

# The State of the MENA Region Lessons and Projections

## ANALYSIS

Potential Challenges  
and Outcomes of  
Brexit: Relations  
Between the UK, the  
GCC and Iran  
Diana Galeeva

Troubled Beginnings:  
The First Decade of  
Hizbullah's  
Interaction With  
Pan-Islamic Ideas  
Luke Wilkinson

Social Media in  
Northern African  
Politics  
Dr Jaafar Bouzomita

## OPINION PIECES

INTERVIEWS &  
EVENT SUMMARIES

NEWS UPDATE

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# In the current issue:

From the Editor  
From the Vice President

## ANALYSIS

Potential Challenges and Outcomes of Brexit:  
Relations Between the UK, the GCC and Iran

Troubled Beginnings: The First Decade of  
Hizbullah's Interaction With Pan-Islamic Ideas

Social Media in Northern African Politics

The Capital-Racial Complex and Lebanon's  
October Uprising

The Debacle of State Mosque Competition in  
the Middle East and North Africa

The Islamic State Will Never Be up for  
Negotiations - or to Any Good

## OPINION PIECES

Strategic Relationships of Foreign Involvement  
in the Middle East

The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Humanitarian  
Emergency or a Development Failure?

Climate Change and the Middle East

Refugees After the Syrian Civil War

In Free Fall: The Tale of Omar al-Bashir and  
the ICC

## INTERVIEWS & EVENT SUMMARIES

John Simpson: Around the World in Fifty Years

"A Different Partnership for Cyprus": In  
Conversation with Professor Kudret Özersay

"Sectarianism and Post-Sectarianism in Theory  
and Practice" - In Conversation with Professor  
Bassel F. Salloukh

## Potential Challenges and Outcomes of Brexit: Relations Be- tween the UK, the GCC and Iran

If we accept the future of Britain's poli-  
cies under the idea of a 'Global Britain',  
which the UK's policy-makers and state  
stakeholders expect post-Brexit UK to  
be based on, then advocates of the idea  
of 'Global Britain' suggest that Global  
Britain is about linking with 'old friends  
and new allies'.

By Diana Galeeva



## Strategic Relationships of Foreign Involvement in the Middle East

Discourse in the media and in public  
diplomacy often echoes the notion of  
'Middle East Exceptionalism', a simpli-  
fied dismissal of the perceived failure of  
MENA states to transition into democra-  
cy on their own. This (mostly) Western  
perspective patronizes in its disregard of  
the legacy of colonialism and scars of  
imperialism across the nascent region.

By Dana Bibi

## NEWS UPDATE

Preliminary subscription for MENAF's  
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## Manara Editorial

By Molly Bolding

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When I took over as the first dedicated Manara editor in March last year, I had big plans for this publication. The wealth of potential that it offered in terms of integrating student and academic writers; connecting with institutions around the world; and providing an accessible entry point into MEN region discourse was undeniable, and since the magazine's modest beginnings it has now grown into our first full print and online edition.

**This new, updated issue** of Manara features our classic long-form articles on a range of topics, alongside the newly introduced interview, opinion essay and book review sections. Innovating the style of articles has provided a variety of new lenses through which to view relevant issues and made writing for the magazine more accessible for all. Our theme for this term was 'The State of the MENA Region - Lessons and Projections': in this issue my writers and I hope to bring you up to date with ongoing debates and provide insight into topics such as international negotiations, State Mosque competition, and the semantic conflict of 'crisis' versus 'emergency'.

**In terms of articles**, there is plenty to choose from - our main feature is by the UPEC-based Dr Jaafar Bouzomita, examining the role of social media within the case study of recent Tunisian political unrest. In it, the twin prongs of the Tunisian government's attempts to suppress civilian protest - propaganda and censorship - are put under scrutiny, using data that suggests a growing number of Facebook

users in the country is changing the space in which politics is performed. Elsewhere, you can find a visual journey through the history of Hizbollah's 'Pan-Islam' poster campaign up to the present day - explained in comprehensive detail by Luke Wilkinson - or a study on the consequences of Lebanon's October Uprising. And finally, this wouldn't be a 2020 edition without at least one mention of Brexit; revisited in detail by Diana Galeeva and providing an intriguing look at the potential impact of 'Global Britain' policies on our relationship with the GCC and Iran. As for opinion essays, you will find differing perspectives on global responsibility for Syrian refugees; a reflection on the nascent impact of climate change across the Middle East and North African region; and much more.

**Over in Interviews**, you can find coverage of our speakers' events from this term, providing a deeper insight into the basis of their talks and a catch-up for anyone who couldn't make it. This style of coverage will continue once we return to Cambridge in the new academic year, and if you would be interested in joining our writers team feel free to get in touch!

I would like to extend enormous thanks to all the writers whom I had the pleasure of working with, to everyone on the Interviews team for their fantastic work this past year, and to my fellow Committee member Patrik Kurath for his invaluable design skills. I hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as I enjoyed curating it!

Yours,

Molly Bolding, Editor in Chief



## Social Media in Northern African Politics

By Dr Jaafar Bouzomita

Unlike Western democracies that allow the existence of a free and open media space, most or all the different regimes in the MENA region, before the Arab Spring, has kept a heavy hand on traditional media. Equally, state-owned and private TVs, newspapers, radios or magazines used the information process to shape a submissive public opinion. The long-standing regimes in the MENA region failed to foresee the danger that the innovations in information technology could affect the effectiveness of their various systems. Their politics did not consider social media as a catalyst for political regeneration. That's why the link between the use of social media and politics has become more visible since the collapse of the regime of Ben Ali. In other words, social media is affecting the information process and the users; equally shaping institutions and politicians' behaviour. In this respect, the role of Facebook, as a case in point, in Tunisia should be analysed in the context of the technological innovation theory. This case study supports an understanding of the political upheavals in the MENA region from both a political and sociological perspective.

### An Outdated Political Regime

Certainly, the regime of Ben Ali collapsed for economic and social or political reasons, but one of

the main factors could also be associated to the information technology innovations that allowed the different social classes of the country to have access to smartphones and Facebook. The regime "mini-mized" the ability and capacity of mobilization of Facebook users as it considered smartphones as a gadget and it considered the role of social platforms to be "useless". In addition, Ben Ali's statesmen thought watching over the internet users would be sufficient to guarantee a political stability. They invested in sophisticated equipment to watch over the internet. They blocked access to YouTube and other websites. Meanwhile, they continued to harass political opponents and enforced their heavy hand on classical media outlets. The regime believed that blocking access to specific websites and controlling the public space would be enough to prevent the new generations from participating in political actions or having a political consciousness. In other words, the regime failed to forecast the expectancy and the capacity of the new interconnected generation. While the gap between this regime and its new ambitious generations was increasing, the regime maintained old-fashioned propaganda based on discrediting opponents and alarming the public opinion about a "plot" being prepared and implemented by the unpatriotic opponents in cooperation with the enemies of Tunisia. The double talk was the main strategy for the regime which thought that the access to smartphones was its own success and an achievement. In a sense, the regime did not expect that the new technology could lead to the emergence of a new public space.

### Political Battlefield: making a confusing space

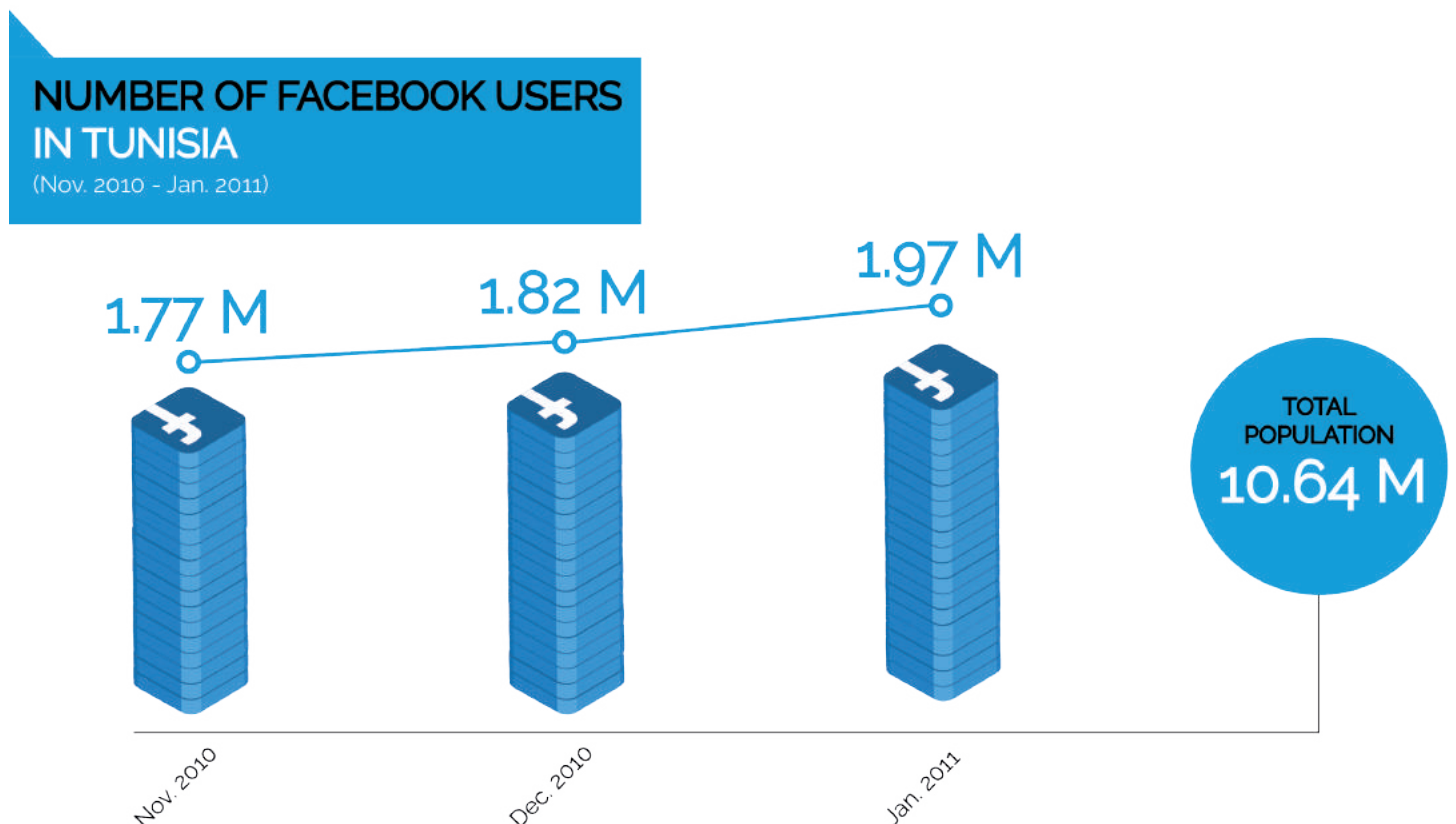
The collapse of the regime was the beginning of a new virtual public space that has been shaped by "smartphoners, YouTubers or Facebookers." This new sphere is political par excellence, since the users have used it to debate politics, shape public opinion, sensitize people and mobilize them, influence decision-makers and participate in the decision-making process. In addition, the users of social media have acquired the role of "checks-and-balances." They have turned into a watchdog to fight corruption, terrorism, and even regionalism and racism as social problems. They have strengthened the progressive aspects of the Republic and defend fundamental human rights. Thanks to Facebook, the civil society

has succeeded specifically in defending women and “countering the power”, resisting political deviation/-totalitarianism. Moreover, they held anti-poverty campaigns to help inhabitants of rural areas that have been marginalized by the system.

The digital public space has been shaping the national political atmosphere, which depends hugely on the international politics specifically in the region of the Middle East. “Facebookers” are divided along their political affiliation which determines their position in dealing with the geopolitics of the country. The conflicted mixture of religious and political backgrounds of Facebook users has determined their way of shaping a divided public opinion. While some Tunisian users have supported the war against the regime of Bashar Al Assad, the war against Gadhafi and the departure of Boutaflika, others have chosen to oppose those wars. It is important to note that the users’ attitudes towards the war in Yemen continues to be confusing, though a lot have announced their

opposition because the Saudi Arabia and UAE are leading the Arab coalition against Houthis who are backed by Iran. Therefore, social media appears to deepen both the clash and the confusion not only for the followers, but also for the opinion leaders and the political decision-makers. The confusion has affected the national scene and turned to be a real source of social instability as it led to strikes and roadblocks, aggression against artists and companies as well as industries. It has led also to personal disputes between users and friends, with personal insults giving to judicial condemnation. The populist and non-populist styles displayed on Facebook means that the communication between users often turns to be violent, as it is a direct outlet for intense emotions. Tension has overwhelmed the platform, as the tendency to expressiveness is exploited. Therefore, the platform has turned into “an open access platform of political campaigns” or “unfinished” process of information and misinformation. In a sense, the democratic transition has been engaged a personal

## Visual Data by MENAF



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and emotional discourse since the users have formed opposite emotional communities on Facebook. They are “emotionally offensive” since they were excluded from politics or had been “inboxed” in the traditional political structure. This “digital emotional activism” or “emotional intelligence”, according to George Marcus, has played a major role in polarizing the democratic transition in Tunisia. They have turned to be harmful to ensure a political stability, an open-governance and the function of the state’s institutions.

Tunisian politicians and candidates for elections have stuck to the formula: engaging in politics means first and foremost exposing yourself. Politics requires an expression of emotions because candidates are expected to produce emotional “content” matching the users or the receivers’ (voters) expectancy. Consequently, the striking feature of all campaigns is “making the buzz” to keep themselves “visible on Facebook.” The obsession of visibility dictates the information delivery process. To target multipolar followers, there is a media overexposure of politicians. Remarkably, the quality of information has been affected. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer et al refer to a phenomenon of “cascading information” as users roll-out pre-scheduled information posts without checking their authenticity. The more information is shared, the more it will tend to be trusted and the less it will be criticized. The political discourse is constructed to seduce voters and match their expectations. Consequently, a mismatch between the shared content and the realpolitik prevails.

### **Populism wins over**

Exposing oneself on Facebook reveals the tension between the social media logic and that of the institution. Some political parties or pages and communities choose to construct their own narrative of events. Their populist style has violated the “institutional exemplarity”, according to Armand Colin. The dependence of politicians on Facebook synchronizes the mass and the elite, on one hand, and it has turned Facebookers from observers or passive actors into political leaders. This synchronisation has not only helped prevailing the “culture of emotion” under different forms such as fake news and intox, but also “radicalization of the political offer.” They have become the norms organizing the interaction on social media. Therefore, Facebook users appear to be

a total emotional entity which operates in uncontrolled virtual public space. They can no longer manage their emotions because they are governed by the feeling of distrust.

Every political user orchestrates emotion in an attempt to reinforce his/her legitimacy or to discredit the coalition in power. Consequently, the shared narrative of construction targeting the state’s institutions is devoted to impress the public emotionally and win their hearts and minds. In other words, legitimacy is determined by emotions. As a matter of fact, the political representation started to depend on the digital visibility of candidates who are in a continuous “fabrique du charisme.”[1] Overwhelming self-promotion and populist promises during the recent election campaigns have boosted candidates claiming their fight is against poverty and obscurantism or those claiming their involvement is to protect Islam and liberate Jerusalem. In Tunisia, social media, especially Facebook, has built the aftermath of Ben Ali into an ‘emotional democracy’ characterized by “a decisionlessness” that affects the state. Smugglers have their say on Facebook since they sponsor different pages and news magazines to protect their interests and make profits. The campaigners on Facebook could be financed by smugglers or businessmen who are potentially “a bad influence”. They have even launched attacks against the government whenever it tried to eradicate “the shadow/black economy”. They compete by producing mass content rapidly on Facebook in order to attract attention and corral favourable public opinion. Thus, the information process has turned into an open battle of populist style and manipulation.

According to Armond Colin, resorting to the populist narrative construction of politics in its different forms “rocks institutional routines, attracts media attention, provides visibility capital and helps build political stance”. An abundance of visibility on Facebook upsets the logic of the state’s institutions and has become a “political resource which allows them to claim a leadership position. So, consensus has been built on interpersonal and face-to-face relation between the leader and his followers.”[2] For Armond, there is an efficient “disintermediation” which helps politicians adopting a populist style to make a place for them in a period of crisis.

In the aftermath of Ben Ali’s regime, the democratic



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transition has been structured by the principles of virality and immediacy provided by the social media. They play a central role in the political process of Tunisia since they have formed the foundation of the vertical relationship between politicians and ordinary citizens. Beyond that, Facebook has made the task of governing more complicated because having a majority in the National Assembly can no longer be enough to exercise power and make some rigorous reforms against corruption or informal economy. While some Facebookers or administrators of communities' pages' used to produce an anti-establishment discourse, some others claim their involvement to protect the Republic and reinforce fundamental rights. In the words of Lorenzo Castellani, the traditional forms of politics have been overwhelmed by an accelerated process, and the theatricality of the virtual public space, with an emotional legitimacy leading to "an instantaneous or fast democracy".[3]

[1] Groupe d'études géopolitiques, *Le style populiste*, Paris: Amsterdam, 2019, 132.

[2] Ibid, 131.

[3] Ibid, 130.

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## Troubled Beginnings: The First Decade of Hizbullah's Interaction With Pan-Islamic Ideas

By Luke Wilkinson

It was November 2017. The columns of an ancient temple stood wearily against the persistent sun, which attempted to expose every cavity in the structure's limestone canvass. Below, a rugged seller displayed his wares to the occasional passer-by, among which were several yellow t-shirts for sale that bore the emblem of Hizbullah - its green Kalashnikov and globe highlighting the group's avowed commitment to supranational struggle. This discovery came as little surprise; during 1982, it was here in the city of Ba'albek, northern Lebanon, that the 'Party of God' was established. Almost since then, interested outsiders, from academic historians to security analysts, have attempted to understand the extent to which pan-Islamic ideas have shaped the core ideology of the party. Several scholars, such as Martin Kramer, argue that these were a genuine part of Hizbullah's actions. [1] By contrast, historians like Amal Saad-Ghorayeb view pan-Islam as a concept that solely existed in the 'intellectual realm' for Hizbullah and was thus never truly implemented. [2]

### Pan-Islam

In general terms, pan-Islam is best understood as the

Islām alone is an awkward concept. As the verbal noun of the Arabic root S L M, which connotes 'to submit' or 'to surrender', the word itself implies that individual action is at the centre of man's relationship to God.[3] Shahab Ahmed cogently argues that 'in the first semantic instance, [Islam] is something a person does'.[4] As such, the religion inherently contains variation in belief: each individual follower or believer can choose the manner in which they submit, creating multiple and contradictory interpretations as to how the religion should be practised. This makes the implementation of pan-Islam, an idea that seeks to unite all Muslims, particularly difficult.

### Hizbullah

Hizbullah's rise to power in Lebanon was rapid yet complex. Consequently, for the purposes of clarity, this essay focuses on the period of 1982 to 1992. The group's foundations were radical, Islamist, and often militant. However, their decision to contest parliamentary elections in 1992, instead of maintaining a wholesale rejection of the government, indicated that Hizbullah was willing to increase its alignment with the status quo in Lebanon.

It is impossible to interrogate the evolution of Hizbullah without acknowledging the influence of Iran. Ruhollah Khomeini and his revolutionary Iran provided a significant source of inspiration for Hizbullah's members and supporters, while the revolution of 1979 was crucial in revitalising global interest in pan-Islamic ideas, championing the ideal of an Islamic government and calling for the export of the Islamic revolution. As such, pan-Islam as it was understood in the later twentieth century was closely linked to Iran's interpretation of the concept. Iran's promotion of pan-Islamic ideas is clear in its constitution of 1979, which states Iran 'should exert continuous efforts in order to realize the political, economic and cultural unity of the Islamic world'.[5] That Khomeini's Iran was a source of inspiration for Hizbullah in particular is evident in a photo in al-'Ahd, the organisation's newspaper that was set up in 1984. It shows little girls distributing pictures of Khomeini to passing cars during 1985 celebrations in Lebanon of the anniversary of the Iranian revolution.[6]

### Methodology

In analysing Hizbullah's implementation of pan-Islam, this article focuses on its use of rhetoric and imagery. These were, and remain, crucial to Hizbullah's methods of implementation of their ideology. Hizbullah's set of ideas focused on the central concept of 'resistance'; it is no accident that its Open Letter of 1985 is addressed to the 'oppressed in Lebanon and the world'. [7] As a result, if we follow the thought of Antonio Gramsci, in order to implement their idea of resistance, Hizbullah had to fight a 'war of position'. Although this term is used in multiple ways by Gramsci, his crucial argument is that a 'war of position' would alter the consciousness of the oppressed classes to make them aware of their subjugation, leading to an overthrow of the status quo. [8] With regard to Hizbullah, the oppressed were either the Shi'ites, the Lebanese in general, or the umma, contingent upon the context. Rhetoric from Hizbullah-affiliated religious leaders, and political posters, provided consistent, persuasive messages to the oppressed in an attempt to produce a change of consciousness from the latter. Hizbullah clearly valued this form of implementation; from 1987, it formally created a centralised media production, the Central Information Unit. [9] The focus on Hizbullah's media as a form of implementation is supported by Dina Matar, Lina Khatib, and Atef Alshaer, who argue that Hizbullah utilised communication strategies – in their case, television and newspapers – to achieve its political goals. [10]

## Implementation

Hizbullah's interpretation of pan-Islamic ideas revolved around the idea of a united Muslim struggle. This was a key tenet of pan-Islam in the later twentieth century, when unity of the umma against neo-colonialism and Zionism was more relevant than a general political union of the Muslims. The creation of Israel in 1948 added a new anti-Zionist ingredient to pan-Islam. In the eyes of many Muslims, the Jews had seized the land of largely Muslim Palestinians, and also threatened the significant Islamic holy site in Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock, and thus had to be opposed by a united umma. Resistance to neo-colonialism also was a relevant aspect of pan-Islam at the time. The Islamic awakening, *aş-Şaḥwah l'Islāmiyyah*, that had begun in the late 1970s, sought to restore Muslims to their past prosperity, which included preventing the neo-colonialism of the US from further harming the umma. In light of the

decline of the economically and politically stagnant USSR, the threat of a hyperpower US was on the horizon. Thus, a united Muslim struggle against this new threat of a unilateral form of American neo-colonialism became an increasingly popular interpretation of pan-Islam. Such an idea was articulated by Khomeini's revolutionary Iran, which, as explained earlier, was a key influence in late twentieth century pan-Islamic ideas. The 1979 constitution highlights that the failure of the past 'religious school movements' was due to the 'absence of struggles'. [11] This indicates that a united Muslim struggle was a central aspect of pan-Islam at the time.

Through rhetoric Hizbullah implemented the idea of a united Muslim struggle against Zionism. Hizbullah utilised rhetoric which associated Israel with sexual abuse, highlighting the moral depravity of Israel, and thus the threat it represents to the holy site of the Dome of the Rock and its tyrannical treatment of Palestinian Muslims. For instance, throughout sections fifteen to twenty-two of the Open Letter, Israel is rarely discussed without the denomination of a rapist - the 'Zionist entity that raped Palestine' is a typical sentence. [12] This was not only the language of Hizbullah's officials, but also its ordinary members or followers. Consider the example of Khaidiji, a female member of Hizbullah who lived in south Beirut. When discussing her past, she calmly uses the expression 'rape of Palestine' when discussing the conflict with Israel - indicating that it was an everyday label among Hizbullah supporters. [13] Hizbullah's use of this form of rhetoric clearly affected the language of its largely Shi'ite followers; normalising powerful anti-Zionist sentiment, and thus spreading the idea of a Muslim front against their oppressors. Hizbullah utilised posters in an attempt to unite the umma in a struggle against Israel. In this regard, the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic shrine in the old city of Jerusalem, was a consistently used symbol. The Dome was an important holy site for Muslims but was under the control of the Israeli enemy; Israel captured the old city in the Six Day War and briefly hoisted an Israeli flag over the Dome. Thus, it was a powerful image for members of the umma. It was used in a Hizbullah poster from 1984, which articulates a need for the umma to be united against their non-Muslim oppressors. The poster depicts two soldiers, a woman dressed in a hijab, and a Muslim cleric advancing together towards the Dome of the Rock. The writing on the poster reads, 'Jerusalem...



here we come. Every Muslim has to prepare himself to confront Israel... and Jerusalem will ultimately return to Muslims'.[14] The portrayal of numerous different members of society demonstrates that all Muslims, no matter what gender or profession, must be involved in the struggle against their oppressors. Consequently, several images in this poster encouraged a change of consciousness among Muslim onlookers to unite all members of the umma against their Zionist oppressors.

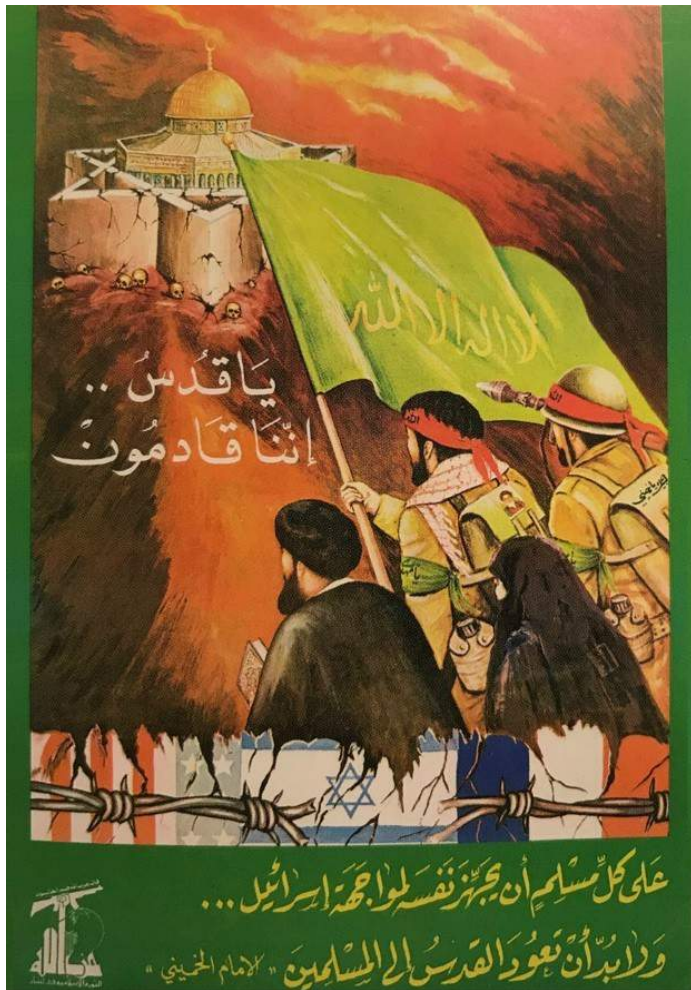


Figure 1 Hizbullah, Poster, 1984, Maasri, Off the Wall, Fig. 3.28

### Shi'ite particularism

Despite these early efforts to carry out the idea of a united Muslim struggle, Hizbullah's implementation of pan-Islam was undermined by the organisation's Shi'ite particularism. Ultimately, its chief aim of improving the condition of Shi'ites largely in Lebanese society, but also beyond the borders, sacrificed the pan-Islamic ideal of Sunni-Shi'ite unity. Although often pan-Islamic on the surface, Hizbullah's rhetoric

and imagery contained Shi'ite symbols; resulting in a message of Shi'ite universalism instead of pan Islam. This spoke intimately to Shi'ite observers and listeners but excluded those who were Sunni.

In order to understand why this phenomenon occurred, it is crucial to appreciate the context against which Hizbullah rose up. The party was formed and supported by Shi'ites frustrated at their inferior position in Lebanese society. Despite being the largest sect in Lebanon, the Shi'ites had the least constitutional power. Under the National Charter of 1943, the President had to be Maronite Christian and the Prime-Minister Sunni, while the Shi'ites were only given representation by the lesser role of Speaker of the House. Furthermore, non-Shi'ites intended to maintain their advantage in society via cultural hegemony. Maronite Christians and Sunnis formulated a mode of thinking that aimed to keep the more numerous Shi'ite population in a subordinate position in society. As Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr demonstrates, jokes and stereotypes were frequently constructed by Sunnis and Maronites about the inferiority of the Shi'ites and their unworthiness of partaking in the rule of Lebanon.[15] As Shi'ites became increasingly aware of their subordination, their anger at the injustice of their treatment and position in Lebanese society grew. This was exacerbated by the failure of Amal, at the time the more institutionalised Shi'ite representative party in Lebanon, to effectively improve the Shi'ite condition – a revision of the National Charter remained unachieved in the 1980s.[16] Consequently, by taking actions that augmented the position of Shi'ites, Hizbullah could draw the majority of Shi'ite support away from Amal. This led to the 'Party of God' articulating a form of Shi'ite universalism, instead of pan Islam.

Shi'ite universalism contradicted pan-Islam, undermining Hizbullah's aforementioned efforts to implement the latter. The former aims to improve the global condition of the Shi'ites; often realised in calls for the overthrow of a Sunni-dominated regime. By contrast, pan-Islam calls for increased unity among all Muslims, whether Sunni or Shi'ite. Shi'ite universalism undermines pan-Islamic ideas as it causes divisions among Sunnis and Shi'ites instead of encouraging the unity of the two sects. For example, as part of his general argument on the global resurgence of Shi'ism, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr demonstrates that Khomeini's revolution in 1979 provided

inspiration to Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia. Protests erupted among the Shi'ites against their Sunni rulers in the oil-rich east of the country, to which the Saudi monarchy responded with brutal crackdowns.[17] This was the very opposite of what pan-Islam aimed to achieve; one of its key early champions in South Asia, Muhammad Iqbal, stated in a poem, 'From the Banks of the Nile/ To the soil of Kashgar/ The Muslims should be united'.[18] The fact that Iqbal desired for all Muslims across the Middle East and South Asia to be united, which included both Sunni and Shi'ite dominated areas such as the Gulf states and Iran respectively, indicates that this key pan-Islamic thinker sought to overcome the doctrinal differences of certain geographical areas. The frequently anti-Sunni consequences of Shi'ite universalism resulted in an undermining of this pan-Islamic aim. Underneath the surface of its audio-visual production, elements of which have been shown to be pan-Islamic, Hizbullah in fact disseminated a message of Shi'ite universalism. Consider a poster from

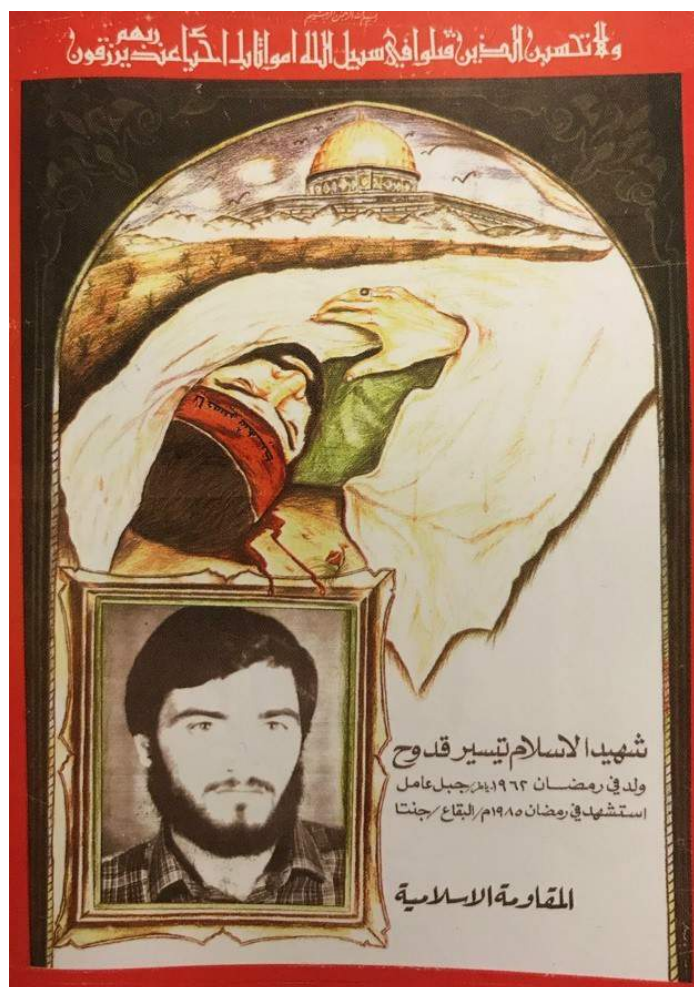


Figure 2 Hizbullah, Poster, 1985, Maasri, Off the Wall, Fig. 4.39.

1985. It depicts a martyr, Taysir Kdouh, lying serenely under a white cloth with the Dome of the Rock in the distance. The combination of Shi'ite symbolism and anti-Zionism demonstrates the Shi'ite universalism of this poster. The Dome of the Rock has been discussed as a typical pan-Islamic symbol due to the fact that it encourages Muslims to unite against the Zionist threat. However, in this case, it is combined with a uniquely Shi'ite symbol; the headbanded martyr. Kdouh is stylised wearing a headband just like Husayn, the ultimate Shi'ite martyr, who reputedly wore a headcloth to stem his bleeding head wound while making his last stand at Karbala against the Umayyad caliph, Yazid – a Sunni. Hizbullah are clearly utilising Shi'ite symbolism in this poster in order to speak intimately to members of this minority of the umma. This is supported by Martin Kramer, who argues that Hizbullah's clerics and officials make such a wide use of Shi'ite symbolism, it almost seems that 'they expect not to be read or heard by Sunnis at all'.[19] Thus, the visible pandering to Shi'ite culture and belief combined with anti-Zionist symbols in Hizbullah's poster production articulated a form of Shi'ite universalism, which undermined the pan-Islamic message of all-Muslim unity.

### Lebanese Nationalism

Another facet of particularism undermines Hizbullah's implementation of pan-Islamic ideas: the question of its Lebanese identity. As explained, the party sought to ameliorate the Shi'ite condition largely in Lebanon in order to maintain their predominantly Shi'ite support base. However, in order to achieve this, Hizbullah first had to gain a position of influence over multi-sectarian Lebanese society by articulating and implementing a vision of Lebanese nationalism, which could inspire loyalty despite internal differences. Although the pursuit of Lebanese nationalism formed part of Hizbullah's amelioration of the Shi'ite condition, it undermined pan-Islamic ideas. After World War Two, the concept of the nation-state took hold among many peoples aiming to rid themselves of foreign domination. With this development sprung open a debate around the relationship between nationalism and pan-Islam. In this case, nationalism connotes local nationalism, such as Lebanese nationalism, rather than a wider variety like Arab nationalism. As outlined earlier, pan-Islam calls for cooperation and solidarity among the umma, in cultural, economic, and political terms. By contrast, national-



ism demands an exclusive focus on what Benedict Anderson would describe as an ‘imagined community’; those people sharing ethnic or cultural traits living within the territorial limits of the nation-state.[20] This contradicts pan-Islam’s universalist plea for a united umma. This is a different ‘imagined community’ whose common trait is religion; not ethnic similarities, and not necessarily cultural ties.[21] For example, Khomeini, in Islamic Government, states that the imperialists ‘have separated the various segments of the Islamic umma from each other and artificially created separate nations’ and that ‘each of these nations was entrusted to one of their servants’.[22] Khomeini’s determined invalidation of nationalism as a Western fabrication indicates the irreconcilability of the umma and the nation-state.

Hizbullah implemented Lebanese nationalism through the rhetoric of its leading figures, undermining its efforts to realise pan-Islamic ideas. Consider the speech given by Hassan Nasrullah in Kafarmelki, southern Lebanon, only a few months after the Open Letter of 1985. It likely referenced a proclamation from the deputy chief of PLO, Abu Iyad, in 1976, which stated that Palestinians should control Lebanon in order to fight Israel.[23] In al-‘Ahd, Nasrullah proclaims that ‘it is not as was said that the road to Jerusalem goes through Lebanon but the road to Lebanon goes through Jerusalem’.[24] This indicates a national focus in place of a pan-Islamic one. Lebanon is designated the final destination of ‘the road’, rather than Jerusalem; the home of the pan-Islamic symbol, the Dome of the Rock.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that the influence of pan-Islam on Hizbullah’s policies in 1982 to 1992 is evident, the organisation’s implementation of these ideas was limited in practice. Granted, Hizbullah did make efforts to realise the idea of a united Muslim struggle, which was a powerful pan-Islamic idea during the late twentieth century. They attempted to spread this concept through moderate means - anti-Zionist rhetoric and the use of pan-Islamic symbols in their posters – as well as via the extreme method of violence against Israeli and neo-colonial targets. However, in order to maintain and gain the support of disaffected Lebanese Shi’ites, Hizbullah had to focus on ameliorating the Shi’ite position. This resulted in

the organisation actually disseminating a message of Shi’ite universalism in its posters. This alienated Sunnis and amplified divisions among Sunnis and Shi’ites; undermining the pan-Islamic goal of unity between the two. In order to mitigate that alienation and gain ascendancy over Lebanon as a whole, whereby they could reshape society in favour of the Shi’ites, Hizbullah had to embrace nationalism. To that end, they propagated Lebanese nationalism in their rhetoric. This compromised its realisation of pan-Islamic ideas; many of the latter’s thinkers, such as Khomeini in his earlier years, viewed nations as simply non-Muslim devices to divide the umma.

Pan-Islam, particularly the idea of a united Muslim struggle against the oppressors of the umma, remains a visible element of Hizbullah’s politics in the contemporary Middle East. Responding to the US assassination of Qassem Soleimani, Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah, proclaimed in his speech that the ‘we must all, through our region and our umma’ work towards removing the

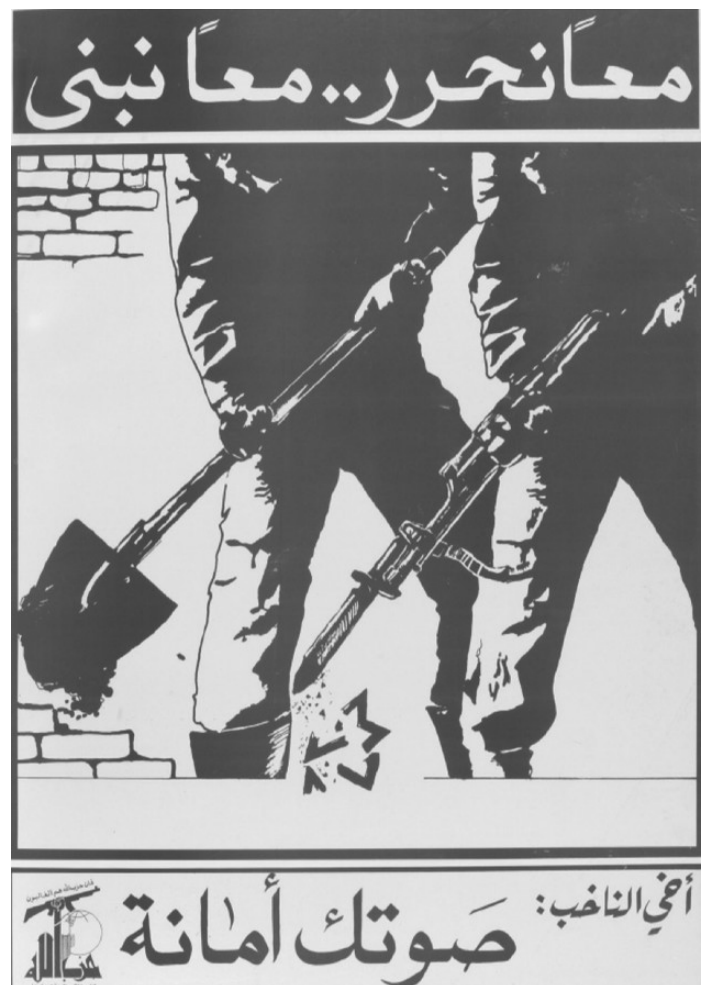


Figure 3 Hizbullah, Poster, 1992, Maasri, ‘The Aesthetics of Belonging’, p. 172.



US military from the Middle East, which will result in the 'full return of all Palestine and all the holy places of Palestine to the umma'.<sup>[25]</sup> However, echoing a similar statement by Naim Qassem in a BBC interview in December 2019, Nasrallah also indicated that a war with Israel is 'unlikely in the near future'.<sup>[26]</sup> This indicates the limits of Hizbullah's commitment to defending transnational members of the umma; the party is not willing to jeopardise the condition of its Lebanese Shi'ite supporters by precipitating aggressive responses from the US or Israel. Nasrallah's speech represents a visible instance of friction between the particularism of its rhetoric and posters towards its supporters and the pan-Islamic concern with the whole umma that continues to be played out today. When analysing the 'Party of God' and its actions in the present climate, it is crucial that we do not overlook this inherent tension in its politics as a whole.

1. Kramer, Martin. 'Redeeming Jerusalem: The Pan-Islamic Premise of Hizballah', in *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, ed. David Menashri, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.

2. Saad-Ghorayeb, Amal. *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, p. 86-7.

3. 'Islam' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. Esposito, John. [<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com>, accessed 12 October 2019].

4. Ahmed, Shahab. *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 101-3.

5. Iran constitution, Principle 11, in Ramazani, Rouhollah. 'Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle East Journal* 34, 1980, p. 190.

6. Photo in *Al-Ahd* 34, 15 February 1985, in Kramer, Martin. 'Redeeming Jerusalem: The Pan-Islamic Premise of Hizballah', in *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, ed. David Menashri, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990, p. 112.

7. Open Letter Cover Page, in Alagha, Joseph. *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011, p. 39.

8. Hoare, Quintin., Smith, Geoffrey Nowell. Eds. and Trans., Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 207. Gramsci sees civil society in the West as an area that 'must be conquered' in order to attain governmental power. In other words, civil society, which Gramsci views as the sphere in which the governing classes rule by consent through cultural hegemony, must be changed in order to bring about an overthrow of the status quo. In order to achieve this, a new culture, or consciousness, had to be created among the oppressed classes to counter that of the leading classes.

9. Lamloom, 'Hezbollah's Media', p. 356. 10 Alshaer, Atef., Khatib, Lina., Matar, Dina. *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 2014, p. 5.

10. Alshaer, Atef., Khatib, Lina., Matar, Dina. *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication*,

11. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2014, p. 5.

12. Ramazani, Rouhollah. 'Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle East Journal* 34, 1980 p. 184.

13. Open Letter Section 20, in Alagha, Hizbullah's Documents, p. 50.

14. Maasri, Zeina. *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2009, Figure 3.28.

15. Shaery-Eisenlohr, Roschanack. *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 43-4. A typical stereotype of Shi'ites among non-Shi'ites was their animalistic sexual desires.

16. It was not until 1990 in the Taif Agreement that the National Charter was altered to give Shi'ites more power.

17. Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 1st ed, New York; London: Norton, 2006, p. 139.

18. Landau, Jacob M. *Pan-Islam: History and Poli-*

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tics, London: Routledge, 2016, p. 213.

19. Kramer, 'Redeeming Jerusalem', p. 125.

20. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London; New York: Verso, 2006, p. 6-7.

21. Though being followers of the same religion encourages certain cultural similarities.

22. Algar, Hamid. Trans., Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981, p. 48.

23. Saade, Bashir. *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance: Writing the Lebanese Nation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 112.

24. Al-Ahd, 12 July 1985, p. 2, in *Ibid*, p. 112.

25. 'Nasrallah's full speech: Soleimani's assassination will put an end to US presence in the Middle East, US troops will go home in coffins', [<https://resistancenews.org>, accessed 13 January 2020].

26. *Ibid*; BBC News, 'Hezbollah deputy leader Naim Qassem Interview', [[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), accessed 13 January 2020].

*Luke Wilkinson*



## Potential Challenges and Outcomes of Brexit: Relations Between the UK, the GCC and Iran

By Diana Galeeva

### ‘Global Britain’

Following a general election, the British Parliament ratified the proposed withdrawal agreement, and the United Kingdom (UK) left the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2020. This article acknowledges that Britain’s international standing will certainly be damaged immediately post-Brexit, but intends to offer some potentially positive outcomes in the long-term. If we accept the future of Britain’s policies under the idea of a ‘Global Britain’, which the UK’s policy-makers and state stakeholders expect post-Brexit UK to be based on, then advocates of the idea of ‘Global Britain’ suggest that Global Britain is about linking with ‘old friends and new allies’[1], in order to find ‘a new place for itself in the world’[2] outside of the EU. This view is supported with the argument that Britain’s international standing has never been dependent on EU membership. Britain’s policies have been based on three main bridges through its relationships with the US, the EU, and the rest of the world[3].

The idea of Global Britain has received criticism at home and abroad. For example, Parliament’s Foreign

Affairs Committee stated that ‘Global Britain’ is at risk of being simply a ‘slogan’ devoid of ‘substance’[4]. A UN report also states that ‘there is still no clarity on what Global Britain might mean, even from a UK perspective’[5]. Considering the scepticism of the idea of Global Britain, it seems it is important to acknowledge that, along with the Brexit process, the future perspectives of Britain foreign policies under a Global Britain agenda are also in progress and it might take time to identifying clear strategies for cooperation. At the same time, along with the challenges, the idea of Global Britain also provides a number of opportunities for the UK to develop relations with the rest of the world, specifically with states in the Middle East. For this reason, I hope to consider the future of Britain’s policies under the idea of Global Britain. Specifically, possible challenges and opportunities in relations between the UK, the GCC and Iran will be in focus.

### Post-Brexit UK – EU Relations

The first question, or challenge, for a post-Brexit UK is connected to its future cooperation with EU member states. Given that Britain might lose institutional links with the EU post-Brexit, the question arises of how Britain can build, or renew, links to key partners in Europe such as France and Germany in the next 20-30 years. Addressing these, one might expect Britain to engage with so-called ‘informal groupings of countries’[6]. Despite expectations during the acceptance of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, that establishment of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and security Policy, together with the European External Action Service (EEAS)[7], might assist further coherence in EU foreign policy. In reality, the EU shifts from a single community of practice[8] to ad hoc groupings, which are smaller, informal groupings, known as ‘the like-minded’. These ad hoc groupings are examples of ‘soft alliance’ with no formal contract, no decision-making procedure, and no enforcing mechanisms. However, they work through mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, coordination and knowledge exchange. Despite their informality in the EU, their importance has grown, and these states and their collaborations have been involved in the so-called Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)[9]. Additionally, an informal grouping of countries also can appear between EU member states and other countries to tackle specific

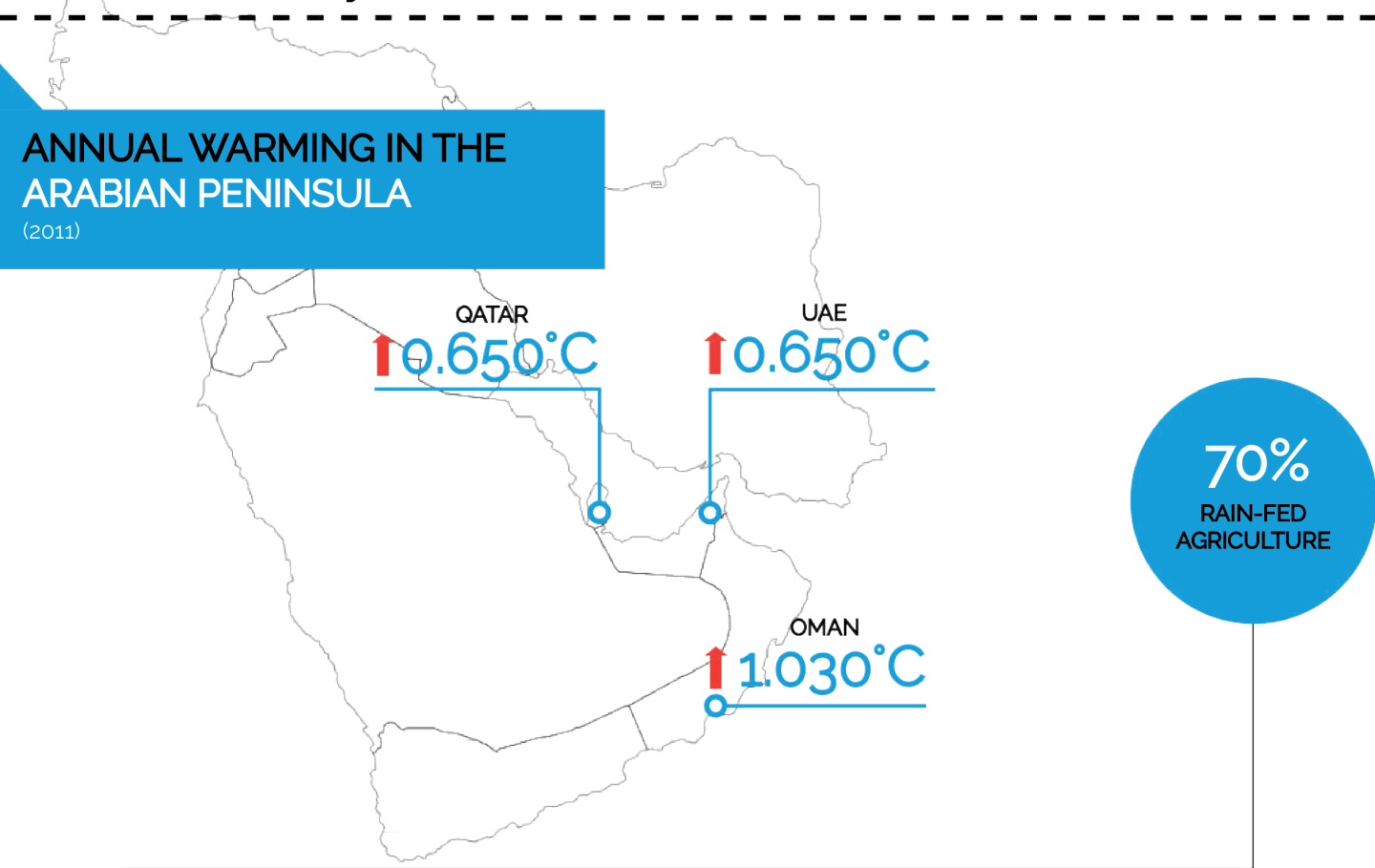


subjects. Countries might be united within an informal grouping, however these ‘partners’ might not have deep and close diplomatic relations with each other.[10] An example of such informal grouping is the E3+3, where Russia and China partnered with the United States and European nations (France, the UK, Germany), while the UN led the negotiations.[11]

Using this as a model for such cooperation, Britain might choose to deal with climate change issues in the Middle East, especially in the Arab region. The region is characterised by a fragile desert environment,[12] which is among the most vulnerable to potential climate change. The Gulf states face a number of climate change challenges, such as desertification, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and sea level growth.[13] The recent trends on climate change in the region are alarming: the annual warming is increasing in the Arabian Peninsula, such as between 1980-2008, in Oman up to 1.03oC, up to 0.81oC in the UAE, and up to 0.65oC in Qatar.[14]

Importantly, the economy of GCC states, as rentier states[15], mainly relies on oil export revenues. As such, the GCC states are highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.[16] Thus economic diversification strategies form one of the recommendations for the GCC states’ climate change mitigation. As Britain’s security is dependent upon Gulf security[17], Britain can also become active in developing such informal groups with other European states, especially its key partners France and Germany. These groupings can collaborate with the GCC states to deal with this challenge. Opportunities for closer involvement in the GCC diversification strategies as the part of the climate change initiatives might occur for ‘soft’ alliances between the UK and other European states. In other words, post-Brexit Britain may leave the EU, but not Europe. Therefore, post-Brexit Britain still might develop European foreign policies based on informal groupings.

## Visual Data by MENAF



**SOURCES:**

The World Bank, <https://www.data.worldbank.org>  
Journal of Geophysical Research, <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/21562202>

Figure 3 Hizbullah, Poster, 1992, Maasri, 'The Aesthetics of Belonging', p. 172, CREDIT: Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum ©

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## Post-Brexit UK – US Relations

While a part of the European Union, Britain was a bridge between the EU and the US. Post-Brexit Britain expects to be closer to its traditional ally - Washington. While it is uncertain what this partnership might look like, among expectations are a possibility of the US-UK trade and investment collaboration.[18] With regard to the Middle East, especially towards the Gulf, it seems the US and the UK are already developing 'special' relationships. The UK even became involved in the Crisis in 2019, which started with the US withdrawal from the Iran's nuclear deal, which led to tensions between the US and Iran. This has continued with Trump administration-imposed sanctions to undermine the Iranian economy, while Tehran has taken a variety of steps to scale back commitments given in the 2015.[19] When the US accused Iran of detaining the crew of one of two oil tankers attacked in the Gulf of Oman in June 2019,[20] and US also blamed Iran for drone strikes on Saudi oil facilities in September 2019[21], both accusations were, notably, also supported by the UK government.[22] The UK has been involved even further, following US officials policy of 'maximum pressure' on Iran.[23] An Iranian oil tanker was captured by the UK's Royal Marines in the Strait of Gibraltar under the claims that it was shipping oil to Syria in violation of European Union sanctions in August 2019. In response, a UK-flagged oil tanker was held by Iran in September 2019.[24] Moreover, on 3 January 2020, the commander of the Quds force of the Revolutionary Guards Corps Qassem Suleimani was killed by a US air strike in Iraq.[25] The foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, stated that the UK was 'on the same page' as the US in regard to assassination of the Iranian general Qassem Suleimani in January 2020.[26]

On the one hand, such a 'special' partnership with Washington suggests that the post-Brexit UK will have a close partnership with a global power. Even despite speculations that the US-UK alliance will be under challenge over if there is a change of leadership in the US in the next elections, the historical relations and that the UK, while being in the EU, served a bridge between the US and Europe, indicates that relations will still be close in the future. At the same time, it provides challenges; due to this 'special' partnership, the UK expects to always play a role in tensions or conflicts with US opponents in the

region, especially Iran. In other words, the challenge of post-Brexit Britain is that it will adapt its policies mainly in order to follow Washington's objectives in the region.

## Post-Brexit UK and the rest of the World

This might suggest even closer relations with its historical traditional allies – the GCC states. As the third part of the Global Britain strategy, such as a post-Brexit Britain deal with the rest of the world, the UK might further develop relations with the Gulf states. The first possibility is that the UK will conclude a free trade deal with the GCC states.[27] The working group was already established in December 2016, based on the Singapore-GCC trade deal as an example of such a future pattern. Though it 'made good progress',[28] the talks were paused due to the Gulf Crisis of 2017. Predictions of a fall in the value of the British pound, can be another possibility for closer cooperation. It will provide the GCC dollar-pegged investors to purchase commercial properties to take advantage from a 'Brexit discount'.[29] Moreover, the GCC diversification programmes provide opportunities for further cooperation for the post-Brexit UK, such as Saudi Vision 2030. As part of the realisation of Saudi Vision 2030, contracts for partnership in several fields have already been concluded. These include Standard Chartered being granted a banking license in Saudi Arabia and Alderley winning a \$10 million Saudi Aramco contract for the in-Kingdom design and manufacture of modular skids.[30]

Challenges remain though, such as rising political opposition to the sale of UK armed equipment to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen. For example, in June 2019, the UK Court of Appeals ruled that these specific arms sales are unlawful because there is 'clear risk' as these weapons can be in 'serious violation of international humanitarian law'.[31] Additionally, with the rise of other powers, especially from Asia, and uncertainty of the British place on the global map, there are challenges for a post-Brexit UK to keep these close relations with the GCC states. As part of the diversification the GCC relations with the rest of the world based on interests, David Wearing also clarifies that because China is set to become the largest gas and oil importer by 2020, and India the second-largest by 2035, there may be a general recalibration away from Europe, towards states

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where there is a greater and growing energy demand.[32]

[1] “The government’s negotiating objectives for exiting the EU: PM speech”, Gov.UK, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>

[2] Josh May, “David David’s speech to Conservative conference”, PoliticsHome, October 2, 2016, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/news/79518/read-full-david-davis-speech-conservative>

[3] RUSI, “The UK in the Middle East: Strategy in a Changing Region”, July 2, 2019, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/news/79518/read-full-david-davis-speech-conservative>

[4] House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Global Britain, “Sixth Report of Session 2017-19”, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cm-faff/780/780.pdf>

[5] Jess Gifkins, Samuel Jarvis and Jason Ralph, “Global Britain in the United Nations”, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.una.org.uk/-/file/13085/download?token=cl0pgYF->

[6] RUSI, “The UK in the Middle East: Strategy in a Changing Region”.

[7] Official EU Website, “About the European External Action Service (EEAS), March 2, 2016, accessed November 24, 2019, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82/about-european-external-action-service-eeas\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82/about-european-external-action-service-eeas_en)

[8] Federica Bicchì, “The EU as a community of practice: foreign policy communications in the COREU network”, 21 November 2011, *Journal of European Public Policy* 18, no. 8, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13501763.2011.615200?journalCod>

e=rjpp20

[9] Federica Bicchì and Lisbeth Aggestam, “How informal groupings of like-minded states are coming to dominate EU foreign policy governance”, August 7, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurompblog/2019/08/07/how-informal-groupings-of-like-minded-states-are-coming-to-dominate-eu-foreign-policy-governance/>

[10] RUSI, “The UK in the Middle East: Strategy in a Changing Region”.

[11] Joshua Keating, “You say P5+1, I say E3+3”, September 20, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/30/you-say-p51-i-say-e33/>

[12] Mostafa K., Tolba and Najib W., Saab, “Arab Environment: Impact of Climate Change on Arab Countries” Report of the Arab Forum for Environment and Development, 2009, [http://www.drought-management.info/literature/AFED\\_climate\\_change\\_arab\\_countries\\_2009.pdf](http://www.drought-management.info/literature/AFED_climate_change_arab_countries_2009.pdf)

[13] Tariq Al-Olaimy, “Climate Change Impacts in GCC.” *EcoMENA Echoing Sustainability in MENA*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.ecomena.org/climate-change-gcc/>

[14] Said AlSarmi and Richard Washington, “Recent Observed Climate Change over the Arabian Peninsula”, *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* 116, D11 (2011)

[15] A rentier state is a state in which a large proportion of income is generated from rents (specifically from oil and gas revenues) or externally-derived, unproductively-earned payments.

[16] Aisha Al-Sarihi, “Prospects for climate change integration into the GCC economic diversification strategies”, LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/86873/1/Al-Sarihi\\_Prospects%20for%20climate%20change\\_2018.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/86873/1/Al-Sarihi_Prospects%20for%20climate%20change_2018.pdf)

[17] Ibid.

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[20] Patrick Wintour, “UK joins USS in accusing Iran of tanker attacks as crew held,” 14 January 2019, <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Us+accused+Iran+to+attcak+tankers&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

[21] “Saudi oil attacks: US blames Iran for drone strikes on two sites”, BBC News, accessed 15 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-49705197>

[22] “Johnson blames Iran for Saudi Arabia oil attacks”, BBC News, accessed 23 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49792997>

[23] Borzou Daragahi, “British ship seized by Iran free to leave, official says”, 23 September 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/british-ship-iran-seized-us-tanker-latest-a9116561.html>

[24] Ibid.

[25] “Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike”, BBC News, accessed 3 January, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50979463>

[26] “Boris Johnson: Qassem Suleimani was threat to all our interests”, The Guardian, accessed 5 January, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020-jan/05/boris-johnson-qassem-suleimani-was-threat-to-all-our-interests-lament-death>

[27] Noor Naji and Damien McElroy, “Post-Brexit talks between UK-GCC to resume ‘soon’, says minister”, accessed 16 May 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/post-brexit-trade-talks-between-uk-gcc-to-resume-soon-says-minister-1.731161>

[28] Ibid.

[29] Patrick Gearon, “GCC opportunities in a

post-Brexit Britain”, 21 September, 2016, <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/514576/GCC-opportunities-in-a-post-Brexit-Britain>

[30] “UK companies to benefit from UK-Saudi trade”, Gov.UK, accessed 5 January, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-companies-to-benefit-from-uk-saudi-trade>

[31] “UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia unlawful, court rules,” BBC News, accessed 20 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48704596>

[32] Burhan Wazir, “How the Gulf’s petrodollars lubricate the British economy.” September 12, 2018, <https://www.newstatesman.com/AngloArabia-Why-Gulf-Wealth-Matters-Briatin-David-Wearing>

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## The Capital-Racial Complex and Lebanon's October Uprising

By Ali Kassem

Lebanon is a multiparty confessional republic on the shores of the Mediterranean which “never existed before in history. It is a product of the Franco-British colonial partition of the Middle East” (Traboulsi 2007: 75). Invented and expanded in pursuit of an independence from the rest of the Levant, with a special relationship to France as the beacon of its civilising mission to the ‘backward Arab world’, Lebanon was set up in the Levant under Christian Maronite domination and came to include over 17 religious sects in the first part of the twentieth century (Salibi 1989, Hakim 2013). With a history far too complex to be engaged here, the country has been through multiple civil wars to survive through a delicate power balance between its three main religious constituencies (Christian Maronites, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims) as it navigates multiple lines of global division. Under a weak state with a project of westernisation and neo-liberalism, it is certainly not a homogenous place but is rather a space where multiple (religious) groups (co)-exist in parallel, each with distinct founding myths and imagined horizons.

The Levantine land, whose population is around four

million citizens, is host to over one million Syrians, over half a million Palestinians and large numbers of Iraqi, Bangladeshi, and African and Asian migrants. These various groups, which have made it into the country for reasons as varied as armed conflict and economic migration over the past decades, find themselves systematically subject to racism, xenophobia, exploitation, abuse, marginalization, and exclusion across the small country. Eventually, with entangling reasons structured by the nation’s very invention under French colonialism and ongoing imperialism, being a refugee or a migrant from the Global South in Lebanon is a massively dehumanizing experience.

In this respect, research has documented and conceptualised the lived experience of Syrians in Lebanon, for example, as one of a serious “plight” as they are systematically “subject to exploitation and abuse” across social spheres (Saab 2014:94; Usta et al. 2019; Karis and Aranki 2014), one long predating the Syrian war (Chalcraft 2009; Thorleifsson 2016). Increasingly sedimented as Lebanon’s internal ‘others’, being Syrian has in this sense been transformed into a “stigma” as Syrians try to “change their accent or other characteristics in order not to be specially indexed or subjected to violence” (Thorleifsson 2016: 1079). With this, the Lebanese state has recently taken legal measures to ban Syrians from working in all but a few of the “lowest” occupations at the same time that it has forced them to pay unbearable fees for the simplest of paperwork (Harb et al. 2019). In a similar vein, Palestinians have been argued to be living at the intersection of multiple subjugating wounds as they have been cloistered in refugee camps where a state of exception rules (Hanafi and Long 2010; Hanafi 2008). In this respect, despite their protracted dwelling in the country, they are excluded from any and all forms of organisation, of media presence and expression, as well as of public visibility. Other groups, such as Iraqis and Sri Lankans, find themselves in similar positions (Moukarbel 2007; Trad and Frangieh 2007). Throughout, from common “jokes” to common “wisdom”, a social structure of racist exclusion appears to hold firm with the support of a structurally racist order.

In parallel to this racist order, the past years have seen Lebanon’s economic situation systematically

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deteriorating under the watchful eyes of global neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. From its currency devaluing to inflation, unemployment and public debt (currently the third highest in the world), this economic collapse is the product of entwining international, regional and internal factors. In this experience, refugees have been scapegoated and anti-refugee discourses and measures have increasingly blamed Syrians and Palestinians, in particular, for being an economic burden that has brought the country's resources, infrastructure and economy to its knees.

Indeed, in shifting the blame away from neo-liberal policies and the corruption of the oligarchic elite, Lebanon's political leaders have advanced a 'Lebanese first' agenda mobilising various media channels and public discourses subjugating refugees as they claim to push for the average citizen's economic betterment. Key in this has been right-wing political parties, organisations and figures, such as the country's interior minister and head of the Free Patriotic Movement Gebran Bassil who has explicitly positioned himself as a racist nationalist advocating for municipalities to prohibit Syrians from entering their jurisdiction and legally barring businesses from hiring refugees, for example. Yet, despite the mass spread of the refugee scapegoat and the ensuing exclusions, Lebanon's economic situation has systematically deteriorated as the entire nation has increasingly felt the burden of economic collapse.

### **The October Emergence**

On October 17, 2019, an unexpected wave of mass demonstrations was triggered by a Lebanese Internal Ministry decision imposing a tax on WhatsApp calls to generate revenues for an increasingly impotent state. Given mass socio-economic grievances, these demonstrations quickly turned into a cross-sectarian leaderless revolution protesting and seeking the overturning of the Lebanese socio-economic order.

With this mobilisation, chants of "Refugees are welcome here!" have casually echoed in the streets of Beirut. These have been, in turn, accompanied by previously unheard-of refugee participation alongside Lebanese citizens in protests, ensuing celebrations of this participation, and acts of collective solidarity. In parallel, demonstrations and marches by various migrant groups have received media attention while

being supported by Lebanese citizens. Throughout, there is an emerging mass insistence on refusing the xenophobic order enforced by the ruling elite, voiced through modes as varied as slogans, graffiti, and marches, producing one of the Lebanese October Uprising's most distinguishing and unexpected feats: an explicit discourse of inclusion, anti-racism and anti-xenophobia in Lebanon.

This emergence is particularly relevant for two main reasons. The first is that much racism against refugees builds on a potent narrative of refugee culpability for the country's economic ailments, particularly in attacking Syrian refugees who have entered Lebanon since 2011. As the protest was itself a result of a deteriorating economy, one might expect this racism's perpetuation, yet that did not happen. The second reason is that the protests were invigorated by a rare manifestation of what might be termed a collective national 'Lebanese identity' beyond sectarian and political divides. With the often-unavoidable entwinement of nationalism and racism, one would also expect a racist unfolding. There wasn't one.

Complex and multifaceted, this unfolding offers insights into anti-racist social movements that may be of use within and beyond the small Levantine land. For this reason, the following paragraphs will attempt to identify some key influences of this emergence in pushing for a anti-racist research agenda.

In identifying the structuring of this anti-racist ethos, one can begin by centring the development of a powerful mass consciousness with a clear identification of the enemy: the country's oligarchic ruling elite. With this identification, a clear centre of power was recognised: neo-liberal capitalism and its agents. Accordingly, the emerging movement explicitly and systematically directed itself against this socio-economic order. While the factors leading to the emergence of this consciousness are complex, it is not difficult to suggest that they have been largely driven by this elite's systematic and successive economic and political failures in close cooperation with global neoliberal institutions. From the failure of successive international aid conferences held over the past decades in bringing relief to the disillusionment with Lebanon's post-war reconstruction project expected to 'trickle down' to Lebanon's middle and lower classes. In this respect, the average Lebanese seems to have increasingly come to recognise the complici-



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ty of a corrupt elite with global capitalism.

The country's governing class' flagrantly provocative actions against various sections of Lebanon's dwellers and its exclusive, identitarian, and class distance from the mass population can be advanced as complementing variables. Accordingly, the movement's deep sense and need to distance itself from the ruling elite, and the ruling's elite's overtly racist agenda, seem to have intersected to espouse an anti-racist position. Bassil, for example, was a key target of the protests, with multiple dedicated chants emerging to reject his person and his politics. These, as is common knowledge in the country, included an anti-refugee politics. In this sense, as the movement worked to negate, to define itself as essentially an antithesis, an anti-xenophobia sentiment was strongly embraced. With the lack of a clear leadership, this quickly spread as the movement came to be defined as the old political model's antithesis: its neo-liberal failure and its racist scapegoating were merged for the masses.

In building towards this, the work of a large number of academics and intellectuals who have participated in and pioneered the protest movement with information sessions, teach-outs and various critical conversations were key. Indeed, the presence of 'public intellectuals' from the movement's earliest days can be said to be crucial in pushing for an inclusive and critical conversation setting the leaderless agenda's ethos. With this, the presence, involvement and support of educational institutions in the mass mobilisation, from schools to universities, also sedimented the movement's engagement with knowledge and criticality.

In line with this, the strong presence of students and youths – for whom the baggage of Lebanon's civil war and the entangled anti-Palestinian and anti-Syrian hostility is not as present – at the forefront of the demonstrations proved vital. Coupled with the academic and intellectual presence, an emerging consciousness seems to have developed among protestors where the capitalist ruling elite and its corruption were increasingly recognized as the complete culprit as the refugee scapegoat gradually collapsed.

In parallel, and as the economic condition of the Lebanese population continues to deteriorate, empa-

thy with the lived experience of refugees and migrants also seems to have developed, especially among the middle classes who now find themselves faced with burdens that (relatively) parallel those of non-citizen fellows. From the increase in the cost of basic services to the inability to provide health and education, many Lebanese citizens have begun to find themselves sharing a subjugation with migrants and refugees as the two groups emerged as similarly disadvantaged allies with shared interests. Hence, chants declaring that fighting against the corrupt system was all Lebanese resident's rights, not that of legal citizens only, echoed in the marches and protests.

Eventually, through the intersection of multiple variables, the Lebanese October uprising seems to have managed a feat the majority of other social movements evolving out of modernity's crisis over the past years have possibly failed to do: it has set itself an anti-racist agenda as it sought to combat neo-liberal capitalism. To realise the value of this, one can look at the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US and the gilets jaunes (yellow vests movement) in France, for example. Both movements can be said to have sought a class struggle for their respective populations identifying the culprit as capital, and only capital, rather than modernity's racialised capital. In this respect, they have failed to deliver, especially (but not only) for their communities', and the world's, racialised. By defining itself as a complete negation, the Lebanese leaderless movement did not fall into this fallacy as the protestors pursued a dismantlement of the racial-capital complex.

Despite the bleakness of Lebanon's current reality, the development of an anti-racist ethos in the Lebanon October Uprising offers plenty in the pursuit of anti-racist politics within the country but also across geographies and stands as a key feat of a popular will to combat for justice. Consequently, in the case of the US and the UK today, for example, much stands to be learnt given the significant similarities between the two situations: from the neo-liberal oligarchic ruling order and the right-wing political elite to expanding inequalities and unabated social hierarchies and racisms. In a time of rising right-wing nationalism, a rise which many white elements of the left appear incapable of adequately resisting, this is particularly relevant and research into this emer-

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gence, and the lessons to be learnt from it, are evidenced as particularly important.

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## The debacle of State Mosque Competition in the Middle East and North Africa

By Muhammed Madandola

Last year, an appalling headline read, “the biggest Mosque in Africa is now in Algeria, not Morocco”.<sup>[1]</sup> This was a notice of a broken record; a new landmark created by a ‘narcissist’. This news was about the admiration of the Djamaa el Djazaïr as the new biggest mosque in Africa, and most importantly, the tallest minaret in the world. In other words, a celebration that the Great Hassan II mosque in Casablanca has been ‘dethroned’ as the mightiest in Africa. It was confounding to contemplate that someone will surpass the record for the ‘vanity’ minaret of 200 metres after all the debauchery of squandered funds. Likewise, it was quandary to fathom that this new mosque was constructed purposely to outshine other mosques. Moreover, could this have been a ‘pious project’ that dissipated €1.2 billion<sup>[2]</sup> of public funds in Algeria when the citizens are suffering from basic amenities? The fuzzy logic to allocate considerable resources for a structure that is only utilized for Jum’ah prayer needs scrutiny. The mosque does not require a built structure in the first place. Regardless of the importance of a Mosque in a community, no liturgical provision warrants any structure because the whole earth has been made a place of prayer. Some of the archetypal

examples of the Prophet’s mosque in Medina utilized ‘crude’ bricks. During the period of the Rashidun Caliphs, later evolutions had a trench to outline the boundary of the mosque in Kufa (637-638 A.D).<sup>[3]</sup> Comparing this with our contemporary practices, mosques now function as a tool for the ultimate expression of power and wealth in the region.

### The Contagious Mosque Ambition

The ambition for State mosque is a pervasive leitmotif in the Middle East and North Africa. A major criterion for such endowment is a mesmerising structure that has superfluous decorations that are unprecedented in the community.<sup>[4]</sup> Currently, the relations between the Islamic countries has yielded a grand mosque as the symbol of their wealth in direct competition with their fellow neighbours. However, it would be unfair to ascribe this act of mosque propaganda as a phenomenon that started in the last decade. Several grand mosques were constructed throughout the apogee of Islamic culture. Even after centuries of construction, the glory of the Great Mosque of Damascus, Ibn Tulun and several other Ottoman mosques shine for all to see. However, the modern definition of ambitious state mosques coincides with the discovery of oil in the 1970s. The surge in the financial prowess in the region came with the concomitant ostentatious desires and global aspirations. Countries like Kuwait and Jordan created new mosque rhetoric to match their thriving environment. Without the context of need and functional integration, some of the symbolic element like the minarets and domes became a key part of mosques around the Gulf states.<sup>[5]</sup> The euphoria of independence from colonialism created an architectural ideology that is entangled with the concept of national identity and authenticity.<sup>[6]</sup>

Placing the occurrences in its right chronology will have the State mosque competition in Baghdad as the exacerbated ideology that divulges the propaganda in 1982. An international competition to create an outstanding edifice was organized for reputable architects. Seven prominent architects like Venturi, Bofill, Makiya, Badran, and Takeyama made the final proposals. Nonetheless, more than twenty architects were invited to partake in the competition. Each proposal from the architects has the ingenious definition of grandeur never seen before. While the project



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remained unbuilt, similar design competition became the popular trend as Muslim societies followed suit. Each successive State mosque construction evokes an obsession entwined with the ambition for the bigger and taller mosque in the region.

Hassan II mosque falls in the right place as a model of manufacturing consent to gain influence among the local community. This mosque evokes the essence of an audacious aspiration around a period marked with social unrest and financial hardship. The construction of the mosque started in 1986 to curb public disgruntle about the ruler. Perhaps, the renewed Islamic symbolism in countries like Iran reinforced the need to gratify the masses emotional attachment to religion. Hassan II embarked on the construction of 52 mosques[7] between 1981 and 1992 to change the foci of their national Departments of Public Works into religious missions in order to exempt themselves from political accountability, cover-up mismanagement of Public finances.[8]

Admittedly, the Hassan II mosque achieves the intent of the king as the “eighth wonder of the world”. [9] It is important to note that the desire for Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque was initiated by the visit of the ruler to Casablanca in 1989.[10] Part of the key aspect of creating a monument is an isolated location where the magnificence of the mosque can be seen from a long distance. Some of the popular locations in areas like Turkey was the Hilltop or elevated ground where the adjoining structures cannot obstruct a view of the mosque. Hassan II mosque exudes the duality of view from both land and sea with the coastline location of the mosque. This became a design inclination in mosques like Djamaa el Djazair (c.2019) and Sheikh Zayed in Abu Dhabi (c.2007). With closer proximity to the sea coast, contemporary mosques diverge from the inland location in ancient Muslim society. Certainly, such trends adversely affect the use of the mosque because of the distance of travel to such location from the hub of the city.

At the same time, the cynosure mosques became gradually aggrandized in height with each successive construction. This leitmotif connotes that all the design architects carried out a detailed study of existing mosques as a means to create something grander. Perhaps this is linked with the superiority complex of the patrons and design architects. In the North African context, the Hassan II mosque has a

prayer hall with 65 metres roofline while the Mosque of Algiers has a dome 70 metres high from the plain level. Even with the modern-day redundancy, the competition extends to the minarets with the former having 200 metres, while the later outshines it with a loftier 265 metres height. In the Middle East, the Grand Mosque of Kuwait (c.1986) is one of the most subtle with a dome and minaret of 43 and 74 metres height. Rising to a height of 50 and 95 metres respectively, the Sultan Qaboos mosque in Oman exceed the precedents in comparison with the dome and principal minaret. Being the most iconic, the Sheikh Zayed mosque crowns the glory with a central dome of 85m and four courtyard minarets, each exceeding 110 metres in height.

Decorative elements also fostered competition among the nations in the Middle East and North Africa. The interior hall of the Hassan II mosque has fifty-four Murano glass chandeliers to add glamour to the ambient decoration. Although this is sophisticated, it cannot be compared with the fascination of the subsequent mosques. At the time of its construction in 2001, Sultan Qaboos mosque has the largest chandelier made of Swarovski crystals and 24 karat gold. It has a mammoth length of 14.5 metres and was 8 metres in width. Interestingly, this record was broken by the Sheikh Zayed mosque with a similar piece of luxurious art that sparkle like diamonds. As insignificant as it is, a larger length of 15 metres and 10 metres wide was commissioned.[11] Moreover, it was the most expensive and cost more than US\$ 8 million.[12] Going with the norms, the Djamee el Djazair imbibed a 400,000-crystal chandelier in the prayer hall. Similar milieu occurred with the floor carpet of the two Grand mosques in the Gulf States. The Omani mosque had the largest handmade carpet which covers the entire prayer sanctuary of 4263 sqm. The new carpet produced by the same company for Sheikh Zayed mosque has a larger size and cost more than US\$ 8.5 million.[13]

In general, these mosques have the similitude in being national tourist attractions that are open to non-Muslim visitors. Their splendid architecture ranks high among the mosques in the world. Concomitantly, the construction of the Hassan II mosque has had recurrent repercussions on the animals and plants, whose ecosystem were destroyed on the coast. The building activities on the shoreline encroached more than 20 hectares of the Atlantic Ocean.[14]

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ty of a corrupt elite with global capitalism.

Similarly, huge resources were expended to achieve such splendour. The Hassan II mosque was funded by public subscription tangled with extortion. Money for the construction came from donations, tax, grants, and loans from western countries during a period when the country ranked high amongst the most indebted in the world.[16] Even though the official records has US\$ 700 million, presumably the cost of construction was up to US\$ 1 billion.[17] Moreover, the structure depleted double of the construction materials and was hypothetically built twice due to its deterioration after just 10 years of occupancy. Again, the restoration work between 2005-2008 cost as high as US\$ 100 million.[18] Presumably, the recent mosques cost more. Irrespective of the €1.2 billion budget for Djamaa el Djazair mosque, it is plausible to suggest the project incurred more cost due to the construction delay of more than three years. The financial stability of Oman and Abu Dhabi place them in a safe zone as a country that could spend more on constructions. Moreover, the finishing works of Sheikh Zayed cost more than \$ 450 million which makes speculation about the probable cost impalpable. It is important to note that this generalization about contemporary State mosque has an exception in the mosque of Imam AbdulWahhab In Qatar. Although its construction in 2011 will suggest a similar trend for the glory of vanity, it reclined from the tandem competition.

This exploration of the debacle of competition in State mosques demonstrates, among other things, that the irrelevant rivalry for taller structures can attest to the non-religious intent of most of the works. The human anthropometry does not warrant structure of such lofty height. Technological advancements have provided a better solution for the call to prayer that renders the minarets useless. No liturgical necessity warrants shimmering chandeliers with the tendency of distracting the worshippers. The large capacity of 20,000 to 120,000 worshippers of the state mosques suggests the need to have a space that provides for the sacred and secular need of the people. Moreover, resources that are meant for the development of the civic infrastructures were utilized for a structure that does not warrant a building in the first place. Indeed, the emergence of the state mosque created the divorce of the massive public works in the region.[19]

Furthermore, the competition for grander State mosques has little or no impact on the propagation of Islam. The influence of mosque tourism and ostentatious decorations has further reignited the 'one thousand and one' imagery of Islam to non-Muslims. Users' perception of the mosques denotes emphasis on the architectural elements and embellishments rather than the spiritual function.[20] Likewise, contagious architectural desire is adversely affecting the cognitive understanding of mosques in the region. If not, there would be less concern about the Vali-e-Asr Mosque in Iran. It was declined by the local community as a mosque because of the dearth of visible dome and minaret.[21] Even when they have values that are core to the principles of Islam, the modest structures has a contradictory image to what they understand about mosques, The state of affairs is exacerbating and can further worsen if not addressed.

[1] Eliason, 'The Biggest Mosque in Africa Is Now in Algeria, Not Morocco'.

[2] France-Presse, 'Algeria Builds Giant Mosque with World's Tallest Minaret'.

[3] Abdelrahman, The Influence of Hadith on the Architecture of Early Congregational Mosques, 251.

[4] Hillenbrand, The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque: A Landmark of Modern Islamic Architecture.

[5] Walsh, The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

[6] Vale, Architecture, Power and National Identity.

[7] Cattedra, 'La Mosquée et La Cité'.

[8] Elleh, Architecture and Power in Africa, 1.

[9] Fathers, 'The Broader Picture'.

[10] Hillenbrand, The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque: A Landmark of Modern Islamic Architecture.

[11] KG, 'World Record 2007 - Faustig'.

[12] Arabian Construction Co, 'Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque'.

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[13] Arabian Construction Co.

[14] Mansoum, ‘La Grande Mosquée Hassan II et l’évolution Du Littoral de Casablanca’.

[15] Omira et al., ‘Tsunami Vulnerability Assessment of Casablanca-Morocco Using Numerical Modelling and GIS Tools’.

[16] World Bank, World Development Report 1992., 258–59.

[17] Khan, ‘Identity, Authenticity and Power. the Mosque of Hassan II’, 8.

[18] Mansoum, ‘La Grande Mosquée Hassan II et l’évolution Du Littoral de Casablanca’.

[19] Serageldin and Steele, Architecture of the Contemporary Mosque, 15.

[20] Huang and Chu, ‘Tourist Experience at Religious Sites’.

[21] Dehghan, ‘A Modern Mosque without Minarets Stirs Controversy in Tehran’.

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## The Islamic State Will Never Be up for Negotiations - or to Any Good

By Tamara Volozhanina

Terrorists are neither easy nor particularly appealing to talk to. Traditionally, states have been unwilling to send their representatives to communicate with terrorist organisations out of fear that the very fact of negotiation with violent anti-government actor, daring to break state monopoly on the use of force, might undermine governmental legitimacy in the eyes of domestic constituencies and the international community of fellow nation-states. Agreeing to terms with a terrorist organization might be seen as a sign of a state's submissiveness; an agreement to not only recognize the validity of terrorists' political endeavours but also to normalize unlawful coercion as a tool of political interaction. However, as political theory can tell us, a decision on whether states should negotiate with terrorists is not a straightforward one: often dependent on the context of the civil conflict and the nature of the terrorist organization that the state is seeking to tame.

In the wake of recent developments in Syria and Iraq and the seeming retreat of the Islamic State from its claimed territory, thousands of mujahidin (guerrilla fighters) are likely to resurface in their communities - a development that potentially creates a window of

opportunity to approach the bleeding enemy with constructive talks. A 90% fall in civilian death toll, that has already ameliorated suffering of affected populations, is not permanent (Lincoln Center 2019). As Al Qaeda and Hezbollah show, Wahhabist salafi jihadism (a militantly extremist version of Sunni fundamentalism preached by ISIS) is a complex and sinister ideology, which can hide through the turmoil and re-emerge again to kill in the name of global jihad. Should the regional governments and international actors seize the moment of strategic weakness, luring and pressuring ISIS into negotiations? A demilitarising agreement today might pre-empt continuous, albeit, low-scale calamities for decades to come. The answer should be no.

Theoretically, negotiating with the terrorists can be seen as a legitimate strategy of conflict resolution. In some cases, the feasibility of such endeavour is a matter of proper interaction design, which takes advantage of face-to-face persuasion, coercive diplomacy (sanctions and ultimatums followed by symbolic concessions) and tough bargaining (making high demands and threatening great costs for non-compliance) while also securing the state a loophole to withdraw, should it feel the urge to do so (Marcus Holmes, 2013). In terms of moral imperatives, even a temporary ceasefire can significantly reduce a civilian death toll: giving terrorists a chance to make their point by shouting at the government's representatives which might prevent them from blowing up buildings (or using crowds as a driving site).

Oftentimes the ideological undercurrent of the violent anti-state actors comes from socio-economic disparities rather than distinct political will (even though the two are much intermingled). According to Willson Center statistics (2019), female suicide terrorism increased by 15% from 2013, with attacks happening primarily in the MENA region. The findings of my research (Volozhanina, 2017) focusing on cross-case analysis of the reasons behind female terrorism revealed that the degree of the women's emancipation largely affects the likelihood of their engagement in violent activities, but also the objectives that they seek to achieve in the process. In the states characterized by multidimensional gender inequality, such as Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, and Palestine, women tend to follow the extremist path due to



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restrained freedoms and opportunities rather than out of ideological devotion: they seek security and social validation, not a global victory of the religious doctrines. By sacrificing their ‘less significant’ lives in the name of male-led societies, women merely reaffirm their subordinate position rather than make their own political statements: as Mia Bloom puts it, “the message female suicide bombers send is that they are more valuable to their societies dead than they ever could have been alive” (2011: 100).

Importantly, what this research demonstrates, is that female terrorism could have been if not eliminated, then significantly curtailed, if the states tried addressing the structural conditions in which this terrorism is rooted: an insight that would have certainly surfaced if negotiations with terrorists from these cultures were to take place. Perhaps even more significantly, both the state and the terrorists usually perceive each other in equally absolutist negative terms. By showing the parties the mutuality of the villainization process, there is a tiny hope that negotiations might encourage both diplomats and terrorists to question the credibility of their binary vision, making the conflict seem less about the good-evil dichotomy and more about both sides having their rights and wrongs.

Yet a very fundamental counterargument is that regardless of their potential utility, all the strategies, modelling the conditions for engaging with the anti-state actors, rest upon the premises that the latter have the a) willingness, b) rationality, and c) representational capacity to engage in the talks. None of the criteria apply to the Islamic State.

First of all, concerning willingness, Wahhabist salafi jihadists, whether former or not, can never agree to interact with the diplomatic representatives of the ‘regimes’ that they consider to be the real-life embodiments of metaphysical evil, because any kind of such interaction can negatively affect their position within the terrorist structure as well as their ideological purity and self-respect. As al-Baghdadi put it, “the war will not be over until the caliphate covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny of jahiliyyah” (qtd. in Dabiq #5 108). Indeed, some of the practices (for want of a better term) in which ISIS is involved, render its followers unlikely to commu-

nicate with the state, even if they would have considered this option otherwise. Coming back to the case study on female terrorism: in general, female jihadists would have probably come to the negotiations table if they were given a chance, but would never engage with the authorities in a particular context of being on a suicide mission - they have already made up their mind, have been drugged into pacification and the lives of their families are probably at stake. It could also be the case that ISIS will never negotiate with the state not only because it sits uncomfortably within its ideological agenda but out of considerations of efficiency: violence yields them greater influence on the state than any kind of peace talks would ever have.

As Robert Pape (2005) famously argues, people resort to terrorism not to compensate for power disparities vis-a-vis the state, but because of “strategic logic” attached to the civilian killings, which generate social outcry - thus, restraining the potential for a full-scale response from the government. Indeed, the Islamic State seems to have mastered the art of spilling innocent blood - a grim achievement - in a variety of creative ways over a wide range of locations. According to CNN, over a period of time from 2014 till 2017 more than 2043 of people in 29 countries were killed and dozens injured as a result of 140 ISIS-organized or -inspired martyrdom operations (Lister et al. 2017). The group also used to leave the details of their brutal vengeance laid bare for the world to tremble (Manne 2016). Such playing on the public hysteria and grief to make regional authorities and international actors in particular watch their steps in fear of provoking another round of fatal violence works especially well in the context of highly accountable democracies, whose coercive capacities are bound by constitutional freedoms and who are, therefore, unable to violently interrogate the population in search of the threat (or just wipe out the suspicious ‘hot spots’ regardless of collateral damage as many authoritarian regimes would have done).

As far as rationality is concerned, it is not always possible to disentangle reasonable claims from unreasonable ones, as Spector (2003) proposes, just because the whole terrorist agenda might be built upon ideological fanaticism; or because bits and pieces of pragmatic demands, identified by the diplomats, cannot be incorporated in the government’s domestic policies if the government is still to

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exist. Indeed, there is no way in which the diplomats can negotiate with someone with the ultimate goal of destroying their state, no matter how rationally comprehensible and down-to-earth the language in which the given goal is being packaged. In other words, the notion of rationality is not universal: unification of all the Muslims within a global khilāfah (caliphate) is a completely rational objective to pursue from the Islamic State's point of view; much less so for the Western and Middle East governments which the group targets.

On a functional level a diplomatic encounter with ISIS' representatives can prove to be a rationality-trust deadlock. The very process of intention reading and diplomatic "brain-to-brain" coupling requires certain mental characteristics such as developed intuition, understanding of psychology, and, most importantly, empathetic bonding; a task that terrorists are often neither able nor willing to undertake. Wahhabist salafi jihadism rests upon dehumanization of its opponents to collectively justify mass killings and to mitigate individual trauma of taking an innocent life. When it comes to waging a holy war, the scale of the task and the nobility of intentions easily outweigh the atrocities which had to be carried out throughout the process: after all, according to Abu Bakr Naji, Al Qaeda's propaganda chief, all the great empires rose from a bloodbath (35). To contextualize, as Graeme Wood finds out with astonishment, ISIS supporters can "mentally shift from contemplating mass death to discussing the virtues of Vietnamese coffee, with apparent delight in each" (Wood 2015).

Finally, even if ISIS was willing to negotiate and voice rational demands that deserve regional governments' consideration, there is no guarantee that the jihadists engaged with the authorities would in truth represent the opinion of the violent group as a whole, if there is any unilateral opinion at all. To avoid the dangers of being proliferated by the state agents or tracked down in case of betrayal, ISIS, learning from Al Qaeda, has increasingly adopted a clandestine system of organizations; operating as a web of autonomous decentralized cells connected by one or two people or even completely isolated from each other. Alternatively, the hierarchy-less, loosely coordinated nature of jihadi groupings can also be coupled with ideological fragmentation with one faction passionately disapproving another faction's

dealings with the authorities. In this case, negotiations with the ISIS' 'actors' can even worsen the situation if the members of the dissenting faction decide to use even more brutal methods of fighting to "make up" for the betrayal of their counterparts, 'corrupted' by the state (for example, the ISIS Takfiri doctrine viewing liberal Muslim 'apostates', the kuffār, as greater enemies of the faith than initially deviant Western crusaders).

To conclude, the Islamic State's brave jihadists are simply the wrong buddies for a political pillow talk - whether one recognizes the legitimacy of their grievances or not. In terms of feasibility, differences in rationality, extremely destructive political objectives, lack of proper hierarchy and the very willingness to establish a communication channel create physical constraints for negotiations to unfold. However, the question of conditional viability is not the only problem here: the principle of 'doing no harm' is the one to keep in mind. In attempt to tailor up conflict-torn societies, states need to think twice whether they want to strike a deal in the first place. There is a risk of successful negotiations resulting in a painful trade-off between immediate cessation of hostilities and resumption of instability in the long run. Questionable in their intentions and reasonability, the terrorists can be appeased and reintegrated for now but what prevents them from taking up arms again whenever they feel being treated unjustly (and having learned that dead bodies force authorities to listen)? As the saying goes, old soldiers never die, they simply fade away. ISIS is not up for negotiations, or to any good. Gambling with citizens' life is a dictatorial luxury, something that democratically elected governments - thankfully - cannot afford.

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## Strategic Relationships of Foreign Involvement in the Middle East

By Dana Bibi

Hypercharged and wreathing, power in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is continuously coiled with concepts of coercion, crisis, and carnage. Discourse in the media and in public diplomacy often echoes the notion of ‘Middle East Exceptionalism’, a simplified dismissal of the perceived failure of MENA states to transition into democracy on their own[1]. This (mostly) Western perspective patronizes in its disregard of the legacy of colonialism and scars of imperialism across the nascent region. Public rhetoric has strategically provided the justification for foreign military involvement to help redress the balance of power and regime changes[2]. It is linked to global debates of power vacuums and proxy wars in an attempt to exert control and dominance[3]. Foreign intervention has become normalized across large swaths of the region, often at the expense of national sovereignty. This can be exemplified by the ongoing tensions - interstate and intrastate - that have swept countries like Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran into economic spirals and civil unrest.

In the region’s simmering war of attrition, there needs to be a strategic re-examination about how foreign intervention can affect the relentless power competition. Soft-power positioning can provide political and economic advantages for a region like MENA where loyalty is dispersed and divided for

political leverage. Moreover, although some MENA states are not fiscally strong enough to contribute meaningful impact with regards to trade activities, there are intrinsic benefits to cultivating political relationships based on reputation. For instance, Japan is very active in exerting influence by enhancing the effectiveness of its soft power assets in the MENA. With the absence of a coercive military force, Japan can leverage perceived political neutrality[4] to protect its economic interests and strengthen its diplomatic relationships with the conflict-impacted countries. Japan is allowed to deploy navy destroyers in strategic positions in the Arabian and Red Seas - independent of the “potential flashpoints”[5] triggered by or targeting the American military’s Operation Sentinel. This is beneficial for Japan, as it can guard its commercial shipments, secure the vital oil tanks, and gather intel away from a potential maritime confrontation between America, Iran, and their respective coalition allies. Other countries who lack the influence and political clout to intervene might find it difficult to replicate this logistical manoeuvre to protect their assets.

Both direct and indirect approaches can achieve this diplomatic persuasion - the key is to help support a favourable environment where the intangible assets of goodwill and trust can flourish. Development aid programs, although problematic, can enable pragmatic change by stipulating mandates that promote a specific agenda, such as increasing women’s empowerment[6]. This might have been a national objective, but arguably the foreign program funding might have pushed its prioritization. To extend the case of Japan, the Japanese government has spent decades investing and infiltrating nation-building processes, including investments in healthcare and hospitals[7]. Aware of the emotive power of economic hope mobilizing its population, Jordan lauds its “solid ties”<sup>10</sup> with Japan and is happy to collaborate in the “political, economic, cultural, security and defence fields”[8]. Even so, benign economic assistance can become coercive with consequences. The Trump administration’s ever constricting budget cuts to the American foreign development programs ultimately created “panic”[9], resentment, and mistrust by August 2019. By November 2019, Jordan committed to considering strategic realignment of its interests with a new ally - Russia[10].



The media highlights the aggressive hard power exerted by foreign and regional powers who have vested economic, ideological, and territorial interests in the MENA. The strategic indirect influence of emerging external powers is not addressed enough. Their activities in the region are overshadowed by sensationalism and media bias of bloodshed and blame. As the hegemonic powers compete to be the dominant regional intermediary of the cacophonous and frustrated MENA, it is easy to forget that foreign intervention can still be unassuming and seductive; strengthening regional ties via a domestic perception of a 'benevolent' presence. The complex reality has a high barrier to entry as a primary strategic partner, but a variety of dynamics could trigger cooperative diplomatic arrangements with countries that have less of a historical track record in the MENA. In the right circumstances, it could ultimately manipulate negotiations to the foreign nation's advantage by exploiting the cracks wrought from other countries' abrasive approach. This type of soft-power foreign intervention is important to take into consideration when deliberating the future of a resource-rich region currently comprising of over 410 million people[11]. There can be ripple effects that influence local politics and impact generations through endless, legitimate, invisible persuasion tactics.

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## The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Humanitarian Emergency or a Development Failure?

By Alexia Faus Onbargi

Head to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website and you will find a distinctive tab dedicated to the 'Syria emergency'. The numbers are staggering: 5.6 million people have been forced to flee Syria since 2011, while an additional 6.6 million have been internally displaced. Now, click on the 'Figures at a Glance' tab and you will see that Syria is the country in the world with the most UNHCR refugees. The scale of the conflict would certainly seem to render an appropriate use of the term 'emergency'. This is often conflated with the word 'crisis', both within the UN and beyond.

Nine years after the war in the country unfolded, are we still right to call the Syrian refugee situation a 'crisis' or a 'humanitarian emergency'? Let's examine some official definitions. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, an emergency is "something dangerous or serious, such as an accident, that happens suddenly or unexpectedly and needs fast action in order to avoid harmful results". A crisis on the other hand, is roughly defined as "a time of great disagreement, confusion, or suffering" and "an extremely difficult or dangerous point in a situation." Based on these definitions – and we can look to other sources that would more or less say the same – we

can agree that the Syrian refugee situation is still a crisis. Calling it a humanitarian emergency is harder to swallow.

The Syrian refugee situation was a humanitarian emergency at first – particularly in the early years when people had to relocate to safer parts of Syria, while neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, started welcoming thousands and then millions of people. Managing sudden displacement certainly required fast action by agencies like the UNHCR. But nine years on – and five years after thousands of people migrated to Europe - we are dealing with a very different set of issues. The living conditions in camps, informal tented settlements (ITSs) and other informal accommodation – including garages and shared apartments in major cities – continues to be extremely poor. Such housing units are often unable to withstand extreme weather shocks like storms and floods. It is difficult to find employment that pays a fair wage, both in the countryside and in the main cities. Discrimination based on nationality and gender is strife. Children are often unable to go to school and complete their education. Many of them are sent to the streets to beg. Child marriage is on the rise, increasing gender-based violence and reducing girls' chances of going to school.

These are developmental failures. We see similar problems in countries where poverty and inequality abound. Yet, here we call them problems of 'underdevelopment', not 'humanitarian emergencies'. These development failures have more to do with host countries' inability – or lack of interest - to integrate their refugee population and provide them with basic goods and services to lead a dignified life until they can return home. However, they are also concerned with international institutions' and donors' responses to these conditions. By treating the problems faced by the Syrian refugee population as a collective 'humanitarian emergency' they are latching onto the immediacy of a crisis waiting to be solved, while missing the wider dynamics that feed and compound long-term development failures with lasting implications. Furthermore, this discourse relieves host states of their responsibilities in development, cooperation and their commitments to international human rights.

Words matter. How we choose to talk about the

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world – and what definitions we employ to describe it – have great implications on how we address the most pressing issues. What do these words imply and what do they conceal? Are they true reflections of what is happening on the ground? The sudden and unexpected components of this crisis have long been assimilated, albeit poorly. It is no longer an ‘emergency’, given the time scale we have been dealing with. The Syrian refugee situation must be described, and therefore treated in a new way. Only when we move away from a ‘humanitarian emergency’ towards a ‘development failure’ discourse can we remove unhelpful narratives that feed the status quo - and strive towards real solutions to a very real set of problems.

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## Refugees After the Syrian Civil War

By Dana Bibi

In the Western world, the term ‘refugee’ has become synonymous with terrorism, extremism and Islamist Fundamentalism. As the conflict in Syria continues to produce more refugees every minute, the future of those displaced is filled with uncertainty. Refugee camps like Za’atari, in Jordan, have been continuously inhabited since 2012; generations of Syrians have lived and died in these camps and an equal number of stateless infants have taken their place.

Children born to Syrian refugees in 2012 will be 8 years old this year, and when they reminisce about their childhood, they would have tales of hardship, poverty and statelessness to tell their own children - that is, if they make it out alive. Their parents’ memories of home will have to suffice them for years to come. Furthermore, the psychological trauma experienced by Syrian children has left permanent scars, and war zones have precedents of post-traumatic stress disorder in order to verify these claims. Isolation, a lack of identity and distress can barely sum up the lives of these children.

Are these refugees, stuck in limbo for eight years, willing to return to Syria after Bashar Al Assad emerges victorious? Where, if they were to return, would they be repatriated? Who will take the onus of rebuilding Syria? What good is victory in a broken nation, amidst an obliterated society and international

scorn? These questions have created an economic vacuum which must be filled with investment, lest the Islamic State gains control on the promises of financial security and discipline. Women have been raped with impunity; men have been radicalized to take on the fight against Westernization; young boys have been trained to fight in the name of jihad; and Syria’s natural and cultural resources have been mindlessly plundered. Palmyra, Aleppo, Idlib are only a few out of all the cities that have been reduced to rubble. This debris has produced refugees; innocent people who have been buried under the rubble and saved by the White Helmets.

Populism in Europe; Donald Trump and Islamophobia in the United States; and economic constraints arising from immigration have been cited countless times as viable reasons for the vilification of Syrian refugees. As spectators of the Syrian conflict, we are equally culpable for this racist onslaught on asylum seekers. The interstice between ‘Old Immigrants’ and ‘New Immigrants’ has widened and there is a general disregard for those who wish to lead better lives in the ‘first world’ and build educated futures for their children. There has been no repatriation framework forthcoming from the UN or the EU, as neither body has reached a consensus on matters regarding immigration and asylum. Syrian refugees must begin to create new lives in tents across Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, rapidly learning necessary skills of survival from Palestinian refugees who have dwelled in camps since 1948.

The future is bleak, one could say, for those who have had to leave their destroyed homes and shrapnel-ridden lives, but Syrian success stories offer hope all the way from Berlin, London and Toronto. Chefs have opened restaurants, doctors who remained in Syria and operated in bunkers have documented lives through movies, journalists continue to report through all the bombings and raids. Hope persists amongst the Syrian community; they still strive for better lives outside of refugee camps. The scars of war will never disappear, and neither will the insecurity that comes with leaving home empty-handed with just the clothes on your back, but lives can be rebuilt, and the Syrian community must persevere in this time of adversity.

Their strength resonates with millions across the



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world. Syrian children will soon be the architects who rebuild Aleppo and their parents will return to the garden they so lovingly planted. Syrians shall, once again, be buried in the graves of their homeland and their past will not haunt generations to come. We, in our capacity, must help Syrians find solace in the justice that still prevails, and Assad must not be their destiny.

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## In Free Fall: The Tale of Omar al-Bashir and the ICC

By Carolina Cwajg

On April 11th, 2019, Sudan was transformed. Crowds cheered at the sight of the deposed leader who ruled with an iron fist for thirty years. Yet a civilian government and democratic elections were still out of reach, despite popular demands. After al-Bashir's overthrow, the ruling transitional military council was unwilling to share power and was later implicated in the massacre of peaceful protesters in Khartoum. However, an unexpected turn occurred when the same military council signed a constitutional declaration agreeing to share power with civilians. The climate shifted significantly. When the newly formed Sovereign Council announced it "would allow those indicted by the ICC to appear before the court", the possibility emerged that al-Bashir would be tried in the Hague. Nonetheless, the Sovereign Council's commitment to international accountability remains ambiguous. As always, the devil is in the detail.

On April 11th, 2019, Sudan was transformed. Crowds cheered at the sight of the deposed leader who ruled with an iron fist for thirty years. Yet a civilian government and democratic elections were still out of reach, despite popular demands. After al-Bashir's overthrow, the ruling transitional military council was unwilling to share power and was later implicated in the massacre of peaceful protesters in Khartoum. However, an unexpected turn occurred when

the same military council signed a constitutional declaration agreeing to share power with civilians. The climate shifted significantly. When the newly formed Sovereign Council announced it "would allow those indicted by the ICC to appear before the court", the possibility emerged that al-Bashir would be tried in the Hague. Nonetheless, the Sovereign Council's commitment to international accountability remains ambiguous. As always, the devil is in the detail.

Economic strength was also key in maintaining social order. al-Bashir lowered prices of basic commodities to appease protesters in periods of heightened dissatisfaction. But these measures were contingent on resource abundance. After the rise of oil prices and oil-rich South Sudan's secession, al-Bashir lost his leverage. As a result of the unchanging economic situation, combined with a mobilization of protesters centred around a message amplified beyond the original complaints about bread prices to demands for the fall of the regime, al-Bashir stood on feeble ground.

Once al-Bashir was convicted on corruption charges, demands for justice grew. Yet these requests sat at odds with the Sovereign Council's military limb. Among them lay General Dagalo, leader of the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group which originated from a regional militia responsible for the Darfur genocide. It is then questionable how such paradoxical leadership could lead Sudan towards accountability. Considering how the former military council, implicated in the June 3rd massacre committed by the Rapid Support Forces, was granted immunity alongside the newly formed government in the Sovereign Council's formation, answering it is a tall order. Despite arguably being a necessary trade-off between divergent aspirations, it marks a recurring theme, where instead of agreeing on the best way forward, policies will be constrained to their lowest common denominators. Its effect: the delivery of partial justice.

At first glance, the announcement was a victory for the ICC. Al-Bashir is the first sitting president indicted by the court, but for almost 10 years he travelled freely since his arrest depended on other states parties' cooperation. Yet the announcement's vagueness is worrying. Whether appearing before the

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court means extradition to the Hague, the establishment of a hybrid court, or an ICC court in Sudan, is uncertain. Besides the concerning lack of precedence that the latter option holds, given the fact that Sudan would be in compliance with the ICC and its principle of Complementarity by prosecuting crimes internally, is concerning. Beyond scepticism of the Sudanese judiciary's capacity to deliver justice, Sudan's 1991 penal system lacks provisions addressing crimes against humanity and genocide, meaning domestic prosecutions cannot fully encapsulate what transpired in Darfur. This recent development raises broader considerations surrounding the court's perceived legitimacy. The fact that state-consent is central to the ICC is its greatest strength and weakness. While it legitimizes the court for not infringing state sovereignty, it also renders obtaining those accused contingent on state's political whims. Behind veiled demands for justice, lies a political weapon enabling rulers to eliminate opposition leaders.

Whatever the conditions, prosecuting al-Bashir would be a win for the ICC. It is part of the court's underlying logic: to ensure that ruthless leaders, high or low-ranking, do not abuse their power to commit grave atrocities. However, once wounds are re-opened by revisiting the past, it is unclear whether this will enable the Sudanese to heal them. Sudan's best chance at an impartial trial is through the ICC. Yet the difficulty of securing a guilty verdict will be amplified by the legal challenge of proving the 'intent to destroy' needed to secure a genocide conviction. Lastly, it is important to stress how the crimes of Darfur are a mere snapshot of a wider picture. Crimes were since committed in Darfur, the Nuba mountains, South Kordofan and Khartoum on June 3rd. Will a conviction for the now woefully incomplete time frame quench the Sudanese's thirst for justice?

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## Climate Change and the Middle East

By Carolina Cwajg

Climate change and the Middle East can seem like two opposing forces, since the Middle East is home to the most influential and powerful petrol companies in the world. Climate change has been a critical issue that scientists have spoken about for decades, but it was only recently that it became a current global issue due to an international uproar within younger generations - due in part to climate activist Greta Thunberg's famous 'Fridays for Future' strikes.

Whether they like it or not, countries from the Middle East will be affected by the rise of temperatures which causes high levels of evaporation, resulting in water scarcity. The symbolic Dead Sea has receded at a swift rate due to the falling water level. Rising sea levels are threatening to flood major maritime cities such as Jebel Ali in the UAE or Alexandria in Egypt. Countries in the Middle East will need to take actions immediately if they want to efficiently reduce the consequences of climate change in their regions. Currently, the loss of biodiversity is causing a downfall in food production; creating a potential food crisis that most countries in the region are not ready to deal with. Studies have concluded that by 2030, climate change will have an impact on the economy of the Middle East, with a loss of 1% of their GDP, equivalent to 6.57 billion dollars. The country which will be affected the most is Oman, which will lose 2.1% of its annual GDP. If these countries do not make a fundamental change to

their approach to climate change, this trend is likely to become a tough reality. However, if efficient measures were to be applied, the impact on GDP may be limited in the next decade. For instance, Yemen, which is currently ranked the 30th most vulnerable country, would be able to gain 1% of its GDP.

The Paris Agreement in 2016 brought together many nations for the first time over a common cause: to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects. They agreed to limit global warming below 2°C above pre-industrial level. It was also a place to talk about the complex relationship between climate change and the governance in the MENA region. Following this Agreement, most Middle East countries signed the treaty, including Egypt, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, State of Palestine and the UAE. They are now officially part of the fight against climate change. The world agreed to maintain global warming at 1.5°C, but carbon emissions are still rising and the GIEC scientists are predicting it will exceed 3°C by 2100. As a result, Saudi Arabia had said that it will try to decentralize its economy and focus on water management. All of that said, practical measures taken by Middle Eastern countries to tackle global warming remain scarce. With the UAE's minimal reduction in carbon emissions and the lack of data provided by Arab countries, it is hard for the international committee to believe that meaningful change is occurring in these regions.

Like most developing countries, the Middle East is seeking for economic prosperity and international exposure. Therefore, it is burying its head in the sand to avoid seeing, and dealing with, the environmental issue. Countries in this region hold around 60% of the world's oil reserves and 30% of gas reserves, making them a hub for international maritime oil and gas trades. This trade contributes to one third of worldwide carbon emissions, making them major actors in climate change. In addition, several Middle Eastern countries are among the world's top carbon emitters per capita. For instance, Qatar's carbon emissions reach fifty tonnes per capita while the United States, which is over 800 times bigger, has a carbon footprint of nineteen tones per capita. With an overall high carbon footprint and a high "human development index", the Arab region is in a situation that will force them to move towards green and



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sustainable solutions in order to maintain their high-quality of living. Scientists and engineers are globally conducting research to find new renewable energies for the Middle East. The Middle East is now being encouraged to follow in the steps of Switzerland. In 2017, a Swiss company became the world's first industry to commercially remove carbon dioxide from the air and transform it into a useful product. If the Middle East did the same, they could stock huge amounts of carbon dioxide in the oil wells created by the petrol industry, while waiting for future engineers to find a way to transform it into a new green energy. If this project was to become a success, the Middle East would become the saviours of the planet.

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### John Simpson: Around the World in Fifty Years

By Alex Manzoor

The name John Simpson is synonymous with the most historic international events and he has been present at numerous events of historical significance: from flying on the same plane as Ayatollah Khomeini as he returned to Iran during the 1979 Revolution, to reporting within Baghdad itself whilst it was being bombarded during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As a long-time foreign correspondent, he has developed a wealth of experience, expertise and contacts across the globe which allow him to keep abreast the latest international stories. As I talked with John Simpson about his journalistic career with the BBC, it became very apparent that his consistency in following the road literally less travelled to find the truth comes from a genuine and insatiable curiosity.

Focusing on the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Simpson argues that the “big shakeup in 2011” has meant that we have “retreated” in many ways due to the “chaos in Libya” and destruction of nations like Syria. Something he found surprising is that he had found people on the ground, throughout the Middle East, who reminisce fondly about “how good the old days were” which is “even true in Iraq where, under Saddam, life could really be quite nasty if you had any feelings of independence or criticism of the government in any way”. Even people who “would have always been critics of Saddam were saying that they ‘missed the old days’”, including “one or two Kurds”. These people did not “wish Saddam back but they wanted a little bit more peace and stability”. The

same was true when it came to ideas about western democracy and “the mistake, that particularly people like me make is to assume that people want to be able to speak openly about politics” and although “some people certainly do, it isn’t widespread” and most people “prefer a peaceful existence to... an expressive one”. While speaking to Simpson, it was clear that his empathy and understanding of the precarious situations of different people around the world informs his analysis and enables him to escape his own frame and communicate the situation facing ordinary people in different circumstances.

However, Simpson’s reliance on international contacts clearly has significant drawbacks. He demonstrated his evident frustration that he “can’t nowadays talk about Iran because the BBC is utterly banned from Iran, I think we have only had three people around to visit just for the night because of the BBC Persian service which is offensive to the government in Iran”. He still has great expertise on Iran even though “his personal knowledge is about ten years out of date” and the only Iranians he communicates with are those in Tehran. He views Iran as “very different from any of the other countries around”. He suggested that this is partly because “you cannot be exposed to the kind of freedom you get on the internet without it affecting you very seriously”. His Iranian contacts, both in their twenties, are good examples of this: thanks to the internet they feel “mentally free” despite the restraints of the government. Access to the internet allows for the kind of intellectual exchange previously impossible in many authoritarian states and raises the interesting question - never definitively answered by the events of the Arab Spring - of the whether this would translate into freedom in real world.

According to Simpson, young people in the Middle East are increasingly abandoning traditional sectarian divides. While in Lebanon, he related, he was “really interested to see how younger people were... putting aside the labels” of Shia and Sunni and instead “simply uniting with the people that think like them and demanding an end to the old system and that is what is happening on a more or less daily basis”. This non-sectarianism is an interesting and novel change in the political framework of the Middle East and the way in which people conceptualise opposition to their governments.

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The fact that many authoritarian leaders are propped up by Russia and China is, in Simpson's view, "a fairly ad hoc thing that comes from two directions". The specific directions he went on to identify are Russian "diplomatic and military output" and "Chinese money". 'Chinese money', Simpson suggested, is particularly prevalent in Africa, where people just "do what China wants" because they "pay off the top levels of government and also pour in money for infrastructure, which do change people's lives for the better". This has been made possible by the United States and Europe withdrawing and purportedly "seeming less interested" in many parts of the world. As to whether this continual Chinese influence in these areas will continue, Simpson is more sceptical. Nonetheless, whether or not China keeps up its influence, it is clear that Western countries will have to contend, at least in the short-term, with Russian and Chinese involvement in the Middle East and Africa.

When it comes to the future of Western action, Simpson was incredibly matter of fact: "I am assuming we are looking at four more years of Donald Trump [which] means another four years of which America is the centre of everything for Americans and the outside world does not get much of a look in". According to Simpson, all of the European states along with the US have either been weakened or not been paying much attention to the outside world which is something that has led to the "quite effective" alliance of Putin and Xi Jinping. He outlined what he perceives as the key advantages the West have, like the "soft power" of the internet which has an effective "counter- attraction to the Chinese and Russian model" of society and governance. His reaction is one of mourning when I mention the BBC as the prime example of this kind of institution, stating "yes, while it lasts". As he went on, it was revealed that he was "rather depressed about this [situation with the BBC]", due in part to the current Conservative government sending signals that they are sceptical about the BBC continuing to function as it currently does. Simpson has publicly defended the BBC and its output against this kind of criticism.

Finally, he responded with an emphatic "oh yes!" to the question of whether the West has become increasingly insular in recent years - going as far as to argue that "everything has changed". Simpson's example of this was the broadening of the idea of the region: he

suggested that when people used to talk about "the Middle East", they meant "Israel and the Palestinians", whereas now they are referring to a much larger geographic area. Meanwhile the situation in the broader Middle East has changed in a way that makes it unique, as it has become increasingly divided between Saudi Arabia, under the influence of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, and the Iranians. What is equally interesting is his assertion that "no Western government seems to have a grip on this". The way in which many are lining up behind Mohammed Bin Salman "despite what he has done" is clearly a development that Simpson sees as significant. This worrying sign is coupled with the fact that there are no more regional actors, since the death of Sultan Qaboos of Oman, who could bring both sides together in negotiations - in the eyes of Simpson, these people "don't exist" at the moment.

Although Simpson has not yet met Mohammed Bin Salman - something which he says he is working on and has "got a bid in" - he has interacted with many of the most influential Middle Eastern leaders who often "start off quite well" and then degenerate into tyrants: "lots and lots of people who thought that they had a messianic role to play in improving the lot of the nation [end up merely] improving their lot and insuring that they can keep control and we have got back to that with different methods". However, he did caution against people too quickly resorting to "wag their finger" at certain leaders, because according to Simpson these leaders are often trying to manage a very "slippery slope".

In his talk, he combined a fairly pessimistic view of the state of international affairs post-2016 with a freewheeling and humorous question and answer session, drawing on stories and information around the world. Throughout the event his passion for being at the heart of the story shone - a fact which made his claim that that he would love to be in Wuhan to report on the coronavirus outbreak all the more believable, if still difficult to fathom.

*Alex Manzoor*



### “A Different Partnership for Cyprus”: In Conversation with Professor Kudret Özersay

By Alex Manzoor

Despite the long-drawn and frustrating process of intercommunal talks, the Cyprus dispute has been frozen since 1974. Effectively divided in two, Greek Cypriots have been living in the south under the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus (ROC) while Turkish Cypriots live in the north under the de facto administration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Serving as TRNC’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Professor Kudret Özersay - who has an academic background in political science and international relations - has been present at the same negotiating table with three TRNC Presidents, four ROC leaders and two United Nations Secretaries-General. Speaking to Professor Özersay at a recent MENAF event, where he shared his incisive opinions on the Cyprus dispute and vision for changing the status quo, what struck me was the very palpable exasperation he felt about the persistent deadlock.

At the start of the year, Professor Özersay announced that he will be running as an independent candidate in TRNC’s upcoming presidential elections. I began the interview by asking him what vision he holds for

TRNC and what changes he is seeking to make. “I’d like to connect my people to the world and our voice to be heard by the international community. For more than 50 years, we’ve been waiting for a comprehensive settlement to be found... but we’ve been unable to achieve it with our counterparts, the Greek Cypriots.” Having spent much of his life working on resolving the dispute, it clearly weighs on his mind.

“My main purpose is to find a mutually acceptable deal between the two sides — not necessarily a federal partnership because we’ve been trying for it for more than 50 years. But even in the absence of an agreement, we should still be able to connect with the international community.”

It is definitely disheartening that the passage of time has failed to assuage the conflicts of interest between TRNC and ROC, for it has overshadowed many aspects of life and development in TRNC. TRNC’s economic growth has been stunted by an international trade embargo placed on it, and Professor Özersay shared that he intends to further boost TRNC’s two main economic sectors of tourism and higher education. “We have a problem because of the absence of direct flights to Northern Cyprus. The flights go to Turkey first, touch down, then [a separate flight is taken to] get to Northern Cyprus.” The added cost and time might dissuade tourism. Interestingly, he pointed out an increasing number of foreign students going to TRNC to study at its universities, “not just Turkey, but from Nigeria, Iran, Pakistan and the West as well.”

As we talked, Professor Özersay reverted to his vision of re-connecting with the international community. “There is potential for Northern Cyprus to establish trade relations with other countries, as we did for twenty years with the [United Kingdom], but unfortunately with the decision of the European Court of Justice, it stopped in 1994.” He then paused and smiled. “With Brexit now, there is the possibility of re-establishing a similar kind of relationship.” The shifting tides of global politics brings new opportunities and Professor Özersay seemed keen to capitalise on them.

However, re-entering the global economy necessarily entails a reconfiguration of TRNC’s close relationship with Turkey, which is arguably one of economic



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and political dependence. As TRNC moves forward with its goal of international recognition, how will this relationship evolve? Professor Özersay agreed that there is dependence, but “it is unfair to accuse Turkish Cypriots for the existing situation. If you are not allowed to have direct trade or travel, the international community is forcing Turkish Cypriots to be more dependent on Turkey.” He maintained that this is not something he desires but reminded that such a situation does not just exist in TNRC. “Look at other independent countries and states in Latin America. Some of them are mainly politically and economically dependent on the United States too.”

Professor Özersay’s discontent with the status quo is apparent. Referring to the lack of international recognition of TRNC and the resulting continuation of UN Peacekeeping forces along the buffer zone in Cyprus, he argued that “it is an unfair situation for us. In every negotiation, the international community accepts the principle that Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots are equal. If we are politically equal, we also deserve the same kind of political status.” In his speech later, he lamented that he has “exhausted everything — technical negotiations, negotiations led by the [United Nations] Secretary-General, direct and indirect [negotiations], mediation, arbitration, high-level meetings, meetings in the buffer zone and joint statements.”

Beneath the layer of resignation lies an undying commitment, and perhaps a renewed optimism as well, in reaching a settlement. Professor Özersay referred multiple times to a “different partnership”. Over the years, he certainly had much time to reflect on the negotiating processes and look for constructive alternatives. “Although it is not recognised, we have two existing states on the island. One way or another, we have to establish a peaceful relationship with each other. There will be a partnership because we are a small island — it can be two states or two administrations, something shaped over time.”

“A gradual approach is better. We can start off on the reality of the existing entities cooperating with each other and try to establish trust between the two and build on that.”

Calling this a “bottom-up” approach, Professor Özersay draws a parallel between this and the European Union, which he pointed out had its origins as a

coal and steel community before increasing the number of competencies in Brussels. “It is a waste of time and energy to try to agree on the ultimate point of the deal from the very beginning. You can start with something and step-by-step, build on it — it may end up a federation, I’m not against that.”

“But it is clear that with today’s circumstances, the main conditions of a federation, which is based on shared prosperity is not present.” Indeed, the development trajectories of both ROC and TRNC have diverged significantly. A key issue is the fact that the ROC is economically stronger than TRNC, enjoying benefits as a member of the European Union. “In conflict resolution, there needs to be a stalemate. The status quo must hurt and disturb all to encourage all to resolve the conflict.” In Professor Özersay’s perspective, the repeated phrase of “bi-communal bi-zonal federation” as the end goal for Cyprus by the international community has become meaningless, because ultimately the ROC is comfortable with the status quo and the “mutual hurt” he suggested as necessary to incite progress is so far non-existent.

Most recently, the ROC has begun exploring offshore hydrocarbon resources, which was met with a fierce backlash from TRNC arguing for the shared right to resources. “Even in the absence of a comprehensive settlement, Greek Cypriots are accepted as a full member of the European Union and the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbon resources is not conditional on a resolution.” The Cyprus dispute is thus, “not as problematic to Greek Cypriots because life goes on.”

*Darren Wong*



### **“Sectarianism and Post-Sectarianism in Theory and Practice” - In Conversation with Professor Bassel F. Salloukh**

**By Joseph Hearn**

Professor Bassel F. Salloukh is a scholar of political science based at the Lebanese American University. The recent ‘revolutionary’ events in Lebanon and Iraq gave his talk on sectarianism in the Middle East an immediacy which, combined with his deep knowledge of the subject, held the audience at Jesus College closely engaged. Given the intricacy and sensitivity of studying such a subject in situ, a degree of external pressure is only to be expected. Sitting down to talk with Manara after the event, he gave an example of such pressure: “I tweeted one time something about how a newspaper was covering the news. And immediately I was attacked ... by bots and so on.” However, there are also obvious benefits to researching within Lebanon, as he explained: “I’m not one who would say that living in the region gives you the kind of insight that scholars who are outside the region cannot get. Living in the region or in the country certainly allows you to be in touch with a particular feeling and nuance. But that comes at a price - to always be careful that you can hear all the voices, and that you give expression to all of the

different visions or views of Lebanon that are out there. That’s very important. I wouldn’t say that you have to live in the country to understand - that I think is a radical and extreme position. In fact, in my training as a graduate student, I learnt the most about theory and method from professors who were living outside of the region.

... It’s a very fine balance. I know a lot of people who study Lebanon from the outside who know Lebanon much better than people living in Lebanon. And the same goes for Syria or Yemen and other countries.”

The possible obstacles to such a study are even more evident given Professor Salloukh’s obvious commitment to an impartial academic analysis of sectarian divisions. In his lecture, he spoke of the ‘political economy of sectarianism’, arguing that the divisions are as much about the holding and usage of power as about differences between communities. This ‘political economy’ ensures that Lebanon’s sectarianism is ‘self-reinforcing’, despite the frequent lack of desire among ‘subaltern’ groups, such as poor Shi’a Muslims, to divide along sectarian lines. Salloukh emphasised this point further, saying, “One of the greatest lessons we have learnt from Iraq and Lebanon today is that often what are marketed as uber-sectarian communities are not like that.”

Another topic discussed was social media: it can act to bring communities together across sectarian lines, but Salloukh explained that it can also do the very opposite. “[Social media] is a place where there is a lot of sectarian demonisation going on. But it’s also a place which allows people in different parts of the country who think alike to connect. So, for example, me sitting in Beirut could not know what’s going on in the south of the country or in Tripoli without Twitter. Having said that, the amount of sectarian trash you see on Twitter makes you wonder where these people live. So, it’s both; it can be a source of empowerment, for you to realise that there are all these people that are contesting sectarianism. But, with new technologies such as bots, it can be a very disciplinary media in the sense that some people are afraid to tell their opinion because they will be attacked massively by these bots.”

In more general terms, Salloukh spoke of the need

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for a 'grand geopolitical bargain' in the region. However, given the recent US-Iran tension in the region; the related failure of the Iran nuclear deal; and the continued blockade of Qatar, the prospects for multilateral agreements to solve sectarianism in the Middle East are not promising. Thus, in Salloukh's view such a 'bargain' must be combined with a shedding of sectarian identities at the grass-roots: "The grand bargain is at the level of the region, the geopolitical. And that's because if you want to explain the sectarian wave after 2011, you simply cannot do it in the region without taking into consideration the sectarianisation of geopolitical battles. People don't like to use this term, but it was instrumentalised. So how do you reverse this? You reverse it by reducing geopolitical tensions and the value of sectarianised geopolitical battles. That said, the problem is that at the level of the everyday life, once you politicize sectarianism, it can take on a life of its own. That's where you need to deal with it at a local level."

Considering the point further, he explained that "the grand bargain will not happen without the role of international actors. But what has happened in Iraq and Lebanon in the past months shows the desire of people to imagine a very different country and a very different existence. Now the problem is that, particularly in the case of Iraq, the external actors are so powerful and so dominant. I think in the case of Lebanon, it's the domestic factors take on a life of their own. I don't buy the argument that in Lebanon what happened is really organically connected to external battles. I think that the real dynamics are internal. And that's the difference between Lebanon and Iraq. In one country you have a settled political field, to use Bourdieu's language, and in another, Iraq, you have an unsettled one. So, there are all these overlapping domestic and external contests over Iraq. In Lebanon, the dynamics today are much more domestic than anything else. The political elite wants us to think that this is all part of an external conspiracy, but that's not the case."

In fact, he expanded, "in Lebanon, from day one you had two battles going on. One between the community that is imagining itself outside the sectarian system and the sectarian system, and the other inside the sectarian system between different sectarian actors. And it's the [participants in the] second battle which want us to believe that this is all part of an external

conspiracy and so on."

This overlapping of internal dynamics with wider geopolitical factors complicates further an already unpredictable region. There are certainly many actors with stakes in the sectarian picture of the Middle East, but perhaps Israel has a larger stake than any other. On this final point, Salloukh had an optimistic view of the future, taking into account the difficult reality of the present: "[This problem is similar] to the question that was asked twenty years ago: Would democracy in the Arab world lead to peace with Israel or be a threat to its security? I think Israel must be part of this grand geopolitical bargain...but when we talk about post-sectarianism, we are really talking about peoples who want to prioritise their socio-economic needs. And there are so many socio-economic problems in the Arab world. The real issues in the Arab world today are unemployment, youth unemployment, economic stagnation and problems. I don't think anyone entertains wars. We've lost so many resources in the past one hundred years that I don't think post-sectarianism will be a threat to Israel."

"On the contrary, communities want to go back and rebuild themselves [focusing] on the need for prosperity, for justice."

*Joseph Hearn*