The Rise of Violent Transnational Movements in the Middle East
Historical Context, Dynamic Drivers and Policy Takeaways

Follow MEI:

@MiddleEastInst

/MiddleEastInstitute

/user/middleastinstitute

The Rise of Violent Transnational Movements in the Middle East

Historical Context, Dynamic Drivers and Policy Takeaways

Paul Salem

Abbreviations

F.L.N.   National Liberation Front

I.M.F.   International Monetary Fund

MENA   Middle East and North Africa

O.E.C.D.   Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

P.L.O.   Palestinian Liberation Organization

V.T.M.   Violent Transnational Movement

Contents

Summary

The conditions that brought about the rise and spread of violent transnational movements in the Middle East are complex and have been long in the making. In order to address the existence of V.T.M.s, the region must address the political and socio-economic challenges that provide the space for such groups to arise, foremost the lack of strong and legitimate state structures. This paper strives to provide the necessary historical and theoretical context in order to understand the enablers of V.T.M.s in today's Middle East. Within this contextualized framework, the paper proceeds to consider strategies to reverse the V.T.M. trend.

Key Findings

♦ V.T.M.s flourish within failing and broken states. The modern Arab world has seen political, socio-economic and cultural contradictions tear several states apart. This has provided a breeding ground for radical alternative movements to take root and grow.

♦ The failure of most states to provide a widely convincing basis for their legitimacy and the socio-political contract they offer, and the decline into unequal development and authoritarianism, has enabled non state actors to successfully appeal to disenchanted populations.

♦ Key developments, particularly those of 1979 and 2003, accelerated the rise of V.T.M.s. These included the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the US-Saudi response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the US-led invasion of Iraq.

♦ Weakening, and ultimately defeating, V.T.M.s requires policies broader than direct military action. This should include ending civil wars and standing up failed states; de-escalating regional proxy tensions and stabilizing regional relations; and investing in longer term governance and socio-economic inclusion and development.

Introduction[1]

Violent transnational movements are not unique to the Middle East nor to this epoch in history, but it is fair to say that the contemporary Middle East hosts an exceptionally high concentration.[2] This essay will examine some of the historical dynamics and systemic conditions that have brought us to the point we are at today, and suggest a way forward. The complex conditions that enable and encourage the rise of V.T.M.s vary, both in levels and sectors. This includes the meta-level of international and regional order or disorder, the macro-level of states and their health or breakdown, the meso-level of subnational communities, and the micro-level of the individual.[3] Factors that enable or encourage V.T.M.s typically include

> **The complex conditions that enable the rise of V.T.M.s vary, both in levels and sectors**

an array of political, socio-economic, and ideological or cultural factors. Some are 'push' factors that render individuals or groups susceptible to V.T.M. recruitment, others are pull factors that turn that susceptibility into a radicalized and mobilized reality.[4] While a wide range of pull and push factors, at various levels and from various sectors, can be identified as contributing to this phenomenon, no constellation of factors works in the same way across different contexts. What might produce a powerful V.T.M. in one place and time, might not in another context. Understanding the rise and fall of V.T.M.s remains more of an approximate practical art than a fixed science.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. In the first, I will examine key turning points in contemporary Middle Eastern history that might help explain why the rise of V.T.M.s has become so prevalent in this part of the world. In the second section, I will engage with the general literature about the factors and drivers that explain the rise of V.T.M.s, and look for particular angles and insights that might enable a keener understanding of this phenomenon in the Arab world. In the final section, I will suggest broad policy outlines that are consistent with the findings of the preceding two sections.

A Note on Terms and Concepts

This study examines the rise of violent transnational movements, V.T.M.s. By describing them as movements, we are acknowledging that these groups, radical as they are, define themselves as movements with fairly clearly defined political or ideological goals. Organized violence, war, civil war, even terrorism, is the continuation of politics by other means. Understanding the political logic and context of these movements is key to understanding how to weaken and defeat them. The *transnational* aspect of the largest and most dangerous of these groups indicates their complex relationship with the vulnerabilities and failures of the modern nation-state system in the Arab world. Some V.T.M.s contest the definition of a nation and the borders that make them, while others accept borders, but contest political orders—i.e. the nature and identity of the state, with some actors seeking to ethnically cleanse the space within their defined borders to conform to their desired order. All are at war with some aspect of the nation-state system that has precariously persisted over the past decades. The transnational label also implies, of course, that they are *non-state* actors; even if some are *backed* by states, and others claim to *be* states.

> **Terrorism is one of the tools at their disposal, not an identity or end in itself**

The descriptor 'violent' indicates, first of all, that these are *armed* non-state actors violating the state's monopoly on the use of force. But it also suggests a more ambiguous implication: that they are excessive or particularly wanton in their use of force. All armed non-state actors instrumentalize violence in some manner. Some use it in a limited tactical way, while others use violence, and spectacular, deliberately excessive violence, as a strategy. But for none of the groups is violence an end in itself. It is a means—whether used extravagantly or parsimoniously—to achieve the broader political or socio-religious goal in pursuit.[5]

And this brings us to the analytically troublesome category of terrorist groups. No members of so-designated groups define themselves as 'terrorists,' and hence it is difficult to gain much analytical advantage from trying to understand these groups in these terms. Each is a distinct movement with fairly distinct political (in the broad sense) goals. Use of large-scale violence against civilians—in other words, terrorism—is one of the tools at their disposal,

not an identity or an end in itself. In addition, while there is broad international agreement about some V.T.M.s being designated as terrorist groups—e.g. ISIS and al-Qaeda—there is significant disagreement about other V.T.M.s: Hezbollah or the P.K.K., for example.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ENABLING CONDITIONS

As Bruce Hoffman writes in his seminal *Inside Terrorism*, it is important to understand the growth of terrorist groups and V.T.M.s within their *historical* context.[6] Hoffman does so in regard to the emergence of terrorism as a tool of politics from ancient times, through the French Revolution's La Terreur, the Anarchists that helped unleash World War I, all the way to the contemporary struggle with Islamic, neo-Nazi white supremacist and other violent movements. Raymond Hinnebusch, in his study of the international politics of terrorism also warns against the dangers of an ahistorical approach.[7] In Part One of this essay, I will examine various contributing factors to the rise of V.T.M.s in the Middle East within a historical lens. This is to gain a deeper understanding of the particular conditions and drivers that led to the emergence of these movements, and to appreciate the complexity of finding long-term responses to them.

LOW NATION-STATE LEGITIMACY

The problem of violent transnational movements is posed primarily in contrast to a presumed Westphalian state system ideal: sovereignty is to be concentrated in discreet nation-states, and violence is to be monopolized by the state, while transnational mobilization or use of force is to be forsworn.[8] The problem of low nation-state legitimacy started early in the Arab world, and the state system setup after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I came under attack in the ensuing decades from four separate ideological directions. *Islamists* decried the division of the *Umma*, the abolishing of the caliphate, and the establishment of states on a geographic, linguistic or ethnic basis. *Arab nationalists* welcomed the collapse of the old Islamic order, but decried the division of the Arab world into what they perceived as illegitimate mini-states, and fought for a united Arab nation. *Anti-colonialists* saw the illegitimacy of the new states in their subservience to colonial masters, and fought to overthrow them for that reason. *Leftists* and *communists* saw the new states as entrenching

local landowner and capitalist elites in league with first world capitalism against the interests of the peasant and working classes.

State elites fought back with various attempts to boost state legitimacy. Some appealed to an ancient past—e.g. pharaonic in the case of Egypt, Phoenician in the case of Lebanon—to claim a nationalist basis for statehood. Appeal was also made to the trappings of constitutional monarchy, for example in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, in which local elites inherited a British model that marries the pomp and circumstance of monarchy with the electoral, parliamentary and prime ministerial institutions of Westminster-style government. Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia inherited a more straightforward republican model from the French whose legitimacy was tied directly to elections and democratic institutions.[9] Other countries, to varying degrees, used a combination of monarchy and religion as legitimating factors, with a wide variation between Morocco in the West, the Wahhabi-Saud alliance in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, and various local tribal arrangements in the small Arab Gulf States.

But the Arab countries never arrived at one broad collective legitimizing principle. Egypt under Gamal Abd al-Nasser, and with the support of a wide array of Arab nationalists and leftists, sought to create a unified, or at least united, Arab order led by Egypt with anti-colonialist, Arab nationalist, and socialist principles as its overarching legitimizing narrative. This attempt was thwarted by conservative powers such as Saudi Arabia, and the Egyptian defeat in war with Israel in 1967.[10] The defeat undermined the idea of the Arab nation as capable of unified action and undermined the idea of the state as able to achieve national goals. The repercussions of the 1967 defeat gave legitimacy to armed non-state actors like the P.L.O. It also undermined the secular Arab nationalist narrative in favor of the Islamist narrative that began to gain more ground after the 1967 defeat. Arab state legitimacy generally declined over the 1970s and 1980s as the sheen of anti-colonial victories won after World War II and the promise of state-led progress gave way to the realities of entrenched authoritarian systems and sluggish economic growth. Some authoritarian systems, like Mubarak's Egypt, made a few concessions to façade democracy to shore up their legitimacy, while other regimes like Saddam's Iraq or Assad's Syria doubled down on repression.

One can say that for a moment very early in the Arab uprisings in 2011, there was a glimmer of promise, or an illusion, that perhaps a pro-democracy movement might transform the region and become the new legitimizing principle, as it had swept Eastern Europe after the Cold War, or Latin America in previous decades. But that illusion soon faded, to be followed by a counter-illusion among Islamists that perhaps the Muslim Brotherhood would sweep

elections in several key Arab countries, and with support from a then rising Turkey, and Qatar, could bring about a new Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Islamist regional order.[11] This illusion also soon ran aground.

The Arab state system, in other words, has never had, in its century-long modern history, a consistent overarching legitimizing principle. Nor is there one today, with the new logic being that it is better to have authoritarian government than chaotic state collapse and civil war, which some attempts at democratization have wrought in the region.

The low levels of ideological legitimacy were compounded by generally poor performance on several key governance indicators. Public services declined as public resources failed to keep up with ballooning populations amidst slow economic growth. As legitimacy declined, the levels of repression increased. Entrenched elites and economic liberalization led to growing economic inequalities and highly visible levels of corruption. And political party systems, in several countries, degenerated into family dynasties, further eroding legitimacy.[12]

> **The Arab state system has never had a consistent overarching legitimizing principle**

The chronic low level of ideological legitimacy for many of the modern nation-states of the region has been one of the factors enabling the rise of V.T.M.s that partially try to exploit the ideological spaces or voids left by existing states.

ROOTS OF LEGITIMACY FOR ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

Alongside this trend of low levels of state legitimacy has grown a persistent side trend that legitimizes armed non-state actors. This trend has roots back in the armed Arab revolt against the Ottomans in World War I, and the various armed revolts against European rule in Syria, Libya, Sudan, Algeria and elsewhere both before and after World War II. It found particular purchase after 1967 with the overwhelming public support of the P.L.O. in the armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation; that support soon later included the Palestinian movement's Islamist wing, Hamas.

The second broadly legitimized armed non-state actor movement was that of Hezbollah (before 2011). Hezbollah received widespread support in Arab public opinion for its fight against Israeli occupation of South Lebanon until the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, and then again in fighting Israel to a draw in 2006. The Lebanese state had not been able to protect or liberate south Lebanon, nor had any Arab state army fought the Israeli army to a draw before. Arab publics also looked approvingly at the fight of armed jihadi groups, which included many Arab volunteers, against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Further afield, Arab publics looked admiringly at the armed resistance of the Vietnamese against American power, and at the exploits of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in South America. As states declined in legitimacy, armed non-state actors still had the potential to inspire. It is into this space that al-Qaeda exploded in 2001, violently poking the American imperium in the eye, to be followed later by ISIS in Iraq and Syria that challenged the repressive rule of the Iran-backed Nouri Maliki and Bashar al-Assad respectively. As states have struggled to maintain their legitimacy, and some states have become a primary enemy of a significant portion of their own people (e.g. Assad's Syrian regime), armed non-state actors have found ways to retain and grow their legitimacy.

The widely popular struggle of many armed non-state actors in the region over the past century has created the broad space for various kinds of V.T.M.s to try to exploit that popular openness to armed non-state actors.

The Trajectory of Ideological Evolution: From Nasser to the Islamic State

The radicalization of Islamist political thought is, in some ways, a rather recent ideological phenomenon. In the first two-thirds of the 20th century, it was nationalist or leftist ideological movements that were the more radical, calling for armed confrontation or armed rebellion— and in some cases, like the Algerian F.L.N. or the P.L.O., using violence against civilians—as part of the nationalist or leftist struggle. Most Islamists still represented a more conservative bent of mind. Indeed, most of the vibrant ideological movements of the first two-thirds of the 20th century were reactions against, and attempts to move beyond, the conservative Islamic order and worldview that had prevailed under the Ottomans for five centuries. The liberal, local-nationalist, Arab-nationalist, and various leftist ideological strands were the most prominent among these trends. It is the decline of these various ideological movements, and the radicalization and resurgence of certain Islamist movements, that led to the ideological

environment that we find ourselves in today.[13] The liberal experiment prevailed during the interwar period,[14] but collapsed after World War II. Arab states led by liberal elites were shunned by wide publics, as they appeared powerless to stop or reverse the establishment of the state of Israel over historic Palestine, and were seen as in compromising cahoots with Western colonial powers. The Arab nationalist leftist wave of military and one-party-led coups swept many Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s and had a heyday for a while. But nationalist and socialist enthusiasms flagged after the humiliating defeat of 1967 and after initial economic development gave way to stagnation, income inequality and growing unemployment or underemployment in the 1970s.[15] As the promises of democracy, nationalism and socialism frayed, the call of 'Islam is the way', gained renewed appeal.

The Muslim Brotherhood was formed in Egypt in 1928 as a 'modern' political party, but one intent on resisting the secularizing tide, bringing back the caliphate—but not on Turkish terms—and restoring the Islamic order in state and society. They were partners with the Free Officers in overthrowing the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, but Nasser soon turned against them, as he led Egypt in a staunchly Arab nationalist, secular, and state socialist direction. The Muslim Brotherhood did espouse views that were considered radical by their opponents, and developed an armed wing as part of their struggle, but their main strategy was to build their powerbase through grassroots proselytizing and service-provision to try win over a majority of the population and then ride that popularity to power.[16]

The ideological bifurcation occurred in the 1960s, at the hands of Sayyed Qutb, a Muslim Brotherhood leader jailed by Nasser and later executed. In place of the proselytizing and gradualist approach of the mainstream Brotherhood, Qutb announced that Islamists—like the prophet before his flight

> **As the promises of democracy, nationalism, and socialism frayed, Islam gained appeal**

(hijra) from Medina—are in a state of war, or jihad, not only with the government, but also with the general population that had abandoned Islam. Although Qutb remains revered in the Brotherhood, this ideological bifurcation was not adopted by the mainstream Brotherhood

movement. It did, however, lead to a number of hyper militant offshoots—e.g. the Islamic Jihad that assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat—and most importantly provided one of the ideological pathways that led to the emergence of al-Qaeda and later ISIS.[17]

The early months of the Arab spring in 2011 opened up the possibility that a liberal democratic wave might regain vigor in the Arab world, which was instead followed by a Muslim Brotherhood wave of election victories. The democratic way only found precarious purchase in Tunisia. And the Muslim Brotherhood wave was thwarted in Egypt and later overtaken by the more radical achievements of ISIS in Iraq

> **Ideological bifurcation occured in the 1960s, at the hands of Sayyed Qutb**

and Syria. After the traumatic state failures, civil wars, and terrorist resurgences of recent years, there is a resurgence of 'statist' viewpoints, in countries like Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf, which emphasizes a reassertion of state power, and the call to rally around the flag to preserve basic national order and security.

The ideological trajectory in Iran and various Arab Shiite communities had aspects of similarity and difference with what is described below. Iran had its own liberal and constitutional period, particularly marked by the constitutional revolution of 1905. It also had its anti-colonialist leftist nationalist in the form of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, and an authoritarian national secularist dictatorship in the form of Reza Shah, and then his son Mohammad Reza. But the Islamist trend, led by Ruhollah Khomeini from exile, gained strength in the 1970s and was a driving ideological and mobilization force in the revolution that overthrew Mohammad Reza in 1979. But the revolution also comprised powerful leftist, nationalist and liberal movements. The Islamic Republic turned against them after 1979 to create an ideologically and organizationally 'cleansed' revolutionary state.

Arab Shiite communities in Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait and elsewhere were very much part of the various liberal, leftist, communist, and Arab nationalist movements that animated politics between World War I and the 1970s. But as those movements lost steam, and particularly after the successful Islamist-led revolution against the Shah in Iran, the region's main Shiite country, more Arab Shiite communities began to turn toward the Islamic Republic. This was partly the result of Arab Shiites feeling empowered by the success of the revolution in Iran,

and seeing the inspiring success of using religion for political inspiration and mobilization. It was also partly the result of deliberate and organized outreach by Iran to Shiite communities in the Arab region following the revolution.[18]

The various dead ends that political ideological evolution has experienced in the modern Arab world, and the absence of a clear pathway to an ideologically satisfactory future, has created the charged conditions in which alternative and often radical ideological viewpoints have been given space to be heard and thrive.

The Weaponization of Sunni and Shiite Identity: The Pivot of 1979

In many ways, the Middle East today is living in the shadow of 1979. Five developments that year set the stage for a ravaging conflict between radicalized and armed Sunni and Shiite movements.

First, and as mentioned above, was the Islamic Revolution in Iran itself. This caused a dramatic reorientation of Arab Shiite political consciousness and mobilization away from nationalist, liberal or leftist profiles, toward an Islamist, Shiite-specific, Iran-centric profile. This was partly a natural reorientation after the satisfying success of the Islamic revolution in Iran, but it also became an integral, well-organized, and well-financed strategy of the new Iranian state.

> **Radical idoelogical viewpoints have been given a space to be heard and thrive**

Exporting revolution and helping co-religionists—as well as the 'downtrodden' in general around the world—was written into the new constitution, organized through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (I.R.G.C.) and related institutions of the state, and financed by petrodollars. Mobilizing and arming Shiite—and some Sunni groups, like Hamas—abroad also became part of the Islamic Republic's national security strategy. Confronted by war with Iraq (and Saddam's Iraq received broad Arab backing), threats of regime change from the United States, and threats of attack from Israel, Iran resorted to asymmetric approaches and building proxy forces in Lebanon, supporting the Iraqi opposition to Saddam, and bolstering

Assad's Syria. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 led to the mobilization and weaponization of Shiite power in various parts of the Arab world.

Second, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led directly to U.S.-Saudi cooperation in mobilizing and arming Sunni jihadis. These included native Afghans, as well as the encouragement of thousands of Arab jihadis to join the fight. It was this cauldron that forged the modern jihadi armies, and later enabled the rise of al-Qaeda.[19]

Third, 1979 was also the year of the takeover of the Great Mosque in Mecca by armed Islamist rebels threatening to overthrow the Saudi state. Before 1979, the Saudi state had perceived the main internal, as well as external, threats as coming from nationalist and/or leftist directions. Nasser had been their most dangerous adversary in the 1960s, and other monarchies—in Egypt, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere—had fallen to nationalist or leftist revolts or coups. In 1979, it was driven home to them that the main domestic threat to Saudi rule might come from the political right—radical Sunni Islamists—and that the main external threat would now be from an Islamist Iran.

> **Exporting revolution was written into Iran's new constitution, organized through the I.R.G.C.**

These two conditions spurred the Saudi government, after 1979, to pivot quickly to reassert their Islamic credentials and push their version of Islam both domestically and externally.[20] Internally, this oriented the kingdom in a more conservative direction for ensuing years, while externally, the Saudis spent billions within Sunni communities around the Arab world, and further afield, training Imams, funding madrasas, and buying influence and Islamic credibility. This gradually pulled Sunni institutions, media, mosques, political movements into the Saudi orbit, and with a distinct sectarian and religious overtone.[21] It is important to note that the current Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has vowed to reverse this policy and turn Saudi Arabia to a more moderate and tolerant Islam.[22]

Fourth, 1979 was the year of the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. This decisively removed Egypt, which had led the Arab world for the past 50 years, out of the Arab fold. It further discredited the nationalist secular model that Egypt represented, although that model had already suffered a serious blow in 1967. The departure of Egypt shifted the

locus of Arab power decisively toward the Arab Gulf states. With this shift came a swing from the nationalist secularist discourse, which has a strong presence in Egypt, to the conservative Islamist, and rather Wahhabi and Sunni, discourse that prevails particularly in Saudi Arabia.

Fifth, 1979 marked the height of the oil price boom of the 1970s. For the previous century, Egypt had been the largest, wealthiest, and most advanced of the Arab countries. From 1979 onward, the center of wealth shifted decisively toward not only Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, but also to Iran. Two petro states, Saudi Arabia and Iran, would, for the ensuing decades, vie for power and influence across the Middle East.

Indeed, 1979 ushered in the current era of sectarian mobilization and conflict in the Middle East. Egypt and the U.A.E. have turned clearly against this approach. The crown prince of Saudi Arabia has indicated that he intends to follow suit, but it is not yet clear if that will be sustained and result in real changes in Saudi foreign policy. Turkey and Qatar still maintain fairly strong support for Sunni Islamist movements and show no signs of change in that regard. Iran's current president and foreign minister have indicated that they might be open to moving away from this policy, but that standpoint does not appear to be shared by the supreme leader and the I.R.G.C.

The Breakdown of Regional Order and the Iraqi Jihad: 2003

Until 2003, there was Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and a few armed non-state actors operating in a few pockets of the Arab world. These groups did not pursue a direct global terrorist campaign, but fought localized conflicts. Al-Qaeda, which had proven its global intentions in 2001, was largely confined to Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed that, which had three direct effects. First, it broke the Iraqi state and created conditions of ungoverned space, unmanaged security and political conflict that enabled the entry and spread of both Sunni and Shiite radical armed non-state actors in Iraq, including al-Qaeda.

Second, it broke the precarious Arab regional state order that had prevailed since World War II in which Iraq had been a buffer to Iranian power. After 2003, Iran would project immense influence in Iraq, and from there, further into Syria and Lebanon, as well as harbor ambitions in Yemen and Bahrain. The Iranian surge poured fuel on Sunni-Shiite tensions both in Iraq and the Arab region, and caused a panicked reaction from Arab Sunni states, particularly in the Gulf, to find ways to mobilize and pushback against this surging Iran. In the ensuing

decade and half, Iran would maintain its strong position in Iraq and Lebanon, gain enormous new presence in Syria, and a surprising presence in Yemen through the Houthi movement there.

Third, the prolonged U.S. military occupation and presence in Iraq was the perfect ideological vehicle to mobilize jihadists. In Iraq, jihadists—both Sunni and Shiite—could fight what they considered 'Christian Crusading occupiers' of Muslim lands. For Sunni jihadists, Iraq had the added attraction of providing a venue to also fight what they considered heretical Iranian-backed Shiites (or Safavid-backed *rawafid*, in their nomenclature).[23]

> **1979 ushered in the current era of sectarian mobilization and conflict in the Middle East**

The Arab region has had four orders in the past century and half: it started under an Ottoman Turkish order; shifted to a British-French dominated order in the interwar period; then entered into an Arab order of sorts after World War II (despite an Arab cold war between Saudi and Egypt, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990); the region has now entered a new era in which Iran now wields enormous influence in the Arab region, where it is particularly dominant in the Levant.

This new order has been under contestation, and will be for several years to come. It fuels much of the tension in the region that contributes to state collapse and civil war, and fuels the sectarian radicalization and mobilization that enables the rise of V.T.M.s and designated terrorist groups.

Arab Uprisings, State Failure, Civil War and the Syrian Jihad: 2011

The revolts of 2011 were the result of a long brewing tension between growing populations and public demands on one side, and increasingly rigid, repressive, and corrupt regimes on the other. The revolts erupted in six Arab countries. In Tunisia, and only in Tunisia, did they lead to a tenuous democratic transition. In Egypt and Bahrain, revolt was eventually crushed in a state-led counterrevolution. In Libya, Yemen and Syria revolt led to full or partial state

failure and civil war.

While armed non-state actors proliferated in all three countries, it would be in Syria that the largest and most violent radical groups would take root. This is for several reasons. First, in Syria the regime survived more or less intact, blocked any path toward political negotiation, and used its full force against large swathes of its population. In Libya, Muammar Qaddafi might have wished to do the same, but was defeated through foreign intervention. In Yemen, Ali Abdallah Saleh took a softer approach, negotiating his own departure from office, then engaging in a complex civil war to fight for his, or his son's, way back into state power. The survival and ferocity of the Assad regime drove the opposition increasingly in more militant and radical directions, and was a boon for radical group recruitment.

Second, the war in Syria had a distinctly sectarian identity to it, with a minority Alawite regime, backed by Shiite Iran and Hezbollah, fighting a Sunni majority opposition backed by Turkey and a number of Arab Gulf states.

This also indicates that, third, in addition to becoming a sectarian civil war, in which Islamist sectarian radicalization could thrive, the Syrian war was one that drew in enormous external proxy or direct intervention.[24]

There was foreign air intervention in Libya and support for rival groups between Turkey and Qatar on one side and Egypt and the U.A.E. on the other. In Yemen, there is Iranian backing for the Houthis in Yemen facing off a Saudi-led military intervention. However, those two arenas do not approach the extent to which Syria was a proxy battleground for the future of the Levant at the heart of the Middle East. Iran considered the war to defend the Assad regime and Damascus as the front line for the defense of Tehran, as well as its ability to maintain Hezbollah as a deterrent to Israel. Some Arab Gulf states felt that a Sunni recapture of Damascus would compensate for the historic loss of Baghdad to Shiite and Iranian control as a result of the U.S. invasion of 2003.

> **The region has now entered a new era in which Iran wields enormous influence**

The Iraqi jihad merged into the Syrian jihad, as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq moved into Syria after 2011, and morphed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). This resulted in a splinter in the al-Qaeda movement, with ISIS going its own direction, while al-Qaeda itself took on a slew of different names and found a wide foothold in some pockets of

the Syrian opposition.[25]

The forces and contradictions that led to the Arab uprisings are still present, and in some cases getting more acute. The needs and frustrations that these uprisings expressed, and that in many cases continue, are part of the enabling environment in which V.T.M.s thrive.

Section Conclusion

In the preceding section I have presented six enabling conditions for V.T.M.s in the Middle East and attempted to situate them in their historical context. These included low state legitimacy, the origins of legitimacy for armed non-state actors, the impasse of political ideological development, the weaponization of sectarian identity, the collapse of regional order, and the effects of the Arab uprisings of 2011. Many elements of these enabling conditions will figure again in the next section, which looks at structural drivers and factors from a more sectorial and ahistorical perspective. But it is important to look at drivers and factors from both perspectives. Elements discussed in the drivers and conditions presented in this preceding section will also figure in the third part of this essay, which proposes broad policy directions to counter V.T.M.s and reduce the drivers that provide their enabling environment.

> **The forces and contradictions that led to the Arab uprisings are still present**

Part Two: A Consideration of Structural Drivers and Factors

Much of the valuable literature on violent extremism has repeatedly examined the structural, macro, society-wide 'push' factors that enable and encourage the rise of V.T.M.s, looking for clear explanations and causal links. These factors include dire socio-economic conditions, repressive political practices, and cases of cultural alienation or marginalization. Consideration of these factors is important and fruitful, but there is no simple predictive

link between these factors and the rise of V.T.M.s.[26] These factors often operate indirectly and in complex combinations. And one combination of factors that has led to V.T.M.s in one country or context might not in another. Concomitantly, every case of the rise of V.T.M.s shows a different combination of factors. It is, thus, virtually impossible to make broad macro generalizations about the drivers of V.T.M.s across a wide spectrum of cases or countries.[27]

Examining macro conditions and 'push' factors, as if they can create V.T.M.s on their own, generally grossly underestimates the pull factor of particular groups being effective and successful in organizing, planning, recruiting, growing, and so forth. V.T.M.s, as we mentioned at the outset of this essay, are particular organized movements with goals, organizational structures, and internal dynamics. They take advantage of vulnerabilities in a society—vulnerabilities that may be described in the literature on 'drivers and factors'—to take root and grow in a particular environment. In a medical metaphor, we can think of V.T.M.s as particular pathogens that thrive in a weakened and immunocompromised host. Defeating the pathogen is a big part of curing the patient. However, examining macro push factors remains critical, because even if one pathogen is defeated, another pathogen can easily find purchase in a

> There is no simple predictive link between "push" factors and the rise of V.T.M.s

compromised host; or the 'defeated' pathogen can mutate into a different, often more lethal, form and take root again. This is a dynamic that we have seen in how al-Qaeda mutated into the Islamic State in Iraq, which then mutated into ISIS, and could, in future years, into yet another form. Therefore, in considering the drivers and remedies for V.T.M.s, keeping the push and pull factors in mind, and understanding how they interact, is critical to gaining a more complete picture.

Socio-economic Factors

Recent research indicates that whereas most V.T.M. leaders and key cadres are not in their positions because of economic need, conditions of impoverishment in their surrounding environment greatly enhance their ability to recruit—provided, of course, they have the economic resources to do so. Conditions of dire economic need—exacerbated greatly by

state failure and civil war—certainly create favorable conditions for V.T.M.s to exploit.[28] A related enabling condition might also be, not desperate material economic need per se, but a perception of socio-economic injustice vis-a-vis the state or a dominant group.[29] In that case, the socio-economic factor is one of grievance, not absolute need or deprivation, and the V.T.M. is a vehicle to redress that grievance.

In any case, in a society where socio-economic conditions have deteriorated dramatically, whether because of bad policy, corruption, state failure, or even climatic conditions, both indicators of absolute economic need and/or a sense of socio-economic grievance will rise, because in conditions of increasing scarcity and bad governance there will be a powerful few that will still be able to access or monopolize wealth and resources. And there is no doubt that challenging economic conditions in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and parts of Libya, already strained before the uprisings and conflicts of 2011, got dramatically and desperately worse as state institutions collapsed and civil war ravaged large swathes of those countries.

It is also important to note that, unlike some powerful V.T.M.s in the last century, such as radical communist and leftist groups that identified socio-economic grievance as their main issue, most of the V.T.M.s in today's Middle East have mainly religious, sectarian, ethnic or nationalist grievances and goals.

> One combination of factors that has led to V.T.M.s in one context might not in another

Economics might be part of their concern and program, but it is by no means the principal one.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that economic deprivation provides a conducive host environment for ambitious V.T.M.s, and that improving economic conditions, boosting gainful employment, and increasingly meeting the basic needs of individuals and families for shelter, food, education and basic healthcare, is critical in strengthening the immune system of vulnerable societies.
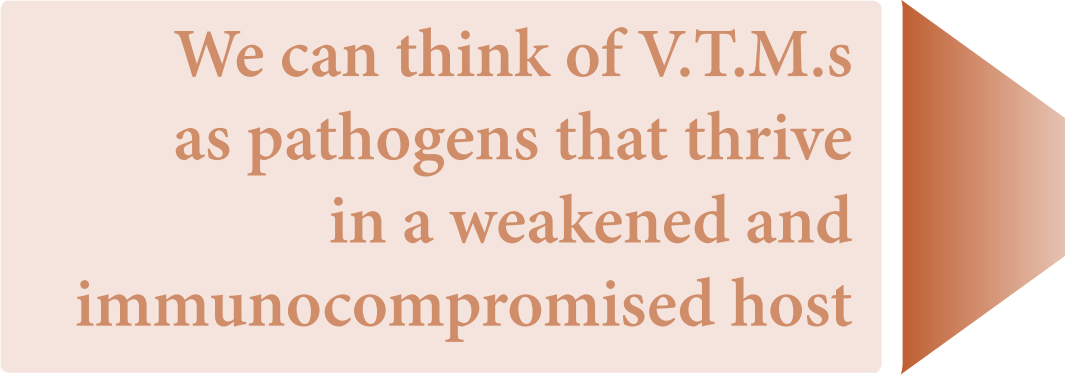
Political Factors

We might divide political factors into three levels: (a) the regional and international environment impacting a state or society; (b) the presence or absence of national political state institutions; and (c) where they exist, the policies and performance of those institutions.

External Environment: Contagion within a Broken Regional Order

One of the likeliest predictors of whether a country will be impacted by the entry and growth of a V.T.M. is whether it is neighboring a country or region, which already harbors such a group. This partly explains why the outbreak of a V.T.M. in one country might quickly turn into an epidemic in other parts of the region. This implies that defeating the threat often requires a region-wide strategy, and might not be sustainably achieved in one country alone. The challenge is exacerbated in a region like the Middle East where there is no regional political or security order to manage or mitigate region-wide threats. To the contrary, principal states are engaged in a proxy war against each other that only fuels, directly or indirectly, radicalization and the conditions that enable V.T.M.s.[30] Of course, it doesn't help if global players, like the United States and Russia, are also not on the same page and are backing different states within a broken regional order, or different groups within one civil war.

> **We can think of V.T.M.s as pathogens that thrive in a weakened and immunocompromised host**

The State: Standing or Collapsed

The presence or absence of a state over a territory is the single strongest variable in the presence or absence of a large-scale V.T.M. presence. Generally, the collapse of a state, or at least its partial collapse, leaves territory ungoverned or tenuously governed. It also creates security, economic and other needs for individuals, families and communities that resourceful V.T.M.s can exploit.[31] The full or partial collapse of a state also opens up the major questions of alternative political orders and borders, which often motivates V.T.M.s and can inspire some adherents .

While there can be lone wolf attacks and dangerous sleeper cells in any state, it is important to note that a V.T.M. has never defeated a standing state that wasn't already broken or collapsed, and that a V.T.M. cannot find purchase and conditions for significant growth except in a fundamentally broken or compromised state. It is also the case that even if a particular V.T.M. is defeated in a certain country, the victory will not be sustained unless a viable and effective state is rebuilt, with a minimal level of acceptance and sovereignty throughout that country. Failed states and V.T.M.s go hand-in-hand—where the former exist, the latter will thrive.

Politics

Some hardcore leaders and cadres of V.T.M.s carry alternative visions of how they define the nation and what they think the state should be. For them, even if the extant state is suddenly inclusive, fair and well-functioning, they would still choose to be at war with it. But for most recruits, it's fair to say that they were driven to join a V.T.M. only after they met with extreme dissatisfaction, or outright threat, at the hands of the state in which they lived. In the Middle East, the rise of V.T.M.s can in no way be divorced from the policies and performance of Saddam's Iraq toward the Shiite or Kurds, Maliki's policy toward the Arab Sunnis, Qaddafi toward Benghazi and other sectors of society, Saleh's policy toward his opposition, or Assad's government toward many of his own citizens. Those states collapsed, fully or partially, for a political reason, and people joined V.T.M.s largely to redress well-defined and egregious political offenses against them. V.T.M.s, including what we call terrorist groups, are enabled in an environment of broken politics.

> A V.T.M. has never defeated a standing state that wasn't already broken or collapsed

A USAID study identified a number of political factors that could contribute to violent extremism and enable V.T.M. recruitment.[32] These include: (a) basic political exclusion and denial of political rights and civil liberties; (b) more violent repression and violation of human rights (torture, assassinations, mass killings); and (c) endemic corruption in favor of a protected state-connected elite. These factors can be exacerbated if there are areas within the state that are not fully under state control and can serve as safe havens for disaffected individuals and groups to mobilize. Attempts by states to control or repress opposition might often make things worse: either by pushing

more political opponents toward radicalization and taking up arms; or through the prison system in which torture and mistreatment also pushes toward radicalization within a ready-made prison network of discontent. Some states might think that they can repress their way toward defeating violent extremism and V.T.M.s, and that might be true in some cases in the short-term. However, in the long-term, unless the politics of the state are more inclusive and less repressive, the dynamics of discontent and pushing people toward the fringes are likely to reproduce conditions conducive for the growth of V.T.M.s.[33]

> **Principal states are engaged in a proxy war against each other that only fuels radicalization**

Section Conclusion

The literature on extremism and conditions that provide push and pull factors for V.T.M.s is rich and valuable. It repeatedly brings to the fore the range of socio-economic and political conditions that enable these types of groups and their ability to thrive. I refer the reader to those valuable studies, without making a claim to summarize them in this essay, but rather to reaffirm their main findings, and to use them as guideposts when thinking about integrated policy responses to combating V.T.M.s in the varied countries of the Middle East. I also reprise the point made in several of these studies, that there is no one condition or set of conditions that consistently leads to the rise of V.T.M.s, or to their demise, but that the challenge of defeating V.T.M.s and preventing their reemergence is, like politics, a practical not a natural science.

Part Three: Policy Takeaways

Immediate Policy Urgencies

So far, most policy has focused on treating the symptom rather than its causes; defeating V.T.M.s after they emerge, in a continuous game of whack-a-mole, rather than trying to address the causes that enabled their rise. While possibly irrational, this is not always completely nonsensical, for six reasons: (a) the symptom, a virulent V.T.M., can cause

immediate and large-scale damage, and must be contained and defeated quickly. Much like a high fever, it can kill the patient, and must be treated immediately regardless of its underlying cause. (b) The symptom manifests as a security threat, and elicits a security counter-response. (c) Devising a policy to attack and kill terrorists is conceptually 'simple' and straightforward; figuring out the long-term policies that would gradually remove the conditions that enable them is complex; few major world leaders or capitals have evinced the breadth and depth of policy appreciation to think beyond the primary level. (d) Political and security gains from whacking a V.T.M. are reaped in the short-term; the gains from a more complex and sustained-gain strategy are long-term, and beyond the horizon of most world leaders. (e) For major players, like the United States, the military is the swollen instrument of foreign policy; as the saying goes, when you have a hammer, most problems look like nails. (f) It has proven easier to sell publics on committing to a security response, than to committing to more complex and long-term diplomatic or political foreign policy goals.

> **For major players, like the United States, the military is the swollen instrument of foreign policy**

Nevertheless, the policy of defeating present V.T.M.s, even if they are symptoms not causes, is an urgent and necessary one. This includes several 'lines of effort,'[34] which have been pursued in recent years. First, working directly and with partners in the region to attack and defeat terrorist groups—this has seen progress in recent ISIS defeats in Mosul and Raqqa. Second, interdicting the flow of foreign fighters to these groups, which have been dramatically reduced, especially across the Turkish border. Third, clamping down on terrorist financing—progress has been made through actions of the U.S. Treasury, as well as policy changes in some regional capitals, and recent terrorism financing agreements. And fourth, limiting and countering V.T.M. media and online messaging through shutting down of suspected V.T.M.-linked accounts and working with partners to provide counter-messaging.

But from the analysis presented in this paper, a more comprehensive and sustained-gain strategy must address the following four longer-term components.

LONGER TERM POLICY COMPONENTS

Primary Pillars
1. Ending Civil Wars and Standing Up Failed States

If one were to select one variable that had the biggest determinant effect on whether V.T.M.s are able to take root and thrive, or alternatively be prevented from taking root or coming back into a country, that variable would be the presence or collapse of the state. As described in this paper, the partial or full collapse of the state creates a perfect storm of security, socio-economic and political conditions, including in many cases, civil war, that enable the entry and growth of V.T.M.s.[35] Any sustained-gain policy for defeating V.T.M.s and addressing the primary conditions that enabled their rise would have to put a very high priority on, first, bringing about an end to the civil wars that have broken out in the collapsed states, and then, post-civil-war, helping get the shattered state back on its institutional feet. The debate over how easy or hard this is, or how cheap or expensive, and what array of regional and international states and institutions should be involved, is a valid one. However, any strategy that presumes that the war against V.T.M.s can be sustainably won in the context of a sea of failed states and ongoing civil wars is deeply misguided.

> **Dynamics of discontent are likely to reproduce conditions conducive for the growth of V.T.M.s**

2. De-Escalating Regional Proxy War and Stabilizing Regional Relations

The second big ticket variable that has driven the rise of V.T.M.s in the Middle East has been the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which erupted in 1979, and only got worse after the Iraq invasion of 2003 and the Arab uprisings of 2011. This has transformed Arab political consciousness and mobilization from the left-right divide that dominated political life in the 1950s and 1960s, to the sectarian Sunni-Shiite divide that now dominates the political spectrum. It has torn societies apart, contributed to state failure and collapse, helped ignite sectarian civil wars, and fueled conditions that now see radical Shiite and Sunni armed non-state actors arrayed against each other throughout the Levant and Yemen.[36]

De-escalating tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and working toward stabilizing regional relations, is neither easy nor straightforward, but it is also by no means impossible. Rather, it is one of the main foreign policy challenges of our time, and one whose resolution

would bring about the greatest global benefits in terms of improved security and economic prosperity. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have legitimate national security concerns, and both have an interest in a de-conflicted and prosperous region where their national security is preserved. I have written elsewhere about how this political challenge might be approached. Any strategy that presumed that the growth of Sunni and Shiite V.T.M.s and terrorist groups could be stemmed, while Iran and Saudi Arabia continued in open and un-curtailed conflict, would also be deeply misguided.

Sustaining Pillars
1. Better Governance

Bad governance and repressive politics don't immediately lead to the emergence of large V.T.M.s, as long as the state is not in collapse, but they do create conditions that: (a) drive people toward increasingly radical political and militant options; (b) enable the penetration into society of V.T.M. cells; and (c) can contribute to the fraying and eventual partial or full failure of the state. This is what happened in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, and is the fear that some currently have regarding Egypt. While states must be resolute in fighting terrorist groups, and should be helped in doing so, they should also be encouraged, or pressed, to pull back from repressive policies that go beyond terrorist groups, reopen civic and political space, and create more inclusive and responsive politics. All the Arab uprisings were about demands for basic political rights and inclusion as well as social justice, and it was the rejection of these demands that led to partial or full state failure and civil wars in several Arab countries, and providing inviting conditions for V.T.M.s. While Arab publics, in the immediate aftermath of the carnage of recent years, might tentatively tolerate a temporary reversion back to authoritarianism, the demands for basic good governance will only grow over time, particularly as key socio-economic indicators continue to add strain.

2. Economic Development

High demographic growth, a youth bulge, coupled with slow economic growth, high unemployment and unfavorable land and water conditions were primary underlying drivers of the Arab uprisings. Those same dire socio-economic conditions were preyed upon by V.T.M.s with cash to spend. Unrest, state collapse and civil war in several countries have only made economic conditions worse. In a long-term outlook of slow global growth, major obstacles to high MENA growth, and escalating climate change impacts, these conditions risk getting worse. While post-war Europe had the Marshall Plan, and China today is pushing investment through its One Belt, One Road policy, there is still no clear long-term economic

integration and development strategy for the Middle East.[37] Unless the region's various resources and economies are integrated better together and with the global economy, and until the large population countries of the region get on a more high growth and job rich economic trajectory, the crises and exported risks of the region are likely to get worse.

In Closing

The conditions that brought about the rise and spread of violent transnational movements in the Middle East are complex and have been long in the making. While particular V.T.M.s might be defeated in the field of battle, addressing the geopolitical, political, and socio-economic conditions that provide the space for their rise and the conditions for their growth is a broader generational challenge. In examining the historical, geopolitical, and other drivers that enable V.T.M.s in today's Middle East, as attempted in this essay, there is provided a helpful context for understanding their rise and thinking about strategies to reverse that trend.

Endnotes

1. I would like to thank MEI intern Mr. Yousuf Eltagouri for his valuable help in preparing the final version of this paper.

2. See, Cordesman, Anthony H. "Tracking the Trends and Numbers: Islam, Terrorism, Stability and Conflict in the Middle East." Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy-- Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 Feb. 2017.

3. See, Allan, Harriet, et al. "Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review." Royal United Services Institute, 16 Oct. 2015, p. 2.

4. See, Jones, Jessica. "Drivers of Violent Extremism." Center for International Private Enterprise, 18 Jan. 2017, www.cipe.org/publications/detail/drivers-violent-extremism.

5. See, Byman, Dan. Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism. Cambridge University Press, 200, pp. 24-26.

6. Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3-17.

7. Raymond Hinnebusch, The International Politics of the Middle East (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003).

8. For more, See, Ruggie, J. G. "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis." World Politics, vol. 35, no. 02, 1983, pp. 261–285.

9. Paul C. Helmreich, From Paris to Sèvres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1974), 65-69.

10. See, Barnett, Michael. "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System." International Studies Quarterly, vol. 37, no. 3, 1993, pp. 280-289; Kerr, Malcolm "The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970." Oxford University Press, 1971.

11. For more, See, Başkan, Birol. Turkey and Qatar in the Tangled Geopolitics of the Middle East. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 96-100, 106-107.

12. Michael C. Hudson, Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy (New York: Yale University Press, 1980), 83-86.

13. See, Nahas, Maridi. "State-Systems and Revolutionary Challenge: Nasser, Khomeini, and the Middle East." International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 17, no. 04, 1985, pp. 507–527

14. Albert Habib Hourani, Arabic Thought In The Liberal Age: 1798 - 1939 (Cambridge University Press, 1962).

15. Fouad Ajami, The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967 (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16. Khalil Al-Anani, "Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypts Muslim Brotherhood," The Middle East Journal 69, no. 4 (2015): 527-543.

17. For more on this perspective, See, Gerges, Fawaz. "ISIS and the Third Wave of Jihadism." Current History , vol. 113, no. 767, Dec. 2014, pp. 339–343.

18. Fred Dallmayr, "Radical Changes in the Muslim World: Turkey, Iran, Egypt," Globalizations 8, no. 5 (2011): 639-646.

19. Mohammed M. Hafez, "Jihad after Iraq: Lessons from the Arab Afghans," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 32, no. 2 (2009): 73-75.

20. For more on al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba, Juhayman ibn Muhammad ibn Sayf al-Otaybi, and rejectionist Islam in Saudi Arabia, See Hegghammer, Thomas, and Stéphane Lacroix. "Rejectionist Islamism In Saudi Arabia: The Story Of Juhayman Al-Utaybi Revisited." International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 39, no. 01, 2007, pp. 103-120.

21. Raihan Ismail, Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam (Oxford University Press, 2016), 18-30.

22. Chulov, Martin. "I will return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam, says crown prince." The Guardian, 24 Oct. 2017.

23. See, Fuller, Graham E. "Islamist Politics in Iraq after Saddam Hussein." United States Institute of Peace, no. 106, 13 Aug. 2003, pp. 3–10.

24. See, Jonathan Spyer, "Syrian Regime Strategy and the Syrian Civil War," Middle East Review of International Affairs 16, no. 3 (September 2012). and Charles Lister, The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency (Oxford University Press, 2015), 5-8.

25. Charles Lister, "The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand.," The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World , November 2016, 4-16.

26. See, Krueger, Alan, and Jitka Maleckova. "Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003, pp. 141-142.

27. Graeme Blair et al., "Poverty and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from Pakistan," American Journal of Political Science 57, no. 1 (2012): 40-48.

28. Susan Rice, Corinne Graff, and Carlos Pascual, "Confronting Poverty: Weak States and U.S. National Security," Yale Journal of International Affairs, 2009.

29. For more on this perspective, see, Moghaddam, Fathali M. "The Staircase to Terrorism." American Psychologist , 2005, pp. 162-166.

30. Ross Harrison, "Defying Gravity: Working Toward a Regional Strategy for a Stable Middle East," Middle East Institute Policy Paper, 2015.

31. See, "The Jihadi Threat 5: Drivers of Extremism." Wilson Center, 14 Dec. 2016, www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-jihadi-threat-5-drivers-extremism.

32. United States Agency for International Development. Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism. Feb. 2009, pp. 27.

33. See, Dalacoura, Katerina. "Islamist Terrorism and the Middle East Democratic Deficit: Political Exclusion, Repression and the Causes of Extremism." Democratization, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp. 508–525.

34. See, "The Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS." U.S. Department of State, 10 Sept. 2014, www.state.gov/s/seci/.

35. Stewart Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Assessing Evidence of "Spillovers"," Center for Global Development, no. 73 (January 2006): 14-22.

36. Gause III, Gregory F. "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War." Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, no. 11 (July 2014): 5-15.

37. For more on this perspective, see Fardoust, Shahrokh. "Economic Integration in the Middle East: Prospects for Development and Stability." Middle East Institute Policy Paper, no. 5, 2016, pp. 17-22.

About the Author

Paul Salem is senior vice president for policy analysis, research and programs at The Middle East Institute. He focuses on issues of political change, transition, and conflict as well as the regional and international relations of the Middle East. He has a particular emphasis on the countries of the Levant and Egypt. Salem writes regularly in the Arab and Western press and has been published in numerous journals and newspapers. Salem is the author and editor of a number of books and reports including From Chaos to Cooperation: Toward Regional Order in the Middle East (ed. with Ross Harrison, 2017), Broken Orders: The Causes and Consequences of the Arab Uprisings (In Arabic, 2013), "The Recurring Rise and Fall of Political Islam" (CSIS, 2015), "The Middle East in 2015 and Beyond: Trends and Drivers" (MEI 2014), Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World (1994), Conflict Resolution in the Arab World (ed., 1997). Prior to joining MEI, Salem was the founding director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, Lebanon between 2006 and 2013. From 1999 to 2006, he was director of the Fares Foundation and in 1989-1999 founded and directed the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Lebanon's leading public policy think tank.

About the Middle East Institute

Founded in 1946, the Middle East Institute is the oldest Washington-based institution dedicated solely to the study of the Middle East. Its founders, scholar George Camp Keiser and former U.S. Secretary of State Christian Herter, laid out a simple mandate: "to increase knowledge of the Middle East among the citizens of the United States and to promote a better understanding between the people of these two areas."

MEI's work is driven by its roster of scholars, comprised of former U.S. ambassadors, government officials, and top analysts who write and appear regularly in the U.S. and international media. MEI reaches a global audience through its website via event videos and podcasts, social media outlets including Twitter and Facebook, and The Middle East Journal, the longest running peer reviewed journal in the United States devoted to the study of the region.

MEI has earned a reputation as an unbiased source of information and analysis on this critical region of the world, a reputation it has meticulously safeguarded since its creation. Today, MEI remains a respected, non-partisan voice in the field of Middle East studies.