THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL GEOPOLITICS OF CIVIL WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

ROSS HARRISON

CONTENTS

Middle East Institute

SUMMARY

Power dynamics between the major global and regional powers have indirectly influenced the civil wars currently plaguing the Middle East. By analyzing the impact of the Cold War, its end, and the regional and domestic dynamics it produced, this paper argues that the shift in the distribution of power caused by end of the Cold War, as well as the resulting American unipolarity, facilitated the creation of two opposing camps, one comprising the U.S. and its allies and the other an "axis of resistance." These two opposing poles later competed for regional primacy in the civil wars of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and this struggle for power is laying the foundation for a future regional political order.

KEY POINTS

*   While the end of the Cold War wasn't a direct factor in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen's descent into civil war, the loss of their Soviet patron put stress on each country, affecting their capacity to cope with the social, economic, and political pressures of the Arab Spring.

*   American unipolarity at the end of the Cold War created an "axis of resistance," made up of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, against perceived efforts by the United States and its allies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel, to impose their will on the region.

*   "Vertical contagion" is a phenomenon of the country-level civil wars morphing into regional-level conflicts engulfing Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel, where interest in a stable Middle East give way to competition for regional dominance.

*   In order for stability to return to the Middle East, international powers will need to cooperate with the major regional powers on a regional security architecture. Instead, the Trump Administration has doubled down on its support for regional U.S. allies and escalated hostility towards Iran.

INTRODUCTION

"A large proportion of the post-World War II civil wars have been 'internationalized' in the sense that one or more nations intervened in the conflict on the side of the government or rebels."[1]

There is little dispute that the Middle East has been one of the regions of the world most deeply penetrated by outside powers. What has sparked controversy is the impact this external interference has had on how the region, and the countries in it, have evolved.

Commenting in the 1970s, Egyptian academic Samir Amin argued that the political-economy of the Middle East had been in a chokehold of dependence on the global, Western-dominated economic system. According to this line of thinking, the exploitive nature of the system kept countries in a chronic state of abject poverty, a condition which could eventually percolate to the surface in the form of civil conflict or even revolution.[2]

Other analysts have focused more on the regional effects of interventions by global powers, looking at civil conflict as a byproduct of state fragility engendered by the arbitrary drawing of the political map of the region after World War I. Writers of this ilk also tend to assign blame to the superpowers for pursuing their ambitions vis-à-vis one another during the Cold War in a region replete with fragile and tentative states. Extending this logic out, both European and superpower interventions came at the expense of the political and economic health of the region, leading to societal discontent, and ultimately insurrection.[3]

This paper will not enter the debate about the overall impact outside powers have had on the Middle East, but will double down on the question of the role global and regional geopolitics have played in the civil conflicts currently plaguing the region. The focus will be less on the specifics of the interventions in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Instead we will step back and look more at how the power dynamics between the major global and regional powers have indirectly influenced how civil wars in the Middle East have played out.

THE ARGUMENTS: THE VIOLENT CIVIL WAR VORTEX

It will be argued that while local grievances and the regional dynamics of the Arab Spring were what sparked the civil wars in the Middle East, it is also important to consider how the disbandment of the Soviet Union and the resultant collapse of the Cold War power structure put all the states in the region, but particularly the erstwhile Soviet allies, under stress.

We will chronicle how the loss of the Soviet Union as a benefactor compelled Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen to scramble

in the face of new political and economic realities, some of which translated into stresses that came to the surface decades later during the Arab Spring. We will also examine how the reality of American unipolarity at the end of the Cold War ultimately led to the creation of an "axis of resistance," consisting of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, against what these actors saw as efforts by the United States and its allies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Israel, to impose their will on the region. It was these two opposing poles which later competed for regional primacy in the civil wars of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. And it was this struggle for power which laid the foundations for a new regional political order.

While this regional competition played out in the civil wars, it is misleading to simplify this as merely a proxy war dynamic. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have in fact treated the civil wars as venues for competition. But this paper will argue that the regional powers don't just "push" themselves into these conflicts, as a proxy war would suggest, but also get "pulled" in based on threats (and in some cases opportunities) created by the civil wars. This will be described as "vertical contagion," where beyond just exploiting the civil wars top-down, regional and international actors get drawn into the vortex of a "conflict trap."[4]

These distinctions in how we define the relationship between regional and international powers and the civil wars are more than semantic. How we look at this relationship has real implications for the challenges of forging the cooperation necessary globally (and regionally) to advance the cause of peace in the countries racked by civil war.

COLD WAR GLOBAL DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL WARS

To properly assess the global context of the civil wars today, it is essential that we look at what has changed over time, starting with the early days of the Cold War.

The onset of the Cold War was the "big bang" moment of the modern Middle East. At the same time the United States and Soviet Union were ramping up their global competition, almost all Arab states were making the transition from being under the thumb of European colonialism to becoming independent sovereign states. In other words, there was a collision between two profound historical forces: The Cold War global conflict heating up, and Arab states entering the headiest, but also most vulnerable, period of their histories.

The clearest evidence of the influence the U.S.-Soviet rivalry exerted on the political order of the Middle East is that the region started to mirror the bipolar structure of the international system. The major manifestation of this "mimicking effect" was the emergence of an Arab Cold War, which pitted Egypt's populist

Arab nationalist leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser (backed by the Soviet Union), against more conservative Arab states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia (allies of the United States).[5]

The different sides of this Arab Cold War competed for influence in the civil wars in Lebanon in the 1950s and Yemen in the 1960s. This rivalry was also a theme in Iraq's 1958 revolution, and the United States and Soviet Union both intervened indirectly in the Lebanese civil war which started in 1975.[6]

SUPERPOWERS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS IN ARAB REGIMES

Unpacking how the domestic politics of states were influenced by the Cold War helps explain how these same states suffered a decline in capacity during the post-Cold War period. This ultimately impinged on their ability to meet the growing demands of their populations, and perhaps also hampered their ability to resist the slide into civil war.

Each of the fledgling independent states that emerged from colonialism struggled with stability due to internal and external pressures. Because of this, most felt compelled to seek support from either the United States or the Soviet Union.

Countries which aligned themselves with the United States, like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iran, gained regime security from this alliance, but at the expense of regime legitimacy. Given the U.S. support for Israel, the Arab regimes paid a domestic legitimacy price for being on the receiving end of American largesse. But the gains in regime security helped offset the legitimacy liability, signaling to opposition groups that the United States would shore up the regime against domestic challenges.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, didn't have this drag on the legitimacy of its Arab allies given that its revolutionary brand overlapped with the Arab nationalist agendas of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya.[7] Moscow tended to back countries (e.g. Nasser's Egypt) which built their legitimizing formulas on a stance of resistance against the United States and its regional allies.[8]

Arab countries aligned with the Soviet Union saw themselves as part of a world-wide struggle against what was viewed as Western hegemonic designs over the Middle East. While

these states still had legitimacy issues, their relationship with Moscow wasn't the source of them.

SYRIA AND EGYPT: CASE STUDIES IN COLD WAR POLITICS

SYRIAN DOMESTIC POLICY

The alliance with the Soviet Union helped Syria patch over some of the legitimacy deficiencies that had plagued it since independence. Soviet aid packages helped shore up the country's political-economy by spurring the growth of the public sector, from which flowed benefits to the regime's social base.[9]

Despite the fractious nature of the Syrian political system, evidenced by the number of coups that took place before the ascension of Hafez al-Assad to the presidency in 1971, the support from Moscow buttressed state capacity.[10]

There was also an ideological component to the relationship between Moscow and Damascus. The expansion of the public sector at the expense of private enterprise, the emergence of a vibrant Communist party in Syria, and the socialist tenets of the Ba'ath party, were ideological manifestations of the relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union.

One could argue that the alliance with the Soviet Union also had a "disciplining effect" on the Syrian political system, sidelining potential challengers to the regime.[11] While there was a formidable challenge from the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in 1982, which was brutally quashed, the social contract enabled by the state's relationship with Moscow kept Syria reasonably stable, particularly starting in the 1970s under former President Hafez al-Assad.

While the state continued to struggle with overcoming divisions and settling on a legitimacy formula in its formative years, exacerbated by the failure to defeat the fledgling Israeli state in 1948 and the botched merger with Egypt a decade later, the alliance with the Soviet Union provided an ideological, financial, and military support system. Through the transfer of security-related equipment and weaponry, Moscow also facilitated the transformation of the regime into an authoritarian police state.

### SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY: INTERVENING IN THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR

One could make an argument that the Cold War prolonged the civil war in Lebanon, which started in 1975. With the United States supporting Israel's involvement and the Soviet Union backing Syria, the

conflict in Lebanon quickly internationalized such that resolution proved to be almost impossible.

Syria was caught on the horns of a vexing dilemma when it came to Lebanon, evidenced by the fact that it switched sides during the war. Because of its historical ties to the Arab nationalist movement, the legitimacy of the Syrian state depended on a strident foreign policy. But the weakness of the state made pursuing an aggressive foreign policy perilous to the regime's stability, case in point being the devastating loss of the Golan Heights to the Israelis during the 1967 war.[12]

Soviet military and economic aid enabled Syria to take more aggressive stands against Israel and meddle in the civil war in Lebanon, without serious risks to the state or regime. In other words, this alliance helped leaders partially square the circle between an inherently fragile state and an assertive foreign policy.

Even with Soviet support, Hafez al-Assad followed a circumspect path in Lebanon, favoring policies that reinforced the state and eschewing policies that threatened stability. An example of this was how he approached the Palestinian cause in Lebanon. He wanted to preserve a Palestinian resistance for later bargaining with Israel, while balancing this against the risk that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) might lead to a total collapse of the Lebanese state, which
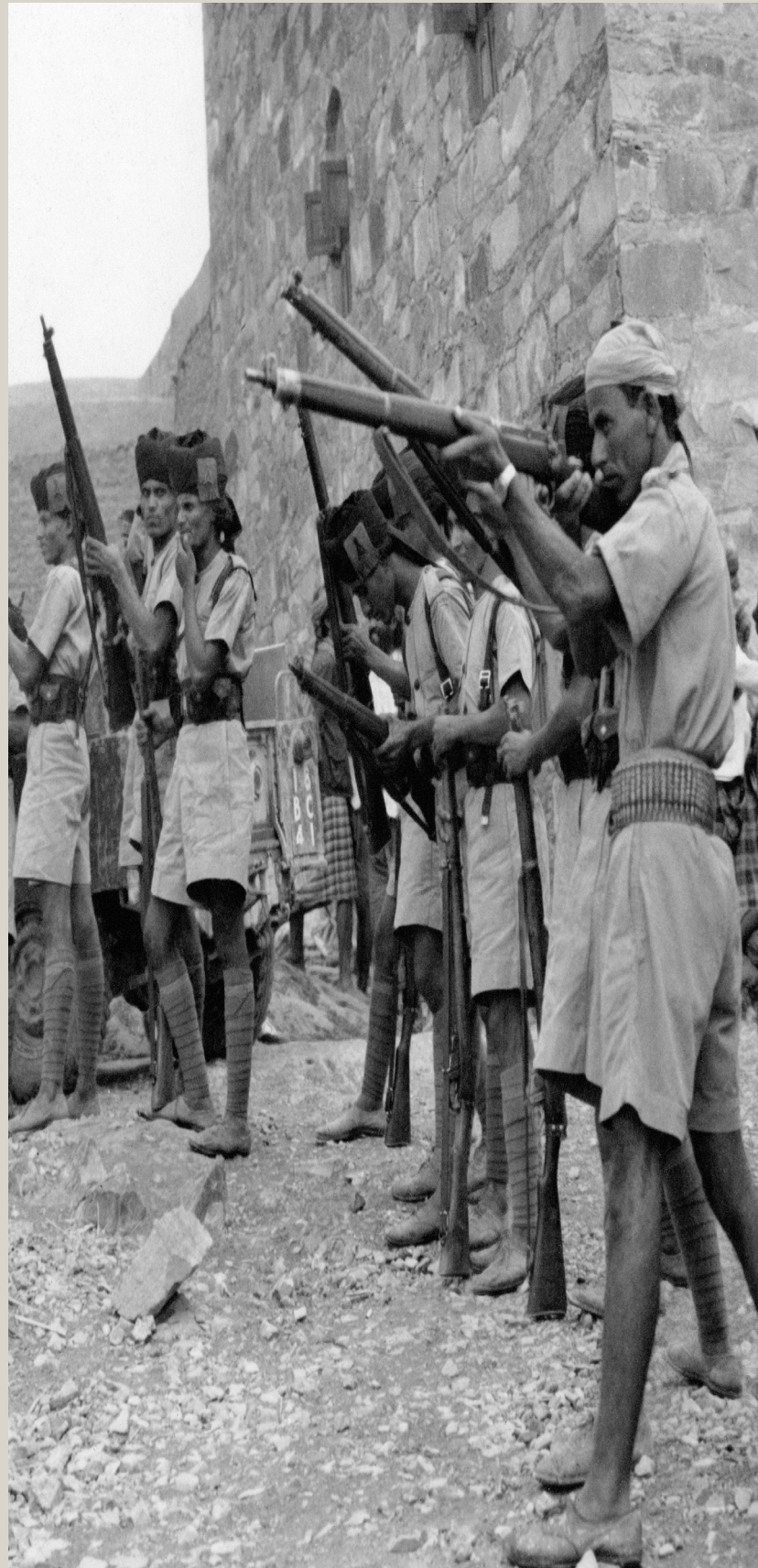
Yemeni fighters belonging to the South British protectorate train in the south of Yemen during the 1960s civil war. *(AFP/ Getty Images)*

could blow back to Syria.[13] To reduce this risk Hafez al-Assad fielded his own Palestinian force, as-Sai'qa, as a hedge against more independent PLO groups, such as Fatah and the even more radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The Soviet Union also had a direct effect on the civil war in Lebanon, by acting as a spoiler in efforts to end the fighting. In the zero-sum-game mentality of the Cold War, Moscow had an interest in pushing back against any Lebanese initiative to end the war that might redound to the advantage of the United States or its regional allies.[14]

EGYPT'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR

While Egypt had stronger political fundamentals than Syria, its domestic and foreign policy options were also heavily shaped by its alliance with the Soviet Union, which was forged after a failed attempt by Washington to strike an arms deal with Nasser. Moscow gave Egypt the military wherewithal to intervene in the 1960s civil war in Yemen on the side of the republicans, against the U.S.-backed Saudi and Jordanian support for the monarchists. While Egypt's involvement was inspired

by and became part of Nasser's pan-Arab agenda, the relationship with Moscow was instrumental. The Soviets were involved directly in activities like financing the building of the strategically important port of Hodeida (which today is seen as a fulcrum of the current Yemen civil war).[15]

Although it would be an oversimplification to paint the civil war in Yemen in the 1960s as simply a proxy war, as local actors willingly exploited and drew resources from the superpowers to prosecute their own agendas, the United States and the Soviet Union certainly played a role by helping regional actors like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, respectively, play out their ambitions vis-à-vis one another on the backs of a Yemeni civil conflict.[16]

REGIONAL DYNAMICS DURING THE COLD WAR

"Enlightened thinkers like Fénelon who believed in Europe's cultural unity feared that all wars between Europeans would become civil wars, because they were fought within the bounds of a community of fellow citizens who recognized one another as such."[17]

During much of the Cold War the Middle East was an Arab-centric region. One reason for this is that the Arab world quickly became contested by the United States and the Soviet Union, each staking out allies as part of the global power struggle. In contrast, non-Arab states Israel, Turkey, and Iran (until 1979) leaned hard towards the West.

This competition between the superpowers split the Arab world into two ideological camps. Allies of the Soviet Union saw themselves as part of a world-wide revolutionary struggle against what was viewed as Western hegemonic designs on the Middle East. This aligned with and reinforced the fiery revolutionary rhetoric of Egypt's President Nasser, who built his country's legitimizing formula on a stance of resistance against the West.[18] In contrast, the United States supported more ideologically conservative regimes, such as the monarchies of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as Israel.

This ideological framing had real consequences in Lebanon, where in the 1950s and 1960s Sunni Muslim groups inspired by Nasser reflected a growing pan-Arab sentiment, against the more conservative, Western-leaning, state-centric Maronite-controlled government. This set up the divisions of the first Lebanese civil war of 1958, which was fought over competing visions of Lebanon and the region. The Maronite Christian president advocated leaning towards the Western-orchestrated Baghdad Pact, while the Sunni Muslim prime minister was a supporter of the United Arab Republic, which from 1958-1961 represented Nasser's intent to unify Egypt and Syria under a single Arab nationalist banner. This split drew the Americans into Lebanon in 1958, setting up conditions for the longer civil war that started in 1975, which drew in both the United States and Soviet Union, and their allies Israel and Syria, respectively.

Asher Orkaby summarized eloquently how the Cold War, and particularly the United States, framed out regional struggles and local civil wars:

"President Dwight Eisenhower's Middle East policy, known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, supported and united the conservative Arab regimes of Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, placing them as an ideological counter to 'Nasserism.' By June 1957, Eisenhower succeeded in polarizing the Arab world and creating a 'royalist axis' of conservative regimes that were willing to counter and criticize Egypt and Syria. The 1958 coup

in Iraq and the U.S. military intervention in Lebanon conversely discredited U.S. intentions in the Middle East and strengthened Nasser as the anti-imperialist power."[19]

GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS AND CIVIL WARS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

"… an intrastate war may be interrupted by an external power or become internationalized."[20]

Any power equilibrium that existed between Soviet and American allies in the Middle East fell away with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The asymmetry became apparent very quickly, with U.S. allies Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey emerging from the Cold War period relatively unscathed, while former Soviet allies Syria, Iraq, Yemen (South), and Libya were handed tougher cards to play.

While the end of the Cold War wasn't a direct causal factor in these four countries succumbing to the Arab Spring and sliding into civil war two decades later, the loss of the Soviet patron put pressure on each of them that affected their capacity to cope with the social, economic, and political pressures that later came their way.

An Israeli military intelligence base (background) is pictured as Syrians return to the town of Quneitra in the Syrian Golan Heights. (*YOUSSEF KARWASHAN/AFP/Getty Images*)

THE EFFECT ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF FORMER SOVIET ALLIES

All countries in the region, including American allies, took a "strategic haircut" when the superpower competition came to an end. U.S. alliances in the Middle East had been largely forged as instruments of containing the Soviet Union. Though the containment imperative disappeared at the end of the Cold War, support for Israel, preserving access to oil, and the sunken costs associated with U.S. alliances in the Arab world, kept the United States tethered to its allies in the region.

But former Soviet allies in the region were disproportionally affected and left holding the bag. The effect of the end of the Cold War on the political-economy of these countries was almost immediate. With the loss of their benefactor in the form of the Soviet Union, weak states became weaker, as they saw their legitimizing principles dissipate.[21]

When the Soviet Union collapsed, it was clear that to avoid a legitimacy crisis the Syrian regime had to develop new internal sources of financial investment as a substitute for the loss of Soviet-era transfers.[22] This required a revision of the old social contract that had been maintained for decades by a sprawling public sector kept afloat with the help of the Soviet Union, and a private sector that had been gutted by the state in the 1960s with the concomitant rise of crony capitalism.

But there were difficult obstacles to overcome in transitioning to a new social contract, as the Syrian political-economy could not easily be shifted towards the private sector. There were valiant attempts, such as the passage of Investment Law 10 in the 1990s, which was an initiative to spur investment in key areas of the private sector, such as tourism and telecoms. But there were problems, such as economic drags associated with attempts to retire Soviet-era debt, an effort that began before the end of the Cold War.[23]

Another problem was that the compact by which the state provided subsidies for food to the lower and middle classes made escape from the old public-sector model impossible, at least not without risking serious instability. The regime was unable to widen its base of support by orienting the economy toward the private sector while still clinging to its traditional constituencies of the lower and middle classes.

Moreover, the reality of a crony capitalist class beholden to the state and the Assad family itself made a transition to a private sector system difficult. Instead, the administration of President Bashar al-Assad tried to forge a middle path, adopting a "social market" approach to economic and political governance.

But the sprawling public sector that had been created over the previous decades made successful adjustment to the new approach difficult. Instead of privatizing public-sector holdings to stimulate growth, the government merely tried to reform them, mostly unsuccessfully. There

was also the reality of regime distrust of an independent private sector, perhaps a hangover from the years of Soviet influence.

In sum, the rigid, praetorian nature of the Syrian state militated against successful adjustment to the shock of the Soviet collapse, particularly given its inability to access significant sources of foreign direct investment. A full transition from the old Ba'athist political-economy towards a hybrid social market approach risked unleashing competition between neo-liberalism and Islamism for the economy of Syria, something that could (and did) eventually lead to unrest.[24] The inability to strike a balance and the lingering effects of decisions made during the Soviet era made it difficult for the regime to respond to the drought that affected Syria from 2006-10, a factor that contributed to the slide into civil war in 2011.[25] The sclerotic state structure that was a legacy of the Cold War era proved incapable of responding effectively to the water shortage. And the climate refugees who had migrated to the major cities acted as kindling for the firestorm of the Arab Spring protests that beset Syria.

Shifting our gaze to the macro level, it seems clear that in the post-Cold War era, Syria was forced to choose between economic reform and regional security. To cope with regional isolation at the end of the Cold War, Syria felt compelled to strengthen its already strong ties with Iran.[26] But it couldn't square the circle of being allied with Iran and seeking capital investments from Western sources. While there was investment from the Gulf Arab states in a few projects, it wasn't enough to compensate for the shortfalls of the Syrian government's economic policies. One way to think about this is that the loss of its superpower patron put the Syrian regime in the unenviable position of having to forego its economic interests in favor of its security concerns.

It would be foolhardy to suggest that the Syrian civil war which started in 2011 was the result of these earlier post-Cold War adjustments. Syria's descent into conflict was a result of the contagion effect of the Arab Spring moment, the brutality of the regime, and the impact of drought. But it is also important not to discount the failure of the regime to adapt to changed economic circumstances as at least contributing to the fraying of the country's social contract. While neither the broader Arab Spring nor the Syrian civil war were solely a result of economic privation, they were both sparked by resistance to sclerotic regimes that limited the political and economic potential of newly energized populations. It wouldn't be reckless to say that the decisions the Assad regime confronted at the end of the Cold War limited the options it had to make needed adjustments and should be considered stress factors that affected the regime's capacity.

AMERICA'S UNIPOLARITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The U.S. started to flex its muscles even before the formal collapse of the Soviet Union. In the last gasps of the Cold War,

Moscow barely objected when the United States crossed the Kuwaiti border into Iraq in 1991 to chase down Saddam Hussein's much vaunted Republican Guard Corps, and pummeled Baghdad from the air in a bid to liberate Kuwait.[27] While this didn't directly lead to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States, it set the stage for the later invasion, which did ultimately lead to civil war.

It is useful to look at the overall strategic patterns of a U.S. running unopposed in the Middle East during this period. There were two phases to this unipolar moment. The first is "soft unipolarity," when the United States imposed a sort of Pax Americana on the region. This took the form of the Clinton administration's strategy of dual containment of both Iran and Iraq in the 1990s, which emerged in response to the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the need to contain an aggressive Saddam Hussein after his attempt to annex Kuwait in 1990. This approach of indirectly trying to shape the power dynamics of the Middle East gave way to more direct and "hard unipolarity" in the wake of 9/11, when the United States saw an opportunity to aggressively reorder the region in its own image. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the ultimatum issued to Damascus to withdraw Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005, were all part of this new "sharp-elbowed" approach.

These manifestations of unipolarity had a profound effect on the foreign policy calculations of former Soviet allies. Just as the end of the Cold War had a shock effect on their domestic politics, the reality of American unipolarity during this period played into their foreign policy calculus.[28] As fleeting of a moment as it might have been, U.S. dominance posed foreign policy challenges for Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

A RESISTANCE FRONT FORMS

In the realist tradition of international relations theory, imbalances of power within a system will lead to an adjustive response.[29] Once the Soviet Union collapsed, its former Middle Eastern allies had to contend with the resultant regional imbalance largely on their own.

Syria had already started hedging its bet on the Soviet Union before the formal end of the Cold War. To compensate for the poor hand Syria believed it was being dealt with an obviously weakening Soviet Union, Damascus forged closer ties with Washington, evidenced by its inclusion in the U.S.-led coalition that went to war against Iraq in 1990, participation in the Madrid peace conference in 1991, and subsequent negotiations with Israel.

But after 9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Damascus feared it might be next. The Syrians tried to weaken the United States position to avoid an attack by allowing Sunni Iraqi insurgents to cross over from Syria into Iraq to slow down the Americans. This and Syria's later forced expulsion from Lebanon by the United States after the assassination of Rafik Hariri

A Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah fighter flies the group's flag and carries a recoilless rifle, in a mountainous area around the Syrian town of Flita. (*LOUAI BESHARA/AFP/Getty Images*)

in 2005 pushed Damascus into a defensive crouch.[30] The loss of its Soviet patron, and the "hard" edge of American unipolarity, gave Syria the incentive to move closer to Iran as part of an axis of resistance.

It is important to note that the close relationship between Iran and Syria predated the end of the Cold War. It was in fact cemented shortly after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and was forged into a strategic partnership after Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, when Syria broke ranks with all its Arab brethren to back Tehran, in a bid to weaken Iraq's Saddam Hussein.[31] For Iran, Syria represented a toehold in the Arab world, and a conduit through which to offer material and logistical support for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

But that partnership was fortified and took on a whole new meaning at the end of the Cold War, particularly after 9/11. For Syria it was a need to break out of an isolation that could make it susceptible to an American attack following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and a desire to boost Syria's strategic relevance to Israel in a post-Soviet environment.

For Iran the resistance front was initially a defensive shield against efforts by the United States and Saudi Arabia to contain it, particularly after George W. Bush's "axis-of-evil" speech, and it was motivated by a need to develop a deterrence and retaliatory capability against an Israeli or U.S. attack.[32] After the United States became mired in Iraq, and after the Arab Spring started, Iran also saw an opportunity to use the alliance to further its broader interests in the region.

UNIPOLARITY AND THE RISE OF JIHADI INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Using Islam to target the perceived injustices of colonialism and other forms of international intervention has a precedent in the Middle East. In the Arab and Iranian experience mosques have long been the center of resistance against outsiders. In the cases of Egypt and Iran, the mosque as a source of resistance goes back to the late 19th century.

The Salafist jihadi international terror organizations that have arisen over previous decades grew out of some of the same ideological traditions as more mainstream groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.[33] But these new organizations used more violent means and sowed sectarian conflict as a way to challenge the identity boundaries of the region.[34]

In a way, al-Qaeda and ISIS can be thought of as another part of the "resistance front" targeting the asymmetry of power in the Middle East that favors the U.S. The belief is that the U.S. should be targeted, as it is an oppressor of the Muslim masses that props up Arab authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Some groups like ISIS also attack the colonial legacy, trying to erase the boundaries that were established in the aftermath of World War I. While it is a different kind of resistance front than the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, nonetheless these groups emerged to fight what they saw as the excesses of American unipolarity.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE ARAB REGIONAL ORDER

"… Countries located in 'bad neighborhoods' … are increasingly likely to experience armed conflict themselves, compared to a country located in a region that is predominately at peace."[35]

The emergence of a resistance axis in the Middle East after the Cold War as a counterweight to U.S. dominance created the contours of a new regional order. It wasn't an Arab-dominated regional order, as had been the case in the 1960s, but rather a broader system pitting U.S.-backed Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran, Syria, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Hezbollah, with Turkey at various points acting as a bridge between the two camps.[36]

Until the Arab Spring broke out, this emerging regional order could be described as a victimless rivalry between two opposing camps. The rivalry consisted of activities like Saudi Arabia and Israel lobbying Washington during the George W. Bush administration to take a hardened stance against Iran. Iran responded by using Hezbollah to undermine Saudi interests in Lebanon and the broader region. But for the most part the competition between these two camps was a jostling for regional power, not the lethal rivalry between two enemies it would later become. Eventually, the resistance front led by Iran and U.S.-backed Saudi Arabia would be on opposing sides as the civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq turned into broader proxy conflicts.

THE VERTICAL CONTAGION CIVIL WAR COMPLEX

There are two ways to think about the relationship between the post-Cold War regional order and the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. One is that the regional powers, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, jockeyed for position by backing different sides in the civil wars.

While this is one dynamic at play, regional power involvement in the civil wars was more complex than this one-dimensional proxy war view. In addition to the regional powers pushing themselves into the civil wars, they were pulled into these conflicts by a dynamic this author has labeled "vertical contagion."[37]

Much of the work on how civil wars spread describe "horizontal contagion" where the violence crosses state borders, based on factors like rebel groups operating in more than one country, terrorism, refugee flows, and arms transfers.[38] The Arab Spring phenomenon, where protests in Tunisia had a contagion effect on Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya, and the sequence of civil war outbreaks across the Arab world are examples of this phenomenon. Also, should the civil wars in Syria and Iraq spread to Jordan or Lebanon, this too would also be a form of horizontal contagion.

But vertical contagion involves the conflict spreading, not just laterally to neighboring fragile countries, but also upward to stronger regional powers. There are two levels on which to consider the phenomenon of vertical contagion. The first is how factors like the compression of time, the fog of war, and "bad neighborhood" effects have drawn in regional actors like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel. When we talk about contagion in this light, we aren't suggesting that the violence itself spreads to these major regional powers, but rather that the effects of the violence of the civil wars are imported into these countries in the form of refugees (to Turkey and Israel), the strengthening of hardliners (in Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia), and terrorist attacks (Iran and Turkey).

The second layer of vertical contagion is the most interesting part of this phenomenon and the most relevant to the prospects for ending the conflicts: The individual civil wars in Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Iraq have spawned a conflict at the regional level that is connected to, but also distinct from, the individual country-level wars. The dynamic of this kind of vertical contagion is that the individual country-level civil wars morph into a broader war among the major regional powers, where common interests in a stable and prosperous Middle East give way to a competition for regional dominance.[39]

Let's unpack this second type of vertical contagion a bit further. As stated previously, a new regional order started to emerge at the end of the Cold War. It started out as a bipolar structure pitting a resistance front led by Iran against U.S.-supported regional allies such as Saudi Arabia. Since that time, other regional actors, such as Turkey and Israel, have asserted themselves in this new regional order.

Vertical contagion means that the country-level civil wars have turned this struggle for power within the emerging regional order from a victimless rivalry into a destructive competition which has lethal implications for the entire Middle East. Unlike the country-level wars, where the battles are about who governs territory, the regional civil war is about which country asserts dominance over the region. In other words, the civil wars aren't just fueled by the regional order; they are in the process of shaping that order.

This analysis of vertical contagion, where the civil wars spread to engulf the region, has significance for the prospects of ending the current violence. It points to the reality that ending the country-level civil wars is not possible without disentangling what Wallensteen and Sollenberg have described as a "regional conflict complex."[40] In other words, without some form of cooperation between the regional actors, there is little likelihood of any kind of sustainable peace in the countries now embroiled in civil war, and any reconstruction efforts will prove to be futile.

UNIPOLARITY AND THE COUNTRY-LEVEL CIVIL WARS

Here we will look individually at the countries now in civil war, focusing on the role played by global and regional powers.

IRAQ: ORIGINAL SIN

In many ways Iraq was the first shot across the bow of resistance against the rise of American power. As the Cold War was

Yemeni army troops salute during a military parade in Sana'a on May 21, 2009, marking the 19th anniversary of Yemen's unification in May 1990. *(KHALED FAZAA/AFP/Getty Images)*

waning, Iraq's Saddam Hussein challenged the Western-backed political order in the region by invading Kuwait in the summer of 1990. Given that he had alienated almost all of the other regional and international powers, the Iraqi leader was isolated and this early attempt at resistance failed.

With the attacks on the U.S. homeland on September 11th, 2001, and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Washington showed it had developed zero tolerance for a posture of resistance.

The connection between the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the civil war that ensued is clear. Not only was the regime of Saddam Hussein toppled, but the entire Iraqi state was collapsed. De-Ba'athification and the dismantlement of the military essentially removed the pillars that had held the country together, sending disenfranchised Sunnis into the opposition, and plunging the country into civil war.

Had the United States worked to prevent disenfranchisement on the part of the Sunnis, the worst of the violence that broke out in Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul might have been forestalled.[41] While a different approach to the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq might have prevented this crisis, once unleashed the forces of disunity took on an inexorable life of their own.

The effect of the Iraqi conflict was profound in other ways too. The invasion of Iraq unleashed a violent Sunni response, from which al-Qaeda benefited and ISIS emerged. While ISIS came late to the game in Iraq and Syria, it certainly added to the complexity of the conflict, drawing in the United States and Turkey. Once ISIS turned towards Iraq from Syria in 2014, capturing Mosul and large swaths of Anbar Province, the civil wars in Syria and Iraq became in many ways a single battlefield.

The vertical contagion phenomenon introduced in the previous section was evident in the civil war in Iraq as well. After the U.S. invasion, Iran was drawn into Iraq, taking advantage of an opportunity to extend its influence into the Arab world, but also to counter a threat from ISIS, which was poised to gobble up large swaths of Iraqi territory. Saudi Arabia also has recently re-engaged with Iraq as part of its struggle with Iran for the heart and soul of the Middle East. Turkey, too, was pulled into the civil war vortex, intervening to attack the Kurdistan Workers' Party (or PKK) in the north of the country, coddle the Kurds friendly to Ankara in the Kurdistan Regional Government, and have the Shi'i-led government in Baghdad take account of Turkey's regional interests and ambitions. The results of Iraq's May 2018 elections indicate a desire on the part of Iraqis to remain neutral in this struggle.

SYRIA: GROUND ZERO

The rising star of the Shi'i majority in Iraq after the U.S. invasion and the disenfranchisement of the country's Sunni minority wasn't lost on the Sunni majority in Syria, which since 1970 has been governed by leaders from the Alawite Shi'i sect. And it also wasn't lost on Saudi Arabia and Turkey,

which initially saw the Syrian civil war as an opportunity to try to reclaim leadership of the Arab world from Shi'i Iran.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 had a demonstration effect on Syria. Even though it was widely thought that Syria's inclusion in the resistance front against a U.S.-dominated regional order made it immune to the fate that had beset many other Arab states, Syria showed that the civil wars hit Arab countries, irrespective of which side of the new regional order they were on.

The moment of American unipolarity in the Middle East had an impact on the Syrian civil war in other ways too. The departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005 under pressure from the U.S. put added stress on the Syrian system. Its corrupt intelligence service, which had been exploiting Lebanon for decades, now turned its sights on towns in rural areas of Syria, sparking discontent and eroding the base of support for the regime. It was the rural areas where the first demonstrations broke out in 2011 that would ultimately lead to civil war

Syria's eviction from Lebanon by the U.S. had another effect on the civil war that would follow. A line can be drawn between the release of the Damascus Declaration, a joint statement issued in October 2005 by members of the Syrian opposition pushing for reform and disengagement from Lebanon, and the Syria civil war.[42] Many of the signatories ended up forming the Syrian National Council in 2011, which became a focal point of the opposition in the early days of the war.[43]

In terms of vertical contagion, Syria has drawn in all regional and international actors, including Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, as well as the United States and Russia. In many ways Syria has become ground zero of the regional battle. While it appears that Iran has the upper hand in Syria due to the lack of any significant opposition to the Assad regime, parts of the country are likely to remain contested for some time. Turkey is still playing a role, and one of the biggest wildcards for Syria is the relationship between Iran and Israel. The possibility that these two countries could do battle on the back of the Syrian civil war underscores the degree of uncertainty about Syria's future.

LIBYA: HERMIT STATE

Other Arab states had their own strategic imperatives and responses to U.S. unipolarity. Libya, which had alienated most of its regional neighbors, found itself isolated at the end of the Cold War. This contrasts with Syria, which multiplied its power through an alliance with Iran and Hezbollah. Tripoli's response was to essentially switch sides from the resistance front to the United States and relinquish all remnants of its fledgling nuclear program.

In Libya, the connection between the end of the Cold War and the change in the country's foreign policy is clear, though a direct link to the civil war is more difficult to establish. Moammar Gaddafi's agreement to relinquish his weapons of mass destruction

after 9/11 certainly was connected to the rise of American "hard unipolarity." This, in turn, made possible the NATO military action that was taken against the regime. But it was the broader themes of the Arab Spring and a desire for Gaddafi's removal that sparked the uprisings in Libya.

YEMEN: SHOTGUN WEDDING

In Yemen, the end of the Cold War coincided with the unification of North and South. While the Soviets began winding down their support for South Yemen (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, or PDRY), Salim al-Beidh from South Yemen and Ali Abdullah Saleh from the North (the Yemen Arab Republic) began discussing unification, which was consummated in 1990. According to Charles Dunbar, who was the U.S. ambassador to Sana'a at the time, because of Moscow's changed attitudes towards Eastern Europe and elsewhere, the leadership in the South felt compelled to strike the best deal with the North possible.[44]

But it is important not to make too deterministic an argument about the causal link between the end of the Cold War and Yemen's unification in 1990. First, the unity ultimately collapsed into civil war in 1994. Second, local actors had considerable agency. Despite the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the PDRY and the Soviet Union, Ali Nasser Mohammed, who presided over South Yemen from

1980-1986, showed an interest in rebuilding relations with the United States, which had been broken since the 1967 war. In other words, even before the end of the Cold War, South Yemen was becoming less ideologically rigid.

Today, Yemen is playing into the vertical contagion vortex through Saudi Arabia's belief that this conflict represents an epic, existential battle between itself and Iran. The logic is that while Iran may have won the strategic advantage through the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, that pattern needs to be broken on the Arabian Peninsula. Even though Saudi Arabia and the UAE may be shadowboxing against Iran in Yemen, the regional civil war is evident in this battle. The idea of a regional conflict complex identified previously also pertains here, where the regional and local civil wars are intertwined.

AFGHANISTAN: GENESIS

At the end of the Cold War, the United States, which had used Pakistan as a conduit for arming the anti-Soviet *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, essentially downgraded its relationship with Islamabad and turned its sights away from Afghanistan. Steve Coll argues that former Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah, who served at the end of the Soviet occupation and until the Taliban took over in 1992, saw the handwriting on the wall that the Americans had moved on.

"[He] could see the future, but there was no one to listen. He had lost his Soviet patrons, and he was discredited and desperate. … and Washington had just announced a new policy: hands off."[45]

Moreover, the United States had walked away from Pakistan, enabling Islamabad to get more involved in Afghanistan, backing different factions of the mujahideen. These different factions ultimately went to war against one another.

By 1992, it was clear for all to see that Kabul would fall to the Taliban. And the series of events after the Taliban took over, including the attacks of 9/11 hatched in the Afghan mountains by al-Qaeda, drew the United States in to rout the terror organization and topple the Taliban, plunging the country into a new phase of civil war.

MULTIPOLARITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"As is now clear, the end of the Cold War produced a unipolar moment, not a unipolar era."[46]

In this paper we have tried to demonstrate how the Middle East adjusted to the reality of American unipolarity, and to explore how this adds some context to our understanding of civil wars. We have also looked at how this unipolar moment led to a reordering of the region at the end of the Cold War, and how this set up a struggle for power that is playing out now in the civil wars in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Libya.

The historical period when the United States was ascendant in the region was but a fleeting moment. The international system and the Middle East have already made the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity.

This happened for a couple of reasons. First, the U.S. became mired in Afghanistan and Iraq, breaking the ideological certainty that Washington could fashion the Middle East in its own image. This led to at least a perception among regional actors that the United States was retrenching from the Middle East, a view that was reinforced by President Barack Obama's stated intention to "pivot to Asia."[47]

Second, the entrance of Russia into Syria in 2015 turned what had been a unipolar moment into a new geopolitical reality of multipolarity, with Russia aligning itself with the resistance front of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. Moscow saw Syria as an opportunity to push back against a pattern of hapless U.S.-led efforts to topple regimes, from Afghanistan and Iraq to Libya, correcting for the imbalance that had been created by the end of the Cold War.[48]

And with the U.S. having impetuously withdrawn in 2018 from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the Iran nuclear deal is officially known, Russia has assumed a capability previously monopolized by the United States, which is the power to convene. Even though Moscow has thrown its weight behind Iran and Syria, as the new kingmaker it has some sway with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Because of these relationships it has been working

Libyan forces loyal to the Government of National Accord (GNA) keep watch from a position south of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. *(MAHMUD TURKIA/AFP/Getty Images)*

to manage tensions between Israel and Iran, Turkey and Iran, and possibly even Iran and Saudi Arabia, tensions that need to be mitigated if the civil wars besetting the Arab order are to be wound down.

In addition to Russia, this multipolar environment also includes other influencers in the Middle East. China and the European Union, while less involved in the region than the United States and Russia on security matters, do nevertheless play a role as well. Europe sees the Middle East as strategically important because of issues related to energy, refugees, and terrorism, all of which originate in this region. And China sees the Middle East as a critical part of its Belt and Road Initiative and a supplier for its energy needs.

TOWARDS ENDING CIVIL WARS

How is this discussion about the role the global order played in conflicts in the Middle East relevant for ending the civil wars today? There has been a strategic shift in that the global powers can no longer take a cavalier attitude toward the security and economic issues of the Middle East. During the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union could meddle in the region and even sow civil conflict, with little concern that these actions could redound to their own security issues. Today that has changed, as the Middle East is both a recipient of and contributor to international politics. What starts in the Middle East quickly globalizes, meaning that instability in the region affects the security of all states in the international system, in the form of refugees, terrorism, and oil prices.

The fact that the security and economic interests of the great powers are linked to what happens in the Middle East should be a positive development, creating an alignment between what is best for the region and what is good for the global powers. It should open pathways for the settlement of conflicts and reconstruction, in contrast to the negative externalities of vertical contagion.[49]

There are two possible approaches to how international powers, like the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union, might involve themselves in trying to end the civil wars. One is a model of directly intervening. This is the approach currently being pursued by Russia, which has tipped the scales in the Syrian civil war toward the government of Bashar al-Assad. The U.S. also has followed this approach in the northeast part of Syria, where it has been battling ISIS.

But Moscow has augmented its direct approach in Syria with an indirect initiative, where it is working with regional stakeholders to bring the war to an end. It is trying to break the destructive vortex of vertical contagion by coming down hard on the side of Bashar al-Assad, and publicly defending this tilt by touting the principle of sovereignty. But this ground level involvement is being augmented by the Astana process, whereby Russia is working with regional powers Turkey and Iran to deescalate the conflict zones in Syria, an imperfect process given the complexities on the ground, particularly the potential for Iran and Israel to clash in Syria.

Given that the regional powers, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel, hold direct sway over the civil wars in the Middle East, the model of working to forge compromise among them is sound and should be expanded beyond Syria. One approach for the future would be for the international community to work with the regional powers on some type of security architecture.[50]

While it is unlikely to emerge with civil wars still raging, such an arrangement could become viable after the violence ends to prevent a relapse, which occurs in about 50% of the countries that experience civil war. Such a regional architecture could also work to break the cycle of vertical contagion and the regional conflict complex, whereby major regional players work counterproductively and at cross-purposes with each other in the countries in civil war.[51]

The Trump administration's approach contrasts with a regional cooperation model. Instead of working to quiet the region, Trump is taking sides, using Israel and Saudi Arabia as cudgels against Iran. The problem with this kind of an approach is that it is likely to stoke rather than quiet the civil wars in the region.[52] It gives Iran an incentive to spread its tentacles further into the Arab heartland to create deterrence against a possible U.S. or Israeli attack, and to give it a retaliatory capability should such an attack occur. Rather than pushing Iran to play a constructive regional role from its current position of strength, this approach will force it into a threat-induced defensive crouch, something that will strengthen

hardliners in Tehran, and likely pit Iran's own national interests against the interests of the broader region.

Another problem with this approach is that it could lead to a ratcheting up of the regional conflict in the Middle East, the result being greater conflict and polarization between the regional actors.[53] This will come about if the U.S. continues to close ranks with Israel and Saudi Arabia, and Russia and Iran do the same to deprive the United States of influence in the region in a zero-sum fashion.

CONCLUSION

The end of the Cold War didn't just create a global imbalance, it led to a concomitant shift in the distribution of power in the Middle East, where U.S. allies were emboldened, and erstwhile Soviet allies saw their domestic and foreign power challenged. Countries like Syria and Iraq had their political and economic legitimacy tested and were forced to face the consequences of losing their superpower benefactor. This fragility was one factor that made these already tenuous states vulnerable to domestic unrest, particularly given the momentum of Arab Spring forces.

But another way in which this period contributed to the civil wars was in the alliances that formed in response to a moment of unipolarity. The rebalancing that took place in the region, with the emergence of a resistance front consisting of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah against a U.S-dominated political order, changed the

balance of power in the region and created two opposing camps, which ultimately competed in and perpetuated the Arab civil wars. And as the wars at the country level unfolded, vertical contagion occurred which created a regional conflict complex.[54]

The period of American unipolarity is long over, and we are now in an era of multipolarity. The question going forward will be can Russia and the United States, along with Europe and China, coalesce to help bring the civil wars to an end and help the region transition from chaos to stability. While the Trump administration makes this unlikely in the short term, it should be the vision for the future.

ENDNOTES

1. T. David Mason, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, and Alyssa K. Prorok "What Do We Know About Civil Wars? Introduction and Overview" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 313.

2. Samir Amin takes the Latin American-originated "dependencia" or dependence theory of international political-economy and applies it to the Arab world in "Les Effets Structurels De L'intégration Internationale Des Économies Précapitalistes." *Une Étude Théorique Du Mécanisme Qui a Engendré Les Économies Dites Sous Développées* (Paris: Université de Paris, 1957), and in *The Law of Value and Historical Materialism* (London: Harvester, 1977).

3. For an example of this logic, see Robin Wright, "How the Curse of Sykes-Picot Still Haunts the Middle East," *The New Yorker* (April 30th, 2016).

4. Erika Forsberg "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 1913. She claims that conflict issues become complex, drawing in a number of external actors.

5. Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his Rivals*, 1958-1970, 3rd Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

6. See Efraim Karsh, "Influence through Arms Supplies: The Soviet Experience in the Middle East," *Conflict Quarterly* (Winter 1986).

7. See Yevgeny Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present* (Basic Books: 2009), p.10. He argues that there was a significant deviation between Soviet-style communism and Nasser's Arab socialism: where the former was built on class, the latter was not. But is hard to deny the ideological ripple effect of the Russian revolution and the Soviet Union on socialist movements, from Nasser's Arab nationalism to the Syrian and Iraq Ba'ath parties.

8. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no.1 (2012) 95-113.

9. See John F. Devlin, *Syria: Modern State in an Ancient Land* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983) 81-2.

10. See Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012).

11. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *The American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (August 2010), 416.

12. See Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) for the most in-depth analysis of the legitimacy problems that have plagued Arab countries since independence.

13. See Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation," in *International Organization* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1984) and Itamar Rabinovich *The War for Lebanon: 1970-1985, Revised Edition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) for Syria's motivation for entering the Lebanese civil war. Also, Guy Laron, *The Six Day War: The Breaking of the Middle East* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017).

14. For the story about how the Soviets acted as a spoiler in Lebanon, see Elie A. Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), who was foreign minister in Lebanon from 1982-4.

15. Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

16. William Harris, *Quicksilver War: Syria, Iraq and the Spiral of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) Kindle Location 271.

17. David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History of Ideas* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

18. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012): 95-113.

19. Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20-21.

20. Joseph K. Young, "Antecedents of Civil War Onset: Greed, Grievance, and State Repression," in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 799.

21. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells,"International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *The American Political Science Review*, 104, no. 3 (August 2010), 421.

22. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012), 97.

23. I want to thank Abdallah Dardari, former deputy prime minister of Syria from 2005-11, who provided insights about the attempts to retire the Soviet-era debt, as well as Sami Moubayed, a Damascus-based academic who has written extensively on the political-economy of Syria.

24. Ibid, 98.

25. I want to thank Robert Ford, U.S. ambassador to Syria from 2010-14 (and a contributor to this series of papers), for his insights about the refugees from the drought, who set up shantytowns outside Damascus and became a factor in the uprisings of 2011.

26. David Wallsh, "Syrian Alliance Strategy in the Post-Cold-War Era: The Impact of Unipolarity," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 37, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 108.

27. Roger E. Kanet, "The Superpower Quest for Empire: The Cold War and Soviet Support for 'Wars of National Liberation'," *Cold War History*, 6, no. 3 (August 2006): 343. Also, see Graham E. Fuller, "Moscow and the Gulf War," *Foreign Affairs*, (Summer 1991).

28. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *The American Political Science Review*, 104, no. 3 (August 2010), 427.

29. See Hans J. Morganthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993).

30. I want to thank former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford for his invaluable insights into how Syria changed its foreign policy calculus after 2005 and details on how Syria secreted Iraqi insurgents across the border to Iraq.

31. For a discussion of this partnership and how it was forged, see Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 11-58.

32. Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2009), 292.

33. See Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) for an excellent analysis of the evolution of the Brotherhood.

34. See Michael W.S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), chapter 1.

35. Erika Forsberg, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 1760

36. Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East,* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2009) chapter 4.

37. Ross Harrison, "Regionalism in the Middle East," *Orient*, 1 (2018), 10-11.

38. Erika Forsberg, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 1805.

39. For a portrayal of this "regional war," see Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2017)

40. See Erika Forsberg "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 1901. She has described and analyzed this "regional conflict complex," which she draws from Peter Wallenstein and Margareta Sollenberg "Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes: 1989-97, *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 5, (September 1998).

41. Discussion with Robert Ford, former U.S. Ambassador to Syria, and also Political Counselor to the U.S. Embassy, Baghdad, Iraq, 2004-6.

42. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012), 100.

43. "The Damascus Declaration" Carnegie Middle East Center, March 1, 2012, http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/48514?lang=en

44. See Charles Dunbar, "The Unification of Yemen: Process, Politics and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 3 (Summer 1992), 463.

45. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10th, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), chapter 12.

46. Graham Allison, "The Myth of the Liberal Order: From Historical Accident to Conventional Wisdom," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2018).

47. Stephen P. Cohen and Robert Ward, "Asia Pivot: Obama's Ticket Out of the Middle East?", *Brookings*, August 21st, 2013,

48. See Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict", *The American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (August 2010).

49. See Erika Forsberg "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Kindle Version location 2040.

50. See Ross Harrison "Toward a Regional Framework for the Middle East: Takeaways from other Regions" in Ross Harrison and Paul Salem (eds), *From Chaos to Cooperation: Towards Regional Order in the Middle East,* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2017).

51. See Erika Forsberg "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

52. See Erika Forsberg "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)

53. Hal Brands, *The Limits of Offshore Balancing*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2015).

54. See Erika Forsberg "Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness" in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

Cover Photo: An opposition fighter fires a gun from a village near al-Tamanah during ongoing battles with government forces in Syria's Idlib province. *(OMAR HAJ KADOUR/AFP/Getty Images)*

Photo 2: Syrian children write during class in a barn that has been converted into a makeshift school to teach internally displaced children from areas under government control, in a rebel-held area of Daraa, in southern Syria. *(MOHAMAD ABAZEED/ AFP/Getty Images)*

Photo 3: A picture taken on February 15, 2018 shows a view of destroyed buildings along the seaside promenade of Libya's eastern city of Benghazi near the Benghazi courthouse where demonstrations first broke out in February 2011. *(ABDULLAH DOMA/ AFP/Getty Images)*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allison, Graham. "The Myth of the Liberal Order: From Historical Accident to Conventional Wisdom." *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2018.

Amin, Samir. *Les Effets Structurels De L'intégration Internationale Des Économies Précapitalistes. Une Étude Théorique Du Mécanisme Qui a Engendré Les Économies Dites Sous Développées*. Paris: Université de Paris, 1957.

Armitage, David. *Civil Wars: A History of Ideas*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

Devlin, John F. *Syria: Modern State in an Ancient Land*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1983.

Dunbar, Charles. "The Unification of Yemen: Process, Politics and Prospects." *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer 1992).

Goodarzi, Jubin M. *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East.* London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2009.

Harris, William. *Quicksilver War: Syria, Iraq and the Spiral of Conflict.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Harrison, Ross and Salem, Paul (eds). *From Chaos to Cooperation: Towards Regional Order in the Middle East.* Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2017.

Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88:1 (2012).

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

Kalyvas, Stathis N. and Balcels, Laia. "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (August 2010).

Kerr, Malcolm. *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Lawson, Fred H. "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation." *International Organization*, Volume 38, No. 3 (Summer 1984).

Lynch, Marc. *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East.* New York: Public Affairs, 2017.

Mason, T. David and McLaughlin, Sara (eds). *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

Morganthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1993.

Orkaby, Asher. *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Primakov, Yevgeny. *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present.* New York: Basic Books, 2009.

Rabinovich, Itamar. *The War for Lebanon: 1970-1985*, Revised Edition. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Salem, Elie A. *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1995.

Wallenstein, Peter and Sollenberg, Margareta. "Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes: 1989-97." *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 35, No. 5. (September 1998).

Walsh, David. "Syrian Alliance Strategy in the Post-Cold-War Era: The Impact of Unipolarity." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer 2013).

Wright, Robin. "How the Curse of Sykes-Picot Still Haunts the Middle East." *The New Yorker* (April 30th, 2016).

ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE

The Middle East Institute is a center of knowledge dedicated to narrowing divides between the peoples of the Middle East and the United States. With over 70 years' experience, MEI has established itself as a credible, non-partisan source of insight and policy analysis on all matters concerning the Middle East. MEI is distinguished by its holistic approach to the region and its deep understanding of the Middle East's political, economic and cultural contexts. Through the collaborative work of its three centers—Policy & Research, Arts & Culture and Education—MEI provides current and future leaders with the resources necessary to build a future of mutual understanding.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ross Harrison is a non-resident senior fellow at MEI and is on the faculty of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. From 2007-2013, he was professor in the practice of international affairs at Georgetown, serving as chair of the international commerce and business concentration in the Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) program. Ross is also on the faculty of the political science department at the University of Pittsburgh, teaching courses in Middle East politics. He annually teaches a course on strategy and international security to senior Georgian government officials at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in Tbilisi, Georgia, funded by the U.S. Department of State.

Harrison authored Strategic Thinking in 3D: A Guide for National Security, Foreign Policy and Business Professionals (Potomac Books, 2013), which currently is a required strategy text at the U.S. National War College. Related to the book release, he has lectured at the U.S. Department of State, the National War College and National Defense University, Georgetown University, and the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies. He has also been published in policy-related outlets such as The National Interest, Al Monitor, The Middle East Journal, and Parameters (the U.S. Army War College Journal). Harrison lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife Mahnaz.