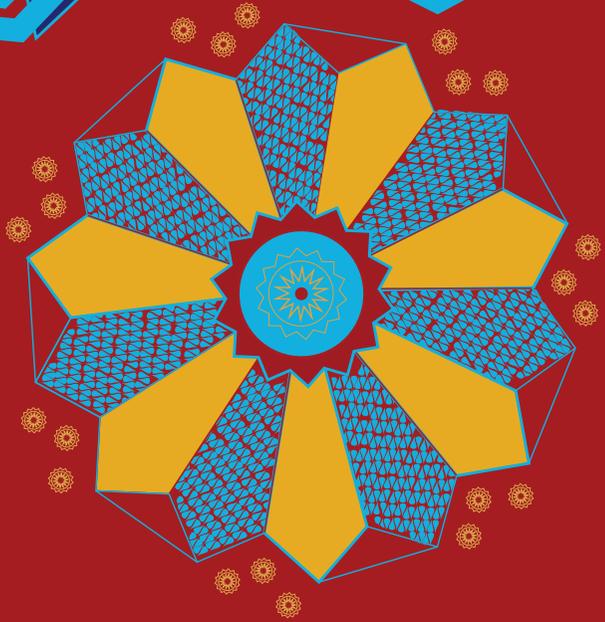
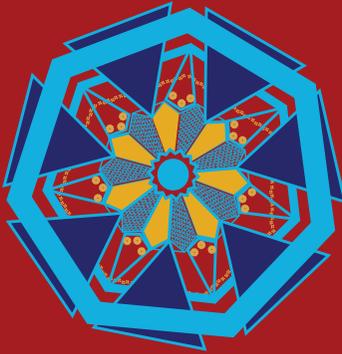
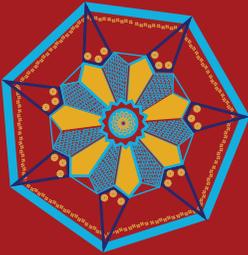




Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy

Harvard Kennedy School of Government



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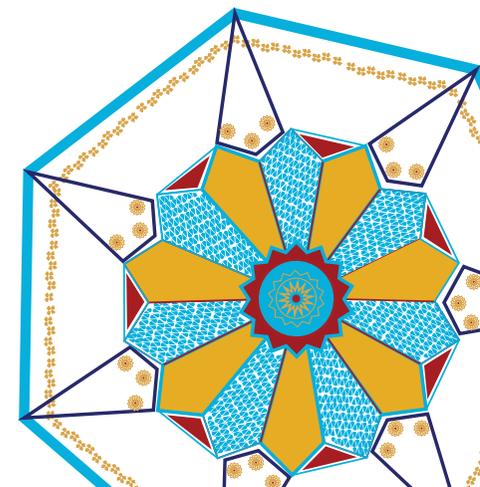
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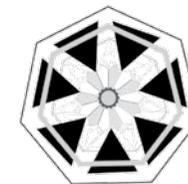
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from the editors...

We are pleased to present the third edition of the *Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy*. This volume is being published at a time of rapid transformation in the Middle East and North Africa. The euphoric uprisings of 2011 have met with fierce resistance from resilient autocrats and the complex realities of reshuffled domestic politics. With corruption scandals threatening the long-venerated Turkish model, an Egyptian military reasserting itself in political life, and heated tribal disputes compromising an already fragile Libyan state, which way the region is headed remains altogether unclear.

These volatile domestic transformations coincide with regional diplomatic realignments. Nuclear diplomacy between Iran and the West has complicated the relationship between Washington and its traditional allies in Israel and the Gulf. The Obama administration's hesitance to intervene militarily in Syria has at times further strained these ties. Meanwhile, the unprecedented diffusion of Syrian refugees risks destabilizing neighboring states and igniting a region-wide conflagration. This year's Journal sheds light on many of the dynamics underlying what we see as a larger regional transformation.

Ibrahim Sharqieh opens the Journal with a commentary on the often overlooked plight of Palestinian "double refugees"—those first displaced by conflict with Israel, displaced again by conflict in Syria. **Matthew Levitt** provides our first feature article investigating the evolving strategic relationship between Hezbollah and Iran. **Denise Natali** analyzes the dynamics—new and old—of transborder Kurdish politics. **Todd M. Johnson** and **Gina A. Zurlo** focus our attention on demographic trends behind the flight of the region's Christian communities. **Karina Piser** helps dispel the popular narrative of religion as

the sole driver of Islamist political parties in Tunisia, focusing us instead on their internal debates and political acumen. **John Strickland** points us to an economic transformation with global consequences taking place in the region's skies: the growth of Gulf airlines. Lastly, spanning the politics of the Palestinian Authority, the political economy of oil and gas, and the underpinnings of the region's grassroots political movements, this year's staff interviews offer fresh perspectives on pressing issues.

This year also marks the launch of our new website: www.hksjmepp.com. We believe that now more than ever, politics and public policy in the Middle East and North Africa require constant engagement and assessment. For this, an annual publication alone is not sufficient. Our website is a forum in which to engage the policy and political issues of the region as they evolve in real time. It is also a place for us to expand the conversation beyond politics to questions of society, history, and even art. We envision this website as a valuable extension of—and complement to—the debate presented each year in our print publication. We invite you to read, comment, and contribute in the coming weeks, months, and years. Only through active debate and constructive engagement will we move toward sound policies capable of overcoming the momentous challenges facing the region. It is an exciting time here at the Journal, and we hope you will join the conversation.

Colin Eide & Averell Schmidt

Editors-in-Chief
Cambridge, MA, May 2014

call for submissions

DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 30, 2014

The *Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy* (JMEPP) is accepting submissions for its print and online publications. JMEPP is a nonpartisan policy review published at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The Journal presents a diversity of advanced scholarship on issues of policy relevance to the contemporary Middle East and North Africa.

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Preventing a New Displacement for the Palestinian Double Refugees

By Ibrahim Sharqieh

Talking to people in the narrow streets of Ayn al-Hilwe—the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon—you frequently hear a new term in their daily conversations about the Syria conflict: “Death Convoys” (Qawafel al-Mawt). It refers to Palestinian refugees who fled the fighting in Syria, found no refuge in the neighboring countries, and ultimately decided to take part in the extremely dangerous voyages across the Mediterranean to Europe. The Lampedusa tragedy, where at least 359 refugees drowned in October 2013, was only one example.¹ The Palestinians face sieges and starvation in Syria and systematic discrimination in the neighboring countries if they manage to escape. The United Nations (UN) and all the neighboring countries have failed miserably to respond to the latest Palestinian refugee crisis. This must change immediately.

More than 125 Palestinians and Syrians have died of starvation and a lack of medical treatment over the past nine months in the besieged Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus.² Most of Yarmouk’s more than 160,000 refugees have fled, but the less than 18,000 people that

remain are trapped, victims of an increasingly strict blockade. The pro-Assad factions surrounding the strategically located camp have not allowed residents to leave or food to enter for months now, and approaching humanitarian convoys have been attacked. Small deliveries of food aid have recently made it through, but the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) say it is “nothing like enough to meet the needs.”³ More Palestinian refugees are expected to starve if the blockade is not lifted. This is just the starkest example of how Syria’s Palestinian refugees have been subjected to what UNRWA has called “extreme human suffering” since the beginning of the country’s conflict.⁴

The first displacement of Palestinians occurred during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War when approximately 750,000 were forced out of their homes and sought refuge in neighboring countries. Israel continues to deny those refugees their right of return to their homes—even though it is prescribed by UN General Assembly Resolution 194—and so a series of regional crises have

pushed them from one place to another. Syria was one of the main destinations for displaced Palestinians. Approximately 540,000 Palestinian refugees lived in Syria before the fighting began over three years ago. Most of them have now experienced the bitterness of a second displacement, and the conflict has turned many of them into “double refugees.” As of 31 March 2014, roughly 270,000 Palestinians were internally displaced, and at least 52,000 have fled to Lebanon, 12,000 to Jordan, 6,000 to Egypt, and smaller numbers to Gaza, Europe, and elsewhere.⁵ The misery of displacement for the Palestinian double refugees has manifested itself not only in being forced from their homes in Syria but also in the conditions they face at their destinations.

Jordan has been flooded with nearly 600,000 refugees from Syria, raising serious concerns

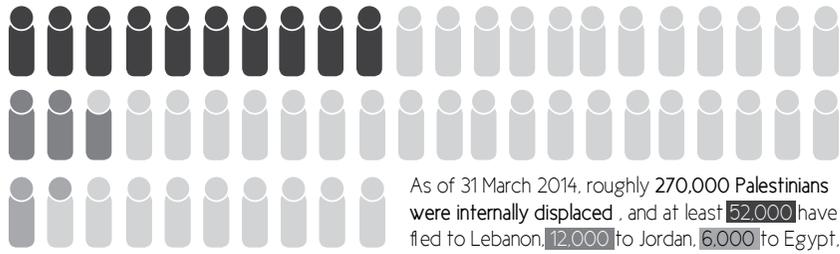
accommodate them in special camps like Al-Zaatari, it has established strict procedures that make it nearly impossible for Palestinians to gain entry. Some of the Palestinians that have been admitted are constrained to the campus of a converted technical college—an area called Cyber City—where their movement is tightly controlled by Jordanian security. UNRWA has also reported cases of forced deportation, where, in a blatant violation of international law, Palestinians have been dumped back across the border to fend for themselves.⁶

Lebanon has also been less than welcoming to the double refugees. Overwhelmed by an estimated 868,000 refugees and ever-concerned with its sectarian demographics, in August 2013 Lebanon initiated a set of measures that significantly limits the entry of Palestinians. The

In a blatant violation of international law, Palestinians have been dumped back across the border to fend for themselves.

over how many more it can accommodate. The small nation also continues to host over 30,000 Iraqi refugees that fled their country following the 2003 American invasion. The issue of taking in Palestinian refugees is particularly sensitive due to the delicate balance between Jordanians and Palestinians in the country. While Jordan continues to receive Syrian refugees and

new policy does not explicitly ban Palestinians, but the government regularly uses its arbitrary nature to effectively do just that. For example, a refugee can be returned simply because he does not have a clear destination address like a hotel or for not having a visa to travel to a third country. Lebanon has not established any camps, leaving the refugees to seek their own



As of 31 March 2014, roughly 270,000 Palestinians were internally displaced, and at least 52,000 have fled to Lebanon, 12,000 to Jordan, 6,000 to Egypt, and smaller numbers to Gaza, Europe, and elsewhere.⁵

shelter throughout the country. The Palestinian double refugees often end up in the already overcrowded preexisting camps, such as Ayn al-Hilwe, which has added over 20,000 new refugees to its 70,000 residents who live on a space of almost a square mile. Multiple families regularly share single rooms, and food, water, and electricity are scarce. Unlike Syrian refugees, the Palestinians are not allowed to work in Lebanon, exacerbating their hardship. According to the current system, after one year, each refugee must either pay a \$200 fee or return to Syria before attempting to reenter Lebanon. Both options are clearly untenable. The outcome is that the double refugees are living “illegally” in Lebanon, making them vulnerable to all sorts of exploitation. The UN has utterly failed to alleviate the misery of the Palestinian refugees. Despite Secretary General Ban Ki-moon constantly advocating that the UN work in a united fashion, bureaucratic and jurisdictional issues are negatively impacting the Palestinian double refugees. UNRWA, the UN agency responsible for providing aid

to the refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that live in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, historically struggles with funding and is underresourced by the UN. UNRWA’s reliance on donations and lack of a protection mandate leaves the Palestinian refugees in constant limbo. UNRWA is limited to providing health and education services with no proper mandate to protect and advocate for Palestinian refugees.

Though the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is leading the effort to care for the Syrian refugees, it insists that Palestinian refugees are exclusively UNRWA’s responsibility.⁷ Under UNHCR protection, Syrian refugees are able to enjoy residency privileges in Lebanon that Palestinian refugees do not. Such privileges—in addition to others—enable Syrian refugees to infiltrate the market in Lebanon and secure jobs and incomes. This is not the case for Palestinian double refugees. Cash assistance to vulnerable refugees varies depending on availability of resources, but in December, for example, UNHCR was paying seventy dollars a month per

vulnerable refugee in Jordan while UNRWA was paying only thirty-five dollars. Systems and policies created by the UN and the authorities of host countries led twenty-nine-year-old Mahmoud, a Palestinian double refugee in Ayn Al-Hilwe to say, “Our dream is that we Palestinian refugees would just be treated like the Syrian refugees. This will help us to cope with the harsh life of refuge.”⁸ This is not in any way to suggest that the Syrian refugees are experiencing good conditions in Lebanon. On the contrary, their situation is dire, and their suffering is mounting every day. This comparison endeavors to illustrate the flaws of the UN system and its inability to respond to this humanitarian crisis, in the hope that these issues can be rectified.

This systemic discrimination is perhaps most harmful in Egypt. UNHCR continues to claim that Palestinian refugees are not their responsibility, UNRWA does not have a mandate in Egypt, and Egyptian authorities refuse to acknowledge the existence of Palestinian refugees on their soil to avoid Egypt being identified as a “place of refuge.” As a result, Palestinian refugees in Egypt are not receiving the aid—cash assistance, medical care, education for children—that Syrian refugees enjoy. Egypt has also arbitrarily arrested and detained Palestinian double refugees, even deporting several groups to Syria.⁹

The crisis of the Palestinian

double refugees is a grievous moral and humanitarian dilemma. This displaced population is vulnerable not only to physical suffering, but many types of exploitation, such as price gouging and extremely low wages. Due to increased demand, rent for apartments in Lebanon’s Shatila refugee camp has jumped almost 300 percent since the beginning of the Syria crisis. By not adequately addressing the situation, the host nations are also creating risks for themselves. Particularly in Lebanon, the longer the government goes without providing the Palestinians with legal methods of survival, the more likely they will be to set up their own illegal systems that will be difficult to eradicate in the future. Many Palestinians have already overstayed their one-year residency limit and are now living in the shadows in constant fear of being deported back to Syria. To be fair to the Lebanese government, not a single case of deportation has been reported so far, but nevertheless, this shadow life subjects them to exploitation and radicalization, threatening to further destabilize these fragile countries.

What is the answer for the Palestinians? Some are actually refugees for the third or fourth time, having been previously forced from Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, or Iraq during the region’s many conflicts. In 2003, Palestinian refugees who were

forced out of Iraq after the U.S. invasion ended up stranded in the desert between Iraq and Jordan for three years with no one accepting them until they were finally sent to Brazil and Chile. There is no guarantee that the refugees that have now fled from Syria will be able to return when the situation there improves. This long journey of suffering that began with the establishment of Israel in 1948 and has since turned many Palestinians into double, triple, and quadruple refugees must end. Israel bears a major responsibility

treat them fairly, like the other Syrian refugees, especially with regard to entry and residency requirements. Lebanon especially must change its visa and residency policies, allowing the Palestinian double refugees to remain in the country as long as the conditions that caused them to flee persist, and without paying exorbitant fees.

Lebanon should also take the domestically controversial step of establishing refugee camps, or at the very least, expanding the ones that exist. Leaving the

It is in the interest of everyone to end the suffering of the Palestinian double refugees.

for the current situation because it caused the original displacement and continues to deny the refugees the universal right of returning to their homes. This experience has left no doubt that no shelter in the region or the world presents a sustainable alternative to returning to their own land. Applying the right of return is the only solution to one of the most horrific humanitarian crises in the world today and will save the region from further conflicts, radicalization, and destabilization.

As for countries currently hosting the double refugees, Jordan and Lebanon should repeal the policies that discriminate against Palestinian refugees and

refugees to roam the country has serious potential to create many security, economic, and humanitarian problems, both for the refugees and the country. It is time for Lebanon to define and address this issue—through official registration and proper residency regulations—rather than continuing to push it underground and pretending it does not exist.

However, Jordan and Lebanon should not be left with the entire responsibility of handling their refugee influx just because they happen to border Syria. The massive number of refugees these two countries have absorbed far exceeds their resources and has imposed a heavy economic burden. The

international community should take responsibility and contribute significant additional financial resources to deal with the serious challenge Jordan and Lebanon are facing. Israel should not be exempted from its responsibility towards the first displacement of the double refugees and contribute today towards a solution especially on applying the principle of the right of return. Moreover, other Arab countries should offer to host some of the refugees fleeing Syria. Many refugees have excellent skills and can contribute to market needs, especially in the Gulf region. This approach is particularly important as it advances a dignified method of alleviating the suffering of the refugees. Refugees could contribute positively to Gulf economies while supporting themselves and their families wherever they are taking refuge.

The UN must better integrate UNRWA within its system. The UN should recognize that UNRWA is only mandated to provide services such as health and education, and though it tries its best to advocate for the refugees, it does not have a proper protection mandate like UNHCR. UN agencies must include Palestinian double refugees in their planning and studies—such as needs assessments—and stop assuming that UNRWA is capable of handling all types of needs.

Finally, the UN must step up to its responsibility and

intervene strongly in Egypt to ensure Palestinian double refugees are receiving the health, education, shelter, and protection they need. Leaving the double refugees vulnerable to the UN's conflicting mandates and systemic inconsistencies in addition to the brutal policies of Egyptian authorities will only multiply the “convoys of death.” It is in the interest of everyone to end the suffering of the Palestinian double refugees. One should not assume that they will be forever passive participants in this misery. Eventually, they may very well take things into their own hands. ♦

Ibrahim Sharqieh is a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution's Doha Center and adjunct professor at Georgetown University in Qatar. He previously taught International Conflict Resolution at George Mason University and George Washington University.

¹ Agence France-Presse. “Lampedusa Migrant Shipwreck Toll Rises to 359,” 12 October 2013.

² Amnesty International. “Syria: Yarmouk Under Siege - a Horror Story of War Crimes, Starvation and Death,” 10 March 2014.

³ BBC. “‘Aid Enters’ Besieged Damascus Camp of Yarmouk,” 18 January 2014.

⁴ Agence France-Presse. “U.N. Warns on Syria's Yarmuk Refugee Camp,” 9 January 2014.

⁵ UNRWA. “Syria Crisis Response Update (Issue No 73),” 7 April 2014.

⁶ UNRWA. “UNRWA Syria Crisis Response January–June 2013,” 21 December 2012.

⁷ UNHCR officials. Author interview, Beirut, January 2014, and Amman, December 2013.

⁸ Mahmoud. Author conversation, Ayn al-Hilwe, January 2013.

⁹ Amnesty International. “‘We Cannot Live Here Any More’: Refugees from Syria in Egypt,” 17 October 2013.

Hezbollah and Iran's Strategic Partnership

By Matthew Levitt

ABSTRACT

Today, Hezbollah is more actively involved in international terrorist plots than it has been since the late 1980s and early 1990s. But, as was the case when the group first formed in the 1980s, the impetus for Hezbollah's surge in international violence and intervention in Syria comes directly from Tehran—not Beirut.

Over the past few years, a series of events have exposed some of Hezbollah's covert and militant enterprises in the region and around the world, challenging the group's standing at home and abroad. Well before Hezbollah announced its participation in the Syrian crisis fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime, there was a notable and significant increase in Iranian and Hezbollah terrorist activities around the world. The State Department's annual terrorism report noted a "marked resurgence" of Iranian state sponsorship of terrorism in general. Most worrying, it added, was that "Iran and Hezbollah's terrorist activity has reached a tempo unseen since the 1990s, with attacks plotted in Southeast Asia, Europe, and Africa."¹ While it surprised many, the increased operational tempo was no coincidence but part of a coordinated strategy first centered

around Iran's nuclear program and now focused on the increasingly sectarian war in Syria. Hezbollah's behavior has confirmed Director of National Intelligence James Clapper's characterization of the relationship of Hezbollah and Iran as "a partnership arrangement[,] with the Iranians as the senior partner."² This "strategic partnership," as the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Director Matthew Olsen put it, "is the product of a long evolution from the 1980s, when Hezbollah was just a proxy of Iran."³

Hezbollah Origins: Still Relevant Today

This evolution began in the early 1980s. The 1983 bombings of the U.S. Marines and French military barracks in Beirut are well-known events. But few people are aware that the bombings were carried out at the direct

instruction of Iranian intelligence. According to the testimony of former U.S. military officials, two days after the bombing—on 25 October 1983—the chief of naval intelligence notified Adm. James Lyons, then deputy chief of naval operations, of an intercepted message from 26 September 1983, just a few weeks before the barracks bombing. Sent from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) in Tehran, the message instructed the Iranian ambassador in Damascus, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, to contact Husayn al-Musawi, the leader of Islamic Amal (a key precursor to Hezbollah) and to direct him to "take spectacular action against the United States Marines" and the multinational coalition in Lebanon.⁴ In the words of Col. Timothy Geraghty, commander of the Marine unit in Beirut at the time of the bombing, "If there was ever a 24-karat gold document, this was it."⁵

Lawyers for the families in the Marine barrack bombing suit found a former Hezbollah member—referred to as Mahmoud—who testified that Ambassador Mohtashemi followed orders and contacted an Islamic Revolutionary Guardsman named Kanani, who commanded the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Lebanon headquarters.⁶ Imad Mughniyeh and his brother-in-law, Mustapha Baddredine, were named operation leaders after a meeting

between Kanani, Musawi, and then-Hezbollah security official Hassan Nasrallah. Planning meetings were held at the Iranian embassy in Damascus, often chaired by Ambassador Mohtashemi, who helped establish Hezbollah in the first place.⁷ All of these individuals remained key players, and those who are still alive are now in higher leadership roles. Hassan Nasrallah is serving as Hezbollah's Secretary-General; Mustapha Baddredine is Hezbollah's top militant commander, having replaced Imad Mughniyeh following his assassination in 2008. In other words, when Hezbollah initially began to shift its attention toward Western targets—first in Lebanon, later abroad—it was done at Iran's behest. Today, Iran and Hezbollah's relationship is stronger still—a strategic partnership—which explains why Hezbollah is willing to incur such high costs for actions it is taking at Iran's behest around the world, in the region, and next door in Syria.

Syria: "Bad for the Brand"

Over the past couple of years, Hezbollah's combatant role in Syria has become more formal and overt. At the same time, intercommunal violence has increased significantly in Lebanon, including gunfights between Sunni and Alawite militants in Tripoli, between Sunnis and Shi'as in Sidon, and of course bombings by Sunni militants—including

Jabhat al-Nusrah in Lebanon—in Shi'a neighborhoods in Beirut and Hermel. Hezbollah's stronghold in the Dahiyeh (a predominantly Shi'a suburb south of Beirut) has been struck on multiple occasions, and even the Iranian embassy was the target of a 19 November 2013 double suicide bombing.

By siding with the Assad regime, its Alawite supporters, and Iran, and taking up arms against Sunni rebels, Hezbollah has placed itself at the epicenter of a sectarian conflict that has nothing to do with the group's purported *raison d'être*: "resistance" to Israeli occupation. As one Shi'a Lebanese satirist put it, "Either the fighters have lost Palestine on the map and think it is in Syria," he said, "or they were informed that the road to Jerusalem runs through Qusayr and Homs," locations in Syria where Hezbollah has fought with Assad loyalists against Sunni rebels.⁸

The implication is clear: for many Lebanese, Hezbollah is no longer a pure "Islamic Resistance" fighting Israel, but a sectarian militia and Iranian proxy doing Assad and Khamenei's bidding at the expense of fellow Muslims. And it, therefore, does not surprise that the pokes come from extremist circles too. In June 2013, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, a Lebanon-based al-Qa'eda-affiliated group, released a statement challenging Nasrallah and his Hezbollah fighters "to fire one bullet at occupied Palestine and

claim responsibility" for it. They could fire at Israel from either Lebanon or Syria, the statement continued, seeing as Hezbollah "fired thousands of shells and bullets upon unarmed Sunnis and their women, elderly and children, and destroyed their homes on top of them."⁹

But while taunts might be expected from radical Sunni extremist groups, Hezbollah now faces challenges it never would have anticipated just a few years ago. For example, the day before Nasrallah's August speech, Lebanese President Michel Suleiman called, for the first time ever, for the state to curtail Hezbollah's ability to operate as an independent militia outside the control of the government.¹⁰ By sending fighters to Syria, many Lebanese believe Hezbollah has put its interests as a group ahead of those of Lebanon as a state, something that flies in the face of Hezbollah's longtime efforts to portray itself as a group that is, first and foremost, Lebanese. Now, the group that describes itself as the vanguard standing up for the dispossessed in the face of injustice and that has always tried to downplay its sectarian and pro-Iranian identities finds those assertions challenged over its refusal to abide by the Lebanese government's official position of noninterference in Syria. To the contrary, its proactive support of a brutal Alawite regime against the predominantly Sunni

Syrian opposition undermines its long-cultivated image as a distinctly Lebanese "resistance" movement.

Hezbollah has doubled down on its support for the Assad regime, even after bombs started going off in the Dahiyeh. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was crystal clear: "If you are punishing Hezbollah for its role in Syria, I will tell you, if we want to respond to the Dahiyeh explosion, we would double the number of fighters in Syria—if they were 1,000 to 2,000, and if they were 5,000, they would become 10,000." Indeed, Hezbollah—and Nasrallah himself—have cast their lot in with Assad to the end. "If," Nasrallah added, "one day came, and required that Hezbollah and I go to Syria, we will do so."¹¹

At one point, Nasrallah tried to paper over the fact that Lebanese Shi'as and Lebanese Sunnis were now openly battling one another in Syria, and threatening to drag that sectarian fighting across the border into Lebanon, by proposing that Lebanese Shi'as and Sunnis agree to disagree over Syria. Addressing Lebanese Sunnis, Nasrallah said in a speech last May: "We disagree over Syria. You fight in Syria; we fight in Syria; then let's fight there. Do you want me to be more frank? Keep Lebanon aside. Why should we fight in Lebanon?"¹² But that pitch did not go over so well with Nasrallah's fellow Lebanese, who wanted an end to Lebanese

interference in the war in Syria, not a gentleman's agreement that Lebanese citizens would only slaughter one another across the border.

So why has Hezbollah risked its status as the champion of the Palestinian cause? Why engage in a sectarian war that threatens not only the stability of the fractured and deeply divided sectarian society that is Lebanon but also Hezbollah's place therein?

To be sure, Hezbollah seeks to keep Assad in power for its own and Iran's interests. For years Syria has been a reliable patron of Hezbollah's, a relationship that only grew deeper under the rule of Bashar al-Assad.¹³ By 2010, Syria was not just allowing the shipment of Iranian arms to Hezbollah through Syria but was reportedly providing Hezbollah long-range Scud rockets from its own arsenal.¹⁴ Hezbollah is keen to make sure that air and land corridors remain open for the delivery of weapons, cash, and other materials from Tehran.

But, fundamentally, Hezbollah leaders are willing to risk the group's standing at home and in the region because they were asked to do so by Iran. Hezbollah's ideological commitment to Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolutionary doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*—the rule of the jurisprudent—is a key source of tension since it means that the group is simultaneously committed to the decrees of

Iranian clerics, the Lebanese state, its sectarian Shi'a community within Lebanon, and fellow Shi'a abroad. According to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, "the subject of the velayat-e faqih and the Imamate is at the heart of our religious doctrine, and any offense to it is an offense to our religion."¹⁵

Nowhere has this tension been more evident than in Syria. As late as mid-2012, U.S. officials believed the Assad regime would crumble "within months."¹⁶ But just months later, that assessment changed as intelligence revealed that Iran and Hezbollah were doubling down in defense of the Assad regime. U.S. intelligence assessments noted that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah at first declined repeated requests from Iranian leaders, in particular Qods Force chief Gen. Qassem Suleimani, for Hezbollah to send large numbers of experienced fighters to fight on behalf of the Assad regime. While some Hezbollah leaders were inclined to provide the fighters, others resisted what they (correctly) feared would prove to undermine their position in Lebanon and be, as one official put it, "bad for the brand." Nasrallah only acquiesced, officials explained, after receiving a personal appeal from Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran, the Supreme Leader made clear, not only expected Hezbollah to act, but to act decisively.¹⁷

Iran, for its part, would provide

Hezbollah with sophisticated guided-missile systems, in part to deter future Israeli strikes targeting either Lebanon or Iran's nuclear program. But the weapons were primarily stored in Hezbollah warehouses in Syria and were delivered to Hezbollah via shared supply lines used by both the Assad regime and Hezbollah. As such, the weapons transfers were also believed by U.S. and Israeli officials to be a means of giving Hezbollah another reason for having vested interests in the defense of the regime.¹⁸ Iran would work no less decisively to uphold its end of the bargain, deploying senior Qods Force commanders to personally oversee the transfer of advanced weapons systems to Hezbollah. The movement of such weaponry, however, crossed an Israeli red line, leading the Israeli Air Force to carry out at least six different air strikes targeting weapons transfers for Hezbollah—some of which killed senior Iranian personnel like Gen. Hassan Shateri.¹⁹ In response, Iran began to smuggle these guided missiles in smaller, component pieces that could later be reconstructed on arrival in Lebanon.²⁰

Operation Radwan

Hezbollah flags were on display at Shateri's funeral, where a representative of Supreme Leader Khamenei spoke of Shateri as "our very own Imad Mughniyeh."²¹ But it was

Mughniyeh's assassination five years earlier that led Hezbollah to engage in a wave of international terrorist plots, the likes of which it had not carried out for many years.

Exiting a meeting with Syrian intelligence on the evening of 12 February 2008, Imad Mughniyeh climbed into his Mitsubishi Pajero and was killed instantly when an explosive device, reportedly inserted into the driver's seat headrest, went off, causing a massive explosion.²² Hezbollah denied Mughniyeh's existence altogether while he lived but openly embraced him in death.²³ Following the assassination, Nasrallah promised, "Zionists, if you want this sort of open war, then let the whole world hear, so be it! The blood of Imad Mughniyeh will make them [Israel] withdraw from existence."²⁴

Within weeks, Hezbollah attempted the first of several plots—this one targeting the Israeli ambassador in Baku, Azerbaijan—as part of Operation Radwan (named for Mughniyeh, who also went by Hajj Radwan). Plots were discovered in West Africa, Egypt, and Turkey, among others, but none succeeded. A foiled attack in Turkey in September 2009 proved to be a watershed event for Hezbollah operational planners and their Iranian sponsors. Turkish security officials were able to uncover a plot after receiving information

from a Western intelligence service.²⁵ Hezbollah operatives with Canadian and Kuwaiti passports were arrested for their involvement in smuggling a car bomb from Syria.²⁶ The suspected targets were American and Israeli. Reportedly, Hezbollah's attacks were well planned and coordinated with Syrian and Iranian intelligence.²⁷ Despite the massive logistical support Qods Force operatives provided for that plot, Hezbollah operatives still failed to successfully execute the attack.

By late 2009, Iran's interest in Hezbollah's operational prowess focused less on local issues like avenging Mughniyeh's death and more on the much larger issue of combating threats to its nascent nuclear program. A shadow war between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear program had been going on since April 2006, when fifty centrifuges were destroyed at the Natanz nuclear facility when equipment—according to press reports was reportedly tampered with by American and Israeli intelligence services in a cyberattack—malfunctioned.²⁸ But, in January 2010, a magnetic "sticky bomb" killed Iranian physics professor Masoud Ali Mohammadi outside his Tehran home, an act which Iran blamed on Israeli agents.²⁹ According to Israeli intelligence officials, furious Iranian leaders reached two conclusions after Mohammadi's death: (1) Hezbollah's Islamic

Jihad Organization (IJO)—Hezbollah’s international terrorist wing formerly led by Imad Mughniyeh—had to revitalize its operational capabilities and carry out attacks to deter future Israeli actions targeting the Iranian regime, and (2) the IRGC would no longer rely solely on Hezbollah to carry out terrorist attacks abroad—it would now deploy Qods Force operatives to do so on their own, not just as logisticians supporting Hezbollah

on hold, and major personnel changes made. New operatives were recruited from the elite of Hezbollah’s military wing for intelligence and operational training, while existing IJO operatives were moved into new positions. At the same time, the IJO invested in the development of capabilities and tradecraft that had withered on the vine since the 2001 decision to rein in operations.³² Moving forward, Hezbollah would continue to seek

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hit men.³⁰ Even more than the loss of its scientists, Tehran sought to address its damaged prestige—the image of an Iran so weak it could not even protect its own scientists at home could not stand.

Much finger-pointing ensued between Hezbollah and the Qods Force regarding where the blame lay for the two years of failed operations, culminating in the botched attack in Turkey and then another failed plot in Jordan in January 2010. Humiliated and under Nasrallah’s instructions, Badreddine and Talal Hamiyeh “undertook a massive operational reevaluation in January 2010, which led to big changes within the IJO over a period of a little over six months.”³¹ During this period, IJO operations were put

to avenge Mughniyeh’s death, but Operation Radwan would be accompanied by a completely different operational track aimed at deterring future Israeli action targeting Iran’s nuclear program. To avenge Mughniyeh, Hezbollah had to strike a similarly senior target, but to deter future action against its nuclear program, Iran concluded, Hezbollah need only hit softer targets, like Israeli tourists traveling abroad.

Hezbollah’s first successful operation came in July 2012 when a bus carrying Israeli tourists was destroyed by a bomb in Burgas, Bulgaria. Three Hezbollah operatives were identified by authorities, including two Lebanese-Canadian dual citizens and one Lebanese-Australian dual

citizen. The bus driver and five Israelis were killed, and thirty more were wounded.³³ Two weeks earlier, another Hezbollah agent—a Lebanese-Swedish dual citizen—was arrested in Cyprus for plotting a similar type of attack.³⁴ In his defense, this operative told Cypriot police, “I was just collecting information about the Jews, and this is what my organization is doing everywhere in the world.”³⁵ Even as Syria has dominated Hezbollah and Iran’s attention and resources, their agents are still being discovered around the world—from Thailand to Nigeria and other spots in between. In September 2013, an Iranian with Belgian citizenship was arrested for conducting surveillance outside the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv.³⁶

But again, why take the risk? Over the past few years, Hezbollah has suffered several international setbacks, ranging from the indictment of five members by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) investigating the murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, to a series of Treasury Department designations of Hezbollah operatives around the world—naming specific operatives as terrorists, cutting operatives from the U.S. financial system, assessing operatives for possible civil and criminal penalties—to the exposure of Hezbollah narco-trafficking and money-laundering in high-profile

cases like the one surrounding the Lebanese-Canadian Bank (LCB). Why invite still more scrutiny by international law enforcement and intelligence agencies by carrying out terrorist operations around the world? Here, too, it is Hezbollah’s strategic partnership with Iran that swayed the group’s decision making. Asked to expand its targeting to include Israeli tourists, not as part of Operation Radwan but to further Iran’s goal of deterring action against its nuclear program, Hezbollah stepped up and held up its part of this partnership, despite the risks involved.

Conclusion: Conflict in Syria will not stay in Syria

Thirty years ago, around the time Hezbollah first started targeting Western interests, the group blew up the U.S. Marines and French military barracks in Beirut. Today, Hezbollah is more actively involved in international terrorist plots than it has been since the late 1980s and early 1990s. In both cases, ironically enough, the impetus for Hezbollah’s surge in international violence came directly from Tehran—not Beirut. Some Western intelligence agencies see the Iran-Hezbollah relationship as so closely intertwined that they are reorganizing their operational and analytical unit structures to allow for more cross-fertilization among and between Hezbollah, Lebanon, and Iranian programs.

The U.S. intelligence community sees things much the same way, no longer describing the bond between Hezbollah and Iran as a patron-proxy relationship but rather as a “strategic partnership” with Iran as the primary partner. The implications of such an alliance are severe, and understanding them is critical to developing effective policy related to not only Hezbollah and Iran but also Lebanon, Syria, and the Middle East writ large.

Consider, for example, that while a tremendous amount of attention has been paid to Sunni foreign fighters traveling to fight in Syria, at least as many Shi’a foreign fighters have gone to defend the Assad regime.³⁷ Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi’a militants from groups like Asaib Ahl al-Haqq and Kataib Hezbollah make up a majority of the Shi’as fighting in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime.³⁸ Shi’as from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Côte d’Ivoire, Yemen, and Afghanistan have also reportedly gone to Syria to fight on behalf of the regime.³⁹ Iranians are present in smaller support and advising roles, although recently there have been reports of additional deployments of various Iranian forces, including sixty to seventy Qods Force commanders.⁴⁰

Hezbollah’s activities carried out at the behest of Iran extend beyond Syria. In August 2013, the U.S. Treasury Department

revealed that as of 2012, Khalil Harb, an advisor to Nasrallah, is now in charge of Hezbollah’s Yemen portfolio, sending as much as \$50,000 a month through Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to the leader of a Yemeni political party.⁴¹ In Kuwait, where protestors burned effigies of Hassan Nasrallah, the government began boycotting Iranian goods to demonstrate its anger with Hezbollah.⁴² In July 2013, the European Union (E.U.) designated the “military wing” of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, followed quickly by similar actions by Bahrain and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Iran, too, is paying the price of its adventurism in Syria and beyond. Iran supports the Assad regime and Hezbollah in Syria, but the Gulf States are not idly sitting by. They are pouring resources into opposition Sunni fighters in Syria, moderates and extremists alike. Several attacks have now occurred inside Hezbollah-controlled territory in Lebanon. And after the Iranian embassy was attacked in November 2013, killing 25 and injuring about 150 more, Nasrallah accused Saudi Arabia’s intelligence service of being the real power behind the attack.⁴³

The conflict in Syria has already deepened Iran and Hezbollah’s strategic partnership, and it will continue to do so as they fight to win what they—and their opponents—view as an

existential conflict. Today, the scale and scope of Hezbollah and Iran’s international terrorist plots appear to have waned. And while some attribute this to Iranian moderation under the Rouhani presidency and in the context of nuclear negotiations, intelligence officials believe it is at least, if not much more, related to Iran and Hezbollah’s all-in investment in Syria and a lack of bandwidth to fully prosecute the war in Syria and an international terrorist campaign at the same time. Several intelligence agencies now see an Iran-Hezbollah relationship that is intimately entangled when it comes to Shi’a militancy around the world. Given the likelihood that the Syrian conflict will not end anytime soon, and that its repercussions will be felt across the region and around the world for some time to come, a reorganization that allows operational and analytical units to better coordinate their approaches to Hezbollah and Iran is a step in the right direction.

Bringing together those focused on Hezbollah and Iran would provide vision into the full range of risky behaviors Hezbollah and Iran are engaged in and would offer insights into why they are willing to engage in such a wide range of these behaviors in the first place. For Hezbollah, this includes not just its militia activities but also its involvement in terrorism, transnational organized crime, narcotics

trafficking, and open intervention in Syria.

By virtue of engaging in such risky behaviors, Hezbollah and Iran expose themselves to domestic and international scrutiny and create opportunities that Washington and its allies should take advantage of to undermine their standings at home and in the region. For example, in July 2013, the E.U. banned the military wing of Hezbollah following a successful attack in Bulgaria and a thwarted attack in Cyprus the previous year. The designation empowered the twenty-eight E.U. member states to initiate preemptive intelligence investigations of Hezbollah activities in Europe, making Europe a less attractive operating environment for the group and threatening still further exposure of other Hezbollah activities on the continent. Hezbollah and Iranian members have been arrested elsewhere around the world as well—from Thailand to Nepal to Nigeria—where they have been found conducting surveillance or possessing large amounts of illegal, explosive materials. Exposing Hezbollah’s illicit conduct through a variety of tools—designations, prosecutions, investigations, etc.—not only fulfills a useful naming and shaming function, it also offers a way to force the group and its strategic partner to incur costs for their illicit conduct. This is

something sorely lacking and long in coming.

Neither Iran nor Hezbollah incurred any real cost for the Beirut bombings of the 1980s, the Khobar Towers bombing in 1996, their activities in Iraq during the coalition war there, or their activities in Syria today. As a result, they see such activities as being relatively risk and cost free. There is precedent, however, for a revised approach. Responding to Iranian and Hezbollah activities targeting coalition forces in Iraq, a review of the U.S. approach to Iran and Hezbollah activities in Iraq was conducted in the summer of 2006. "There were no costs for the Iranians," a senior administration official commented, explaining the reason for the policy review.⁴⁴ A new presidential directive soon authorized U.S. forces to kill or capture Iranian operatives in Iraq. Coined "Counter Iranian Influence," the initiative included measures to roll back Iranian successes in five different theaters from Lebanon to Afghanistan and isolate the regime in Tehran. In Lebanon, for example, the White House authorized the intelligence community to engage in broadened operations targeting Hezbollah's engagement in a spectrum of activities called the Blue Game Matrix.⁴⁵

Today, the Iran-Hezbollah strategic partnership demands a similar approach. It's time to dust off the Counter Iranian Influence

and Blue Game Matrix programs and update them for a post-Iraq era that would focus on, but by no means be limited to, Hezbollah's and Iran's roles in Syria. ♦

Matthew Levitt is the director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Previously, he served as a counterterrorism analyst at the FBI and as the deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and analysis at the U.S. Department of Treasury. Most recently, he is the author of Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God (Georgetown University Press, 2013).

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Transborder Kurdish Politics: Unity or Division?

By Dr. Denise Natali

ABSTRACT

Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria are, for the first time, mobilizing simultaneously for Kurdish nationalism. Yet, political divisions in the two main nationalist tendencies—the Barzani strain and the Öcalan strain—have become salient. Kurds are also separated by geopolitical realities, distinct historical trajectories, differing levels of support from regional actors, and distinct elite power structures. What are the policy implications? Although international actors cannot fully resolve intra-Kurdish dynamics, they can pursue a more evenhanded approach that lessens the discrepancies in external support for different Kurdish groups. And while keeping states together should certainly remain a priority to assuring regional stability, this effort should be pursued in a manner that effectively balances the commitment to territorial integrity with rising demands for group rights.

For the first time since the creation of modern Middle Eastern states, Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria are mobilizing simultaneously for Kurdish nationalism. Iraqi Kurds are seeking to secure their quasi-state with an independent energy sector. Turkish Kurds are negotiating a peace process with the state and demanding democratic autonomy. Syrian Kurds have recently declared their own autonomous cantons. Some Kurdish groups are also taking advantage of the weakened Iraqi and Syrian states by penetrating porous borders, controlling

ungoverned spaces, and accessing commercial and energy wealth. The Kurdistan Region in Iraq has become a base for transborder Kurdish groups, creating a political arena to unify Kurds and advance Kurdish national interests within and across borders.

Still, transborder Kurdish politics are entrenched in the distinct historical trajectories of each Kurdish group, institutional legacies, geopolitics, and traditional power structures. Kurdish communities also have different levels of external support that legitimize certain

nationalist agendas over others. Iraqi Kurds' extensive autonomy is enshrined in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution and backed by Ankara and world powers; however, Kurdish autonomy in Syria is not recognized regionally or internationally, while Kurdish demands in Turkey have limited backing. Instead of a cohesive movement that could potentially redraw Sykes-Picot boundaries and create a unified Kurdish state or statelets, modern transborder Kurdish politics have become increasingly complex, creating more avenues for division. What are the implications of these trends on regional stability and resolving the Kurdish problem across borders?

Tribes, Sheikhs, and Ottomans: Fragmented Nationalism

While nearly all Kurds in the Middle East and the diaspora affirm a shared national identity based on a shared culture (Kurdewarî), ethnicity, language, history, and territory, they have not consistently or uniformly mobilized as a national group across space and time.¹ During the late Ottoman period, for instance, the Sunni Islamic ties that bound most Kurds together were the same ones that linked them to Arabs and Turks. Sunni Kurds were part of the dominant Sunni Muslim millet and enjoyed certain privileges and alliances to the Ottoman Porte. Small

pockets of urbanized Kurds in Damascus, Istanbul, and Baghdad also integrated with Arab and Turkish elites as Ottoman citizens and became part of Ottoman institutions.² Boundaries of exclusion existed, but they were largely based on religion rather than ethnicity. The “Other” was not the ethnic Kurd but the heterodox Muslim: Alevi, Kaka-i, Yezidi, Druze, and Ismaili.

During this period, Kurdish unity was also stifled by the salience of traditional power structures and by the geography of the Kurdish regions. Kurdish communities resided in the outlying provinces of the Empire and were largely illiterate, tribal, and agrarian. Loyalties were based on the tribal sheikh, *agha*, Sufi leader, and *qaimaqam*, and not to an abstract Kurdish nation. Absence of a standardized language and communications network apart from Turkish or Arabic enhanced divisions. Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) speakers in the Turkish and Syrian provinces could not communicate with Sorani (Central Kurdish) speakers in the southern Kurdish provinces of Iraq—many of whom were closely tied to Kurdish Sorani speakers in the Qajar Empire.

Indeed, Kurdish nationalist tendencies emerged late in the nineteenth century in reaction to Istanbul's centralizing and ethnicizing tendencies. Kurdish tribal leaders revolted while

Kurdish intellectuals, such as the Bedirkhan brothers, travelled between Istanbul, Damascus, and Paris, establishing nationalist organizations and publications written in Kurmanji and French.

Still, while the Kurds lacked sufficient external support for statehood—a theme that has become an integral part of their nationalist discourse—internal fragmentations undermined their own nationalist agenda. Rather than take advantage of the interwar political vacuum to unify under a nationalist banner, Kurdish tribes and notables remained at odds with one another while maintaining Ottoman alliances. Kurdish tribal leaders participated alongside Sunni Arabs and Turks in the Turkish nationalist movement to safeguard Mosul province in Iraq—the very territory of a proposed Kurdish state. Kurdish sheikhs and the traditional stratum protested against “breaking the bonds of Islam with their Turkish and Arab brothers.” Leading Kurdish notables also criticized the idea of Kurdish independence, arguing that it was “indignant to the Kurdish honor.”³

Emergent Transborder Ethnonationalisms

Kurdish politics and identities started to shift, however, with the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the states of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran.⁴ Instead of building upon

Sunni Islam as a common basis of citizenship that tied Kurds, Turks, and Arabs together, the new mandatory powers and local elites emphasized ethnicity and secularism as official state nationalisms. Turkey modernized and Turkified under the Kemalist state-building project. More gradually, Iraq and Syria became secular, Arab nationalist Ba'athist states. Consequently, as Kurds became ethnic minorities—discriminated against in the states in which they lived—they developed a shared sense of Kurdish ethnonationalism within and across borders.⁵

The emergent sense of transborder Kurdish nationalism was reinforced by mobilizing structures: cross-border family ties, nationalist leaders, political parties, and external support. Despite the new territorial and administrative boundaries that divided Kurds across four states, some groups continued to penetrate porous borders and maintain familial, tribal, and commercial-smuggling networks. Before and after Kemal Atatürk's Turkish nationalist project commenced in 1923, Kurdish tribal leaders were killed, deported westward, or expelled from the country. Many relocated to the Kurdish regions of Syria—and to a lesser extent Iraq—forming socioeconomic and political links that continue to the present day.⁶ Syrian-Turkish Kurdish ties were reinforced when the radical

nationalist separatist group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), established a base in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, which was controlled by the Syrian army from the early 1980s until 1999.

Transborder Kurdish politics have strengthened over time. As state sovereignty weakened, external support for Kurds increased, regional alliances and the balance of power shifted, and minorities started making claims for group rights. Post-conflict state-building operations, informed by the “new humanitarianism” of the 1990s, created opportunities for victims of state repression and subnationalist movements.⁷ After the 1990 Gulf War, Iraqi Kurds became beneficiaries of international aid through the creation of no-fly zones in Iraq and a safe haven in parts of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq.⁸ Foreign aid and security assistance continued for over a decade, helping to propel Kurdish nationalist institutions and self-rule, embodied in the election of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992.

The Kurdish safe haven immediately became a magnet for cross-border nationalist groups and political dissidents. Since its inception, over 200,000 Iraqi Kurds—having lived in Iran since the 1975 Barzani revolution—have returned to Barzani strongholds. Meanwhile, Iranian Kurdish groups have

set up camps in Sulaymaniyah province under Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's auspices. Similarly, thousands of PKK-affiliated Kurds from Turkey have resettled in Dohuk and the Makhmur refugee camp outside Erbil. After its expulsion from the Bekaa Valley and the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK established a new base in the Qandil Mountains in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where it continues to launch its cross-border, nationalist operations.

Transborder Kurdish politics have become more complex in recent years as the Iraqi Kurdish region has strengthened its internal sovereignty with the extensive rights, revenues, and recognition it gained from the 2005 Constitution and developed economically. In contrast to earlier periods, wherein Kurdish migrants were dissidents and refugees in isolated camps, Kurds repatriating to the region after 2003 were largely businessmen, entrepreneurs, artists, intellectuals, and political elites seeking to generate wealth and use their skills to develop a Kurdish homeland. As Erbil has become a regional business hub, it has attracted populations from the outlying provinces of Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah, as well as Kurdish workers and students from Turkey, Syria, Iran, and the diaspora. These efforts are reinforced by diaspora activities largely in

Europe and the dozens of Iraqi Kurdish delegations that represent and advance Kurdish interests worldwide.

Different States; Different Nationalist Agendas

Given this shared Kurdish national consciousness and opportunity to mobilize, why have Kurds resisted unification? In contrast to earlier periods, the weakened Iraqi and Syrian states of the last decade have little or no control over Kurdish border areas. Turkey has developed strong ties with Iraqi Kurds and is seeking to resolve its own Kurdish problem. Some Kurdish groups have also become increasingly prominent players in the changing Middle Eastern political landscape, with significant external support and new access to hydrocarbon revenues. Yet, rather than merge under a single Kurdish leader and agenda, transborder Kurdish politics have fractured among two main nationalist tendencies: followers of Ma'sud Barzani and supporters of Abdullah Öcalan. Divisions also remain within and between Kurdish groups over distinct issues and balance of power politics, particularly as they relate to the Syrian civil war, regional alliances (Turkey and Iran), and governance in Kurdish regions.

These divisions are in many ways tied to geopolitical realities. Regional states have little interest in seeing a strong and unified

Kurdish movement that would undermine their territorial integrity. The governments of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran continue to co-opt Kurdish groups and use them as regional proxies. Turkey and Iran have created spheres of influence in the Badinan (Barzani) and Sorani (Talabani-Gorran) regions of Iraqi Kurdistan respectively that reinforce intra-Kurdish power struggles. Regional states also maintain divide-and-rule policies

Even without these regional state tactics, Kurdish transborder politics would likely be fractured due to the different political spaces in which Kurdish nationalist projects evolved.

that reinforce traditional Kurdish sociopolitical structures and group rivalries. Turkey's village guard system and state-created parties (Kurdish Hezbollah) operate against the PKK. Damascus' tacit support of the PKK and its Syrian affiliate, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), challenges Barzani and Turkish-supported Kurdish groups in Syria and across borders.

Even without these regional state tactics, Kurdish transborder

politics would likely be fractured due to the different political spaces in which Kurdish nationalist projects evolved. Although a shared sense of ethnonationalism has emerged in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran, Kurdish movements have also been shaped by different elites, demands, and nationalist agendas. Whereas tribal leaders and traditional power structures assumed a key role in Iraqi Kurds' nationalist politics, they had little place in Turkey where Kurdish politics were largely defined by urbanized leftists linked to radicalized and working-class groups. Syrian Kurdish politics have also been shaped by the coexistence and competition between tribal and leftist groups, as well as by strong cross-border ties to Kurds in Iraq and Turkey. Each group also has a distinct political agenda. Kurds in Turkey, whose ethnic existence was denied from the outset of the modern Turkish state, seek constitutional reforms that recognize their distinct ethnic identity, democratic autonomy, and for some, Öcalan's release from prison. Iraqi Kurds, who have been recognized as a distinct ethnic group with its own language since 1925 and then as an autonomous region since 1970, seek economic independence. Kurds in Syria seek citizenship status, de-ethnicizing the name of the Syrian "Arab" Republic, and some form of administrative decentralization.

These distinctions have been reinforced by different levels of external support, which have legitimized some Kurdish nationalist projects over others. Kurds in Iraq have access to significant oil revenues and international recognition, including a lucrative commercial partnership with Ankara and large-scale energy projects. Kurds in Turkey and Syria, however, have few resources and scant external backing, largely due to their ties to the PKK and Turkey's alliance to the West. Although Ankara is engaged in a Kurdish "peace process" and ceasefire with the PKK, it has thus far made no real steps toward recognizing Kurdish political demands in Turkey.

Different levels of international support and recognition have enhanced development differentials between Kurdish groups and their nationalist agendas. For instance, the Iraqi Kurdish quasi-state—with an estimated foreign direct investment (FDI) of \$5.5 billion⁹ and major international oil companies (IOCs), foreign consulates, and private sector investment in its region—requires open and secure borders to assure a positive investment climate. To do so, KRG leaders have negotiated pacts with Damascus (until 2010), Tehran, and Ankara that keep borders open in exchange for Kurdish help in countering Kurdish nationalist dissidents

from Turkey, Syria, and Iran.¹⁰ This nationalist survival strategy has helped enhance regional wealth and stabilize parts of the Kurdistan Region, but it also has hindered the political agendas of other Kurdish nationalist groups, including the PKK/PYD in Turkey and Syria. In contrast to Iraqi Kurds, absence of access to Western support and Turkish backing—alongside their leftist ideology—has encouraged different regional alliances and strategies by PKK-influenced groups. Instead of Turkey, these groups have at different moments turned to Damascus, Baghdad, and Iran for support against the Turkish state and Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Indeed, Iraqi Kurdish leaders have tried to break down these differences by reframing Kurdish national identity as being “Kurdistani”—a citizenship regime inclusive of all populations living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. To close the linguistic gap between groups, KRG officials and civil society organizations employ the two main dialects in news broadcasts and publications while attempting to standardize and Latinize the Kurdish language. The KRG also uses its vast revenue base to organize Kurdish conferences, publications, and cultural events that focus on shared Kurdish histories and national rights. Barzani also has become Erdoğan's interlocutor

in mediating Kurdish problems in Syria and Turkey—hosting meetings, leading delegations, and sending communiqués between different Kurdish groups across borders, including to Öcalan and other PKK representatives.¹¹

Which Kurdish Nationalism Will Win Out?

Transborder Kurdish politics are unfolding amid shifting regional alliances that undermine Kurdish unity. One challenge is the Ankara-Erbil alliance.¹² While creating important commercial opportunities and a greater degree of energy security for the KRG, Barzani's partnership with Erdoğan has also fueled internal struggles. This partnership developed as Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and his PUK weakened politically, the Gorran opposition movement gained traction, relations between Ankara and Baghdad deteriorated, and vast petrodollars entered the Iraqi Kurdish economy without mechanisms for oversight and distribution. The centralized and opaque control of KRG revenues has deepened patronage networks linked to the KDP and PUK, reinforced traditional sociopolitical structures, and heightened competition between political parties.

The KRG's privileged position in Ankara has amplified power struggles between Barzani and the PKK and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)—

Erdoğan's adversaries in southeastern Turkey. For instance, the public ceremony in the historical Turkish Kurdish city of Diyarbakır with Barzani, Erdoğan, and renowned Kurdish singers Şivan Perwer and İbrahim Tatlıses in November 2013 certainly evoked mass nationalist sentiment and support across Kurdish communities. Yet, the meeting was criticized by many Kurds for its intentions—an election campaign for Erdoğan and platform for Barzani—while failing to resolve Kurdish problems across borders. Barzani and Erdoğan are further attempting to challenge the PKK/BDP by creating a Barzani-influenced party in southeastern Turkey that can capture votes of secular, leftist Kurds.¹³

The Ankara-Erbil alliance has also backfired in Syria. Erdoğan had hoped to use Barzani and the KRG as a counterweight to the PKK/PYD. Yet, Ankara's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, toleration of radical Islamic groups crossing its borders into Syria, and the unresolved Kurdish problem in Turkey have all undermined any potential alliance that could have formed between the PYD, Barzani's Kurdish National Council (KNC), and the Syrian Opposition Council (SOC). Moreover, the problems plaguing Turkey's Syria policy are the same ones limiting Barzani's influence over Kurdish majorities in Turkey and Syria and have become a

source of division among Iraqi Kurdish groups.

For instance, while hosting and supporting over 200,000 Syrian Kurdish refugees in the Kurdistan Region and initially training Syrian Kurdish Peshmerga (militia) to defend Kurdish rights, the KRG has refused to recognize Syrian Kurdish autonomy and is putting pressure on its military wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG).¹⁴ During the Geneva II conference in February 2014, KNC representatives criticized the PYD for having declared autonomy in three cantons (Cizîre/Jazira, Kobane/Ayn al-Arab, and Efrîn/Afrin), stating that “their actions were unilateral and this does not represent a nation at all.”¹⁵ Additionally, after failed attempts to unify the PYD and KNC, Barzani/KDP has dismantled the bridge across the Tigris River connecting the Kurdistan Region with the Syrian Kurdish region, closed the border, refused entry to PYD leader Salih Muslim, and has started constructing a trench between the two regions.¹⁶ PYD leaders, in turn, have negotiated a border opening (Ya'robîyah) with the Iraqi federal government. Other Iraqi Kurdish parties, including the PUK and Gorran, have challenged Barzani by recognizing the PYD and Rojava (West Kurdistan), welcoming its leaders to Sulaymaniyah province.¹⁷

Implications for Regional Stability and Managing the Kurdish Issue

The complexities of transborder Kurdish politics reveal that concern or claims of Kurdish statehood are misplaced. Kurdish groups have a shared national consciousness and large opportunities to mobilize, but they continue to pursue different

The greater challenge to regional stability is the persistence of weakened states and power vacuums that encourage Kurdish land grabs, interethnic resource disputes, demographic shifts, refugee flows, and power struggles.

political agendas. While Kurds in Turkey and Syria demand some form of autonomy within a federal, decentralized structure, they do not necessarily seek to replicate the KRG in Iraq, which they perceive as a feudal and closed political system. Similarly, Iraqi Kurds are unlikely to jeopardize their own relatively successful quasi-state for what they regard as extremist groups tied to illegitimate structures, such as the PYD and PKK. Transborder Kurdish politics are further entrenched in geopolitical realities that require dealmaking between Kurdish elites and different central governments. Assuring the KRG's survival is as much tied to securing revenues from Baghdad as it is in maintaining open borders and alliances with Turkey, Iran, and

eventually Damascus. Similarly, the PKK and PYD leverage their own interests by securing support from Damascus, Iran, and Baghdad against Ankara, while challenging and negotiating with different Iraqi Kurdish groups.

The greater challenge to regional stability is the persistence of weakened states and power vacuums that encourage Kurdish

land grabs, interethnic resource disputes, demographic shifts, refugee flows, and power struggles. As Iraqi Kurds seek to strengthen their autonomy within the dysfunctional Iraqi state, Kurds in Turkey and Syria will take advantage of the political vacuum in Syria and assert their own group rights. These efforts involve creating new facts on the ground that challenge other nonstate actors and their political claims. They are likely to become the source of future conflicts between Kurdish and non-Kurdish groups over land and resources, just as they have in post-Saddam Iraq.

Although international actors cannot fully resolve intra-Kurdish dynamics, they can pursue a more evenhanded approach that lessens the discrepancies in

external support for different Kurdish groups. While continuing to affirm state sovereignty and to situate Kurdish problems within particular states, third party actors should rethink their assumptions about sources of power and influence across the Kurdish regions. In particular, they should reassess policies that treat Ma'sud Barzani and Jalal Talabani as key or sole negotiators of the Kurdish problems and include moderate Kurdish leaders from Turkey and Syria in negotiation processes and decisionmaking. In fact, relying on Barzani to mediate Kurdish demands across borders without resolving the Kurdish problem in Turkey—all while al-Qaeda penetrates Syrian regions—has enhanced PKK/PYD influence in Syria as well as internal Kurdish power struggles.

Turkey is central to these efforts. Although Erdoğan is directly dealing with Öcalan and Barzani as part of the Kurdish peace process, he has largely excluded leading BDP officials and moderate PYD leaders, who also influence Kurdish localities in Turkey and Syria. Incorporating these groups into private or public dialogues, while maintaining necessary restrictions on the PKK, could bridge some political gaps and encourage legitimate behavior. Equally important is creating opportunities for economic development and wealth generation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Syria. The

Iraqi Kurdish case shows that while economic gains cannot entirely resolve deeply embedded political problems, they can create new avenues of cooperation and stability. Ankara can lead this effort in the same way it has done in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The larger dilemma is balancing the commitment to state sovereignty and territorial integrity with rising demands for group rights and decentralized rule—outcomes of the very democratization processes espoused by the West. Keeping states together should certainly remain a priority to assuring regional stability. So too, however, is the need to recognize subnational political trends and assist state leaders in strengthening or rebuilding institutions to manage these challenges. ♦

*Dr. Denise Natali is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University (NDU), where she focuses on the political economy of Iraqi federalism, regional energy sector politics, and the transborder Kurdish issue. She is the author of *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 2005) and *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse University Press, 2010).*

¹ Natali, Denise. *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. Syracuse University Press, 2005, i; van Bruinessen, Martin. *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society*. Isis Press, 2000, 3–4; About 85 percent of Kurds are Sunni Muslim and follow the Shaf'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, and not the Hanafi school followed by their Turkish and Sunni Arab neighbors. There are also Christian minorities among the Kurds, largely in the Dohuk and Erbil regions of Iraq, southeastern Turkey, and Urmia in Iran, and heterodox Muslim sects including Yezidis, Kakais, and Alevis. Faili Kurds are Shi'a Kurds originally from the Khanaqin region of Iraq.

² Tejel, Jordi. *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics, and Society*. Routledge, 2009, 8 and 17.

³ Natali, *The Kurds and the State*, 77.

⁴ The Kurdish regions of the Qajar Empire and contemporary Iran were never part of a Kurdish state proposed in the Sèvres Treaty. The proposed Kurdish state was to include parts of the Mosul vilayet in Iraq and partial Kurdish regions in Turkey.

⁵ The population of Kurds in the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, and the diaspora is difficult to ascertain due to the absence of an accurate and recent census. Estimated figures are about 25 million, with about 20 percent in Turkey, 23 percent in Iraq, 10 percent in Iran, and 8 to 10 percent in Syria. "Kurds," World Directory of Minorities.

⁶ Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 17.

⁷ The literature on new humanitarianism is vast. See Barakat, Sultan. "Post-War Reconstruction and Development: Coming of Age," in *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War*, ed. Sultan Barakat. I.B. Tauris, 2005, 1–32; and Fox, Fiona. "New Humanitarianism: Does It Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?," *Disasters*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 275–289.

⁸ Graham-Brown, Sarah. *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq*. I.B. Tauris, 1999; There were two no-fly zones in Iraq: one in the Kurdish north that was part of Operation Provide Comfort and another in the south that was part of Operation Southern Watch to protect Shi'a populations. Operation Provide Comfort ended in December 1996 and

was replaced by Operation Northern Watch on 1 January 1997, which extended until 17 May 2003.

⁹ The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is among the leaders in FDI (\$2.5 billion) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, followed by Turkey and to a much lesser extent, Iran.

¹⁰ During the civil wars in Iraq in the 1960s and the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), the two main Iraqi Kurdish political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—fought against the Iranian and Iraqi regimes and each other.

¹¹ Buldan, Perwin. "Ocalan woku hawari-yik temasha-yi Barzani dekar," *Bas News*, 25 February 2014; Buldan, a Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) parliamentarian, affirmed that relations between Barzani and Öcalan are friendly despite "some differences that Öcalan has with Barzani at times."

¹² Turkey-KRG ties developed in the early 1990s within the context of the embargoes against Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, the food-for-fuel smuggling operations, and the security pacts to check the PKK. During the Kurdish civil war from 1994 to 1998, the KDP allied with Turkey and militarily engaged against the PKK. Ankara-Erbil relations were severed in 1997, although the border was occasionally opened.

¹³ Taştekin, Fehim. "New Party Linked to Barzani Makes Play for Turkey's Kurds," *Al-Monitor*, 24 November 2013; The Party's slogan is "Rebaz a Barzani," or "On Barzani's path."

¹⁴ *Awene*. "Wutebeyji parti heyresh dekarê ser YPG," 25 February 2014.

¹⁵ Hussein, Taha. "Kurdish Representative in Geneva II Criticizes PYD & Pushes for Negotiations," *MESOP*, 17 February 2014.

¹⁶ DIHA. "KDP Strengthens Embargo on Rojava, Opens Fire on Protesters," 10 April 2014.

¹⁷ *MESOP*. "Sabri Ok (PKK Leader) 'Warns' KDP," 18 February 2014; DIHA. "Rojava-Iraq Border Post to Be Opened Officially," 19 February 2014; The KDP states that the KRG is constructing the ditch for security reasons, particularly to thwart al-Qaeda spillover from Syria. Turkey is building a ditch as well along parts of the Turkey-Syrian border.

Ongoing Exodus: Tracking the Emigration of Christians from the Middle East

By Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo

ABSTRACT

The proportional decline of historic Christian communities in the Middle East is continuing. Christians were 13.6 percent of the region's population in 1910 but only 4.2 percent in 2010; by 2025, they will likely constitute 3.6 percent. While Christians in the Middle East continue to suffer from war and conflict, the expansion of Christianity to the Global South and the postcolonial break between notions of "Western" and "Christian" are positive developments for communities under siege in the region. Christians from the Middle East are now present all over the world, and Christians from the Global South are increasingly drawn to the Middle East. Some of the region's most pressing concerns can be addressed by advocating for freedom for all religious minorities in countries experiencing high restrictions on religion. Additionally, promoting interfaith dialogue where Middle Eastern Christians are in diaspora can serve to strengthen their ties with fellow religionists in their host countries and abroad.

Introduction

In recent history, one of the most profound changes in the global religious landscape has been the unrelenting proportional decline of historic Christian communities in the Middle East. An impassioned appeal for Christians in the region recently came from Patriarch Louis Sako of the Chaldean Catholic community in Babylon

(Iraq). After lamenting the decline of Christians in Iraq and surrounding countries, Patriarch Sako pleaded with Christians around the world not to forget the Christians of the Middle East. He wrote, "The entire international community should insist that Christians remain in the Middle East, not simply as minorities, but as citizens enjoying full equality

under the law, and therefore in a position to continue to contribute to peace, justice, and stability.”¹

Christians represented 13.6 percent of the Middle East’s population in 1910 but only 4.2 percent in 2010. By 2025, we expect they will constitute 3.6 percent of the region. Their diminishing presence is troubling when viewed in light of centuries of relative demographic stability: from 1500 to 1900, Christians were approximately 15 percent of the region’s population.² In addition, the Middle East is the historic geographical origin of Christianity (as well as two other Abrahamic faiths: Judaism and Islam).

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Middle East experienced a host of dramatic political and social challenges, including the carving up of the region into nation-states by colonial authorities, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the emigration of colonial expatriate communities, the power of oppressive political regimes, and the founding of the State of Israel. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these and other factors continue to encourage the exodus of Christians from the region.

This article will discuss the demographics of Christianity around the world between 1910 and 2010, including changes in affiliation among the major traditions: Roman Catholic,

Protestant, Orthodox, and Independent. It continues with a more focused look at Christianity in the Middle East over the same period, highlighting key countries that have experienced significant losses of Christians mainly due to war, conflict, and political shifts.³ We consider three types of Christianity in the region: historic churches (Orthodox and Roman Catholic), modern missionary churches (Protestant and Independent), and immigrant churches (many traditions). Finally, the article concludes with implications for policy—aimed toward both Christians from the Middle East and those around the world—in light of global migration trends.

The data presented in this article are the product of research by scholars in the developing discipline of international religious demography—the scientific and statistical study of the demographic characteristics of religious populations, including their size, migration, vital statistics, and changes in self-identification.⁴ While there are thousands of data sources for religious demography, three are especially critical: first, censuses where either a religion or ethnicity question is asked; second, smaller scale national surveys and polls; and third, data collected by religious communities themselves. Data are analyzed, and discrepancies reconciled by assessing the quality and congruency of sources with

the aim of producing the best estimate for each religion in every country in the world. Data are sourced and available in the *World Religion Database* and *World Christian Database*.⁵ Projections

By 2025, we estimate that 70 percent of all Christians will likely be living in the South

through 2025 are built on a hybrid model that utilizes the United Nations’ medium variant cohort-component projections of populations for five-year periods, which are then modestly adjusted from the 2010 baseline.⁶ Adjustments are based on analysis of past differential growth rates of religious groups, factoring in historical patterns of religious switching and possible future attenuation of past trends. Finally, and most importantly for the Middle East, these projections take into account how migration trends might alter the future religious composition of country populations.⁷

Changing Demographics of Global Christianity

Since 1910, Christians have constituted approximately one-third of the world’s population. However, between 1910 and 2010, Christianity experienced a profound shift in its geographic, ethnic, and linguistic compositions. In 1910, more than 80 percent of all Christians lived in Europe and Northern America

(the Global North, which was 95 percent Christian). By 2010, the percentage of Christians living in the Global North had fallen to less than 40 percent, with the majority of Christians

located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. By 2025, we estimate that 70 percent of all Christians will likely be living in the South. Between 1910 and 2010, the continent of Africa grew from 9.3 percent Christian to 48.2 percent Christian. Asia, as a whole, also saw its Christian percentage grow from 2.4 percent to 8.3 percent.⁸ In one sense, the shift to the Global South represents a return to the demographic makeup of Christianity at the time of Jesus—predominantly Southern—but also depicts a vast expansion of Christianity into every country as well as to thousands of different ethnicities, languages, and cultures.

Our taxonomy of global Christianity is comprised of four major traditions. Roman Catholics are all Christians in communion with the Church of Rome, including both baptized and catechumens (potential converts prebaptism or young adults before confirmation). Orthodox refers to members of the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, both of whom consider themselves

in unbroken continuity with the church founded by the New Testament apostles. Protestants are Christians affiliated with the historical churches originating during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation in Europe (i.e., Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed/Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, and others). Independents are members of churches that are separated and in some way distinct from historic denominationalist Christianity (i.e., African Independent Churches and Chinese House Churches).⁹

Among the four major traditions within Christianity, Roman Catholics represent just over half of all Christians worldwide, growing from 47.6 percent in 1910 to 51.6 percent in 2010. Their percentage of the global population also grew slightly, from 16.6 percent in 1910 to 17.0 percent in 2010. This, however, masks a steep proportional decline of Roman Catholics in Europe, with a simultaneous rise in Africa and Asia. The Orthodox have declined as a percentage within Christianity as well as among the global population. Severely impacted particularly by communism, Orthodoxy dropped from 7.1 percent of the global population in 1910 to 4.0 percent in 2010. At the same time, the Orthodox fell from 20.4 percent of all Christians in 1910 to 12.2 percent in 2010. The story of the Orthodox is further nuanced by its subsequent

rebound in the wake of the fall of European communism, their comparatively low birth rates and high death rates, and the fact that Orthodoxy tends to be a nonproselytizing tradition. Protestants also experienced slight percentage losses globally, falling from 24.4 percent to 22.2 percent of all Christians between 1910 and 2010. Their share of the global population also decreased, from 8.4 percent to 7.3 percent. Independents increased their share of both the total Christian population and the global population. Independents represented only 1.7 percent of all Christians in 1910, rising to 16.6 percent by 2010. Their share of the global population also increased, from 0.6 percent to 5.5 percent.

Changing Demographics of Middle Eastern Christianity

The demographic situation of Christians in the Middle East is quite unique. Similar to the global situation, Christianity in the Middle East has also changed dramatically over the past hundred years, with two dynamics occurring simultaneously: first, emigration, where historic Christian communities are leaving the region primarily for Europe, North America, and Australia; and second, immigration, where Christian guest workers from outside the region are arriving to work mainly in oil-rich Muslim-majority countries.

Another immigration-related trend in the Middle East is the arrival of missionaries into the region, primarily Protestants and Independents. Protestants began arriving at the end of the nineteenth century, intending to reach out to Muslims. When this turned out to be more difficult than anticipated, most turned their attention to the historic Christian communities, causing tensions over proselytism that continue to the present day.

Nine Middle Eastern countries experienced significant declines in the Christian percentages of their populations between 1910 and 2010 (see Table 1): Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon,

wars from 1975 to 1990; and third, their decreasing influence in national affairs.¹⁰ Losses in many Christian communities were already well underway by 1970, but in the case of the three largest Christian populations at the time—Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria—their decline accelerated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Looking toward 2025, the Christian presence in these countries is expected to continue declining in percentage (as well as, for most countries, in actual population). Of particular concern currently is Syria, where the civil war has now forced one million refugees into neighboring Lebanon, including

Among the four major traditions within Christianity, Roman Catholics represent just over half of all Christians worldwide

Palestine, Syria, and Turkey. Of these, the most dramatic changes have occurred in Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, and Palestine, each of which dropped over 10 percentage points over the century. Lebanon in particular dropped an astounding 43 percentage points, largely due to three factors: first, lower birth rates, a consequence of their comparatively higher economic status; second, emigration to the United States, Australia, and various European countries, especially during the

large numbers of Christians. What began as internal displacement has now evolved into international migration.¹¹ While some of this might be temporary, it is likely that many Christians will never return.

At the same time, six Middle Eastern countries have had massive influxes of Christians, most notably since 1970. These include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Bahrain and the UAE saw the greatest percentage

increase, each over 12 percentage points. These Christians are mostly migrants from the Philippines, South Korea, and other countries working in oil production, construction, domestic tasks, and other jobs in the service industry. In all of these countries, the Christian communities are expected to fluctuate little between 2010 and 2025.

Looking at the overall religious landscape of the Middle East from 1910 to 2025, Christians were 13.6 percent of the region's population in 1910 but only 4.2 percent by 2010, and it is likely that they will only represent 3.6 percent of the population by 2025. Muslims have grown from 85 percent in 1910 to 92.3 percent in 2010, projected to reach 92.9

percent by 2025. Projections to 2025 are based on current Christian emigration trends and are particularly apparent in Iraq, Egypt, and, most currently, Syria. If the political, economic, and/or social conditions worsen in any of these countries, the numbers of Christians remaining in 2025 could be much lower.

as missionary Protestants and Independents, have maintained their size is by conversion of Orthodox Christians, a matter of deep concern for ecumenical relations.

Policy Implications for Christians in the Middle East and Around the World

What does it mean for Christian populations in the Middle East that now more Christians worldwide live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America than in the West? From a political standpoint, the context of the early twentieth century was vastly different from that in the early twenty-first. From the carving up of the Middle East into nation-states by British and French authorities in the 1920s to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by U.S. and coalition forces, Western powers have had an outsized role in the region. While in 1910, globally, it was more plausible to consider "Christian" synonymous with "Western," it is inaccurate to make such a connection now.

Many Christian communities in the Global South already have significant ties to the Middle East. For example, the largest populations of people from Lebanese and Syrian backgrounds outside those countries live in Brazil, which is home to over ten million Brazilians of Arab descent. Brazil—the world's second-largest Christian country (185 million Christians)—has deepened economic and cultural

Major Christian Traditions in the Middle East

Orthodox Christians are the largest major Christian tradition in the Middle East. The countries with the most Orthodox Christians are Egypt (Coptic), Cyprus (Greek), and Syria (Armenian, Greek, and Syrian), and each of these communities dates back at least seventeen centuries. Emigration, however, has profoundly affected the Orthodox churches, with their share of the regional population falling from 11.8 percent in 1910 to only 2.7 percent in 2010, and likely continuing to 2.2 percent by 2025. At the same time, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Independents have increased their proportions of the region's Christian population. For example, Roman Catholics were 10 percent of all Christians in the Middle East in 1910 but were 30 percent in 2010. One reason for this increase is large numbers of Roman Catholic guest workers (such as Filipinos) in countries like Saudi Arabia. One way that smaller, newer traditions, such

Table 1 – Christians by Country in the Middle East, 1910–2025¹²

Country	1910	%	1970	%	2010	%	2025	%
Bahrain	220	0.3%	8,200	3.9%	163,000	13.0%	211,000	13.4
Cyprus	214,000	77.9%	469,000	76.4%	793,000	71.8%	905,000	71.5
Egypt	2,263,000	18.7%	5,778,000	15.9%	7,876,000	10.1%	8,208,000	8.5
Iran	130,000	1.2%	268,000	0.9%	272,000	0.4%	317,000	0.4
Iraq	171,000	6.3%	369,000	3.7%	448,000	1.4%	295,000	0.6
Israel	38,000	8.0%	79,000	2.8%	180,000	2.4%	160,000	1.8
Jordan	16,600	5.8%	83,400	5.0%	172,000	2.7%	163,000	1.9
Kuwait	240	0.3%	38,600	5.1%	264,000	8.8%	362,000	8.2
Lebanon	408,000	77.5%	1,436,000	62.5%	1,487,000	34.3%	1,534,000	30.4
Oman	20	0.0%	3,900	0.5%	121,000	4.3%	188,000	3.9
Palestine	39,600	11.6%	53,200	4.7%	74,600	1.9%	60,600	1.0
Qatar	75	0.4%	4,900	4.4%	168,000	9.6%	224,000	8.4
Saudi Arabia	50	0.0%	18,300	0.3%	1,193,000	4.4%	1,525,000	4.5
Syria	314,000	15.6%	617,000	9.7%	1,119,000	5.2%	758,000	2.7
Turkey	3,354,000	21.7%	290,000	0.8%	194,000	0.3%	165,000	0.2
United Arab Emirates	80	0.1%	13,600	5.9%	1,061,000	12.6%	1,449,000	12.6
Yemen	5,000	0.2%	1,700	0.0%	39,200	0.2%	54,800	0.2

relations with the Middle East; former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was the first Brazilian head of state to officially visit the region.¹³ Brazilian Christians have also increased both pilgrimage and mission to the region.¹³

In 1910, Christians in Europe (except Eastern Europe) and the United States represented 60 percent of all Christians worldwide; in 2010, it was only about 20 percent. Many Chinese, Brazilian, Nigerian, and Filipino Christians have developed increased interest in the Middle East because of family members working there as migrants and because of its religious-histori-

cal significance as the birthplace of Christianity. Many Filipinos in particular have interpreted their overseas employment in sacred terms, especially women working as domestic servants. They are active in establishing Christian communities in their host countries and often receive special training as missionaries. In addition, Christian guest workers take advantage of being in close proximity to Israel for pilgrimage purposes.¹⁴ Since at least the 1930s, Chinese Christians

have engaged in what they call a “Back to Jerusalem” movement, sending missionaries along the ancient Silk Road from China to Israel.¹⁵ This vision is partially facilitated by China’s increased economic interest in the Middle East.¹⁶ These kinds of connections between the Middle East and the Global South are likely to increase concern for the diminishing Christian presence in the region. Another important dimension is that the Arab Spring has made life more difficult for religious minorities, including Christians, but also Jews, Baha’is, and minority Muslim sects. The Pew Research Center’s 2012 study

on religious freedom reported that the Middle East experienced increases in social hostilities (by private individuals, organizations, and social groups) while at the same time maintaining high governmental restrictions (laws, policies, and actions) on religion.¹⁷ For Christians specifically, these range from increased attacks on individuals, churches, and businesses in Egypt to massacres in Christian-majority villages in Syria. In October 2013, for example, gunmen opened fired

on a Coptic Christian wedding in Cairo, killing three and wounding eight; earlier that year, Copts in Egypt had been accused of backing the army’s plan to overthrow President Mohamed Morsi.¹⁸ In Syria, on 7 April 2014, the Rev. Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch Jesuit priest who offered refuge to Muslim and Christian families, was murdered in the Old City district of Homs amid continued infighting among Syrian insurgents about the civil war there, sending a clear message to the remaining Christians in the district.¹⁹ The rise in social hostilities is part of the explanation for why emigration of Christians has accelerated in recent years.

Christians from the Middle East are now present in many countries around the world, and émigrés are finding themselves arguing their case for asylum and/or advocating for their communities back home. Coptic Christians in the United States, for example, have taken U.S. State Department publications to task, stating that they fail to address the role of local populations in the persecution of religious minorities in Egypt in light of passive governments.²⁰ Egyptian immigrants in the United States, both Christian and Muslim, were also outspoken critics of violence during the 2012 riots in Cairo.²¹ In addition, prominent émigrés, such as Samuel Tadros, an Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Christian,

work in advocacy organizations, such as the Center for Religious Freedom at Washington-based Hudson Institute. Tadros has written numerous reports on the status of his community in Egypt, claiming that while the Coptic Church has a long and illustrious history, it is now in danger of being tolerated only as a group of second-class citizens living in a Muslim-majority context.²²

Christians from the Middle East are increasingly found in environments more open to interfaith and ecumenical dialogue—particularly between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—in contrast to the more religiously polarized surroundings of many Middle Eastern countries. One among many important interfaith Christian scholars is Lebanon-born Martin Accad, who is of Lebanese and Swiss ancestry and lived in Lebanon during the civil war, later completing a doctorate at the University of Oxford. Accad currently teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary in California and the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Lebanon. He was a key interlocutor following the release of the 2007 “Common Word” document, signed by 138 Muslim leaders, encouraging dialogue between Muslims and Christians.²³ Additionally, in 2013, the Boston Theological Institute, American Jewish Committee, and American Islamic Congress jointly hosted a series titled “Pluralism, Peace,

and Prayer: Religious Pluralism in the Middle East.” Guest speakers included prominent Jewish, Christian, Baha’i, and Muslim religious leaders from the Middle East as well as policy experts and human rights advocates. In one way or another, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Independent Christians all claim the Middle East as their own and advocate on their behalf to governments and other interested parties.

All of these trends point to an uncertain future for Christians in the Middle East and their relationship with global Christianity as a whole. Christians from historic communities in the Middle East are now present all over the world, and Christians from all over the world are increasingly drawn to the Middle East—economically, physically, and ideologically. The dual migration trends of Christians to and from the region presents a unique challenge for supporting Christians in the Middle East as minority communities under intense social and political pressure. The expansion of Christianity to the Global South and the postcolonial break between notions of “Western” and “Christian” can be viewed as positive developments for Christians under siege in the Middle East. International relations and public policy can address some of their pressing concerns by advocating for

freedom for all religious minorities in countries experiencing high social and/or governmental restrictions. Additionally, promoting interfaith dialogue where Middle Eastern Christians are in diaspora can serve to strengthen their ties with fellow religionists in their host countries and abroad. ♦

Todd M. Johnson is a research fellow in the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a visiting research scholar at the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University. Gina A. Zurlo is a PhD candidate at Boston University’s School of Theology and assistant director at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.

¹ Sako, Louis Raphael. “We Will All Lose If Christians Flee the Middle East,” *The Telegraph*, 15 December 2013.

² Barrett, David B., and Todd M. Johnson. *World Christian Trends, AD 30-AD 2200*. William Carey Library, 2012, 323 and 327.

³ The Middle East is defined as seventeen countries: Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

⁴ Johnson, Todd M., and Brian J. Grim. *The World’s Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 1.

⁵ Johnson, Todd M., and Brian J. Grim, eds., *World Religion Database*. Brill, 2008; Johnson, Todd M., ed., *World Christian Database*. Brill, 2007.

⁶ Cohort-component projection is a method for projecting future population size by applying age- and sex-specific factors for fertility, mortality, and migration to each cohort in a baseline population.

⁷ Johnson and Grim, *The World’s Religions in Figures*, 114.

⁸ Western Asia (a United Nations region) saw a drop in its Christian population from 22.9 percent in 1910 to 5.7 percent in 2010. Western Asia includes all countries in the Middle East except Egypt (which is in Northern Africa) and Iran (in South Asia). Western Asia also includes three additional countries not in the Middle East: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

⁹ Johnson, *World Christian Database*.

¹⁰ Labaki, Boutros. “The Christian Communities and the Economic and Social Situation in Lebanon,” in *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, ed. Andrea Pacini. Clarendon Press, 1998, 252–253.

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¹⁹ Barnard, Anne. “Long a Survivor in Syria, a Dutch Priest is Slain,” *New York Times*, 7 April 2014.

²⁰ See U.S. State Department’s annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and its periodic Profile of Asylum Claims and Country Conditions*; Gordon, Louis A. “Christians in the American Court System,” *The Middle East Quarterly* 8.1, Winter 2001, 71–81.

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Balancing Islam and Political Contestation in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia

By Karina Piser

ABSTRACT

On 26 January 2014, the Tunisian Constitution passed with overwhelming support, over two years after the National Constituent Assembly (NCA)—the body elected in 2011 to draft a new charter—first convened. Pride and relief resounded throughout the assembly as politicians from across the ideological spectrum united over their success in bookmarking a first phase in the country's political transition. During the constitution drafting period, assembly members repeatedly stalled over Islam's role in Tunisian politics and law, a debate that divided and polarized a nascent political arena. While religion was indeed a divisive question during this period, the reality of Tunisia's political landscape is more complex than an Islamist-secular dichotomy explains. Exploring the schisms within Ennahda itself—the Islamist party that held the plurality of seats in the NCA—offers a useful lens through which to understand Islam's role in the constitutional transition.

The Constitution's completion came three years after the popular uprising that toppled Tunisian president Zine al Abidine Ben Ali, during which millions of Tunisians from divergent backgrounds united under the refrain of *erhal* (leave), demanding that the dictator step down.¹ Their rapid success in peacefully ousting Ben Ali sent waves of euphoria throughout the country that reverberated across the region as Egyptians, Libyans, and Yemenis were inspired by Tunisia's display of citizen empowerment. Analysts

and scholars immediately latched onto the Tunisian uprising as a beacon of hope for a region in turmoil as neighboring countries' challenges to dictatorship quickly devolved into bloodbaths. The interim government suspended Ben Ali's Constitution by March and organized elections to form a National Constituent Assembly (NCA). When international observers deemed the elections "free and fair,"² the transition seemed on the right track, turning the page on a history of manipulated elections. Journalists offered plati-

tudinous descriptions that projected outcomes rather than assessed the unraveling political process—a gritty, hard-fought battle towards democratic consolidation.

This article explores NCA deputies' perceptions of Ennahda, the Islamist party with the plurality of assembly seats, in order to reveal the principal fault lines—both between Ennahda and the opposition and within Ennahda itself—that shaped the Constitution's evolution and will influence the political sphere in years to come. I base my analysis on existing literature and interviews with NCA deputies and members of civil society conducted between 8 August 2013 and 1 November 2013 in Tunis. Field research began in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of opposition deputy Mohammed Brahmi—the third political assassination since Ben Ali's fall—which provoked the withdrawal of sixty-one opposition members and the subsequent suspension of the NCA. This article also considers the provisions discussed during the January 2014 debates that broke months of political deadlock and led to the Constitution's passage with 200 out of 216 votes.

Ennahda, an Islamist party repressed under Ben Ali, earned 41 percent of seats in the NCA elections and, shortly thereafter, formed a coalition with runner-up secularist parties Ettakatol and Congress for the Republic (CPR).

While pre-election surveys reveal that Ennahda was three times more popular than its closest rivals,³ the party still took heed to avoid being conflated with former extreme Islamist actors. George Washington University professor Marc Lynch describes a June 2011 conversation with Ennahda's President Rachid Ghannouchi who recalled having "instructed [the party's] supporters not to come to the airport to meet him upon his return for fear of creating images reminiscent of Khomeini's return to Iran."⁴ Maintaining this moderate edge was particularly important in allaying the fears of the Tunisian electorate, for whom the memory of Algeria's bloody civil war (1991-2002) following an Islamist party's electoral victory remains vivid.

That considered, Ennahda's religious character was not the sole factor informing its popularity; the uprising was neither religious nor secular. Protesters denounced corruption, nepotism, and political repression—what Yadh Ben Achour, jurist and former dean of the Law School in Tunis, described as "civic, modern, [and] the fruit of modern forms of communication . . . an individualist revolution."⁵ Ennahda's victory, then, did not reflect popular support for Islamist ideology or a revolt against Ben Ali's alleged secularism; Tunisians revolted against his closed politics that had forced the

party underground. Voters also appreciated Ennahda's highly organized campaign platform, which stood out compared to its competition. In explaining the party's rise to power, Ennahda's religious ideology should not overshadow its strategic outlook and the politics inherent to democratic consolidation.

With an Islamist party taking the reins, religion's compatibility with a civil state became the question of the hour. This interrogation is not unique to the recent Arab uprisings; scholars have given greater attention to Islamic societies' democratic potential since Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" in 1993. In deconstructing a "monolithic and unidimensional" characterization of political Islam, this school of analysis distinguishes between "moderates" or "centrists," who openly embrace civic rights in conjunction with Islamist ideology, and "fundamentalists," whose radicalism threatens democratic stability.⁶ Ghannouchi expressed the movement's commitment to pluralism even while in exile in the 1990s,⁷ earning the party a "moderate" label. Once Ennahda was elected to lead the NCA, observers tried to decode Ennahda's ideology in order to forecast whether or not an Islamist party could do justice to the uprising's demands for dignity and freedom. But, as the constitution drafting process unfolded, the

party oscillated along an entire spectrum of religiously charged proposals. Ennahda's behavior during the constitution drafting period challenges a binary framework for understanding Islamist parties and reveals its membership to comprise a spectrum of "moderate" and "fundamentalist" elements.

Tunisians were initially persuaded by what party leader Ghannouchi had described as Erdogan's model of moderate Islam, compatible with democratic governance. Yet, they soon became wary and decried the party's "doublespeak" and hypocrisy.⁸ Just two months after the NCA started its work, Ennahda released a constitutional project that included Shari'a as the primary source of Tunisian law, introducing religious rhetoric unparalleled in Ben Ali's Constitution, which made no mention of Islamic texts.⁹ Shortly thereafter, Ennahda deputy Sahbi Atig described those demanding a separation between Islam and politics as a "threat to the structure of Islamic thought,"¹⁰ provoking fear among secular Tunisians who sensed that the party would prove more conservative than its campaign packaging indicated. Citizens and human rights groups erupted in response, demanding that the party stay true to its campaign promises and establish a secular basis for the country's legal framework. Ultimately, Ghannouchi ceded to pressure

and officially announced that Shari'a would not be present in the Constitution.¹¹

By shifting between extreme proposals and subsequent clarifications, Ennahda exposed its fragile blueprint, plagued by divergent worldviews and contradicting external pressures that undermined its homogeneity. Despite Ghannouchi's denunciation of Shari'a law, Ennahda deputy Sadok Chourou proceeded to publicly announce the party's desire for Islam to guide the country,¹² shortly after suggesting a constitutional provision to criminalize blasphemy.¹³ These internal schisms resurfaced when party member and soon-to-be Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali publicly described Ennahda's role in establishing a "sixth caliphate" in Tunisia, referring to the transition as a "divine moment" in Tunisia's new "State of God."¹⁴ Uproar ensued on the street and within the Assembly. In yet another confirmation of disaccord within the party and in response to public hostility, Jebali retracted his position just days later, reiterating Ennahda's attachment to the "republican, democratic model."¹⁵

Compromise Versus Consensus in Tunisia's New Constitution

Ennahda's vacillation between varying degrees of religiosity and some of its members' final attempts to insert Shari'a into

the Constitution crystallize the transition's political character and shed light on the sources of pressure that shaped the text's evolution. The degree of compromise evident in the new Constitution in large part reflects Ennahda's willingness to cede on a number of points, but opposition members offer varied interpretations of the party's behavior. Salma Baccar, a former filmmaker and member of the center-left Al-Massar party, insisted that Ennahda never actually compromised and predicted in August 2013 that Ennahda would continue to pursue Islamic law as a national framework, even if it did so progressively. She also insisted that the party concealed its compromises in subtler but equally nefarious proposals. "When they retracted Shari'a, they came back with a defense of 'good moral standards' (bonnes moeurs), which . . . creates a slippery slope towards Islamic law."¹⁶

NCA deputy and member of the centrist Al Joumhourii coalition Noomane Fehri believed that Ennahda deliberately adopted religiously conservative stances, heeding to the parties more "extreme" members—fully aware of their provocative nature—only to subsequently acquiesce in order to appear moderate. "It's a smokescreen," he explained. "They bring an issue to its maximum, one they know nobody will support—

Shari'a law . . . would be [a ridiculous constitutional mandate] in a society like Tunisia's, and [Ennahda is] fully aware. And then the opposition, the activists, the human rights organizations reject, and Ennahda comes back, saying that they're for a consensus-driven process, and they seem like a middle-of-the-road political party." Mr. Fehri further developed his theory, arguing that, amidst public backlash, "they make administrative appointments on local, regional, and national levels. Ennahda is not a democratic political actor, aiming

the summer of 2013, creating a tense political atmosphere in Tunis. Michael Ayari, a researcher for International Crisis Group, echoed this sentiment: "When Ennahda . . . shift[s] its rhetoric, when they talk to Salafists and to the Brookings Institution, that's their thing. And then you have all the others saying, 'that's disgusting.' Maybe it is, but that's part of politics. It's dirty, but it's part of the game. It's an arena where everyone struggles and fights. We have an elected body; it's by nature political."¹⁹

"...you have all the others saying, 'that's disgusting.' Maybe it is, but that's part of politics. It's dirty, but it's part of the game."

for cooperation, but they create that appearance as a diversionary tactic to hide their ultimate goal of locking the state apparatus."¹⁷ Many non-Islamists share Mr. Fehri's grievance and argue that Ennahda is attempting to "stack the bureaucracy with loyalists . . . by replacing civil servants with incompetent bureaucrats loyal to Ennahda."¹⁸

Opposition deputies' criticisms are politically charged, more closely informed by perception than reality, and should thus be treated skeptically. Generally, the opposition depicted Ennahda bitterly, particularly during their boycott of the Assembly during

Political Contestation in Tunisia's Evolving Democracy

Mr. Ayari's contention is critical to understanding the dynamics that underscore the political sphere's evolution in post-Ben Ali Tunisia. The opposition's grievances over Ennahda's beguiling behavior are mere reactions to partisan posturing in democratic debate—a new phenomenon for Tunisia's nascent political class, accustomed to decades of single-party rule that quashed debate. Ennahda responded with compromise to secularists' outcries that routinely followed its members' defenses of "extreme" positions but also recognized that a politically and

religiously conservative segment of Tunisians would serve them well in future elections. In renouncing Shari'a, Ghannouchi explained his position: "If we maintain our demand concerning Shari'a, we're not sure that it will receive a 51 percent vote . . . after all, there's no difference between Islam and Shari'a, but there are people that are afraid of it . . . the time will come when Tunisians will be convinced of Shari'a."²⁰ While some secularists considered this to represent the party's insidious extremism, it more likely reflects Ghannouchi's attempt to delicately balance a diverse electorate. Ennahda was forced to acquiesce to external demands—from secular Tunisians, civil society, international organizations, and the West—to "de-Islamicize" its constitutional project in the spirit of democratic consensus, while simultaneously preserving its *raison d'être*. Its behavior is thus not mysterious or uniquely linked to its Islamist character but simply reflects a fragmented political movement struggling to survive in a period of democratic consolidation.

Despite this clear tension, both between the Assembly's camps and within Ennahda itself, references to Islamic law would not appear in any of the three formal drafts that preceded the Constitution's finalization. For months, it seemed that disagreement over Islam's role had been put to rest. In an October 2013 interview,

executive director of the watchdog organization Al Bawsala Selim Kherrat explained "religion was at the center of political debate when Ennahda brought up Shari'a and complementarity between men and women. But that's no longer the case; it's no longer about that. Today, we're concerned with how we're going to finish this constitution."²¹ After months of political paralysis, deputies returned to the assembly floor to cast a final vote on the Constitution in January 2014, and discord over religion resurged. Certain proposed amendments—like one to include "the people's attachment to Islam's teachings as an example of superior values, considering that Islam is a fundamental principle of modern society and universal human rights" in the preamble or another to mandate the Quran and Sunna as the "principal sources of legislation"—that fundamentally transform the Constitution's spirit suggest that the religious divide may endure throughout Tunisia's transitional process.

During the political transition's first three years, democratic apprenticeship weighed on Ennahda's unity; individual members evolved politically as the constitution drafting process unfolded, challenging the party's cohesion. Ennahda deputy Latifa Habashi, the first deputy to suggest that the Constitution enshrine the State's civility, lamented that some of

her colleagues had moved away from the “campaign spirit” in pushing for Shari’a law.²² Religion reemerged in the January debates precisely because of the party’s hybridity. Voting records from these debates, available on Al Bawsala’s website, confirm that Islam’s legal role was not only a force that divided the opposition and the majority but fractured Ennahda itself.

Twenty-two Ennahda deputies voted in favor of amending Article 1, which states Islam is Tunisia’s religion, to include the Quran and Sunna, but seventeen voted against (thirty-nine abstained). Ennahda deputies also split eighteen-to-fifteen on a similar amendment that would add a clause that would make Islam the “principal source of legislation” (fourty-six abstained). The split vote complicates what continues to be a monolithic portrayal of Ennahda, a party still defining itself while simultaneously playing an important political role in Tunisia’s shift from authoritarianism.

Ennahda is not the only party whose alliances are difficult to trace. An amendment to the preamble replacing “on the basis of Islam’s teachings” with “expressing our people’s attachment to Islam’s teachings as a superior example of comprehensive principles, considering that Islam is a fundamental principle of modern humanity and universal human

rights” provides insight into deputies’ erratic behavior across the spectrum. The amendment, which bears a subtle but certain religious tone absent from other national legislation, only received seven favorable votes. Curiously, Ennahda unanimously rejected the amendment, but a strange amalgam of deputies from a myriad of religious and secularist opposition parties supported it. Two opposition deputies who supported the article—Salma Mabrouk (Al Massar) and Selim Ben Abdessalem (Nidaa Tounes), both originally members of the secular Ettakatol—have regularly renounced what they perceive as Ennahda’s desire to Islamicize Tunisia and, during interviews, repeatedly expressed their commitment to secularism. While shifts in partisan alliances or “political nomadism” are natural in young democracies, secularists voting for religiously charged provisions is a far more puzzling trend that indicates the political landscape’s malleability over three years into the transition.

A major analytical error in approaching Tunisia’s transition is the tendency to oversimplify complex events. Observers attempted to order the chaos that necessarily followed Ben Ali’s fall, a period during which diverse political actors strived to assert themselves politically for the first time. At the same time, these phenomena are not unique to transitioning societies. Political

actors in established democracies also defend a wide range of views under one party label. This diversity is not a function of the party’s hypocrisy or deceit but a natural byproduct of pluralism; political survival takes precedent over strict views—even if the party might be religious.

“Ennahda is attached to a certain vision of history,” alleged Dr. Ben Achour, “that makes them convinced that God’s will, more importantly than the people’s, is the reason they’re in power.”²³ In his view, this hierarchy requires supporters to clarify the relationship between Islamic and positive law. For Ennahda, resolving this question resided in political, rather than theological, calculations, dividing the party. Dr. Ben Achour’s portrayal that Ennahda’s political posturing is inextricably linked to its religiosity is common among secularists but neglects to consider that political strategy, rather than religious zeal, might play a greater role in Ennahda’s governance and dialogue with opposition deputies.

Ennahda’s increasingly visible chasms underscore its shifting rhetoric regarding Islam’s controversial place in Tunisian society, a question whose persistent ambiguity will continue to divide the political sphere and drive debate. This tumult is the fruit of democratic consolidation; the transition’s first phase constituted an initial step towards democratizing a

political culture conditioned by decades of authoritarianism. Viewing the NCA as a theatre for partisan rancor in a burgeoning political landscape is essential to understanding the rudimentary bases of democratic consolidation.

The rifts forged during the constitution drafting process are grafted onto the current Tunisian political landscape. But, while alliances are drawn along Islamist-secular lines, the issues at stake do not necessarily pertain to religion. Secular politicians criticize Ennahda’s allegedly lackluster counterterrorism policy and failure to restore the economy. Some have even accused Ennahda of involvement in political assassinations; after Chokri Belaïd’s death, 40,000 Tunisians gathered in front of the Interior Ministry to denounce Ennahda’s leadership, labeling Ghannouchi an “assassin.” Selim Ben Abdessalem, initially a member of the secular Ettakatol party who joined Nidaa Tounes in 2012, insisted that Ennahda routinely downplayed Salafist violence, going so far as to assert that “if you ask any Ennahda member whether or not he feels more politically allied with the democratic opposition or with Salafists, I am sure he would say the latter.”²⁴ Selim’s insistence reveals the extent to which Ennahda’s attempt to maintain religious voters and avoid adopting a hard-line stance against Salafists negatively hurt its performance

and alienated secular politicians against the backdrop of a population with little trust in the party.

Many of Tunisia's liberal and leftist parties have united around these grievances under the increasingly popular Nidaa Tounes ("Call for Tunisia") coalition, launched in 2012. Non-Islamist parties and coalitions like Nidaa Tounes should pay heed to Ennahda's political posturing and governance record as they craft their strategies for the transition's next phase. In the 2011 campaign, secular parties criticized Ennahda's religious character rather than responding to its platform and, absent an agenda of their own, performed poorly. Reacting to Ennahda's strategy rather than to its ideology in the upcoming parliamentary elections (scheduled before the end of 2014) would allow the opposition to capitalize on the party's new fragility.

Ennahda's struggle to maintain a cohesive identity while adhering to internal and external pressures results from a balancing act that other Islamist parties in the region will likely face while participating in democratic consolidation. The popular uprisings since 2011 empowered Islamist movements but also forced them to transform, adapting their oppositional rhetoric to political strategy. Marwan Muasher, vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International

Peace, points to declining public support for Ennahda as a fundamental challenge to the "notion of the 'Islamist threat'—the idea that . . . Islamist forces would never leave power once they acquired it."²⁵ The party's waning popularity due to its poor performance—consequences of its attempt to balance identity and political pragmatism—suggests that Ennahda's full integration into democratic processes could translate to its watered-down religiosity in the future.

International actors aiming to influence Tunisia's democratic trajectory should not lose sight of this inevitable shift in Ennahda's identity. Non-governmental organizations focusing on political development should encourage parties to adopt a practical approach to campaigning and governance in order to foster a multiparty arena that privileges popular demand over ideological infighting. The United States—seen as relatively neutral compared to European powers—is particularly well positioned to encourage partisan negotiation in Tunisia. Because tensions and crises are likely to resurge as the country's democracy solidifies, the United States should use its diplomatic clout to encourage constructive dialogue between divergent political parties, reiterating pluralism's importance in Tunisia's transition moving forward. ♦

Karina Piser is a Master's candidate in International Security at Sciences Po's Paris School of International Affairs and research assistant at the European Council on Foreign Relations. She has worked at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Tunis and the National Democratic Institute in Washington, DC. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of California, Davis and has published articles on North African politics in Foreign Policy, World Politics Review, World Policy Journal, and the Cairo Review.

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From Modest Beginnings: The Growth of Civil Aviation in the Middle East

By John Strickland

ABSTRACT

The Persian Gulf states have positioned the Middle East as a pivotal player in global aviation. Long-haul carriers, such as Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Etihad Airways, are exploiting the region's unique geographic location and airport hubs to capture air traffic flows between emerging markets around the world. Meanwhile, low-cost carriers, like Air Arabia and Fly Dubai, are capitalizing on the Gulf countries' demographic diversity to promote travel within the region. Critics of the Gulf carriers, including foreign airlines and governments, cite alleged state subsidies for fuel and favorable terms for aircraft acquisition as unfair advantages that undermine global competition. The success of these carriers, however, is a reflection of their strong business principles and of the sector's geopolitical significance. Rather than complaining, critics would do well to pursue commercial collaboration with the Gulf carriers and conclude Open Skies agreements with the Gulf states.

Introduction

The Middle East has become a pivotal player in global aviation. This development, fuelled by accelerated growth in the region's civil aviation sector, is taking place at both the intra- and inter-regional levels and spans a number of different airline business models shaping the growth of local carriers. Such changes have significant geopolitical implications. From North America to Europe to Africa, airlines and governments across the world have voiced concerns about the expansion of the Middle East's aviation sector. They allege that a number of the

region's carriers enjoy unfair advantages, including state subsidies for fuel and favorable terms for aircraft acquisition, that adversely affect the financial performance of carriers in other parts of the world.

The rise of the region's aviation sector, however, is neither an overnight sensation nor the result of unfair advantages. Rather, it is the product of a business strategy that, globally, has capitalized on the region's almost ideal geographic location as a hub—linking key emerging markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—

and that, locally, has catered to the region's unique demographics. Complainants would do well to understand this strategy and, rather than fighting these developments, find ways to pursue mutual benefit by collaborating commercially with local carriers and by concluding Open Skies agreements with local states.

The focus of this article is on the airline carriers of the Gulf states, given their dominant role in the region's aviation sector. I begin by describing the landscape of civil aviation in the region, explaining the reasons why specific airlines have become globally important and shedding light on their possible development trajectories in the years ahead. Next, I discuss the factors underpinning the Gulf carriers' success—strong business principles built upon quality management—and their geopolitical implications. I conclude by highlighting potential risks that may affect the sector's continued growth.

A Modest Beginning

In the 1980s, the Middle East's aviation sector had a limited presence in the global landscape of the industry. European and Asian carriers treated a number of destinations in the Middle East, such as Bahrain, Dubai, and Muscat, as technical stops to refuel long-haul services between Europe and Asia. These carriers also picked up limited volumes of local traffic originating from,

or destined to, the region. A small number of other services offered by these carriers targeted key oil-producing countries and served mainly business traffic and expatriate workers from Europe and North America. The other main traffic flows included affluent local populations traveling beyond the region as well as religious traffic, largely to and from Saudi Arabia.

The traditional business model in the region had been for states to fund flag carriers, with airlines seen as little more than symbols of state prestige. There was no accountability for commercial results or service standards. But by the early 1990s, the structure of the aviation market changed dramatically. The arrival of the Boeing 747-400, a longer-range model of the well-established Boeing 747, allowed airlines to operate nonstop flights between Europe and Asia, eliminating the need for a technical stop in the Middle East. This development led European and Asian carriers to reduce their services to the region, creating the impetus for a number of Middle Eastern states and local airlines to protect these air links by undertaking fleet investment and growth.

In Dubai, Emirates had been established in 1985 and was initially the flag carrier of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It carried just 86,000 passengers in its first year of operation.¹ However, as carriers beyond

the region reduced their flights, Emirates began adding new aircraft and destinations, growing throughout the 1990s. From the outset, the airline's owners made clear that it would have to operate on a commercial basis. Meanwhile, Qatar Airways, which had been established in 1994, was relaunched in 1997 under new CEO Akbar Al Baker, who still holds the post today. Under his leadership, it began to grow and, like Emirates, also operated on a clear commercial basis. These two airlines were later joined by Etihad Airways, Abu Dhabi's flag carrier, which was launched in 2003.

These three carriers have contributed much to the region's burgeoning aviation sector, operating long-haul flights between key markets across the globe. In addition to these, there are the low-cost carriers, led by Air Arabia and Fly Dubai, that provide services within the region as well as to markets within a one-to-five hour flight radius of the region. Both business models are shaping today's aviation landscape.

The Gulf's unique demographics also support a buoyant airline sector, as a number of local countries have sizable expatriate populations. In the UAE, for example, local Emiratis constitute only 16 percent of the country's total population.² There is a large community of affluent expatriates, particularly from Europe and North America, who

work in professional positions and have extensive travel requirements, both globally and within the region, for business and leisure. This provides a strong source of traffic for local airlines. There is also a large population of migrant workers, primarily from South and Southeast Asia, who generate high volumes of traffic to and from their home countries. Some states, including the UAE, are also home to substantial communities from other Middle Eastern countries—including Iran, Iraq, and Egypt—that represent another source of traffic.

Growth in the tourism sector has also aided the local aviation market. For example, as part of its strategy to diversify its economy, Dubai has led the region in developing a strong tourism industry. This sector, supported by a diverse tourism proposition and extensive hotel infrastructure, provides yet another source of traffic for the Gulf's airlines.

The Long-Haul Market

Since the turn of the century, the growth of long-haul air traffic has accelerated, much of it a function of the expansion of Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Etihad Airways. During fiscal year (FY) 2003-2004, 10 million passengers flew on Emirates, a figure that rose to 39 million passengers by FY 2012-2013.³ Qatar Airways flew 3 million passengers in FY 2003-2004 but, by FY 2012-2013, had 18 million passengers.⁴

Meanwhile, Etihad Airways, which flew just 340,000 passengers in 2004, carried almost 12 million passengers in 2013.⁵ Together, these three airlines today carry in excess of 69 million passengers annually.

Three factors have fuelled this expansion. The first is concerned with market dynamics. In the global economy, the most rapid growth is taking place in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The demand for air travel linking these global regions is also growing rapidly, and long-haul carriers in the Gulf have a clear geographic advantage in exploiting this potential. For markets, such as China-to-Africa or Asia-to-Latin America, it makes no geographic or commercial sense to travel via Europe or North America. Conversely, the Gulf carriers offer logical flight routes, while their purpose-built hubs provide numerous itinerary permutations between these markets, maximizing revenue from these emerging economies.

A second factor is the types and technical capabilities of aircraft in the Gulf carriers' fleets. All three hub operators have invested in state-of-the-art aircraft—in particular, the ultra-long-range Boeing 777 twin jet and the large-capacity Airbus A380. From Gulf airports, these aircraft can serve any market in the world on a nonstop or one-stop basis. They offer high-capacity and low-unit costs for their operators and

efficient, competitive transport to customers in burgeoning markets. In the future, the region is likely to retain its competitive status as carriers invest in next generation aircraft to further improve fuel economy and reduce risk when opening routes in new markets.

Some critics question the Gulf carriers' large fleet sizes and massive aircraft orders. Emirates has in excess of 200 aircraft in its fleet with over 300 additional aircraft on order.⁶ Etihad Airways has 89 aircraft in its fleet and around 220 on order, while Qatar Airways has around 130 aircraft in its fleet with over 280 on order.⁷ These figures may appear ambitious, but they need to be put in context. These orders stretch out years into the future, and some represent replacement, rather than incremental, aircraft. Flight times from the Gulf are so long—seventeen to eighteen hours to the western United States or Latin America—that to maintain even once-daily frequency requires a minimum of two to three aircraft. Higher frequencies require more aircraft. Considering the growth potential of the markets served, the ultra-long distances of the flights operated, and the high-occupancy level of flights when new capacity is added, there is good reason to believe this expansion is commercially warranted.

A third factor is the availability of adequate and expanding airport capacity that can be used

twenty-four hours a day. This capacity is critical to the Gulf hub carriers' model, which depends on having efficient operations to plan a large number of flights and optimize the itinerary options available to clients to achieve high occupancy levels. By contrast, North American and European airlines tend to be limited by night curfews at their home airports.

Airport traffic statistics demonstrate the effectiveness of these hubs' operations. Dubai International Airport handled just under 4 million passengers in 1985, but as Emirates developed this hub, this figure rose to 18 million in 2003 and 66 million in 2013.⁸ Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi International Airport handled 4 million passengers in 2003 but, by 2013, had over 16 million.⁹ To keep pace with fleet expansion and market potential, however, further investment in airport expansion is essential. Dubai recently opened a second airport, Qatar is moving its Doha hub to a new airport, and Abu Dhabi is opening an additional terminal. Investment is also taking place in other parts of the region—for example, the provision of new airport capacity in Oman.

Low-Cost Carriers

The success of Gulf aviation is not only the result of the long-haul carriers. The emergence of low-cost carriers (LCCs) has generated new travel within and to the region on flights typically

one to five hours in duration. Air Arabia, founded in the UAE emirate of Sharjah, is the leading LCC, having recently reached its tenth year of operation. The company is publicly traded and profitable and has adopted a multi-country model with aircraft based in Egypt and Morocco, in addition to Sharjah. Later this year, it will open an additional base in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah. Fly Dubai, meanwhile, has taken a different approach. Established in 2009 by the government of Dubai, the airline provides flights exclusively from Dubai to a diverse range of destinations largely distinct from those served by Emirates. It has delivered significant profits within four years of its founding.

Although each airline has a different business approach, both are commercially defensible. Some intraregional markets served by LCCs have been buffeted by political unrest, but the model has proved resilient, demonstrating that as soon as stability is restored, confidence recovers and traffic returns.

As in other parts of the world, regional customers have taken to the low-cost model, which includes a simpler service ethos, more affordable pricing, and the use of the Internet as a sales channel. This short-haul business model has democratized air travel in the Gulf and the wider Middle East. It is tapping into the region's vast local population, particularly

of young people who could not previously afford to fly, as well as the region's vast foreign worker population that wishes to visit home in countries like India. The availability of low-cost flights has also stimulated new inbound tourism, with markets—such as Russia—opening up.

The LCC market will continue to flourish given the region's diverse customer base and these airlines' abilities to take advantage of new sources of demand. As such, both Air Arabia and Fly Dubai have additional aircraft on order. Other country markets also offer latent potential: Saudi

a clear commercial rationale, underpinned by macroeconomic and demographic trends, to these airlines' operations. Emirates, by its own acknowledgement, received start-up investment funding but has since stood on its own. It has delivered sustained profitability, supported by its increasingly transparent financial disclosures. Qatar Airways and Etihad Airways do not yet have this level of transparency, but there is little doubt that they intend to move in this direction. Their owners, while certainly governments, still hold them accountable for delivering

"Since the turn of the century, the growth of long-haul air traffic has accelerated, much of it a function of the expansion of Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Etihad Airways."

Arabia, for example, has a developing LCC sector. However, further growth in the LCC market will largely depend on whether local states reduce protectionist barriers that currently inhibit air service development.

Here to Stay

The region's air transport sector is the subject of criticism from foreign airlines and governments that question the Gulf airlines' business models. However, the evidence shows that there is

profitability, and indeed, both have recently reported profits, though not at sufficient levels.

Contrary to critics' claims, the success of the Gulf carriers can be attributed to strong business principles, including the vision, ability, and continuity of their management. Emirates has built its business over almost thirty years. Sir Tim Clark, Emirates' president and an Englishman with vast industry experience, has been with the airline since its founding and initially headed

its planning team. He was instrumental in leading Emirates' move to tap into existing markets, such as Europe-to-Asia and Europe-to-Australasia, and to spot the potential of new markets, like Asia-to-Africa. He has also greatly influenced the direction of Boeing and Airbus' aircraft design specifications from which Emirates and other global airlines have benefited. Clark has provided continuity in leadership to the airline and has instilled a high degree of entrepreneurialism into its management personnel—what he describes as the “Emirates DNA.” This is a key qualitative factor in Emirates' success.

“The success of the Gulf aviation sector is based on linking rapidly growing global markets and capitalizing on favorable demographic and economic conditions within the region.”

Qatar Airways has also benefited from the sharp commercial focus of its CEO Akbar Al Baker, who has been at the airline's helm since 1997. He sees himself, first and foremost, as a businessman and is recognized as a tough negotiator with suppliers. His own words

encapsulate the drive of the airline: “Qatar Airways does not fly airplanes to carry fresh air to any destination.” He adds, “We don't go anywhere to please any government. We go where there are economic opportunities, when there are business opportunities for the airline.”¹⁰ His leadership has succeeded in steering the company from a small local airline into a major global player.

Strong business principles also explain the success of the LCCs. Their capable management has brought a discipline that compares favorably with best-in-class LCCs globally, combining efficient low-cost operation with high productivity.

Although all three long-haul Gulf airlines continue to focus on hub operations, there is evidence that their business strategies are becoming more divergent. Emirates has formed a deep commercial partnership with Australia's Qantas. There is no cross-shareholding between the airlines, but regulations permit the two airlines to have close commercial cooperation, including joint optimization of schedules. Qatar Airways recently joined the oneworld alliance—one of three such alliances in the world—that will allow it to cooperate more closely with alliance partners, notably British Airways. Initially, the level of collaboration will not be as deep, due to regulatory limitations, as that of Emirates and Qantas, but this could change.

Etihad Airways has taken a third path by establishing what it terms “equity alliances.” It has purchased minority stakes in a number of airlines and engages in management contracts with some of its partners.

There are strengths and weaknesses to each of these approaches that will become more clear over time. But what we are witnessing is a willingness on the part of the three Gulf carriers to seek collaboration with partners beyond the region. Although the Gulf carriers provide tough competition for many airlines in other parts of the world, some in the industry recognize the value of working with, rather than complaining about, them. Willie Walsh, CEO of International Airlines Group (IAG), the parent group of British Airways, has indicated his strong support for the commercially rational approach of the Gulf carriers.¹¹ This represents a new phase of maturity in the region's aviation development and one that I see as positive for the future.

Sustainable Growth?

The success of the Gulf aviation sector is based on linking rapidly growing global markets and capitalizing on favorable demographic and economic conditions within the region. This success is confirmed by data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which reported in 2013, 12 percent

growth in passenger traffic for Middle East carriers, the strongest growth shown by any region in the world. IATA credits this figure to the “continued strength of regional economies and solid growth in . . . travel, particularly to developing markets like Africa.”¹² IATA also projects that the UAE will be among the world's top ten markets for air travel by 2016, accommodating 87 million passengers. By comparison, the U.S. market accommodates 223 million passengers and the UK market 200 million.¹³

Other projections underscore the sustainability of this trend. According to Boeing forecasts, between 2013 and 2032, airline traffic in the Middle East will grow by over 6 percent, higher than the global average of 5 percent and well ahead of mature markets, such as North America and Europe. During the same period, Boeing foresees demand for 2,610 additional aircraft in the region, roughly 7 percent of total global demand. More importantly, the region's demand for new long-haul, wide-body aircraft represents 23 percent of global demand, reflecting the significance of the region's hubs.¹⁴ In the geopolitical context, aircraft orders by these airlines support thousands of high-quality jobs beyond the region, particularly in the aerospace industries of Europe and North America.

These opportunities aside, there remain risks to future

growth. Serious military conflict and political unrest, for example, would be extremely damaging to the sector. Fallout from the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War illustrate the negative consequences of these shocks to the industry. At the operational level, insufficient air traffic control capacity and the inefficient use of airspace due to military considerations are serious impediments to air traffic expansion in the region. Averting this problem requires Gulf states to invest resources and muster the political will to avoid a future logjam.

In spite of these risks, aviation in the Middle East is reaching a new level of maturity. The sector is led by well-managed airlines that are best-in-class by global standards. It also has the benefit of its unique geographic location relative to shifting macroeconomic trends. In the years ahead, by making shrewd use of aircraft and airport resources, the Gulf aviation sector is likely to increase its importance both within the region and around the world. ♦

John Strickland is director of JLS Consulting, a London-based air transport consultancy. He has over thirty years of experience in the industry and offers regular commentary and analysis on developments in the Middle East aviation market.

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Breaking the Peace Negotiations Stalemate: An Interview with

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi Interviewed by Nada Zohdy, managing editor of JMEPP, on 15 January 2014

JMEPP: My first question has to do with the most recent talks brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. You said at last night's event at the JFK Forum that the negotiations have become the objective in themselves and not a means to a final solution. Could you expound on this, and if this is going to be the case in the future, why continue to negotiate?

ASHRAWI: Absolutely. If negotiations become an exercise in futility, a sort of repetitive pattern that is generating a negative dynamic, then certainly they become counterproductive, and they negate their very objective. This is what has happened so far in the sense that the emphasis has been on the process rather than on the substance and objective. Negotiations have incorporated the asymmetry of power that allowed the powerful side—the occupier—to exploit its power against the occupied. It robbed the weaker party of any access to global or international instruments of self-empowerment, including international law.

It also did not curb any

violations by the Israelis on the ground, including settlements, the transformation of Jerusalem, annexation of territory, and so on. This meant that while ostensibly you're talking about a two-state solution, you're allowing the more powerful side to destroy the two-state solution by destroying the possibility of having a viable Palestinian state and by creating a larger Israel.

We kept saying that if the means are flawed, you fix them if you have an instrument or a tool like the negotiations. And this instrument is flawed; you either fix it, or you replace it with something else. Unfortunately, there has been a persistence in doing the same thing over and over again—adopting Israeli priorities, allowing the process to run its course in a way that provided Israel with more of an ability to act with impunity and privilege, and destroying the Palestinian chances of having freedom, dignity, and sovereignty. We were hoping that this new initiative by John Kerry would draw the proper conclusions from the process that began in 1991. We hoped the new round would try to maintain some integrity

and viability by addressing the real issues rather than the process itself—by curbing Israeli violations, by basing the process on agreed terms of reference and international law, and therefore safeguarding its own viability and integrity.

JMEPP: *If negotiations continue to be of no use, why not fold the PA and demand full citizenship in return?*

ASHRAWI: Well, there are lots of creative ideas coming out now—the one-state or one-land, one homeland and two states, or the overlapping sovereignty issue, or all sorts of other issues like the binational state, the one secular, democratic state, which we discussed in 1969. It seems to me that the one-state solution is becoming a de facto reality rather than a political program because there is no consensus on the one-state solution anywhere, whether in Palestine or in Israel or in Europe or elsewhere. This is because in a sense Zionism has placed the imperative of division and separation on the table. International resolutions have made it possible, and we made the historical compromise of accepting Israel on 78 percent of historical Palestine. Unfortunately, even that is being destroyed.

So, the one-state solution is taking the shape of Greater Israel, freeing Israel's hand to create

prejudicial unilateral moves on the ground and attempting to prevent Palestinian statehood and sovereignty. The annexation of land and resources and the expansion of settlements continue. We are being told that you have to embrace a one-state solution by some people, knowing that it will mean the perpetuation of the occupation.

We have seen how Israel managed to create a system of legal, effective, on-the-ground administrative and functional discrimination against the indigenous Palestinians who stayed in historical Palestine in Israel. They are citizens of Israel, and yet they are being treated with such blatant discrimination and racism. You have Palestinians who are now being transformed into the demographic threat to Israel because we happen to be non-Jews.

I know Israel is perfectly capable of maintaining a system of apartheid, discrimination, and total exclusion of Palestinians from any consideration of the law or human rights. They continue pressing ahead with Greater Israel. Right now we have come to the UN, and we have had our recognition as a state and are working to have our boundaries, our borders, our capital, and our right to self-determination recognized. It's going to mean a sort of 180-degree shift. Saying “we will stop seeking freedom and sovereignty and so on, and

we will start seeking only equal rights within an apartheid system of Israel” means that we will have postponed any type of solution for generations. It means that again Israel would feel perfectly free to pursue its own expansion. I don't think that there is the political will on the part of the United States or the international community at large to curb Israeli violations and to hold it accountable.

larger-than-life figures. Some of them are in the political arena, some are in the intellectual arena, and Edward Said certainly made his name outside of Palestine. He made his name as a global player, and then he brought to bear this type of presence in the literary world. Through his writings, he brought real expression of quality into the struggle for Palestine.

So, it wasn't that he came

Saying ‘we will stop seeking freedom and sovereignty and so on, and we will start seeking only equal rights within an apartheid system of Israel’ means that we will have postponed any type of solution for generations.

JMEPP: *I wanted to ask you about the state of Palestinian intellectual life. You were close with the late Edward Said who was a champion for the Palestinian cause and a renowned academic. Today, there's no shortage of activists and intellectuals well known in the West and in Palestine such as Rashid Khalidi and Joseph Massad, but no one seems to rise to the level of Edward Said or taken up his mantle. So I was wondering if there is someone who could inherit what Edward Said left behind?*

ASHRAWI: Every country, every culture, every state has its own

to prominence through his struggle for Palestine and then gained international intellectual recognition. He managed to engage the world in terms of intellectual pursuits, and in terms of his political statements, in terms of his national commitment—he engaged the world on his own terms. It was an amazing combination, and I don't think that such phenomena can be repeated frequently.

I think we may have lots of distinguished people. Mahmoud Darwish for me is an amazing creative poet as well. He encapsulated and embodied the Palestinian experience and national identity. He wrote in Arabic but became recognized

internationally. So, his progress is the opposite of Edward's—he started with the struggle, expressed it creatively, and then it was translated and the world took notice. We have others as well. There are quite a few impressive figures. You mentioned Rashid

While ostensibly you're talking about a two-state solution, you're allowing the more powerful side to destroy the two-state solution by destroying the possibility of having a viable Palestinian state and by creating a larger Israel.

Khalidi, you mentioned Massad, and there are also the Makdisi brothers who are nephews of Edward.

In Palestine you have an ongoing and lively debate within civil society. It hasn't crystallized enough, and we haven't had an output of such quality as to make inroads into the consciousness of global intellectual arenas. I think you will see that there are some wonderful poets at home. And they are writing in Arabic. There are quite a few people who are coming to grips in a very creative

combination of intellectual rigor and political commitment—the sort of joint language that Edward legitimized—but they still haven't reached the status to be noticed globally. Palestinians in exile are not constrained by living under occupation. They have greater freedom to explore their possibilities internationally and then to bring Palestine to bear on this freedom to engage intellectually outside. ♦

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi is a renowned legislator, human rights activist and scholar, and is the first woman to be elected to the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the highest executive body in Palestine. She is an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the founder and secretary general of the MIFTAH movement, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy. Dr. Ashrawi has been representing Palestine as an official spokesperson in peace negotiations with Israel since the late 1980s. She received her PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Virginia and then founded and chaired the Department of English at Birzeit University, following which she became Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Birzeit.

Changing Dynamics in the Gulf: An Interview with Dr. Adnan Shihab-Eldin

*Interviewed by Sarath Ganji, managing
editor of JMEPP, on 8 March 2014*

JMEPP: Often we hear the American perspective when it comes to changes in the global energy market and how that will affect American engagement with the Middle East and, in particular, oil-exporting countries. I'd like to reverse that point. How do you see these countries' geopolitical relationships changing in light of America's production of unconventional oil and gas?

SHIHAB-ELDIN: There are two aspects to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) perspective that are important in this regard. One has to do with whether the changes in the United States will imply a disengagement from the Gulf and the oil-producing countries in general. So that is one important perspective, and it has important consequences and challenges and concerns. The second has to do with the United States being an important player in the security of the world—not just in the Middle East—and how that would affect the Gulf. And these are related, but there are also different dimensions.

Let me dwell quickly on the first one. It is clear, from our perspective, that the fact that the United States will become an increasingly important producer of oil is not necessarily bad. In fact, it's welcome in the sense that we need all potential producers to produce oil and sell it or use it because the resources of the Middle East will remain the cheapest that are available in terms of cost of production. So there is no concern from that point of view in the long-term, whether it is the United States or anyone else. But the concern would be if the United States dramatically altered its relationship [with the GCC countries], which has been the cornerstone of security in the Gulf.

That would be something that is not desirable, and that is where the second dimension comes in. The United States currently appears to be adopting a policy of not being the super-policeman of the world, but [rather] a leader of a global alliance to act when there is a need, based on consensus. But consensus may not always work. We have examples. In 1990, there was a grand alliance

established by the United States to liberate Kuwait, but there was no consensus. There were some countries that were not a part of that. And with the United States today, we see that happening in Ukraine. What will be the response of the United States to Ukraine? Will they require a consensus, or will they go with a majority, or will they exercise leadership and just enforce that leadership to try to resolve this thing? This is really what is happening.

“The knowledge economy is not going to be an economy that depends on the government. It has to be dependent on the private sector.”

The United States will continue to be interested in the supplies coming from the Gulf. That’s our view. Why? Because oil is fungible. Even if the United States ends up not importing much oil from the Gulf, and currently it’s not importing much—I think it’s importing one to two million barrels mostly from Saudi Arabia and it’s coming down quickly. The fact that oil is fungible means that if there is a threat to supply security from the Gulf to China, that will impact the United States in two ways: first, U.S. economic growth depends on Chinese economic growth; and second, any shortage in the supply of oil to China will have to be compensated somewhere else,

whether it is the United States, whether it is Europe, whether it is Russia, or somewhere else. Oil is fungible; it moves around quickly.

JMEPP: *I’d like to know more about the domestic implications of these energy trends for the GCC countries in particular. How do you think these changes in the GCC’s oil and gas industries—or in the larger global energy market—will affect their immigration*

policies—namely, workforce nationalization (i.e., Qatarization, Emiratization) versus the importation of large numbers of foreign workers from abroad?

SHIHAB-ELDIN: It’s been well-observed that economic growth in the Gulf countries, which is fueled by oil export revenues, has been dependent to a large extent on having skilled and semi-skilled labor available to move into the region, whether it’s engineers or administrators or clerks or [those] in the service sectors. So the well-being and the development over the last twenty or thirty years would not have been possible were we living

in a region where a labor force was not available. Even if you had enough financial resources coming in, if you don’t have the manpower—and reasonably priced manpower—it would not have been possible. From this perspective, I don’t think it will change with the changing geopolitics of energy or the changes in the energy landscape.

What are the changes in the energy landscape? We’re seeing a revolution in renewables. We’re seeing unconventional oil and gas increasing, and we’re seeing energy efficiency improvement taking place. These are the three important changes in the energy landscape. The only thing that could cause a problem for the Middle East is if the unconventional oil supply combined with energy efficiency and renewables were to reduce dramatically the need for oil exports from the Middle East. That would mean there would be a reduction in oil revenues. In that case, it would not be possible to continue a development that relies on outside labor.

Now, taking the second part of the question—about nationalization policies—I think it’s clear that you have to develop your human resources. It’s natural. And what we have seen in the Middle East—take a country like Kuwait, which has been following this policy now for fifty years, because Kuwait has thirty or forty years of an advantage on

Qatar or the Emirates in terms of oil production. What is the net effect? We still require large labor forces from outside Kuwait because economic growth is large, and so the bottom line is that even after thirty years, we don’t have a sufficient labor force. What you’re going to see is a shift in what type of labor force you will need, either to the very highly-skilled, which we don’t have, or to the service sector, which not many people engage in. In between, you’re going to see more Qataris, more Saudis, more Kuwaitis engaged, and less dependence on labor forces from outside of the country for those sectors: engineers, teachers, accountants, investment managers. But in those very highly-skilled [jobs] in oil and gas or in any industry, or in the service sector, you’re going to continue to see that dominated by labor coming mainly from the Indian subcontinent, Egypt, Syria, maybe the Philippines, and Indonesia.

JMEPP: *As Kuwait progresses toward its goal of producing a knowledge-based economy, what has the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) done to develop and retain the intellectual capital needed to drive this effort?*

SHIHAB-ELDIN: KFAS is a unique foundation. I say unique because not many people know

that it is an alliance between the private sector and the government. It is funded by the private sector, but the foundation is chaired by the head of state, His Highness the Emir of Kuwait. So that puts a responsibility on KFAS to ensure that it carries out strategic programs and that it develops the skilled manpower that is needed by the private sector, because currently most of the employment is in the government sector. So we focus in our programs on developing youth to take on science and engineering careers and to help to develop those who pursue those careers. And that's why we have programs at Harvard and MIT and the London School of Economics. The idea is to use these programs at world-class institutions whereby some of our young graduates can come [to these universities], develop their skills in an exchange program or on a training program. Or some of our more advanced scholars come join researchers at Harvard, at MIT, at LSE, to tackle, on the one hand, research on important issues for the country, but to do it in a collaborative way with some of the top researchers at the top universities.

So, in our small way we are contributing to developing [our] human resources, especially those that are needed by the private sector for the future knowledge economy, because the knowledge economy is not going to be an economy that depends

on the government. It has to be dependent on the private sector. The government role is to enable it, and our role, being an alliance between the government and the private sector, is to enable it with a view that the graduates are better equipped and qualified for work in the private sector. ♦

Dr. Adnan Shihab-Eldin, formerly acting secretary general and director of research at OPEC, is currently director general of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, a board member to Al-Dorra Petroleum Services Company, and a member of the board of trustees of the American University of Kuwait and the Gulf Research Center Foundation (Geneva).

Contextualizing the Arab Awakenings: An Interview with Srjda Popovic

Interviewed by Nada Zohdy, managing editor of JMEPP, on 15 January 2014

JMEPP: *What do you think are the greatest misconceptions around the Arab awakenings?*

POPOVIC: I think there are several misconceptions generally about the situation in the Middle East prior to the Arab Spring. The first is what I like to call the “burger or French fry dilemma.” It’s the idea that the region is somehow stuck in a refrigerator—frozen in time—and that the only two political options you can have in the Middle East are a strict religious theocracy (in the style of Iran or Saudi Arabia),

Egypt and Iran. There are a lot of people born after the Mubaraks and Khomeinis of this world ever came to power. For these people, the revolutionary narratives built around these leaders never made any sense. Arab youth are far more aware with what’s happening in the world and more eager to change their country than what foreign spectators might say.

The second misconception is assuming that masses of people filled the streets in these countries spontaneously. So many observers were taken aback by the mass protests in Iran in 2009, Tunisia in

These revolutions didn’t come out of thin air.

with religious people on top using different coercive pillars to control the population, or a military type of enforced secular dictatorship, like what we saw in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria.

My first big revelation came when I considered the demographic issue. You have very young societies in countries like

2010, and Egypt in 2011 because so many people assumed the refrigerator paradigm. But these revolutions didn’t come out of thin air.

We met many of these young activists prior to these events, and you could see they had great intelligence and planning skills. They were exploring Gandhi,

adopting the clenched fist symbol from Serbia, translating comics of Martin Luther King Jr., and more.

They were planning and thinking about how Mubarak's removal could be a broad-based rallying point. They understood that three major social pillars—the military, the international community, and the business sector—would all be very sensitive to Mubarak's attempt to install his own son to power. When you talk to people who have this type of thoughtful strategy, even without training, then you understand the huge potential. So we weren't surprised when the uprisings broke out. And, of course, timing is everything, so when Tunisia erupted, this was the spark that catalyzed others.

JMEPP: Specifically focusing on Egypt, your organization CANVAS helped train the April 6 Movement years before the Egyptian revolution. Since Morsi was taken out of power last summer, there has been an unprecedented level of polarization, and some have been quick to call Egypt's democratic experiment a failure. What is your reaction to this, and what do you think the role of nonviolent activists like April 6 is now?

POPOVIC: I'm not an academic, but I know that building

democracy takes time. Even looking at U.S. history, you know that over a decade passed between the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Why wouldn't you give at least the same amount of time as a window of opportunity for people in the Arab world, not just in Egypt?

We know from research by Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth that the average nonviolence struggle takes two and a half years. I'm coming from a country that had a successful nonviolent movement in 2000 and peaceful transition after; but before that, we had eight or nine years of trying. Rather than dismiss any of these cases as a success or failure, the only thing I can do is compare where I come from. People were fast to tell us in 1991 that we can't do anything to challenge Milosevic; in 1992, that we lost; and, in 1997, when the opposition split, that we lost our last hope. For so many outsiders, we were labeled the hopeless black hole in the Balkans ruled by the butcher. So I would avoid being that outsider when it comes to Egypt, and I strongly advise everyone to avoid that. Nonviolent struggle takes time.

In my view, there are three parallel processes happening in Egypt. One is very encouraging. One is very discouraging. And one is hard for me to judge.

Let's start with the bad news. The military cleverly shifted sides when they knew Mubarak

was going down then used the popular discontent and Tamarod movement to set the stage for them to step back in. Now, they are prosecuting the Muslim Brotherhood very harshly, gravely violating human rights, and even starting to prosecute the secular activists they are supposedly on the same side with.

A very encouraging process is the process of people awakening. Once people decide they want to be free and exercise nonviolent struggle, people become the shareholders of their future because these movements bring common people, as opposed to elites, into the struggle. Once people risk their energy and time and achieve something collectively (and not just in struggles for democracy, but any nonviolent struggle), they change their understanding of the world and their role in it, and they become shareholders of this change.

When you look at the trajectory

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of Egyptian electoral results over this short window of time in the last few years, this shows another encouraging trend: people are

looking at their leaders and expect them to deliver. If they don't deliver, they punish them in the polls. After thirty years of rigged elections, it is very encouraging that Egyptians are taking this new power of elections so seriously. The democratic potential of the society is there; once people learn they can keep politicians accountable, this can't be reversed.

The third trend is something I don't know if it's good or bad news. For me, bringing groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to the political stage is a necessary part of democracy building the Arab world. I think these groups should be in the political arena, should be subject to elections, and should be subject to public scrutiny if they don't deliver. These groups represent huge parts of the population, and as we've learned, large parts of the population must always be political represented. If they are not represented, this is a recipe for a crisis in any society.

JMEPP: Do you think one of the mistakes some Arab activists made was not sufficiently planning how they

would play in the political game once the transitions took place?

POPOVIC: I think it's a combination of three things. First, consider the objective environment. In Serbia, we had a transitional government in place very fast, and we had a plan for the transition. But we also had well-established political parties. These were the bricks needed to build new structures.

JMEPP: *And, of course, these parties existed before Otpor!*

POPOVIC: Yes, they were around before Otpor!, and there was existing civil society as well. To have the same outcome in a place like Egypt, where you don't have really well-established political parties, you need to build them. You know, building a car and driving a car at the same time is really difficult. It's really unfair to compare Egypt with the Serbian situation on this point.

The second issue is that of where you set your victory bar (or your "goose egg"). The point here is that setting your vision of tomorrow and limiting your strategy to dismantling Mubarak and expecting that once you leave the streets everything will change overnight is shortsighted. This is instead of understanding that the two most organized

groups (the military and the Muslim Brotherhood) would inevitably seize power in this unstable situation. But that doesn't necessarily mean Egypt is a failure.

People power is a marathon, not a sprint. No matter how fast you can finish one level of the game, there is yet another level to accomplish, and another. This is one thing we understood in Serbia, and perhaps not all activists understood this in the Arab world. But you can always start the game over from the beginning.

The third thing is the challenge of building alternative power. When you look at a transition, you need to accomplish several things. Once you build momentum, you need to maintain it—somehow transform this broad political movement into a set of civil society organizations, political parties, pressure groups, watchdog groups, a constitution assembly, etc. But you need to have a plan for this. I keep hearing from people who work within the field that Arab youth activists somehow tend to be very happy being outside the institutions. They see that their role is being on the street while someone else is in power.

JMEPP: *What do you personally find most inspiring about the Arab activists you've worked with?*

POPOVIC: Every time we work with people we learn. We avoid advising people specifically what to do because we know you can't copy and paste strategies. But we try to give them tools about how to evaluate tactics, how to develop strategy, how to negotiate, and how to select target audiences. Through this process, we learned so much about how rich, clever, enthusiastic, and powerful this world of Arab youth is. They have tremendous energy, courage, commitment, and creativity. And their commitment to teachers is very unlike Serbs—who will throw chalk at their teachers. Arab people will respect their teachers. Besides all the contextual information I tried to learn, if I learned one thing from my Arab friends, it is how to respect the people who have taught me in life. ♦

Srdja Popovic was a founder of the Serbian nonviolent resistance group Otpor! that led the successful campaign to unseat Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000. Popovic later served a term as a member of the Serbian National Assembly from 2000-2003. In 2003, Popovic and other ex-Otpor! activists started the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, CANVAS (www.canvasopedia.org), a nonprofit educational institution that has worked with people from over fifty different countries spreading knowledge on nonviolent strategies and tactics. In 2012, Popovic was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.