muslims across the Middle East. Erdoğan told a postelection celebration, "Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul. Beirut won as much as Izmir. Damascus won as much as Ankara."[20]

The AKP government also followed a different path to its predecessors in seeking a solution to the Kurdish issue, recasting it as a political rather than security problem. Speaking in Diyarbakır, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, Prime Minister Erdoğan remarked, "more democracy, not more repression, is the answer to the Kurds' long-running grievances."[21] This was illustrative of the broadening of public discourse about national identity that occurred under the AKP, whereby nationalist rhetoric was less dominant and ethnic diversity was regarded with less suspicion. The AKP's 2002 election manifesto highlighted its acceptance of Turkish society "with all its colours, its points of commonality and difference."[22] In a political arena where the military's Kemalist-nationalist imperatives were less boldly asserted and where nationalist discourse was no longer pervasive, Kurdish politicians were better able to organize and win representation at the municipal and provincial level, and in general elections after 2007 to win seats in the Grand National Assembly.

As such, the AKP in the early years of its incumbency, represented not only a successful example of a political entity able to reconcile Islamic impulses with economic growth and healthy democratic institutions but was also liberal enough to allow a diversity of ethnic voices in the political arena. In many ways, this represented the repudiation of the Kemalist framework, but also the antithesis of earlier "high modernist" models of governance, in that under the AKP the instruments of state were no longer activated to engineer society, rather societal change was seen to be an organic process that would be shaped by social justice. The AKP program also represented the antithesis of earlier modernization theory that foresaw the gradual disappearance of such apparent anachronisms as ethnicity and religion due to the inevitable triumph of reason and rationality as the primary guiding principles within modern societies.

INCLUSION—OR EXCLUSION—AND ITS IMPACTS

Debate rages as to how replicable the AKP "model" really was. Insofar as the debate centers on ways to accommodate Islam within political frameworks, it is indicative of the fact that Islamic currents are now taken as a given in the modern political milieu of the Middle East. Such an assumption is noteworthy, evidence of a paradigmatic shift in analysis of the region, given that before the reemergence of Islam as a political force in the second half of the twentieth century many observers dismissed religion as irrelevant.

Broadly speaking, political Islam, when it emerged, represented the antithesis—and repudiation—of the nation-building and modernizing programs of Middle Eastern regimes; Islamists looked to an idealized "Islamic golden age" and a return to core values, dismissing "modernity" as pale, ill-conceived emulation of the West. The default response of nationalizing regimes across the Middle East was to exclude Islamist parties and organizations from the political arena and/or to directly suppress them, viewing them as rivals and as undermining their legitimacy. Common wisdom, reflecting Kemalist thought, held that Islam was a retrograde force that impeded modernization and that political Islam was intrinsically hostile to democratic ideals and institutions.

More recently, debate has shifted to examine the extent to which inclusion of Islamist parties and movements in the political process may bring moderation to their political views. The premise, at its most basic, is that participation in a pluralist political sphere leads hardline Islamists to assume more open, tolerant, and ultimately democratic platforms.[23] While some argue that Islamist parties tend toward radicalism, being beholden to an uncompromising vision that offers only Islam as a solution and is inherently hostile to democracy;[24] others contend that the accommodation of

Islamist parties in the political process compels them to evolve and adapt to the contingencies of citizens' workaday concerns.[25] This contention, often termed the inclusion-moderation thesis, does not focus specifically on Turkey, but its analysis may just as effectively be applied to the Turkish political sphere. The inclusion-moderation thesis posits that involvement in the rough and tumble of competitive politics requires Islamist politicians to be accountable. When excluded from the political process they may make grand—or radical—claims offering hypothetical solutions to societal woes, but once involved in competitive, electoral politics they must provide compelling and practical policy to win the support of constituents and thereby have some chance of achieving their political goals. As participation is extended to a range of players, moderation becomes the norm, political goals change, and eventually equilibrium is achieved in the form of a free, open, and pluralistic political system.

An alternative argument posits that the exclusion of radical elements from the political arena may induce them to moderate their positions. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone argue that in the case of *Ennahda* in Tunisia it was not only their exclusion from electoral politics but their estrangement from society that led to a tempering of their position. As Cavatorta and Merone see it, Ennahda found that their original message had little resonance within broader society, thus party officials had to either accept fringe status or enhance their appeal to the general public. As a result, Ennahda downplayed the importance of religion in its worldview, maintaining Islam as an important symbol and reference point but not as the overriding determinant of policy and agenda.[26] With time it developed as a moderate influence in the Tunisian political spectrum, albeit one with an Islamic timbre (which it has since further downplayed). In this regard, there are significant parallels between Ennahda's and the AKP's political outlook.[27]

There are also parallels in the trajectories of political Islam in Turkey and Tunisia: in both cases it may be argued that exclusion led to moderation of ideology and demands. The AKP is the latest and most successful in a line of Islamically focused parties in Turkey, all of which were subjected to differing levels of state obstruction, most recently manifest in the military's ouster of the Refah government in 1997. Earlier, Islamic political actors in Turkey had been stymied at every turn of the political process by the state apparatus that upheld a Kemalist vision and sought to prevent Islamic influence. Ömer Taşpınar details the Turkish courts' successive closures of Islamic parties across four decades, but he notes that after each of these setbacks respective Islamic parties re-emerged evolving in a more "moderate and pragmatic" formation.[28] Ultimately this led to the emergence of the AKP, whose blend of piety, economic liberalism, and social conservatism saw them emerge victorious in the general election of 2002.

The impacts of inclusion—or exclusion—on the agenda and behavior of political actors and movements may, of course, also be analyzed for groups who do not necessarily pursue an Islamist agenda. Similar analysis may also be applied to other oppositional groups or others who adopt radical political positions. We might further invert the inclusion-moderation paradigm to suggest that, despite the examples of Ennahda and the AKP mentioned above, exclusion may lead to radicalization. The situations in Algeria during the 1990s and Syria since the 2011 uprising against Bashar al-Assad are clear examples of this. The emergence and rise to prominence in Turkey of the PKK, albeit an ethno-nationalist rather than Islamic-inspired movement, followed a similar trajectory.

As noted earlier, Van Bruinessen contends that Ankara's efforts at repression of the Kurds resulted in ethno-nationalist blowback, creating exactly what the state sought to avoid, a radical Kurdish political entity with separatist intent.[29] Because moderate Kurdish voices were harassed, imprisoned, or worse, many Kurds saw no avenue for political action other than taking the radical path laid out by the PKK. With the state apparatus mobilized to deny and smother identity, Kurdish activists turned to extreme measures—military insurgency and terror tactics—to pursue what they saw as their legitimate rights. Lacking official channels through which to voice concerns or raise demands, young Kurds "went to the mountains," a euphemism for joining the PKK, and the PKK came to dominate Kurdish political discourse.[30] The state's violent tactics—including razing of villages, disappearing of Kurdish figures, and arbitrary arrests and torture of suspects—pursued until the mid-1990s in response to the PKK threat, only made the PKK look more appealing to disaffected Kurdish youth and forestalled the moderation of Kurdish political demands.[31]

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN POST-1990 TURKEY

Thus far, we have seen how, on one hand, the exclusion of Islamic players from the political arena in Turkey led to a moderation of Islamist political demands, but, on the other hand, the exclusion of Kurdish voices resulted in a radical ethno-nationalist vehicle, the PKK, dominating the Kurdish political movement. The 1990s, however, was a decade of transformation in the Turkish polity. While the Islamic political movement in Turkey gradually assumed a moderate and pragmatic path in the wake of successive party closures, Kurdish political demands began to be tempered as well. In large measure this followed the PKK's realization that a military struggle was unwinnable, which led, in 1993, to its first ceasefire declaration. The Turkish high command came to a similar realization, while an extensive survey conducted in

Turkey's Kurdish-populated provinces in 1995 and published as "The Eastern Question: Observations and Diagnosis" found that 90 percent of Kurds did not want an independent "Kurdistan" but wanted to remain within Turkey "as equal citizens, but respected as Kurds."[32] These factors cast a different light on the question of Kurdish identity and the extent to which it was seen as a threat to the integrity of the Republic of Turkey. Gradually, the Turkish government and public came to realize that the so-called Kurdish question could not be solved through military means but that a political approach was necessary. A changing security environment allowed for a different political environment. And for a political solution to be found it was necessary to allow the inclusion of Kurdish political actors within the political framework.

From the early 1990s pro-Kurdish political parties began to organize and participate in elections (although they were not specifically designated along ethnic lines).[33] Like Islamic political parties before them, the pro-Kurdish parties were subjected to restrictive measures from the instruments of state, facing court-ordered closures often on the grounds that they were affiliated with, or were mouthpieces of, the outlawed PKK. Nonetheless, through successive iterations pro-Kurdish parties evolved and as the political environment became more accepting of their presence they adopted less radical positions. The system proved much more willing to accommodate them during the early years of AKP rule amid a broadening of discourse on national identity which accommodated Islamic inclinations and ethnic diversity. This was particularly the case while the Erdoğan-instigated "resolution process" continued. However, this process, during which the government and the Kurdish political movement pursued a negotiated settlement to bring an end to state–PKK violence and to address Kurdish demands, collapsed in July 2015.

The fact that the political arena was sufficiently free to allow reasoned debate about the demands of the Kurds and allow pro-Kurdish parties to participate would suggest a consolidation of democracy in Turkey under the stewardship of the AKP. But despite enjoying electoral dominance, as it has in recent years, the AKP progressively restricted various freedoms, clamping down on critical voices in the press, academia, and judiciary, and assuming an increasingly authoritarian position. This was particularly evident in the government's response to the Gezi Park protests of mid-2013, which began as a protest against a government-sponsored building project in an Istanbul park, but mushroomed into nation-wide anti-government protests. The protests spread to all but one of Turkey's eighty-one provinces and continued sporadically for three months.[34] Police brutally quashed the protests, and AKP members, Erdoğan chief among them, dismissed protesters' demands as illegitimate on the grounds that the government, following successive electoral victories, represented *milli irade* (the national will).[35]

The acclaim that the AKP had accumulated earlier while attempting to peacefully resolve the Kurdish issue evaporated after the inconclusive general election of June 2015. After the pro-Kurdish HDP won an unprecedented eighty seats in parliament, the AKP lost its parliamentary majority. In the uncertain political environment that followed Erdoğan's obstruction of negotiations to form a coalition government, and amid terrorist bombings of pro-Kurdish political gatherings, the "resolution process" came to an abrupt end with hostilities reigniting between the PKK, its affiliates, and state security agencies. This lead to a "repeat" election in November 2015, at which the AKP reclaimed its majority, saw increased government pressure on dissenting voices in the media,[36] a resurgence of anti-Kurdish nationalist violence,[37] and harassment of HDP offices and officials.[38] Pro-AKP voices expressed little concern at this turn of events, and sometimes actively applauded it, leading some to accuse the AKP of fomenting chaos in order to reclaim popularity among conservatives and nationalists. The period saw a resurgence of nationalist discourse across the country among the general populace and AKP government ministers alike. Political tensions continued to build until an unsuccessful coup attempt on July 15, 2016, after which the government declared a state of emergency[39] that was extended several times, subsequently, it would seem, curtailing the political space for all actors, except those of the government.

The AKP's authoritarian turn has led to an "I-told-you-so" discourse from some observers who claim it was inevitable that an Islamically rooted political entity would, upon consolidating power, wind back democratic reforms. Such reasoning effectively moves beyond the inclusion-moderation thesis to predict the reversal of "moderation" in that once an Islamic political group entrenched itself it would cast off its moderate democratic window-dressing to revert to radicalism and institute the Islamist agenda that it always harbored.[40]

Whether the AKP's trajectory really represents an Islamist takeover of the body-politic continues to be debated. Despite a promising start, it has failed to consolidate democracy and manipulated the sociopolitical terrain, including adopting strident nationalist discourse, to further its own interests and entrench itself in power.[41] Further, if the building of a vast—and vastly expensive—presidential palace in Ankara, apparently without requisite building approvals, is any indication, Erdoğan,[42] now Turkey's first directly elected president and seen as the embodiment of the AKP enterprise, has blown his "man-of-the-people" persona and reverted to a form of "high politics" that overlooks the workaday concerns and protests of local constituents. AKP voices continue to defend their democratic credentials by evoking the "national will," but it seems that many regard their electoral majority as granting carte blanche to pursue an agenda unaccountable to the electorate and unrestrained by community consultation.

These events have taken the gloss off the AKP's much-vaunted "Turkish model," not necessarily because they reveal an underlying, previously hidden Islamist agenda, but because the liberal, inclusive, democratic polity that the model promised has not materialized. In a way, politics in Turkey has come full circle. Earlier, Kemalist governments had restricted political spaces, promoted a nationalist line, and quashed dissenting voices, purportedly in the interests of national unity. The AKP now adopts similar postures.

KURDISH POLITICAL PARTIES: BEYOND NATIONALISM AND ISLAM

Meanwhile, the Kurdish political movement in Turkey has evolved. During the tenure of the AKP the military has had less scope to intervene in politics and, for a time, nationalist discourse was less prominent, allowing Kurdish political actors more opportunity spaces. This was highlighted by the fact that the leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş ran in the presidential election of 2014, winning almost 10 percent of the vote. Previously, Kurdish parties had been closed due to alleged links to the PKK, but for some time Kurdish politicians operated in a more open political space, free of accusations of PKK complicity or attempts to close Kurdish parties. Kurdish politicians thus won office at the municipal and national levels. Kemalist rhetoric had posited that allowing manifestations of Kurdishness—to say nothing of Kurdish participation in politics—would lead to separatist demands, however, the Kurds among Turkey's elected representatives have shown no such inclination.[43] Further, while negotiations with the government continued, the PKK reconfigured its political vision, from one demanding a separate Kurdish state to espousing "democratic confederalism" that need not contravene existing national boundaries.[44] In 2014, indicative of the mothballing of a military agenda, PKK activists described theirs as a "politically organized movement,"[45] although amid the resurgence of violence since July 2015 it is doubtful that they would maintain such a position.

Meanwhile, it is clear that the AKP's pro-Islamic character was initially of considerable appeal to Kurdish voters. In the 2007 general election the AKP was the dominant party in the Kurdish southeast of Turkey. This apparently impelled the pro-Kurdish *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party, BDP; aligned with the HDP) to reassess its platform and expand its discourse and strategy to integrate religious symbols and sentiments. In so doing, the pro-Kurdish actors moved from a strictly ethnonationalist position to become a more accommodating political organization with a broader reach and message. The BDP organized spontaneous "civilian" Friday prayer meetings in outdoor locations in various Kurdish cities as

a means of rallying support.[46] This shift paid dividends: during the 2011 general election BDP candidates outpolled their AKP rivals in the Kurdish-populated provinces,[47] as did HDP candidates in the two general elections of 2015. Interviewed in early 2012, BDP party coleader Gültan Kışanak remarked, "in the BDP, we are open to both secular and religious individuals."[48]

The Kurdish political movement, along with broadening its purview to accommodate greater Islamic expression, also shifted its focus from sole concentration on the plight of the Kurds to representing the religious and ethnic diversity within the Republic of Turkey. As an example, pro-Kurdish mayors elected in Diyarbakır after 2004 worked to acknowledge, highlight, and in many cases, restore the multicultural fabric of the city. Street signs were installed in Kurdish, but also in Armenian and Aramaic, and long-neglected churches were refurbished.[49] Abdullah Demirbaş, mayor of the old quarter of Diyarbakır in 2008, stated, "I am not working for the Kurds; I am working for all people."[50]

This inclusive approach to ethnicity on the part of the Kurdish political movement was reflected in the list of candidates put forward by the HDP for the general election of June 2015. While many HDP candidates were Kurdish, the list also included Turks, Circassians, Roma, Armenians, Syriacs, and Yezidis.[51] The Kurdish political movement thus broadened its reach to incorporate Islamic sensibilities while also shunning a narrowly Kurdish-focused, ethno-nationalist approach. In this sense, it was bridging divides that were previously seen as unbridgeable in Turkish politics, that is, between secular and Islamic identities and between discrete, exclusivist ethnic visions. Notably, the original Kemalist party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), perhaps in response to the HDP's ecumenical approach, also put forward candidates of diverse ethnic backgrounds for the June 2015 election. Considering that the CHP ticket featured a Greek candidate for the first time since the 1940s,[52] it can be argued that the pro-Kurdish HDP's inclusive approach to candidate selection had a moderating effect on the broader political landscape.

The HDP's 2015 election manifesto indicates that it occupies a space on the left of the political spectrum, with a liberal, progressive agenda focusing on social freedoms, the rule of law, environmental awareness, and constitutional reform that moves far beyond the narrow agenda of earlier incarnations of the Kurdish political movement and which party activists intended to appeal to voters across the country, regardless of ethnicity. The HDP's inclusion of diverse ethnic and religious segments demonstrated that modernization theory may have predicted the decline of ethnicity and religion as spent forces but their presence in the Turkish political sphere does not necessarily mean that they cannot be incorporated into a progressive political vision.

Prior to the June 2015 election, the Kurdish political movement was touted by some as the last bastion of democracy in the face of AKP hegemony.[53] Erdoğan, who as president was constitutionally required to be impartial,

maintained an openly pro-AKP position while also campaigning vigorously for a so-called Turkish presidency, about which little detail was disclosed. Critics remarked that such a presidential model, lacking democratic checks and balances, would have been a step toward one-man rule rather than toward a freer and more open polity. In the event, the pro-Kurdish HDP won enough votes to enter the parliament both in the inconclusive election of June, then in the repeat election in November, thus denying the AKP sufficient majority to be able to push through the constitutional changes to institute the new presidential model. The irony here is considerable. Once Kurdish identity had been denied and Kurdish actors excluded from the political arena because they were seen as a threat to national sovereignty, but during the electoral jousting of 2015 they came to be seen by some as saviors of a free and open political order in Turkey.

For others, the very success of the HDP, an ostensibly Kurdish political vehicle, in the election of June 2017, was a threat to the status quo. It certainly robbed the AKP of its electoral majority and sullied its hitherto unbeaten record, but it also reawakened latent nationalist impulses and associated fears of diversity within Turkey's political psychology. This, in turn, catalyzed a cascade of events, among them the reignition of conflict with the PKK, that have left Kurdish politicians marginalized, and acted to increase societal divides and political tensions.[54]

Amid ongoing tensions and polarization within Turkish society following the abortive coup of July 2016 and the subsequent referendum of April 2017, which narrowly voted "yes" for Erdoğan's presidential project, it remains to be seen what impact the Kurdish political movement can have in Turkey. Political spaces for those not aligned with the government are rigidly circumscribed amid ongoing emergency rule. There has been a notable rise in nationalist rhetoric in the political sphere, the AKP, as ever led by Erdoğan, trotting out familiar tropes—accusations of complicity with "terror"—in order to marginalize and vilify Kurdish politicians and other political opponents.[55] This culminated in the arrest of the HDP's coleaders in November 2016.[56] Other measures included the removal of HDP municipalities, replaced by government appointed "trustees," in Kurdish-populated cities, and ongoing arrests of HDP officials and parliamentary deputies. In these circumstances, one may be forgiven for thinking that the Kurdish political movement enjoyed only a brief moment in the sun, and that Turkish politics has returned to its default settings of insularity and nationalist rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that ethnicity and religion remain important factors in the political landscape of Turkey, and the wider region, even though

modernization theory may have dismissed them as having limited ongoing significance. Kemalism, an ideology instrumental in the process of nation-building in Turkey, and a model once seen as broadly applicable across the Middle East, downplayed ethnic diversity, seeking to impose a sovereign, homogenous *Turkish* national identity, and attempting to marginalize and control religion. But in its very rigidity and its top-down "high modernist" approach to ethnic diversity and Islam, Kemalism failed to take account of the wishes and desires of its diverse constituents, and in so doing undermined its own capacity for success. Indeed, Kemalism's repressive measures in Turkey backfired, spawning radical Kurdish elements and failing to subdue or accommodate a groundswell of Islamic sentiment within society. In many ways, the shortcomings of the Kemalist model echo the failure of modernization theory to appreciate the resilience of such markers as ethnic identity and religion, and the agency of the masses, in Middle Eastern societies.

Perceptions have changed and it is now taken as given that Islam is an enduring feature of the political landscape of the region. Frameworks have been proposed to analyze its role and impact, and its compatibility with various political visions. Initially deemed an impediment to modernizing trajectories, Islam was suppressed and Islamic political actors were shunned, or worse. In some countries, although not in Turkey, political Islam sometimes assumed radical forms. Thereafter, inclusion in the political sphere was seen as a means to impel radical actors to moderate their views and positions. Here again, Turkey provided a model, this time that of the AKP, whose blend of self-conscious piety, economic smarts, and political progressiveness was seen as a template that could be widely applied. The AKP's recent authoritarian turn, whether evidence of Islamist intransigence or political ossification, has seen declining enthusiasm for such a model.

Through all of this, the Kurdish political movement in Turkey has endured and evolved. Initially excluded from the political arena, some Kurdish actors took a radical path, such as the PKK campaigning—and fighting—for a separate state, but as the radical-military direction proved fruitless, and as opportunity spaces gradually opened, moderate Kurdish political actors raised their voices. In its current incarnation, the Kurdish political movement has proven receptive to constituents from a diversity of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Pursuing a reformist, progressive agenda the pro-Kurdish HDP would appear to represent a bulwark against increasing authoritarianism in the Turkish political arena. It was successful in winning seats in parliament in two general elections in 2015, thus stymieing the AKP's ambition to introduce an "executive presidency." With the resumption of hostilities between the PKK and the Turkish state, and a deteriorating security situation in the Kurdish-populated southeast since late 2015, the HDP's political model, which charts a course between secularism and piety, and aims to incorporate a diversity of ethnic

elements, appears all the more pertinent, with the potential to offer solutions
to the problems that bedevil Turkey. At one time, there were high hopes that
such a political approach would succeed in Turkey. In theory, such a project
may have offered a model for the states of the Middle East. In Turkey's pres-
ent environment of resurgent nationalist rhetoric, inter-ethnic tension, and
accusations of "terrorism" hurled at parliamentarians, however, it appears
that it is all but doomed.

NOTES

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5. Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 311–16.
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Chapter 5

State Formation and Social Conflict in Syria

Causalities, Unintended Consequences, and Analytical Trajectories

Harout Akdedian

Scholarly experts on Syrian politics such as Steven Heydemann and Raymond Hinnebusch have often applied the framework of state formation theory to explore processes of monopolizing violence and power consolidation, and to explain how certain groups are able to stay in power and rule.[1] For Hinnebusch, the framework of state formation theory explains how some political actors in Syria were able to consolidate power and political control in unstable environs, such as during the turbulent postindependence period. By looking into structural conditions, institutional transformations, and strategic choices of key political actors, Heydemann's account similarly cites Syria's militarized postindependence legacy, institutionalized sectarianism, and schemes of economic restructuring, all within a state formation framework, to explain enduring authoritarianism in Syria despite pervasive sociopolitical conflict between 1946 and 1970.

While heavily focused on power groups in charge of the state, state formation theory also sheds light on processes of sociopolitical radicalization, provided that its scope is not exclusively state-centric and state–society interactions are accounted for. Processes of state formation and respective institutional arrangements elicit various reactions from the context in which they operate.[2] As evident from the post-2011 popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, the degree of knowledge about these reactions defines our level of understanding of social upheavals and sociopolitical transformations at work.

In order to review the prevalent framework of state formation theory and assess its relevance for the study of Syrian society and politics in the given

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circumstances, the chapter first outlines the dominant explanatory narratives about causalities and processes that led to communal social conflict—popular uprisings and violent contention against the state after independence in 1946. The second part of the chapter focuses on the framework of state formation theory, which contributes to the literature by integrating the different explanatory narratives and puts forward a more holistic account of conflict dynamics in Syria. The last section of the chapter contends that unless the literature on Syria undergoes a shift toward a localized focus on post-2011 developments and the unintended consequences of the conflict, a recycling of preexisting narratives will obfuscate rather than clarify.

EXPLANATORY NARRATIVES OF
SOCIAL CONFLICT IN SYRIA

Postindependence Syrian history is characterized by the exercise of excessive violence by the state and various episodes of violent contention that erupted against it. Hence, the topic of social conflict has received much attention from scholars on Syrian studies. In the wake of the popular uprisings in Syria and the eventual outbreak of violent conflict, the literature has witnessed a mushrooming of explanatory narratives on the causalities and processes that led to social conflict. For the purpose of presenting an overview of this literature, the next section divides the dominant narratives into four themes: (1) the politicization of the military and the militarization of politics; (2) economic restructuring and marginalization; (3) nation-building and sectarianization; and (4) geopolitics in the Middle East and the role of exogenous influences. These themes are relevant for explaining the dynamics of conflict escalation before and after the uprising in 2011, thus advancing explanations for catalysts of postindependence social conflict in general.

Narratives of Radicalization: Politicization of
the Military and Militarization of Politics

Historical accounts of political radicalization, as the gradual endorsement of uncompromising violence to bring about social and political change, address the basic question of how politics in Syria, which was characterized by participatory political processes following independence, became militarized and violent. To answer this question, historians define radicalization as a process which came about during the early period after independence, when hegemonic institutions of violence—represented by the army and its multiple coups d'état—infringed upon efforts to establish a participatory, representative, and inclusive political system. During the successive military takeovers

in Syria, which began in 1949, politics became a business of domination where brute force was established as the greatest source of political power. It was against this backdrop of diminishing nonviolent options to challenge uncompromising authoritarianism, that political actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood began to take on a more radical form.

The Syrian political landscape after independence comprised a multitude of political actors, of which the Muslim Brotherhood serves as an illustrative example of the processes of militarization. Early on, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood accepted and participated in the secular political system.[3] The Brotherhood representatives demanded a greater role for Islam in the state. Despite being unsuccessful, they continuously abided by the participatory process in advocating their agenda for change. The Brotherhood's acceptance and participation in the democratic political system is exemplified by the parliamentary debate over the constitution that took place from 1949 to 1950. The main issues debated at the time were the economy, distribution of wealth, land reform, and the religion of the state. The founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mustafa al-Siba'i, who was a member of parliament from Damascus at the time, led the controversial effort to determine the religion of the state. Ultimately, these efforts led to an agreement whereby, instead of declaring Islam as the religion of the state, Islam was declared as the religion of the president—it was mandated that the president be a Muslim.[4] However, this constitution was never operationalized because of subsequent military takeovers that abolished previous constitutional frameworks.

The Brotherhood's pragmatism, spirit of reform, and respect for participatory processes withered over time, as the encroachment of army commanders into political processes gained strength from 1949 onwards. Indeed, in 1949 alone, Syria witnessed three coups d'état at the hands of army commanders.[5] Remaining traces of political participation were effectively eliminated with the union of Syria and Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958.[6] At that time Nasser abolished all political parties and was only able to hold onto power by authoritarian means until this union came to an end in 1961.[7]

The last electoral campaigns in Syria took place in 1961.[8] The Ba'thist takeover in 1963 reinforced authoritarianism and established a secular rule founded on socialism and Arab nationalism. This rendered Syrian politics the exact opposite of what the Brotherhood had envisioned; Islam was removed from the equation and participatory processes were swiftly replaced with the autocracy of army commanders. As authoritarianism became a political reality in Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood's cooperative stance gradually disappeared. One of the first manifestations of the transition to radicalism came after the 1963 Ba'thist takeover. In 1964, after a protest in the Osman al-Hourani school in Homs, mobs attacked local government forces.[9] This escalated into an armed confrontation between government forces and protestors.

After clashing with the army, a large number of protesting Brotherhood members took refuge in the Sultan Mosque, exchanging fire with government forces.[10] Ultimately, the army shelled the mosque, killing and detaining a number of the Brotherhood members.

The cycle of violence continued after Hafez al-Assad's takeover in 1970. Multiple assassinations took place, targeting affiliates of Assad's social circle, mostly of prominent professionals—lawyers, doctors, and professors—from the Alawi community, to which Assad belonged.[11] Interestingly, the parties responsible for these acts were unknown until recently. At the time of the above-mentioned assassinations, even the Syrian intelligence services failed to identify or capture the perpetrators. The Muslim Brotherhood had denied responsibility for such acts at that time.[12] However, the recent testimonies of Adnan Saʿd al-Din, general supervisor (1975–86) and vice general supervisor (1981–86) of the Muslim Brotherhood, published after his death, reveal a great deal about the reality of the Brotherhood's involvement in the acts of violence and their relationship with *al-Tali'a al-Moukatila*, a radicalized Islamic faction formed in 1976 to wage armed struggle against the Assad regime.[13] According to these testimonies, Saʿd al-Din met regularly with Abd al-Sattar al-Zaʿim, the founder of *al-Tali'a*, and approved his recruitment of Brotherhood members on the condition that they terminate their membership in the Brotherhood. Hence, the Brotherhood was able to eschew official responsibility for armed operations against the government, while former members partook in armed struggle and carried out many of the attacks.[14] Despite the Brotherhood's formal noninvolvement, these attacks clearly reflect an environment of radicalization that emerged in response to growing oppression and authoritarianism.[15]

Tensions between the government and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood peaked with the Hama uprising in 1982. The Brotherhood's preparations for an uprising led Hama to rebel against the regime.[16] Although the rebels took over the entire city, the government retaliated by destroying almost half the city and killing between ten thousand and forty thousand residents.[17] The government's ruthless killings, coupled with growing internal divisions within the Brotherhood, effectively ended the armed struggle. Following these events, Islamic activists either returned to educational and social endeavors or practiced underground activism in Syria or abroad.[18]

The rise of Islamic radicalization during the first decades of Syrian political independence marks the preliminary phase of radicalization in the postindependence era of Syrian history. Although, historically speaking, the period between 1964 and 1982 represents the first episode of what can be called a process of militarization, it is misleading to link this phase to the post-2011 scenario, as if current developments are manifestations of concealed radicalization carrying over from the previous phase. As Line Khatib argues, notions of the return of

the oppressed that suggests a correlation between the two phases of radicalization must be problematized because analyses of economic restructuring and class formation processes before and after the year 2000 reveal that the social groups and classes behind each phase of radicalization were different.[19] Evaluating the rise of Islamic radicalization in Syria through the perspective of political economy expands the discussion to include the ways in which different schemes of economic restructuring resulted in marginalizing and antagonizing different segments of Syrian society at different times.

Narratives of Economic Restructuring and Marginalization

Application of a political economy perspective to the Syrian uprising in 2011 brings socioeconomic transitions into focus. Of particular interest are those transitions that have occurred since the year 2000, resulting in a shift from a largely centralized socialist system under Assad Senior, to a neoliberal political and economic order under Assad Junior. A political economy perspective highlights the subsequent disenfranchisement and marginalization of many sectors of society, setting the stage for contention with the state.

Prior to the neoliberal turn of 2000, the Baʿthist leadership enjoyed social support from lower socioeconomic classes who were drawn to its socialist agenda, including advocacy for protection of local industry; levying of income taxes; supervision of domestic and foreign trade; and the restriction of private land ownership.[20] When Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970, the economic policies of the state took on an even more radical form of socialism and three main policy objectives were set: "To initiate a land reform program that would eliminate the concentration of land ownership; to destroy the monopolistic merchant families and their businesses by nationalizing most of the organized business sectors; and to give the government a more decisive role in managing the economy through planning."[21] As the Baʿth aligned with the lower classes, the middle and upper classes were simultaneously marginalized.

The Brotherhood, as a political opponent, tried to absorb the disenfranchised middle classes and advocated actively for the urban trading and manufacturing classes.[22] In addition, in an effort to distance its economic agenda from the socialist economic policies in place, the Muslim Brotherhood promoted a combination of socialism, capitalism, and Islamic populism.[23] For instance, Sibaʿi's *'Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam* (The Socialism of Islam) explains how the Brotherhood's more integrated economic approach rejected the materialism of capitalist modes of economic activity, yet accepted fair profit, private enterprise, and fair competition.[24] This language was intended to reach a broader audience within existing economic classes, rather than being limited to one specific socioeconomic group.

Hafez's government employed protectionist economic policies to maintain the loyalty of Syria's rural countryside. However, the government's power base was not solely founded on the support of the lower socioeconomic classes. The protectionist economic policies shielded farmers and local producers from the impacts of foreign trade while managing to keep some of the rich urban families, mainly Sunni, content through selective favoritism, partnerships, and concessions.[25] Hence, Assad's power consolidation rested on a triad of the army's loyalty, the support of the rural socioeconomic classes, and the partnership of a few rich urban elites.[26] However, with growing authoritarianism, opposition to the Baʿth was no longer completely confined to class-based dependencies. After the government's ban of political organizations, including unions and parties, the frustrated classes found in the Muslim Brotherhood an already established anti-government political platform. Unions, merchants, lawyers, and doctors, all took part in the protests against authoritarian government policies.[27] Hence, until its abolishment in 1980, the Muslim Brotherhood acted as an organized channel for political dissent, and Islamic activism in general became synonymous to social resistance against the Assad regime.

Economic policies prior to the year 2000 differed significantly from those that followed. The introduction of neoliberal policies, coupled with processes of unequal development and corruption in economic governance led to new social formations.[28] Hafez al-Assad's sudden death in 2000 put Bashar al-Assad in power. Bashar's promise of "development" gave rise to expectations for change. Computers became abundant, the internet was allowed (although in a limited capacity), new media agencies were set up, and most importantly, foreign imports were introduced.[29] The manner in which these policies were implemented changed Syrian society in unprecedented ways. Syrian markets were inundated with cheap imports, against which local production could not compete.[30] This, coupled with a drought in Syria around 2006, had a negative impact on the Jazeera and Houran areas in the South and East.[31] Poverty, already an issue before the drought, became a major factor in the movement of many farmers and their families to urban cities such as Aleppo and Damascus.[32] Poverty in rural areas intensified and the internal rural to urban migration reconfigured urban market dynamics and urban social space in general.[33] Furthermore, as the government gave concessions to private enterprises, most of these went to people related to the power elite.[34]

In the midst of this struggling economic climate, the regime permitted nonpolitical groups to organize social and humanitarian activities.[35] Hence, religious associations, both Islamic and Christian, began to flourish in this climate of uncertainty.[36] The regime kept these movements under surveillance of course, but most religious associations were able to continue their activism as long as they limited their public face to charity work and religious

activities.[37] Due to unequal economic growth and corrupt governance practices, religious charities increased in popularity. It is in this economic environment that religious activism gained popularity even before the protests of 2011.[38] The anti-government fervor increased with the growth of marginalized classes that were deprived of the benefits of Assad's economic reform. This line of analysis does not suggest that economic conditions and restructuring created radicalization in Syria. Rather, economic policies produced various conflict-prone social formations in the country.

Narratives of Nation-building and Sectarianization

Looking through a political economy lens, policies of economic restructuring before and after 2000 appear to have influenced the formation of marginalized economic classes. From this perspective, although the Brotherhood ended up being a manifest example of radicalization, Sunni Muslims were part of a broader marginalized social group affected by the economic policies of the dictatorship. Various studies posit that the radicalization of segments of the Sunni Arab community cannot be viewed in isolation from wider Syrian society or limited to the Sunni community as such.[39] In line with this, theories of sectarianism similarly posit that radicalization consists of a widespread social process of hardening of identities occurring horizontally among Syria's different ethno-religious communities—each reacting to others and to the rapidly changing circumstances.[40] Here, notions of nationalism, secularism, and sectarianism are considered important factors for the study of communal ties, and the strengthening of antagonistic and exclusionary factional bonds.

Episodes of sectarianization in Syria date back to imperial and colonial ventures in the Middle East, first by the Ottoman Empire, and later under France. The composition of the Syrian army after independence illustrates the institutionalization of such divides. The Syrian army was built on the foundations of the French colonial army in the Middle East (the *Armée du Levant*). The vast majority of conscripts came from minority groups.[41] In fact, some claim that almost 80 percent of conscripts belonged to one sect: the Alawis.[42] For minorities, joining the Syrian army—similar to joining the French colonial army—"gave them the chance to escape the clutches of rich Sunni landowners and gain social mobility."[43] Joining the army was not regarded favorably by the Sunnis, who considered military careers inferior to mercantile and other professions.[44] In addition to being a domain of uneducated rural classes and minority groups, the army became the symbol and primary institution of colonial rule during the revolt against French colonialism.[45] After Assad's takeover in 1970, the ensuing "purification" of the army, through the implantation of loyal personnel from the Alawi community, rendered the army the domain of the ruling Alawi network.[46]

As the purging of the army intensified, followed by Assad's numerous clashes with Islamic organizations, the army earned a reputation for being "sectarian" and "anti-Islamic."[47] This characterization has resurfaced during recent confrontations between the army and rebel groups. During the current war, both rebels and government forces did not hesitate to attack religious sites of significant cultural and religious value. For instance, the approximately 148 foot (45 meter) high minaret of the Great Umayyad Mosque of Aleppo that was erected in the eleventh century was utterly destroyed.[48] This is not a stand-alone incident in the course of the ongoing civil war. On April 13, 2013, in the southern province of Darʿa, the minaret of the Omari Mosque, built in the seventh century by the Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab, was razed to the ground.[49]

The display of brutality during the conflict, and the ensuing insecurity coupled with a rhetoric of intercommunal strife, created the appropriate environment for the sectarianization of the conflict. Lack of security created a fertile ground for sectarian mobilization by warring factions. Radicalized Islamic groups acted as agents of religious sectarianism through their exclusionary agendas and sectarian discourse aimed at religious mobilization, recruitment, and funding.[50] Hence, despite the government's rhetoric and active attempts at portraying the opposition as sectarian from the very onset of the uprising, the decisive sectarian imposition in the Syrian crisis came about through the prominence of exclusionary factions over other opposition groups. Syria's communities became vulnerable to ethno-religious mobilization and militarization. The Sunni Arab community has followed the same social pattern propagated by lack of security, diminishing intercommunal trust, and sectarian mobilization.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the phenomenon of sectarianism despite its intensification during the ongoing conflict, is not a product of the conflict per se. This is evident from the Syrian state's pre-2011 methods of addressing ethno-religious notions of identity, clearly expressed in the constitution of the ruling Baʿth party:

> The Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity. Any differences existing among its sons are accidental and unimportant. They will disappear with the awakening of the Arab consciousness. . . . the national bond will be the only bond existing in the Arab states. It ensures harmony among the citizens by melting them in the crucible of a single nation, and combats all other forms of factional solidarity such as religious, sectarian, tribal, racial and regional factionalism.[51]

In summary, the state pursued a contradictory approach to nation-building. On one hand, sectarianism was institutionalized through formal government institutions such as the army for the purpose of appointing loyal personnel in

key positions. On the other hand, the state ideology called for the eradication of ethno-religious markers of identity to legitimize its rule.[52] Hence, sectarian subjectivities intensified and gained exclusionary and antagonistic characteristics during the process of conflict escalation.

Geopolitics and the Role of Exogenous Influences

Unlike the above-mentioned perspectives that focus primarily on endogenous factors contributing to social conflict and conflict escalation, geopolitical interpretations of the conflict focus on the role of international actors, shedding light on key exogenous influences. After sporadic demonstrations in 2011, Syria plunged into a vicious civil war. Militarization of the uprising ensued and the past years of armed struggle molded a landscape of contested territorial zones among multitudes of warring parties. From a geopolitical perspective, the ongoing civil war represents a moment of crisis during which government control has been challenged, and as a result, exogenous influences such as foreign funding and interference have grown more influential.

Financial and political support from regional and international sources enabled the sustenance of armed groups, including the state army, and the perpetuation of warfare in Syria. Some groups among the opposition were more successful than others in securing consistent funding.[53] This funding made equipment and arms available. Additionally, in a climate of economic uncertainty, salaries offered by armed groups are effective for recruitment purposes. This enabled resourceful groups to attract recruits from other factions and make further inductions. In a country ripped apart by civil war, where money is a rare commodity, civilians are recruited in broad daylight. These factors have granted some militias a distinct advantage over other inexperienced rebel groups, often consisting of defected army soldiers trained only to wage conventional war and lacking the skills required for fighting in a civil war.

Non-state funding is mostly received from Islamic aid organizations, Syrian business families located outside the country, and some local families.[54] After the expansion of the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq, the organization secured funds from oil extraction and local distribution.[55] In addition to these independent resources, consistent funding by foreign state actors have sustained and steered local combatants, essentially rendering the conflict in Syria a proxy war. Some notable foreign funders of Syrian opposition groups are the United States of America, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.[56] The support from Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, in the form of training and logistical support, has been vital to some rebel groups.[57] The direct involvement of Iraqi and Shiʿa militias such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, and direct Iranian and Russian support have sustained the Syrian government.[58]

These international stakeholders are also competing among themselves for influence over rebel groups. The competition between Qatar and Saudi Arabia is one such example.[59] Qatar, trying to play a greater role in the region, has attempted to woo some Islamist groups that are not favored by the United States and Saudi Arabia.[60]

Foreign funding of Islamist groups has mainly been motivated by the geopolitical position of Syria in the Middle East. Competing international interest in Syria between Russia and the United States, along with regional divisions of influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran, reveal the larger geopolitical significance of the Syrian crisis. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as a global superpower, regional powers such as Iran became contenders for political influence on a regional scale. Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, attempts to export the revolution to other parts of the region resulted in the Iranian axis of influence extending from Iran to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.[61] This axis of influence came about through an extended process spanning nearly thirty years. For example, the Iranian influence in Iraq really only expanded after the detrimental vacuum created by the US invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Ousting the dictator tilted the balance of power in favor of pro-Iranian political entities in Iraq. In Lebanon, the Iranian influence grew steadily from the early 1980s after the Israeli invasion and the establishment of Hezbollah.[62] The civil war in Lebanon created ideal conditions for recruitment for the newly founded armed group. The 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, which ended with the failure of the Israeli army to eradicate Hezbollah, and Hezbollah's success in sustaining its presence and capacity to confront Israel, is the climax of the Iranian ascent to an influential position in the region.[63]

The geostrategic location of Syria, serving as a link between Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, explains the regional and international political involvement in the Syrian War.[64] A regime change in Syria would contain Iran and serve as a blow to Hezbollah in Lebanon; an outcome much desired by the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and feared by Russia and China. Subsequently, a fight among local factions in Syria has also become an arena of great power politics competing for influence in the Middle East. The Iranian geopolitical surge in the region has encouraged regional and international stakeholders to support Sunni radicalism, directly or indirectly, in an effort to contain the Islamic Republic's growing influence in the Middle East.[65]

STATE FORMATION THEORY

The narratives outlined in the previous section highlight important factors that have contributed to social conflict in Syria. Nevertheless, the multifaceted

reality of conflict requires a multidisciplinary approach. Toward this goal, the following section presents state formation theory as a framework that integrates the dominant narratives and highlights interactions between the different factors mentioned above.

State-centric approaches and analyses, including those of Heydemann and Hinnebusch, are based on the successful union of command and obedience, which serves as the foundation of authoritarianism and early stages of state formation. The commands of authoritarian rulers are intended to regulate the behavior of the ruled either by force or the threat of force. A command is not effective if not coupled with the forced obedience of the ruled.[66] Hence, the successful union of command and obedience, ruler and ruled, leads to successful power consolidation in the process of state formation under authoritarianism.[67]

During state-formation processes, the ruled have limited options to participate in processes of power consolidation, intended to regulate and limit sociopolitical behavior. Opponents and dissenting voices can either submit or challenge the monopoly of violence. In the case of effective resistance that has a potential to undermine state control, authoritarian political systems resort to more violence and coercion in order to reassert their monopoly. This is because coercion is the foundation of authoritarian systems—without the ability to coerce, authoritarianism is rendered obsolete and the groups in charge of the authoritarian system become powerless. Hence, during processes of power consolidation, different groups compete against one another and endeavor to eliminate competition. The gradual endorsement of violent means for uncompromising political objectives, such as obtaining control of government or destroying competing factions, is what defines and further generates political radicalization during state formation. Hence, state formation theory suggests that radicalization in Syria is not only an unintended consequence but also a process running parallel to the course of state formation which manifested, and continues to manifest, differently in different times.

Historical narratives on Islamic radicalization briefly address this by documenting a series of reactions to authoritarian and oppressive political arrangements in Syria. During the period of power consolidation and monopoly of violence, specifically after 1949, hegemonic institutions of violence disrupted participatory political processes and eliminated Islam from the broader political system because it was among the contenders for power and control.

In addition to the monopoly of violence, state formation processes are equally defined by attempts at legitimization. Contemporary Syrian history reveals how successful monopolization of violence is necessary, but insufficient to sustain a stable political ordering and avoid contention. It is for similar reasons that Max Weber defined the modern state in its ideal type as a

"human community which (successfully) claims the monopoly of the *legitimate* use of physical force within a given territory."[68] By extension, Weber's understanding of state formation does not solely depend upon the process of effectively monopolizing violence, but also legitimizing it. In other words, state formation is an attempt to bring about a *legitimate* association which organizes dominion and defines the social ordering in society. Hence, from this perspective, although the modern state maintains, or tries to maintain, its monopoly over violence and the means of physical coercion, it also strives for a mechanism where physical coercion is not the sole modus operandi of social organization. This does not mean that the state forfeits its monopoly over violence for a more cooperative attitude. Cooperation takes place in the presence of the state's monopoly of violence. In Syria, the institutional measures taken toward this end were based on two pillars: nation-building and the distribution of wealth.[69]

Nation-building strives to create a collective identity uniting a vast proportion of the population under the rule of power groups who are at the center of this national identity.[70] The institutional means for this are conscription and education as tools of indoctrination.[71] The nation-building project in post-1963 Syria was founded on Arab nationalism and secularism, and was characterized by its inherent contradiction with institutionalized sectarianism, which served the function of implanting loyal partners in key government (political and security) positions. Despite the efforts of the ruling class to legitimize the institutions of violence, secular Syrian Arab nationalism did not deliver the desired outcomes and was eventually forfeited.[72]

Orchestrated distribution of wealth, on the other hand, serves two functions. First, through economic restructuring and institutional innovations, the distribution of wealth leads to class formation and the expansion of dependent social and business networks loyal to power groups in charge of the state. Second, the orchestrated distribution of wealth and unequal economic development provides the required concentration of wealth and resources to monopolize violence.[73] The different schemes of economic restructuring in Syria before and after 2000 were different answers to the requirements of power consolidation in different times. While the early "socialism" was meant to grow the regime's social support in the rural countryside through economic policies of land reform, elimination of concentrated land ownership, and nationalization initiatives, it simultaneously resulted in the marginalization of the middle classes. Similarly, subsequent to the economic crunch, and in an effort to generate more resources for the state, neoliberal economic policies were introduced in 2000. This further compounded socioeconomic issues in the country as rural classes became economically marginalized. In addition to the unequal distribution of wealth, the sanctioning of social and development associations and religious charity organizations exposed the

state's efforts to separate itself from society and take on the role of an umpire, intervening only if necessary. Through measured devolution of social and economic authority to the private sector, the state tried to absolve itself of any responsibility for social conflict. In this sense, the state allowed the limited expansion of social and religious charity associations after 2003 in an effort to establish partnerships to confront socioeconomic challenges.[74]

State formation theory also accounts for exogenous and geopolitical influences in the Syrian War. Civil war represents a moment of crisis in the process of Syrian state-formation, leaving the state more vulnerable and open to exogenous influences. During this phase, the framework shifts the focus toward the erosion of state control and the resultant foreign involvement and influence over the armed conflict.

STATE ATROPHY AND THE PLACE OF LOCALITY

State formation theory is useful in highlighting the correlations and dialectics between the seemingly isolated factors contributing to social conflict, highlighting macro-level and broad processes that have influenced the course of postindependence Syrian political history up to 2011. Thus, in the wake of popular uprisings, the literature on Syrian politics and society was predominantly characterized by its content on broad processes rather than detailed accounts of how broad processes translated within localities. However, the continued reliance on this framework to discuss post-2011 developments would lead to the cyclical return to the same dominant explanatory narratives, rather than break new grounds and explore novel and uncharted developments.

After 2011, popular uprisings and militarization took different forms in Syria's different localities. As Isam al-Khafaji argues, Syrians underwent highly contrasting shifts, and the trajectories of change have been different in different provinces.[75] Through distinct features of class structure; rates of poverty, unemployment, and education; demographics of employment; and internal migration, each locality had different resources to draw upon and conditions to function in. These led different localities to respond and react differently to the changes they were undergoing.[76] Similarly, oppositional armed activism had a clearly and explicitly local base and expression as well.[77] Here, in light of significant deficiency in knowledge about Syrian localities and the sociopolitical transformations therein, the limitations of the literature preoccupied with broad processes are exposed.

Al-Khafaji's piece stands out as he sheds light on significant local differences in Syria and how they have shaped the uprising and subsequent developments. Through statistical insight from the Central Bureau of Statistics and

a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on poverty and inequality in Syria between 1997 and 2007, he points out the different implications of population growth for different areas, tracks precise trajectories of internal migration, and situates the various social spaces where unemployment triggered different pressures,[78] all while acknowledging the influence of the state, directly or indirectly, in shaping these distinct social formations and their interactions. Al-Khafaji poignantly concludes that as Syrians rose against the Assad regime, "it [was] but natural that the revolt of each of the oppressed groups [took] different patterns according to the social configuration that prevailed in its region."[79]

Here, locality should not be understood as the measure of accuracy. As David Harvey states in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, studying locality while disregarding broader processes such as economic restructuring and methods of political organization, only leads to "fetishizing" locality.[80] Localities, no matter how isolated, cannot be assumed to be separate entities as even their isolation could be an outcome of exogenous pressures and broad processes.

Nevertheless, localities and local dynamics demand special attention given the de facto disintegration of the state as a superstructure. This brings us to the question about the here and now. When the superstructure has shrunk to the scale it has in Syria, the locality is left to its own devices to organize and govern itself. This also leads locality to become a field where a multitude of power groups and new power relations are forged. This applies to rebel-held, government-held, and Kurdish areas alike. In other words, locality is not synonymous with a territorial area or "place" but is rather a social space where new power relations are emerging and new social dependencies are being established. In this sense, the postwar sociopolitical scene will not be divorced from these local conditions in the here and now. Without a focus on locality in the scholarship, whatever the postwar situation may be, knowledge about post-2011 development will be lacking.

In light of disintegrating state-structures, the rise of informal actors, paramilitary groups, militias, war economies, and the devolution of various state functions to new actors, the focus of state formation theory on state–society relations does not capture transformations that have been taking place after 2011. Studying the consequences of state atrophy requires an approach other than state formation because the state is no longer the primary protagonist. Instead, there is the need for novel language and conceptual tools to capture power relations taking place beyond the confines of the state structure. The current stage of the Syrian War cannot simply be assumed to be a transient period of chaos resulting from the breakdown of the Syrian state. Rather, the environment in Syria is such that new actors and power relations are emerging in the informal fields of war economy, networks of violence,

and local government. Studying these aspects of the Syrian reality requires its own conceptual and analytical tools. Needless to say, there is new and valuable research heading in this direction.[81] But given that this direction of research is newly emerging and local circumstances are still evolving, the existing literature remains insufficient and inconclusive.

CONCLUSION

Scholarly narratives about post-2011 developments in Syria focus mostly on sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions that caused popular uprisings and the ensuing violence and conflict. Consequently, the state of the literature is such that the period prior to 2011 is deemed a period of radical but somewhat suppressed socioeconomic transformations, whereas the period after 2011 is framed as their manifest unraveling.

Without focusing on unintended consequences of the war and emerging power relations beyond the confines of the state structure, retrospective narratives are bound to reinforce notions that the current moment is utterly chaotic, and hardly legible due to the scale of destruction and disintegration. The inevitable outcome from such accounts is a projection of a dynamic past but a confirmation of a chaotic condition that defines the present. In other words, the extant literature imposes a deterministic structure and a retrogressive trajectory on contemporaneous debate about society and politics in Syria—a deterministic retrogressive trajectory defined by a past that was full of dynamism, a disrupted and chaotic present, and a future that remains uncertain. This retrogressive logic eliminates the possibility for exploring how Syria is transforming by limiting the discussion about the country's alleged illegible future, either to narratives of perpetual violence or to preexisting and overstated historical references of authoritarianism, political Islam, and/or geographic segmentation.

The state of current literature reflects and reinforces the poverty of knowledge and understanding of post-2011 developments in Syria. In response, this chapter suggests that cutting-edge research must focus on dynamics of devolution and reconfiguration after 2011. Needless to say, processes of devolution after 2011 are related to pre-2011 developments—specifically to the constellation of relations that upheld the social order in Syria before the uprisings. Despite this connection, post-2011 dynamics of disarticulation continue to yield an ever-changing reality—religion, the state, and social structures at large have been transforming according to novel power relations between a multitude of centers and margins. To avoid the deterministic and retrogressive logic, and to take into account ongoing transformations, localized perspectives are a must.

NOTES

1. Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946–1970* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999); Raymond Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Baʿthist Syria: Army, Party, and Peasant* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1990).

2. Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State–Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

3. For instance, in the very first elections in Syria in 1947, the Muslim Brotherhood took part in parliamentary elections with four candidates, of whom three were elected, Johannes Reissner, *Al-harakat al-Islamiyya fi Sourya* [Islamic movements in Syria] (Beirut: Riyad el-Rayyes, 2005), 203; see also George Jabbour, *Al-fikral siyasi al-muʿasser fi Souriya* [Modern political thought in Syria] (Beirut: Al-Manara, 1993).

4. Furthermore, a clause in the constitution declared Shariʿa and Islamic jurisprudence to be the main source of legislation. See, Adnan Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr: Adnan Saʿd al-Din" [Witness of the era: Adnan Saʿd al-Din], by Adnan Mansour, *Al Jazeera* interview series, 8 sections, September 9, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIusQVhw4cI.

5. Ghada Talhami, "Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism and the Military," *Middle East Policy* 8, no. 4 (2001): 113; Husni al-Zaʿim in March 1949; Sami Hinnawi in August 1949; and Adib al-Shishakly in December 1949. Shishakly himself was eliminated in another coup in February 1954.

6. Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 54–55; Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria*, 82–90.

7. Seale, *The Struggle for the Middle East*, 58–68; and in Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria.*

8. Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*, 38–44.

9. Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr."

10. Ibid.

11. For more on the family background see Seale, *The Struggle for the Middle East*, 3–13.

12. Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr."

13. Umar Abd-Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1983); Abdulrahman al-Haj, *State and Community: The Political Aspirations of Religious Groups in Syria 2000–2010* (London: Strategic Research and Communication Centre, 2011).

14. Hashem Othman, *Al-ahzab al-siyasiyya fi Souriya: al-Srriyya wal-ʿAlaniyya* [The political parties in Syria: The explicit and the confidential] (Beirut: Riyad el-Rayyis, 2001), 222–26; Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr."

15. Among the many attacks that followed was the 1979 Aleppo artillery school massacre, where thirty-two cadets were killed and fifty-four others wounded, after being summoned unarmed to a meeting hall, then sprayed with bullets. Among the perpetrators were previous Muslim Brotherhood members who had infiltrated the army. See, Othman, *Al-ahzab al-siyasiyya fi Souriya*, 222–26; Nikolaos Van Dam,

The Struggle for Power in Syria (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 89–103; Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr."

16. Seale, *The Struggle for the Middle East*, 332; Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr"; Kamal Dib, *Tarikh Souriya al-mou'asir: Min al-intidab al-Faransi 'ila sayf 2011* [The contemporary history of Syria: From French colonialism to the summer of 2011] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2011).

17. Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128; Seale, *The Struggle for the Middle East*, 333; Aron Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents: The Rise of The Syrian Islamic Front," *The Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, March 2013, http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/86861.pdf.

18. Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr"; Haj, *State and Community*; Sheikh Muhammad Nasr el-Din al-Albani is one example among radicalized Islamists.

19. Line Khatib, *Islamic Revivalism in Syria: The Rise and Fall of Baʿthist Secularism* (London: Routledge, 2011).

20. Although the Baʿthist leadership came from the lower middle class of intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, and army officers, their social support came from the lower classes. See Kamel Abu-Jaber, *Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party: History, Ideology, and Organization* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966); Mansoor Moaddel, "The Social Bases and Discursive Context of the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism: The Cases of Iran and Syria," *Sociological Inquiry* 66, no. 3 (1996): 330–55; Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables, and their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*.

21. Moaddel, "The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism," 346.

22. Run mostly by middle class and upper middle class Sunni Muslims. See Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*.

23. Ibid.

24. Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam* [The socialism of Islam] (Cairo, 1960).

25. Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 125–27.

26. Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*.

27. Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*; Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*; Seale, *The Struggle for the Middle East*; Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr."

28. Economic stagnation in the late 1980s, mainly driven by the increase of oil prices and the plummeting of Soviet support, led the Syrian government to introduce limited measures of economic liberalization; see Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*, 133–35. Although this is significant and considered by some as the beginning of the liberalization process of Syria's economic modes of production, however, all measures of liberalization and privatization were limited and the economy maintained its centralized features and characteristics.

29. Shamel Azmeh, "The Uprising of the Marginalised: A Socio-Economic Perspective of the Syrian Uprising," *LSE Middle East Centre* 6 (2014): 1–23.

30. Abu-Ismail, Khalid, Ali Abdel-Gadir, and Heba el-Laithy. "Poverty and Inequality in Syria (1997–2007)." *UNDP Arab Development Challenges Report*, 2011, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/poverty/BG_15_Poverty%20 and%20Inequality%20in%20Syria_FeB.pdf.

31. Azmeh, "The Uprising of the Marginalised," 16.

32. Ibid.

33. This came about through the rise of illegal housing on the outskirts of cities such as Aleppo City. Locally known as ʿishwaʾiyyat, these urban slums were allocated only limited social and municipal services and experienced relatively high rates of illegal and criminal activity. See Isam al-Khafaji, "De-Urbanizing the Syrian Revolt," *The Arab Reform Initiative*, March 6, 2016, http://www.arab-reform.net/en/ node/935.

34. Haddad, *Business Networks*. A prime example of this is Syriatel, one of only two mobile telecommunication operators in Syria. Established in 2000, Syriatel is owned by Rami Makhlouf, a first cousin of Bashar al-Assad. Rami Makhlouf also owns major businesses all over Syria including Dunia TV, currently blacklisted under European and US sanctions. During a period of ten years during which corruption, privatization, unequal access to development, and environmental challenges were all evidently growing issues, public dissatisfaction spread wider.

35. Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents"; Haj, *State and Community*; Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Thomas Pierret and Kjetil Selvik, "Limits of 'Authoritarian Upgrading' in Syria: Private Welfare, Islamic Charities, and the Rise of the Zayd Movement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 4 (2009): 595–614; Laura Ruiz de Elvira and Tina Zintl, "The End of the Baʿthist Social Contract in Bashar al-Asad's Syria: Reading Sociopolitical Transformations through Charities and Broader Benevolent Activism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 2 (2014): 329–49.

36. Haj, *State and Community*.

37. Ruiz de Elvira and Zintl, "The Baʿthist Social Contract"; Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents."

38. Ruiz de Elvira and Zintl, "The Baʿthist Social Contract"; Khatib, *Islamic Revivalism in Syria*; Haj, *State and Community*; Aron Lund, "Syrian Jihadism," *The Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, September 14, 2012, http://www.ui.se/upl/ files/77409.pdf; Pierret, *Religion and State*.

39. Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin, *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015); Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*; Nibras Kazimi, *Syria Through Jihadist Eyes: A Perfect Enemy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2010).

40. The majority of the population in Syria is Muslim but the country is comprised of different denominations: Sunni, ʿAlawis, Druzes, Ismaʾilis, Shiʿites, and Yezidis, as well as eleven Christian denominations: Greek Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Maronites, Nestorians, Protestants, and others, see David Long, Bernard Reich, and Mark Gasiorowski, *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa* (Colorado: Westview

Press, 2010). These groups are officially recognized by Resolution 53 (1939) "Regulation on the Religious Sects" and enforced to the present. See Haj, *State and Community*, 7. Exact figures on the ethno-religious demography of Syria are hard to find. The average of the numbers circulated in the main scholarly works on Syria provides the following image: 65 percent Sunni Arabs; 11 percent ʿAlawites; 10 percent Sunni Kurds; 9 percent Christians; 3 percent Druze; and 2 percent others, see Kjetil Selvik and Stig Stenslie, *Stability and Change in the Modern Middle East* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). These numbers could be misleading because many minority groups have great social and political significance in Syria. Van Dam in *The Struggle for Power* uses the term "compact minorities" to describe the social groups that do not enjoy a numeric advantage, yet since they are geographically concentrated in specific areas they cannot be neglected; Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945–1986: Politics and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Stephen Starr, *Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). For instance, despite the fact that the Druze only represent 3 percent of Syrian society, their mountainous regions have been historically preserved and defended against invaders. See, Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*.

41. Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*.

42. Saʿd al-Din, "Shahidon ʿalal-ʿasr"; Andrew Mollo, *The Armed Forces of World War II* (New York: Crown, 1981).

43. Selvik and Stenslie, *Stability and Change*, 88.

44. Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*, 15–20.

45. Seale, *The Struggle for the Middle East*, 18.

46. Ibid.; also Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*, 51–55.

47. Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*, 51–55.

48. Abdul Qadir Rihawi, *Arabic Islamic Architecture: Its Characteristics and Traces in Syria* (Damascus: The Ministry of Culture and National Leadership, 1979); "Minaret of Historic Syrian Mosque Destroyed in Aleppo," *The Guardian*, April 24, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/24/minaret-historic-syrian-mosque-destroyed-aleppo.

49. "Historic Mosque in Daraa Destroyed in Syrian Army Shelling," *Al Arabiya*, April 14, 2013, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/04/14/Historic-mosque-in-Daraa-destroyed-in-Syrian-army-shelling-.html#.

50. In a country where in recent memory Sunni Muslims have constituted a marginalized majority and minorities have enjoyed more freedoms and privileges, sectarianism is a potent tool to alter the preexisting social order. Hence, policies of branding, labeling, and persecuting minority groups have been actively pursued by groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (previously known as Nusra Front), Harakat Ahrar al-Sham, and the Islamic State. These policies redefine the social order and reconfigure power relations between the Sunni-Muslim majority and minority groups.

51. Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power*, 15.

52. Syrian Arab nationalism was a part of the national curriculum even at the earliest levels of the school system. Syrian Arab Republic Department of Education,

Al-tarbiya al-wataniyya: al-saf al-thalith thanawi [Civic education: Third secondary grade] (Damascus: General Institution for Printing, 2010); Syrian Arab Republic Department of Education, *Al-tarikh al-mou'asir lil-'oumma al-'Arabiyya* [Contemporary history of the Arab nation: Third secondary grade] (Damascus: General Institution for Printing, 2012).

53. Lund, "Syrian Jihadism"; Glen Carey, "Saudis said to Disregard U.S. on Aid to Syrian Islamists," *Bloomberg*, October 23, 2013, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-10-22/saudi-arabia-said-to-disregard-u-s-on-aid-to-syria-islamists.html; Colin Freeman, "Qatar 'Playing with Fire' as it Funds Syrian Islamists in Quest for Global Influence," *The Telegraph*, April 27, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/qatar/10022759/Qatar-playing-with-fire-as-it-funds-Syrian-Islamists-in-quest-for-global-influence.html.

54. Mainly in the Gulf area, see Lund, "Syrian Jihadism," 18–20.

55. Terrence McCoy, "Islamic State now Controls Resources and Territory Unmatched in History of Extremist Organizations," *The Washington Post*, August 4, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/08/04/islamic-state-now-controls-resources-and-territory-unmatched-in-history-of-extremist-organizations/.

56. Ibid.; also, Eric Schmitt, "C.I.A. said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0; and Mark Hosenball, "U.S. Aid to Syria Rebels Likely to Include Mortars, RPGs," *Reuters*, June 14, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/14/us-syria-crisis-weapons-idUSBRE95D11I20130614.

57. Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents." The United States has been hesitant in arming Islamist rebel groups, nonetheless, its political support to the opposition in general, inclusive of all different factions, continues unchanged in diplomatic venues. See Hosenball, "U.S. Aid to Syria"; Nick Cumming-Bruce and Anne Barnard, "Syrian Talks Disrupted by Congress's Approval of Aid to Rebels," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/world/middleeast/syria.html?_r=0.

58. Aziz al-Azmeh, "Civil War in Syria: Interview with Aziz al-Azmeh," by Ardeshir Mehrdad, *Middle East for Change*, November 20, 2016, https://www.striking-margins.com/news-1/2017/3/6/interview-with-prof-aziz-al-azmeh-civil-war-in-syria.

59. The blatant manifestation of this was the rise and fall of the previous "Five Fronts Command" attempting to unify the armed opposition flanks through the support of Qatar. While the "Five Fronts Command" initiative had a promising start, "the Saudis saw this . . . as an attempt to sideline their influence among the opposition and decided to create their own rebel organization by breaking away from the Joint Command structure. They reportedly offered vast sums to Military Council leaders and independent brigade leaders to refuse the Qatari invitation and work directly with Saudi Arabia instead." See Elizabeth O'Bagy, *The Free Syrian Army* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2013), 15. These divisions between the followers of Qatar and the followers of Saudi Arabia continue to plague the opposition.

60. Freeman, "Qatar 'Playing with Fire'."

61. Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 97–98.

62. Ibid.

63. In 2006, while Israel continuously bombed Lebanon and the Shiʿa strongholds for thirty-three days, Hezbollah was able to launch an average of 100 missiles per day. See Uzi Rubin, "Hizballah's Rocket Campaign Against Northern Israel: A Preliminary Report," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 6, no. 10 (2006), http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief006-10.htm; Furthermore, Hezbollah was able to force its conditions for peace—the release of the Israeli captured soldiers in return for the Lebanese prisoners of war in Israel. This was Hezbollah's precondition from the very onset of the confrontations in 2006.

64. Jubin Goodarzi, *Syria And Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

65. The US–Iranian nuclear agreement might be a sign of a changing US foreign policy regarding the Middle East. However, to the present, the status-quo in the Middle East remains largely unchanged.

66. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

67. Consisting of institutional arrangements striving to monopolize violence and dominate the social ordering, see Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–87.

68. Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

69. The Hobbesian school of political thought, for example, argues that cooperation can only take place in the presence of the state's monopoly of violence. Without stability, control, and order enforced by the sovereign, society would fall back into a state of chaos and insecurity. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (London: Manuscript for Andrew Crook, 1651).

70. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 118.

71. Ibid.

72. For more on the decline of Baʿthist ideology and Islamic revivalism after 2000 see, Khatib, *Islamic Revivalism in Syria*; also Harout Akdedian, "The 'Local Turn' and Resilient Communities in Syria: Infrastructure for Peace or Hegemonic Pathways?" *Peace and Conflict Review* 9, no. 1 (2017): 71–79.

73. Tilly, "War Making."

74. Ruiz de Elvira and Zintl, "The End of the Baʿthist Social Contract," 333–36.

75. Khafaji, "De-urbanizing the Syrian Revolt," 5.

76. Ibid.

77. Still today albeit less so than earlier in 2012–2013. See O'Bagy, *The Free Syrian Army.*

78. Abu-Ismail, Abdel-Gadir, and El Laithy, "Poverty and Inequality."

79. Khafaji, "De-urbanizing the Syrian Revolt," 5.

80. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 117.

81. Syrian Centre for Policy Research, "Confronting Fragmentation: Impact of Syrian Crisis Report," *Syrian Centre for Policy Research*, February 2016, http://www.ara.cat/2016/02/11/1520927894.pdf?hash=3a186be3bc9bfbc70d11f024 1fd49d847f7f0042; Thanassis Cambanis and Michael Wahid Hanna, "Arab Politics Beyond the Uprisings: Experiments in an Era of Resurgent Authoritarianism," *The Century Foundation*, May 30, 2017; Ramia Ismail, Jad Jebaie, Zaki Mehchy, and Rabie Nasser, "The Conflict Impact on Social Capital: Social Degradation in Syria," *Syrian Centre for Policy Research*, 2017, https://static1.squarespace.com/ static/58945fa6e4fcb5b66bf94ec4/t/5936bafe46c3c496baa3746e/1496759139298/ SCPR_SocialDegradation_En+%281%29.pdf; Rim Turkmani, "ISIL, JAN, and the War Economy in Syria," *Civil Society and Human Security Research Unit*, July 30, 2015, http://www.securityintransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ISIL-JAN-and-the-war-economy-in-Syria1.pdf. For conceptual frameworks suited for such endeavors, see research project *Striking from the Margins*, Central European University: https://www.strikingmargins.com/.

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Chapter 6

Seen from a Distance

Political Contexts for Middle Eastern Contemporary Art

Sam Bowker

Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot were not the only Europeans to draw authoritative lines across the modern Middle East. One of the most problematic of these lines is the myth that the capacious field of "Islamic art" continues seamlessly into the twenty-first century, holistically summarizing the ongoing material and visual cultures of the Middle East and Central Asia. Instead, the art of this complex region can—and should—be situated against the political changes that have shaped and informed its production, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Therefore, an understanding of the changing political landscape of this complex region is essential for curators, educators, and practitioners.

If we review the scope of contemporary art from the Middle East—which includes the journals, exhibitions, reviews, films, conferences, galleries, art production spaces, and major auctions—a few themes stand out. These include the cultural negotiation of feminism, the impact of the United States and international policies on the region, responses to terrorism and other forms of extremism, the influence of changing youth demographics, and the establishment of diaspora identities. Reviewing the contemporary art of the Middle East and Central Asia requires consideration of these discourses.

Though art can serve as a form of shorthand for political manifestos, images of contemporary art cannot simply appear as colorful additions to enliven dry lecture slides. As Tasnim Qutait wrote in 2014, "using art for intercultural understanding requires sustained one-to-one engagements." And:

There seems to be a "positive image" at the end of every culturally-connecting bridge, and that's the problem. All the warm, feel-good talk of honouring

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diversity and understanding one another can often seem very distant from the wrenchingly violent, confusing reality—in particular in the context of the Middle East.[1]

As Bob Bowker stated in his review of demographic and political change across the Arab world and Iran for the Australian National University in 2014, "There is a powerful sense of disconnection and frustration, alienation and marginalization from politics and decision-making not only at the government level but across society in general."[2] It should be no surprise that these themes are conspicuously manifested in the contemporary art of the Middle East. For example:

> The Arab world is somewhere between the decline of an authoritarian order and the emergence of a new model of Arab modernity. We are witnessing the emergence of [a] more connected, politically-sophisticated Arab audience, amidst great uncertainty about what it might mean, for a younger generation, to be simultaneously Arab, modern, and Muslim. Fundamental issues of power, legitimacy, freedom and authenticity are being contested in the public domain.[3]

The gallery and museum sector provide an important opportunity for such contestation. It evokes Dawn Casey's ambition for the National Museum of Australia in 2000, drawing on Elaine Gurian's statement that a museum should be "a safe place for unsafe ideas."[4] Such claims take on grandeur in that context, where Australia's main public debates include Indigenous affairs (past and present), marriage equality, and the rights of a relatively small number of asylum seekers. Dangerous ideas in the Middle East and Central Asia take on other risks.

According to the Palestinian Museum, touring exhibitions of Palestinian art have been displaced with alarming frequency.[5] These displacements have been attributed to causes varying from incompetence to conspiratorial Israeli intervention, but the frequency of this problem suggests that these artworks are not effective as agents *for* political change. Rather, contemporary art provides a means to "connect with Palestinian identity, to nonviolently channel frustrations, and to individually and collectively resist the Israeli occupation of Palestine."[6] As a result of this pragmatism, Palestinian art was characterized by the Israeli art historian Gannit Ankori for its "displacement, cultural hybridity and fragmentation."[7] In May 2016, the recently completed Palestine Museum in Birzeit opened as a cultural institution, controversially without any exhibits on display—a vacant space to be populated. This symbolic gesture echoed the opening of the "empty" Jewish Museum in Berlin in 1999, which was also initially displayed as "an iconic piece of contemporary design by architect Daniel Libeskind."[8] This is not the first time Libeskind's work has been borrowed to make a political point—the National Museum of

Australia in Canberra, designed by Ashton Raggatt McDougall and Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, appropriated the floor plan of the same building to define the "Gallery of First Australians," dedicated to the social history of Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.[9] This is another set of narratives that can also be characterized by displacement, cultural hybridity, and fragmentation.

For all their exhibitions, critiques, and creative visual statements, no Palestinian artist (or Banksy's various murals in Gaza or his 2017 "Walled Off" hotel in Bethlehem), has measurably assisted the political outcomes of the peace process. We need realistic expectations for the transformative power of art. Despite optimistic rhetoric and ambitions, art's influence as a direct agent of change is very limited. Despite this, due to their political and social expressive potential, the representation and analysis of artworks must engage with political and cultural realities. If this shift in perspective is not achieved, then we are perpetuating the reductivist concept of "Islamic art" from the nineteenth century, misrepresenting artists for whom Islam is not a primary motivation, and omitting important causes for change in the Middle East and Central Asia from the history of art.

WHAT WAS "ISLAMIC ART"?

Art can serve to explain and critique political perspectives, but like the contemporary Middle East, the concept of "Islamic art" is a famously "unwieldy field."[10] As noted by Souren Melikan in a survey of London's art market, "Jamming anything that can be called art from the seventh to the nineteenth century is not a recipe for coherence. Broaden your geographical sweep to start in Spain and end up in China, and things get worse."[11] Since 2001, what used to be a "classical and scholarly" field now prompts "more volatile and direct questions."[12] It is a capricious and changing field in which past and present political agendas can be made manifest.

Prior to the First World War, the delineations of "Islamic art" had been drawn and rewritten to suit the needs of European museums, galleries, publications, and exhibitions, all of which had been shaped by the political legacies of colonialism. Perhaps the most systematic of these early approaches was that of the French savants under Napoleon in Egypt from 1798 to 1801, who included Islamic aspects of Egyptian art within the encyclopedic survey, *Description de l'Egypte*. This twenty-three-volume text, published between 1809 and 1828, was an important component of the "enlightened despotism" sought by Napoleon.[13] This investigation provides an early example of the politically loaded term "Orientalism," most famously critiqued by Edward Said in 1978. Though his commentary was not about Islamic art as such, it

reviewed the representation and interpretation of the Middle East through visual culture, starting with observations regarding primarily European artists from the nineteenth century.[14] Said rejected the cultural authenticity and political legitimacy of these artworks, claiming they perpetuated stereotypes through the mythologies of an imaginary or timeless Orient. In general terms, the work of the Orientalists perpetuated difference over familiarity, and evoked the strange, mystical, and exotic (or barbaric) over the rational or analytic.

Within that expanse of history and geography, it is possible to recognize enduring themes within what has been called Islamic art. These include the central roles of calligraphy, widespread aniconic attitudes to figuration and prevalence of geometric ornament, the persistence of anonymous production, and the importance placed upon the functional role or design of the object in society, as opposed to symbolic roles in art galleries. However, none of these themes are unique to Islamic visual cultures—they apply to the study of historic textiles, ceramics, armor, or books, for example. All of these themes have been revised or challenged in recent art from the Middle East and Central Asia.

The juxtapositions of Islamic art and contemporary art in the expanded Middle East are especially pertinent when considering the emergence of Middle Eastern modern art movements during the early twentieth century. Long marginalized as provincial spin-offs of mainstream movements in European art,[15] these have only relatively recently been subject to dedicated collecting by contemporary art institutions. Egyptian surrealism, for example, is a current subject of international scholarly and curatorial interest.[16] This reevaluation is noteworthy given Maged Atiya's observation that this group "never made a political impact, less for lack of trying than for its internationalist orientation in nativist setting."[17]

Such pluralistic discourses are still establishing their positions within international art historiography.[18] Although scholarly publications are emerging to acknowledge the political contexts informing modern art movements—such as nationalism, secularity, and gender relations—the differentiation between these regional discourses are yet to be widely taught within universities.[19] They are intermittently acknowledged by popular online resources such as the Heillbrunn Timeline of Art History, hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[20] These alternative narratives have complicated the concept of Islamic art after the mid-nineteenth century, for artists and art historians alike.[21]

More problematically, for international audiences the contributions of Middle Eastern artists, designers, and poets can seem all too irrelevant. They are located, like Star Wars, a long time ago in a place far, far away. Trying to engage current audiences with visual cultures from many centuries ago and thousands of miles away, creates issues of interpretation and relevance,

leading to a chiaroscuro of Golden Ages and Dark Ages, of historic periods or regional demographics both emphasized and omitted. When exceptional exhibitions are displayed, they primarily reach audiences in major capital cities. Few universities currently offer dedicated undergraduate subjects that survey the art of the Middle East, even fewer offer specializations across multiple subjects in this field. Beyond specialist museums and the most comprehensive encyclopedic collections, most international audiences have very limited access to, or understanding of, this important field within visual culture. The genre called Islamic art can be perceived as monolithic and reductivist, situated in the past rather than the present, and representative of a potentially imaginary set of relations rather than the complex realities of past and present patrons.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ANALOGIES

Despite those problems, the challenges facing international engagement with the art of the Middle East can be compared to the formation of Indigenous Australian art history over the last forty years. This comparison also relies on a dichotomy between how we regard the old and the new, the familiar and the exotic. One perspective serves deep-seated cultural purposes and represents ancient systems of knowledge. This is contested by what can be called Urban Aboriginal art (this split could also be described as the Bush versus the City). The former has been presented, often problematically, in an ethnographic museum-like context of anonymous objects detached from their cultural contexts. The latter, are artworks that actively engage international galleries as any other contemporary artist might, showcasing the named artist's agency as an individual. These are capable of critiquing their cultural legacies, not just perpetuating them.

Both Indigenous Australian and Middle Eastern visual cultures have suffered from variations of Said's Orientalism. These terms have disrupted their creative agency, because they are defined by systems of art historical review that have been imposed by others beyond these cultures. These have borrowed from Euro-Renaissance models that champion biographic attributions, figurative visual narratives, and tastes informed by hierarchies of cultural values, among other fundamental assumptions.[22] The reductive categorization of the terms "Islamic" and "Indigenous" thwarts the potential for artworks, and artists, from those fields to refer to things beyond their designation—such as politics.

Indigenous Australian art history is indebted to the rise of specialized scholarly interest from the second half of the twentieth century. The development of aboriginal art centers from the late 1940s, including Geoffrey

Bardon's work at Papunya, enabled not only the production of new works, but a conceptualization of Indigenous Australian art shaped by individuals, regions, and materials suited for display in existing gallery infrastructure. From the 1980s, postmodern, urban alternative directions within Indigenous art became increasingly evident, partly because of their deliberate incompatibility with conventions established for the curation of Indigenous art.[23]

Within the contemporary art of the Middle East and Central Asia, we see a similar contest of artistic intent and curatorial attitudes, played out over a longer period. Due to previous attitudes to attribution and analysis of objects, the old "Islamic art" was almost ethnographic. Biographic provenances were usually named through patrons, not makers. When possible, artworks were attributed within dynastic contexts, located in places named on maps, and likened to examples known elsewhere. Their display reflected these emphases in scholarship. For scholars of contemporary art, however, many of these concerns are secondary ambitions. Just like recent Indigenous Australian art, their capacity to serve as political and cultural critiques of identity are much more relevant for contemporary audiences.

THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUALS
AND INSTITUTIONS

The reception of "Islamic art" in the early twentieth century was shaped by specialized art historians, notably in Europe and the United States. Given the relative rarity of US-based lecturers specializing in this field after the Second World War, it is possible to trace many American academics back to a handful of well-positioned individuals. Members of this "first generation" include Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969),[24] Max van Berchem (1863–1921),[25] Richard Ettinghausen (1906–1979),[26] and Oleg Grabar (1929–2011).[27] Their successors, such as the prolific academics Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, form a second generation.[28] The patronage of figures like the Aga Khan (Prince Shah Karim Al Husseini Aga Khan IV), Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Nasser D. Khalili, and Syed Mohamad Albukhary has been vital for the increased visibility of "Islamic arts" and support of new scholarship. Influential peer-reviewed journals such as Harvard's *Muqarnas* and the United Kingdom-based *Hali* have evolved from niche readerships to standard international references. These people and publications have informed textbooks, grants, syllabi, and exhibitions. They are the dragomans or guides for curators and tertiary students worldwide, and have shaped international interpretations and expectations of the visual cultures of the Middle East.

Blair and Bloom, in a review of their US teaching practice, observed that by the 1970s "Islamic art remained a rather esoteric field taught in a few elite

institutions."[29] The oil crisis of the 1970s saw rapid change and growth in the field of Islamic art, prompted by "a sudden escalation of Western interest in the Middle East."[30] The catastrophe of September 11, 2001, sparked another surge of interest, instigating what might be called the current "third generation" of Islamic art academics, driven by new social and political agendas. Some of these interests may have been rebooted by the visa-cancelling and border-blocking actions of the Trump administration in early 2017.[31] For this third generation, English-language scholarship into various aspects of "Islamic" and contemporary Middle Eastern art is increasingly accessible online. International efforts to increase the visibility of these discourses can be seen through the rapid expansion of existing galleries and introduction of new institutions specializing in this field.[32] Formerly obscure pursuits like the reevaluation of Egyptian surrealism, *Khayamiya* textiles, or the role of the nude in Lebanese modernism, are widely attended at events like the College Art Association (CAA) conferences in the United States. Receiving much greater international attention, however, was the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) rapid curatorial action to display seven contemporary artworks by artists representing the seven nations temporarily prohibited from entering the United States under President Trump's executive orders on immigration in February 2017. These included works by Zaha Hadid, Tala Madani, Ibrahim el-Salahi, and others, enabled by the removal of works by artists such as Picasso, Matisse, and Picabia.[33]

Just as changing political and economic contexts can trigger scholarly responses to art history, getting to the heart of contemporary art from the Middle East and Central Asia requires an appreciation of the political contexts of the region. New generations of curators, educators, and artists are now being challenged "to make the complexities and diversities of Muslim cultural heritage more easily understandable and readily accessible."[34]

The curatorial design of the gallery formerly known as Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum in New York demonstrates some of their practical problems. In 2011, it re-opened as the "New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia." This has been criticized as a "murky designation . . . so lengthy that no-one will remember it."[35] It reflects the institution's need to restructure the world to suit their collection. Mehri Khalil also noted that the new position of Roman art within the circuit of the Islamic galleries at the Met requires visitors move around a Eurocentric heritage "like Muslims around the Ka'ba," so that visitors are inevitably "culturally positioned" by the museum. She also optimistically felt that the Metropolitan "ideally ought to be a safe haven from geopolitics," and noted that the temporary closure of these galleries from 2003, to make room for an expanded Greek and Roman space, was perceived by some as "annihilating Islam at a very sensitive time."[36]

Rebecca Lindsey's survey claims that the Metropolitan Museum displayed little to no art from the Middle East until the 1910s, when the collection was driven by an Orientalist emphasis on exotic decorative arts, selected in contrast to American design trends, and complicated by the wishes of private benefactors.[37] During the Second World War, Lindsey noted that North African art became an area of American interest following the Battle of El-Alamein, and textiles were displayed in lieu of more fragile works in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. It was not until early 1944 that the threat of air raids was declared over, as far as the Metropolitan Museum was concerned.[38] The most recent renovation of these galleries has been accompanied by an increasingly competitive Middle Eastern market for their own art, complicated by the "clandestine trade in antiquities," looted or otherwise exported.[39] This black market is also one of the reasons why the United Kingdom's antiques trade features a consistent provenance emphasis—seen in catalogue descriptions and price indexes—on items brought into the United Kingdom prior to 1950.[40]

Khalil also calls a curators' statement (by Sheila Canby) to task for claiming that the Metropolitan's Middle Eastern collection is "primarily secular." To Khalil's view, this "does not reflect the reality that the cultural and religious elements of Islamic art are interwoven."[41] To this tapestry, educators and curators must also add the political as an essential thread of interpretation—particularly for contemporary art.

This urgent need has been acknowledged by major collections in the United Kingdom and Europe as well as the Middle East. For example, the two major collections of Islamic Art in London—the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the British Museum—have recently completed renovations and committed to expansions for their exhibition spaces. This includes the showcasing of "Islamic" visual culture at the symbolic center of the British Museum through Venetia Porter's major 2012 exhibition *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam*. This exhibition was widely acclaimed and attracted nearly 120,000 visitors, yet was also criticized for playing down the Saudi government's attitudes to the preservation of heritage sites at Mecca.[42]

The V&A's 2006 transformation saw the "Islamic Middle East" section became the "Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art." This gallery's focal point remains the Ardabil Carpet, acquired under the recommendation of William Morris in 1893. It is interesting to note that the Islamic galleries came into existence at the V&A in the early 1950s, possibly in response to public interest following the 1948 Arab–Israeli war. Tim Stanley explains the design of the new galleries represents a substantial restructuring of the museum's collection, historically divided along lines informed by materials and the colonization of India, as well as the distinction from the acquisitions of the British Museum.[43] Their focus was to address the popular misconception

among visitors that "Islamic art" is the domain of exclusively religious or ritual objects, rather than a cultural concept.[44] They wanted visitors to leave with the impression that "Islamic art is beautiful, varied, and interesting."[45]

More interesting for political implications was the V&A's desire to respond to the polemical representation of the Middle East in British news media. Stanley summarizes this perception of Islamic art as "isolated and rejectionist, with no relevance to non-Muslims." As a result, the long-standing interactions between the Middle East, Europe, and Asia are emphasized in the display of historic objects. The V&A's online resources also include references to recent artworks, such as an Egyptian Wissa Wassef tapestry (2008) and a survey of contemporary Islamic architecture, which discusses new mosques in London, the restoration of damaged heritage sites, and the celebrated architect Zaha Hadid's proposed design for the Strasbourg Mosque (2000).[46] The Jameel Prize, first awarded in 2009, is a high-profile touring exhibition curated biannually by the V&A to showcase contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic traditions, drawn from a global field of practitioners. Finalists often feature content relating to recent sociopolitical events.

The British Museum announced in March 2015 that their Islamic art galleries would be entirely renewed, expanded, and relocated to a more prominent position by October 2018. This media release was accompanied by images of contemporary art from the Middle East, not historic artifacts like those displayed in the V&A or Metropolitan. Porter noted her focus on collecting contemporary art in order to "show the contrast, the breadth of creativity from early Islam to the present day . . . to explore how our collections represent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, colonialism and the formation of the new nation states taking us right up to the present day." [47] The British Museum already displays contemporary Middle Eastern art within its Islamic galleries, but responses to this announcement by the readers of British news media (unsurprisingly) demonstrated a staggering popular disregard for contemporary Islamic art—or, indeed, any form of visual culture from the Middle East.[48]

Perhaps surprisingly, the popular disregard for "Islamic art" appears to have been a factor in the decision of the custodians of the Keir Collection to loan their extraordinary treasures to the Dallas Museum of Art in Texas in 2014. This quickly turned the otherwise encyclopedic museum, with minimal representation of Middle Eastern visual culture as of 2013, into the third largest collection of Islamic art in the United States.[49] The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has also driven the acquisition and exhibition of contemporary Middle Eastern art with a view to increasing the visibility of the region as a dynamic creative center, relevant to the present day.[50] This situation is comparable to Australian attempts to increase the visibility of contemporary "Islamic art," such as the opening of the Islamic Museum of

Australia in Melbourne in February 2014, and the dedicated space for historic "Islamic art" in the Asian galleries of the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide. These institutions claim they are addressing immediate political and social needs through contemporary art exhibition programs—reducing marginalization by enabling mainstream visibility.

From another perspective, Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi (founder of the Barjeel Foundation, an extensive collection of twentieth-century Middle Eastern art frequently loaned to international exhibitions) regularly writes across many online platforms in support of contemporary gallery initiatives in Beirut, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Doha as the new "centres of gravity" for the art of the Middle East, distinguished for their diversity of artist-run spaces, commercial galleries, auction houses and most importantly, relative political stability.[51] The international agendas implied in such claims deserve acknowledgement in future reviews by art historians, for they include the ambitious development of international art projects like the new Louvre and Guggenheim museums in Abu Dhabi.

CASE STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

International exhibitions of art from the Middle East such as *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* (Saatchi Gallery, London, 2009)[52] *Light from the Middle East* (Photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2013)[53] *Islamic Art Now: Contemporary Art of the Middle East* (LACMA, 2015), *But A Storm is Blowing in from Paradise* (Guggenheim, New York, 2016)[54] and *Modern Art from the Middle East* (McMillan Centre, Yale University, 2017)[55] among others, are "repurposing [art] so that it becomes more clearly a vehicle for personal expression, freed from the constraints of patronage and functionality."[56] However, the structure of these exhibitions can also make these constraints explicit. For example, the 2013 V&A's photography exhibition was curated into three parts—Recording, Reframing, and Resisting. The photographic series by Jowhara AlSaud, *Out of Line*, and Amirali Ghasemi, *Party*, are critiques of censorship in Saudi Arabia and Iran, themes also supported by a nine-minute video interviewing five of the photographers. The "formidable presence" of female artists in the Middle East has also been highlighted in repeated surveys—typically framed in terms of the challenges they face to create and exhibit their work.[57]

Such identities are also critically addressed on national and regional scales. Faig Ahmed, a textile sculptor from Baku, Azerbaijan, transforms antique carpets and designs new variations on old patterns, conspicuously marred by computer-aided glitches, distortions, and speculative three-dimensional expansions. The original textile in *Recycled Tradition* (2013–14)[58] is a

Karabakh carpet, from a territory that was once part of Azerbaijan, but is now occupied by Armenia, unable to be visited by Azerbaijanis. It was sold to Ahmed by an elderly woman on the understanding that it was being sold to an artist. She had initially rejected offers by others, because it was the sole inheritance from her own grandmother. She also had been given the carpet by her grandmother when she married her husband, against her parent's wishes. Upon learning this story, Ahmed felt he could not repurpose the carpet as intended—finding himself "a hostage of tradition," and explaining, "I always thought that my mind is cold and I'm totally impersonal and that the tradition is only a part of history. But when you touch it directly, it changes. I've felt the responsibility for everything I do and now this artwork is a part of the recycled tradition and it carries not only this story but also my own."[59] The anonymity of carpets and their designers, once very loosely classified under the erroneous term "Islamic art," had seeped into his contemporary arts practice.

The photographic work of Lalla Essaydi also acknowledges this problematic legacy by situating female odalisques in intricate Moroccan *zellige*-tiled interiors, draped in textiles wrought with indecipherable calligraphy. Hassan Hajjaj also draws on Moroccan heritage through photography, displaying women as creative agents in command of their own identity through vibrant photographs of female motorcycle gangs.[60]

Contemporary studio sculpture from the Middle East can evoke related themes of multigenerational political legacies through subtle and nuanced means. Diana al-Hadid is a young artist (b.1981) from Syria, who resides in New York. Her work is internationally acclaimed and based on room-sized sculptural installations reminiscent of architectural models. She describes these as "impossible architecture," though their similarity to ruins is immediately apparent. In the case of her contribution to the Unveiled exhibition in 2009 at the prestigious Saatchi Gallery in London, *Tower of Infinite Problems* features two fallen structures, laid along the floor in an orientation unlike her previous (upright) sculptures. From one angle, these visually join to form a spiraling formation, which she likened to the repetition of history. These are responses by a member of the Syrian diaspora to a specific generation's crises—including the September 11 attacks and the War on Terror, as well as the Syrian civil war in the wake of the Arab Spring. Their political references provide their aesthetic resonance.

As another form of biographic analysis, the career of Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (b.1924) is shaped by a lifetime of political events within Iran. Her drawings and sculptures are inspired by the resplendent mirror-mosaic forms seen in the Shah Cheragh complex near Shiraz, which she was familiar with as a girl in the 1920–30s. Upon moving to New York, she became a contemporary of Jackson Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists,

and later worked with Andy Warhol. The revolution of 1979 disrupted her art practice in Tehran, and saw the confiscation of her American art collection, causing her to move to New York once again. It was not until 2004 that she returned to live in Tehran. As of 2015, her work is being celebrated in a major retrospective at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum.[61] It could be argued that Farmanfarmaian's lifelong interaction with Western art and Iranian politics mirrors, in microcosm, the turbulent relationship between the United States and Iran across the twentieth century.

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CONFLICT

Myrna Ayad, the Director of Art Dubai as of May 2016, attributes the combination of political instability and economic growth as a catalyst for new art, though the situating of contemporary art from the Middle East primarily around war or conflict is a destructive cliché.[62] Examples of this are explicit in the contemporary visual art inspired by the invasions of Iraq and the current conflict in Syria. This applies to artists from Iraq and those from other nations engaged in this conflict. For example, Jeremy Deller's *Baghdad, 5 March 2007* consists of the salvaged wreck of a burned car, "appropriated" from al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, following a suicide bombing that killed thirty-eight people and injured over one hundred others. Found objects have a strong place in art history, particularly since this installation is now part of the permanent collection of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London following an extensive tour of the United States. Critic Jonathan Jones likened it to the peat-preserved corpse of the Lindow Man in the British Museum and described it as "the most serious and thoughtful response to the Iraq war by any British artist."[63] It clearly left an impression on Jones, as he wrote about it again three days later,

> What immediately strikes you is the information this car brings, the terrible moment of reality. It is a piece of evidence; here is something solid, actual, to replace the strange abstraction of nightmare news stories from remote places. . . . It is a historical document, dragged from hell for us to contemplate in the calm of a museum.[64]

Frederick Deknatel described his impression of Deller's exhibit when it was installed in the IWM on the ground floor beneath galleries dedicated to the history of British military interventions in Iraq: "Sectarian violence continues, even if the media has moved on, drawn back only when the bombs are big enough. The car succeeds as an exhibit because it forces you to remember where it is from and how it got here; it doesn't let you forget Iraq."[65]

From the perspective of a hypothetical student of political studies, the car would speak quite plainly as a grotesque souvenir of a violent sectarian conflict. The nationality of the artist, be it British, American, Iraqi, would make little difference. There is a lack of intervention in these damaged materials, a detachment from individual or even national agendas on this installation as a communicative "sculpture" rather than an interpretative "artifact." It is a problematically simple statement for it reduces the nuances of decision-making, partisanship, interpretation, and representation to the material detritus of a bomb blast.

The representation of political events takes greater nuance when they are not simply appropriated from an event verbatim as statements but incorporated into ongoing forms of visual culture as recurring motifs or memories. The war rugs of Afghanistan are a spectacular example of this adaptation of political and social heritage into physical objects. They have been studied and published on account of their complex iconography, chronological variations, and idiosyncratic adaptations of the War on Terror in visual culture, as well as the Soviet–Afghan war (from 1979 to 1989) during which they first emerged.[66] Though perhaps an acquired taste, they are now a well-established field for textile collectors. These distinctive rugs adapted a preexisting indigenous craft heritage to include motifs from new technological, social, and political circumstances, and they marketed these innovations directly to foreign audiences. As textiles made for visiting collectors as souvenirs, they retain the historic convention of anonymity for the artisans, unlike most forms of contemporary art. Nigel Lendon describes them as "disquieting artifacts," and observes that they do not sit easily within carpet dealer's inventories.[67] They are an uneasy adaptation of the visual culture of prolonged warfare into the vocabulary of vernacular design. They may be read as both celebratory and bleakly satirical, entrepreneurial and strangely patriotic.

Another comparable example of political implications for the contemporary art of the Middle East is the *Revolution Khayamiya* by Hany Abdel Khader. He is one of the tentmakers of Cairo, an endangered community of artisans who sew elaborate appliqued textiles known as *Khayamiya*. These were used as decorated pavilions to host festivals and other commemorative events but are now primarily made as artworks. Although a new "genre" of politically active and socially responsive *Khayamiya* could have emerged from Abdel Khader's reinterpretations of this art form, this was not sustained. The 2011 revolution failed to deliver, for all Egyptians, the ambitious reforms that were demanded. The topic is now discussed by the tentmakers in diverse tones of disappointment, anger, and nostalgia. To them, it certainly has not been a triumph over a repressive regime. Whereas the Afghan weavers of "war rugs" lived with decades of warfare by various parties, leading to the acceptance, recurrence, and modification of generic military motifs, the Egyptian tentmakers had a comparatively brief revolutionary moment in 2011.

Despite the brevity of the 2011 revolution, the subsequent flourishing of Egyptian street art remains highly published, researched, and internationally regarded as a vibrant visual manifestation of political change.[68] Graffiti operates within well-established conventions of sociopolitical dissidence, all the more remarkable for the political context in which these were produced. These spray-painted or stenciled statements are painted for the most part by tertiary-educated artists who identify with globalized networks of contemporary "street art," somewhat removed from the general Egyptian public. Their work appropriates international visual cultures through abundant art historical references, particularly claiming Ancient Egyptian visual culture as signifiers of contemporary Egyptian youth identity. The infamous *Girl in the Blue Bra* became a rallying point for criticism of a range of social and political issues, including the politicization of the female body, beyond a mere symbol of victimization and resistance.[69] This simple stencil engages with the "citizen journalism" of mobile phone footage to create a powerful motif, shared online and on walls, in which its reproduction is an act of political and social critique.

Some resistance movements in Syria have produced their own art. These have been made internationally visible through publications such as *Syria Speaks* (2014), which features a range of cultural responses to the civil conflict, primarily in opposition to Assad's government.[70] As noted by Robyn Creswell, "much of the work in *Syria Speaks* is testimonial, blurring the boundary between aesthetics and journalism."[71] These Syrian artists present "a mirror image of regime culture . . . typically satirical, small-scale, and improvisatorial. Whereas government slogans and propaganda fetishize the image of the leader, the revolutionaries often deal with collective or anonymous subjects: women, orphans, dissenters." Their ideas, consequently, are pacifist, anti-sectarian, and feminist.[72] Posters developed by graphic designers are distributed online to be printed by protesters for demonstrations, using visual forms derived from Revolutionary Soviet abstraction and more recent Palestinian iconography of the 1970s and 1980s. Displaying these internationally provides a subversive alternative to the visual culture of the Syrian conflict, which has been recently dominated by the militant black and white flag of Islamic State extremists. Notably, their interactions with contemporary art are far less noteworthy than their looting and destruction of ancient art collections. Terrorists are not artists.

CONCLUSION

The art of the Middle East reflects changing political and social issues at individual, institutional, and regional levels. This chapter has outlined the shape of Islamic and Middle Eastern art as historic fields undergoing dramatic

recent changes. It demonstrated how major twentieth-century political issues and events are currently reflected, summarized, and contested through the visual cultures of the Middle East and Central Asia, primarily through international exhibitions in major museums and galleries beyond this region. Within these visual cultures, particularly in the form of contemporary art, we can see the emergence of negotiated multilayered Muslim identities and lifestyles. These exhibitions, artworks, and artists present many complex issues succinctly, ready for discussion.

An understanding of the complex political landscape of the Middle East and Central Asia is intrinsic to the production, representation, and analysis of the contemporary art of this dynamic region. The reproduction and interpretation of this knowledge is assisted by contemporary and historic art as a vehicle for discourse. These case studies present forums and scenarios for innovative commentary and critiques of public institutions. They are not isolated to the laboratory-like environment of a gallery; contemporary artists and curators are players on international stages. Their exhibitions are designed for global audiences yet draw from specific regional contexts. They provide an important series of perspectives upon the politics and implications of cultural production in the Middle East.

Art historians can reform the orientalizing heritage of cultural, religious, conflict-centered, and historic reductivism by emphasizing the dynamic political tensions of the twentieth century within the visual art of the Middle East. One effective way to do this is to chart ongoing changes in art history to their concurrent political and social movements. This method is now being pursued by curators, educators, and artists alike. Given the intense interest in this region, this renewal of purpose for Middle Eastern art is not only timely, it is a necessity for international audiences.

NOTES

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3. Ibid.

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11. Souren Melikan, "Clarity Vanishes in Big 'Islamic Art' Auctions," *New York Times,* April 26, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/arts/27iht-melikian27.html.

12. Juliette Peers, "Mightier than the Sword," *Artlink* 23, no. 2 (2003), https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/2467/mightier-than-the-sword/. In this piece Peers quotes Chris McCaullife from the catalogue of the "Arabic Script, Beauty and Meaning" exhibition at the University of Melbourne's *Ian Potter Museum of Art,* from March 22–23, 2003.

13. Diana Kappel, "Soldiers and Savants: An Enlighted Despot Discovers Egypt" (Masters thesis, Seton Hall University, 2013), http://scholarship.shu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2876&context=dissertations.

14. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

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nativist setting," Twitter, June 1, 2017, 12:27PM https://twitter.com/salamamoussa/
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20. Such as the essay by Salwa Mikdadi, "Egyptian Modern Art," October
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and Marika Sardar's 2004 essay on nineteenth century Persian (Qajar) art (noting
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21. Sussan Babaie, "Voices of Authority: Locating the 'Modern' in 'Islamic' Arts,"
Getty Research Journal 3 (2011): 133–49, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23005392.

22. Martina Muller-Wiener, "Aesthetics vs Context? Towards New Strategies for
the Study of the Object," in *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and
Archaeology of the Muslim World in the Twenty-First Century,* eds. Benoit Junod,
Georges Khalil, Stefan Weber, and Gerhard Wolf (London: Saqi Books, 2012), 139.

23. Indigenous Australian art is a vast and dynamic field in art history. For an
introduction, see Susan McCulloch and Emily McCulloch Childs, *McCulloch's
Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Complete Guide* (Whistlewood: McCulloch &
McCulloch, 2008).

24. Arthur Upham Pope and his partner Phyllis Ackerman were established as
authorities on Persian art by the early 1920s, particularly as advisers to major muse-
ums and private collectors. From 1925 he was assisted by Reza Khan Pahlavi (then
prime minister and later Shah) who granted Pope access to historic sites. His scholar-
ship culminated in the *Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*
(1938–39), published by Oxford University over six volumes. Until the late 1970s,
this text defined the field of Persian art history.

25. Max van Berchem was a Swiss scholar of Arabic epigraphy, whose Foundation
continues to fund the publication, research, and heritage preservation of Islamic art
and architectural sites worldwide.

26. Richard Ettinghausen was a German-born curator of Islamic art, graduating
with a PhD in this field from Frankfurt in 1931. He presented an influential lecture on
"The Character of Islamic Art" to Princeton University in 1941, and commissioned
Oleg Grabar to help him divide a survey of Islamic art and architecture into two
volumes in 1959. Jaclynne Kerner claims that Ettinghausen "almost singlehandedly"
established the scholarly field of Islamic iconography. See, Jaclynne J. Kerner "From
Margin to Mainstream: The History of Islamic Art and Architecture in the Twenty-
First Century," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies*, ed. Clinton Bennett
(London: Bloomsbury 2013), 238.

27. It is indicative of Grabar's exceptional influence that a four-volume collection featuring eighty-three of his articles was published by Ashgate under the audacious title *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005–06).

28. Blair and Bloom both received their doctorates in Islamic Art from Harvard University. They share the Hamad bin Khalifa Endowed Chair of Islamic Art at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Norma Jean Calderwood University Chair of Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College. Their ongoing contributions are distinctive for their diversity across many aspects of Islamic art, ranging from specialized insights to popular books.

29. Blair and Bloom, *Mirage*, 152.

30. Kerner, "From Margin to Mainstream," 238.

31. A two-day seminar at the University of Michigan was memorably titled "Islamic Studies in the Trumpocene: Art/Praxis/Ideas," (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, April 13–14, 2017), https://events.umich.edu/event/38698.

32. It also bears mentioning that the Louvre's expansion in 2011 facilitated a long-awaited display of their extensive Middle Eastern collections from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries. Other recent institutional developments include the Museum of Islamic Art in Athens (an extension of the Benaki Museum) which opened in 2004, and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, which opened in 2008, and the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, which opened in 2014. The Islamic Art Museum in Kuala Lumpur, which opened in 1998, is sponsored by Syed Mokhtar Albukhary of the Albukhary Foundation, which also is supporting the current expansion of the British Museum's galleries for Islamic art. The Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin will re-open in 2019, following a tripling of its exhibition space.

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34. Stefan Weber (Director of the Islamic Art Museum in Berlin) quoted by Tamsin Walker, "Berlin's Museum of Islamic Art Reaches Out to New Audiences," *Deutsche Welle*, February 1, 2010, http://dw.de/p/LmyJ.

35. Mehri Khalil, "From 'Islamic Art' to 'Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia': Reliving the Distortions of History," *Jadaliyya*, April 30, 2013, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11380/from-%E2%80%9Cislamic-art%E2%80%9D-to-%E2%80%9Carab-lands-turkey-iran-cent.

36. Ibid.

37. Rebecca Lindsey, "Displaying Islamic Art at the Metropolitan: A Retrospective Look," *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, February 2, 2012, http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/now-at-the-met/features/2012/displaying-islamic-art-at-the-metropolitan.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Melikan, "Clarity Vanishes."

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The Afghan Threat to the Security of the Central Asian Nations

Myth or Reality?

Azam Isabaev

Rarely does one find scholarly argument addressing the credibility of official Central Asian[1] discourses on the Afghan threat to regional or national security. The dominant position on this issue in academia is that by securitization of the Afghan issue, the Central Asian states are attempting to create a smokescreen to hide their own domestic problems as well as using the "Afghan threat" to legitimize their authoritarian regimes. The same sorts of scholarly analyses were published when Central Asian governments began to raise alarms about the emerging Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/IS) factor in the Afghan territories.

This chapter comprises an attempt to determine whether the threat from the Afghan territories is a real concern for the Central Asian states or whether it is merely used for rent-seeking and domestic oppression of opposition groups. To begin with, the chapter makes a comparative analysis of the official discourses on the Afghan threat in Central Asia and the official evaluations of the Afghan threat in the Western world. In particular, the official narratives about the Afghan threat by Tajik and Uzbek officials will be compared to those of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The aim is to reveal what the Central Asian and the Western nations mean by "Afghan threat." Once the parallels are drawn and the differences are exposed, the chapter attempts to find out why Central Asia's "Afghan fear" and the US/NATO's "Afghan concerns" are given different scholarly explanations, where the former is labeled as a "fiction" and the latter becomes a part of the international community's priority tasks.

This chapter argues that both the official Central Asian discourse and the Western scholarly interpretation of it, represent extremes in their respective

theoretical propositions. While the former derives from a system-centric (neorealist) approach with external causal primacy, the latter argues for an agent-centric (authoritarian-rent-seeking) approach with domestic causal primacy.

Methodologically, the chapter is built on speech and text analysis. Official statements, as well as principal documents and declarations concerning Afghanistan and Central Asia, have been analyzed. For the Western scholarly discourse, I have concentrated on an array of policy papers which have emerged recently in light of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan up to 2014. These policy papers directly inform and advise decision-makers, and thus significantly determine the content of the current dominant Western scholarly discourse on the Central Asia–Afghanistan relationship.

This chapter discusses the official discourses of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on Afghanistan and compares it with official Western and scholarly discourse. The selection of these two Central Asian countries is justified for the following reasons: first, both states border Afghanistan and have relatively strong ethno-political and cultural ties with it; and second, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have followed similar paths in their relations with Afghanistan since the early 1990s and have, in many respects, been proactive. In the 1990s, both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan backed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, they willingly supported the US/NATO/ISAF-mission in Afghanistan by providing bases and infrastructure, including NATO's nonlethal overland transportation to and from Afghanistan. Thus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have been major Central Asian players in Afghan politics. They have constantly securitized the Afghan issue, which has been reflected in their official statements.

The chapter proceeds through three steps: first, selected official statements will show how Tajikistan and Uzbekistan depict their "Afghan concerns"; second, Western official discourse on Afghanistan, emanating from the United States and NATO, will be described; and third, the chapter will show how Western scholarship tends to interpret Central Asian discourse on Afghanistan. Such analysis aims to demonstrate that while Central Asian and Western official concerns on Afghanistan largely coincide, the Western scholarly discourse substantially diverges in terms of questioning the credibility of Central Asian worries over Afghanistan.

THE OFFICIAL CENTRAL ASIAN DISCOURSE ON AFGHANISTAN: TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

As the source of official discourse, I refer to selected addresses of leaders (presidents and ministers) at the United Nations General Assembly

(UNGA) as well as other notable statements. The views of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with respect to Afghanistan are, in many respects, identical. They securitize their neighbor in a way which is largely shared, both in the content and the structure of their statements. Since Tajikistan's and Uzbekistan's first ever statements at the UNGA in the early 1990s, the Afghan conflict and threats associated with it have become an integral part of their annual addresses to the United Nations (UN). Throughout the 1990s, their discourse on "Afghan threats," ranging from terrorism and religious extremism to drug trafficking, was firmly established, becoming the foundation for subsequent speeches. Apart from perceived threats, both states attempted to promote their own diplomatic initiatives as well as socioeconomic projects.

The Afghan discourse of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has been subject to particular historical periods and/or turning points, which have considerably affected the evolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. As such, three major timelines are differentiated here: the 1990s; the September 11 attacks and the subsequent US/NATO/ISAF-mission in Afghanistan; and the 2011–14 gradual withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan. Important to note is that the latter two events have not changed, but rather have substantially reinforced the already existing security agenda of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan vis-à-vis Afghanistan, which was shaped in previous years.

The 1990s

It should be noted that the Afghan discourse of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the early 1990s had one particular nuance which distinguishes it qualitatively from the discourse of other periods, that is: viewing Afghanistan through, and in connection with, the civil war in Tajikistan (1992–97).

During their first ever appearance at the UNGA in 1993, the presidents of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan spoke, in their respective statements, first and foremost about the situation in Tajikistan. They considered the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan a co-affecting factor for instability in Tajikistan. Both states underlined the tense situation on the Tajik–Afghan border, pointed to Afghanistan as a source of international terrorism and drug business, and called on the international community to make practical proposals for the resolution of the Afghan conflict, which would have a positive effect on processes in Tajikistan as well.[2]

Nevertheless, Afghanistan remained a key security concern for both states even after inter-Tajik peace was concluded in 1997. Having solved the "Tajik issue," Dushanbe and Tashkent started to concentrate on the threats stemming from Afghanistan, by evaluating them as highly dangerous to their national, as well as regional, and global security.[3]

The September 11 Attacks and the Subsequent US/NATO/ISAF-Mission in Afghanistan

As stated earlier, the September 11 attacks and the emergence of an international military presence in Afghanistan and, to some extent, in Central Asia, has not changed the already existing Tajik and Uzbek security agenda with respect to Afghanistan but has rather reinforced it and further underpinned the Tajik and Uzbek positions on this issue. Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have used the opportunity to reiterate the "rightness" of their previous statements and have continued to mention the basic threats persisting in and emanating from Afghanistan.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States, Tajikistan portrayed itself as a target and Afghanistan as a source of terrorism,[4] while highlighting the importance of the international community's efforts "toward complete elimination of the hotbeds of international terrorism on its territory and toward eradication of religious extremism and narcotics threat."[5] Similarly, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Uzbekistan expressed support for the international coalition's mission[6] and accentuated the regional and global implications of the Afghan situation characterizing it as a "breeding ground and hotbed of international terrorism."[7]

In general, since 2001, the Tajik and Uzbek discourse on Afghanistan has evolved, as previously noted, mainly around three basic threats—terrorism, religious extremism, and drugs. However, one can uncover differences between aspects emphasized by each of the states in particular. In its statements, Tajikistan has especially concentrated on so-called narco-aggression. This aspect not only occupies the greatest part of the text on Afghanistan within its statements, but also has come to be the first point voiced.[8] One can assume that the Tajik focus on drug production and drug trafficking may be associated with its geographical conditions; at 750 miles (1,206 kilometers), the Tajik–Afghan border is not only much longer than the 85 miles (137 kilometer) Uzbek–Afghan one, but is also mountainous, which makes measures to intercept the trafficking highly challenging.

The threat of narcotics has also been constantly present in Uzbekistan's statements, but unlike Tajikistan, Uzbekistan has frequently placed greater emphasis on concern about the militarization of Afghanistan. Since its first initiative in 1995, "to ban the delivery of weapons to Afghanistan from any interested state,"[9] it has consistently expressed concerns over the "uncontrolled proliferation/accumulation of weapons," as well as the necessity of "reduction and clearance of the Afghan territory from weapons."[10]

The focus on demilitarization is not a new aspect of the Uzbek security agenda on Afghanistan, produced as a result of the US/NATO/ISAF-mission. On the contrary, as shown above, this aspect has been present since the 1990s

and is still being raised by Uzbek authorities in various international forums. This particular stance of Uzbekistan may have been reinforced after the incursions by Afghanistan-based militants and the resulting military clashes with those militants, who attempted to penetrate the territory of Uzbekistan through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Moreover, in 2010, Uzbekistan also viewed "the Afghan factor as having played a significant role in destabilizing the situation in Kyrgyzstan and instability in Tajikistan."[11]

It can also be observed that Tajikistan's and Uzbekistan's statements fit in with the evaluations and the concerns raised by the international community over the ongoing situation in Afghanistan. The so-called resurgence of the Taliban—meaning a tremendous rise in resistance by the militants and their increasing advances, mainly in the southern part of Afghanistan, observed after US strategic attention shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq—has also been mentioned in Tajik and Uzbek speeches. Tajikistan noted that "the Taliban and advocates of Al-Qaeda are again raising their heads and making attempts to restore the infrastructure of terror,"[12] and Uzbekistan, in turn, pointed to a "radicalization of situation" and intensification of terrorist raids.

2011–14: Gradual Withdrawal of International Troops from Afghanistan

The announcement about the drawdown of forces, made by US President Barack Obama in December 2009, as well as NATO's declaration in 2010 about the start of its mission's transition period from mid-2011, were too important not to affect the Afghan discourse of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Two major tendencies can be seen in their respective statements: an increase in the concern over the situation in Afghanistan in light of the withdrawal of troops; and the promotion of their own political recommendations for the settlement of the Afghan conflict. The latter was also accompanied by a listing of the contributions each of them has made to the common neighbor (building of bridges and railways, and the supply of electricity and humanitarian goods).

The expected withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan made both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan stress, in their statements, the likely future escalation of the situation in Afghanistan. In its addresses to the UNGA, Tajikistan spoke about "upcoming difficulties in Afghanistan" as well as maintaining the "targeted support of the international community."[13] And during his annual addresses to the *Majlisi Oli* (Tajik parliament), President Emomali Rahmon called for an increase in attention to Afghanistan as well as a strengthening of the borders.

Given the threats mentioned and the withdrawal of the international anti-terrorist forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the heads of law enforcement and military structures must take immediate steps aimed at fighting terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, as well as enhancing the country's defensive potential and protection of the state borders.[14]

As far as Uzbekistan is concerned, Tashkent has been clearly pointing to the potential deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan in light of the pullout of forces from the country.

The tough problems may surface due to the forthcoming drawdown of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) from Afghanistan by late 2014 and the transfer of responsibility in ensuring stability in the country to the newly created Afghan national security forces. Today, it becomes obvious that such a development of events may lead to the rise of a standoff between confronting forces in Afghanistan itself and around it, the growth of extremism and radicalism, a further surge of drug trafficking and aggravation of the tension in the whole region.[15]

   The persisting instability in Afghanistan, which shows a tendency to escalate further, poses a serious threat to the stability and security of Central Asia and the greater region. In the unfolding situation, the accelerated drawdown of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) may turn out to be counterproductive, and this can complicate the state of affairs in Afghanistan even more.[16]

As stated, rising concerns have been accompanied by the promotion of their own visions of the political settlement in Afghanistan. Since 2010, Tajikistan, in its statements to the UNGA, has begun to mention the work of the quadrilateral meeting on Afghanistan, consisting of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan.[17]

   As for Uzbekistan, since the first initiation at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Tashkent has begun promoting the creation of a "Six plus Three"[18] negotiation platform in its annual addresses to the UNGA and beyond. Since then, this proposal has virtually dominated the Uzbek agenda on Afghanistan.[19]

THE OFFICIAL WESTERN DISCOURSE

In principle, the Western discourse on Afghanistan does not differ in substance from the Central Asian one. In the 1990s, concern over Afghanistan as a base of international terrorism and drugs production was present in official Western discourse. The September 11 attacks intensified those concerns.

Even now, in light of the withdrawal process, NATOs basic goal for Afghanistan is to prevent the state from becoming a terrorists' safe haven again.

As stated earlier, by "the official Western discourse," I am referring to some principal documents of the United States and NATO, as these two actors have, so far, been the major Western players on the Afghan military-political scene. For the United States, I refer to the National Security Strategy (editions from the early 1990s up to the present time), and for NATO—declarations on Afghanistan.

By looking at the National Security Strategy (NSS) from the 1990s to the 2000s, one can observe a gradual evolution of Afghanistan in the US security assessment: from a state affected by the problem of refugees, to a drugs producer and terrorists' shelter.

In the NSS of the early 1990s, Afghanistan appeared against the backdrop of the Soviet troop withdrawal. The document highlighted the necessity of helping refugees return home, as well as support for a "comprehensive political settlement."[20] The NSS retained almost the same wording on Afghanistan until 1996. From 1997, the United States associated Afghanistan with the narcotics problematic, by pointing to "the flow of illegal drugs from South Asia, most notably from Afghanistan."[21]

In the late 1990s, however, Afghanistan made a "jump" into the thematic framework of "transnational threats," in particular "terrorism" within the NSS. Together with Sudan, it was portrayed as a place harboring "one of the most active terrorist bases in the world."[22] The NSS mentioned the strikes the United States carried out in August 1998 against "terrorist facilities in Afghanistan," which "contained key elements of the bin Laden network's infrastructure, and served as a training camp for literally thousands of terrorists from around the globe."[23] The document also further associated Afghanistan with the "opium harvest" and "illegal drugs."[24]

In 2000, the United States considerably broadened the "Afghanistan topic." First, it gave information about designating and sanctioning the Taliban regime as one of "particular concern" for "severe violations of religious freedom."[25] Second, and most importantly, the United States started to consider Afghanistan as posing a "serious threat to US interests": "Afghanistan remains a serious threat to U.S. worldwide interests because of the Taliban's continued sheltering of international terrorists and its increasing export of illicit drugs. Afghanistan remains the primary safe haven for terrorists threatening the United States, including Osama bin Laden."[26]

Since 2002, Afghanistan has become one of the most important issues in the NSS due to the direct military involvement of the United States and NATO in the country. In 2002, the document highlighted the "liberation" of Afghanistan as well as the continuation of "hunting down the Taliban

and Al-Qaeda," and underlined the importance of not letting Afghanistan "threaten its neighbors" once again and "provide a haven for terrorists."[27]

The term Af–Pak, popularized by US diplomat Richard Holbrooke appeared in the next NSS of 2010. Af–Pak stands for the interconnectedness of (in)stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, pointing to the period of the so-called resurgence of militants in Afghanistan and in areas bordering with Pakistan. The NSS called Afghanistan and Pakistan an "epicenter of the violent extremism practiced by Al-Qaeda," and pointed to the Taliban as controlling "large swaths of Afghanistan" and to Al-Qaeda as being "allowed to operate with impunity."[28] The document provided information, first about sending additional American troops (a "surge") to "break the Taliban momentum" and "defeat Al-Qaeda and its violent extremist affiliates," and, second, about the start of the gradual withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan from mid-2011, while simultaneously training local forces and supporting the economy and good governance.[29]

The latest NSS (2015) admittedly does not express such serious concern over Afghanistan as previous editions. The document points to the completion of the combat mission in Afghanistan and the transition to a limited counterterrorism mission "against the remnants of Al-Qaeda." It points out that the United States, in concert with NATO/ISAF, will maintain support for local security forces in particular, as well as for the Afghan government in general.[30] However, it should be noted that one of the main messages of the latest issue of the NSS seems to be about how a specific goal set by the Obama administration has been successfully achieved, that is, the goal of shifting from "costly and large-scale ground wars" to "targeted counterterrorism operations."[31] The document prioritizes nonmilitary preventive measures (diplomacy), as well as sharing the burden with partners. As an illustrative example, the document makes a comparison between 180,000 troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan back in 2008 and fifteen thousand at present. Does the absence of dangers previously assigned to Afghanistan indicate real success on the ground? Or does it merely serve to demonstrate the promises fulfilled and reflect present US imperatives (e.g., ending America's costly wars abroad and retrenchment)? Such questions remain open or at least prompt different speculations.

As for NATO, its official discourse does not substantially (if ever) differ from that of the United States. It could never be contradictory per se. In line with Article 5 of the NATO treaty, it has been a partner of the US-led operation against the Taliban from the very beginning. Since then, NATO has been consistent with and complementary to US strategy on Afghanistan. With every major step taken by the United States, NATO has followed suit: surge in troops; transfer of responsibility; pull-out of troops; ending the combat mission; maintaining the post-2014 mission in Afghanistan.[32]

In general, apart from joint efforts to support the Afghan government and despite the evolution/change of priorities over the past few years, the United States and NATO still retain their basic concern/goal over Afghanistan, that is, not to let Afghanistan become a safe haven for terrorists ever again.

The analysis of Central Asian and Western official discourses demonstrates that they are quite similar in terms of evaluations of threats emanating from Afghanistan. Although Central Asian preoccupation with Afghanistan dates back to the early 1990s, since 2001, the views of both sides have largely been identical. In the next section, I will turn to the Western scholarly discourse, which sees different motives behind Central Asian concerns.

WESTERN SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE ON CENTRAL ASIA–AFGHANISTAN

Western knowledge about Central Asian politics has obviously expanded a great deal since the 1990s. There has been an evolution from a system-centric approach to Central Asian states as a battlefield of the great powers and an area considerably affected by regional instabilities (in particular those arising from Afghanistan), to an agent-centric approach giving insights into the domestic vulnerabilities underlying state behavior. This particular shift or advance in scholarly explanations, has also led to considerable reconsideration of the Afghan factor for Central Asia. Over the past couple of years, a series of policy papers which address the Central Asia–Afghanistan relationship in light of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, demonstrate an extreme position, by concentrating on the domestic affairs of Central Asian states, while virtually rejecting the systemic factors, presented by the situation in Afghanistan. It seems that the insights into behavioral patterns of neo-patrimonial authoritarian states of Central Asia are literally translated into their approaches to Afghanistan as well. They point out that the genuine Central Asian concern over Afghanistan is not the same as the US/NATO's concern, despite the fact that they express similar worries in their official statements. On the contrary, Western scholars argue that, by virtue of the causal primacy of domestic politics of Central Asian states, their Afghanistan polices are also nothing more than instrumentalization within the regime-survival and rent-seeking pattern. In particular, scholars argue that Central Asian governments intentionally exaggerate spill-over from Afghanistan and use the threat of radical Islam to justify the overall oppression of domestic opposition groups. Concerning the drug threat, Central Asian officials are described to be the main drivers and beneficiaries of the narco business.

Here, I would like to cite a couple of Western policy papers, which attempt to explain "the real state of affairs" with respect to Central Asia's

relationship to Afghanistan and make corresponding recommendations for their decision-makers.

In a joint article, Scott Radnitz and Marlene Laruelle call on Western strategists not to fall victim to "mappism." That is, not to make assessments based on geographic proximity, which lead to "faulty assumptions"[33] about likely spill-over from Afghanistan into Central Asia. The authors contend that Central Asian "alarmism" over Afghanistan is "sold to ill-informed observers" and reveals certain political interests behind that alarm.

> U.S. officials must keep in mind that the spill-over narrative supports two claims from Central Asian governments that are self-serving, erroneous, and counterproductive for U.S. policy. . . . In arguing that their sovereignty is at risk, they have successfully played the victim card vis-à-vis their Afghan neighbor. . . . The expected rise in narco-traffic post-2014 will not be a spill-over from Afghanistan but "business as usual" carried out by senior officials in both Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. Moreover, the "non-lethal" material to be given to Afghan and Central Asian armies by NATO nations upon the latter's exit could assist Central Asian armies and security services in repressing their own populations. . . . The tendency to blame others comes naturally from the region's politicians, and is often sold to ill-informed observers. Yet the perception of Afghanistan as the region's scourge inevitably distracts from domestic political failings.[34]

The article sees the Afghan posture of Central Asian states solely through their domestic constraints. Furthermore, the Central Asian states themselves appear to be nurturing the instability in Afghanistan. A similar logic can be seen in another policy paper informing the European Union about the impact on Central Asia of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Although it briefly mentions "some real potential spill-overs" such as a "possible collapse of Afghan national security forces," "substantial flows of refugees from Afghanistan" as well as "destabilization in Tajikistan," it concentrates on domestic constraints of the states under discussion.

> The main security threats to Central Asia are neither externally driven through Afghanistan, nor do they consist of potential inter-state military conflicts. Threats to the region's stability lie foremost in deeply-embedded state corruption and links to drug-trafficking, which affects the region's governance. Central Asian countries' national security agencies also play a negative role in the region's security, mainly due to their corrupt and rent-seeking nature and their fixation on regime security instead of on state and community security.[35]

A report by Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazemi is also skeptical about Central Asian concerns over Afghanistan. Although the authors admit the

difficulty of predicting how events will develop in Afghanistan and Central Asia, they are quite sure about "exaggerations" from Central Asia, which serve their rent-seeking regimes.

> In reality, throughout Central Asia the main players in narcotics trafficking are government employees, security officers and mafia figures. . . . Being prepared for possible spill-over from Afghanistan is often mentioned, yet the threat of Islamist insurgents connected to Afghanistan is, and has been, consistently exaggerated. Some foreign analysts can be faulted for their ignorance and poor analytical skills, but local governments' alarmist public assessments (excluding that of Kazakhstan) have more to do with their desire to justify their oppressive and authoritarian internal politics while seeking funding from foreign patrons.[36]

Another article in this series of publications on the post-2014 Central Asia–Afghanistan relationship, delivers the same message. The paper calls on Central Asian states not to "oversell the overspill" of Afghanistan, stating that "Central Asian regimes constitute a key element in their own right in the emerging instability in the region."[37]

Research on Central Asia is also being affected by the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan. Western scholarship interprets the emerging ISIS-factor in Afghanistan as yet another political tool for Central Asian elites to further consolidate their power and suppress the domestic opposition, which in turn creates internal radicalization.[38]

With respect to home-grown radicalization, such claims are well-reasoned, but their generalization might be misleading, as well. For example, John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery argue, "there is no evidence to support the idea that radicalization is more likely to occur in authoritarian states and among poor populations."[39] They further add, "There is growing evidence suggesting that a small number of individuals and small groups are drawn to violent extremism from within democratic and prosperous Western societies."[40]

FROM "LOCUS OF DANGERS" TO "LOCUS OF CHARLATANS"

The Western scholarly discourse on the "Afghan threat" to Central Asian states rests on plausible theoretical findings. In particular, Central Asian states fall well within the theoretical framework of weak states, which gives a clue to understanding basic (recurrent) patterns of weak state behavior.

There was a kind of evolution in grasping the weak state problematic from a system-centered to an agent-centered approach. For systemic theories

such as neorealism, weak states are distinguished from great ones on the basis of distribution of power in the international system. Correspondingly, due to their lesser material capabilities, weak states are more vulnerable to systemic (external) constraints and "concerned primarily with events in their immediate vicinity."[41] However, neorealism's overemphasis on the systemic level and its neglect of the domestic level made it unable to identify some particular patterns of behavior of weak states. In this regard, agent-centered approaches such as Third Worldism accentuated peculiar domestic structures of weak states, in particular, their internal fragility, which fundamentally determines core security problems.[42] Such domains are especially characteristic of Third World states or newly independent states, which are usually faced with difficult nation-building processes, so that their primary focus is on internal challenges rather than external.

Post-Soviet Central Asian states are no exception in this respect: it is hardly possible to better understand their behavior without taking into account their inherent domestic features such as authoritarianism, neo-patrimonialism, and clientelism. Indeed, viewing Central Asian states as "like-units" ("billiard balls"), which are distinguished from others only by their material capabilities, is not sufficient to explain and understand the patterns of their behavior. On the contrary, their internal constraints as well as rent-seeking authoritarian patrimonial regimes tell us much more about them than mere systemic pressures.

However, what one can see in ongoing scholarly discussions on Central Asian politics in general, and Central Asian policies on Afghanistan in particular, is the rising analytical imbalance, that is, a tendency not to supplement but rather to supplant one dominant approach with another. As illustrated above, agent-centered approaches such as authoritarianism, neo-patrimonialism, and rentierism are becoming decisive lenses through which the Central Asian posture to Afghanistan is being seen by many Western scholars, whereas old, but still valid, propositions of system-centered approaches about the pressures of proximate events on weak states' behavior are being equated with "faulty assumptions" and "ill-informedness," and are, thereby, avoided by scholars of the region. Certainly, systemic approaches contributed to the generation of "dangerous pictures" of weak state domains, which in many cases were not proved empirically. In particular, an initial Western "discourse of endangerment" of Central Asia was later tellingly challenged as misrepresenting and distorting.[43] It seems however, that the discourse has swung from one extreme to the other: the discussion of Central Asia as "a locus of dangers" has been replaced by the discussion of Central Asia as "a locus of charlatans."

CONCLUSION

The official Western and Central Asian discourses on real and potential threats associated with events in Afghanistan have been largely identical from the late 1990s up to the present. Even where emphasis differed there was a common referential basis: preventing Afghanistan from becoming the terrorists' shelter it was in the past. Apart from different accentuations, another difference lies in the way in which the respective discourse has evolved. The Western discourse started to consider the situation in Afghanistan as threatening to regional and global security shortly before the September 11 attacks, while Central Asian officials have been referring to the issue since the early 1990s. Another distinction can be seen in the tonality of discourses. The Western concern over Afghanistan reached its apogee in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, while Central Asian preoccupation with the issue was especially "loud" in the 1990s, or prior to September 11—that is, in the absence of the international community's direct involvement—as well as prior to 2014—that is, in expectation of the regress of the international community's direct involvement.

With respect to the Western scholarly discourse on the implications for Central Asia of the situation in Afghanistan, the interpretation has evolved from more or less equal consideration of domestic and external factors to an imbalance, by increasingly concentrating on the former and neglecting the latter. It seems that Western analysts tend to downplay the Afghan spill-over to Central Asia to the same extent to which Central Asia exaggerates it.

Obviously, neither pure domestic nor absolute external considerations serve a better understanding of the Afghan factor for Central Asia. In this respect, the most important question seems to be: When does internal pressure end and when does systemic pressure start and vice versa? A deeper and more thorough differentiation is needed, so as to distinguish between "alarmism" and "real concern," between "rent-seeking" and "targeted funding," between "governmental drug-business" and "drug-threat as such," between "endogenous radical Islam" and "exogenous radical Islam," and so on. The insights on the primacy of agents' internal constraints within weak states should not lead to the denial of systemic constraints. Indeed, neorealist insights about the greater pressures of the systemic realm on weak states, as well as the greater vulnerability of weak states to neighboring events, still has explanatory power in its own right. Individually taken, pure agent-based and pure system-based approaches correspond, respectively, to the myth and reality of "the Afghan threat" to Central Asia. In combination, however, these approaches can be informative about the extent to which that threat is "a fiction" and the extent to which it constitutes a real concern for Central Asia.

NOTES

1. Although in historical, cultural, and other contexts, the geographic area of the Central Asian region might be broader, this chapter refers to Central Asia as a region comprising five former Soviet republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

2. For some of the early speeches regarding Afghanistan see Islom Karimov, *Bizdan ozod va obod vatan qolsin* [Our goal: Free and prosperous motherland] (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1996), 49–60; Islom Karimov, *Bunyodkorlik yulidan* [On the way to creation] (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1996), 56–59; Emomali Rahmon, "Vistuplenie na 48-y sessii Generalnoy Assamblei Organizatsii Obyedinennih Natsiy" [Speech at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly] (New York, September 29, 1993), http://president.tj/ru/node/1091; and Emomali Rahmon, "Vistuplenie na 49-y sessii Generalnoy Assamblei OON" [Speech at the 49th session of the UN General Assembly] (New York, September 30, 1994), http://www.prezident.tj/ru/node/1097.

3. For example, Rashid Alimov, "Statement of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan to the United Nations H.E. Mr. Rashid Alimov at the 55th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Millennium Assembly" (New York, September 21, 2000), http://www.un.org/ga/55/webcast/statements/tajikistanE.htm; Islom Karimov, *Vatan ravnaqi uchun har birimiz masulmiz* [Each of us is responsible for the prosperity of the motherland] (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 2001), 65–69.

4. As in Rashid Alimov, "Statement by H.E. Mr. Rashid Alimov Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan to the United Nations, Head of the Delegations of the Republic of Tajikistan at the 56th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, November 13, 2001), http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/56/statements/011113tajikistanE.htm.

5. Talbak Nazarov, "Statement by H.E. Mr. Talbak Nazarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, United Nations General Assembly 57th Ordinary Session" (New York, September 18, 2002), http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/57/statements/020918tajikistanE.htm.

6. Abdulaziz Kamilov, "Address by H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at the General Debate of the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (New York, November 15, 2001), http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/56/statements/011115uzbekistanE.htm.

7. Abdulaziz Kamilov, "Address by H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at the General Debate of the 57th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (New York, September 19, 2002), http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/57/statements/020919uzbekistanE.htm.

8. Alimov, "56th Session of the UN General Assembly"; Emomali Rahmon, "Statement by H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, at the General Debates of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, September 23, 2009), http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/TJ_en.pdf.

9. Karimov, *Bunyodkorlik yulidan* [On the way to creation], 57.

10. Kamilov, "57th Session of the United Nations General Assembly"; Vladimir Norov, "Statement by H.E. Mr. Vladimir Norov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the

Republic of Uzbekistan, at the General Debates of the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (New York, October 2, 2007), http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/62/PV.14; Abdulaziz Kamilov and Sodiq Safaev, "Providing Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Uzbekistan's View" (Discussion at the Atlantic Council, Washington, DC, October 14, 2010), http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/?id=4482:uzbekistan-s-view-on-providing-security-and-stability-in-afghanistan-10-14-10-transcript.

11. Kamilov and Safaev, "Providing Security and Stability in Afghanistan."

12. Talbak Nazarov, "Statement by Academician Talbak Nazarov, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan, at the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, September 20, 2005), http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/60/statements/taji050920eng.pdf.

13. Qohir Rasulzoda, "Statement by Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan H.E. Mr. Qohir Rasulzoda at the General Debates of the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, September 26, 2014), http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/pdf/TJ_en.pdf.

14. Emomali Rahmon, "Poslanie Presidenta Respubliki Tadjikistan Emomali Rahmona Madjlisi Oli Respubliki Tadjikistan" [Address of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon to the Parliament of the Republic of Tajikistan] (Dushanbe, April 26, 2013), http://president.tj/ru/node/4324.

15. Abdulaziz Kamilov, "Address by H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at the General Debates of the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (New York, September 28, 2012), http://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/UZ_en.pdf.

16. Abdulaziz Kamilov, "Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov at the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (New York, September 26, 2014), http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/pdf/UZ_en.pdf.

17. Emomali Rahmon, "Statement by H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, at the General Debate of the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, September 23, 2010), http://www.un.org/en/ga/65/meetings/generaldebate/Portals/1/statements/634208415241718750TJ_en.pdf; Hamrokhon Zarifi, "Statement by H.E. Mr. Hamrokhon Zarifi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, at the General Debate of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (New York, September 26, 2011), http://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/66/TJ_en.pdf.

18. The six plus two contact group is a negotiation platform consisting of six bordering states of Afghanistan as well as the US and Russia. The group operated in 1997–2001 under the aegis of the UN and in July 1999 adopted "the Tashkent declaration on the main principles of a peaceful solution of the conflict in Afghanistan." Six plus three is about the revival of the very same contact group by including another party, namely, NATO.

19. Islom Karimov, "Address by President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov at NATO Summit" (Bucharest, April 3, 2008), http://uza.uz/en/politics/address-by-president-islam-karimov-at-the-nato-summit-03.04.2008-197; Islom Karimov, "President's

Speech at UN Session on Millennium Development Goals" (New York, September 20, 2010), http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/65/PV.3; Norov, "63rd Session of the UN General Assembly"; Vladimir Norov, "Address by H.E. Mr. Vladimir Norov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at the General Debate of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, September 28, 2009), http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/UZ_en.pdf; Elyor Ganiev, "Address by H.E. Mr. Elyor Ganiev, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly" (New York, September 26, 2011), http://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/66/UZ_en.pdf; Kamilov, "67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly."

20. *The White House*, "National Security Strategy of the United States," March 1990, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1990.pdf.

21. *The White House*, "A National Security Strategy for a New Century," May 1997, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1997.pdf.

22. *The White House*, "A National Security Strategy for a New Century," October 1998, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1998.pdf.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. *The White House*, "A National Security Strategy for a New Century," December 1999, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2000.pdf.

26. Ibid.

27. *The White House*, "The National Security Strategy of the United States," September 2002, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2002.pdf.

28. *The White House*, "National Security Strategy," May 2010, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf.

29. Ibid.

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Chapter 8

When East Looks West
to the Middle East

Ian Nelson

Few places outside the Pacific rim can bring to the fore and accumulate as many critical, polarized, and sometimes contradictory contentions, as the growing activities of China in the Middle East—an area that from the Chinese perspective might be more appropriately categorized as West Asia. The strategic location of the Middle East as a linchpin between the three continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia, and its energy resources centered on oil and gas reserves, have made the region a magnet in the rolling pattern of empires and contesting Western states throughout much of the interwar and post-1945 eras. Outwardly the domain of the European powers until the advent of the superpower Cold War rivalries—played out by respective United States and Soviet surrogates during, on average, one major war in each decade—the Middle East theater was largely empty of Chinese diplomatic and political involvement. The transformation of those circumstances since 1978, however, has been significant if not dramatic, as the post-Mao Communist leadership was able to undertake a new course of openness and global economic expansionism.

In this chapter, I consider the growing involvement of China in the Middle East from the early 1970s—when the People's Republic gained a permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council—asking what Beijing might still bring to the negotiating table in a deeply unsettled region. I do this by looking at China's role in two particularly testing spheres of interest in the Middle East—the Israeli–Palestinian peace process and the Iranian nuclear nonproliferation question. However, to fully grasp the contemporary approach of the Chinese to this region and its further potential engagement, it is necessary to take a perspective that highlights the special character of China as both a postcolonial and a communist nation-state. In order to pursue this perspective, I establish a preliminary understanding of the growing disquiet in the West regarding the

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rise of China, as expressed in a negative, near dystopian political framing of its emergence as a global Asian superpower. I show that such apprehensions are reflected not only in the media, but also in the language of some leading Western political and diplomatic institutions, as well as in a prestigious body of English-language scholarship on Chinese international affairs. In large part, such Western unease is generated by a perception that China already enjoys special advantages and ties with Middle Eastern states. As Lillian Harris has suggested in a groundbreaking study, countries that share a common historical experience of Western colonial exploitation are generally more disposed to forming close relationships with Beijing.[1] However, it is China's strong aware-ness of its own political development away from the colonial relationship, that is also at the root of Western concerns. Key historical events from the high colonial era, particularly the Opium Wars conducted by Britain against the Qing dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century, have ongoing reverberations for China's sense of self within the contemporary global context, as well as for the appeal China holds on the part of other postcolonial states, including those in the Middle East. Negative discourses and representations have been instru-mental in creating a barrier to a more influential role of China in world affairs, especially toward the Middle East, as the region continues to be of central inter-est to the West. Beijing's ethical stances in its foreign policy toward the Middle East, substantially based on international law through the auspices of the UN, have also exposed the often contradictory positions of Western powers toward the problems of the region amid the escalating competition for influence and access to natural resources.

SHALL THE TWAIN MEET?

In 1889 the poet Rudyard Kipling wrote, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."[2] It is a sentiment that to some extent, and in one way or another, many have subscribed to since. However, the resolute assertion of the impossibility of a meeting of minds and cultures (beyond concerns of commerce) is a claim that was made even earlier. According to the Chinese historian Qiguang Zhao, Marco Polo, the thirteenth-century Venetian traveler, not only firmly believed in a "them" and "us," but as the conveyer of the inherent improbabilities afflicting East–West relations, also—through the written account of his twenty-four years of travel across the Middle East, Southern Asia, and China—"told the story first, changing the way the world was seen."[3] Zhao also rather intriguingly posed the related questions, "East and West? Can we ever meet? Is it a clash of civilizations?" No less importantly, reflecting on Marco Polo's narrative, Zhao asked, "What would it be like to tell the same story today?"[4]

In relation to the Asia-Pacific region, one subject and defining phenomenon has dominated much of the political, diplomatic, and media discourse during the new millennium: the global economic rise of China. With the prospect of the world's leading economy being headed by a communist government in Beijing, there are burgeoning questions about how far financial and trading power will be replicated in the expanding engagement of the Chinese in foreign affairs.

As many Western countries, not least the United States and those in the European Union, struggled to come to terms with the age of austerity and zero growth rates following the collapse of the deregulated investment banking system in 2008 and the subsequent financial crisis (a "global" crisis that left the Chinese economy largely unscathed), concern around the motivations and foreign policy intentions of Beijing has become more critically fixed on the development of China's interests in key resource regions and centers of commerce. While some enquiries have been accompanied by a blend of cultural intrigue, and the lure of the mystique that surrounds the precise workings of the most populous nation on earth (and one of the most successful economies) something of a more traditional attitude of uneasiness and misgiving has also prevailed. There is a tendency to view the rise of China in international relations, not as offering a progressive potential diplomatic partner with fresh perspectives and alternative ideas in the perennial search for new answers to old, as well as emerging, problems, but rather as an entity altogether more controversial and challenging. Among some of the most critical reactions to Beijing's expanding international activities has been the depiction of China as an economic monolith: the Chinese as the "new colonialists"[5] and as a largely unfathomable cause of "anxiety" for the West.[6] Certainly China has become a major player in the globalized jostle to secure access to finite natural resources and custom in markets once dominated by the industrialized Western powers.[7] On the periphery of the more mainstream concerns—voiced by an increasingly disparate and vocal pastiche of corporate bodies, human rights groups, and environmental lobbyists, and ranging from copyright protection laws to the promotion of animal welfare—there have been the overtly party political expressions of disquiet conveyed on local, national, regional, and international levels. Some of the most notable enquiries have stemmed from US congressional hearings and reports.[8] These enquiries are frequently supported by an array of expert advisers from within the institutions of government, in consultation with the armed services and intelligence agencies, along with contributions from think tanks and academics. Many of these proceedings have been channeled toward addressing what Ross Terrill has termed, "the Problem of China."[9] Collectively, these openly expressed opinions seem to have settled upon a consensus of sorts that the activities of the new Asian power in world affairs represents a destabilizing force that extends

from "cyberhacking" and "antimonopoly investigations,"[10] to issues around national security and defense, and ultimately, the belief that Beijing presents a military challenge. Bruce A. Elleman argues that, distracted by the winding down of the Cold War in the early 1990s, "few, if any, could have predicted that thirty years later it would be China, not the USSR, that would most concern the West." In the Pacific theater "China is now seeking to fill that vacuum" left by the Soviets. "The question of the hour," Elleman asserted, "is 'can China succeed in becoming a sea power?'"[11] Concerns of this kind also quite literally extend to the "final frontier," with questions raised over the true purposes of China's accelerated space program that has included a lunar probe and proven advances in the use of strategic anti-satellite weapons technologies.[12]

SCHOLARLY REFLECTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

In addition to the aforementioned critical enquiries of China, the general sense of concerned incomprehension expressed about the global activities of the Chinese has also extended to academia. While these analyses may not be specifically directed at Beijing's involvement in the Middle East, they nevertheless establish a groundwork of distinguished literature upon which nonacademic writers and policymakers can build and perpetuate the "China problem" school of thought, and more easily graft the critical materials onto other regions of the world. Although these studies cover areas and subjects that in some cases might seem far removed from the world of foreign affairs, for example, major international cultural events, they do in fact suggest that despite the apparent innocent activities, the Chinese are invariably hiding behind a façade that disguises a more ominous and threatening global agenda. A study straddling identity politics, culture, and psychology by William Callahan is a case in point. In plotting the course of China's new-found position in the world, he has added a further conceptual label to those already in circulation,[13]—China, as the "pessoptimist nation."[14] What the world witnessed at the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics in 2008, argues Callahan, was "the birth of a new superpower," as Beijing asserted its presence "through fireworks rather than firepower." It was an occasion, he continues, when the national interest was communicated through a choreographic display of the "national aesthetic" in the form of a "stunning cultural performance, as opposed to a decisive military victory."[15] Aside from the poetic license sometimes afforded the prose of a monographic piece, the author further states that beyond the "hyperbole" to which the experience of the Chinese apparently "lends itself," the ceremony also told us "much about the political direction of China's rise."[16]

Through an analysis of the links between China's "security and identity dynamic," and the "mix of positive and negative views" among the Chinese populace, Callahan claims, it is possible to see "how Chinese people relate to the world in ways that often go against Beijing's peaceful multilateralism," and "beyond the foreign ministry's official policies." Relatedly, "Foreign affairs, thus expands to encompass a range of sovereignty performances; it emerges in social activities where people continually divide friends from enemies, domestic from foreign, East from West, and patriots from traitors in everyday life, as well as in the halls of power." In concluding, he asserts, "this fantastic performance graphically shows how we need to refocus our analysis from the material measures of hard power to the symbolic politics of soft power."[17] Despite Callahan's assertions, it would be difficult to imagine a credible debate emerging from an analysis of the dissentient influence engendered by the performing arts on the national mindset of the Chinese toward foreign affairs, through the medium of a global event entirely devoted to sport. In order to illustrate these limitations in Callahan's discussion, it is possible to apply the same method of analysis to a parallel Western case, for instance, by extrapolating the impact of popular British attitudes on decision-making in international affairs based on the effect of the pageantry surrounding the opening "Isles of Wonder" of the London Olympics ceremony of 2012. What the parades of celebrity elites, a fictional James Bond character, and a "parachuting Queen"[18] could reasonably or usefully tell us about the political direction of Britain, much less the mechanisms and varied interests shaping its foreign policy (still overshadowed, as it was, by the double mires of Afghanistan and Iraq), is open to question. Indeed, it seems to illustrate only the gap between the thinking of the people and the official approach to foreign affairs, in as much as the stance of various government ministries and a majority of Members of Parliament (MPs) ensured the invasion of Iraq went ahead, despite the biggest street demonstration in British history against an imminent US-led invasion. Ultimately, it could be argued that the influence of British public opinion on the trajectory of foreign policy-making is par with the contribution of the everyday Chinese to their own. Without the inclusion of a comparative element, it is hard to detect the connection between "security and identity" in policy-making that Callahan is attempting to make. While he does refer to the "new multilateralism and China's peaceful rise" (distinguishing it from the traditionally violent ascendancy of many Western powers), he nevertheless inserts the caveat that these themes are not deeply embedded in Chinese society. Accordingly, he states, it is important to look beyond the "mainstream international relations scholars" who see culture and identity as a decoy from the "real politics of economic strength and military force."[19] It is not that culture and identity for Callahan are not necessarily a part of the multifaceted dimensions of China's development, it is just that the

personal identities have also come to form part of the wider critical equation applied to the Chinese. With that, he tries to provide a link to the broader debate around what has variously come to pass as the Chinese "problem" that permeates many of the critical accounts of China's rise.

Surprisingly, even within the genre of historical scholarly studies there are instances of this inclination to link the legacies of Western contacts with Southeast Asia to critiques of the contemporary rise of China. Robert Bickers, for example, couples bygone Western imperial-colonial misdeeds to an analysis of present-day attitudes of the Chinese toward the West, including a forewarning of the uncertainties the political and economic nonpareil radiating from Beijing poses for the wider world.

A SHARED HISTORY OF COLONIZATION

Historically, the record chronicling the nature of Sino–European relations is, when examined closely, not pretty, clouded, as it is, by misconduct and characterized by controversy. As "untidy, unplanned," and for the Chinese, largely unfortunate and disadvantageous, as the Western forays into the interior of China from their fortified coastal bases in the early 1830s were, it was the paramilitary corporatism, as represented by the business activities of the British East India Company, that hastened what Bickers termed the "scramble for China."[20] As a host of mainly European powers moved to occupy Chinese territory and access the hinterland through a combination of armed force and "unequal treaties,"[21] an altogether more contentious chapter in Sino–Western contacts was written.

Western frustrations over an inward-looking, closed-door China led to one of the most formative events in nineteenth century Chinese history: the Opium Wars. Purportedly fought in the interests of free trade, the British conflicts with the Qing dynasty were—as the name implies—specifically concerned with facilitating the export of opium by the East India Company to China. Originally conceived in an effort to offset the flow of silver bullion from the coffers of London into those of Peking, generated by payments for much sought after goods like porcelain, silk, and especially tea—items that the acquisition of had become something of an obsession among the royalty, aristocracy, and the industrialist mercantile nouveau riche—the revenue gap was further enlarged by the fact that among the limited Western products on offer—principally, cotton and wool—there was little the Chinese found either of interest or of comparable quality.

Selling opium to the Chinese, however, faced two principal obstacles: Qing law, that had prohibited its import since 1729; and what the historian Michael Wood described as the existence of "an almost negligible local

consumption." In practice, he asserted, overcoming the absence of an existing customer base "meant getting as many Chinese addicted to the drug as possible."[22] In contrast to Wood's account, Bickers argues that "opium was already long-embedded in Chinese elite leisure culture—the British hardly needed to create the market that brought prodigiously when it could—and it was spreading further through different circles in society, combining to generate a powerful demand."[23] Whatever the actual circumstances of the opium trade in the initial phase, its exportation through the threat or deployment of armed force, launched from mainland enclaves like Canton (Guangzhou), and the adjacent offshore stronghold of Hong Kong, became the not so *official* policy of the British government in 1851. Such was the military superiority of the West over China during the last century of the three-hundred-year reign of the Qing dynasty, that its emperors and empresses were unable to resist the violation of their own laws by foreign powers.[24] "It is as if, today," Wood suggested, "the Columbian drug barons possessed such a powerful fleet that they were able to sail into San Francisco bay and compel a large portion of the population of the United States to become addicted to heroin and cocaine, and to wipe out the US fleet if it intervened." "In the tale of colonial infamy," he pointed out, "this is one of the least known episodes in the West": "an infernal triangle" between Britain, its imperial possession of India, and China, "that parallels the tragic triangle of the previous century between Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe—the slave trade." "This was no small business," Wood concluded, "incredible as it may sound, in the early nineteenth century opium was the biggest single trade anywhere."[25] Such was the increase in the Chinese demand for opium that in less than fifty years to 1808 the transfer in silver from Britain to China had been reversed.

It is against this historical backdrop that Bickers explores the many issues surrounding "Sino–foreign interactions, confrontation and confusions," beginning in 1832, a "year of augury."[26] In summing up, however, in the last paragraphs of a near five-hundred-page tome, he appears to adopt a decidedly cautionary and critical tone toward the Chinese when compared, in the main, to what has gone before. "A globalised China," he asserted, "is not new; but a powerful global China is unprecedented. That provides new food for thought." Moreover, he draws attention to what he sees as the misuse of history by the government in Beijing. Though the character of Occidental–Sino relations are diametrically contrasted by the power and conquest of the colonizers (the West), on the one hand, and by the weakness and occupation of the colonized (the Chinese), on the other hand, Bickers added, that as "intertwined and interconnected" as our histories are, it is the problem posed by the priming of the new generations that presents the wider long-term challenges, especially as the Chinese youth come out "equipped" as they are with an "instinctive indignation." This anger or annoyance, he goes on to explain,

stems from "China's past humiliations and what they feel to be contemporary echoes of those." As a consequence of this politically orchestrated psychological condition fostered by the propaganda of the communist regime, Bickers concluded, "the awkward confidence that such sensitivity engenders in them might make for all of us a very awkward world."[27]

Given the historical background against which East–West encounters were played out, the concluding observations about Chinese attitudes are not what we would expect to see leveled at a people who live with the reverberating knowledge of this history. It would surely be out of the ordinary to find that manner of comment being directed, for example, at the respective "sensitivity" of Afro-Caribbeans or the Irish regarding the slave trade or the potato famine. Is it presumably acceptable to further distinguish the boundaries between the exception to the customary rule extended elsewhere, because in the Chinese case it has become something approaching routine and often appears to result from a random selection of thoughts, or a personal whim. Or is it simply because the subject matter is a dimension of the generic "China problem" that makes it not only permissible, but commonplace? Either way, if it is reasonable or even practicable to allocate responsibility or engender a sense of mea culpa, then the object would assuredly be more likely to reside, not with the decedents of the victims (the Chinese), but with the decedents of the perpetrators (the Westerners), or more pointedly, with the heirs and present shareholders of the companies historically involved in the exploitation of China. As Bickers himself observed, Jardine, Matheson & Co., one of the British shipping traders that transported the highly profitable opium, is "still active today in China and occupying a suite of offices in the heart of the City of London."[28]

CHINA AND THE WEST IN THE
MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER

"China is a far off country and cannot do anything for you."[29] Arguably, much has changed since Premier Zhou Enlai uttered those words in 1957 to Amir Abdullah of the Communist Party of Iraq. Metaphorically at least, China is no longer afar.[30] Its omnipresence in the Middle East is a testament to the fact that many leaders and regimes have courted its economic investment, trading capacities, and expertise, though for Beijing at least, as has been noted, the "primary objective in the region is energy security."[31] Yet some aspects in relations have stayed fairly constant. Instinctively, it seems, Beijing is still reticent about becoming involved in the internal affairs of states and the politics of the area in its entirety. Whatever the convergences or divergences, the mutual importance of the contacts that blossomed after the 1950s led the

scholar Pan Guang to claim, in 1997, that "it has reached the point that not knowing China's Middle East policies means not understanding Chinese diplomacy as a whole. Nor can one understand the Middle East without knowledge of that region's relations with China."[32] Those ties have continued apace. "China today [2006] has cordial political and commercial relations with all area states," Harris claimed. "Its advice," she added, "is listened to carefully in all capitals and it is seldom criticised." A pivotal reason for this standing, and one that largely differentiates China from many Western nations, is partly attributed to common identities resulting from mirrored historical experiences, in that "as a fellow victim of colonialist and imperialist oppression and a member of the developing world, China is 'us' to the Middle Easterners, rather than 'them'."[33]

To say that Beijing has not been overly involved in a series of US-led Middle East peace initiatives since the late 1970s would be something of an understatement. Indeed, it has been singularly conspicuous by its absence. Other than its obligatory inclusion in name by virtue of its UN membership, the role of Beijing has remained tentative, mostly confined to isolated proposals, amid intermittent Western soundings about a greater inclusion that has never really materialized.

Evidence of a more assertive diplomatic role for China took a pronounced step forward with the release of a peace proposal by Beijing in May 2013,[34] underpinned by the appointment of China's first Middle East envoy, Wu Sike, in 2009 (possibly in response to the Quartet's own emissary, Tony Blair, installed in 2007).[35] It was the first formal diplomatic foray by China since 1989 when, following a US–Palestinian rapprochement and exploratory dialogue in 1988, Chinese premier, Li Peng, had presented "China's Five Steps to Peace in the Middle East" to Yasser Arafat during his visit to Beijing. The plan included an international peace conference chaired by the UN, in which China would take a seat, and based on UN Resolution 242 (1967).[36] Founded on the original Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (FPPC) in China's foreign policy making—"mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence"[37]—what set the initiative apart from the protocol of the Western trilateralist template— bilateral Arab–Israeli talks, unilaterally overseen by the United States—was the overriding emphasis on the open forum of the UN. What the proposals by China in 2013 may have inadvertently reconfirmed, however, was a further period of absenteeism for Beijing from negotiations. The idea of a center-stage UN role confronted the primacy of trilateralism still moored in the climate of the Cold War. It also challenged its modus operandi set beneath the "long shadow cast by Henry Kissinger's post-1973 policies" when the three principles of Washington's engagement were established—"US dominance

over the 'peace process'; no 'imposed' peace by third parties; and commit-
ment to 'step-by-step' negotiations."[38] While Chinese economic leverage in
the region is all but unassailable, in the diplomatic sphere, as it was noted,
"it still lacks the clout to knock heads together."[39] Even so, the latest Chinese
overture came at an important juncture in the furtherance of the Western-
sponsored peace efforts, in the wake of a series of unilateral decisions by
European government legislatures to recognize Palestine as a state. In some
ways, both developments were symptomatic of a growing restiveness among
some of Washington's closest allies, and elsewhere, with a stalled peace
process, an ebb of confidence in US competence to check Israeli civilian
settlement building since 1967 (illegal in international law),[40] and a general
fatigue in the prevailing recourse to trilateralism as the primary mechanism
of conflict resolution in the region.

The series of parliamentary votes in Europe on recognition for Pales-
tinian statehood, that began with Iceland in 2011,[41] has continued to gain
momentum over the last decade. In 2014, Sweden became the 135th of the
193 member states of the UN to recognize the state of Palestine,[42] followed
by the Vatican City State (a non-UN state member) in 2015.[43] This indi-
cates that a two-state resolution based on 1967 borders (the 1949 Armistice
Lines) is widely supported. Though the 1978 accords, and Egyptian–Israeli
peace treaty (1979), were widely celebrated in the West, it was roundly crit-
icized in the Middle East (culminating in the expulsion of Egypt from the
Arab League) for not addressing what was viewed as the underlying cause
of the wider Arab–Israeli conflict—the Israeli–Palestinian struggle.[44] In the
intervening period there have been four trilateral peace initiatives of note:
the Madrid Conference (1991); Oslo Accords (1993); Camp David Summit,
including the Taba Summit (2000 and 2001 respectively); and the Quartet's
Road Map (2003). While variously incorporating the nominal inclusion of
the Soviet Union in 1991, and the combined representations of the Russian
Federation, European Union, and the UN within the Quartet following the
Iraq War of 2003, in practice, all the peace processes were essentially domi-
nated by the United States, with a peripheral role for the leading Western,
mostly European, powers. Although ostensibly directed at resolving the
Israeli–Palestinian conflict, tangible outcomes from a quadrupling of dip-
lomatic efforts were limited to an Israel–Jordan peace treaty (1994), and a
Declaration of Principles between the Palestinian Liberation Organization
(PLO) and Israel in 1995, leading to a semiautonomous Palestinian Author-
ity in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. A final two-state resolution—Israel and
Palestine—remained elusive, as the core issues (borders, settlements, Jeru-
salem, and refugees) were repeatedly deferred, despite being substantially
addressed by existing UN resolutions. In short, "one administration after
another has tried and failed."[45]

If one issue stood alongside the importance of the Arab–Israeli conflicts in the concerns of Beijing and the West, it was the regional question of nuclear nonproliferation. In part, the fact that some of the most urgent and destabilizing of the region's many problems remain unresolved, is arguably attributable to a central flaw in the moral reasoning of the Western powers and variable peculiarities in the practical application of the trilateral peace-making mode. Rather than being systematically formulated on a cornerstone of universal principle, whereby the required comportment of states is pursued on the grounds of illegality in international law and/or noncompliance with UN resolutions, Western conduct is often viewed (particularly within the Middle East) as being permeated by inconsistencies. As the former British foreign secretary, Robin Cook, claimed on the eve of the last major Western military ground intervention in the area (Iraq in 2003), the fact that the impatience expressed over noncompliance in one case ("12 years in which to complete disarmament"), bore little resemblance to the patience exhibited in another ("30 years since resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories"), meant the justification for action was seen to be premised on "one rule for the allies of the US and another rule for the rest."[46] Placing the judicial prosecution of conflict resolution on a kind of "friends" and "enemies" footing is something of a blunt instrument amid the fluctuating interests shaping the partnerships around the Arab–Israeli conflict, and engendering confidence-building in East–West cooperation. One such consequence emerged from the Middle East nuclear nonproliferation debate. With smoldering Saudi–Iranian tensions (founded on mutual Sunni–Shiʿa and Arab–Persian historical and contemporary antipathies) moderating voices usually present in the Arab–Israeli context were distinctly reduced or missing altogether. As a result, the Western-sponsored stance appeared to see little, if anything, adverse in firmly acting through sanctions and boycotts in the pursuit of some regional states ("enemies") to comply with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), while others ("friends"), go largely or entirely unscrutinized and unpunished.

Despite appearances, the United States has not been alone in its pursuit of Iran. Under the auspices of the IAEA, and in the presence of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, a number of leading European countries (supported, among others, by the Arab Gulf States) have been at the forefront of Washington's efforts to curtail Tehran's nuclear ambitions. Among them the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, most notably in the form of the "plus one" (Germany) element to the "P5+1" negotiations, comprising the five UNSC permanent members (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States), that concluded with the Framework Agreement in April 2015, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in mid-July.[47] Notwithstanding the likelihood of

these talks to diminish an armed conflict with the Iranians, and firm Republican objections in Congress and in Israel over the terms of the deal, prolonged German activity toward Iran (as with other European powers) sits somewhat at odds with the policies of successive governments in Berlin since the 1970s. Centrally, while at the helm of a series of Reichstag coalitions since 2005, Merkel has continued to facilitate the potential for nuclear proliferation in the Middle Eastern region, and globally, with the export provision of submarines equipped with nuclear weapons delivery capabilities to Israel, a state long suspected of possessing nuclear weapons.[48] Under the terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (1970) neither Germany, as a signatory, nor Israel, as one of four UN member non-signatory states (the others being India, Pakistan, and South Sudan), has technically violated the treaty. Nonetheless, how the two governments navigated around the quintessential purpose of the treaty—the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons technology—are less explicable, especially in the context of their simultaneous trailing of Tehran. Some of the anomalies allowing for the acquisition of nuclear weapons are clearly derived from historical defects. As Mohamed ElBaradei, the former IAEA director general, retrospectively interposed, the basic premises of the NPT "seem less than optimal. In a nod to 'the early bird gets the nuke', it temporarily legitimised the arsenals of the five countries that had already developed nuclear weapons." Just as problematically, perhaps, "it forbade other signatories to develop such weapons, but included no strategy for persuading countries that refused to sign—a loophole which India, Pakistan and, presumably, Israel have used."[49] It is an omission that has yet to be rectified.

An additional aspect of the German nuclear issue is that Berlin is said to have gained little, if any, notably influence on Tel Aviv in terms of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. "Merkel had tied the delivery of the sixth submarine to a number of conditions, including a demand that Israel stop its expansionist settlement policy,"[50] so far, without success. Others have questioned whether the crux of the Middle East nuclear issue might lie in the interpretation of the word proliferation. Are the Western-led campaigns concerning Iran (and previously Iraq) about preventing proliferation through regional containment, or by failing to ascertain if one Middle Eastern country has nuclear weapons (Israel), ensuring the "domination" of the area by one nominally pro-Western state?[51] These discrepancies in Western conduct have not gone unobserved in China, "from Beijing's perspective, Western and especially US leaders speak with two voices: what is acceptable for Israel, including a probable nuclear stockpile, is not acceptable for the Arab states."[52] Even so, and albeit with some qualifications regarding the prospects of Western military strikes on Iran, China has supported the position of the IAEA on Tehran since 2006.[53] More pointedly,

perhaps, in 2015, Beijing also reaffirmed its broader regional goal by stating it would welcome "the early convening of an international conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East."[54] Where Beijing differed from the West was the emphasis China placed on the judgment that either all regional states should be compelled to comply with a nuclear ban (including inspections and sanctions), or none. In the wider regional sense, the nuclear nonproliferation gauntlet has arguably been laid down by Beijing. As with the Arab–Israeli UN centered peace plans, the political astuteness of the Chinese lies not so much in what Beijing was advocating and offering to support, as it was in illuminating what the West, and the United States in particular, were not apparently prepared to advance or enforce. Seen through Chinese eyes, the inequities in regional compliance meant the balance of probability in the genuine motivations of the West was progressively weighted toward another less conspicuous agenda, "when it comes to Iran, China views the U.S. policy towards the Iranian nuclear project as part of its regime-change policy, rather than as a strict commitment to non-proliferation strategy."[55] Irrespective of the apparent consensus among the Western foreign ministers that the nuclear talks with Iran (supported by a series of UN resolutions and some of the most stringent and protracted economic sanctions since those imposed in the 1990s on Iraq) constituted a notable success, the idea that the "comprehensive nuclear deal could become a model [for] the Middle East and beyond enabling the same level of transparency, monitoring and verification,"[56] has yet to be taken up. In fact, the reverse appears to be the case. Less than two months after the Iran agreement, and some three decades after Egypt first proposed that the Middle East become a nuclear-free zone, some Western powers have continued to obstruct the motion, most recently in the Ninth UN International Conference on Nuclear Non-Proliferation (April 22 to May 22, 2015) when the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada vetoed the latest efforts by Cairo to reinvigorate the initiative.[57]

AN AMERICAN OFFER BEIJING COULD HARDLY REFUSE

After being Iran's most important nuclear partner since the mid-1980s, China began to ease away from the arrangement with Tehran in 1997, after coming under "intense U.S. pressure." This allowed China to safeguard its "vital relation with the United States."[58] Washington–Beijing tensions over respective ties with third parties are nothing new—from 1949 until 1972 mutual enmity over Taiwan and Vietnam was the mainstay of US and Chinese foreign policy.

The crucial difference in the ability of China to sustain that stance (and thus the political will to persist) occurred in the period after Mao Tse-tung's passing in 1976. Up until 1979, China was self-sufficient in oil and coal; in 1993 China became a net importer of oil, and in 2003 it became the second largest consumer of imported oil after the United States. Those basic facts of economic consumption effectively changed the whole dynamic of China's strategic approach to the Middle East and to international affairs more broadly. The prime inducement in bringing about a Chinese change of mind (if not heart) over its collaboration with the West concerning Iran was the American offer for Beijing to acquire US nuclear electrical power technology. Years of neglect had left the efficient generation of energy in China lagging behind. Additionally, the modernization and open market liberalization policies of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 had not only stimulated the export of China's nuclear expertise to developing countries (Iran being a chief recipient) as a way of attracting foreign currency for internal investment purposes, but the industrial manufacturing and consumer boom also increased the demand for electricity, exacerbating the political difficulties over energy supplies. In short, "China's economic growth—and the domestic political stability that growth helps provide—is dependent on energy that China cannot secure alone,"[59] be that Saudi Arabian oil, Central Asian gas, or US nuclear computer software. The dilemma over energy needs stands as another example of the influence the national situation has over foreign policy. It possibly also underlines the case that China could participate in a US-led process so long as it fell into step with the West by compromising its regional nuclear nonproliferation principles. As John Garver noted, "the terms the United States set for access to that technology were Chinese compliance with global nonproliferation norms— and in the case of Iran, cooperation with the United States beyond those global norms."[60] Set against the uneven application of Western policy toward nuclear nonproliferation, it is tricky to define, much less assess, what would constitute the "norms." Certainly we might assess Chinese acquiescence to the practice of vigorously pursuing some regional states, while others are left unattended, to the potential detriment of the stated cross-region nuclear ban, and despite abstract Western protestations to the contrary, as being "beyond those global norms." This far more selective approach to nonproliferation has the effect of preserving Beijing's overbearing domestic policy agenda. An agenda that is, in turn, dependent on energy guarantees procured from the Arab Gulf States, whose furthermost maneuverings in curbing Iranian nuclear aspirations were just as preoccupied with advancing Saudi and Sunni hegemony, as regional nuclear nonproliferation per se. In terms of advancing the perception of China as being inside the Western fold of respectability, Beijing had begun the exacting task of squaring the circle by harmonizing the friction in foreign and domestic policy-making.

BEIJING'S FOREIGN POLICY–DOMESTIC
AGENDA CONUNDRUM

Beside the political risks associated with the responsibilities of a leading economic world power (and any number of Chinese voices urging caution from within),[61] some key domestic indicators also look to have determined the directional scale of the undertakings China will sanction in terms of its role in Middle Eastern affairs. Foremost among them, is the fact that since 1978 the ruling Communist Party has been essentially caught up in a paradoxically overlapping and interrelated quandary in the spheres of domestic and foreign policy making.

As Premier Deng Xiaoping's 1980 comment "poverty . . . [is] not socialism"[62] made plain, leading party interests in affairs abroad were inexorably bound to domestic policy apprehensions. Among the most pressing concerns for Beijing was sustaining the program to reduce rural poverty through the combination of export-led economic growth and a series of "pro-poor policies" introduced in the late 1970s. Based on the official poverty line figure set at less than a US dollar a day by the Chinese government in 1978, rural poverty was reduced from an estimated 33 percent in 1978 to 15 percent in 1985. "This implies," Shi Li has stated, "that the rural poverty rate fell by over 60 percent in the first seven years of economic reform." Or, as she explained in another way, "during the period 1978–1989, around 14 million poor people exited poverty annually."[63] Lifting some 140 million people out of poverty in a decade (equivalent to half the US population) is a notable achievement. The Chinese data comes into sharper focus, however, when placed alongside some of the leading advanced economies in Europe. In Britain, for example, during a period of four successive Conservative Party governments from 1979 to 1997, the number of children living in relative poverty increased from one in eight, to more than one in four. Moreover, the goal announced in 1998 by the incoming Labour government of the "abolition of child poverty within 20 years," seems relatively modest in comparison to Chinese achievements in this area. Unlike the Chinese policy (that presumably saw little advantage in mitigating penury among children if the parents were left in situ), the British plan established "no targets for working-age poverty."[64] Although a million children were lifted out of poverty during Labour's first term in office, the fact remained, as was dryly commented upon, "that still leaves three million more to go."[65] Despite some reservations, overall, assessments of the campaign were favorable. As Mike Brewer reported, "reducing child poverty by 900,000 children was a remarkable achievement, certainly without historical precedent in the UK, and impressive compared with other countries."[66] Whether China was included in the comparisons Brewer made is not stated. But what surely cannot have gone unnoticed in Beijing was that as a result of the escalating financial cost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,[67] the socialist Labour party (now out

of office) had been required in 2013 to revise downward its "expensive" child poverty reducing targets.[68]

Given the domestic social consequences arising from costly interventions abroad, the Chinese will not be easily persuaded to take on a more active role in foreign affairs, especially one emanating from the activities of the Western powers. Nevertheless, the facts of the matter for China (as with the United States and Europe as a whole), is that a considerable number of impoverished categories of people remain to be elevated from their lowly socioeconomic circumstances. As such the reflection by Deng Xiaoping that socialism and poverty are irreconcilable still holds an appreciable sway over the calculations of Beijing in foreign, as well as domestic affairs, as does his overarching philosophy that "some of the people and some regions of the country" must "get rich first."[69] But that slogan, and the wealth creation thus far achieved, cannot guarantee against growing disaffection—especially among the rural and urban poor. Indeed, such disaffection seems almost certain if the promise to elevate some of the substantial remainder left behind by the economic miracle is not met within a reasonable period of time. Ensuring that the unparalleled prosperity being generated in parts of China is adequately shared around will be a seminal factor directing foreign policy, not just toward the Middle East, but wherever Beijing's global interests lie.

Can the Chinese diplomatic model offer something the West or the UN might adopt? If the problem-solving efforts toward the Middle East are ever to converge at the high table of diplomacy—the UN—then an even-handedness in approach, and a uniformity in the application of legal principles are prerequisites that must surely govern the conduct of the post-Cold War order. In that setting, perhaps, the West has just as far to travel as the emergent power from the East. The centrality of the UN as the supreme arbiter in worldwide affairs—the *not* so new narrative reaffirmed by Beijing, and a code largely rejected by Washington in preference to trilateralism—was established at the conclusion of the last global calamity in June 1945; its Charter enshrined a universal system imbued by the indispensable theorem that all are equal under the law (a document drafted, after all, to stem the reliance on great powers from any hemisphere). A return of the United States (and by proxy, its Western allies) to "its high water mark," before its Cold War decline as a result of the clash of "domestic and foreign policies that contradicted its proclaimed principles,"[70] is not beyond reach. As with the many critical interpretations of China, Chandran Nair has suggested, "whilst Beijing will accept they have many struggles to deal with and many shortcomings too, . . . only time will tell at what point the Chinese start to ignore this criticism and just go their own way." In diplomacy, as in much else, "China is re-writing the rule book," and to many in the West, "this must cause great discomfort."[71] If Western disquietude is only half right about the nature of the Chinese military, then an excluded Beijing—neither

domestically predisposed nor able to accede to the interchanging moral dispositions of the West—might just opt to stand fast.

Ordinarily, the sentiment in Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West" has stood more like an irrefutable statement of the obvious, rather than one of primed wisdom. Moreover, and most unfortuitously, "the first line is, of course, very familiar and often quoted,"[72] to the extent that it has become synonymous with those who side with the claimed inevitabilities of East–West confrontations, and the existence of their innate incompatibilities. Consequently, it now stands as a kind of latter-day anthem to Samuel Huntington's twentieth-century *Clash of Civilizations,*[73] and its innumerable theoretical manifestations. Written and published in the last quarter of the nineteenth century at a time when Britain and Germany were being overtaken by the industrial, economic, and soon to be military prowess of the United States, the reflections of the late Victorian conscience could just as well be said to symbolize the forlorn hope that there can ever be a meeting of minds and interests between, and amid, the shifting gravitational pull of great powers, whatever their nationalities, political ideologies, or faiths. As with much else, perhaps the orthodox and somewhat gloomy perceptions of Kipling's statement on East–West relations is in need of a timely review—in order to place it in a different and more complete light. That well-known line—"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet"—is undoubtedly modified by the subsequent less familiar lines of verse:

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though
they come from the ends of the earth![74]

Robert Hampson surmised that, "the second couplet offers a significant qualification" to that of the first line, not least in "its conception of the mutual respect and recognition of 'strong men' as a bonding that transcends 'race', creed, colour or class."[75]

Perhaps we can read here an opportunity for greater optimism regarding China's rise and the potential role of Beijing in the rapidly changing theater of the Middle East. Drawing on Kipling we might anticipate not a failure of the meeting of minds but, rather, the possibility of discovering new forms of partnership and shared responsibility in the search for solutions to some of the seemingly intractable political problems confronting the region.

NOTES

1. Lillian Craig Harris, "Myth and Reality in China's Relations with the Middle East," in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, eds. Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 323.

2. Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," quoted in Robert Hampson, "Kipling and the Fin-de-Siècle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Howard J. Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11.

3. These comments are made by Qiguang Zhao in "The New World," Episode 1 of *Marco Polo: A Very Modern Journey*, Al Jazeera video, 47:27, screened August 28, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/marco-polo/2014/08/another-world-2014824203547367689.html.

4. Ibid.

5. "The New Colonialists: China's Hunger for Natural Resources is Causing More Problems at Home than Abroad," *The Economist,* March 15, 2008, http://www.economist.com/node/10853534.

6. Shujie Yao and Pan Wang, *China's Outward Foreign Direct Investments and Impact on the World Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2014), 8–9.

7. For a broader sense of Western perceptions of China from the 1980s through to 2004, see Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 31–34.

8. Some indication of US congressional views on Sino–Middle East contacts, from the "Silk Road" to the "Arab Spring," can be gleaned from *Hearing Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, China and the Middle East,* 113th Cong., June 6, 2013,://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/transcripts/USCC%20Hearing%20-%20June%206%202013.pdf. Of particular interest is pages 1–2. Noting that China imports half its oil from the region, Jeffrey Fiedler (Hearing Co-Chair) stated that the "strong and growing" Chinese economic and energy interests are related to "Iran's nuclear capabilities and generally threatening posture." While China's activity "pales in comparison" to the US, he continued, some Chinese scholars advised the government to adopt a new "March West" foreign policy, that suggested "Beijing may be take a more forward-leaning approach to the Middle East." A different perspective has been offered by the scholar of International Affairs Robert Sutter, in *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy Since the Cold War*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 295–6. Sutter has taken issue with the claim of Beijing's dominance:Increased Chinese trade, investment, and foreign assistance activities in these areas [Middle East, Africa, and Latin America] received prominent attention in international media. The growth in China's economic profile included a large and growing share of foreign economic interactions in these regions. In contrast to sometimes sensational media reports, however, China did not dominate the economic interaction as the Western-oriented developed countries led by United States, countries of the European Union, Japan, and international financial institutions played a far more important role than China as investors, aid providers, and markets for regional exports.

9. Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means for the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 1.

10. US Congressman Steve Chabot reported on a "critical relationship that is becoming increasingly challenging and unfortunately confrontational." Chabot claimed, that under Xi Jinping's leadership, "US–China affairs have steadily undergone a fundamental transformation . . . the PRC is more assertive and, indeed, aggressive on an entire

range of issues covering the political, security, and socio-economic spectrums." *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, A New Era of U.S.-China Relations?* House of Representatives, 113th Cong., (September 17, 2014) (statement of Steve Chabot) http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA05/20140917/102677/HHRG-113-FA05-Transcript-20140917.pdf.

11. Bruce A. Elleman, "Foreword," in *China as a Sea Power, 1127–1368: A Preliminary Survey of the Maritime Expansion and Naval Exploits of the Chinese People During the Southern Song and Yuan Periods*, ed. Jung-pang Lo (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012), x–xiii.

12. Li Xiaokun, "US Report Claims China Shoots down its Own Satellite," *China Daily*, July 19, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2010-07/19/content_10121179.htm. In contrast to Elleman's concerns about Chinese weaponry in space, some five years earlier Noam Chomsky had already brought to public attention the fact that Beijing had presented an opportunity to help avoid just such a potential confrontation: "China has led efforts in the United Nations to preserve outer space for peaceful purposes, in conflict with the United States, which, along with Israel, has barred all moves to prevent an arms race in space." Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (London: Penguin, 2007), 10.

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