

Political (In)Security in the Middle East

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YANNIS STIVACHTIS, APR 15 2019

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It has been argued (Holsti 1996 & 1991) that war in the post-Cold War era has different sources and takes on significantly different characteristics than previous wars. It has also become a common belief that the majority of contemporary wars are less a problem of the relations between states than a problem within states (Melander 1999). Although military considerations remain at the core of states' security policies, it has been recognised that threats of non-military nature coming from the internal environment of the state could have a significant impact on the security of the state. Yet, domestic strife may lead to regional and international upheaval and invite foreign political and military intervention. The recent Arab uprisings have demonstrated that one of the main sources of regional instability in the Middle East stems from regional states' domestic environments, while the Syrian conflict clearly shows how civil wars may lead to regional and international instability and invite foreign intervention.

Civil war, nevertheless, is not chronic in all states. It has been suggested (Buzan 1991) that the socio-political cohesion of states is the primary cause of domestic insecurity and that states that are weak in terms of their socio-political cohesion are the primary locale of present and future wars. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate Buzan's thesis by focusing on state-society relations in the Middle East. In doing so, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section draws on the state-society literature to provide the basis for understanding the nature of domestic insecurity facing Middle Eastern states. The second section focuses on the weak/strong state/power concept as a way to enrich our understanding of the Middle East's domestic security problematique. Finally, the last two sections focus on the cases of Iraq and the Arab Spring to demonstrate the relevance of the concept of 'weak' state to Middle East security.

The State-Society Relationship

The state-society literature emphasises the domestic realm of the state. This literature distinguishes between state and society and attempts to understand how they interact (Halliday 1988; Migdal 1988). In other words, state and society are viewed as separate entities while the state is understood mainly in politico-institutional terms. In this view, the state is equated with government and hence state security coincides with the security of the regime. Such identification has important ramifications for international relations. For example, according to the state-society approach, there was a difference between the security of the territory of Iraq and its citizens (society), and that of the security of Saddam Hussein and his regime. Hence, national security differs from state/regime security.

The state-society relationship can take three forms: first, state and society are both strong; second, the state is weak but the society is strong; and third, the state is strong but the society is weak. Because strong states which also have strong societies rarely, if ever, face insecurity due to their socio-political cohesion, this paper will focus on the latter two forms of state-society relationship.

Weak States and Strong Societies

Discussing conflict and underdevelopment in the Third World, Joe Migdal (1988, 19) defines the state as:

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an organisation, composed of numerous agencies led and coordinated by the state's leadership that has the ability or authority to make and implement the binding rules for all the people as well as the parameters of rule making for other social organisations in a given territory, using force if necessary to have its way.

According to Migdal, levels of state/social control are reflected in three indicators: compliance, participation, and legitimation.

The state's struggle for social control is characterised by conflict between state leaders (who seek to mobilise people and resources and impose a single set of rules) and other social organisations applying different rules in parts of the society. The distribution of social control in society that emerges from this conflict (between societies and states) is the main determinant of whether states become strong or weak.

Strong states are able to guide the rules of society without threatening opponents. Here, the 'rightness of a state's having high capabilities to extract, penetrate, regulate and appropriate' the rules of society is unchallenged (Migdal 1988, 20). In other words, a strong state possesses the legitimate authority that provides the official rules that people within the borders must follow. Weak states, on the other hand, are unable to mobilise the population for political purposes and there is often a fragmentation of social control (Migdal 1988, 228). Thus, weak states often employ coercion and various 'dirty tricks' to gain control. Migdal's point is that the stronger the state, the stronger will be its institutional penetration.

For Migdal, the main problem in the Third World is that the state is weak and the regimes are confronted by 'the rulers' dilemma', namely state leaders can only achieve political mobilisation when they have proffered viable strategies of survival to the populace. This requires an elaborate set of institutions. However, by creating strong state agencies, state leaders risk creating powerful sub-organisations, which may become potential power centres they cannot control. Lack of or fragmented social control, the 'rulers' dilemma', and the difficulties of political mobilisation are all conditions that, according to Migdal, weaken the state. Therefore, the political prescription is to make the state stronger.

Strong States and Weak Societies

In contrast to Migdal's thesis, it has been argued (Muslu 2013) that the lack of democracy in the Middle East should be attributed to the existence of strong states and weak societies, rather than the other way around. In other words, it is due to the existence of a strong and centralised state and the simultaneous lack of or weak presence of an autonomous and independent civil society that is the most significant limiting factor to democracy in the Middle East (Abootalebi 1998). According to Fatih Muslu (2013, 3) state control over its citizens' behaviours via control of jobs, benefits, and modernisation processes has made democratic, political activism difficult to occur in the Middle East. Establishing a relationship of dependency by controlling socio-economic structure and creating an economic class highly dependent on the state for employment, financing and protection is one of the key factors perpetuating state power in the Middle East (Sivan 1997). This tendency, in conjunction with the clientelistic nature of Middle Eastern political systems reinforces authoritarian values (Ciftci 2010, 1145). Hence, in the absence of autonomous counter mechanisms in place to balance their power, Middle Eastern states have been too powerful in relation to their societies. As Eva Bellin (2004) argues, the primary factor contributing to the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East can be determined by the strength of the state and its capacity to maintain a monopoly on the means of coercion.

According to Muslu (2013, 10), the distribution of economic capabilities is the main determinant of social and political life in the Middle East. In fact, states are in control of every domain ranging from the economic to the cultural field. Even the rich classes lack independence from the control of the central state. Against strong and centralised bureaucracies, there is no aristocracy or urbanised bourgeoisie class (Muslu 2013, 9). In Middle Eastern societies, oil revenues, the presence of strong and expanded militaries, the increasing number of state bureaucrats, weak political oppositions, and foreign military and financial support have increased state capabilities and strength over society (Abootalebi 1998, 8). The disproportionate growth in state capabilities has expanded the state's sphere of influence.

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Middle Eastern societies have most certainly witnessed transformative developments but these developments were initiated by populist regimes, which launched intensive industrialisation and modernisation processes and aimed to reinforce their control and legitimacy by instituting and expanding bureaucracy (Ayubi 1990). This massive state-led capitalism penetrated into all segments of society and most urban classes and organisations became materially tied to the state and its patronage (Muslu 2013, 11). Existing social and economic classes have been demolished via successive land reforms, with the development of a new urban class who owes their economic status and prestige to the state (Sullivan 1992, 27–28; Kamrawa and Mora 1998, 895–6). While these ongoing economic and political developments in the region have enhanced the urban classes, tribal and other traditional social organisations have lost their social and political importance (Kienle 2011, 146). In most Middle Eastern countries, civil society organisations have had to deal with the various political and economic restrictions that have diminished their profound impact.

The problem with the above analysis is that strength is understood in terms of the state's capacity to control its society and minimise or even eliminate societal expression. This implies that if resistance breaks out, then the state has not been so strong after all. Thus, the Arab Spring demonstrated the inability of the Middle Eastern state to manage its society and its weakness in terms of its socio-political cohesion. In other words, the more oppressive the state has been, the more anger created among its populace. Therefore, it was a matter of time before this anger would come out in the form of rebellion and resistance.

Weak/Strong States Versus Weak/Strong Powers

Strength as a state neither depends on, nor correlates with power. Hence, a distinction should be drawn between 'weak' or 'strong' states, on the one hand, and 'weak' or 'strong' powers, on the other. The notion of a 'weak' or 'strong' state refers to a country's degree of socio-political cohesion (Buzan 1991, 97), while the notion of 'weak' or 'strong' power refers to the traditional distinction among states in respect of their military and economic capabilities (Handel 1981; Morgenthau 1973; Knorr 1975). Whether a state is weak or strong in terms of its socio-political cohesion has thus little to do with whether it is as weak or strong as a power. Of course, strong states can also be strong powers, such as Israel. On the other hand, strong states can be weak powers, like Egypt, while weak states can be quite strong powers, like Turkey and Iran. As the case of the Soviet Union indicates, even major powers could have serious weaknesses as states. Thus, they are obliged to maintain extensive internal security establishments. The main difference between weak and strong states is the low/high degree of legitimacy facing their governments.

Although no single indicator adequately defines the difference between weak and strong states, there are certain conditions which are expected to be found in weak ones (Buzan 1991, p. 100). First, weak states usually experience high levels of political violence or they are confronted with an ever-existing potential for violence. Second, they are characterised by a significant degree of police control over their citizens. Third, they face major political conflict over which ideology will be used to organise the state (e.g. secularism vs. Islamism or nationalism vs. pan-Arabism). Fourth, weak states lack coherent national identity, or they experience the presence of contending national identities within their territories (e.g. the Kurdish factor in Turkey and Iraq). Fifth, weak states lack a clear and observed hierarchy of political authority. Finally, they experience a high degree of state control over the media.

Within international anarchy, security issues are conditioned not only by the structure of the international system and the interaction of units (Waltz 1979; Jarvis 1989, 281) but also by the domestic characteristics of states (Buzan 1991, 37). In this way, the international and domestic realms of the state are not only of equal importance but, most importantly, they are interrelated. Consequently, security analysis requires a comprehensive definition of the state that binds territory, government, and society together and which links the internal and systemic perspectives mentioned above. Indeed, a third body of thought has attempted to do so by placing state and system into a mutually constitutive relationship (Buzan, Little and Jones 1993). In this way, the state is understood in terms of its territorial, political, and societal nexus and its security is analysed with reference to its three basic components: its idea, its physical base, and its institutional expression (Buzan 1991, 69–96).

The Idea of the State

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By employing the idea of the state, one accepts the fact that the state exists primarily on the socio-political rather than on the physical plane. If the essence of the state resides in the idea of it held in the minds of its citizens, then, that idea itself becomes a major object of national security.

The idea of the state, however, might take different forms, and might even be quite different among those who share a common loyalty to a particular state. This notion raises significant security problems. A state without a binding idea among its citizens might be so disadvantaged as to be unable to sustain its territorial integrity. Discussing the idea of the state, one should focus on its two main sources: the nation and organising ideologies (Buzan 1991, 69–82).

The State-Nation Relationship

The importance of nation to the idea of the state is highlighted by the concept of national security itself, which implies that the object of security is the nation. This raises questions about the link between state and nation (Seton-Watson 1977; Gellner 1983). If the territories of nation and state coincide, then nation would define much of the relationship between state and society. However, this is very rarely the case. One is, therefore, obliged to conclude that the relationship between state and nation is a complex one.

According to Barry Buzan (1991, 72–78), the complex relationship between state and nation can be expressed through four models. The first is the *nation-state* model, which implies that the nation precedes the state and plays a significant role in giving rise to it. The purpose of the state is to protect and express the nation, and ensure the bond between them. The nation, on the other hand, provides the state with a strong identity in the international environment and a strong base of domestic legitimacy enabling it to resist domestic upheavals. Egypt offers a good example of a nation-state.

The second model is the *state-nation*. This model implies that after coming into existence the state plays a significant role in creating the nation. The United States (US) provides a good example of a state-nation. The purpose of the state is to generate uniform cultural and political elements that in the long-term would produce a national entity that would identify with the state. This may require the absorption of various ethnicities or religions (melting pot) in order to create a single new national one. So long as state-nations fail to solve their nationality problem, they remain vulnerable to instability and internal conflict in ways not normally experienced by states in harmony with their nations.

The third model is the *part nation-state*. This implies that a nation, like the Palestinians or the Kurds, is divided among two or more states. The idea of the unified nation-state frequently exercises a strong hold on part nation-states, which, thereby, represent a severe source of insecurity both to themselves and to other states. This case offers the maximum level of contradiction to the idea of national security, for it is precisely the nation that makes the idea of the state insecure.

The fourth model is the *multination-state*. It comprises those states that contain two or more nations within their boundaries. Two sub-types exist within this model: *federative states* and *imperial states*. Federative states, like Canada or Switzerland, reject the nation-state as the ideal type. Consequently, separate nations are allowed or even encouraged to pursue their own identities, and attempts are made to structure the state in such a way that no one nationality comes to dominate the whole state structure. Federative states have no natural unifying principle and, consequently, are more vulnerable to separatism and political interference than nation-states. However, there is a belief that political, social, economic, and cultural freedom and development would make this type of state preferable to its citizens than any other alternative.

Imperial states are those in which one of the nations within the state dominates the state structures to its own advantage. The dominant nation may seek to suppress the other nationalities by various means with a view of transforming itself into a nation-state. Turkey offers a good example of this type of state. It may also seek simply to retain its dominance, using the machinery of the state to enforce its position, without trying to eliminate or absorb other groups. The case of Iraq is illustrative of this type of state. In addition, it may adopt a more subtle approach of cultivating a pervasive non-nationalist ideology, such as Islam, which appears to transcend the national issue while in fact perpetuating the *status quo*.

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Imperial states are vulnerable to threats aimed at their national division and their stability depends on the ability of the dominant nation to retain control. If their ability is weakened either by internal developments or by external intervention, the state structure stands at risk of complete collapse. Political threats are, thus, a key element in the national security problem of imperial states.

The above analysis makes it clear that national security in regard to the state-nation link can be read in several different ways and that, consequently, different states will experience very different kinds of insecurity and security in relation to the nationality question. Some states will derive great strength from their link to the nation, whereas for others the tensions between state and nation will define their weakest and most vulnerable point.

Organising Ideologies

Organising ideologies purport to address the bases of relationships between government and society and define the conditions for both harmony and conflict in domestic politics. If these ideas themselves are weak, or 'if they are weakly held within society; or if strongly held, but opposed, ideas compete within society: then the state stands on fragile political foundations' (Buzan 1991, 79). A variety of political, economic, religious and social ideologies can serve as an idea of the state. The importance of ideology as an organising principle of the state is highlighted by the conflict between secularism and Islamism in Turkey, between autocracy and democracy throughout the Middle East, between pan-Arabism and nationalism, and between moderate and radical Islamism.

Here a note of caution is required regarding the role of religion as an organising ideology as we need to be aware of the propensity to oversimplify its role in domestic and international affairs. Iran's international assertiveness is as much due to Iranian-Persian nationalism as it is to the dictates of Shi'ite clerics. The international policies that Iran's clerics adopt are rarely driven by theological precepts or religious doctrine, but rather political power calculations and a desire to preserve the quasi-theocratic *status quo*. Similarly, in Iraq, conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites rarely stems from differences over religious doctrine and practice, but rather from historical and contemporary competition for state power. Sunni and Shi'ite identities are as much ethnic as religious.

Meanwhile, the Kurds, whether in Iraq or Turkey, are ethnically based. Most Kurds are also Sunni Muslims. This is not to suggest that religious identity is synonymous with ethnic identity, as in many circumstances religious identity implies explicitly religious behaviour and belief. However, in many cases the lines between ethnic and religious identities become so blurred that parsing them to assign blame for violence is difficult if not impossible. In both Somalia and Afghanistan, one source of the conflicts there is over which brand of Islam will prevail. But in both cases clan and ethnic differences define the composition of the forces in conflict as much as religious differences do.

Both the idea of the nation and organising ideologies point out that where the idea of the state is weak, a lapse in institutional strength might invite domestic upheavals which may, in turn, threaten the existence of state.

The Physical Base of the State

The physical base of the state refers to its population and territory, including all of the natural resources and wealth contained within its borders (Buzan, 1991, 90-96). The concrete character of the physical base makes threats against it considerably easy to be determined. However, a quite different threat to population can arise from human migrations whether voluntary or forced. This threat works primarily on the societal level, especially when the incoming population is of a different cultural, linguistic or ethnic group.

The Institutions of the State

According to Buzan (1991, 82), to understand the relevance of the institutions of state to security, one needs to ask the question: how does a state in which the 'idea of state' is weak or non-existent react to potential and actual domestic upheavals? This question raises the image of a maximal state in which an elite commands the machinery of government, particularly the armed forces and the police, and uses it to run the state in its own interests. In this case, the coherence of the state would be preserved by the use of the state's coercive powers against its citizens.

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The institutions of the state can be threatened by force (rebellion or revolution) or by political action based on ideas that have different institutional implications. When institutions are threatened by force, the natural reaction is defence. The use of armed or police forces may sustain the state institutions but without significant popular mass support, they would be precariously positioned. When institutions are threatened by opposing political ideas, the danger is that their legitimacy will be eroded.

The State-Nation-Religion Nexus and Political (In)Security: The Case of Iraq

Iraq is one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse societies in the Middle East. Roughly, two-thirds of Iraq's people are Arabs, about one-fourth are Kurds, and the remainder consists of small minority groups. Iraq's Arab population is divided between Sunni Muslims and Shi'ites. About three-fifths of the Iraqi population are Shi'ite and about two-fifths are Sunni. Fault lines between communities deepened in the twentieth century as a succession of authoritarian regimes ruled by exploiting tribal, sectarian, and ethnic divisions (Robertson 2016; Polk 2006).

It is estimated that the Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East and they constitute a separate and distinctive cultural group possessing a strong tribal structure. There are important Kurdish minorities in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Iraq's Kurds are concentrated in the relatively inaccessible mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, which is roughly contiguous with Kurdish regions in those other countries; a fact that raises the possibility of a unified Kurdistan and simultaneously creates territorial threats to the countries where the Kurds are based.

The Kurds were thwarted in their ambitions for statehood after WWI and the Iraqi Kurds have since resisted inclusion in the state of Iraq. At various times, the Kurds have been in undisputed control of large tracts of territory. Attempts to reach a compromise with the Kurds in their demands for autonomy, however, have ended in failure, owing partly to government pressure and partly to the inability of Kurdish factional groups to maintain a united front against successive Iraqi governments. From 1961 to 1975, aided by military support from Iran, they were intermittently in open rebellion against the Iraqi government, as they were during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, and again, supported largely by the United States, throughout the 1990s (Tripp 2007, 192–239). As a result, the Saddam Hussein regime consistently tried to extend its control into Kurdish areas through threats, coercion, violence, and, at times, the forced internal transfer of larger numbers of Kurds (Tripp 2007, 192–193). Kurdish rebellions in the last quarter of the twentieth century resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds – both combatants and non-combatants – and on various occasions forced hundreds of thousands of Kurds to flee to neighbouring Iran and Turkey (Tripp 2007, 203).

As it was mentioned previously, Iraq's Arab population is divided between Sunni Muslims and the more numerous Shi'ites. These groups, however, are for the most part ethnically and linguistically homogenous, and both value family relations strongly. Many Arabs, in fact, identify more strongly with their family or tribe than with national or confessional affiliations, a significant factor contributing to ongoing difficulties in maintaining a strong central government.

Although Shi'ites constitute the majority of the population, Iraq's Sunni rulers have given preferential treatment to influential Sunni tribal networks, and Sunnis have dominated the military officer corps and civil service. Shi'ites remained politically and economically marginalised from the inception of the Iraqi state in 1920 until the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 (Tripp 2007 194–196). Since the transition to elective government, Shi'ite factions have wielded significant political power.

Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 installed a regime that was clearly anti-Iraqi and had close ties with Syria. Given Iraq's large and for the most part disfranchised Shi'ite population, Baghdad perceived relations between Syria and Iran as an unprecedented threat. When Khomeini came to power in February 1979, his example inspired many Shi'ites in Iraq to engage in greater political activism. Mass pro-Khomeini demonstrations and guerrilla activity became regular occurrences in Iraq. The regime cracked down on the Shi'ite movement with great ferocity, and hundreds were executed, some 10,000 were imprisoned, and tens of thousands were driven across the border into Iran.

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During the Iran-Iraq War, in the northeastern provinces Iranian forces, in cooperation with Iraqi Kurds, threatened the area from Kirkuk to the Turkish border and penetrated into the Iraqi town of Halabjah. They met with stiff resistance in the north, however. Using chemical weapons, Iraqi forces inflicted heavy casualties on Kurdish civilians in and around Halabjah in March 1988 (Tripp 2007, 206). Meanwhile, Saddam's control of society was strengthened by his continued domination of the country's internal security services.

The defeat of Iraq in the 1990-1991 Gulf War encouraged the Shi'ite and Kurdish populations to rebel against the regime. In response, the government forces killed many people and caused extensive damage. The attempt by Iraqi forces to reconquer Kurdistan forced more than a million Kurds to flee to Turkey and Iran. Many died from hunger and disease. Only with Western intervention did the Kurdish refugees feel they could return to their homes in northern Iraq. In April 1991, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France established a 'safe haven' in Iraqi Kurdistan, in which Iraqi forces were barred from operating. Nevertheless, the Iraqi military launched a successful attack against the Kurdish city of Arbil in 1996 and engaged in a consistent policy of ethnic cleansing in areas directly under its control – particularly in and around the oil-rich city of Kirkuk – that was inhabited predominantly by Kurds (Tripp 2007, 234–239).

Only after the end of the 1990-1991 Gulf War did the Shi'ites rise up against Saddam Hussein's regime. However, their rebellion was put down with great brutality. Shi'ite leaders were killed and imprisoned, madrasahs were closed, and public religious ceremonies were banned. The US-led coalition did not establish a safe haven for the Shi'ites in southern Iraq, and the regime subsequently put immense resources into excavating several large canals to drain the country's southern marshes, which had been the traditional stronghold of the Shi'ite.

Following the 2003 US military intervention in Iraq, attempts were made to hand over control of the government to Iraqis (Marr and Al-Marashi 2017, 205–239; Dawisha 2011, 242–276). On January 30, 2005, despite the ongoing violence, general elections were successfully held for Iraq's new 275-member Transitional National Assembly. A draft constitution approved by a national referendum in October 2005 called for a new legislature. Sunni Arabs voted overwhelmingly against the new constitution, fearing that it would make them a perpetual minority. In a general election on December 15, the Shi'ite United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) gained the most seats but not enough to call a government. After four months of political wrangling, the Shi'ite leader Nuri al-Maliki formed a coalition government that included both Arabs and Kurds but which was largely perceived as being pro-Shi'a.

In November 2010, after an eight-month political stalemate, Iraq's major political parties entered a power-sharing agreement that paved the way for a national unity government (Marr and Al-Marashi 2017, 240-285; Dawisha 2011, 242–276). However, the power-sharing agreement soon proved unworkable; factional struggles over oil revenues and the control of government institutions continued. In February 2011, the Arab spring reached Iraq. On February 25, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Iraq to protest the country's high unemployment rate, corruption, and insufficient public services. Iraqi police responded aggressively, attempting to disperse protesters with water cannons and in some cases live fire. The protests caused several provincial governors to step down from their posts. In the aftermath of the demonstrations, Al-Maliki announced new initiatives to meet protesters' demands, including measures to ensure greater government accountability and fight corruption.

Iraq's factional stalemate persisted, hindering reconstruction efforts and threatening to push the country back into sectarian conflict. The aggravation of sectarian tensions in 2013 translated into increased violence (Marr and Al-Marashi 2017, 287–311). Radical Sunni militants in western Iraq benefited from the presence of similar Sunni groups fighting in the Syrian Civil War, and weapons and fighters flowed back and forth across the Iraq-Syria border. In April 2013, al-Qaeda in Iraq and some radical elements of the Syrian opposition began operating jointly under the name Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL; also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria [ISIS]). By late 2013, ISIL had begun to pose a serious challenge to the Iraqi government's control in western and northern areas of the country.

The ISIL/ISIS crisis eroded support for Maliki, whose sectarian approach to governing was seen as a major factor in the alienation of Sunnis. The nomination in early August of Haider al-Abadi to form a new cabinet seemed to signal that Al-Maliki's efforts to retain power were doomed. Indeed, al-Abadi was installed as prime minister on September 8, 2014, and was able to form an inclusive administration. Efforts by Iraqi forces to expel ISIL from Iraq, with the

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support of a US-led coalition, continued under Abadi, with the group finally being pushed out of most of the country by the end of 2017.

Meanwhile, in September 2017, Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) officials held a nonbinding referendum on independence in the area under KRG control. The referendum was overwhelmingly approved with more than 92% of the vote. The referendum, however, found very little international support, many countries having urged the KRG not to proceed with it in order to avoid further exacerbating the already unstable nature of the region. The Iraqi central government was strongly opposed to the referendum. Within weeks of the vote, the government sent troops to the areas outside the KRG's borders that were claimed by both the central government and the KRG, resulting in clashes between the two sides. Iraqi forces quickly retook Kirkurk, as well as other disputed areas outside the Kurdish autonomous region. Tensions between the two sides were reduced somewhat in March 2018 by the progress of ongoing negotiations.

The State-Society Relationship and Political (In)Security: The Case of the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring refers to the outbreak of protests in the Middle East that ultimately resulted in regime changes in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. The participants in these grassroots movements sought increased social freedoms and greater participation in the political process (Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds 2015; Lynch 2017). Not all of the movements, however, could be deemed successful. In fact, in many Middle East countries the revolts of the Arab Spring resulted in increased instability and oppression (Bayat 2017; Fisk and Cockburn 2017). In some cases, these protests morphed into full-scale civil wars, as seen in countries such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

The series of large-scale political and social movements associated with the Arab Spring began in December 2010 when a Tunisian street vendor – Mohammed Bouazizi – set himself on fire to protest the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stand by police over failure to obtain a permit. Bouazizi's sacrificial act served as a catalyst for the so-called Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia (Zartman 2015, 50-79; Fisk and Cockburn 2017). As a result, massive protests broke out in Tunis, the country's capital, and quickly spread throughout the country. The Tunisian government attempted to end the unrest by using violence against street demonstrations and by offering political and economic concessions. However, protests soon overwhelmed the country's security forces prompting authoritarian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled the country with an iron fist for more than 20 years, to abdicate his position and flee to Saudi Arabia. The country's first democratic parliamentary elections were held in October 2011 when Tunisians chose members of a council tasked with drafting a new constitution. A democratically chosen president and prime minister took office in December 2011. In addition, political prisoners were released and the political police was dissolved. In 2013 new protests began against the interim Islamist-led government, which led to the adoption of a new constitution. On October 2014, parliamentary elections took place; an event that signified the end of the political transition with Tunisia becoming a unicameral parliamentary republic.

The successful uprising in Tunisia inspired activists in other countries in the region to protest similar authoritarian governments in their own nations. Specifically, massive protests broke out in Egypt in late January 2011. The Egyptian government tried and failed to control protests by offering concessions while cracking down violently against protesters. After several days of massive demonstrations and clashes between protesters and security forces in Cairo and around the country, a turning point came at the end of the month when the Egyptian army announced that it would refuse to use force against protesters calling for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak (Fisk and Cockburn 2017). Having lost the support of the military, Mubarak left office on 11 February ceding power to a council of senior military officers.

In the period of euphoria that followed, the new military administration enjoyed high public approval, since the military had played a decisive role in ending the Mubarak regime. However, optimism was dampened when the new administration appeared hesitant to begin a full transfer of power to an elected government and when military and security forces resumed the use of violence against protesters (Danahr 2015, 54; Zartman 2015, 80). Confrontations between protesters and security forces became frequent occurrences. In spite of a multiday outbreak of violence in late November 2011, parliamentary elections proceeded as scheduled and the newly elected People's Assembly held its inaugural session in late January 2012.

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Following the controversial election of Mohamed Morsi in 2012, a coup led by Defence Minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi installed the latter as president and he has remained in office since 2014. In response to a subsequent insurgency in Sinai, Egyptian armed forces launched anti-terror military operations in the peninsula. Nevertheless, violence and attacks by insurgents have increased since the ouster of Morsi. Encouraged by protesters' rapid successes in Tunisia and Egypt, protest movements took hold in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. In these countries, however, outpourings of popular discontent led to protracted bloody struggles between opposition groups and ruling regimes.

In Yemen, where the first protests appeared in late January 2011, President Ali Adb Allah Salih's regime was weakened when a number of the country's most powerful tribal and military leaders aligned themselves with the pro-democracy protesters calling for him to step down (Zartman 2015, 116–144; Fisk and Cockburn 2017). When negotiations to remove Şalih from power failed, loyalist and opposition fighters clashed in Sanaa, the country's capital. Şalih left Yemen in June to receive medical treatment after he was injured in a bomb attack, raising hopes among the opposition that a transition would begin. Şalih returned to the country unexpectedly four months later, however, adding to the uncertainty and confusion about Yemen's political future.

In 2011, Prime Minister Mujawar and members of the Yemeni Parliament from the ruling party resigned. Political chaos led to the occupation of several Yemeni regions by al-Qaeda and Houthi rebels. In response, Saleh sacked the military leaders and restructured the Yemeni military forces. In November 2011, after the approval of his immunity from prosecution by Yemeni legislators, Şaleh signed an internationally mediated agreement calling for a phased transfer of power to Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. However, al-Hadi was ousted by Houthi rebels and a violent civil war broke out as a result. The conflict has devolved into tribal warfare causing significant damage to the country's infrastructure.

Mass protests demanding political and economic reforms erupted in Bahrain in mid-February 2011, led by Bahraini human rights activists and members of Bahrain's marginalised Shi'ite majority (Zartman 2015, 209–248; Fisk and Cockburn 2017). In response, King Hamad offered economic concessions, released political prisoners and entered into negotiations with Shi'a representatives. However, the protests continued and the King requested the intervention of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). As a result, protests were violently suppressed by Bahraini security forces, aided by a force of about 1,500 soldiers from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By the end of March, the protest movement had been stifled. In the aftermath of the protests, dozens of accused protest leaders were convicted of anti-government activity and imprisoned, hundreds of Shi'ite workers suspected of supporting the protests were fired, and dozens of Shi'ite mosques were demolished by the government. In November 2011, an independent investigation into the uprising, commissioned by the Bahraini government, concluded that the government had used excessive force and torture against protesters. As a result, the Head of the National Security Apparatus removed from his post while the government vowed to act on the recommendations for reform included in the report. To this end, a Committee to implement the recommendations was formed. Today, officially, the country has a constitutional monarchy form of government, but personal freedoms remain limited.

In Libya, protests against the authoritarian regime of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi erupted in mid-February 2011 and they quickly escalated into a violent civil war (Danahr 2015, 325–368; Fisk and Cockburn 2017). When the rebel forces appeared to be on the verge of defeat in March, an international coalition led by NATO launched a campaign of air strikes targeting Qaddafi's forces. Qaddafi was forced from power in August 2011 after rebel forces took control of Tripoli. After evading capture for several weeks, Qaddafi was captured, tortured, and eventually executed by opposition fighters in Surt in October 2011.

The challenges of governing Libya in the post-Qaddafi era became apparent soon after the internationally recognised provisional government, known as the Transitional National Council (TNC), took power. The TNC struggled to restart the Libyan economy, establish functional institutions of government, and exert control over the many autonomous regional and tribal militias that had participated in the rebellion against Qaddafi. Thus, since Qaddafi's downfall, Libya has remained in a state of civil war, and two opposing governments effectively rule separate regions of the country. Libya's civilian population has suffered significantly during the years of political upheaval, with violence in the streets and access to food, resources and healthcare services severely limited. This has contributed, in part, to the ongoing worldwide refugee crisis, which has seen thousands flee Libya, most often by boat across the

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Mediterranean Sea, with hopes of new opportunities in Europe.

In Syria protests calling for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad broke out in southern Syria in mid-March 2011 and spread through the country (Danahar 2015, 369–420; Fisk and Cockburn 2017; Lynch 2017, 105–130; Zartman 2015, 291–331). The initial response of the Syrian government was to release some political prisoners, end the Emergency Law, and dismiss the Provincial Governors. This followed by the resignation of the government, as well as the resignation of members of the Syrian Parliament. Nevertheless the protests continued. The Assad regime responded with a brutal crackdown against protesters, drawing condemnation from international leaders and human rights groups. As a result, the Syrian army experienced a large number of defections, which led first to clashes between soldiers and defectors and eventually to the formation of the Free Syrian Army and a full-scale civil war.

A leadership council for the Syrian opposition formed in Istanbul in August, and opposition militias began to launch attacks on government forces. In spite of the upheaval, Assad's hold on power appeared strong, as he was able to retain the support of critical military units composed largely of members of Syria's 'Alawite' minority, to which Assad also belonged. Meanwhile, divisions in the international community made it unlikely that international military intervention, which had proved decisive in Libya, would be possible in Syria. Russia and China vetoed UN Security Council resolutions meant to pressure the Assad regime in October 2011 and February 2012 and vowed to oppose any measure that would lead to foreign intervention in Syria or Assad's removal from power. The arrival of a delegation of peace monitors from the Arab League in December 2011 did little to reduce violence. The monitoring mission was suspended several weeks later over concerns for the safety of the monitors.

The Syrian Civil War has lasted for several years, forcing many to leave the country to seek refuge in Turkey, Greece and throughout Western Europe. For a time, the militant group ISIS had declared a caliphate in north-eastern Syria. The group executed thousands of people, and many others fled the region in fear of their lives. Yet, although ISIS has largely been defeated in Syria, the oppressive regime of Bashar al Assad remains in power in the country largely due to the military assistance it has received from Russia.

Lastly, the effects of the Arab Spring movement were felt elsewhere throughout the Middle East and North Africa as many of the countries in the region experienced at least minor pro-democracy protests. In Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and Oman rulers offered a variety of concessions, ranging from the dismissal of unpopular officials to constitutional changes, in order to head off the spread of protest movements in their countries.

Specifically, in Algeria the 19-year old state of emergency was lifted (Zartman 2015, 145–181). In Jordan, King Abdullah II dismissed Prime Minister Rifai and his cabinet on February 2011 while on October 2011, King Abdullah dismissed Prime Minister Bakhit and his cabinet after complaints of slow progress on promised reforms. In April 2012, as the protests continued, Prime Minister Al-Khasawneh resigned, and the King appointed Fayez al-Tarawneh as the new Prime Minister of Jordan. In October 2012, King Abdullah dissolved the parliament for new early elections and appointed Abdullah Ensour as the new Prime Minister of Jordan.

In Oman, Sultan Qaboos offered economic concessions, dismissed his ministers and granted law-making powers to the country's elected legislature. In Kuwait, protests led to the resignation of Prime Minister Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah and the dissolution of the Parliament, while in Morocco political concessions were offered by King Mohammed VI, including a referendum on constitutional reforms, respect and observance of civil rights, and a commitment to end corruption (Zartman 2015, 182–208).

In Saudi Arabia, economic concessions were offered by King Abdullah and male-only municipal elections were held on 29 September 2011 (Lynch 2017, 225–240). Later, King Abdullah announced his approval for women to vote and be elected in the 2015 municipal elections, as well as to be nominated to the Shura Council. He also committed himself to the expansion of women's rights in Saudi Arabia; a process that was undertaken by Mohammad bin Salman after his ascension to the position of Crown Prince.

Conclusion

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Due to their low degree of socio-political cohesion, weak states face great insecurity at the regime level. This is not only crucial to their own security, but also to that of the regions within which they are located. International anarchy is a decentralised system of order and, therefore, depends for its stability on the stability of its component units (states). Weak states are problematic for international order because their internal politics are often violent, and their domestic insecurity often spills over to disrupt the security of neighbouring states. Moreover, weak states can easily attract competitive outside intervention, as well as serve as targets to opportunistic aggressors.

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