State Failure, Power Expansion, and Balance of Power in the Middle East

The Struggle Over Failed States

Aso M. Ali

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Introduction

Originated in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, modern state is the supreme organizing power within a delimited geographic space. Its primary goal is to establish social order through the concentration of power. The relationship between the state and order is fundamentally organic. Conceiving the state as the supreme body entitled with the task of security provision within its borders is rooted in the history of its invention and in the justification of its continuation. The expectation that defines and measures state performance in terms of establishing and maintaining public order has empirically and theoretically become inherent to the existence of the state as the highest authority within a human community. The primacy of order/security as the highest public good bestows upon the state certain enabling and exclusive prerogatives within its borders to the subordination of other societal groups and organizations. That is, any other center of authority within the state borders must obey and submit to the state authority.

Singularity, not multiplicity, of source of authority is the order of the state. The underlying logic is that the existence of more than one center of power with one delimited territorial space will give rise to divergent orientations and opposing forces on basic organizing rules and principles of running the human community: the prescription for public disorder and power struggle for predominance. If the core justification for the existence

of a single source of power aims to create harmony, predictability, and accountability, then the fragmentation of the source of power hinders the development of those elements of order. In this analysis, within the territory governed by a functioning state, there is no room for actors, armed or non-armed, beyond the state's control or regulation. Of course, states might periodically face domestic challenges to their hold on power, and many states do. Still, the measure of a state's functionality remains rested on its success in maintaining this power hierarchy and singularity which requires denying or destroying the emergence of a rival source of power. Only when it succeeds in achieving and maintaining its singular hold on public authority, this power is the state able to preserve its autonomy vis-à-vis social groups within the population which is a critical component for the reinforcement of order and security.

The primacy of the concentration of power essentially entitles the state to make use of almost all means under its disposal—whatever approach is necessary to overcome challenges to its order. In pursuit of this goal, therefore, the state operates as the sole legitimate organ of using, or at least holding in reserve, violence as the ultimate means of building public order. While the state certainly needs more than just crude violence for long-term maintenance of its domestic order, the monopoly over the organized means of violence remains the cornerstone of the state supremacy, even if as the last resort of authority. Not least, securing compliance can sometimes be attained only through coercion. This coercive power enables the state to harness and mobilize its human and material resources for broader national objectives. The ability to perform this task turns the state into a territorial powerhouse toward its external environment: the anarchic realm of independent states.

Principally, the relations among states rest on the key ordering principle of mutual recognition, which elevates each state into a sovereign actor. The main practical significance of this principle is the right of states to protection from external intervention. The state is recognized as the sole boss of its domestic and foreign affairs, free from external impositions. Freedom from external intervention is what constitutes juridical (external) sovereignty. Ideally, this principle obliges states to limit their power exercise to the boundaries of their territories. An effective institutionalization of this principle would have guarded states from each other's power seeking impulses and ambitions. In other words, empirically, it requires the existence of a global government with enforcing capacity and

legitimacy in order to save those mutually independent actors from each other.

However, in the real world of self-help system of states where principles are commonly contested and ambitions frequently irreconcilable, power often provides its own legitimacy, including justifying acts of intervention in domestic and foreign affairs of states. The pursuit of power, in this sense, frequently overrides the principle of sovereignty. In the final analysis, therefore, it comes down to every state's own effort to guarantee its political independent and, even physical, survival. This requires the development of its own material-military capabilities, the allocation of resources according to priorities, and designing and implementing goals in view of the primacy of state interests. In this sense, the external defense, to repeat what stated above, requires, as a precondition, the maintenance of domestic order within the territory for which the monopoly over the means of organized violence is the key. When a state fails on this measure tends to leave its external borders effectively defenseless against intervention and even occupation.

In this analysis, the relationship between state failure and external intervention can be described as straightforward: the retreat of a state's central authority over its territory creates a power vacuum that tempts surrounding states to encroach upon it. In this manner, failed states can become targets of regional intervention and expansion, which ultimately turns them into contested spaces for power and influence among the intervening neighbors. The configuration of power struggle is expected to develop largely along the strategic divide between those which prefer the status quo balance of power and those which desire its revision.

This book aims to examine this relationship between the occurrence of state failure and the outbreak of struggle over the balance of power between revisionist and status quo states in the Middle East from a historical perspective.

Literature Discussion

In this section, two strands of scholarships on regional foreign policies and state failure in the Middle East are briefly discussed. The purpose is not to engage in an exhaustive or up-to-date survey of the literature. The volume of scholarship in the region is broad and diverse. It suffices for the purpose here to cite some key pieces that generally represent the mainstream relevant literature.

Statehood in the Middle East

The studies of foreign policies of Middle Eastern states have largely been carried out from, or influenced by, constructivist paradigm. The overarching theme of this approach is that shared cultural ties and the transnational identities have traditionally constituted constraints on states' ability to, at least fully, play the game of hard power politics—the practice of raison d'état. Thereby, the conclusion drawn, at least implicitly, is that the theory of balance of power does not exactly apply to inter-state relations in the region, especially in the context of Arab states. For example, Hinnebusch (2014) argues that the Middle East regional system, primarily the Arab world, is characterized by "the high level of incongruence between states and identity," due to the imposition of borders "by Western imperialism at the expense of a preexisting and relative cultural and linguistic unity," and long history of "powerful suprastate identities and hence its suprastate politics of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islam" (Hinnebusch, 2014, 8–11). As a result, a situation has developed in which the identification of peoples within the modern state borders is undercut by their identifications with larger communities across those borders. These transborder loyalties make the ruling leaderships of those states vulnerable to pressure from their publics' attachment to those transborder identities, which in turn undermine states' autonomy versus their publics, and thereby, constrain the pursuit of hard politics of balance of power in relations among those states.

Similarly, F. Gregory Gause (1992) argues Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, two popular transnational ideologies in the region, have been effective in generating popular mobilization and support outside states' borders. These local allegiances for transborder causes have created opportunity that induced certain states "to support them or destabilizing regimes that oppose them" to "justify and encourage efforts to alter or obliterate existing borders, either militarily or through groundswells of popular support" (Gause, 1992, 446–447). Therefore, given their transborder mass appeal, Gause explains, these ideologies "provide an important power resource for leaders who can successfully project their policies as embodying those ideologies". This projection of transnational ideology posed a challenge to the norms of state sovereignty, which threatened domestic authority in some states and puts them in a vulnerable position. Therefore, these ideological threats can better account for

regional politics in the Middle East than the calculation of capabilities distribution (Gause, 1992, 451).

In the same vein, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver argue that regional politics in the Middle East is characterized by the existence of "some distinctive cultural features" (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, 187). Common Arab ethnic identity, Islamic religious ties, sectarian Sunni-Shia cleavages, and territorial and resource disputes have formed multiple layers of conflictual relationships in the region. These authors contend that while Arabism could be considered the most powerful unifying ideational-security force that can explain the Arab versus others (Jews, Iranian, and Turks) conflictual dynamics, it has also triggered significant inter-Arab states rivalry over the norms of public legitimacy. Buzan and Wæver conclude that while the Arab state system has "consolidated itself sufficiently" to act independently in both domestic and regional international realms against transnational ties, it continues to face challenges as Pan-Islam and Pan-Arab forces continue to influence the working of the system (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, 195–196).

Indeed, both Arab nationalism and Islamic faith have historically functioned as two transnational cultural linkages that gave rise to two influential political ideological bodies—known as Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism. These two cultural-ideological bodies produced policy pressure, political upheavals, and regime changes. Their power of influence sprung largely from their native roots as being locals to the region—unlike other ideological frameworks such as communism or liberalism. During 1940–1960s, Pan-Arabism played a critical transborder influence as an alternative source of identification and legitimacy, which coincided with the birth of statehood in the region. The state system in the region was basically born into the interface of those two ideologies. Therefore, in their formative years, those states faced a competitive ideational arena. Although Pan-Islamism had mostly been dismantled following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, its influence as a source of political community was still relatively present in the collective memory of peoples of the post-empire Middle East. Still, the fresh challenge to the state system came from nationalism in the form of Pan-Arabism. Thus, the state system in the region was not born into a political community vacuum in search of ideational-political boundaries. The boundaries, albeit on a transnational level, already existed in some form. Therefore, to ensure their survival, the states, especially those without much geographical viability or historical root, desperately tried to invent their own reason

for domestic legitimacy and independent foreign policy. In the course of history, domestic legitimacy was attacked and, frequently undermined, and foreign policy independence was compromised, including freedom in making international alliances or treaty agreements.

Just as when Pan-Arabism began to lose its momentum by the end of 1970s, Pan-Islamism made a new resurgence with the rise of political Islam to power in the post-revolution Iran in 1979. Although the ascension of Shia theocracy to power in Iran did not really extend to the Arab Sunni countries given the separating sectarian divide, its impact was felt in the region; it opened a new possibility that Islam as a framework of political identity was achievable and, thereby, inspired Pan-Islamic movements in various countries whether in support of the Iranian version of Islamic ideology or in opposition to it. In the Sunni world, the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement (or parties) represented the major face of the revival of Pan-Islamism. To be sure, the movement started since at least 1940s; still, it (re)gained new public momentum by late 1970s, advancing new form of political order as an alternative to the existing, mostly secular, one.

Without underestimating the influence of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism on the operation of the state system in the region, at least two counterarguments can be offered. First, although the cultural ideology of Pan-Arabism was a potent force, especially since 1950s, the influence cannot clearly be disentangled from the physical-material capabilities of the sponsor country itself: namely Egypt. The ideational projection capacity of Egypt under President Jamal Abdul-Nasser was clearly empowered and energized by its material capacity derived from its central geographical location, strong historical root of statehood, its relatively massive population size, and, critically, its national cohesion which in combination provided it with a unique advantage over all other Arab countries. In comparison, geographically smaller and socially incohesive countries, such as Syria and Iraq, tried to contest Egypt, or later pick up its abdicated role, as the leading Pan-Arab force; however, they failed to produce or exert a degree of ideological influence, anything near to what Nasser's Egypt enjoyed.

The other argument is that the existence of both Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism within the system afforded states meant the availability of more than one source of legitimizing political identity. This availability of two essentially opposite ideational frameworks, one secular and the other religious, in fact, created a significant degree of freedom for political

pragmatism in regional relations. In this context, states had the freedom to choose this one or the other cultural-ideological framework (Arabism or Islamism) depending on which one served their power objectives to counteract the rival one. In this manner, the duplicity of ideational system in a sense reduced the constraining force of the transnational identities on grand strategies vis-à-vis each other. An example was the Saudi's adoption of Islamism discourse to counter the Egypt's Arabism during the 1960s, and again the Saudi's Arabism assertion to counter Iran's Shia Islamism some decades later.

This is not to say that Pan-Arabism, for example, lacked any policy-shifting influence. Egypt, the leading Pan-Arabism ideologue state, occasionally succeeded in limiting the raison d'etat of other Arab states by extracting concessions from them. For example, when President Nasser asked the Saudi government in 1958 to terminate its military treaty with the US government that permitted an American base on its soil, the Kingdom immediately conceded to the pressure. Still, when the push comes to shove, the Kingdom would not hesitate to act upon the requirements of the balance of power. When the Pan-Arab Egypt expanded into the failed state of Yemen in 1962 across the Saudi borders, the conservative Arab power wasted no time to counteract the expansion as it considered the move a threat to its security.

Therefore, the study of foreign policy in the region has also received some attention from the realist approach. Alan R. Taylor (1982), for example, argues that raison d'état, rather than stated transborder identity linkages, has persistently been the primary, even if unpronounced, driving force behind the policies of Arab states. Since the formation of the Arab League, which bestowed a semblance of solidarity upon inter-Arab relations, but which also essentially reinforced the sovereignty of individual states, every major development was either propelled by or further strengthened, the balance of power. From the creation and collapse of the United Arab Republic to the war of 1967 and 1973 and Egypt's separate peace with Israel, alignments and realignments transcended ideological differences and tramped ideological affinities in which pro-unification states (Egypt, Iraq, Syria) often became rivals with each other and friends with states across the ideological divide in the conservative monarchical camp led by Saudi Arabia. Taylor concludes that Arab states, namely Pan-Arab ones, sought to project "ideological purity" but only in the service of state interests, aiming to strengthen the legitimacy of their domestic and foreign policies (Taylor, 1982, 111).

Taking a modified version of power politics approach, Stephen Walt explains that the patterns of alliances among Arab states have been shaped by threat analysis, rather than ideological considerations, even though ideological played a role in power calculation. Although Walt proclaims his theory as based on the balance of threat, not the balance of power per se, the elements of hard power remain the primary component in his theory. The level of threat, according to his theory, is determined by aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and intention aggressiveness (Walt, 1987, 22). According to him, a state with a growing aggregate power, sufficient capability to wage attack, geographical closeness, and reputation for aggressive goals has frequently become the target of alliance-based balancing from its threatened neighbors.

The conclusion can be drawn is, thus, that when it comes to serious threats to the security or survival of the state, the considerations of raison d'état in inter-Arab states overrode the pressure of transborder cultural-ideological linkages as the driving force of foreign policy. While those states occasionally yielded to marginal concessions, the constraining role of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism on the policy choices remained limited and situational. In the final analysis, even in the formative period of the state system, the states acted upon the requirements of balance of power by blocking each other from gaining predominance.

State Failure in the Middle East

On the other strand of the literature, the question of state weakness/ failure and regional conflict also received wide scholarly attention. The general consensus in the relevant literature is that the decline or disintegration of central authorities has generated a destabilizing environment in the region. Primarily, it creates opportunities for the emergence of non-state armed actors whose military objectives and political-cultural affiliations transcend states' borders and, in turn, provide geostrategic space for the involvement of regional states (Kausch, 2017; Mikaelian & Salloukh, 2016; Polese & Santinic, 2018; Schmitz, 2016; Soage, 2020).

In his examination of the case study of Yemen, Schmitz (2016) highlights that the chronic fragility of that externally imposed state has historically invited various regional powers, (mainly Egypt and Saudi Arabia) that sought to influence or shape its domestic politics according to their respective regional interests. In another case study analysis, Mikaelian and Salloukh (2016) argue that the chronic weakness of the

Lebanese state left room for the formation and flourishing of militant organizations such as Hezbollah under strong patronage of Iran and its regional ally of al-Assad's Syria. The organization has been instrumental both domestically in Lebanon and regionally in the service of the strategic objectives of its patronage states.

Introducing the concept of "limited statehood," Polese and Santinic (2018) argue that the inability of the state to retain its control over its national territory in different parts of the Middle East and North Africa has effectively created stateless zones where non-state armed actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthi in Yemen, and various groups in Syria have developed and to carve out their own zones of control and "share" power and control with central government state, a situation which expose those states to external intervention. Similarly, Kausch (2017) explains that the proliferation of conflict in the region can be explained in terms of collaboration between non-state local armed actors, primarily Iran and Saudi Arabia with their respective global power partners of Russia and the United States. The end result is that those failed states have become battlegrounds of power struggle in which religious, sectarian, ideological, and tribal affiliations contest with state boundaries and legitimacy. According to similar lines, Senzai and Bokhari (2017) argue that regional rivalry in the Middle East between the Sunni camp led by Saudi Arabia and Jihadist groups on the one hand, and the Shia camp led by Iran and its allies from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon on the other has turned the region into "geosectarian" spaces whose lines cut across the existing borders. This conflict is concentrated in places like Syria where Iran sought to protect its ally (the Assad regime) while the Saudi-led camp strove to topple it. Finally, taking a broader perspective, Soage (2020) argues that the regional disorder in the Middle East has constituted polarizing dynamics that pits the conservative camp led by Saudi Arabia against the resistance (struggle) camp led by Iran in combination with its regional allies such as Syrian government, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Houthis in Yemen, and a constellation of militia forces in Iraq, which are all united by ideological ties and power objectives.

To sum up, this wealth of literature offers basic but informative theoretical and empirical insights into state failure and its effect on regional politics in the Middle East. They introduce the reader to certain general fault-lines of systemic polarizations and conflict formations in the

region. However, these analyses are largely drawn upon single cases, anecdotal evidence, or broad arguments without offering much generalizable conceptualizations, causal accounts, or historical patterns. This book aims to make a contribution to fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework

State Failure and Its Consequences

The term of state failure has typically been defined broadly and variously, reflecting both the purpose of the work at hand as well as the complexity of the state's properities and operations. The conceptualization offered here, accordingly, aims to meet the purpose of this book while capturing the essence of the subject. To build a definition of state failure it is perhaps inevitable that one has to begin with the concept of the state itself. Typically, discussions on the state lead back to the Weberian definition of the concept. Max Weber has famously succinctly defined the state as a "human community which within a certain area (territory)… claims (successfully) the monopoly of legitimate physical violence" (Weber, 1919, 4). The ability to concentrate the means of coercion or violence is the single most operational and consequential element of stateness. It is this condition that transforms the state, in the words of Onuf, into "a coercive organization" within its borders (Onuf, 1991, 441). Accordingly to this characterization, the state is first and foremost a security organization. Of course, the state is more than a mere organ of the use, actual or potential, of violence. Still, given that the supply of security is the most fundamental task of the state (Rotberg, 2004, 3; Howard, 2014, 14), the concentration of the means of organized violence under the state control is the fundamental requirement of public order. For, when other means of enforcing compliance, extracting concession, or overcoming resistance are exhausted, the employment violence becomes indispensible. Therefore, only with this measure of functionality can a state act as the supreme law-enacting and law-enforcing authority within its borders.

The monopoly over the use of organized violence is what enables the state to perform its primary ends: domestic order and external defense—two constituting components of sovereignty. Domestic order presupposes a bounded domain which is the territory in the case of the state system; it is the space over which the state bases and realizes its power. This quality is

what turns the state into "territorialized mode of power" (Sahlins, 1989, 346). As the physical manifestation of authority, territoriality couples power with geography. But also, the territorial right comes with other entitlements. It confers upon the state to exert power over the human community residing within its territorial boundaries—the normal confines of its authority. Toward that end, the public authority aims to "effectively regulate movements (human and material) across their borders and within them" (Krasner, 2001, 18). To put it in a mundane language, the state is the sole entitled body that has the power over who enters into its territory and who leaves it; what activities are allowed within its territory, and what activities are prohibited. Moreover, territory is also the state's repository power whose resources and their utilities are the exclusive prerogative of the state authority. Indeed, the state's competence depends on its ability to carry out resource and revenue extraction, which cannot efficiently, or at all, be done without the monopoly over the means of violence over the societal compositions within the territory. Taxation (the major source of national budget in most states) requires more than just political representation; the presence of physical coercion is often required in order to extract material resources from the public, necessary for the provision of various public goods, both domestically as well as externally.

Accordingly, the successful organization of domestic order is indispensible for mobilizing and channeling resources, human and material, for external goals. The principal external function of the state is to safeguard the security and properties of its citizens from the actions of foreigners and other states (Gilpin, 1981, 17). As long as the realm beyond the state is anarchic in the sense that there is no world body for law enforcement, states have to build up their own capabilities for external defense. Of course, a militarily weak or vulnerable state may receive defense assistance, or even full protection, from powerful allies. Still, for a state to truly keep its freedom of choice and action in international relations, it has to acquire its own home-based requirements of external defense, independent from the wants and wills of allies which commonly compromise to political independence.

Political independence means that states enjoy the right to "make treaties and to subscribe to multilateral agreements… to choose the company they will keep… to join this or that alliance or association" (Miller, 1986, 84). This follows that they can enter into, or withdraw from, arrangements and treaties with each other solely based on their own self-determined interests and preferences, rather than under mandates

from outside. Of course, no state is totally immune from outside influence. Still, yielding to external preferences or imposition against one's policy choices clearly constitutes a breach of political independence. For a state that depends on outside help for its external defense, it can hardly keep its foreign policy choices from being constrained or, at least, compromised by the benefactor state. This would be a high price paid for physical survival, often at the expense of domestic well-being with potential risk to domestic political stability. For, as governments realize, ceding freedom in foreign policy-making is likely to compromise their ability to fulfill their responsibilities toward their own people whose preferences and needs are supposed to be the single major guide of national policies (Wolfers, 1962, 28).

In brief, maintaining sovereignty in international conducts could only rest on a stable domestic order. The successful performance of these two interrelated criteria is the measure of the state's ability to translate its claim to sovereignty (juridical) into empirical sovereignty. In other words, "the recognition by internal and external actors that the state has the exclusive authority… within its territory" (Thomson, 1995, 219) becomes an actionable political reality. Internal actors submit to the order of the state which assures the absence of domestic rivalry to the central authority; external actors admit the state as the only recognized body within its territory external domination over which is not permissible. Thus, together, these two levels of recognition endow the states with, in the word of Hinsley, "final and absolute authority" (Hinsley, 1986, 26).

The chief quality of failed states is the lack of the capacity to successfully exercise a monopoly over the use of organized violence. As a result, they are no longer able to operate as that supreme organizing power which is necessary in order to establish order within their recognized territorial spaces. The loss of the monopoly is the manifestation, if not the root cause, of the decline of the central authority over its territory. Whatever the source of the first trigger toward the failure (societal or natural, internal or external), the spread of the means of organized violence beyond the state control represents the breaking point in which the state is no longer able to function as a single authority of order enforcement over its territory. The state may still enjoy juridical sovereignty since the decline of its domestic capacity may not affect its sovereignty recognition; however, the decline means the state lacks the physical muscle to enforce and sustain its claim to supreme authority.

As a result, a situation emerges under which other actors with the capacity of using organized violence grow. The development of armed groups within the borders of the state but outside the state control represents the hallmark of state failure (Krasner, 2004, 91). The condition commonly characterizes the emergence of armed resistance or rebellion by one or more militia group(s) or movement(s). Whether the armed struggle could occur either between the central government and armed actor(s) or between two or more armed groups following the total collapse of the central authority. In either case, the state authority is typically the locus of contestation through the use of violence with the ultimate aim of political predominance. Ultimately, the struggle gives rise to a situation in which "for parts or all of a state's territory the holders of empirical sovereignty cannot be determined or not synonymous with those that juridical sovereignty" (Wolff, 2011, 961). In this sense, state failure results in the decoupling of physical power from juridical authority; the state incumbents could still officially claim sovereignty, but the actual power, at least partly, shifts to hands beyond their rule.

Not all states fail to the same degree. The degree to which a central security authority disintegrates often varies from one case to another. Therefore, state failure could be measured roughly along a spectrum, ranging from low failure at the start end to total collapse on the extreme end. In the literature, the differentiation has been made between state weakness "where central government has a poor capacity to control public order within its territory" (Newman, 2009, 422), while state collapse indicates "as a situation where the structure, authority, law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some for, old or new" (Zartman, 1995, 1), and in between stands state failure that refers to a situation in which "the expression of official power is limited to a capital city and one or more ethnically specific zones" (Rotberg, 2002, 86). Such differentiation between various degrees of failure might be useful for comparing individual cases; still, if the concept of state failure is defined, as in this book, in terms of the absence of state monopoly over the means of organized violence, and since monopoly, like sovereignty itself, is essentially an absolute property which admits no degrees, measuring state failure as a dichotomous value (either present or absent) offers a parsimonious definition of the concept while capturing the primary operational essence of the state.

In this definition, the struggle for the state is a zero-sum game. Unless the central government completely overcomes its domestic rivals (non-state armed actors), its territory fragments into two or more, marked or virtual, contested zones of control among contending power seeking parties. The resultant outcome is the emergence of power vacuum. Power vacuum here does not necessarily mean that there is no power actor operating in the space; rather, it simply refers to "stateless areas" (Piazza, 2008, 471); a space over which the supreme policing power of the state has declined or disappeared. When the state authority is gone, insecurity and uncertainty can prevail. Indeed, the power vacuum has been considered as a major consequence of state failure with security destabilizing implications (Armstrong & Rubin, 2005; Howard, 2014; Rotberg, 2004).

Since the resources of external defense are, as a matter of common sense, located within the internal realm, a state that fails to maintain its supreme policing power over its domestic order is also unable to protect its external border. A consensus among the scholars of state failure is that power vacuums within failed states constitute hotbeds for attracting external non-state armed actors, often with transnational linkages and global objectives. The argument made is that the retreat of central authorities over their territories leaves behind state control-free areas where various non-state actors can move and operate (Krasner, 2004; Howard, 2014; Newman, 2009; Patrick, 2007; Piazza, 2008; Rotberg, 2002; Yoo, 2011). An overarching theme in these works is that state failure poses security threats by providing "terrorist groups" with a safe-haven to train, recruit, and conduct operations against local but also global targets. In the words of one scholar, those stateless areas become "reservoirs and exporters of terror" (Rotberg, 2002, 128). Focusing on the spread of transnational and global terrorism as a primary destabilizing consequence of state failure has been inspired particularly by the fact that major global militant groups, primarily of Islamic ideological subscription led by al-Qaida and its offshoots such as the Islamic State, organized in and operated from territories of failed states from Somalia to Syria. That failed states have been used as launching pads by global violence, and terrorism has made scholars and policy-makers alike to designate them as a new source of international threat, equal to, and more complex than, conventional threats from other states.

While the question of the spread of non-state violence is a major security destabilizing consequence of state failure, the question of what

consequence(s) do failed states produce to the balance of power within their region has not received systematic scholarly attention. This question rests on a simple premise: if state failure-created power vacuums attract non-state actors, states should also be expected to take advantage of the vacuum for their own power objectives. This does not mean that a failed state automatically or unconditionally becomes a target of expansionism. Rather, a power vacuum only provides opportunity for expansion. Whether it becomes a target of power expansionism depends basically on how the surrounding states behave toward it: leaving it alone or encroaching upon it. And, only those states with the desire to expand their power are expected to seize upon the rising opportunity. But since power gain by a state or a group of states affects the existing power distribution, defined as the balance of power, other states also tend to intervene in the target failed state(s). In the end, failed states become epicenters of struggle over the balance of power between those that aim to extend their power into them and those that seek to block the expansion.

The Balance of Power and Its Management

In principle, the balance of power refers to some degree of equilibrium in capability distribution among the states of a system, international or regional, during a particular period. Power refers to material capabilities or resources "with which states can influence one another" (Wohlforth, 1993, 4). The operation of the balance of power is based on two interrelated assumptions: "the elements to be balanced are necessary for society or are entitled to exist" and "without a state of equilibrium among them one element will gain ascendancy over others, encroach upon their interests and rights, and may destroy them" (Morgenthau, 1948, 126). In a society of independent members operating in the absence of a universal rule-enforcement body, security and survival should come only self-provided. States have to seek them through an aggregation of self-helping efforts by the vulnerable members against the source of threat.

The conceptual essence of the theory of balance of power is hinged on the belief that only power can effectively check power. In the absence of effective mechanisms to accommodate or regulate competition, force serves as the primary and perpetual ultima ratio in the relations among states (Waltz, 1979, 113). International politics is not as much the realm of establishing legitimacy as of relations of power—the ultimate means of domination. Although the state system in principle enshrines the right

of the state to existence and independence, the inherent anarchic nature of system means that the threat is constantly present because force overrides any legal or moral constraints that might exist. In this manner, states are inescapably and helplessly locked in a situation in which they need to constantly maintain equilibrium to ensure that "no single state or coalition of states possesses overwhelming power and thereby incentive to launch war against weaker states" (T.V, 2004, 5–6). Constructing order through the balance of force might not be the best operational choice. Still, in an anarchic system populated by separate states, the alternative to checking power predominance through a collective power is "either universal anarchy, or universal dominion" (Wight, 2019, 179). That means the balance of power is both less dangerous and more practical for the maintenance of sovereignty plurality of the system.

A state's attempt at power aggrandizement might well be driven by defensive and security goals, rather than hegemonic design. Still, the uncertainty about unknown intentions or future ambitions stands in the way of accommodation (Waltz, 1979, 105). The relativity of power means that any state's gain sooner or later becomes other states' loss. Also, holding power capability in reserve without putting it into use whether directly or indirectly is not a long-lasting trait in international relations is based on the premise that power is not only a means for furthering influence but also can accelerate the drive for more power. Therefore, the worry permeating the system is that the growth of power may in the end breed the temptations for a full-scale push for dominating the system (Gilpin, 1981, 94–95) regardless of its original intended purpose. For this reason, whenever a state expands its power, it should be counteracted to reverse the gain or to neutralize it with an equal gain. Thus, peace and stability through the balance of capabilities means that states need to remain constantly alert to changes in power distribution.

By postulating that the distribution of material-military capabilities is/ should be the anchor of international order, the theory of balance of power makes the underlying assumption that power can be measured with reliable precision. In the real world, however, this requirement can hardly be met. Power is a complex composition and not all its elements submit to precise measurement. Tangible components such as the mass of territory, the size of population, the extent of natural resource endowments, or the quantities and qualities of weaponries are largely quantifiable assets and, therefore, can be measured with significant certainty. But power also includes what Paul Kennedy calls "unquantifiable factors," that part

of power that pertains to ideational, political, and organizational realms (Kennedy, 1988, 212). The existence of this intangible aspect complicates any attempt at drawing a comprehensive and objective assessment of the capabilities of states. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that the degree of the im/balance of a particular power distribution remains always uncertain, which, in turn, can present empirical challenges to the reliability of the system as a basis of stability. For, if the system is supposed to extract stability from equilibrium of force, how objective judgments can be drawn about the equilibrium if power itself does not yield to precise measurement. Scholars of the theory of balance of power recognize this operationalization shortcoming in the theory. Nevertheless, they contend that "a fair approximation" (Wolfers, 1962, 118), or rough assessment (Waltz, 1979, 131) of capability distribution among states is useful enough to make a judgment on the state of im/balance of power.

Still, immaterial elements remain to be taken into power consideration. Among unquantifiable components of power, ideology is one of the most consequential ones. Defined as basically a set of ideas that advance certain prescriptions on how a political order should be organized and legitimized, an ideology is a means for either promoting or undermining the stability of established relations of power. An ideology is power because it carries the potential for cultivating allegiance and inspiring action. Therefore, it provides its flagbearer state with a potential source of power. Locally it generates political energy and popular mobilization; transnationally, it often proves instrumental in winning support and building loyalty among populations across national borders on behalf of the cause it advances. In this way, a state that successfully appropriates and propagates an ideology externally adds to its influence projection abroad, which may ultimately shift the existing equilibrium of power in its favor. For example, through prescribing a new political security order, a state with a hegemonic or revolutionary ideology can spawn and sponsor radical or subversive movements among dissatisfied or marginalized populations within its region. This development can both destabilize the existing balance of power and shift it in favor of the ideologue state. This transnational ideology projection tends to assume higher intensity and effectiveness in contexts of the existence of transborder cultural-historical ties between national populations. In such cases, those ties provide the ideologue state with readily available conduits to transmit its political visions for a new order across the borders into the neighboring countries in order to influence their political decision or even to overthrow

their domestic order by inciting local populations. Thus, if successful, an ideology becomes a vehicle for the state to expand its power and, thereby, upset an existing balance of power. The conclusion can be drawn, therefore, is that even if the material capability distribution is approximately or roughly in balance, when the system is characterized by ideational disharmony with at least one radical or hegemonic ideologue state, the stability of the system becomes unsettled and even collapses under the pressure produced by political discord and its resultant power dispute among its states.

Some scholars of the theory recognize this inadequacy of the system of balance of power as a reliable guide for international stability. The argument made is that a durable maintenance of peace and stability requires more than just a degree of equilibrium in material capability distribution; it also needs some sort of ideational consensus among the states in order for a balance of power to survive in the long term. For example, they argue that a key reason for why the system relatively worked out to its stated purpose in the nineteenth century Europe was that there existed among the statesmen of the period "a uniformity of assumptions" (Gulik, 1955, 23) or "a sense of shared value" (Kissinger, 2014, 75) that buttressed the stability of the system through cultivating mutual trust in the necessity of resisting hegemonic attempts and through harmonizing the legitimizing principles of the order. The underlying postulate here is that a balance of power is as much a matter of capability calculation or its equilibrium as of the political judgments of statesmen. Even if the balance of power is not really equal, which cannot be determined with certainty anyway, a consensus among the statesmen over the ideational principles of the system can work as a supplement element to ensure peace and stability. Under such condition of harmony, there might even be an opportunity for changing the balance of power; still, the states mutually refrain from launching expansionism, preferring to keep the stability. By the same token, the absence of such ideational-political consensus and the balance by itself is not likely to survive in long-term amid ideational discord. Gulik explains that in the absence of homogeneity in political principles "an equilibrium would be seriously handicapped and… and highly unstable" (Gulik, 1955, 24).

Thus, if a level of ideational harmony, which creates mutual satisfaction, among the states of a system of balance of power is indispensible for stability, the rise of dissatisfaction within the system tends to create the recipe for a power struggle. Under such a state of disharmony, the

general polarization develops in which satisfied states advocate the power distribution based on the status quo, while dissatisfied ones seek to alter it and thereby become revisionist.

Revisionism and Status Quoism

Revisionism and status quoism represent two opposite types of grand strategies. According to this strategic dichotomy, states pursue divergent power goals toward an existing balance of power. While some states seek to alter or overthrow the distribution, others desire or defend, its preservation. Morgenthau succinctly draws a comparison between these types of grand strategies:

> A nation whose foreign policy tends toward keeping power and not toward changing the distribution of power in its favor pursues a policy of the status quo. A nation whose foreign policy aims at acquiring more power than it actually has through expansion of its power beyond its frontiers, whose foreign policy, in other words, seeks a favorable change in power status, pursues a policy of imperialism (revisionism). (Morgenthau, 1948, 20)

Accordingly, the divergent in power goals between status quo and revisionist states is basically the function of their dis/satisfaction with the system. Being satisfied, the former tries to preserve what it already has of power values; while the latter seeks to extend its own in order redress its dissatisfaction (Schweller, 1998; Wolfers, 1951). The causes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction could be diverse. Yet, a general categorization can be made. Status quoism is the strategy of either the predominant that, by definition, possesses a favorable power position, a distribution that commonly emerges following victory in a recent war; or the reserved that refers to a state that chooses to adjust its power goal to the status quo not particularly because it possesses a favorable power position within the system but because it wishes to allocate its energy and resources for domestic national-societal developments instead of external power adventures. Similarly, revisionism is the strategy of either the disadvantaged that does not settle for its current power positions that it sustained as a result of defeat in a recent war or the ambitious that following the rise of a combative or revivalist leadership aspires to extend its power position within the system.

Regardless of the root cause of the polarization of the system into dissatisfied and satisfied states, power remains the core preoccupation of both sides across the strategic divide. In both cases, the power values at stake could be similar, which commonly involve ideological arrangements, territorial boundaries, or spheres of dominance. Wolfers contends that for a revisionist state:

> The aim may be… domination over other peoples or territorial expansion; but it may also represent a quest for the return of lost territory, or the redress of legitimate grievances, such as termination of unjust discriminations, the emancipation from foreign control or imposition… Self-preservation (status quoism)… may be considered to include only national independence and the territorial integrity of the homeland; or it may be held to embrace a whole catalogue of "vital interests," from safety belts and influence zones… (Wolfers, 1951, 5051)

In this sense, a revisionist state's push for power might well be driven by the desire for preponderance over the system, or simply for consolidating its security in view of external threats. By the same token, a status quo state's security boundaries may be limited to its national borders, but it may also encompass an extended area of influence or dominance far beyond its borders. Therefore, drawing any categorical judgment to identify the drive for revisionism with the greed for power and status quoism with the mere goal of self-preservation does not necessarily correspond to reality. True, revisionist states seek to further their positions on those power values given their disadvantage, real or perceived; while given their favorable position or general content, status quo states seek the preservation of the existing order of their distribution. Beyond this divergence, however, the underlying drives of either of these two opposite power preferences remain to be power, or what power can achieve. After all, as Buzan says, revisionist states are "as much a part of the anarchy" as the status quo ones (Buzan, 1983, 177) under which states could be driven by a combination of survival, security, and hegemony. Revisionist states might be chief movers of international politics in terms of stability and war; yet, they are not necessarily inherently or uniquely aggressive or hegemonic. The reason that their call for a redistribution of power values or reordering the principles of system is likely to generate conflict and war is simply because those demands go opposite to the power interests of some other states, status quo ones.

This similarity in the type and the scope of strategic ambitions between revisionist and status quo states aside, that the two differ in their immediate goal. That a status quo state concentrates on securing its existing power position while a revisionist strives for the enlargement of its own justifies defining the former as a security seeker while the latter is a power seeker (Schuman, 1948, 378; Schweller, 1998, 24). This distinction should not mean that only status quo states seek security or self-preservation, or revisionist states pursue power in disregard for their security. As Waltz argues, states are all security seekers at the core, whose primary goal is physical survival (Waltz, 1979, 18). Still, it is necessary for analytical purposes to draw a distinction between the strategies of status quoism and revisionism in terms of security and power respectively as their initial drive.

In view of their division into satisfied and dissatisfied actors based on security-seeking versus power-seeking dichotomous immediate goal, status quo and revisionist states tend to use different pronouncements to proclaim and legitimize their opposite positions on an existing balance of power. In this respect, while status quo states typically stress stability and security as the benefits of the existing order, revisionist states denounce it as unjust or oppressive and call for an alternative order, one based on justice or liberation.

The revisionist-status quo polarization may exist for periods of time without destabilizing the system. Yet, as the revisionist states act upon their expansionist strategy, power struggle tends to break out as the status quo states react to resist changes. This strategic incompatibility has been considered a major source of international conflicts and war in the history of international relations (Buzan, 1983, 176; Davidson, 2006, 10). True, some degree of revisionism might still be accommodated within the existing balance of power when only limited adjustments, such as a territorial modification, are required without posing a major challenge to the essence of the power distribution (Buzan, 1983, 181–182; Morgenthau, 1948, 27). Beyond such accommodable revisionism, however, unless revisionism is denied opportunity, power struggle along the strategic divide is bound to occur. That power distribution is a zero-sum calculus ensures that the revisionist states' move to change the balance of power induces the status quo states to counteract with balancing, fearing that the expansion might ultimately undermine or destroy the security of their territorial-political independence, or their spheres of dominance or alliance abroad.

States are opportunist actors. Since the value of a gain from an action diminishes proportionally by the cost of the action, revisionist states, in the expectation of resistance from status quo states, are expected to pursue their expansionist objective only in the presence of opportunities. An opportunity functions as an incentive because it relatively reduces the cost of seeking a particular value. While the system of balance of power aims to contain the drive for power expansion, opportunity creates incentives for it. If status quo states stand on guard to thwart threats of revisionism, revisionist states look for windows of opportunity for altering a power distribution. Traditionally the accumulation of preponderant capabilities through alignment among dissatisfied states vis-à-vis the status quo states represented a typical opportune moment for starting a revisionist campaign (Schweller, 1994). Nonetheless, the emergence of power vacuum may provide opportunities for equal incentives for launching revisionism. The opportunity emerging in this context makes the expectation that the expected cost of expansion is relatively low, not least given the failed state in question lacks defense capability against external intervention. In this context, the degree to which state failure-produced power vacuum creates temptations for expansion, to the same degree it becomes a potential threat to the status quo power distribution. This threat becomes real when a state or group of states seize upon the emerging into the failed state as a venue to alter the existing balance of power in their favor.

Any order of power distributions is constructed around some sort of political-territorial arrangements. In the contemporary world, it is based on the system of sovereign states. The identification of power distribution with the state system means territorial unity of states, their independence, their belonging within a particular sphere of dominance, and/or their alliance membership constitute(s) key elements of power equilibrium within the system. A change in this respect tends to produce a shift in the balance of power. True, territorial unity of states is largely secure from, for example, dismemberment under the current international rule under which, as Robert Jackson points out, the right of territorial takeover has largely been "extinguished" (Jackson, 1999, 434, 454). Territorial annexation might have not completely disappeared altogether as an approach of international revisionism, yet it has increasingly become an uncommon venture given its ultimate costs incurred by international reactions that it provokes whether in the form of economic sanctions and/or military responses. However, the same international rule that more or less

assures the territorial survival of states does not particularly save them from becoming targets of political-military domination, which could be incremental and/or indirect.

Accordingly, power expansion into failed states commonly limits itself to establishing political-military domination, rather than territorial incorporation. The domination is simply initiated by intervention (expansionist intervention) either directly through the deployment of a regular army to occupy the failed state or indirectly through forming/supporting ally or proxy forces to achieve domination over the state. In the first case, the revisionist state aims to achieve domination on its own behalf; in the second case, it uses its linked forces to achieve it on its own behalf. Expansionist intervention provokes counter-intervention from threatened states with the aim of balancing any power gain that the expanding state may achieve. By this definition, a balancing intervention occurs only following the expansionist intervention and aims at its prevention or reversion; the concern of prevention is typically the preservation of the ruling elite in government; the concern of reversion may require its restoration to power after its overthrow. The balancing intervention could be conducted through a range of means. While the conventional means of hard military capabilities is still the common use, balancing states may also employ economic resources. Accordingly, the intervention takes direct form through the deployment of the army or indirect form through supplying military assistance or sending financial aids to an ally or proxy force, government or non-government. In the direct case, the war occurs between the balancing state against the expanding state or its local ally or proxy forces; in the indirect case, the war occurs between the ally or proxy forces of the balancing state against the expanding state or its local ally or proxy forces.

In this manner, expansionist and balancing interventions turn target failed states into epicenters of power struggle. Their resources including territories, the form of their political systems, their external alignments, and alliance memberships can all become power values at stake in the struggle among the intervening states. Given these power values of failed states, the outcome of the struggle determines the fate of the existing balance of power between its preservation and revision, or its restoration and redistribution.

Argument and Organization of the Book

This book starts from the basic argument that through creating a power vacuum, failed states provide opportunities for power expansion. It further argues that when a state or a group of states initiates intervention into them, other states react with counter-intervention. Moreover, it argues that the type of power intervention a state conducts into failed states is determined by its grand strategy. Accordingly, this power struggle develops roughly along a revisionist-status quo strategic divide; while revisionist states expand, status quo one's balance: expansionist intervention versus balancing intervention.

This proposition is examined using multiple-case studies analysis in the Middle East. This book deals with two classes of cases: regional states and failed states. The first class includes six cases: Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria (pre-2011), and Turkey. This group of states constitutes major powers of the state system of the region and, therefore, they form the preeminent local players of the region's balance of power. Accordingly, their interventionist approaches (expansionist versus balancing) toward failed states are the focus of the analysis of this book. The class of failed states includes five cases: Yemen (1962–1970), Lebanon (1975–1989), Iraq (2003–2020), Yemen (2004–2020), and Syria (2011–2020).[1] These cases of state failure constitute the context within which the struggle for a balance of power between revisionist and status quo powers becomes activated. Since during the period under study that spans the history of the occurrence of those cases of state failure, the region remained continuously and variably divided along revisionist-status quo grand strategies, it offers a rich universe of data to examine the determining effect of the type of grand strategy on the type interventionist approach toward those failed states. This question is the focus of analysis of this book.

The body analysis is structured around three major questions: what did bring about state failure? This is the basic question that lays the backdrop for the analysis of each empirical chapter. What interventionist approaches did various regional powers take toward the failed states? Did revisionist powers initiate expansionist intervention while status quo ones counteract

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[1] At this writing, many of the recent cases of state failure (cases started during 2000s) are still going on to various degrees. Therefore, the end years only indicate the point in time that this book covers.

with balancing intervention? These two interrelated questions compel the heart of the analysis. These three questions are asked in each case, and the answers provided aim to examine the primary assumption that there are patterns of relationships between the type of grand strategy and the type of intervention approach toward failed states according to which revisionist powers initiate expansionist intervention, while status quo ones counteract with balancing intervention.

The organization of this book is straightforward. It contains seven chapters. The first two chapters deal with literature and theory. Chapter one lays out the theoretical discussion and formulation. Chapter two establishes grand strategy of each one of regional powers through using selections of speeches of their top statesmen during various points in time of the period under study. The empirical part includes five cases. They are simply organized in a chronological order, starting with the case of Yemen (1962–1970) and ending with the case of Syria (2011–2020).

To conclude, this book is primarily a historical study. Its main aim is to identify certain historical patterns in international regional politics of the Middle East. But also, it aims at theoretical generalizations to contribute to systematic knowledge about Middle East politics and the broader scholarly field of both strands of literature: grand strategy and state failure. By selecting a region that has experienced both multiple cases of state failure and persistent regional polarization into revisionist and status quo states, this book represents a major effort to establish the connection between the occurrence of state failure and the outbreak of conflict over the regional balance of power.

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Regional Powers: Grand Strategies of Revisionism and Status Quoism

Overview

This chapter aims to determine the type of grand strategies of the six regional powers of the Middle East: Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria (pre-2011), and Turkey. For this purpose, it conducts a survey of samples of speech delivered by states' top leaders as a source to identify the grand strategy of each one of those states under every leadership with at least a four year-tenure in power during different periods under study. This selection is based on the premise that states not only formulate their own grand strategies but also communicate them in the form of public statements or policy declarations to audiences domestically as well as externally. Publicizing grand strategies, generally, aims to form expectations, draw lines, or convey commitments. For example, a revisionist state may want to prepare its people for conflict or to pressure its opposing state(s) for concession; similarly, a status quo state may want to reassure its people or show resolve against aggression or subversion. In other words, a state's grand strategies can be detected in the speeches communicated or published by its statesmen. Finally, due to space constraints, as a rule only three relevant speeches in the case of each leader are quoted as samples.

As outlined in the previous chapter, in accordance with their respective immediate goals, revisionist states are concerned with power while the status quo with security, the leaders of each side tend to make different

types of assertions and pronouncements. To repeat, while status quo states typically stress stability and security as the benefits of the existing order, revisionist states condemn it as unjust or oppressive and, therefore, call for an alternative order, one based on justice and liberation.

Egypt: From Pan-Arabism to State Sovereignty

During the period under study (1960–2020), Egyptian leadership changed four times: Gamal Abdul-Nasser ruled (1956–1970), Anwar Sadat (1970–1981), Hosni Mubarak (1981–2011), Muhamed Morsi (2012–2013), and Abdul-Fatah al-Sisi (2014–2020). The reign Morsi is excluded as it lasted less than four years.

With the ascension of Arab nationalists to power following the military coup of 1952 that overthrew the monarchy, Egypt became an avowed champion of Pan-Arabism under President **Nasser**. During the reign of Nasser, thus, Egypt had become a classic case of revisionist power with a pronounced intent of removing "imperialism and its collaborators from the Arab homeland" and unifying Arab countries under a single rule. Accordingly, proclaiming the universality of his revolution to the Arab countries as one homeland of one cultural-historical community, Nasser expressed the desire to export it throughout the Arab world now divided into the jurisdiction of separate sovereign states. He proclaimed:

> Our revolution of 1952 is not a local revolution. It is an Arab revolution. The artificial division between parts of the Arab homeland is baseless and meaningless. Any revolution in any part of the Arab homeland extends to other parts because our history and our destiny is one… We support revolution against imperialism in every part of the Arab homeland because our struggle, our cause, and our goal are the same. (Nasser, 1959)

As Pan-Arab wave continued to make inroad with the continuous fall of pro-Western monarchies in other parts of the Arab world, Egypt grew in confidence that the coming age would vindicate its grand strategy. Reflecting on the growing momentum, Nasser declared, "the success of revolution for independence in Damascus, in Cairo, and in Baghdad brings about revolution in other parts of the homeland… to remove all collaborators of imperialism from the Arab homeland from the Ocean to the Gulf" (Nasser, 1958). It was during this period that the revolution gained its first real success when in 1958 Syria agreed to make unification

with Egypt. The outcome was the creation of **the United Arab Republic** dominated by Egyptians. The new entity was meant to be nothing less than the nucleus of an Arab empire under the hegemony of the giant Arab nationalist power. **Nasser** proclaimed such a design in a speech he delivered in Damascus in February 1961 when he declared, "today the UAR is pioneering the Arab struggle. The people of the UAR are leading their holy march to destroy the existence of imperialism and its collaborators… in the Arab homeland" (Nasser, 1961). The promise of Arab unification suffered a severe blow, however, when the union fell apart following Syria's secession in September 1961.

Still, like a prophet who had been suffered a temporary setback, Nasser reasserted his mission, doubling down on his goal of unifying Arab countries. Defeated but undeterred, he vowed to continue, "Egypt's struggle for Arab unification is a historical responsibility that falls on the shoulder of Egyptians due to their potential capabilities and status," he boasted (Nasser, 1962). The implosion of the UAR, President Nasser believed, was a temporary setback that determination could reverse. However, Egypt's chance for realizing its Pan-Arab revisionism was effectively eliminated following the death of President Nasser himself in 1970—marking the beginning of the Egypt's strategic turn from Pan-Arab revolutionary expansionism toward status quoism.

Muhammad Anwar Sadat, who succeeded President Nasser, represented this new era of Egypt's grand strategy. Although he highlighted the role of President Nasser "in awakening the nation, leading her to join the course of world history, and galvanizing her with purpose, value, and hope," President **Sadat** also recognized that "we are facing challenges and obstacles" as a result of the policies of the Nasser's era (Sadat, 1970). To be sure, Sadat was not totally to settle for the status quo. After all, a large swath of his country, the strategic Sinai Peninsula, was lost in the latest war with Israel. Yet, the scope of Egypt's revisionist design under Sadat had been reduced to what was described in the previous chapter as a limited territorial claim that it did not pose threats to a principal structure of the existing power distribution and, therefore, could be accommodated with a pre-war territorial restoration. In fact, if anything, the return of the Sinai would essentially solidify the status quo since the adjustment was to come at the expense of Egypt's acceptance of the state of Israel whose destruction was essentially the Nasser revisionism's gateway toward Arab unification. Sadat needed to launch one more war but only as halfway toward a permanent political settlement. Therefore, after the

partial military victory against Israel in 1973 in what he dubbed "the Crossing", Sadat declared that Egypt chose to pursue diplomatic solution to bring to an end the enduring conflicts with its neighbor. Pursing such a diplomatic approach would allow **Sadat** to turn his focus domestically to deal the mounting economic and social crises. Indeed, Sadat found his reign in the face of the heavily inherited burdens incurred by economic bankruptcy, militarily defeats, and territorial loss. In response to this unfavorable reality, Sadat began shifting his country away from his predecessor's apparently costly revisionist ambitions.

Addressing the members of the Egyptian National Assembly, he recognized that "after we have achieved military and political crossings, my brothers and sisters, time had come to call upon you to participate in one of the most urgent task that our country is facing. That task I call the second crossing or the task of reconstruction and growth…" (Sadat, 1974). For this purpose, Sadat's Egypt also needed to build cordial ties with the status quo oil-rich Arab monarchies of the Gulf, whom **Nasser**'s aggressive nationalism had terrorized and antagonized. Therefore, to win their goodwill in order to secure urgently needed financial aids, as an act of reassurance, President Sadat renounced his predecessor's political incrimination of pro-Western Arab monarchies. He understood the futility and danger of Nasser's Pan-Arabism, he was eager to scrap it. "Arab solidarity is a primary antidote for the divisive policy of polarizing Arab countries into reactionary states and progressive states. We said that the Arab peoples are free in choosing their system of rule … Arab states should not doubt our commitment to this principle and our non-interference, overt or covert, in their domestic affairs" (Sadat, 1977). This expressed renouncement of Pan-Arabism by Egypt became evident in Egypt's disinclination toward the unification project proposed by Syria and Libya during this period. Thus, **Sadat** turned the Arab giant state away from the Nasser's Pan-Arab revisionism into status quo state, abiding by the system of state sovereignty.

Sadat's successor, Muhammad Husni **Mubarak** (1982–2011), continued and promoted his predecessor's status quo grand strategy. During a speech to the Egyptian National Assembly, Mubarak expressed this commitment to Sadat's vision both domestically for advancing political and economic reforms and internationally for stability when he explained:

We continue with a stable approach in the foreign policy domain that protects the national rights of Egypt and protect its vital interest based on friendship and cooperation with all nations who are willing to build understanding and cooperation… Our strategic interests are tied in the first place with Arab, Islamic, African and Asian states, and those interests require that we maintain close cooperation with the countries of Europe and the US in various fields… Our way is one of achieving prosperity and stability which is the choice of our nation. (Mubarak, 1983, 30)

Thus, Mubarak reinforced the foreign policy approach that made continuity both at home and abroad the driving principle of Egypt. "My policy is clear and transparent… I want to reiterate to you that the policy of Egypt continuity (with Sadat's era) and stability, this is as true in both our foreign policy as well as our domestic affairs… the goal is to make sure that peace, instead of hegemonic ambitions toward each other, prevails…" (Mubarak, 1983, 47).

In this order for the maintenance of peace and stability, President Mubarak asserted, his country had a major role, as a regional power, to act whenever the situation demands it. "We cannot stand by doing nothing (toward the regional developments), for anything that happens in the region affects our interests, and Egypt is capable of striving to ensure the preservation of balance and stability" (Mubarak, 1983, 90). The Mubarak's era, which lasted for nearly three decades, consolidated the position of Egypt as a power for regional stability when it continued to focus its resources toward handling its domestic challenges, which proved to be chronic and challenged the carrying capacity of the country's resources.

After the departure of President **Mubarak** in 2011, Egypt plunged into a two-year period of instability caused by regime change and resultant tumultuous political transition under a one-year rule of Muslim Brotherhood led by Muhamad Moris. The domestic order was restored with a military coup in summer 2013 which brought General Abdul-Fatah **al-Sisi**. Al-Sisi inherited not only the age-old economic frailty which was only compounded by a two-year domestic turmoil but also a weakened domestic order represented by the rise of Islamic militancy. Therefore, more than ever since Sadat, Egypt, now under a new leader, continued to be occupied by its domestic affairs.

In his first address to the nation as a president, al-Sisi tried to encourage working on putting the country's economy in order as the national priority in order to maintain its regional role. "Egypt needs to be strong from within in order to follow its objectives and roles abroad-…Whenever we are strong from within and our economy is strong, we maintain our independence in decision-making and making our voice heard and our will is free. Egypt must restore its traditional role… as a pillar of stability in the Middle East…" (State Information Service, 2014a, 2014b).

Still, overwhelmed with domestic challenges, Egypt did not have much attention directed toward its regional environment. This was evident in the frequent absence of mentioning of foreign policy issues in al-Sisi's speeches. While economic erosion continued to be a major domestic issue, the security instability caused by Islamic groups against the government also handicapped the state from within. "You must know that we are facing a tremendous challenge… Our challenge is not economy; it is an existential challenge… There are people who are plotting to destroy the Egyptian state…," he recognized in reference to Islamic militant groups (State Information Service, 2014a, 2014b).

But also, **al-Sisi** tried early on to revive Egypt's traditional role as a regional stabilizer. In this regard, al-Sisi sought to revive his country's peace mediation role in its immediate neighborhood. Egypt "will do all efforts in order to achieve comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East, the peace that will drain one of the primary sources that feed terrorists organization… Peace that will open the door of hope for achieving prosperity, security and stability," al-Sisi declared (State Information Service, 2016).

To sum up, Egypt was a revisionist power during Nasser (1960–1970). Following the departure of Nasser, Sadat transformed Egypt into a status quo power in 1970. Since then, both Mubarak who came to power following the departure of Sadat and al-Sisi who succeeded post-Mubarak era led the country in accordance with this status quo strategy.

Iran; From a Status Quo Monarchy to a Theocratic Revolutionary

Iran was a status quo power under the reign of Monarchy of Muhamad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1960–1979). When Monarchy was replaced by the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran following the 1979 Revolution, Iran shifted to revisionism since then.

Under the Shah Pahlavi, Iran was primarily preoccupied with domestic modernization. The Shah aimed to modernize socioeconomic structure of the country to join the ranks of modern countries—a mission that was initiated by his father Raza Shah some decades earlier. In this regard, he says:

> Reza khan had been greatly influenced by the reforms Kemal Ataturk had introduced in Turkey and for a time he hoped to emulate his neighbor's achievements and turn Iran into a modern republic…. A rapid program of industrialization was launched to begin domestic production of basic manufactured goods. Agricultural reform was on his mind but something he never had time to implement. That was left to me and the White Revolution I began in the 1960s. (Pahlavi, 1980, 52)

The national modernization was anchored on lavish increase in national revenue from oil export. While the **Shah** lavishly spent on military advancement, it was modernizing his country under what he dubbed **"White Revolution"** that became his priority policy focus. To realize his goal, Shah needed stability in the region. In this connection, he remarked in 1961 that "We are striving for a durable world peace, not only from the viewpoint of our earnest and unceasing desires for peace… but also in the light of our national interests. We aspire to peace so that under its protection we shall be able to attain our lofty objectives (modernization) successfully" (Shahanshah Aryamehr, 1970, 84). From this standpoint, the Shah actively supported the preservation of regional stability and maintenance of state sovereignty in the region an imperative matter. "The Middle East requires a peace that is permanent and enduring if the countries of this region are to organize their economy and domestic affairs… Each nation must remain within the confines of its boundaries and devote its energies to the development and improvement of its territory" (Shahanshah Aryamehr, 1970, 125). To the end of his

reign, the Shah moved ahead with his national modernization at home while remained committed to regional status quoism.

The end of the Shah's monarchy by **the 1979 revolution** also brought about a new Iran from a strategic perspective. The revolution ultimately brought Shia theocratic class led by Ayatollah **Khomeini** to power. Imam Khomeini soon began calling for an Iranian-style revolution in other countries. "We want to export our revolution, our cultural revolution, our Islamic revolution to all other Muslim countries," he declared (Khomeini, 1981, 107). Khomeini asserted that the bid for exporting the revolution was legitimized by the transnational nature of its principles. "Our revolution is Islamic before being Iranian…Islam cannot be confined to any particular countries…," he asserted (Khomeini, 1981, 176, 219). In this sense, similar to the now demised Pan-Arab revolutionary nationalism, the revolutionary Iran considered its political Islamic ideology as transcending state boundaries and sovereignty.

The declared aim of spreading the revolution was to support the peoples of the region to end what the Imam considered as foreign influence or rule. "We fully support all countries that currently live under the influence of imperialism to win their independence…," the Imam asserted (Khomeini, 1981, 31–32). Not only had the presence of foreign powers in the region was to be targeted but also their allies in the region. Thus, echoing a version of the strategic discourse of Egypt under President **Nasser**, Imam **Khomeini**'s Iran denounced "unfaithful Muslims… who act as collaborators of dominant powers… who open (military) bases for non-believers and oppressors" in Muslim countries (Khomeini, 1981, 71). This was a clear reference to other monarchies in the region, which like the Shah, aligned with Western powers for their security protection. In this manner, Iran radically transformed into a revolutionary force in the region, bent on exporting its model of Islamic revolution and to other countries in a bid to remake the regional order. Thus, with the rise of revolutionary Iran, the center of regional systemic dissatisfaction had basically moved from Egypt to Iran—Iran assumed the revisionist role that Egypt played under President Nasser and which his successor abdicated.

When Imam **Khomeini** died in 1989, his handpick cleric and the first president of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei replaced him as the leader of the Islamic Republic. Upon assuming supreme leadership,

Khamenei pledged full commitment to the Imam's grand strategy. In his inaugural address, he affirmed:

> The path of the Iranian people is the path that was invented by our great Imam… the goals are the same, the enemies are the same, and the purpose, concerns and the faith are the same… It is our duty to continue on that path without hesitation until we reach the final destination which is the absolute rule of Islam and the realization of the religion of God and the total victory of Islam on its enemies…. (Dar al-Welayah, 1989a, 1989b)

Accordingly, following the path of his predecessor, **Khamenei** reinforced the Iran's commitment to exporting the Islamic Revolution to other countries. In the view of the new leader, the revolution had made a breakthrough in human history that carried the potential to generate further transformation by history and the lives of other peoples. "The oppressed peoples did not imagine the possibility of confronting the powers of arrogance and its collaborators. We rose and we won. Why we should not introduce our experience (the revolution) to other peoples? We will export our revolution; we will not hesitate to export the faith of the prophets and righteous human culture and the ideas of perseverance, struggle, and self-sacrifice," Khamenei declared (Dar al-Welayah, 1989a, 1989b). The commitment to the legacy of the revolution's founder on foreign policy, particularly in regard to removing the presence of Western powers in the region, became the chief declared motto of Iran under Khamenei. On the occasion of the Imam's passing, for example, Khamenei remarked:

> The guide of the Imam can be surmised as the call to return to true Islam… The fact is Islam guarantees independence and liberty for peoples from oppression and suppression… There is no doubt that the sufferings of Muslim peoples today are caused by domination of the oppressive powers… The essence of the Imam's teachings was that we Muslims need to expel foreign forces and enemies of Islam who are the source of the sufferings of Muslims today. (Dar al-Welayah, 1999)

To sum up, Iran was a status quo power under the Monarchy of the Shah until its overthrow by the 1979 Revolution. With the ascension of the Shia clergy class to power under Imam Khomeini following the regime change, Iran turned revisionist with a stated goal of changing the regional

order through exporting its version of Islamic revolution to other countries. After the death of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Republic, in 1989, his successor, Ali Khamenei, reinforced this revisionist grand strategy.

Israel; Perpetual Struggle
for Shifting Status Quo

Although during the period under study (1962–2020), it experienced regular transitions of leadership as an election-based political system, Israel remained essentially consistent in its grand strategy. As the quest for security and stability in the region has been its primary concern, Israel fixedly pursued status quoism. What varied has been the mechanism of attaining and maintaining its objectives while recurring wars with its neighbors repeatedly created a new reality in its favor. Therefore, while Israel identified its interests with the preservation of the status quo, paradoxically, the status quo kept changing as a result of its own military victories against its Arab neighbors. After every war, Israel tried to consolidate new territorial or military status quo or trade it for some more security.

With its birth in 1948 as a result of a resolution by the United Nations, Israel started facing existential threats from its Arab neighbors who refused to accept it as a sovereign state. Thus, Israel was born into insecurity. To avoid confrontation with its much-larger neighbors, the nascent appealed for neighborliness. During the proclamation of independence, Prime Minister David **Ben-Gurion** (1948–1953 and 1955–1963) called upon "all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness… to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land… in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East" (Knesset, 1948). However, soon war broke out as Israeli neighboring Arab states declined to recognize the new state as a sovereign country. The war of 1948 did not change much of the reality as it ended in a stalemate. Although the ceasefire brought military relief for the new state, it failed to bring about the lasting peace it sought. The Israel's constant sense of insecurity of its neighbors was evident in the speech of Ben-Gurion after the shaky cessation of hostility with Arab states:

> Our desire, however, is to prevent war and to safeguard our rights, our position, and our security. That can be achieved in one way only: if our

friends and the true lovers of peace supply us with sufficient defensive arms not lower in quality than those of the enemy, even if not in the same quantity. Only if we receive sufficient arms of superior quality will the enemy be deterred from initiating a war against us, violating our rights, and endangering our position. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1956)

Ben-Gurion saw that while his country had to make preparations for war, he also sought to secure the support of the UN in the hope of helping with removing the ground of hostility with Arab neighbors:

The United Nations is certainly still far from perfection… But we shall not reject this international institution. The vision embodied in the United Nations is the vision of our prophets. The principles on which it is founded are the principles of peace, justice, and equality among nations… In accordance with their heritage, faith, needs, and position in the world, the people of Israel have to adhere to these principles and assist with all their modest strength in preserving them and making them effective in international relations. (Jewish Virtual Library, 1957)

Israel quest for stable ties with the regional states emanated from its urgent objective of nation-building from within. It aimed to direct its resources inwardly, particularly during the critically formative years of the new state. This was left to Ben-Gurion successor to manage the new for security from without in order to build the state from within.

When **Levi Eshkol** (1963–1969) came to power, the threat to Israel had only grown as its neighbors continued their low-level attacks to incur military attrition. To ward off the threats, Israel continued to build up its deterrent capabilities as its method of gaining peace. Eshkol suggested "(a) strong State of Israel is a guarantee for the prevention of war in the Middle East…" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1963a, 1963b). But also, during this period, Israel kept pushing for recognition from its neighbors as the key for its stability within the region. "The general obligation is the duty accepted by all member-states of the United Nations to live with each other in peace and good neighbourliness, to unite their forces for the maintenance of peace and security in the world…," **Eshkol** appealed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1965a, 1965b). However, tension continued to brew beneath the surface. The event culminated in the Six-Day War when Israel waged preemptive and decisive air strikes on its two threatening neighbors, Egypt and Syria, before charging its army across the borders into their territories. Thus, the new round of war ended with

Israel acquiring large swathes of territories which only granted it further bargaining assets in exchange for recognition and peace with its neighbors. "Readiness for such a peace leads to direct negotiations and the conclusion of peace treaties between Israel and its neighbors, together and separately… Without recognition there is no peace," Eshkol declared in his proposal for returning occupied lands in exchange for peace and recognition (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1966).

Yitzhak **Rabin** (1974–1977) sustained his predecessors' strategy of security through a dual policy of increasing military build-up on the one hand and peace offer on the other. Rabin laid out his vision in an address during his inauguration:

> For over 26 years we have been engaged in one long and continuous war. At the beginning it was the war for the establishment of the State, and since then the battles for its survival as a state capable of independent existence have never ceased… Occasionally, there have been periods of quiet, but throughout this entire period we have not known one day of peace. The **Zionist** vision of establishing a sovereign Jewish state which will live in peace with its neighbours is still in the process of realization, a process which has not yet reached fulfillment…Twenty-six years of war have not in any way altered our view of peace with our neighbours as a central goal of our policy. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1974a, 1974b)

Like his predecessors, Rabin aimed to obtain a secure peace. For example, linking the security of Israel with the realization of peace with its belligerent neighbors, he affirmed that "the promotion of the processes of negotiation with each of the neighbouring states is a vital necessity for the State of Israel, which aspires to accelerate peace in the region… This involves negotiations and the attainment of agreement between the parties, and not imposed solutions" as he told the Knesset (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976). Still, assured of its ability to militarily preserve its gains but skeptical of the realization of a lasting peace to surrender all those gains for, Israel now began to advance the proposition that any peace agreement should be based on post-war new reality. "It is in this volatile climate of shifting winds that Israel persists in its quest for peace with security… In the given situation of our region, defensible boundaries constitute a crucial condition for the preservation of peace itself. To make progress toward a settlement in an area so unsettled is a difficult mission indeed" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d, 1977e, 1977f). Thus, under **Rabin**, Israel continued to pursue

stability through a diplomatic process with the hope of achieving peace without totally abandoning the war-created new status quo.

During the rule of Menachem **Begin** (1977–1983), Israel's quest for security met some success. In his inaugural address, Begin stated, "Our prime concern is prevention of a new war in the Middle East" calling upon the neighboring countries "to discuss the establishment of true peace between their countries and Israel… for the vital needs of our peoples and our countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d, 1977e, 1977f).

Begin continued his predecessor's desire for territorial concession in return for a peace treaty—an official end of the condition of war toward cooperation-based comprehensive ties. "We want peace treaties. Complete treaties with all that this involves. Secure borders, free movement of people, open commerce, diplomatic relations, scientific cooperation, etc. However, if until that day it will not be possible to achieve peace treaties, we agree to take the path of peaceful relations" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1978). But also, as a strategic continuation of his predecessors' path, Begin insisted on preserving at least part of the post-war status quo territorial distribution as the end formula of any settlement. Invoking ambiguity in the intention of the neighboring countries, he reiterated that:

> Israel cannot under any circumstances withdraw to the lines of June 4, 1967, and will not do so… We must also take note of the fact that even in return for such a withdrawal our enemies are not promising peace, but what is called an end to the state of belligerency. They stress that they will not recognize Israel, nor will they sign a peace treaty with her. Only what they refer to as an end to the state of belligerency, an expression that has no standing in international law. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d, 1977e, 1977f)

Eventually after years of negotiations and sustained external involvement, Israel quest for formal security met with partial success when Egypt agreed to sign a peace accord with it in 1979 which delivered official recognition from the Arab's giant state. It was left for Begin's successors to broaden its circle to include other neighboring states.

The Begin's successor, Yitzhak **Shamir** (1986–1992), inherited two interconnected elements: partial peace and partial state of war. The Shamir's approach was to push for widening the existing peace to include

other parties. In his inaugural address, he laid out his policy when he stressed, "over nine years have passed since the Government of Israel, headed by Menachem **Begin**, managed to make the first breach in the wall of enmity and belligerency around the State of Israel… This government will continue on the same path…" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1986a, 1986b). For accelerating peace rapprochement, Shamir proposed direct negotiations instead of through third-party mediations which had been the norm since the initiation of the process.

> There never was and there never will be a state in this region able to claim that it extended us a hand in peace but was rebuffed. I refer to peace which is an outgrowth of assent, of acceptance, of meeting others halfway, and not a peace of slogans or of propaganda campaigns. Peace can be realized only through a direct encounter between the adversaries of yesterday, who are bent on putting an end to the rivalry and the state of belligerence, and on building the house of peace through negotiations and cooperation. No external element and no convocation of foreign states will be able to serve as a substitute for direct negotiations - to the contrary. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1987a, 1987b)

Emboldened by the peace treaty with Egypt that "possible to bridge the gap" with the neighbors, Shamir declared his country's readiness to accept an adjustment in the status quo by returning more territories to other states in exchange for formal peace and political recognition. "We undertake risks; we are in favor of peace and we have a way, and it is a logical one… Therefore, we are not in favor of the status quo. We are in favor of peace. And we have a way of our own of achieving peace," the prime minister stressed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1989a, 1989b). **Shamir** sounded more optimistic that security through peaceful means was now a realistic option, encouraged by the peace accord with Egypt as evidence for this prospect. The Israel's search for peace made some further inroad during the early 1990s when it obtained a peace treaty with the smaller kingdom of Jordan.

In 2001, Ariel **Sharon** (2001–2006) took over the government. In his inaugural address, Sharon stressed that he would continue his predecessors' efforts for ending the state of perpetual war through expanding peace with the neighboring countries:

> We are fed up with battles and wars imposed upon us, and we all know and appreciate the value of peace. The broad spectrum of the new Government

will express this yearning for peace and work towards achieving peace by means of realistic political agreements. I also would like to strengthen the peace, good neighborly relations…. The Government under my leadership will be committed to do all that is possible in order to restore security and stability. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001a, 2001b)

During his rule, the main threat to security came increasingly from non-state armed actors such as Palestinian armed groups and the Lebanese **Hezbollah**. Although Israel under Sharon kept peace for security agenda on the table, it grew more and more reliant on force to preserve the security anchored in the status quo. In reference to the growing attacks by armed groups, the prime minister warned that "Israel has been dealing with a murderous terror offensive that has been forced upon it… Israel is a state that pursues peace, but we will not compromise on our security" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002a, 2002b). In this context, unlike most of his predecessors, Sharon made the end of anti-Israeli violence a precondition for peace-making. He warned the security in the region was at a critical crossroad. "The peoples of the Middle East must choose one of two paths: to continue on the path of useless violence, while subjecting their people to the dire consequences of that choice, or choosing a new path of condemning terror, violence and incitement, and choosing peace, coexistence and cooperation instead. Israel's position is clear: only with the absolute rejection of terror… will a new era of quiet and peace for all peoples of the region be assured," he declared (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003a, 2003b). Under **Sharon**, Israel quest for security met with some success, but it also enhanced the belief in the necessity of defending the status quo with more assertive force.

The Sharon's strategic legacy of an iron fist approach for the maintenance of status quo acquired further assertiveness under Benjamin **Netanyahu** (2009–2020)—whose reign also coincided with the emergence of new destabilizing development in the region. In principle, Netanyahu did not indicate any substantial departure from his predecessors in stressing the need to pursue a positive approach and with a genuine desire to bring an end to the conflict between us and our neighbors. However, he also identified the new threats to the regional order and his country's position within it:

The greatest threat to humanity, and to the State of Israel, stems from the possibility that a radical regime will be armed with nuclear weapons

or that nuclear weapons will find a home in a radical regime. Today, more than ever, Israel strives to achieve full peace with all the Arab and Muslim world. Today, this ambition is also backed by a shared interest of Israel and the Arab world that are facing a wave of fanaticism which threatens us all... This track—combining the economic, security and political—is the right way to achieve peace. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009)

The Israeli strategy under **Netanyahu** was basically preservation of the status quo in its surroundings. Yet, it also offered to make a limited concession on the status quo in exchange for peaceful recognition without compromising the conditions of military assurance for deterring a new war. "In order for the compromise to lead to peace and not war, it must be accompanied by two fundamental components: recognition and security arrangements... Peace and security are interwoven, and they are the principles which guide me" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010).

But also during this period, new threats began to emerge real potential to overthrow the existing order in the region which Israel aimed to consolidate as a safeguard of its security and under which it had been expressing its readiness to make some concession for peace agreement. The major event in this regard was the regional political upheavals of 2011 caused engendered regime change including in Egypt. In his address to the Knesset winter in October 2011, Netanyahu highlighted the looming threat of regional instability:

No-one can guarantee how good or how stable these new regimes will be, nor their attitude towards Israel. Unfortunately, this attitude, which left much to be desired to begin with, is not expected to get any better in some, or most, of the new regimes... These new regimes depend on the masses, the raging masses, of which many of the people have been systematically poisoned with anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist propaganda... If I had to summarize what will happen in our region, I would use two terms: instability and uncertainty... These changes can increase the instability within these countries, and the instability between countries. Regional powers who have control in the Middle East will try to ensure they have greater influence on the new regimes.... (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011)

It is safe to state that those events could have made Israel to move more away from territorial concession for security through peace toward protecting security through maintaining its "defensible borders" which

meant maintaining peace through further reliance on military to defend the status quo.

To sum up, from Ben-Gurion to Netanyahu, the Israeli quest for security under the status quo remained the primary, if not the sole, regional strategic objective. The status quo itself kept changing in favor of Israel thanks to recurring wars with its Arab neighbors. And following each military-territorial gain, Israel sought to realize its quest for permanent security through a peace agreement by trading land for recognition.

Saudi Kingdom; A Permanent Pursuit of Status Quoism

Since its foundation by **King Abdul Aziz** al-Saud in 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has steadily pursued a status quo grand strategy. Successive kings made the quest for security and stability the primary motive of the Kingdom's regional goal. This strategy is originated in the vision of the Kingdom's founding father who envisaged that the long-term interests of his nascent kingdom should be rested on status quoism, rather than some revisionist design. This vision became solidified as the path of the future for the country when pro-Saud royal forces defeated the Ikhwan forces which pressed for religious crusade to spread the Pan-Islamic ideology of **Wahabism**, based on the puritanical theological teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul al-Wahab. As a result of the suppression of the Ikhwan militants by the royal forces, "Wahabism in one country" triumphed over "revolutionary Wahabism" (Safran, 1985, 56). The successful conclusion of the unification war consolidated the reign of al-Saud Royal family which would secure political continuity of the Kingdom based on the twin pillars of development at home, and stability in the region.

The accession of King **Saud**, the crown prince, after the death of the founding father in 1953, marked the first step toward reinforcing this founding principle of the Kingdom's foreign policy under a new royal generation. In his inaugural speech in November 1953, King Saud pledged "to follow the approaches and policies of our blessed father… I will continue to work for promoting the bond of brotherhood with Islamic and Arab countries and preserve the relationships of friendship that our deceased beloved King has constructed and which granted our country its deserved place as a world peace-maker" (Om

el-Qura, 1953, 1). The foreign policy of the Kingdom, King emphasized, should continue on its original path for enhancing "peace and cooperation with all nations for defending rights and resisting aggression... the Arab League and its commitments and duties... and the United Nations organization with its principles of respecting the independence and sovereignty of nations with good-will" (Om el-Qura, 1954, 1). **King Saud** claimed that working for the preservation of the status quo in relations among nations was demanded by the national interests of the kingdom including its quest for security. He linked his country's security with regional peace when he remarked that "... our peaceful policies and friendly relations with states have contributed to the preservation of security and peace in our region and enhance the security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia both at home and abroad..." (Om el-Qura, 1958, 1).

This status quoism was reasserted by the ascension of the Saud's successor to the throne, King **Faysal**. Expressing the strategic continuity with his predecessors, Faysal stressed, "since its foundation, this state has demonstrated to the world our firm belief in the world peace, the desire to support it, and promote it..." (Om el-Qura, 1964, 1). During the reign of Faysal, the Saudi's worries over instability due to the rise of what he called "subversive forces", in a reference to nationalist and socialist revolutionary forces of the period. The increase of threat of external interference in the domestic affairs of countries and the destabilizing effect it carried further put the Kingdom on the defensive. Remarking on the threat, Faysal sought to keep out of the kingdom from the turmoil when he declared, "We have no demand toward others (states). All we want is the end of interference in our (domestic) affairs so we have the freedom to choose our destiny on our own... But as long as many states continue their policies of interference in other states' domestic affairs in various ways with the aim of establishing domination, the world will not witness peace or prosperity" (Om el-Qura, 1968, 1). Naturally, therefore, like his predecessor, **King Faysal** also called for strengthening the role of international organizations, particularly the United Nations. "For the UN and its charter and principles to survive, it must guarantee justice and national sovereignty for all, and work to prevent the violations of international laws and all its principles... I hope that this organization will settle international problems in accordance with the principles outlined in its Charter... for the preservation of peace and justice in order to pave the way for human development and prosperity" (Om el-Qura, 1962, 1, 6).

Under the reign of King Faysal, the Kingdom's status quoism acquired further root.

When the reign was transferred to **King Khalid** in 1975, another period of continuity was assured. "We are pledge to continue on the vision that the deceased King (Faysal) designed and we are determined to continue on the path of construction and development…," he assured (Om el-Qura, 1975a, 1975b, 1). Describing his predecessor "as a defender of the principles of right and justice and a champion of international cooperation and global peace," he maintained, "True his departure is a great loss and grief. Still, he left behind for his people a well-articulated policy and path for achieving the prospects in the country… He demonstrated to the world that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a member of international community, understands its legal and moral responsibilities to promote peace based on right and justice" (Om el-Qura, 1975a, 1975b, 1).

Thus, prosperity at home and stability abroad remained the driving motto of the Kingdom under Khalid. Like his predecessors, he defined the primary purpose of his monarchy as to keep up domestic development to acquire a higher position among nations as a contributor to world stability:

> God blessed the founder of the Kingdom, King Abdul-Aziz to achieve this great entity that is now an international power with its Islamic values and economic successes to contribute to the prosperity, security, and peace of the world. His Highness King Abdul-Aziz passed down to us a rich legacy of wise leadership for realizing prosperity, dignity, security and stability for the country, and it is incumbent on us to continue on the path and complete the project. (Om el-Qura, 1978, 1)

The transfer of the throne to a new king, Fahd bin Abdul Aziz, in 1982 only reassured the survival of the Saudi's conservative continuity. Using his short inaugural speech to pledge continuity in his country's policies, **King Fahd** maintained, "I will devote all my effort and time for prosperity, security, and stability of this beloved country" (al-Saud, 2015, 297). In international relations too King Fahad reiterated his country's traditional approach of stability through international cooperation. "Our first circle of cooperation is the Arab League… within its framework we work for cooperation with our Arab brothers… And, the **Gulf Cooperation Council** has become a model for cooperation

among Arab brothers… And **the Islamic Cooperation Organization** which was formed in this holy land… is a circle within which we fulfill our Islamic activities… We also work within the wider international framework which is the UN… and support its efforts and oppose any action that might undermine it…" (al-Saud, 2015, 302). Fahd saw in working for cooperation for stability as a source of prestige for the Kingdom in the international realm. "Today the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a real power, and this power would not have been realized without working for peace, stability and solidarity… without our contribution to helping humanity… development and stability in the world" (al-Saud, 2015, 483). Thus, another king ruled and passed down the reign of the Saudi monarchy according to the policy lines of his predecessors.

In 2006, the kingdom underwent another episode of royal power transition. On the exact tradition of his predecessors, upon ascending to the throne, **King Abdullah** reassured continuity when he declared that he would "sustain the path set by the founder of the Kingdom of the Saudi Arabia, the great King Abdul Aziz al-Saud and followed by his sons. We pray to God for the maintenance of safety and security of this country and protect its people from any threat…" (Om el-Qura, 2005, 1, 48). While he was to maintain continuity, Abdullah also furthered the decades-long domestic modernization, acting upon his belief that in today's world, the standard to judge a nation is the level of its socioeconomic modernization. "The degree of sovereignty, independence, security, and stability of countries depends on their level of growth, development and modernization," the King declared (Majlis al-Shura, 2007a, 2007b).

But also, similar to the era of **King Faysal**, Saudi Arabia under **King Abdullah** witnessed a new era of instability in its surrounding region which threatened the kingdom's deeply rooted quest for stability. The threats of transnational terrorism and political interference began to cast their shadows over the regional order. Seeing the danger, the King both warned against the threats and reaffirmed his country's role in maintaining peace. "Our region is going through a dangerous period in which conflicts and crises are increasing and interference in domestic affairs is growing which only further cause instability and turmoil. This requires that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enhances its diplomatic efforts both regionally and internationally… in order to defuse destructive conflicts, and settle the disputes by peaceful means," King Abdullah declared (Majlis al-Shura, 2007a, 2007b).

When Abdullah left the throne in 2015, the reign of the monarchy was smoothly handed over to **King Salman** Abdul Aziz who pledged to follow the path of the political tradition of continuity. Following the political tradition of the monarchy, the new king pledged continuity on his inauguration:

> We will remain committed, God willing, to the righteous approach that has been governing this state since its foundation by the Founder King Abdul Aziz and followed by his sons afterward… and will never depart from it… Our peoples in Arab and Islamic countries need cooperation and unity today more than before. May God help me to realize the prospects of my beloved people by maintaining the safety, security, and stability of our country. (Om el-Qura, 2015, 1)

In the realm of foreign policy in particular, the new king maintained, "we will continue our approach of cooperation with international community for world peace and promoting ties with peoples and fostering the values of coexistence. We believe that peaceful settlement of international crises is the only way to achieve the prospects of peoples for peace and growth…" (Majlis al-Shura, 2016). Moreover, working within the framework international organizations as a venue for maintaining peace and security remained the kingdom's approach to international relations. "The Kingdom possesses an influential position within regional and international organizations. Its role is held highly at regional and international levels, as it is evident in its participation in historical summits and decision-making with great number of ally and brotherly countries which have laid the foundation for collective action for achieving security and stability in the region and in the world," **King Salman** asserted (Majlis al-Shura, 2017). Thus, the ascension of King Salman to the throne only reinforced the continuity of the Saudi's status quoism as an advocate of regional stability.

To sum up, through the ages of political developments and the eras of various kings, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has remarkably been consistent in its pursuit of status quoism. This strategic stability is so much so that if the names of the Kings are removed from the speeches, one can hardly detect which policy speech was delivered by which king. Following the original strategic vision of the founder King Abdul Aziz, successive kings rose to the throne with a pronounced quest for preserving security and stability in the region, while the Kingdom continued to focus

on modernizing socioeconomic system by allocating its increasingly lavish oil-generated income.

Syria; From a Weak State into Regional Revisionist

The pre-1970 Syria was a country in perpetual domestic turmoil caused by recurring military coups. Just within the decade of 1960s, it experienced four episodes of regime change. The cycle of coup and counter-coup was finally broken in 1970 by the coming of **Hafiz al-Assad** to power by another military coup. President al-Assad would bring stability to the country which ultimately thrust it into the rank of regional powers. Under al-Assad, two factors came to define the Syrian regional strategy: its version of **Pan-Arabism** and the war defeat with Israel.

Based on its ideological doctrine, similar to Nasser's doctrine, **the Ba'ath Party** envisioned the unification of all Arab countries. The party's role was "to lead people in this struggle toward the realization of their objectives of unity, liberty, and socialism" al-Assad explained during outlining his party's program for unifying the Arabs which would be culminated in the establishment of a socialist system (al-Assad, 1975). In al-Assad's view, this ambition could only be achieved through a power struggle that led by Syria on behalf of the Arabs. "Syria is the country of struggle… Those who are for struggle should stand with Syria. Syria is the country of liberation; those who are for liberation should support Syria… Syria will remain the shinning bastion that inspires all warriors of our Arab nation. We embody the glory, dignity, and mission of our Arab nation" (al-Assad, 1976).

He asserted that the Syria's strive for the unification of the Arabs was no less than a responsibility that history had bestowed upon his country to achieve on behalf of all Arab people:

> Syria commands a historical Arab national role. Syria is Arab and will remain Arab steadfast in the face of plots and conspiracies. All plots that aim to compromise or undermine the Arab cause will fail in the face of the struggle of this people. For, Syria has a historic nationalist role to play, a role that it cannot abandon and does not wish to abandon. Time and again it sacrifices for this role with full faith for its principle and loyalty to our Arab nation… We should re-affirm on this occasion and every occasion that our faith will never shake in Arab unification and we endeavor

ceaselessly for its realization no matter the difficulties and stumbles in the way of our struggle for it.... (al-Assad, 1977)

The failure to realize Arab unification after decades of trial should not be a cause to resign to the status quo, in the view of **al-Assad**. Instead, he continued his assertion that the constant struggle with the existing unfavorable reality would be overcome toward materializing the grand objective of unification of Arab land:

> We cannot pass an anniversary day of the Revolution without mentioning unification and reiterating its importance even though this hope sometimes seems remote after failed attempts which something causes worries and sometimes doubts about the chance of its realization... My brethren, this should not despair us or make us lose hope. Instead, it should make us to redouble our effort in order to destroy the will of imperialism... We are moving forward with clear vision and defined means and objectives in order to realize unification, liberty, and socialism.... (al-Assad, 1980)

Al-Assad the father might have not lost his hope for unifying Arab states, but he definitely failed to achieve such unification on the ground with any Arab states. The Assad's Syria even failed to achieve its related goal of restoring its lost territory from Israeli control. Thus, when al-Assad the father died in 2000, the Ba'ath Syria's unaccomlished mission of Pan-Arabism and territorial restoration was left for his son, **Bashar al-Assad**, to carry on. Al-Assad the son assured, however, that he would stay on the path of the father:

> The task ahead of us is both easy and difficult at the same time. It is easy because the leader has left behind a solid ground and great legacy of principles and values which he upheld to the last moment of his life... The difficulty comes from the fact that the approach of Leader al-Assad was unique and therefore its practice will not be easy, especially we need not only to maintain it but also develop it... We are determined to overcome the obstacles and adjust to the age without abandoning our national and patriotic constants which he planted in our hearts and minds.... (Shabh News, 2000a)

Meanwhile, he lamented what he perceived as "the rise of local (territorial state) interests above those of (Arab) nationalism... which has made any talk of Arab nationalism or Arab solidairty to be seen as a matter

of idealism or utopianism". Still, he warned that this undersirable reality of Arab division should not be a cause for acquiescence and resignation. Highlighting the ideological tenets of the Ba'ath Party, the young al-Assad suggested that Arab unification was still achievable goal:

> Unification seems to be taking place in Europe… The two Germans have unified… Many states seek to form economic or political integrations with other states, even where there is no any shared tie. Therefore, Arabs states, which have several historical linkages, should seek to realize unification, even if step by step. Although this (goal) has materialized, it remains a legitimate goal… There is a line of thinking claiming that our party has become outdated… that today's world has no longer had room for ideologies, economic and technological interests have become the determinant of policies, or that the calls of the party have no future… As you know I am full for economic and technological renovations; yet, I totally disagree with that line of thinking… The ideology of the party and its calls are still compatible and in step with the age," he observed on another occasion (Shabh News, 2000b)

In this sense, Syria under al-Assad the son continued to cling to Pan-Arabism, even if with apparently less assertiveness than the previous era. Having constructed its regional status on the basis of espousing Pan-Arab cause, the Syrian regime would not be expected to depart from it. While championing Pan-Arab revisionism had clearly defined Syrian national objective behind it—the restoration of its territory from much powerful Israel—publically Syria kept linking its own territorial cause (to restore the Golan Height) with the broader Arab national-territorial causes, primarily the Palestinian one—a move which held the potential of securing the solidarity and support among Arab peoples which Syria needed and sought for its revisionist goal. Therefore, any act of struggle for those Arab causes was taken by Syria as a ground to reassert its Pan-Arab strategy as sound and, ultimately, winning. In this respect, al-Assad declared:

> The wave of nationalism (Pan-Arabism) is on the rise side by side with the uprising (in Palestine territory) ... Therefore, we have now a strong ground to act upon toward our future… After ten years of persistently harsh pressure on Syria in order to make it to accept that partial peace, after ten years of Syria's rejection of unjust and partial peace… and after ten years of its continuous cooperation the Palestinian and Lebanese axis (of armed struggle) what has the result been? The result has been the

acquirement of more power and leverage by Syria. What will Syria do with its strength? Certainly it will use it for the national cause—of the Golan (Heights), but before anything else it will use it for the cause of nationalism… What we experience today is the resurgence of nationalism in Arab streets as a result of various reasons but above all is the Palestinian cause… It is our duty to support it in order to sustain its momentum… We should help this uprising by all means. (Shahb News, 2009)

To sum up, since it rose to a regional power status in 1970 under Hafiz al-Assad, Syria became a Pan-Arab revisionist power. Driven by its own version of Pan-Arabism of **the Ba'ath Party** ideology, al-Assad's Syria transformed itself into a champion of the cause of "liberation" and "unification" of the Arab homeland. The transition of power from the father to the son did not shift Syria from this grand strategy, even though Pan-Arabism had long entered its waning era. Syria kept advancing its claim of championing Arab causes in neighboring countries as an act of principle-ideological pursuit but also in a bid to galvanize its power status in the region and particularly among Arab countries with the hope of restoring its own lost land (**the Golan Heights**) which would enable it to come out as a victorious revisionist regional power. By 2011, however, Syria declined into state failure following the outbreak of its civil war.

Turkey; Isolationist Status Quo Turning Revivalist Revisionist

Since its formation as a modern republic in the wake of the dissolution of Ottoman Empire in 1923, Turkey adopted its own version of status quoism. Formulated by the founder of the republic, General **Mustafa Kemal Ataturk**, this strategy simultaneously moved Turkey into alignment with the West against the communist revisionism and isolated it from its former imperial domain of the Muslim Middle East. In other words, Turkey adopted a passive status quoism toward the regional order in the Middle East. For decades after the death of **Ataturk** himself, his grand strategy, which become known as the external dimension of Kemalism, was closely maintained by the military establishment as the guiding principle of Turkey's Middle Eastern policies. Thus, this founding grand strategy survived the reigns of various governments in Ankara to the end of the century as the military remained the ultimate power holder over the state. By the beginning of the new century, however, Turkey's

grand strategy began to shift toward revisionism following the ascension to power of the Islamic-leaning party of the Justice and Development Party (the AKP) in 2002 under the leadership of Receb Tayb **Erdoğan**, who was to thrust Turkey out of an isolationist status quoism toward active revisionism.

General Kemal, or Ataturk, dethroned the Pan-Islamic Khalafat of **the Ottoman Empire** and steadily and radically scrapped its Pan-Islamic design. In its place, he inaugurated a system of secular nationalism and republicanism at home, and status quoism abroad. Following this new political program, Ataturk founded a state (Turkey) based on defined geographic boundaries. Condemning pursuing ambitious transnational designs of the now defunct Ottoman Empire, he charged, "we did not serve Pan-Islamism… we did not serve Pan-Turanianism… Rather than running after ideas which we did not and could not realize, and thus increase the number of enemies and the pressure upon us, let us return to our natural, legitimate limits, and let us know our limits" (Lewis, 2001, 227). **Ataturk** condemned imperial ambitions as anachronistic projects, maintaining that in the new age of national independence and sovereignty, any attempt at unifying different national peoples would end in futility or strategic liability. He explained:

> Let's suppose for a moment that Turkey would take this mission upon herself and would devote herself to the aim of uniting and leading the whole Islamic world and the she would succeed in achieving this aim. Very good, but suppose these nations whom we want to subject and administer would say to us: 'You have rendered great service and assistance to us for which we are thankful to you, but we want to remain independent'… In such a case will the efforts and sacrifices made by the people of Turkey result in anything more than earning thanks and a benediction? It is evident they (Pan-Islamists) intended that the people of Turkey should be sacrificed to a mere caprice, to a fancy, to a phantom. (Ataturk, 1981, 592)

He further justified his national republicanism and statehood, as opposite to transnational-imperial entity, by highlighting both the futility and high costs of the imperial rule of the Ottoman Turks over other peoples in the region in the name of Pan-Islamism:

> The Turkish nation is incapable of undertaking such an irrational mission. For centuries our nation was guided under the influence of these erroneous ideas. But what has been the result of it? Everywhere they have lost millions

of men. Do you know… how many sons of Anadolu have perished in the scorching deserts of the **Yemen**? Do you know the losses we have suffered in holding Syria and the Irak (sic) and Egypt and in maintaining our position in Africa… (Ataturk, 1981, 420–592)

Instead, **Ataturk** advocated that the purpose of the state is and should be to realize national development and prosperity for its population from within as opposite to external expansionism:

In order that our nation to be able to live a happy, strenuous and permanent life, it is necessary that the State pursue an exclusively national policy and that this policy be in perfect agreement with our internal organization and be based on it. When I speak of national policy, I mean it in this sense: to work within our national boundaries for the real happiness and welfare of the nation and the country by above, relying on our own strengthen in order to retain our existence. We must not lead the people to follow fictitious. (Ataturk, 1981, 420)

Thus, Ataturk effectively scrapped the past expansionist strategy of the Ottoman Turk by remodeling the grand strategy of its successor state, Turkey, based on status quoism that advocated the system of state sovereignty. This strategy was destined to guide the foreign policy of Turkey for the coming decades. To be sure, from time to time, the ascension of Islamic parties to power brought with it potential challenges to Kemalism including shifting Turkey away from this status quo-Isolationist strategy. However, every time, the military stepped in to suppress the attempt through staging some type of coup. The most recent case was the coup against the Welfare Party headed by **Necedein Erbakan** in the late 1990s. After it was toppled a year previously by the military, the party was banned in 1998 for "its actions against the principles of the secular republic," as the constitutional court ruled (Middle East Journal, 1998, 438). Yet, political Islam in the country survived ages of suppression as the most resilient challenger to Kemalism.

With the turn of the century, the Turkish Islamic movement made a new but momentous comeback. This new revivalism was led by the **Justice and Development Party** (AKP) under the leadership of Receb Tayyip **Erdoğan** who was himself the head of the banned Welfare Party's branch of Istanbul. Established in August 2001, the AK Party came to power after winning the national elections of 2002, in spite of the disqualification of Erdoğan himself based on past court conviction for inciting

"religious hatred". After the charge was overturned, Erdoğan rose to power as prime minister during 2003–2014 before becoming president later on. Still, the AKP's hold over the government remained contained during its first decade of rule by the military-dominated powerful political body of the National Council which remained the actual power holder over the state. For example, as Islamic movement continued to grow during the presidential elections of 2007, the General Staff issued a warning against attempts to overthrow secularism, asserting, "The Turkish Armed Forces is monitoring the situation with concern," reminding, "the Turkish Armed Forces is a party to the matter and is the definitive defender of secularism" (Hurriyet, 2007).

However, by mid-2009, the AKP had made significant headway to dislocate the military from power. The landmark development in this regard was the trial of **Ergenekon group**, a clandestine anti-government network formed by a group of military officers and state officials allegedly plot a coup against the AKP government. The trials sent tens of officers and officials to prison. Furthermore, in July 2013, The Turkey's parliament amended the Turkish Armed Forces' code which had granted the army the right to defend the secular Republic—traditionally used as a ground for staging coups against Islamic-leaning rules.

Now that it had gradually consolidated its rule against the military establishment, the AKP moved to pursue its grand strategy. In his announcement of the AKP in August 2001, Erdoğan vowed to bring about a revolutionary change in the Turkey's politics. The starting point of this new strategy was that the existing strategy was based on objectives less ambitious than Turkey's historical legacy and present potentials. "Turkey deserves its glorious past. Our glorious history puts this responsibility on our shoulders to restore power and glory…. When our country and our people act in unity, we will be able take steps to reach the level of civilization that befits that glorious history," **Erdoğan** asserted (Erdoğan, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 55–56). Clearly, the scrapping of the status quoism of Kemalism, which had handicapped the country from playing an active play in the region, became inevitable. Erdoğan recognized this point when he stated, "In order to strengthen Turkey's status in the world, we abandon the approach of status quo in foreign policy" (Erdoğan, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 203).

The ultimate purpose was to thrust Turkey into a high position of power in order to become an active player in remaking the regional order. "At regional and world levels, Turkey is becoming an order-building

actor. This is no longer a matter of choice, but it is a historical responsibility," **Erdoğan** declared (Erdoğan, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 137). Regionally, Erdoğan stressed the need for creating conditions of a lasting peace. According to Erdoğan, however, the main obstacle was that the existing balance of power was not conducive to peace. "The existing balance of power unfortunately does not serve peace… It only provokes imperial sentiments," he argues (Erdoğan, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 67). The road to sustainable peace and stability, therefore, requires a new order. In this pursuit, Erdoğan's Turkey began advocating popular rule in the region, in place of the ruling authoritarian regimes, as a basis for a new and sustainable regional order. Erdoğan explained:

> For nearly a century, the Middle East has been set on a completely different path. The Middle East has been known as a place of violations of rights as wars, conflicts, bloodshed, poverty, corruption, ignorance went on… With democratic change, the balance between the demand for stability, security, and social peace will be established. We believe that by establishing this balance, Middle Eastern societies will take step toward an enlightened, democratic, egalitarian, fair, and prosperous future… We believe that Middle Eastern peoples will take steps towards a brighter future with further democracy and prosperity… Order and stability can only be established by promoting democracy…. (Erdoğan, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 264–267)

Indeed, in the age of peoples' call for popular rule in the region, Turkey had become the showcase of a successful combination of Islam and democracy. Therefore, Turkey gained a unique position to espouse the cause of democracy in the Muslim Middle East. Accordingly, in a historical shift of grand strategy, President Erdoğan charted a revisionist strategy for the country under which it began actively pushing for the remaking of the regional order in the Middle East based on a form of popular rule.

To sum up, since its inception as a modern national state, Turkey adhered to an isolationist status quo strategy which was designed by its founding leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and which was preserved by the military establishment afterward. After coming to power in 2002, the Islamic-leaning AK Party under the leadership of Erdoğan gradually but radically transformed Turkey into an avowedly regional revisionist power. Ideologically, Turkey did not publically espouse a particularly defined ideology. Rather, it concentrated its claim on replacing the autocratic

Table 2.1 Regional Power and Their Grand Strategies Across Time

Power	Period	Strategy	Leadership
Egypt	1962–1970	Revisionist	Pan-Arabism/Nasser
Egypt	1970–2020	Status quo	Sadat/Mubarak/Sisi
Iran	1962–1979	Status quo	Shah Monarchy
Iran	1979–2020	Revisionist	Islamic Theocracy
Israel	1962–2020	Status quo	Alternation of Power
Saudi Arabia	1962–2020	Status quo	Al-Saud Monarchy
Syria	1970–2010	Revisionist	Ba'ath Party/al-Assad
Turkey	1962–2001	Status quo	Kemalism
Turkey	2001–2020	Revisionist	AK Party/Erdoğan

and secular systems with some type of popular rule. Still, since opening up those closed systems for popular participation would in most likelihood have paved the way for the ascension of Islamic-oriented parties to power given the relatively strong popular currency that they enjoyed vis-à-vis much divided and fragmented secular-liberal parties, the case can be made that the regional project of Islamic-oriented Turkey under Erdoğan was definitely geared, by default or design but mostly likely by the latter, toward the cause of spreading Islamic type of governments in the region. In the final analysis, Erdoğan's Turkey formed its regional strategy around the remaking of political order in the region based on a new, and statedly people's power, principle.

Conclusion

The table summarizes the conclusion of this chapter. It shows the type of grand strategy of each regional power during each period and under the tenure of each political leadership/system (Table 2.1).

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Yemen (1962–1970): Failure by a Military Coup

MILITARY COUP AND ARMED INSURGENCY

The failure of the Yemeni state in 1962 occurred as a result of the overthrow of the monarchic rule of **Imam Badr** by a military junta in September 1962. The state of Yemen had been under the rule of the Zaydi Shia traditional monarchy for centuries in which "the only law was the Imam himself," as a Yemeni opposition figure described it (al-Baydani, 1962, 22). The decade of the 1950s marked the beginning of a serial regicide in the region. Riding the growing aspirations for national liberation and modernization, military junta staged coups against royal regimes in a number of countries throughout the region. In some cases, the transformation was as brutal as swift, while in some other cases, it led to protracted conflict. This anti-monarchy military insurrection did not spare Yemen which would also plunge it into state failure.

The first major attempt on the **Yemeni monarchy** was carried out in the late 1950s. While on medical leave in Italy in 1958, the army carried out another attempt on the throne. The coup was foiled but its propelling cause continued to grow beneath the surface. The monarchy fought back. To demonstrate the consequences of dissent against his regime, the Imam carried out major purges in the army. The punitive measures succeeded in buying the regime a few more years of life. The next coup attempt would meet with success.

On September 19, 1962, Imam Ahmed died. His son, Muhamad, replaced him as a new king. In the midst of the power transition and the uncertainty that ensued, a new opportunity arrived for the opposition to try a new regime change attempt. Thus, not to allow the new king to consolidate his throne, a group of military officers marched on the palace and took power. In its place, the Junta proclaimed "republicanism" in the footsteps of other anti-monarchic military rules in the region (al-Irayani 2013a, 431). **The Republic of Yemen**, thus, was born to join the rank of other newly Arab republican regimes. In a fast-unfolding event, the army shifted its allegiance to the new regime throughout the country. Although at the beginning, the junta declared King (Imam) Muhammad al-Badr dead in the palace, it turned out that he and his royal guards in fact had survived the military onslaught (Naji, 1988, 208). How the king and many of his courtiers succeeded in escaping the bombing and raiding of his palace by the coup-makers remains to be explained; however, the escape was to affect the fate of Yemen at least for another 8 years.

The fact that the army eventually succeeded in toppling it does not mean that the monarchy hold on power was fragile. Rather, its grip on the state remained pretty strong to the end. This was evident in the way the coup was executed. **Abdul-Rahman Yaha al-Irayani**, one of the figures of the coup, describes the fear and confusion among the coup plotters in the lead-up to its execution. Al-Irayani claims that in the lead up to the attack on the palace an intense fear began to permeate the ranks of the coup plotters who were anxious that their coup plan might be exposed and discovered by the authorities, which would have meant "either death or prison", similar to the fate of previous coup plotters (al-Irayani, 2013a. 430–431). But also, in a highly tribal and religious society of Yemen, the public allegiance to a traditional king, who basically anchored his legitimacy upon religious piety, could not have been insignificance. In actuality, it seems that he still had well commanded a broad popular support, regardless of what a secular elite of military officers thought of his regime.

Regardless of how the escape took place, the event proved to be of critical consequence for the subsequent developments in the country. For, the dethroned king refused to abdicate. Arriving at the safety of the mountainous tribal area on the northern border away from the reach of the government in Sana'a, the Imam began to organize his followers into some fighting force formation. From there, he proclaimed the beginning of a counter-revolution armed resistance to reclaim the monarchy. In reaction, the Republican government in Sana'a started counter-insurgency

operations in the northern region, threatening the local populations with military attacks in case of supporting or providing aids to the unfolding armed insurgency (Middle East Journal, 1963, 141). In a fast-unfolding development that occurred within a few days, Yemen quickly plunged into civil war between the Republican government in Sana'a and the Royalist resistance forces in the northern region, which would last for nearly eight years.

Expansion into Yemen

The Pan-Arab **Egypt** would quickly seize upon the domestic power vacuum in Yemen to extend its influence into it. Over the past decade prior to the civil war, the Pan-Arab Egypt and the traditional Yemeni Kingdom had maintained close ties despite the inherent ideological incompatibilities between their two political systems. The relationship was, therefore, largely governed by certain temporary pragmatic political considerations. In the age of nationalism, the traditional monarchy of al-Badr needed to appease the most powerful and the leader of Pan-Arabism as a support for sustaining its domestic stability. On its part, Egypt found in a friendly relationship with the Arab country on the southern tip of the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula an asset for its regional standing in general and its presence on the Peninsula in particular. As a result of this bilateral convenience, some form of nominal federation between the two countries came into existence in 1958. According to the pact of the federation, a supreme council was to be established under the leadership of President Nasser and Imam Ahmed with the task of coordinating the two countries' policies in various areas of foreign policy, military, economic, cultural (Middle East Journal, 1958,194).

As ambitious as the pact was on paper, however, there is no evidence that the federation led to any concrete step of coordination, let alone combination, between the two countries especially in strategic areas such as defense and foreign affairs. The ideological and political incompatibilities between the nationalist and socialist UAR and the traditional monarchy of Yemen were too wide to make room for any tangible political or institutional cooperation, let alone unification, between the two states—in the fashion that it developed and dissolved between Egypt and Syria few years earlier. Eventually, unsatisfied with the lack of progress toward unification, the UAR officially unilaterally abolished federation in 1961. Despite the Egypt's cut of ties, however, Yemen remained

committed, at least in public, to maintain a close tie with Pan-Arab Egypt. For example, upon taking over the throne, Imam Muhamad sent an official delegate to Cairo in January 1962 with message to President Nasser to convey his interest to restore their bilateral relations (Middle East Journal, 1962, 214). From his part, unhopeful for a revolutionary change in Yemen, **Nasser** reciprocated the King's desire for a new reset. Following the diplomatic exchange and as a demonstration of its goodwill, Egypt effectively banned the activities of the anti-monarchy movements on its soil, al-Baydani recounts (al-Baydani, 1984, 305). Consequently, a new era of cordial ties seemed to be on the horizon between the two countries, less than a year prior to the military coup in Yemen.

As it descended into state failure, Yemen was about to become an epicenter of power struggle in the region. The turning point of the escalation started when Egypt (the UAR)[1] initiate expansionist intervention into the country through dispatching military forces just few days following the outbreak of the civil war. The intervention marked a major shift in the Egypt's calculus toward now-failed state of Yemen. Now that Yemen had declined into civil war and state of failure Egypt was about to seize upon the opportunity to expand its power into it. Egypt saw in Yemen's domestic upheaval—a typical case of Pan-Arab revolutionary change. In a speech in the Liberation Square in Sana' in April 1964, Nasser made his expectation public:

> Today, when I see you, revolutionary heroes of Yemeni people and their brothers of the Egyptian military forces in Yemen, I feel that the goal of Arab unification has been realized; the union that we have long been calling for… When I give my attention to the battles and how the Egyptian armed forces side by side with the Yemeni army and tribes fight off the reactionary and imperialist forces, I feel from the bottom of my heart that the Arab unification has been achieved… Today I feel the Arab unification has become a reality for which no written document or constitution is needed since you proclaimed it with sacrificing of your lives. (Nasser, 1964a)

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[1] Egypt retained the name United Arab Republic officially until 1971 when President Sadat scrapped it.

The urgency with which Egypt undertook its expansion attempt into the failed state of Yemen demonstrated its sense of necessity for compensating its loss of Syria in a year earlier. The Pan-Arab Egypt needed Yemen to keep alive the momentum of its Pan-Arab revisionism. Nasser referred to this point in a speech he delivered in Sana'a in April 1964 when he remarked:

> Your revolution, the 27 September Revolution, is a great turning point in the history of Arab nation. For, after the secession of Syria (from the Egypt-dominated UAR), the reactionaries (the monarchies in the region) and the imperialist powers thought that the world had turned in their favor and they would be able to bring Arab nation under their domination. However, your revolution here in Yemen dashed this hope of imperialists and their collaborators. (Nasser, 1964b)

With characterizing the coup as another case of the Arab national revolution and also recognizing the coup government as the sole legitimate authority in Yemen, Egypt paved the way for its expansion into the country. Soon, Egypt would translate its claim to Yemeni upheaval into a motto for a full-fledged military intervention. Al-Baydani (1984) mentions that a few days after the coup on September 28, as the new revolutionary government in Sana'a started a military campaign against emerging resistance of the Royalist forces; Egypt sent a military plane to Yemen carrying a number of military officers (Al-Baydani, 1984, 324). The dispatch of the officers proved to be just a prelude to a pervasive intervention. In preparation of committing larger force, Nasser sought to survey the political and military situation in Yemen. In his memoir, General Abdul Mooneim Khalil the Commander of the Egyptian Military Operations recounts that a few days after the military coup:

> For the purpose of exploring the situation in Yemen, President Nasser decided to send a delegate to the country. The delegate was comprised of Mr. Anwar Sadat and Mr. Said Kamal Rafat, the two members of the Revolutionary Command Council accompanied by a group of Egyptian military officers. After 36 hours visit, the delegate returned (to Egypt) with a clear interest in an Egyptian intervention in Yemen. They recommended sending a set of Egyptian jets to Yemen based on the calculation that such a limited force would be sufficient to force the rebellious Yemeni tribes into accept the rule of the republicans. That step was the beginning of a

forceful intervention from air, land, and sea with men, equipment, arm, treasure, gold, silver, and everything. (Khalil, 1990, 213)

As an additional backup force, the first Egyptian military ship with a full load of soldiers and supplies would dock at the port of Yemeni city of al-Hodeida. Although the question of the quantities or qualities of the shipment remained unknown, according to some leading figures of the Yemeni Republican government, the ship delivered "a large number of Egyptian soldiers and tanks" (al-Irayani, 2013b, 31). Its military intervention quickly took on an extensive scale with the participation of all three branches of military service (the ground force, air forces, and navy). According to an Egyptian military commander in Yemen, within a few months "an air and maritime bridges have been set up between Egypt and Egyptian forces in Yemen through which hundreds of soldiers and all types of weapons are being transported every day" (Abu-Dhikra, 1977, 34). Although officially Egyptian authorities never disclosed the size of the military deployment in Yemen throughout the war, according to some sources, the size of the intervention steadily rose up to tens of thousands. According to a Yemeni source, for example, while in 1963 Egypt had only around 15 thousand soldiers, by 1964 it rose to 50 thousand (Naji, 1988, 208, 223, 226). To supervise the operation closely, President **Nasser** appointed his Vice-President Field Marshal Abdul-Hakeem Amar to direct the military affairs of Yemeni operation. By early 1963, Egyptian troops became active participants in the civil war on the side of the republican forces.

With these tens of thousands of military personnel on the ground, Egypt began bringing the political reconstruction of the Yemeni state under its own control. For that purpose, Nasser appointed the Speaker of the Egyptian National Assembly Anwar Sadat in charge of Yemeni political affairs. Moreover, when it came to major decisions on reconstituting the Yemeni constitutional-political structure, Nasser himself stepped in as the ultimate decision-maker. For example, in April 1964, he intervened personally when the talks were under way among Yemeni factions on drafting a new constitution. In his memoir, al-Irayani recounts:

In 23/4/1964, President Jamal Abdul-Nasser came to visit Yemen for the first time accompanied by Field Marshal al-Hakeem and Anwar Sadat… He stayed for two days in Sana'a. During that time a large popular conference was being held in the building of the Shura Council (Parliament) with the

presence of President Jamal Abdul-Nasser. A permanent constitution was proclaimed after it was imposed on the participants. When (some participants) tried to debate some of its articles, President Jamal Abdul-Nasser objected to any debate. (al-Irayani, 2013b, 36)

In another example that only demonstrated the extent to which Egypt treated the Yemeni Republican leaders as its subordinates, Egyptian authorities arrested the entire members of a Yemeni delegate headed by the Yemeni Vice-President Abdul Rahman al-Baydani during an official visit to Egypt on the ground that they had established "contacts with British authorities" in South Yemen which was then under the British rule (Middle East Journal, 1963, 106). Egypt objected to any Yemeni establishing contact with the British authorities in the south on the grounds that such acts undermined its policy of removing the British rule over Eden.

Internationally too Egypt tried to establish a tight rein on the foreign policy of the Yemeni government. In one instance, al-Baydani (1984) mentions that in the aftermath of the declaration of the republican system in Yemen, "President Nasser handed me a demand to shut down the US and UK embassies" in Sana'a on the ground that the two countries had not recognized the new Yemeni government (al-Baydani 1984, 379). In another case, al-Irayani mentions that during his visit to Cairo as the head of an official delegate in November 1962, "President **Nasser** began to dictate on us a list of those Arab countries that he wanted us to visit, during which he granted us his consent to visit Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Algeria, and Sudan while exempted Syria" (al-Irayani, 2013b, 36). When they found out that Nasser's insisted on his objection, the delegation canceled their planned trip to Syria, which Nasser considered an unfriendly regime since it pulled out from the UAR.

Although on the surface, Egyptian officials sometimes claimed that the purpose of the intervention was to protect "the Yemeni revolution" from its enemies, Nasser tended to project a more ambitious and radical for Yemen than simply securing the new government and pulling out. For example, in a reception speech to a brigade of returning Egyptian troops from Yemen in August 1963, President Nasser described the objective of their fight in Yemen:

The Yemeni battle contained within it the seeds of the total battle of Arab nation. If Arab nation seeks liberty, the Yemeni battle was for liberty. If

Arab nation seeks demolishing exploitation, the Yemeni battle was a solid effort for freedom from exploitation… If Arab nation seeks to control its own destiny from the despots and anachronistic rulers, the Yemeni battle that you fought was for that end. Your battle was not confined to Yemen. The battle recognized no borders… Instead, our responsibility extended to all borders of Arab nation… When we talked about the Arab unification, we meant what we said. It was not a slogan or a political maneuver. We meant what we called for. (Nasser, 1963)

It was this fear that Egypt's objective in Yemen was nothing less than a stage in a wider campaign of spreading its revolution and regional hegemony that provoked other regional powers to take balancing measures against it in Yemen.

Balancing Against Expansion into Yemen

The Egypt's military expansion into the failed state of Yemen inevitably aroused fear in the neighboring countries. Indeed, the Egypt's grand display of its army charging into the country on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula was so bold that it even created an ominous feeling in the mind of some pro-Egypt Yemeni Republicans themselves in the anticipation of reactions by the neighboring countries. In his memoir, al-Irayani describes the sense of foreboding among Yemenis as they watched the arrival of intervening Egyptian troops in the country, worried that the intervention would provoke a response from other powers, particularly Saudi Arabia across the border:

We had never expected that the Egyptian military aids (to the Yemeni Republicans) would take on that massive scale. The spectacle made me to grow in worries that it would only provoke the Saudi Arabia's since it would deem the move as a threat and thereby would intervene in the battle (the civil war) with her treasure and weapons, if not directly with its own army. At least, it would be able to mobilize an army of tens of thousands of the Yemeni tribes as long as it continued to supply money and weapons to them. (al-Irayani, 2013b, 31)

The ominous prediction was to become reality. As a status quo power, Saudi Arabia had identified its security, and even very survival, with the stability of the existing regional order. The Kingdom watched closely the constant threat from Pan-Arab Egypt over the past decade or so with

growing apprehension. This feeling of insecurity was expressed in a letter to the US President by King **Faysal** as he appealed for military assurance:

> As we are working toward our goals of modernization and reform, we need to count on the US to protect the security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia… We appreciate your understanding of the danger of the existing tension in the region… that might derail the efforts for development and deflect from the real need of the peoples of the region which is eradicating poverty, elevating living standards, increasing national revenues, and creating democratic institutions. (Om el-Qura, 1963a, 1)

In the past, to avert the Nasser's fire and accommodate its interests in tune with the rising **Pan-Arabism,** the Kingdom made certain concessions. For example, the Kingdom terminated the leasing agreement with the US on the use of the Dhahran Airfield, which had granted the latter a military airbase on the Saudi territory. For, President Nasser considered US military presence in the Kingdom, and the region generally, a form of imperialism and, therefore, had recommended to the Saudi government to terminate the agreement (Middle East Journal, 1959, 443).

Now that Egypt had expanded into Yemen, the status quo Kingdom grew in the realization that its past appeasement had failed to accommodate Nasser's ambition. Indeed, the development across its border was a double trouble for the Kingdom. For, it not only lost a friendly neighboring country but it also placed the army of the Pan-Arab giant right on its borders. As a result, the heretofore Kingdom acquired a new heightened sense of insecurity. Therefore, the time had come for the Kingdom to cast its caution toward the leading Arab nationalist power into the wind. The threat was too grave not to take the risk for countering it. With this sense of security urgency, now time had come for the Kingdom to actively resist the expansion in defense of the status quo; the failed state of Yemen was about to become a regional battleground.

The position of the Kingdom on the Yemeni question was outlined in a speech by **King Saud** in November 1962, about two weeks into the outbreak of civil war. In addition to re-affirming the Saudi recognition of the rule of the deposed Imam as "the sole legitimate authority" of Yemen, the King also considered the Egyptian military deployment as "an act of outright intervention in support of domestic insurrection" and "an act of aggression against our borders" (Om el-Qura, 1962c, 1, 10). Accordingly, the Saudi government practically declared its objection

to the presence of the Egyptian military in the area. To make its policy position public, the Kingdom outlined its own conditions for settling the conflict: (1) the withdrawal of all foreign forces of all types; (2) cutting off all aids, direct and indirect, to the warring parties; (3) guaranteeing the right of the Yemeni people to determine their form of government; and (4) appointing an impartial international committee to supervise the implementation of those steps to end the fighting (Om el-Qura, 1963a, 1).

By outlining its conditions for resolving the conflict, the Kingdom set the ground for military action since Egypt declined to withdraw its troops. However, in the expectation that its assistance for the anti-Egyptian forces of the **Royalists** would provoke retaliatory response from the mighty Arab power, the Saudi government first needed to bolster its defensive military capabilities. In October 1962, Crown Prince **Faysal**, the de facto ruler of the Kingdom, traveled to the US to meet with President J. F Kennedy. According to the memorandum of conversation with President Kennedy, Crown Prince **Faysal's** aimed to convey the sense of security urgency of his country caused by Egypt's regional revisionism and, thereby, to secure the US military guarantee. Toward that end, he tried to persuade US officials to support his country's measures to counter the threat. He explained that President **Nasser** had embarked on a regional campaign "to subordinate its neighbors", that "if insurgents were not given any outside help, they would not be able to retain authority", that "unless the situation is reversed, fertile ground for… subversive activities will be provided in the area," and that "Saudi Arabia would not hesitate to give Hassan (the heir apparent to the Yemeni Monarchy) any assistance…" (Department of State, 1995).

However, the US government was quite reluctant to follow the Saudi's call for countering Nasser's Egypt in Yemen. According to correspondents among American officials during the period, the overall US position was that such an endeavor would be futile, unnecessary, and counterproductive, simultaneously. It would be nearly impossible to force Nasser out of Yemen due to his heavy military and personal investment in the cause; it was not a worthy cause to try to restore the anachronistic and unpopular rule of the deposed king (imam); the threat from Egyptian military presence or the new regime in Yemen to the Kingdom was not as mortal as Saudi leadership was trying to portray; and tighten the screws on Nasser in Yemen would provoke him to carry out more subversive activities against the Kingdom; this was while making him all the more becoming "even

more mortgaged to Moscow", which would further the Soviets influence in the region. Therefore, the US government preferred an appeasement over aggressing him. For example, in a telegram to the American Embassy in Riyadh in December 1962, the State Department conveyed this US position to King **Faysal**, declaring:

> You (US ambassador in Riyadh) may inform (King) Faysal that his overt importation of war materiel for dispatch to Yemen could provide reason for UAR-piloted Yemeni aircraft to strike at supply depots in Saudi Arabia. The US has no intention of being drawn into hostilities between Saudi Arabia and the UAR nor… can US serve as "shield" protecting Saudi Arabia while SAG stokes fires of war by supplying weapons and ammunition to Royalists. You should again urge that such activities be suspended to permit us exert our influence in Cairo to get UAR military withdrawal under way. (Department of State, 1995)

In the end, the US government yielded to Faysal's urgent plea for military assistance but kept it largely to defensive type of weaponry—clearly just enough to mitigate the Kingdom's intensely growing worries for the Pan-Arab Egypt's forces across its borders which might well have further instigated it into deeper military engage against the most powerful and popular Arab country. Thus, to navigate between the Kingdom's sense of insecurity and the danger of further provoking Nasser, the US deployed a destroyer and a number of fighter jets to the Kingdom for which the Kingdom reopened its airfields for arriving US military personnel—reversing its previous move to close down the base to appease **Nasser**. Relatedly, the Kingdom resumed its diplomatic ties with Britain following brief talks between the crown prince and the UK foreign office (Om el-Qura, 1963b, 1). The rapprochement between the two kingdoms was made imperative by their mutual fear of Egypt's revisionism. For, Nasser's Egypt had antagonized the British by championing anti-British sentiments and supporting local resistance in various countries against the imperial British. In this respect, the UK would quickly join the effort, albeit indirectly, of anti-Egypt's balancing effort in Yemen by providing covert military assistance.

With buttressing its national defense, the Kingdom began actively balancing against Egypt in the failed state of Yemen. Since the outset of the war, the Saudi government ruled out a direct military intervention when Faysal assured that the Kingdom would not "send any Saudi force

to Yemen" to fight on the side of the Royalists (Om el-Qura, 1962b, 1). Instead, it opted for indirect measures. Accordingly, the Kingdom chose to supply the **Royalist**s with all sorts of military assistance as well as political support. King **Faysal** defined his country's support for the Royalist forces in Yemen in the language of defending the sovereignty of a friendly state against outside intervention. "We always see danger in having a state intervening in the domestic affairs of other states. This is a serious threat. Regarding our arm assistance, we have been doing it based on agreement between us and our Arab brothers in the summit conference, which is for defending all Arab countries, not just Saudi Arabia" (Om el-Qura, 1967a, 1). In other words, the Kingdom chose to wage a proxy war to balance Egypt's expansion into Yemen. What made that option more appealing militarily was the existence of battle-hardened Yemeni tribesmen to rely on as foot soldiers to do the fight against Egyptian troops; and the fact that the stronghold of the counter-revolutionary Royalists was located in the northern Yemeni mountainous region just across its 812 miles' porous border with the Kingdom. Therefore, what the Kingdom basically needed to fight Egyptians in Yemen was basically to ship arms and other types of military aids across the border readied fighters.

The questions of when the Kingdom exactly started its military support and what type of supplies it sent remain not quite clear. This is primarily because the Kingdom followed a highly covert and intelligent approach in carrying out the operations. Even with its allies, Saudi officials refrained from recognizing or disclosing information on the military aids being delivered, particularly at the beginning. For example, to the inquiry about any military aid that his country was delivering to the Royalist fighters, Faysal evasively replied that he was not "fully conversant with what the Saudi Government is actually doing" even though he reiterated that his country had no hesitation to send "any assistance which was within the modest capabilities of his country" (Department of State, 1995). Moreover, even when in early October 1962, Egypt announced that the defection of some Saudi military cargo planes which were on the mission of delivering military aids to the Royalists in the northern Yemeni-Saudi border, the Kingdom categorically denied such existence of any mission by claiming that the plane was simply "on an assignment to transport military equipment to the Saudi military outposts on the southern borders" (Om el-Qura, 1962a, 1).

It was not until spring 1963 that the Saudi government officially and openly admitted that it had been supplying the Royalist forces with military aids. In a public address in Jeddah, the Crown Prince recognized that his country's position was "the Egyptian military has to withdraw from Yemen with all its equipment in return for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's termination of its aids for the soldiers of the Imam…" as he elaborated on the Kingdom's terms of negotiations with Egypt (Om el-Qura, 1963d, 1). Related to that, the Kingdom never disclosed data on the fighting capabilities of the **Royalists**, or its role in organizing or directing their operations. However, according to some Egyptian military sources in Yemen, by October 1962, the Royalists leadership had set up military and political headquarters in the Saudi border city of Najran from whence it commanded the activities of some 20,000 tribesmen fighters with "the full backing of the Saudi Arabia of all kinds of aids" (Abu-Dhikra, 1977, 37). Thus, using the Royalist fighters on the ground as foot soldiers and with its own constant flow of arms, ammunition, money, and sanctuary, the status quo Saudi Arabia was set to wage its war of balancing against the expanding Pan-Arab Egypt military in the failed state of Yemen.

OTHER STATUS QUO POWERS

Although Saudi Arabia led the anti-Egypt balancing behavior in Yemen, it was not the only status quo power in this pursuit. Two other status quo powers, Israel and Shah's Iran, also contributed. Under President **Nasser**, Egypt had become an uncompromising hostile country to Israel. Besides imperialism (Western powers) and reactionaries (Arab monarchs), Nasser considered Zionism (Israel) as the primary hostile force on the road of Pan-Arabism and, therefore, eventually had to be removed in the course of the realization of his Pan-Arab unification goal. In a speech in February 1961, he pointed out:

> After the World War One Zionism aligned with imperialism in order to dismember Arab nation into weak sub-states and contain it within spheres of imperialism. As a result of this scheme, Zionists took over Palestine. Arab nation was divided and fragmented. In this manner, imperialism, collaborators of imperialism, and Zionism prevailed. If this (division) is reversed and the Arab nation is re-united, collaborators of imperialism will be rooted out and with it Zionism will also be rooted out. (Nasser, 1961)

While busy building the domestic foundation of its nascent state, the Israeli leaders also had to deal with the constant threat from its Pan-Arab neighbor. Egypt was seeking "at dominating all the peoples of the Middle East, as well, perhaps the entire African continent" then Israeli Prime Minister warned in a speech in 1957 (Jewish Virtual Library, 1957). The Egyptian expansion into Yemen only confirmed this ever-present sense of threat from Egypt. "There is a constant shadow of Nasser's ambitions in the Middle East," Israeli Foreign Minister **Golda Meir** told President Kennedy in her remark on the ongoing Egypt's expansion into the Yemeni civil war (Department of State, 1995). Although Israel had clearly demonstrated its military edge over the much larger Egypt in previous wars, Egypt kept rebuilding its military capabilities and insisting on its ultimate goal of destroying the Jewish state. Now by expanding into Yemen, Egypt proved its determination to move on with its power aggrandizement in the region.

But also, by expanding into the quagmire of the Yemeni civil war, Egypt presented its rival powers with an opportunity. For, by embarking on such expansive military deployment into a large and non-contiguous Yemen, Egypt had stretched its capabilities. For one, Egypt had deployed around a third of its armed forces away from home (Abdul-Ghani, 2001, 30). Therefore, the time was strategically auspicious for Egypt's enemy powers like the status quo Israel to act in order to turn the Yemeni civil war into a swamp to bog down its mortal neighboring enemy state.

A dilemma for Israel, however, was that by openly taking balancing behavior against Egypt in the Arab Yemen, it might well cause the start of an unprovoked war with it, or at least it would play into the hand of the leader of Arab nationalism by rallying wider support from Arabs around its Pan-Arab design. Therefore, in response to the circumstance, Israel decided to take a covert approach in its balancing move against Egypt in Yemen. In this pursuit, it opted to collaborate with a mercenary company owned by a retired British Colonel named David Sterling who had a close connection to the British government. After laying out an operational plan, Israel assigned its foreign secret service (Mossad) to supervise the delivery of military supplies to the anti-Egypt Royalist forces (Melman, 2008). According to some Israeli declassified archive, after a short exploratory visit by a group of Israeli operatives and retired British officers to Yemen to assess the possibilities and logistics of the planned operation, Israel decided to supply the Royalist forces with arms, ammunition, and medical supplies through parachuting (Liran & Zuchbaya,

2018, 40). Through using the giant cargo plane Stratofreighter, Israel Air Force delivered a total of 14 airdrops to the Royalist forces between March 1964 and May 1966 in what was code-named Operation Gravy and Operation Porcupine (Liran & Zuchbaya, 2018, 44).

Although not much details are available regarding the scope of the arms shipments, judging from Imam al-Badr's request for the continuation of operations, it can be concluded that the supplies had made a tangible positive impact on the state of the battlefield for the **Royalists**. For example, at one point during a halt of the arm delivery, the Imam conveyed to Israeli officials a letter of appreciation but also an appeal for resuming the aids. "Please call the friends (Israeli authorities) and give them our blessing and our appreciation, and our hopes that aid will be renewed at the appropriate time" (Liran & Zuchbaya, 2018, 44). Moreover, the support had a morale-boosting effect for the Royalists. It is said that when the fighters saw for themselves the barrages of armed parachutes being dropped from the airplanes on their headquarters, they boasted that now with all these military equipments "we will not only conquer Sana'a, but we will also conquer Eden" (Liran & Zuchbaya, 2018, 43). Besides sending arms shipments, Israel also provided military training to the Royalist forces. In this respect, Israel dispatched a group of military advisors of Yemeni origin to train the Royalists on the use of modern weapons and war tactics (Dorril, 2002, 695). The Israeli assistance to the anti-Egypt Royalists continued until the summer of 1966 when the war in Yemen reached its climax.

Shah's Iran, another status quo, made its own contribution to the anti-Egypt balancing operation in Yemen, too. As a regional status quo power with vital interests in the existing order, Iran saw in the expansion of the Pan-Arab Egypt into Yemen a threat that would derail its quest for stability in the region. As mentioned in Chapter two, during 1960s, the Iranian monarchy was busy carrying out domestic reform. This socio-industrial reformation was powered by Iran's primary source of national revenue: oil. Therefore, the Shah needed to seek to maintain stability in the regional environment, particularly in the Gulf and its surrounding geography on whose maritime Iran heavily depended in exporting its oil to the global market. This meant first and foremost that the Arabian Peninsula, the other side of the Gulf, remained under like-minded friendly governments. In this respect, the **Shah** later said:

> Our lifeline was and is the Persian Gulf. We have no oil pipeline to the Mediterranean as Saudi Arabia. Defense of the Strait of Hormuz required that the nations on the Arab side remain our friends. Our forces had to be strong enough to prevent these friendly and poorly-armed governments from being overthrown… Outside the Persian Gulf, the sea lanes through the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean were vulnerable… to submarine attack. This aspect of our defense required a substantial investment in our naval capabilities. (Pahlavi, 1980, 142)

Also, similar to Saudi Arabia, Shah's Iran aligned with the Western powers, first the UK and then the US, for its national security. These steps only earned the Iran's monarchy more animosity from Pan-Arab Egypt who had vowed to remove Western influence in the region. For one, Nasser attributed to the Shah government all the publically delegitimizing characterizations that he did to his other rival countries in the region. For example, in his remark on breaking up diplomatic ties with Iran, President Nasser charged:

> We look forward to see the day that Iran will be liberated from the rule of reactionary, corruption, and control of imperialism and Zionism… We support the Iranian people in its movement for liberation from the agent of imperialism and Zionism, and we know that the Iranian people will rise up… the Shah made himself a stooge of imperialists and Zionists, and challenged Arab nation… (Nasser, 1961)

The **Nasser's** designation of the Shah as an obstacle in the way of Pan-Arab nationalism was reciprocated by the Shah's sense of threat from Pan-Arab revisionism. The Nasser's attempt to unify the neighboring Arab countries under its dominion would have diminished Iran into a subordinate power status—a pronounced desire that had only reinforced the Shah's worry. A case in point was the preliminary unification agreement between Egypt and Iraq in 1963. For example, in a meeting with the US officials, the Shah particularly stressed "his concerns at the prospect of Nasser controlling Iraq with its eight hundred miles of land border (with Iran), but more importantly, the control of the Shatt-al-Arab and access to the Persian Gulf" if the unification became reality (Department of State, 1995). While the prospect of the unification of Iraq with the Pan-Arab Egypt soon fell apart, the Egypt's expansion into the failed state of Yemen had heightened the Shah's persistent worries into a new level. Describing the threat from the President Nasser's regional

design during 1960s, the **Shah** says "by 1960s, **Nasser** had already succeeded in fomenting dissension in the region…(and) I knew then that as Iran continued to grow and prosper, we would become an increasingly attractive prize for foreign predators of every ilk" (Pahlavi, 1980, 141). From this understanding and in accordance with its interests to safeguard regional stability, Shah's Iran decided to join anti-Egypt's balancing behavior in the failed state of Yemen.

Iran never disclosed information on the scope or type of its military involvement in Yemen. Thus, like other status quo powers, Iran opted to carry out its involvement in the war covertly. What is available of a limited data in this regard came either from Egypt or some third party. For example, in December 1963, Egyptian officials reported that "Iranian planes dropped weapon by parachute to the rebels in the areas of al-Jawf, Khilan, and Khema (areas in the north of the country)" (Al-Ahram, 1963, 1). Also, there is evidence that Iran used its territory as a transit for delivering arm shipments to the Royalists, particularly shipments from Israel. According to the arrangement, Israel shipped armed cargoes to Iran for repackaging to disguise the source of their origin before shipping them to their final destination in northern Yemen where the Royalist forces operated (Dorril, 2002, 695). Besides delivering arms, Iran also opened military camps on its territory jointly with Saudi Arabia to train Royalist fighters on the use of modern weapons and warfare tactics before sending them back to fight the Egyptian army in their country (Badeeb, 1993, 129).

CLIMAX OF THE POWER STRUGGLE

The Egyptian expansion and balancing behavior by status quo powers turned the civil war-ravaged Yemen into an epicenter for a regional power struggle. Having been counteracted with balancing intervention, the expanding Egypt ratcheted up its force by sending in more troops. According to President **Nasser** himself, by 1965, Egypt had at least 50 thousand soldiers in Yemen—a surge that aimed to break the stalemate (Nasser, 1966a). Meanwhile, determined to abort the Egypt's bid, the status quo powers of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran continued to supply the Royalist insurgency with various military assistance. With sustained flow of assistance, the **Royalists** continued to inflect heavy casualties on

the Egyptian army. According to an Egyptian source in Yemen, the Egyptian death toll stood at around 20 thousands of soldiers by the fifth year of the war (Abu-Dhikra, 1977, 185).

Still, even with no any victory in sight, Nasser pressed on with his ambition; against the advice of his own military advisors. For example, in October 1963, Egyptian military commanders in Yemen conveyed to Nasser their concern over the high cost and low expectation of winning the war in Yemen in the face of relentless resistance by the regionally backed Royalists. However, Nasser turned down the recommendation by asserting "withdrawing our forces is not possible… It means the collapse of the Yemeni revolution… I think by our intervention in Yemen we have made up for the loss that was caused by the secession of Syria… We just cannot leave Yemen" (Abdul-Ghani, 2001, 31). It could only have been expected that Nasser only take further steps to defend his newly acquired military advance. A major evidence of this escalation was that in a bid to cut off the supply line from Saudi Arabia, Egypt started carrying out frequent aerial bombing strikes on Saudi border territory with an increasing frequency. However, the Egyptian attacks failed to force the Kingdom to cease arm supplies Royalist fighters.

While the war raged on, political solution was also being tried from time to time. Various settlement attempts were initiated, negotiated, and, at times, even signed, only to fall apart soon after. In every attempt, the same proposition was put on the table: termination of military aids for the **Royalists** in return for Egypt's military withdrawal. For the backers of the Royalists, any permanent termination of military assistance to the Royalists was strictly conditioned on a complete pullout of Egyptian forces, something that Egypt continuously declined to commit in one way or another.

The arrival of Egypt's military forces on its doorsteps was undoubtedly the major cause for the Saudi's insecurity and resultant balancing intervention. But also the power struggle began to assume an ideological dimension too. The conservative Kingdom's fear was only exacerbated by the progressive Egypt's launching of the secular Pan-Arab ideological crusade. To counter this Egyptian power of ideological appeal (a secular identity), the Kingdom started advocating the notion of Pan-Islamism. To be sure, since the early days of the conflict over Yemen, Saudi leadership tried to frame the **Nasser's** regional revisionism in terms of socialist or even communist terms. In a speech in Mecca in 1963, Faysal declared:

We believe neither in socialism nor in communism. We do not believe in any belief system that contradicts Islamic jurisprudence. We do not believe in any other doctrine except Islam. We do not interfere in the affairs of other to impose our belief system or doctrine on others. If they want socialism or whatever they choose of a belief system, it is their choice. It is up to Egyptians to decide if they accept it or not. This is not our business. But if they attempt to impose on us belief systems that contradict our religion and our morality, we say no, and emphatically. (Om el-Qura, 1963c, 1)

Now that Nasser with his Arab secular nationalism was on a crusade, the cause of modeling Islam was an ideological alternative to nationalism gained further momentum. In their meetings with Americans, Saudi officials were even more explicit in drawing the connection between the Yemeni conflict and the cause of anti-communism. They tried to persuade their American counterparts that with the escalating political development in Yemen the threat of the spread of communism in the area was real, and they presented Islam as "the strongest shield" to abort it (Department of State, 2000).

Still, it was a regional context that the Kingdom was the primary focus of the Kingdom. The Saudi's vision of an Islamic alliance proposition aimed at bringing about the unity of conservative monarchies with a shared interest in stability, combating revolutionary currents, if nothing more than as an ideational-moral force. Toward that end, it launched a diplomatic offense to "enhance the fraternal ties between the Kingdom and Arab and Islamic countries" (Om el-Qura, 1966, 1), essentially an inauguration of its campaign of popularizing its newly envisaged vision for establishing an Islamic conference—even if as an ideational structure, not necessarily military one. As a step toward that end, in December 1965, King **Faisal** visited Iran to introduce his vision to the secular **Shah**. During this visit, he delivered an elaborate speech in the Iranian National Assembly in which in addition to highlighting the close partnership between the two countries, he also emphasized the importance of Islam as a framework for cooperation. King Faisal stated:

If we look at the Arab nation and the Iranian nation, we see no disagreement. Both share the same goals and the same interests. Even more importantly, our Islamic faith unites us with many other nations… You Majesty, today more than ever, we are in need for cooperation and unity in order to preserve our religion, promote our nation (of Islam) and advance

our countries…Today, we are under attack from certain destabilizing and deviant forces and tendencies, and this makes it incumbent on us to reinforce our commitment to our religion and cooperation for the sake of our peoples and countries. (Om el-Qura, 1965, 4)

The visit met with some success. Saudi media announced that "the two kings agreed on the necessity of having Islamic countries to combine to address the problems, uphold their interests, and promote their relations for realizing the high principles of Islam… and agreed on the proposal issued previously for holding a conference of Islamic Umma (nation) to address the matters concerning Muslim countries in order to maintain their unity and interests" (Om el-Qura, 1965, 1). Thus, it seemed that the foundation was laid for an inter-state Islamic gathering. Indeed, under the Shah, the two monarchies cultivated bilateral close ties. To be sure, they still remained potential rivals; yet, a state of equilibrium between the major powers of the Gulf maintained that was also more or less buttressed by a sense of shared values and preferences: both were conservative regimes with pronounced anti-nationalism and socialism tendencies that had chosen to allocate their energies and resources of domestic societal developments. Saudi Arabia and Shah's Iran were basically natural candidates for an alliance at the period.

Turkey was another Muslim-majority country in the region that the Kingdom courted in the effort. Turkey had essentially stayed on the sideline of Middle Eastern power politics since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire during the World War One. For a brief period when Egypt ruled Syria under the Pan-Arab federal state of the UAR, Turkey became a direct target of Nasser's Arabism. For, in its second conference in Cairo in February 1960, the UAR announced that the historically Arab-majority Iskenderun (or Hatay) in Turkey was an integral part of the Arab homeland and therefore ruled as "null and void" the result of the plebiscite held upon the Franco-Turkish agreement in 1937, which decided the status of the province as part of modern Turkey (Middle East Record, 1961, 513). However, by 1962 this threat of Pan-Arab revisionism had receded away from the Turkey's borders following the breakaway of Syria from the UAR. If anything, the retreat of the UAR from Turkey's southern border had only reinforced Turkey's long-term lack of interest in the regional power struggle. This neutral stance became evident during the King's visit to Ankara in late August 1966. For example, while the joint communiqué issued following the

summit "emphasized economic, cultural, and social links between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, based on the moral links between them as well as their common interests" (İhsanoğlu, 1997, 99), no declaration was made on cooperation under the umbrella of the initiated Islamic conference. The reluctance of Turkey to join the Islamic identity-based alliance was expressed in what was missing in the statement. Thus, while the visit resulted in an upgrading of the diplomatic relations between the two regional powers, the push to enlist the support of one of the major Mulsim-majority powers in the region did not materialize, at least for now.

As it is commonly the case in assessing the influence of ideational factors on military-political equations, it is hard to gauge how much the Islamic initiative aided Saudi Arabia in its anti-Pan-Arab Egypt effort. One thing for sure is that the invoking religion (a fundamental component of public culture) was definitely a cultivation on the part of militarily and ideologically vulnerable Saudi Arabia for buttressing the legitimacy of its strategy, and, thereby, to function as an ideational counterweight against the most powerful and popular Pan-Arab state on the ideological front, besides military one. The advantage the Kingdom possessed in this regard was its status as the cultural heartland of Islam, which meant that it was endowed with the natural authority necessary to translate Islam from being merely a cultural system into an organizing principle of the form of Pan-Islamism as a protective ideology against that of the marching movement of **Pan-Arabism**, whose momentum had now reached the Kingdom's edge from south.

On its part, considering it was the target of this new religion-based alliance, Egypt condemned it as simply another plot being carried out by the conservative regimes in the region with the backing of Western powers against Pan-Arab revolution and liberation. President **Nasser** charged:

> Now they are surrounding Arab countries with a new pact that disguises in religion as a cover. For Baghdad Pact they invented an Arabic name they called Baghdad Pact… they have named the new pact the Islamic conference or gathering… Whether it is Baghdad Pact or Islamic Alliance the goal is the same: to crush the Arab nationalist movement and the wishes of the Arabs… The Islamic Alliance is an imperialist alliance aiming to abort the liberation movements and to hinder social progress. The Islamic alliance is an alliance of conspiracy against the Arab peoples to subject them within western spheres of influence… Islamic alliance is a gathering

of reactionary forces collaborating with imperialism as the last defense in the face of the flow of the Arab revolutionary progressive movement in the Arab countries. (Nasser, 1966b)

For Saudi Arabia, running the risk of antagonizing the Pan-Arab giant and its widespread ideological followers in the region was required by the degree of urgency of thwarting the immediate threat, real or perceived, to its political independence, and probably territorial integrity as well. The reality of having Yemen dominated by the Pan-Arab Egypt was too close threat to yield to a compromise deal. The full pullout Egyptian troops remained the consistent demand of the Kingdom. Therefore, the cause was zero-sum outcome. In a conversation with the US officials, **King Faysal** pointed out, "no power on earth can stop this fighting; one side or other must prevail" (Department of State, 2000). Accordingly, the Kingdom, with the support of some allies, sustained its low-cost but efficient proxy fight against Nasser's threat with the constant dumping of weapons and money into anti-Egyptian Royalist insurgency. Therefore, the Kingdom enjoyed the advantage of enduring a long-term war while the Royalists gradually wore down Egyptian army with relentless guerilla warfare in the rugged terrains of the northern Yemen.

For the Pan-Arab Egypt, the cumulative material drain of its expansionist campaign was justified by the ambitiousness of its design, even in the face of the growing decline of its economy. As late as 1966, Nasser came out to renew its commitment to his military campaign in Yemen. "We are willing to stay in Yemen a year, two years, three years, four years, five years… and we are able to sustain sacrifice and shoulder the burden because we believe in the Arab people, in the Arab revolution, and in the oneness of the Arab struggle," he vowed (Nasser, 1966c). The gradual widening of its military-political investments it made virtually impossible for the Pan-Arab power to just give up and exit Yemen, especially the crushing failure of the collapse of the unification with Syria was just some five years old. Like a prophet of a new vision unwilling to concede to unfavorable reality, Nasser was ready for an adjustment of the operational tactics, but not the abandonment of the mission. Thus, he initiated a new operational plan of military engagement in preparation for a long-term war. In this respect, Nasser proposed "Long-Breath Strategy" according to which the size of the deployed forces would be reduced and the expenses cut down by concentrating troops only in specific areas of

importance in order to sustain the capability for a long battle (Nasser, 1966c).

Eventually, the beginning of the end of the Egypt-Saudi power struggle over the failed state of Yemen came about not in the rugged terrains of Yemen itself but on the deserts of the Egyptian-Israeli border. In a lightning short-lasted air campaign in June 1967, the Israeli army took out nearly the entire Egyptian air force in a preemptive strike—in addition to capturing the Suez Canal, the Egypt's major source of national revenue. The military defeat marked the beginning of the end of Egypt's expansion into Yemen. Already having its army over-stretched into an attrition war of insurgency on foreign land, Egypt reached the point of military exhaustion. The Israeli strike was the last straw. For, with its loss of fighter planes, Egypt military practically became crippled, at least as far as the Yemeni war was concerned. In its Yemen campaign, Egypt relied heavily on air power to fight off the Royalists in the rugged terrains of the northern areas. "The air force is the real hero in Yemen. It was that force that contributed to lifting the siege on Sana'a, it was that force that helped to dismantle the bases of the Yemenis (Royalists) throughout Yemen," an Egyptian military officer estimated during the war (Abu-Dhikra, 1977, 107). Now that this force was essentially knocked out of operation, the war for the failed state of Yemen had become a lost cause for Egypt. As a result, the door for a political settlement to the Yemeni war opened again. During a meeting in August 1967, King **Faysal** and President **Nasser** reached what would be the final agreement to end the war. According to the preliminary agreement, a committee would be formed by representatives of three Arab states chosen by Saudi Arabia and Egypt for the purpose of: 1, overseeing the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops and the termination of the Saudi's military aids to the Royalist forces or any other Yemeni party; 2, enabling Yemeni (warring) parties to achieve stability, sovereignty and independence of the country; and 3, carrying out negotiations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia regarding the details of the process of building consensus between the Yemeni warring parties and removing the root causes of the war (Om el-Qura, 1967b, 1).

The key word of the agreement was the termination of the Saudi's military aids to the Royalist forces in return for the full withdrawal of the Egyptian military. The agreement was the exit strategy that Egypt needed to make a face-saving pullout from its inefficient and expensive war of Yemen. As a result, by March 1969, both powers fulfilled their end of the bargain with Egypt first pulling out its troops. Egyptian military left, and

the Saudi Arabia and other power ceased their military assistance for the Royalists.

In brief, the Yemeni failed state became an epicenter for regional balance power when the revisionist Egypt started expanding into it, which in turn induced the other regional powers leading by the status quo Saudi Arabia to take balancing operation in their effort to abort the attempt. With the withdrawal of the expansionist power, Yemen ceased to be a regional battlefield. The retreat of the regional powers from Yemen paved the way for the re-localization of the Yemeni civil war. Left alone, the Yemeni warring factions themselves played out the final episode of the war for controlling the Yemeni state—in not too long time. Having been cut off from their source of military assistance, the Royalists found themselves alone in the face of the overwhelming power of the Republican government in Sana'a. Eventually, the government crushed the insurgency and reestablished state control throughout the country.

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Lebanon (1975–1989): From Consensus Democracy to Communal War

Communal Discontent and War

In a country in which its levers of powers are strictly split based on the respective ratio of population size of each of its comprising cultural-social communities, the stability, or even the very survival, of its governing structure is contingent on the in/flexibility and in/variability of those demographic ratios and also on the creativity and tendency of the political elite to continually adjust the governing system and/or social relations among the communities in order to accommodate the changes. Otherwise, the domestic order might ultimately collapse under the strain of a combination of social changes and political tensions. This is what happened in Lebanon in mid-1970s.

The Lebanese civil war grew out of the cumulative impact of brewing communal tension and chronic political instability that the country had experienced for years—a recipe for national implosion which was only further fed by the arrival of external groups. In a multi-communal country where the major holdings of power are allocated based on the numeric size of each community within the national population, an increase in the relative size of a community tends to cause threat perception in the other communities. The communal worries might eventually erode national peace if some assurance mechanism is not advanced to address the concerns of the declined community. This was the case of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in pre-civil war Lebanon.

The evidence of the long-brewing communal tension between Christians and Muslims over their respective population weight is reflected in the lack of ability or willingness on the part of the government to hold a national census. This left the census of 1932, which was held under the French mandate, the only population data to rely on in allocating government powers among the communal component (Wenger & Denney, 1990, 23–25). The census had been used as the foundation of creating a communal balance within the state. Formulated in an agreement known as the National Pact of 1943, which was an unwritten agreement worked out by the political leaders of Christians and Muslims, the consensus had laid down a workable custom for a power-sharing system according to which the presidency went to the Christians, the premiership to the Sunni Muslims, and the less influential position of the speakership to the Shia Muslim. In this sense, a political system of consociational democracy was put in place.

However, the shift of relations between the communities internally and the growing presence of outside groups began to strain the already fragile domestic order in the country. The growth of the Muslim population relative to the Christians engendered destabilizing political force. For one, Muslim leaders began calling for a remaking of the power allocation by increasing their power share within the state institutions in order to proportionately adjust for the relative growth in the size of their constituency. The demand was resisted by Christian leaders who vetoed any move to carry out amendments in the power distribution arrangement.

This domestic communal contention was compounded by external influence over the Lebanese state. In the age of **Pan-Arabism** and socialism of the 1960s and 1970s, the culturally and ideologically variegated Lebanon found itself in the face of an additional fault line. One of the divisive questions was whether Lebanon should align itself with the Arab nationalist camp as many Lebanese Arab Muslims advocated, or pursue an independent path based on its own status as a multi-ethnic country as many Lebanese Christians insisted. Therefore, throughout 1950s–1960s, occasionally political disagreements boiled over into armed conflict between proponents of **Pan-Arabism** and its opponents. During the 1950s, for example, fueled by interference by regional Pan-Arab forces, armed clashes broke out between the government security forces and Arab militant groups in various areas, which prompted Lebanese President, a Christian, to send a protest memorandum to the UN against

the Pan-Arab Egypt for interfering in his country through supporting local militia groups (Middle East Journal, 1959, 307). Still, in spite of persistent communal-political tensions from within and constant pressure from without, Lebanon managed to preserve its relative peace under the National Pact for some two more decades.

By the early 1970s, a new and more destabilizing force entered the politics of the already fragile state of Lebanon, which would re-ignite the old source of communal tension by abruptly impacting the delicate Christian-Muslim demographic balance: the influx of Palestinian refugees. Refugee movements typically burden their host countries in various economic and socio-political aspects. The impact of the flow of refugees on ethnic composition and communal demographic balances of host countries is not an uncommon source of political instability (Lambach, 2007, 42). But when this occurred in a country with highly tense inter-communal relations over the demographic size of each community within the national population, the result could be deadly. By mid-1970s, hundreds of thousands of Arab Muslims had relocated to Lebanon and brought with them fear to the diminishing Christian community.

As if the country had not had enough domestic fault-lines, **the Palestinian Liberation Movement** (**PLO**) also relocated its fighters to the country in accordance with the **Cairo Agreement of 1970** which worked out by some Arab leaders (Middle East Journal, 1970, 61). Thus, the Palestinian relocation inserted a doubly destabilizing element into Lebanon. While the coming of the civilian refugees created the fear of demographic upset in favor of the Arab-Muslim community, the PLO brought the force of Arab nationalism right into Lebanon, given its tight Pan-Arab connections. With this development, the worry over having the state brought under the dominion of Pan-Arabism deepened among the already discontented non-Arab Lebanese communities, mainly the Christians. The Lebanese nationalists and rightist groups such as **Christian Phalangists** were in particular considered the development a violation of the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and a threat to its economic resources (MERIP Reports, 1975, 30–32). As the Lebanese government failed to renounce the Cairo Agreement by removing the PLO from the country, the nationalist and rightist groups, such as the Kataeb militant movement, decided to take the matter of confronting the threat into their own hands by waging armed attacks against the PLO and its Lebanese allies of socialist and Islamist forces. By spring 1975, Lebanon was on the brink of an all-out civil war.

The Lebanese civil war did not start as a result of a single incident occurring at a specific time or place. Instead, it slowly grew out of a series of isolated but recurring incidents of violence. Before spring 1975, sporadic violent clashes continued to occur in various areas. However, one major violent incident that would mark the first major push for the years-long war was attacks by the Rightist Christian militias in early 1975 on Palestinian refugees. In April 1975, the Kataeb militiamen killed scores Palestinians and Lebanese citizens in a rally in a suburb of Beirut, then opened fire on the dispatched ambulances that arrived on the scene to pick up the victims. This incident provoked quick retaliation from the PLO and its local allies. According to some estimate, several days of fighting caused hundreds of casualties in the capital (MERIP Reports, 1975, 30–32). Like a wildfire, the fighting began to spread beyond the capital city. After months of fighting, the Lebanese leaders formed a peace committee for national dialogue with the participation of 20 political figures representing various communal and political components of the country. Several months of talks, however, failed to restore peace as the committee broke up as fighting continued to spread throughout the country particularly in Beirut and its suburbs.

Moreover, the fire of the civil war engulfed the army units too. Disobedience and defection began to disintegrate the last remaining national institution as soldiers, particularly of Muslim background left their positions to join forces led by low-ranked officers of Arabs and Muslims against their mainly Christian superiors. In some other cases, the soldiers deserted the national army to join their communal militia forces. In one case, the commander of the Beirut military garrison rebelled and imposed military rule in the capital, demanded the resignations of the government, and declared the state of emergency in the country (Middle East Journal, 1976a, 432). He was never able to establish any national control; yet the move demonstrated the irreversible disintegration of the army. With the disintegration of the army, the authority of the national government further crumbled and gave way to the militia forces—ever-changing and spreading armed factions of various communal, ideological, and regional inclinations and connections.

Like other civil wars, the Lebanese war produced its own dynamics. Myriad militia forces emerged here and there at various points of the war, some old ones either splintered or forced out, new ones popped up to replace or rival the old ones, and within all these armed volatility, alignment, and realignment of forces never stopped. In the initial days of

the war, two main warring camps, the Lebanese Forces and **the South Lebanon Army** led by the Christian **Phalangists** and Lebanese nationalists on the one hand and the Lebanese National Front led by the Arab nationalists and Leftists including the **PLO**, run the course of the war. As the war continued to evolve, other militia groups emerged such as the secular Amal Movement and the **Hezbollah** (the Party of God). Thus, the armed struggle for these forces brought down the Lebanese state into state failure, and the country was about to become another focal point of regional power struggle.

Expansion into Lebanon

The first regional power that intervened in Lebanon was the Ba'athist Syria. The Lebanese powerful neighbor did not wait long before it conducted expansionist intervention by rolling troops across the border into the war-engulfed neighbor. Syria used the urgency of restoring peace to its neighboring failed state as a pretext of its military deployment. However, as the events unfolded, it became clear that the objective of the intervention was far more ambitious than simply restoring peace to the country and leaving it in the hands of its people. With incrementally stationing tens of thousands of troops and security personnel in the country, Syria would lay the stage for exerting control over the Lebanese state, domestically but also externally, for decades to come.

The intervention marked a new turn in the relations between the two countries. Historically, the relations between the two countries remained largely dormant, conflictual, and at times cordial. After all, Syria itself had been experiencing chronic domestic turmoil during 1950s–1960s due to repeated military coups and counter-coups which effectively debilitated the Syrian state from within and prevented it from projecting any impactful power regionally. It was not until the rise of **Hafiz al-Assad** to power in 1970 that the state began to constitute stable domestic governance and thereby advance its regional strategy. The first country that closely received the effect of this Syria's thrust into regional power status was its smaller and weaker—Lebanon. In view of this development across its border, Lebanon felt the necessity for constructing a cordial relationship with Syria. Perhaps the event that signified this urgency most was a collective visit by the entire heads of the Lebanese government (the president, prime minister, and the speaker, foreign minister, and army chief) in March 1971 to Syria to meet with President al-Assad who had

gradually resorted order to his country. Initially, it seemed that the two countries had laid the foundation of neighborly ties. However, soon the prospects hit stumbling blocks; in particular, the rising tension over armed confrontation between the Lebanese army and **PLO** militias in 1973, as Lebanese authorities tried to restrict the activities of the militias in the country. Since its move to Lebanon in early 1970s, the PLO had been using Lebanese southern region as a launching-pad for conducting military raids into Israeli territory. As every attack was followed by further retaliatory response from the Israeli army, the Lebanese government decided to deploy force to end the situation by removing the militants from its territory—a step that Syria strongly opposed.

As an expression of its discontent, Syria shut down its border with Lebanon conditioning its reopening on the cessation attacks by the Lebanese military on the PLO positions in southern Lebanon. The Syria's border closure was as much an act of its protest to the Lebanese policies as an evidence of its failure to impose its policy preferences on its smaller neighbor. Asked about the closing of the border with Lebanon al-Assad reminded, "Historically there have been special ties between Lebanon and Syria that no ruler in Lebanon or Syria can disregard it; anyone that overlooks the eternal ties would harm the interests of the Arab nation in the two countries and its history" (al-Assad, 1971). Clearly, within the Assad's political design, Lebanon was considered just as another geographic piece of land envisaged by Pan-Arabism. As mentioned above, Lebanon had been targeted by Pan-Arab tendency in the recent past, mainly from the Nasser's Egypt. Now, as the self-designated barrier of Pan-Arab mission, Syria perpetuated that ambition toward Lebanon. However, Pan-Arabism had always met with rejection from large segments of Lebanese, particularly the leading non-Arab Christian population who desired to keep the country as a neutral state, out of the orbit of Arab nationalism. That was prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 when the Lebanese government was still able to say no to the Syrian government. However, now that it had increasingly declined into state failure, Lebanon was about to lose its ability to exercise its independence as a sovereign state.

Therefore, the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon presented Syria with an auspicious occasion to extend its control inot the country through direct military intervnetion. It is officially unclear when exactly Syria initiated the intervention. Yet, according to some Lebanese source, by April 1976 Syria had poured as many as 6000 troops equiped with heavy weaponry into its civil war-engulfed neighbor (al-Ahram, 1976b, 1)—a

figure which was soon to jump up by thousands. Indeed, it was a measure of Syria's rapid military ground gain that President al-Assad publically boasted that the Syrian army had established "total freedom of movement" over the Lebanese territory (Middle East Journal, 1976a, 434). Although declaring "total freedom of movement" in the situation of an ever-shifting and multi-frontline civil war sounds like an overestimation of power influence, the statement showed the scope of ambition of the Ba'athist Syria.

Although in public Syria justified its intervention on the ground of restoring peace, its troops soon became active participants in the war, on this or that warring party depending on which side opposed or supported its expansionist bid over the country. This event explains the reason why Syrian troops engaged in fighting with almost every single armed militia group in the course of the war at some point and to some degree. Initially, Syrian military backed the overwhelmed Christian forces against Lebanese-Palestinian progressive forces who opposed the Syrian intervention. Later, the line of alignment shifted. As the Syrian troops began spreading their presence to various parts of the country, the Lebanese nationalist forces of Christian **Phalangist** forces began turning on the Syrian occupying troops. In summer of 1976, fighting erupted between Christian militias and Syrian military which continued through 1978 with Beirut becoming its major battlefield. In an attempt to subdue the resistance forces, the Syrian forces heavily pounded the Christian population quarters in the city for weeks with an "indiscriminate shelling" according to Phalanges leaders (Middle East Journal, 1978, 464). The fighting became so devastating that ironically it was the Lebanese army that had to mediate to break ceasefire between the Syrian army from the Christian forces (al-Ahram, 1978, 1).

Now with its near total military control of the country, Syria was closer than ever to revive its **"the Greater Syria"** ambition. The idea of "the Greater Syria" is based on the belief that "throughout history, Syria and Lebanon have been one country and one people" but the Western powers divided it into two separate countries when they cut off Lebanon from its historical geographic motherland of today's Syria (Dawisha, 1984, 229). Officially, Syria did not invoke that old-held notion, at least not directly. Instead, the Syria leadership began to popularize some modified version of it: "the special relations between Syria and Lebanon (given that) historically, Syrians and Lebanese were one country and one people, having the real common interests and common security between them" between

them, al-Assad emphasized (al-Assad, 1976). Still more telling, Syria never officially accepted Lebanon as an independent state. Syria's unwillingness to grant recognition to its smaller neighbor was evident, for example, in the fact that it never opened an embassy in Lebanon. Therefore, it was not surprising that the President **al-Assad** was not ready to visit Lebanon on any official footing. The only time during his three-decade reign that he ever crossed the border into Lebanon was to hold a brief meeting with his Lebanese counterpart in a Lebanese village just across the border. He later reflected that his trip was like "going from one town to another within a single country" (Gambill, 2002). In brief, now with tens of thousands of troops on the territory of the failed state of Lebanon, **Syria** had seized upon a rare opportunity to reclaim the country, at least practically, by effectively bringing it under its military rule.

Expansion of Another Revisionist Power

The Ba'athist Syria was not the only revisionist power that expanded into the failed state of Lebanon. By 1979, another regional power had just turned revisionist: the post-1979 Revolution Iran. Since his ascension to power following the revolution the 1979 revolution, Imam **Khomeini** aimed to spread the Iran's version of Islamic ideals had become the driving motto of the new Republic's regional design. The new Iranian leadership believed that the crises inflecting Muslim countries were caused by the existing form of governance and relations of power. The solution would be the adoption of the Iranian version of Islamic form of government, which Iran was ready to carry out. As discussed in Chapter two, by 1979, Iran had turned a revisionist power bent on exporting its version of Islamic government, albeit according to Shia interpretation, to other countries. As a practical translation of its revisionist strategy, Iran started a campaign of spawning and sponsoring militant movements in other countries. In particular countries with sizable Shia population became the primary targets for Iranian revolutionary operatives who sought to form local militant organizations as foundational armed proxies or constituencies of Iran.

A failed state with demographically sizable but politically-economically marginalized Shia population, Lebanon represented an ideal spot that suited Iran's push to start to try its grand strategy. Iran would tap into the Lebanese Shia collective deprivation and marginalization but growing population to establish a power base in the country. By 1975, when the

Lebanese civil war started, some militia formation had already formed within the Shia community in the country. Prominent was the secular militant group of **the Amal Movement.** The movement had allied with Syria in the war against anti-Syrian Lebanese forces of the nationalist and rightist groups. To extend its reach to Lebanon, Iran needed to form its own ally force in there that would subscribe to its Shia theocratic ideology. For this purpose, as early as late 1979, Iranian revolutionary fighters arrived in Lebanon. The urgency of Iran's bid to establish a foothold in the country was evident in the volume and speed of its deployment of forces. There is not much data on the specifics of Iran's expansionist intervention, especially during that early period. However, the deployment including through air reached an alarming extent that prompted Lebanese authorities to shut down Lebanese airspace to Iranian planes to block the Iran's stream of fighters (Middle East Journal, 1980, 173).

The shutdown of the Lebanese airspace to its air travel forced Iran to look for alternative route in order to continue its military deployment into the war-torn Lebanon. For this purpose, after some negotiations in June 1982, Iran succeeded in securing permission from the Syrian government to deploy some additional 1200 revolutionary guard officers in Beqaa Valley in Lebanese-Syrian border area (Europa Publications, 1993, 121). Given the covert nature of its intervention, the precise size of the Iranian total forces in Lebanon remained unknown. However, by 1984, according to some estimates, Iran had deployed around 2000–3000 of revolutionary operatives into Lebanon during this period (Friedman, 1984). Out of this Iran's military deployment, **Hezbollah** came into existence with a rapid growing military assertiveness. By 1982, Iran-backed Hezbollah became an influential armed player in the Lebanese civil war, waging its own fight for power and territory. First, the "Iranian volunteers" (as they were initially called) started fighting with Lebanese militia forces such as Progressive Socialist Party and its affiliates (Middle East Journal, 1982, 577). But as it grew in force, the Shia militants started attacking Lebanese soldiers and its barracks and government locations in cities, primarily in Baalbek region (Middle East Journal, 1983a, 249). The attacks demonstrated the growth of the pro-Iran forces into considerable fighting force. Thus, Iran's bid for expanding power into the failed state of Lebanon effectively came to fruition. The rapid rise of Hezbollah alarmed Lebanese parties. The development prompted the Syria-backed Lebanese government to break its diplomatic ties with Iran in November 1983 due to Iran's "interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs…" (Middle

East Journal, 1984a, 299). However, the diplomatic breakup did not deter the revolutionary Iran from furthering its power expansion into Lebanon. With its continuous supply of military aids and political support, Iran brought up Hezbollah militias into the most organized and powerful non-state militant force in Lebanon.

Balancing Against Expansion into Lebanon

The status quo powers of the period reacted in different ways to the expansion into the failed state of Lebanon. To begin with, Lebanon was the first test ground for Post-Nasser Egypt's grand strategy of status quoism that Sadat had inaugurated. Since the early days of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, Egypt warned of the use of the Lebanese domestic crisis by regional powers. In this regard, President **Sadat** was clear about the position of Egypt. "My position frankly is that I do not want interfere in the Lebanese domestic affairs, and hope that others abstained from intervening, but I know some Arab country has already intervened and I condemn it because what is going on in Lebanon is a Lebanese domestic matter and should be left for Lebanon itself to deal with" (Sadat, 1976). Egypt became particularly vocal in its opposition to external intervention as Syria increased its military presence in Lebanon. Therefore, Sadat called for the end of the ongoing Syrian unilateral intervention, reiterating "our policy is that: take your hands out of Lebanon,… whether it is Arabs or non-Arabs, the Ba'ath Party or any other party… I propose, instead, that we Arab states through a collective Arab force go there to bring about ceasefire and defuse the conflict" (al-Ahram, 1976a, 3). The Egypt's effort resulted in an Arab League meeting held in Cairo in October 1976 during which the agreement was made to deploy an Arab peace force to Lebanon, in addition to the provision of financial resources for peace operations and reconstruction of the country.

However, even when the peace contingency force (called the Arab Deterrent Forces) was formed, Egypt declined to contribute with its share of military personnel. Indeed, it was a testimony to Sadat's Egypt strategic shift away from Pan-Arab revisionism that it practically obtained from intervening in now the failed state of Lebanon, while during the Nasser's era the still functioning Lebanon was a major target of Pan-Arab forces in the struggle against "imperialism".

The status quo Saudi Arabia was also involved in the Lebanese civil war. When the war first broke out, the Kingdom called on the neighboring countries to act "to stop the bloodshed and exercise restraint and act with wisdom toward the emerging conflict" (Om el-Qura, 1976, 1). Beyond rhetoric, as Syrian military rolled over into Lebanon, the Kingdom hosted an Arab League summit in 1976 to discuss the developing crisis in Lebanon. The meeting, which finalized the procedures of deploying a peace force into Lebanon, outlined a plan for "the provision of necessary financial aids in order to help removing the sources of the ongoing armed conflict...," with substantial contribution from the Kingdom (Om el-Qura, 1976, 1). Following the resolution, the Kingdom dispatched its own share in the contingency force. Although the exact size of the Saudi military participation remains unknown, it was estimated to be around some hundred troops (Middle East Journal, 1976b, 531). This is in addition to its continuous financial aids to the Lebanese government. Numbering several thousand troops aiming to perate as a backup force for the fragmented Lebanese army to regain control over the country, the operation of the Arab Deterrent Force tried to remove the reason for regional expansion into the war-torn Lebanon. However, after less than two years, the mission failed to accomplish its stated purpose as the civil war escalated following Syrian military attacks on the Christian town. The Arab League-backed Arab Deterrence Forces pulled out of Lebanon, leaving it for other regional powers to fight it out.

The other two non-Arab status quo powers, Shah's Iran and Turkey, effectively adopted a non-involvement stance toward the civil war of Lebanon. While Turkey's position was a forgone conclusion given its long-standing non-involvement strategy in the regional affairs of the Middle East, the possibility of an intervention by Shah's Iran seemed to be a realistic prospect. As mentioned above, not only was there a numerically sizable and politically marginalized Shia community in Lebanon, which increasingly became a major party to the war, particularly following the emergence of the militant **Amal Movement**. Therefore, the Shia-majority Iran possessed a potential source for local alliance and influence in Lebanon if it chose to be involved in the domestic power struggle in the country. However, Iran abstained from interference in Lebanon. In fact, there is no evidence to indicate such a move by Shah's Iran. For example, in his book *Answer to History* (Pahlavi, 1980), in which he provides a broad overview of the Iran's relations with the regional countries during the period, the Shah does not mention Iranian-Lebanese or Iran-Syrian

relations even in a single sentence. This Iran's non-involvement stance toward the failed state of Lebanon continued to the end of the Shah's reign.

The neighboring Israel came out as the most assertive among the status quo powers conducting balancing intervention into Lebanon. It is true that Israeli security concerns over Lebanon did not exactly start with the Syrian expansion in the country. At least since 1970 the anti-Israel PLO militants had obtained permission under the then Nasser's Egypt-sponsored Cairo Agreement to use southern Lebanon areas as a launching pad for its armed operations against Israel across the border. The development had caused persistent tension between the two countries. Israel warned its neighbor that it was "under an obligation to respect the independence and security of Israel and prevent any attack made from her territory on Israeli citizens or territory" (Middle East Journal, 1970, 61). Other times it matched its protest with a measure of military operations.

Now, however, the failure of the state of Lebanon and the subsequent Syrian expansion into it further heightened the Israel's sense of insecurity from its northern neighbor. Since the outset of the expansion, Israel drew its security red-line on the matter. In April 1976, for example, Israeli Premier Yitzhak **Rabin** warned Syria against overstepping "a definite red line" in Lebanon (Middle East Journal, 1976a, 434). For one, Israel always suspected that Syria's purpose in Lebanon was more ambitious than peace-making. It considered the intervention as no less than a covert act of domination. In this respect, then Israeli Defense Minister clearly expressed the position of his country on the matter:

> They have turned Lebanon into a land of lawlessness, a centre for unbridled terrorism directed against Israel. However - not only terrorists, but other countries as well and Syria in particular, harbor covetous designs on Lebanon, purportedly out of anxiety over Lebanon's fate, an anxiety which could have been alleviated by moving the terrorists and their bases out of Lebanon proper - they are trying to obtain her consent to dispatch expeditionary forces of their own in order to take up positions on her territory… It must be remembered that Syria has always entertained expansionist intentions…. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1975)

To the Israeli government, the consequence of the looming threat of a Syria-dominated Lebanon for Israel was clear-cut. "Should the Syrians take over Lebanon," Begin warned, "we would be faced with a pincer

movement by the Syrians, both from Syria proper and from the other side" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1975). To thwart the rising threat, therefore, Israel decided to take countermeasures. In September 1977, Israeli military rolled over into Lebanon with the stated purpose of establishing "free Lebanon" in the southern region under the control of militias of the Lebanese Force (Middle East Journal, 1979, 358). Israel demanded "a return to the status quo," reiterating its red-line that it would not allow Syria to "take over Lebanon" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1977). As a step in that pursuit, Israel began building up alliances with local armed parties inside Lebanon. The prominent among them was the militia formation of the Southern Lebanon Army—a predominantly Christian with a minority Shia Muslims within its ranks—led by General **Sa'ad Haddad**. A Lebanese nationalist, Haddad represented the political orientation within Lebanon prevalent among the country's Christian population that sought to keep the country out of the orbit of Arab nationalism and its forces. For this cause, his forces had been waging armed resistance against the Syrian military presence in the country for years. Forced out of the Lebanese proper by the Syrian army, Haddad retreated to the south of the Israeli-Lebanese borders where he proclaimed independence of his state of free Lebanon in 1979 under the protection of his forces now known as the South Lebanon Army.

Conveniently, therefore, Israel found in the Haddad militia forces a military partner to counteract Syrians, as well as the Palestinian PLO, in Lebanon. As early as 1977, reports came to the surface revealing Israel's covert arms supplies for the militias. Although the Israeli government never disclosed the details of the assistance, it later recognized that it indeed had been sending military supplies. "We help them militarily… It shouldn't be a secret… Without our military help the Christian minority would have long ago they would have been wiped out totally," Israeli prime minister disclosed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1977). As part of this Israeli-Lebanese Christian alignment, the Israeli army enabled the Haddad's forces to carve out a strip of area of control in the south, which was also to serve as a security zone for Israel, before it pulled out its troops during an incursion in 1978. The enclave, where General Haddad announced his secessionist state, was gradually fortified with continuous Israeli assistance into a permanent buffer zone between Israel and the Syria-dominated Lebanon. However, the measure proved insufficient to check Syria's thrust into turning Lebanon.

The Syria's constant pounding of Christian forces in Beirut and in Zahle of the Beqaa Valley from the air would soon draw in the Israeli army into Lebanon again—the event represented a textbook case of chain reaction that escalated into a short but almost an all-out war between the two adversaries. Although it had more or less resigned to the reality of Syrian military intervention into Lebanon, Israel strove to block Syria from developing its expansion into hegemony over its neighboring failed state—the survival of the anti-Syrian Christian forces was the key in this Israel's endeavor. During spring 1981, recurring clashes between Israeli and Syrian air forces over Lebanon resulted in Syria's losing a number of aircrafts during the engagement with Christian forces. Meanwhile, Israeli authorities kept warning Syrian army of the Israeli red-line in Lebanon, designated as protecting Lebanese Christian forces. Israeli defense ministry declared, "We have made it clear many times that we have a commitment to the Christians and that we will not allow them to be annihilated. The State of Israel has made it clear and will make it clear once again that there shall be no Syrian areal activity in Lebanese skies" (Shipler, 1981).

However, undeterred and determined to consolidate its self-proclaimed hand freedom over Lebanon, Syria sought to neutralize the Israel's balancing intervention from the air. To this end, it started deploying surface-to-air missile system, known as SAM, into the Lebanese Beqaa Valley region. Expectedly, the missile batteries deployment caused a new alarm in Israel which deemed the build-up an attack on its air superiority over Lebanon. With controlling the ground by the deployment of tens of thousands of troops in various Lebanese cities and towns, introducing an air defense system meant that Syria would also be able to control the country's sky as well—a military advantage that had been the monopoly of Israel. Therefore, the Israeli army made a new intervention into Lebanon in 1982, this time with the purpose of a larger military countermeasure. To be sure, as suggested above, Israel had never totally disengaged from the ongoing civil war in Lebanon; but, the continuous Syrian advance against the Haddad-led forces, constant forays by Palestinian guerrilla into Israeli territory, and now the Syria's deployment of missile system into Lebanon all came together to provoke a new but larger military counteraction from Israel.

Aiming first at restoring its violated air superiority, Israel acted the new round of balancing intervention, starting from the air. The major showdown between the two countries' air forces took place in June 1982

during which Israeli fighter jets shot down several Syrian ones. Following the encounter, Israel waged an intense air campaign on the Syrian surface-to-air missile systems in the Beqaa Valley in eastern Lebanon. According to Israeli military source, the strike destroyed more than 15 out of 19 deployed batteries of the missile system in addition to 29 aircraft (Israel Defense Force, 2017). Regardless of the exact counting of the Syria's losses, the Israeli army effectively re-instated its air superiority over the Lebanese sky. With this victory from the air, Israel went ahead to launch its long-expected ground campaign. The initial plan was to avoid engaging the Syrian army before crushing Palestinian guerrillas, fearing that fighting with Syrian troops might undermine the aim of eliminating the immediate security concern. However, later defense officials proposed a more ambitious objective, which was eventually adopted. Ruling out the possibility of a peaceable or voluntary Syrian military pullout, the ministry of defense argued that in fact engaging the Syrian army in Lebanon might not only be unavoidable, given the extent of its operations and presence, but it might also be necessary too in order to remove it from the country, mainly from critical areas of extending from Beirut to the south of the Beqaa Valley, concluding correctly that as long as its military was in control of the area, Syria would be able to prevent the Lebanese state from signing peace treaty with Israel (Golan, 2022). The call to simultaneously attack both Syrian and Palestinian forces could only have been reinforced by the fact that only a few months prior, Syria and the PLO had signed a "strategic cooperation agreement" in Damascus.

Thus, on June 6, Israeli forces rolled over into Lebanon from various directions in what it code-named the Operation Peace for Galilee. In a rapid advance, it fought its way into the capital city and the northern region where Syrian troops were holding positions. As his country had effectively been turned into a battlefield between the Israeli-Syrian warring armies, Lebanese President Ilyas Sarkis formed a national committee, or National Salvation Council, with the participation of representatives of the country's main communal and political factions, aiming to rescue the country from foreign military intervention and restoring the central authority. The committee called upon Syria to pull out its troops from the capital city in order to remove the reason for the Israeli military intervention and its siege on the city; but Syria turned down the call for a withdrawal (Middle East Journal, 1982, 567). However, with the vast imbalance of force in the sky, the outcome of the battle was but a foregone conclusion. In a rapid advance, the Israeli army and its Lebanese

allies had taken over strategic points around Beirut including the Beirut-Damascus highway toward the Mount Lebanon region—areas where the Syrian army had been waging relentless attacks on Christian resistance forces. Although under international pressure a ceasefire was struck, intermittent confrontation continued to erupt between the two armies, with Israeli jets kept pounding Syrian missile sites in the Beqaa Valley.

By the summer of 1982, Operation Peace for Galilee had largely achieved its objectives. Israel had regained its superiority over the Lebanese airspace from Syria, removed Palestinian fighters from the southern border areas, and pushed back the Syrian army from areas in the Lebanese proper around Beirut further toward the Beqaa region and Lebanese-Syrian border in the north. Israel regained a new sense of security relief. Following the war victory, the Israeli prime minister defiantly announced, "We have destroyed the best tanks and planes the Syrians had. We have destroyed 24 of their ground-to-air missile batteries. After everything that happened, Syria did not go to war against us, not in Lebanon and not in the Golan Heights" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1981a). Having achieved these twofold objectives, it then retreated back into the security zone it had set up in southern Lebanon in collaboration with the Haddad-led Lebanese Army. However, the political dividend of the victory was yet to be delivered. The Israel's main political objective from the operation was "the signing of a peace treaty with independent Lebanon" free from Syrian interference or imposition (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1981b). However, Israel would soon find out that extracting peace and recognition from the civil war-torn Lebanon was far harder than securing a military victory. The country was not to regain its independence from Syiran domination.

Clash of the Two Expanding Powers

By 1982, two revisionist powers had effectively expanded into the failed state of Lebanon. The Ba'athist Syria expanded under the pretext of a peace-making mission through the direct deployment of its regular army. Iran expanded through sending in revolutionary volunteers who would form the Shia militant organization of **Hezbollah** as the Iran's loyal force in the country. The Iran's expansion created the ground for collision with the already expanding Syria. As Hezbollah grew into an influential fighting force thanks to Iranian Revolutionary Guard officers, it began to militarily rival the other parties to the civil war for predominance. It

turned its guns on any force that stood on the way of its operations; from local groups to the Lebanese government and eventually Syrian troops. Starting in the early 1980s, the group clashed with the Lebanese army and, then increasingly, **the Amal Movement,** and, subsequently, Syrian forces. In late 1983 and early 1984, during its fight against the Lebanese army in the Capital Beirut, **Hezbollah** militias took control of a large section of the capital and continued its military momentum to complete its control over the city against government forces (Middle East Journal, 1984b, 506).

Soon, the militant movement came to fight with Syria-allied Amal militias. The attacks on Amal positions proved to be the beginning of the opening of a new fault line in the war. Since **Amal Movement** had become the closet Syrian ally in the Lebanese civil war during this period, the Syrian army could stay on the sideline. Syria had been bolstering Amal militias with various military supplies. For example, in July 1985 Syrian authorities delivered 50 tanks to militias in a bid to reinforce its military edge over the other warring groups (Middle East Journal, 1986a, 127). Therefore, by attacking Amal militias, Hezbollah set itself on the sure course of direct confrontation with the Syrian military. Eventually, sporadic armed confrontations began to break out between Hezbollah fighters and Syrian troops in various areas of Lebanon.

By the second half of the 1980s, the Hezbollah-Syrian clashes escalated in both frequency and intensity. By mid-1986, Hezbollah presented an increasingly serious security challenge to the Syrian army, particularly in Baalbek Valley which prompted Syrian military to launch a campaign of shelling and raiding on Hezbollah centers in the area (Middle East Journal, 1986b, 705). The most striking armed confrontation between Syrian forces and the Iran-linked militias occurred during what is known as the Fathallah Barracks Operation. In the summer of 1986, Syria declared a security plan to Beirut where disorder had escalated as a result of continuous fighting in the city. To restore order, Syrian military authorities initiated a security operation. However, Hezbollah objected to the extension of the operation into the Shia-majority southern suburbs of the city (Middle East Journal, 1987a, 85). In early 1987, Syria decided to force its way into the **Hezbollah**-held districts of the city in the face of opposition by the Iran-backed militant group. In his memoir, then Syrian Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam says in February 1987 as anarchy continued to spread in Beirut, al-Assad "decided to dispatch a military unit to area in response to a request by Islamic leaders (in Lebanon), and

gave his instructions to the (Syrian) military command to carry out the operation (Fathallah Barracks Operation)" (Khaddam, 2021a).

A major manifestation of that "the disorder" was the Hezbollah's continuing hostage-taking, especially against Western nationals—whose release was used by Iran in exchange for highly needed arms for its war with Iraq. The high-profile case of such deals was what came to be known as the Iran-Contra deal. According to the covert deal, the US Regan Administration agreed to sell Iran arms in exchange for Iran's using "its influence to help gain the release of Americans hostages in Lebanon" held by pro-Iran militias (Washington Post, 1998). As the occupying power of Lebanon aiming to establish its control unchallenged, Syria opposed the Hezbollah's activities against foreign interests in Lebanon. In this endeavor, Syria frequently resorted to the use of force against the Iran-linked Hezbollah to secure the release of hostages.

However, Hezbollah defiantly continued its hostage-taking activities in open defiance to the Syrian military in the country. Therefore, Syria decided to use its leverage with Iran itself in order to rein its loyal militia group in the country. In this respect, Syrian officials threatened the termination of Syria's military assistance for Iran in its ongoing war with Iraq unless Hezbollah released all hostages (Middle East Journal, 1986b, 704).

Despite the Syrian military and political pressure, the pro-Iran group did not halt its activity. Therefore, the Syria's military decided to go ahead with its security operation in a crackdown measure against the pro-Iran militias in Beirut. According to Khaddam, the Syrian authority in Lebanon ordered **Hezbollah** fighters to evacuate the Fathallah barracks in Beirut, and hand over their weapons to the Syrian military. Yet again, instead of complying with the order, the group started actively fighting back against the advancing Syrian troops. In a military showdown which started as the militias opened fire that led to "the killing of a number of soldiers," the advancing Syrian forces raided the bases which ended with the death of around 22 Hezbollah fighters and Syrian control over the bases (al-Safir, 1987, 1). As a result of the military encounter and the subsequent Syrian security measures that aimed to curtail the growing force of Hezbollah, the conflict of power interests between the two expanding revisionist powers in the failed state of Lebanon increasingly came to the open. The Syria's determination to secure hegemony over Lebanon by eliminating any source of resistance to its presence in the country on the one hand, and the Iran's attempt to establish a power base in there through its proxy militant movement of Hezbollah on the other

hand made it certain that unless the two sides work out an agreement to accommodate their respective interests, escalating armed confrontation would continue to govern the relations between the two expanding powers.

Watching its Lebanese proxy militant group being pounded and facing possible destruction, Iran sensed the urgency of the threat to its power ambition in the country. Therefore, it began exerting pressure on Syria to cease its crackdown. For this purpose, several Iranian delegates visited Syria in quick succession to figure out the extent of the Syria's military-security plans and its ultimate position on the presence of Hezbollah as an armed group in the country (Khaddam, 2021a). What sort of compromise arrangement the two governments worked out remains unclear in its details. However, following one of those visits by its officials to Damascus, Iran declared that it had secured assurance from Syria that it would not force the pro-Iran's militant organization into disarming (Middle East Journal, 1987b, 432). It seemed that for the time being at least, the two powers agreed to de-conflict their competitive presence on Lebanese territory. Although the Syria's acceptance of the Iran's demand to maintain **Hezbollah** as an armed organization constituted a first step toward reconciling the respective power interests of the two expanding powers in the failed state of Lebanon, the relations remained basically unstable.

Armed confrontation continued to occur with increasing frequency between their Lebanese local allies: The Syria-aligned **Amal Movement** and Hezbollah. And whenever necessary to keep the Hezbollah within a limit, the Syrian army intervened directly on the side of Amal forces. In late spring of 1988, after months of fierce battle between the two Shia militant groups in southern Beirut which caused hundreds of causalities, the Iran-linked Hezbollah succeeded in taking over 90 percent of the region (Middle East Journal, 1988, 665–666). Although the two states reached a ceasefire deal at the highest level, the rapid expansion of Hezbollah's military dominance provoked Syria to take new military measures, particularly to keep it out of strategic positions such as the Beirut Airport where the group tried to set up control.

On its side, Iran tried to use the ongoing clashes as an opportunity to introduce its own military into the area by creating "a joint Syrian-Iranian force" which was quickly turned down by Syria and the Amal Movement (Middle East Journal, 1988, 665–666). With its predominant military position in the country, Syria pressed on with its security operation, instead. Following its operation in late May, the Syrian military

forced its way into the southern suburbs and took over the Hezbollah and Amal positions in exchange for allowing Hezbollah forces to relocate to southern Lebanon where they could maintain freedom of operation (Middle East Journal, 1988, 667). Although there is no information on the details of the agreement, judging from the relocation of Hezbollah to the southern area of the country, the agreement effectively brought about a consensus according to which the two revisionist powers agreed to virtually divide Lebanon into two respective spheres of dominance with the Iran-linked Hezbollah would control the south while proper Lebanon would remain under the rule of the Syrian military. The agreement marked the beginning of the end of the conflict of power interests between Syria and Iran in the failed state of Lebanon. The final agreement that was hammered out after the official end of the civil war in 1989 further established the initial understanding reached some time before.

Climax of the Power Struggle

By the second half of 1980s, the involved powers, revisionist and status quo, had largely used up their military options in Lebanon and with various degrees of success and failure. To begin with, the status quo Arab powers, whose involvement through the Arab Deterrent contingency force had long been ended in failure, militarily stayed out of the conflict. Yet, Saudi Arabia, the most resourceful status quo Arab power, maintained an active political and economic involvement in the country with the aim of "restoring stability and preserving independence of the brotherly Lebanon…" (Om el-Qura, 1987, 1). Critically, it intensified its political effort to bring about an end to the civil war, which eventually yielded a final settlement.

The status quo Israel's balancing intervention was the most decisive of all. With its military success during the **Operation Peace of Galilee**, Israel felt confident that the political objective of its military intervention was within reach. Indeed, for a while, the Israeli quest for peace with Lebanon in return for military withdrawal seemed to be just a negotiation away. With US peace mediation, and after thirty-four rounds of negotiations, the two governments of Israel and Lebanon concluded a security agreement in mid of May 1983. In **the May 17th Agreement**, as it is officially known, the two parties pledged to:

Respect the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of each other… confirm that the state of war between Israel and Lebanon has been terminated and no longer exists… undertake to settle their disputes by peaceful means… refrain from allowing the territory of each other be used as a base for hostile or terrorist activity against the other Party, its territory, or its people… deployment in, or passage through its territory, its air space and… its territorial sea, by military forces, armament, or military equipment of any state hostile to the other Party… undertake not to apply existing obligations, enter into any obligations, or adopt laws or regulations in conflict with the present Agreement. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983)

In Lebanon, the agreement brought the promise of relief from foreign occupation. Lebanese president hailed the agreement "as a significant step and watershed achievement in the history of Lebanon, made it possible by the Lebanese unity of goal and interest for liberating its land, and restoring its sovereignty and territorial unity" (Republic of Lebanon, 1983, 41). The agreement was immediately ratified by the representatives of the two countries. More significantly, in the Lebanese Parliament among the 72 deputies (out of 99 total) present for the voting session on the treaty, 65 of them voted in favor of the treaty was approved by 65–2, with deputies abstained (al-Diyar, 1997). The signing of the agreement was the expression of the Israel's bid for security on its northern border, but it was also the will on the part of Lebanese leadership to free its country from being a battleground for a regional power struggle. A practical translation of this end goal would be to create the condition for the withdrawal of all external military interventions, namely of both Israel as well as Syria, as envisaged in the May 17 Agreement.

However, the prospects of implementing the security agreement soon began to falter in the face of Syria's categorical rejection. For, not only did the agreement require the prevention of Lebanese territory for activities against Israel, but also it had made the withdrawal of Israeli forces contingent on the withdrawal of all other foreign forces. "Within 8 to 12 weeks of the entry into force of the present Agreement, all Israeli forces will have been withdrawn from Lebanon. This is consistent with the objective of Lebanon that all external forces withdraw from Lebanon," the agreement stipulated (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983, 30). Refusing to relinquish its newfound military foothold in Lebanon, the Syrian government vowed to "take measures against the Lebanese state" in reaction for signing the security agreement with Israel, as Abdel-Halim Khaddam

warned openly (Middle East Journal, 1983b, 659). The Syria's disapproval of the security treaty was both expected and ultimately proved to undo. Syria declined to carry out any troop withdrawal simultaneous with an Israeli military pullout; to give any security assurance to Israel from its border with Lebanon; or to order the halt of armed operations by groups across Syrian Lebanese border (al-Ahram, 1984, 1). By August 1983, the brewing tension between the Lebanese and Syrian governments escalated into armed clashes between their two armies in the Lebanese capital.

In this manner, even when it came to sovereign decisions such as entering into treaties with other countries, Syria sought to ensure that while it might have lost some of its leverage over Lebanese politics following its defeat in the clashes with Israel; it persisted in holding onto whatever control and leverage it could still muster in order to steer the policies of its failed neighbor. Syria tried to demonstrate—indeed successfully—that it might not be in control of every decision of the Lebanese government, but it could lead Lebanese internal security out of control if it did not get its way in the country. Thus, when the Lebanese government decided to go ahead with the May 17 Agreement by submitting it to the Chamber of Deputies (the parliament) for ratification, Syria reacted with what amounted to a military coup when the head of its intelligence service in Lebanon, General Ghazi Kanaan ordered Syria-linked militia forces to act in order to sabotage the agreement (Nassif, 2000). As a result, the capital city plunged back into the state of disorder and violence when the pro-Syria forces of the Druze's Progressive Socialist Party and the Shia's Amal Movement waged fierce armed activities against the Lebanese army in the capital city and beyond. The new surge of anti-government armed rebellion both exposed the government's inability to maintain domestic order by itself and further eroded whatever power it could still organize to act independently.

Torn between Syrian domination and Israeli counteraction, the Lebanese president embarked on a regional and international diplomatic campaign to garner support for his goal of "rescuing Lebanon from the game of balance of power in the region and rehabilitating it," as he put it (Om el-Qura, 1982, 26). However, his efforts failed in the face of Syria's determination to keep the country within its strategic orbit. Therefore, realizing that Syria was the mover behind the new anti-government armed rebellion, President **Ameen Jumayyil** pleaded for appeasing it. In this context, after meeting with Hafiz al-Assad, Jumayyil rescinded his consent to the agreement, which rendered it dead—at least as far as Lebanon was

concerned. Later, he revealed that "pressure from Syria, Iran, and the Soviet Union was largely responsible for cancelling the agreement" (al-Diyar, 1997). Following the Jumayyil's decision, leaders of the pro-Syrian Lebanese factions accepted a ceasefire in preparation for the previously proposed "National Reconciliation" initiative by the Lebanese government (Middle East Journal, 1984b, 508). Thus, Syria reinforced its status as the major center of power in Lebanese politics. Damscus remained the first destination for various Lebanese contending leaders and officials who variously sought the Syrian government's opinion, consent, or support for this or that policy or proposition regarding their country.

With Lebanon pulling out of the peace agreement, the Israel's bid for a peace treaty began to fall apart. Yet, instead of scraping the agreement (or its mandates), the Israeli government vowed to press to handle the security threat from its northern border on its own (Middle East Journal, 1984b, 496). Thus, now that its attempt to obtain security bilaterally through agreement had essentially been aborted, Israel decided to push ahead unilaterally. What Israel did next was effectively tantamount to a unilateral implementation of the security agreement, albeit only the section that pertained to its own ends.

The agreement contained a provision for the creation of "Security Region," encompassing the whole length of Israeli-Lebanese border area under a set of restrictive conditions. In this respect, it stated:

> The Lebanese authorities will enforce special security measures aimed at detecting and preventing hostile activities in, the introduction into, or movement through the Security Region of unauthorized armed men or military equipment… The Lebanese army, Lebanese police, internal security forces, and the Lebanese auxiliary forces organized under the full authority of the Lebanese government, are the only organized armed forces and elements permitted in the Security Region… These forces and elements will be equipped only with personal and light automatic weapons…. (Republic of Lebanon, 1983, 26)

Accordingly, in essence, the May 17 Security Agreement demanded the Lebanese government re-restoring the southern border area to its control, to the exclusion of non-Lebanese and non-government forces from it. Now that the scrapping of the agreement dashed this prospect, Israel decided to take the matter into its own hands by creating such a military reality in the area to keep away hostile forces from its northern

border with Lebanon. Toward that end, after retreating its troops from the Lebanese proper to southern Lebanon, it began reconstructing and reinforcing the previously designated security zone in the region in collaboration with the South Lebanon Army—now headed by General Antoine Lahad, following the death of General Sa'ad Haddad. Following the plan, a security belt was established, which was essentially the re-consolidation of the previously designated zone, over a land strip along Lebanese border with Israel under the guard of around 2500 SLA militiamen backed by some 1000 Israeli troops in running the zone of around 10% of Lebanese territory (BBC, 2000). Thus, having resigned to the reality of having its neighboring failed state succumb to Syrian expansionism, Israel effectively isolated its territory from it by setting up a buffer zone that would stay in place for nearly two decades.

On their side, Syria and Iran continued consolidating their respective power positions. Simultaneously, intermittent clashes continued to occur between the Syrian army and its Lebanese ally of Amal Movement on the one hand and the Iran-linked Hezbollah militias on the other hand in various parts of the country. As late as January 1989, for example, the Syrian military destroyed four Hezbollah positions in the south (Middle East Journal, 1989, 489). In the meantime, the two sides continued negotiations to reconcile their differences, namely the status of Hezbollah as an armed organization. As mentioned previously, the two sides had already reached an understanding regarding this question. Following three days of talks in Damascus in April 1991, Syrian President **al-Assad** and Iranian President Rafsanjani reached the final settlement. According to the agreement, Syria agreed that the Iranian-backed militant group was to maintain its status as an armed group in southern Lebanon and eastern Beqaa Valley (Middle East Journal, 1991, 668). Since then, southern Lebanon effectively became the exclusive sphere of control of Hezbollah. As for the Syrian army, it maintained its rule over the rest of Lebanon. This Syrian domination would be secured with a formidable army of 35,000 troops (Traboulsi, 1990, 9), in addition to a complex security apparatus.

The explanation for why the two expanding powers in Lebanon succeeded in reaching a political solution to end their conflicting power interests could be found in the power equilibrium between the two, and between either of them and the most assertive balancing power: the status quo Israel. As discussed previously, since the outset when it first started dispatching its revolutionary operatives into the civil war-ravaged

Lebanon in 1979, Iran increasingly utilized Syrian territory as its route to extend its power reach into Lebanon, albeit with the consent of Syrian authorities. In this sense, the Iran's success in forming Hezbollah as an armed movement was basically due to the Syria's permission. This Iran's reliance on Syria's consent became even more critical when the Lebanese government shut down its air space to Iranian flights as a reaction to the flood of Iranian men and weapons into the country.

Since the beginning, therefore, when it came to expansion into the failed state of Lebanon, there existed a decisively asymmetrical opportunity between the two revisionist powers in favor of Lebanon's adjacent Syria. This equilibrium put Iran in a disadvantageous power position vis-à-vis Syria in any possible balancing and counter-balancing confrontation. Still more, Iran was dealing with vulnerability on another front. On top of dealing with being ravaged by domestic revolutionary turmoil, Iran was in an all-out war with Iraq. These limits on the Iran's ability to power exertion were not lost on Syrian leadership. Then Syrian Vice-President **Khaddam** recalls that "President Hafiz al-Assad had no worries over the Iran's bid to increase influence… In the calculation of President Hafiz al-Assad Iran would have no choice under any circumstance but to be an ally of Syria because it was an enemy of Israel, had troubled relations with its neighboring states especially in regard to the war with Iraq or threat from Iraq. He did not see a serious possibility of the fall of Lebanon to Iran's dominance" (Khaddam, 2021b).

While Syria had power advantages vis-à-vis the revolutionary Iran, it was also in need of a power partner to combine with to counter the superior power of the status quo Israel in Lebanon and beyond. Also, the Ba'athist Syria had some part of its territory (the Golan Heights) remained under the occupation of Israel since the war of 1967 and it failed to recover in its last attempt during the 1973 War. Therefore, while it possessed a power advantage vis-à-vis Iran, Syria needed a regional ally to compensation for its power disadvantage vis-à-vis its enemy, the status quo Israel. What further made this strategic partnership between Syria and Iran realistically more auspicious was the fact that since its rise to power in post-1979 revolution, Iran had designated the destruction of Israel a major pillar of its regional revisionism. For example, Imam Khomeini once denounced Israel as "a cancerous tumor that has been planted in the Middle East… against which every Muslim should to fight" (Khomeini, 1981, 141).

Accordingly, the struggle against Israel came out as a unifying objective between the Ba'athist Syria and the revolutionary Iran in their bid for bringing about a new regional order. The prospect of this common objective between the two revisionist powers had begun to grow when Imam **Khomeini** came to power in Iran in 1979. For example, al-Assad sent a message to Imam Khomeini in which he expressed "the willingness of the Arab republic of Syria to cooperate closely with the Islamic revolution in common struggle against imperialism and Zionism …" (al-Thawra, 1979, 11). The Iran's response to the Syria's strategic overture was unequivocally receptive. In a response letter, Khomeini reaffirmed that "we hope that we revive oppressed peoples in the world particularly Muslims against the tiger paper of imperialism in complete unity, remove our difference, and ending the hegemony of imperialist powers in the region" (al-Thawra, 1980, 1). In brief, a combination of shared objectives at the regional level and a mutual need for alliance-making to enhance their respective power positions in pursuit of separate national ends drew Iran and Syria together as regional allies. In brief, in search to add to their regional power status, the two ideologically distant powers settled their dispute over Lebanon for the sake of a wider regional power struggle.

An End to the War

In October 1989, the Saudi-led Arab League succeeded in bringing the representatives of major Lebanese communities to the negotiating table in the Saudi city of Taif. After three weeks of intense negotiations, the warring groups reached a peace deal known as **the Taif Agreement.** The National Charter, a written political constitution derived based on the agreement, laid down a road for rehabilitating the failed state of Lebanon by empowering its domestic institutions but also restoring its sovereignty over its territory and foreign policy (United Nations, 2004). The agreement entailed "disbanding all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" and their "weapons shall be handed over to the State of Lebanon within a period of six months". Regarding territorial sovereignty, the agreement stated, "the objective of the State of Lebanon to spread its authority over all the Lebanese territory by using its own forces… the Syrian forces shall thankfully assist the forces of the legitimate Lebanese government to spread the authority of the State of Lebanon within a set period of no more than two years, beginning with ratification of the national

accord charter… At the end of this period, the two governments (Syria and Lebanon) … shall decide to redeploy the Syrian forces in al-Beqaa area and the tip of western Beqaa… and in other areas upon the recommendation of a joint Lebanese-Syrian military committee". In relations to the presence of Israeli military control over the southern Lebanese border, the agreement asked for "taking all the measures necessary to liberate all Lebanese territories from the Israeli occupation, to spread state sovereignty over all the territories, and to deploy the Lebanese army in the border area with Israel".

The practical challenge facing the implementation of **the Taif Agreement** in relation to state sovereignty was to be the Syrian-Iranian influence over the Lebanese state. To begin with, the Syrian-Iranian power bargaining deal that allowed **Hezbollah** to maintain its status as a militant organization assured that the Lebanese state would never be able to fully reconstitute its central organizing power—to reestablish its monopoly over the organized use of violence. Also, in regard to a general timetable for a "redeployment" of the Syrian military toward Beqaa Valley, following the creation of "a joint Lebanese-Syrian military committee," the challenge was that with a lack of a capable army under the command and control of its national government, for Lebanon a Syrian military withdrawal of its tens of thousands of soldiers would have most certainly meant a new dissension into the state of domestic disorder and communal anarchy—the precondition of its full-fledge civil war. Since it disbanded the Lebanese army in the early years of the war, Syria never made a serious attempt to rebuild it.

Instead, since the early 1980s Syria had cultivated a broad and complex political security apparatus in Lebanon that basically engineered its broad military intervention into pervasive political domination over the Lebanese state. Headed by General Kana'an, the Syrian security service in Lebanon virtually turned the country into a viceroyalty from its headquarters in the Beqaa Valley with offices spread throughout the country under tens of generals, colonels, majors, and lieutenants (Nassif, 2000). Perhaps, Emile Lahoud, then Lebanese president, accurately portrayed this Syrian crippling domination over the Lebanese state when he complained to the Syrian president, "the affairs of Lebanon cannot be put in order with the existence two presidents; one of them must leave" (Ferzli, 2020, 163). In the final analysis, with this military-security complex Syria secured its tight grip on the failed state of Lebanon for decades to come, controlling its policy-making authority, without annexing it territorially. Khaddam

later recognized that President al-Assad did not intend "to incorporate Lebanon (territorially) into Syria… but rather to dominate Lebanon and direct its foreign policy…" (Khaddam, 2021b). And to that extent, the objective was accomplished.

Meanwhile, Iran continued to cultivate its proxy militant organization of **Hezbollah** into a state-within-a-state army in Lebanon and arguably the most powerful non-state armed organization in the world. Within a decade, the Iran's support enabled Hezbollah fighting capability into what the UN described in 2004 as "reaching almost the capacities of a regular army" (United Nations, 2012). The critical point for the operational capability and even very survival of the organization would be the continued consent of Syria to allow Iran to use its territory as a conduit for funneling military supplies and financial aids to the hands of its Lebanese loyal group. Since they settled their disagreement on the status of Hezbollah, the two revisionist powers laid the foundation for a long-term strategic and military cooperation in Lebanon. The Iran's ally group and the Syrian military would reinforce each other positions. Hezbollah was to function as a Lebanese local supporter of the Syria's military hold over Lebanon against anti-Syrian Lebanese local forces, while Syria would continue its cooperation with Iran in supplying military assistance and financial aids for Hezbollah. Gradually, Hezbollah would effectively become the critical join in the Iranian-Syrian military and security ties, employing the militant fighters against regional opponents as well as domestic opposition.

In brief, the expansion of Syria into the failed state of Lebanon provoked balancing intervention, primarily the status quo Israel, at first indirectly by assisting the anti-Syrian Christian militia forces then directly by conducting direct military intervention. The military encounter between their armies triggered a short war between the two states in Lebanon. Soon, the new revisionist power of the post-Shah Iran joined the power struggle by embarking on its own expansion into the country. The two revisionist powers, Syria and Iran, eventually succeeded in establishing control over the country, each in a different way. The status quo powers Arab powers (Egypt and Saudi Arabia) tried to varying degrees to exert influence over the Lebanese civil war through the formation of the peace-making Arab Deterrence Forces. However, they soon pulled out.

The end of the Lebanese civil war (the root cause of its failure) did not bring about the end of foreign rule over the country. Syria and Iran jointly secured their predominance hold over the country; Syria

through stationing tens of thousands of military and security personnel while Iran through forming and nurturing **Hezbollah** as its local loyal armed player in Lebanon. For its part, Israel retreated to the southern region where it carved out a security zone as a buffer between its territory and the Syria and Iran dominated Lebanon. After the end of the civil war, Saudi Arabia returned with its financial resources and political weight to influence the domestic politics of now Syria–Iran-dominated Lebanon through establishing alliance with the Sunni party of **Rafiq al-Hariri** as a counterweight to the perpetual and growing regional clout over the country. In other words, while its failure turned it into a playground for regional power rivalry, Lebanon remained effectively a military-political condominium of regional powers.

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Iraq (2003–2020): From a Bulwark Power into a Failed State

Regime Change and Sectarian Civil War

The failure of the Iraqi state is rooted in its external war adventures, international sanctions, and internationally conducted regime change. Iraq has been one of those states where the destabilizing impact of the incohesion of their national-social compositions is suppressed by iron-fist hand from the central government—almost universally authoritarian and pervasive over the state and society. Therefore, when the central power is removed, the implosion of domestic order is almost inevitable. And, when power has been run by, or in the name of, a certain national-social component, the transformation tends to be contested and violent as the rising group(s) attempt(s) to gain power positions, while the dislodged one seeks to restore its power. The presence of foreign influence within the domestic communal power struggle can only complicated the development, especially when such presence meets with local resistance.

Its military defeat in the First Gulf War of 1991 and the squeezing international sanctions that followed it severally weakened the Ba'ath rule in Iraq; they effectively crippled the state militarily and exhausted it economically. Yet, except for the de facto breakaway of the Kurdish region in the north, the state control over its domestic order continued to hold nearly intact. The final blow came in spring 2003 when the US-led military intervention overthrew the regime.

The toppling of the **Ba'ath Party** regime also terminated the Sunni Arab minority rule which started since the inception of the country as an independent modern state in 1921. For eight decades, from the monarchical rule of 1930s–1950s to the republican era of 1958–2003, the Arab Sunni minority was the center and source of political power in Iraq. Therefore, their abrupt loss of power to the Shia majority by an act of open foreign military intervention was bound to provoke their public resistance. Therefore, quickly after the removal of the Ba'ath regime an armed insurgency developed in Sunni region led by both secular and religious orientations alike against the new rule in Baghdad. A constellation of armed groups from remnants of the dethroned **Ba'ath Party** and the newly emerged **al-Qaida** militants (later developed the Islamic State in Iraq or the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant) waged a bloody insurgency against the Shia government in Baghdad and its backer of the US-led military coalition.

What further fuelled the Sunni insurgency was the disbanding of the Sunni-dominated national army by the Coalition authority at the insistence of the Shia political parties. The decision rendered tens of thousands of able men to become available for the insurgency. Combined in their opposition to the presence of foreign troops and their goal of restoring the Sunni rule in Baghdad, the secular Ba'ath Arab nationalists and the Pan-Islamic jihadists joined force to wage relentless insurgency warfare to overthrow the newly reconstituted Shia-dominated government in Baghdad. Security members, political leaders, state employees, religious and social figures, and foreign interests and international actors all became direct targets of relentless campaign of assassinations, bombings, and kidnappings. Thus, by summer 2003, the country was in civil war between the Shia-dominated government and its backer of the Coalition military and the Sunni insurgency.

Armed resistance against the new government was not limited to the western Sunni provinces. Armed groups also began to emerge in the southern Shia region. Some of those militias waged their own insurgency. Prominent among them was *Jaish al-Mahdi* (or **the Mahdi Army**) led by the Shia Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Declaring its goal of "restoring the full independence sovereignty of Iraq and ending all forms of occupation…" (Al-Jazeera, 2004), the Mahdi Army waged a ferocious insurgency war during 2004–2008 against the Coalition and government forces. From Basra in the south to Baghdad in the heartland became a new theater

of insurgency war. As a result, the Mahdi Army snatched the control of several major cities in southern region.

As it is conventionally the case, violence by one community breeds more counter-violence. In Iraq, the Sunni insurgency and Shia militia groups reinforced each other's drive for sectarian score settling and struggle for power. Thus, slowly with the prolongation of insurgency war, sectarian war also developed. To be sure, Shia militant groups, such as **al-Badir Organization**,[1] had been targeting Sunnis, not least as acts of exacting retributions for the former regime's repressive policies against the Shias. Still, sectarian violence escalated into an unprecedented scale when the Sunni insurgency extended its attacks to Shia holy places as a new tactic of its warfare. The most notorious of such attacks occurred in early 2006 when the Shia shrine of Imam al-Askariya in Samara was destroyed in a bombing. The bombing set off a wave of identity-based killing and kidnapping rampage by Shia militias against Sunnis civilians in Baghdad and its surrounding areas. According to the United Nation, over 34,000 Iraqi civilians were killed within the first half of that year alone (Middle East Journal, 2007, 505). In one incident, the militias purportedly of the **Mahdi Army** carried out a campaign of random killing in Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad during which tens of civilians including children were executed and homes were set on fire (Middle East Journal, 2006, 765). Through inserting their members into the state security apparatus, Shia militias employed resources and mandates of the state for carrying out sectarian power struggle. According to United Nation' report, at one point, the minister of interior himself, a Shia, led one of the main militant faction that used "police gear and under police insignia" carried out civilian kidnapping and mass executions (Democracy Now, 2006). In turn, the Sunni insurgency, namely al-Qaida, launched its relentless bombing campaigns against Shia cities and Shia-led government in Baghdad.

At the end, it took over seven years of arduous efforts of rebuilding the national army and also forming the Sunni paramilitary forces of **the Awakening Councils** that the tide of the war turned against the insurgency and militias forces. Therefore, by fall of 2011, when the last US combat troops pulled out of Iraq, the central government had

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[1] The Badr Organization was the military wing of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which was formed in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988, before it split from it to become a political party after 2003.

largely reestablished its control over major cities including Anbar, Mosul, and Salahaddin—previously hotbed of Sunni armed insurgency, with the assistance of the Awakening Councils forces. With a force of 100,000 fighters (Middle East Journal, 2009, 299) and local legitimacy within the Sunni population, the Sunni paramilitary fighters proved indispensable in enabling the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad to contain the Sunni insurgency in the Sunni provinces and diverting its forces to curb the spreading Shia militias. The Sunni insurgency retreated to Iraqi-Syrian border areas, where they engage in sporadic attacks on the army, while the Shia militias either left the country or went into hidden.

It did not take long before a new resurgence of insurgency broke out, however. By 2012, a combination of the government's sectarian policy toward the Sunnis and marginalization of the **Awakening Councils** forces, the Sunni's uprising, and civil war spillover from Syrian, Iraq descended into a new round of failure. In this sense, the fall of Mosul to the ISIL represented just the climax of a new collapse of the Iraqi army since 2003. The immediate cause was the withdrawal of the US-led military Coalition. To begin with, the presence of the Coalition military in the country was a check on the Shia-dominated government led by **Nuri al-Maliki**. Now that this check was removed, Prime Minister al-Maliki had found the moment auspicious to consolidate his personal power over the nascent democratizing state. But also, the departure of the Coalition military aroused the old insecurity among the Shia ruling elite. For, the fear of a possible comeback of **the Ba'ath Party** to power on the back of a military coup had not dissipated among the ruling Shia leadership. In December 2011, al-Maliki announced the arrest of over 600 officials of the banned Ba'ath Party in Sunni provinces whom he accused of plotting a coup against his government (Elaph, 2011). In this context, the Awakening Councils forces too became a target for purge by the government. Al-Maliki soon charged that the Sunni paramilitary formation was infiltrated by the element of Sunni insurgency of Ba'ath members and **al-Qaida** jihadists, suggesting that only 20% would be incorporated to the security forces (Elaph, 2009).

Whether or not Ba'ath members or al-Qaida jihadists inserted their organizations into the paramilitary formation, with tens of thousands of fighters, the Awakening Councils forces could have represented a formidable military counterweight to the Shia majority rule in the new

era. At any rate, by 2013, the AW forces had been effectively circumscribed, demobilized and its former leadership was sidelined. The government was trying to re-structure it based on new criteria and under a new leadership. "The new **Awakening Councils** forces have no presence in Anbar Province and have no power... Now they exist in name only, without power," one of its discharged commanders protested (Al-Mada Paper, 2013). Soon, in a reverse of allegiance, many of those fighters would turn their arms on the government in support of their Sunni brethren. Sunni major governmental figures too came under government prosecuted. From Vice-President **Tariq al-Hashmi** to lower ranking officials were pursued on terror charges. Al-Hashimi fled the country following arrest warrant issued for him by the Iraqi court.

These government policies following the departure of Coalition troops had fed growing worries among the Sunnis. The fear of "reversing back to dictatorship" by **al-Maliki** government had continued to grow (Elaph, 2012). Sunni leaders charged al-Maliki's government of pursuing sectarian policy of intimidation and marginalization against them through carrying out arbitrary arrests, raiding homes without a court warrant, and detention without trial or legal proceedings (Al-Jazeera, 2012). Still more, they feared that now that Coalition troops had left, Iran through Iraqi authorities was trying to take over the country through implementing sectarianism. For example, Tariq al-Hashimi, the Sunni Vice-President now a political refugee in Turkey fugitive, warned "al-Maliki is an instrument in the service of Iran's agenda in Iraq... Al-Maliki is working for Iran not only from a sectarian standpoint, but also he relies on Iran for maintaining his personal power... **Iran** is now ruling and imposing its order. Its influence is pervasive to all aspects of the Iraqi state and its institutions from security to politics to ideology and publicly and officially... Unfortunately, the invasion (the US-led regime change) and the heedlessness by Arab countries has reduced Iraq from the guardian of the eastern gate (of the Arab world) as the protector of the Arab nation from Iran into an Iran's arm to harm Arab brothers" (Al-Hashimi, 2013).

Sectarian grievances aside, the year 2011–2013 was the age of the mass protest movements and political upheavals in the Middle East. In what came to be called **the Arab Spring,** anti-government protests from Libya to Syria rose up against their autocratic rulers for political freedoms and economic reforms. Thus, collective grievance and political opportunity came to combine to galvanize Sunni population to rise up against the authoritarian-inclined Baghdad government. Following calls

by Sunni political, religious and tribal leaders, protests broke out in Sunni-majority provinces from Anbar to Mosul, Kirkuk, and Salahaddin. Once again, Anbar Province became the epicenter of the Sunni's opposition to Baghdad. For example, tens of thousands of protesters in Fallujha city cut off a major Iraqi international highway by setting up blockades to force al-Maliki government to respond to their demands. In his refuge in Turkey, **al-Hashimi** applauded the protests as "a true Iraqi spring that paves the way for change… We will take it to the end until our objectives are realized without retreating in the face of al-Maliki and his repressive terrorist apparatus" (Al-Hashimi, 2013).

The government response was a mixture of public promises and a security crackdown. In a bid to accommodate the growing protests, al-Maliki announced the formation of certain committees to address the Sunni demands. In this pursuit, it took some concrete steps such as the release of thousands of female prisoners—one of the primary demands of the protests. Those measures failed, however, to defuse the escalating tension as protests spread from Falajua and Ramadi cities in Anbar, to Mosul in Nineveh.

After its ultimatum to the protesters to end the protests and opening the blockades went unheeded, the government deployed the army into the uprising cities. With the employment of force by the army against the resisting protesters, the situation increasingly turned violent. Slowly, the initially peaceful protest movements turned radical in demands and means. Now, the demand was no longer limited to political or constitutional reforms, but the removal of "the illegitimate regime" in Baghdad (Al-Jazeera, 2013). Clashes began to spread to various cities. The state security enforcement began to crumble once again. Some major cities like Fallujaha went out of the government control as protests escalated into turning armed insurgency. "Today, we defeated the army, and if another force is deployed, we are ready to fight it off… We cannot let that army enter our cities. They are (Shi'ite) militias, not a national army…," a tribal leader warned (Al-Salhy, 2013). Thus, the condition was set for a new resurgence of al-Qaida and its newly rising offshoot, the Islamic State in Iraq (later, the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant, or **the ISIL**). It was in that context that in early June of 2014, a Sunni jihadist group from the ISIL infiltrated Mosul, which in collaboration with some local Sunni groups of Ba'ath Party members, took over the Iraqi second largest city. By mid-June the insurgency was in full control of Nineveh Province and pressed on with its lightening advance against the fleeing national army.

Having tightened its territorial grip, the Sunni insurgency declared itself a "caliphate" and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi national, as "the caliph of all Muslims" (Al-Jazeera, 2014). Demoralized and in disarray, the army continued its fast-track retreat southward. By the end of the month, ISIL had reached the gates of Baghdad.

Unable to halt the marching ISIL forces, the Shia-dominated government appealed for help from the public. It declared "state of emergency and mobilizing all resources to confront the existential threat... calling on all citizens and tribesmen to take arms to defeat terrorism and terrorists in defending the homeland..." (Al-Mada Paper, 2014). Sensing the urgency of the threat, the Shia religious authority in Iraq Grand Ayatollah **Ali al-Sistani** issued an urgent decree (fatwa) for popular resistance. "The severity of the threat that is facing Iraq and its people now requires mobilization for fight to defend the homeland, and this fight is a duty on all able citizens... Citizens who are able to bear arms and fight terrorists, defending their homeland, their people and their holy places, should volunteer and join the security forces for this holy mission" Sistani's office appealed (Sistani, 2014).

The cleric's call received immediate response among the Shia population. Within one week, over one and half million volunteers registered to draft in the army (Al-Sumaria, 2014). Out of this essentially sectarian mobilization a Shia militia formation would come into existence. Known as *Hashed al-Sha'abi* (or **the Popular Mobilization Force** [PMF]), the formation would play a critical impact on the dynamics of power and politics in the country beyond the ISIL war. Although the post-Ba'ath Iraqi army had increasingly been dominated by officers of Shia backgrounds, the formation of the PMF was destined to further tighten the control of the Shias over the military and security establishment, particularly by enabling the sectarian militias to gain influential status within the state apparatus.

Thus, while it was just about to overcome the al-Qaida-Ba'ath insurgency, the Iraqi state suffered another blow to its attempt to reconstitute its organizing power through rebuilding its military-security structure. The breakout of the ISIL insurgency would leave long-lasting eroding impact on the ability of Iraq to reimpose its authority within its borders. For, although the Sunni insurgency itself was ultimately defeated, the opportunity and power vacuum that its emergence created would be

seized upon by other non-state militant forces that effectively proved their resistance to any attempt by the state to bring them under its actual control.

Expansion into Iraq

Now that it had plunged into domestic disorder and warfare, Iraq was about to become a target of regional power ambitions. Iran across the border would become the first regional power to initiate expansionist intervention indirectly into its historical rival regional power the now failed state of Iraq. The history of the relationship between Iraq and Iran had mostly been characterized by lingering animosity and intense hostility caused by conflicting objectives coupled with overlapping insecurity. Their mutually hostile relationship boiled into an all-out war after the Iranian revolution of 1979 that brought the Islamic Republic to power which vowed to export its Shia theocratic revolution in the region. A Sunni-based secular Arab nationalist party presiding over a Shia-majority country, the Ba'ath government in Iraqi sensed the urgency of the threat early on. Months of open quarrel between the two neighbors spiraled into open war when in September 1980 the Iraqi army invaded Iranian territory, quickly established a foothold inside the country. Thus eight-year war, which is simply known as **Iran-Iraq War,** broke out.

However, apparently Iraq had overestimated the demoralizing impact of its initial military success—a miscalculation that proved to be costly. Just a month into the war, Iraq unilaterally declared ceasefire in a bid to pave the way for negotiation in the expectation that Iranians now accept its terms for peace (al-Hamdani, 2007, 66). Turning downing any peace appeal, however, Iran vowed to move the war into Iraq. Propelled by its Shia theocratic ideological zeal and freeing the "downtrodden people" (the marginalized Shia population in Iraq) across the borders, Iran soon adopted the goal of regime change against the Sunni minority rule in Iraq. "Our hope is to free the brotherly Iraqi people from the rule of that person (Saddam)… In the same manner that we ended the rule of the deposed Shah and cut off the hands of world powers from our country, the Iraqi people will also be able to determine its destiny and elect its own rule by itself," Imam **Khomeini** asserted (Khomeini, 1981, 136–137). In this context, Khomeini evoked the legacy of anciently rooted kinship between the two countries that dates back to pre-Islamic period when Iraq was a dominion of the Persian Empire. "When you look back at

history, you see that historically Iraq was part of Iran and Madaen belongs to Iran…," he reminded the audience (Khomeini, 1981, 67).

However, as it dragged on, the war proved to be simultaneously an expensive and futile endeavor. Iraq failed to extract early peace concession from Iran, while the revolutionary Iran failed to bring about regime change in Iraq, and so its hope for installing a Shia wilayat al-faqih rule in its neighbor was dashed. Iraq survived the revolutionary onslaught, thanks mainly to the support from Arab countries; in particular Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, which feared that Iraq was only the first station of the Iran's revolutionary crusade. Still, the war left a legacy that would later became a key operational element in Iran's strategy toward Iraq. In the course of the war, Iran inspired and supported the formation of Shia armed opposition to the Ba'ath rule in Iraq. Later in post-Ba'ath Iraq, many of those Iran-linked actors rose to the position of leadership— Iran would utilize their ideological affiliation and operational capabilities to extend its influence into the country.

With the removal of the Ba'ath regime in the US-led military intervention of 2003, the gate of opportunity finally began to open for Iran toward Iraq. Through covert and indirect approaches, Iran would lead the regional expansion into now the failed state of Iraq ravaged by a complex internal war. For this purpose, it soon began helping the formation and operation Shia militant groups in the country to fight the Coalition military and Iraq security forces. The emergence of armed insurgency among the Shia further facilitated this Iran's bid. The foundation of this Shia armed insurgency was laid down by the Shia Iraqi nationalist cleric **Muqtada al-Sadr** when he formed the Mahdi Army (described above) in summer 2003. The Army's uncompromising anti-Coalition forces stance combined with its operational energy quickly made it an appealing force for Iran's design in Iraq.

To be sure, the alliance between Iran and the Sadr's militant movement did not necessarily mean that the militants operated at the behest of Iran in the country. For one, there is no indication that the movement subscribed to the Iran's theocratic wilayat al-faqih political ideology, as some other groups would do. Rather, the two were united by their shared primary objectives of forcing out "the foreign occupation" from Iraq, not a strategic commonality or ideological bond. Therefore, as later events would demonstrate, the Sadr movement fought its insurgency as an act of national liberation, aiming to restoring Iraqi state sovereignty; for Iran, the aim was removing American troops, the architect and security

provider of the post-Ba'ath Iraq. For Iran, which had been pronouncedly pushed for transforming the America-guarded regional order in the region, the arrival of American troops as an occupying force of a neighboring country to which it had long-cultivated cultural and strategic interests effectively constituted a potential blowback to its revisionist bid.

Although Iran tried to keep its expansionist attempt into Iraq covert, the increase of its involvement exposed its hands. By 2005 evidence came out from British officials that Iranian and its affiliated regional operatives had supplied explosive technology to **Mahdi Army** fighters to target British troops in the southern city of Basra, claiming that "specially shaped charges" anti-armored vehicles used by the Shia insurgency were of similar type of devices used by the Iran-linked Lebanese **Hezbollah** in southern Lebanon (Reynolds, 2007). This British claim was corroborated by US military authorities later in 2007 when it put on display a cache of captured weapons provided by the Iran's Qud's Forces of the Revolutionary Guard Corps to Shia insurgency in Iraq including anti-armored vehicles explosive devices, which it used with effective fatality against Coalition troops during 2004–2006 (Glanz, 2007). According to Coalition authorities, operatives from the Lebanese Hezbollah worked "as a surrogate for the Iranian **Quds Force**" with the assignment of training and arming Iraqi Shia militants to carry out attacks on both Coalition and Iraqi troops (NPR, 2007). A major link was revealed after the arrest of the Shia Cleric Qais al-Khazaali, an aide to al-Sadr. During his detention, al-Khazali disclosed that fighters of the Mahdi Army had indeed been receiving training in bases inside Iran by both the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on "full scale warfare" and the Iran-linked Lebanese **Hezbollah** operatives on "urban or guerrilla warfare" (Gorden & Kesling, 2018). Moreover, Muqata al-Sadr himself admitted the existing of ties between his militia organization and the Lebanese militant organization. "We have formal ties with Hezbollah… It is natural that we would want to improve ourselves by learning from each other. We reproduce Hezbollah's way of fighting as well as tactics, we teach each other and we are getting better through this," al-Sadr revealed (Latif & Sands, 2007).

Given its suffering from pervasive lack of security power during this period, the Iraqi central government was unable to put up any meaningful resistance against the Iran's growing intervention; still, with the backing of Coalition troops it continued its counter-insurgency against the Iran-linked militias in southern cities. Sustained Iraq-Coalition joint

military campaigns and al-Sadr's political compromises brought the Sadr-led Mahdi Army into suspending its armed operations. The suspension of armed activities by al-Sadr caused the splinter from his forces. The splinter groups developed more pro-Iran hard-line. Among them was *A'asaib Ahlualhaq* (or the League of the Righteous People) which was founded by the Shia militant commander al-Khazali in 2004. This group was particularly active during 2007–2011 during which it carried out various multiple attacks on the US-led Coalition and Iraqi forces.

Still, the most Iran-linked Iraqi militant group during this period came out to be the **Kataib Hezbollah**, another offshoot of the Mahdi Army. The Kataib was founded by Jamal Jafaar al-Ibrahim (AKA Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis), who later became the close associate of the commander of the Iran's **Quds Force** General Qassim Solemsni in Iraq. Unlike other groups, the Kataib Hezbollah made no secret of its ideological-political affiliation. It officially subscribes to the Islamic Republic-type theocratic system. "We advocate wilayat al-faqih as the realized ideal system of the rule of Islam… as it has been achieved in the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Kataib Hezbollah, 2020). Operationally too the group demonstrated its tight connection with the revolutionary Iran. For example, the group carried out a wave of bomb and rocket attacks on various military bases of Coalition troops as "a revenge for martyr E'mad al-Mughnya," a leading military commander of the Lebanese **Hezbollah** who was assassinated in Damascus in February 2008 (Kataib Hezbollah, 2008b).

The Kataib ratcheted up its military operation against Coalition troops in 2008. In 2008, American and Iraqi officials signed a security agreement on the status of Coalition troops in the country. The agreement on the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence was it was called, extended the presence of the US-led troop in the country until 2011. Iran publically opposed the extension. For example, during meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki during the US-Iraqi negotiations on the future of the US troops in Iraq, Iran Supreme Leader **al-Khamenei** declared that "the presence of American and British troops is the biggest problem" (Khamenei, 2008a). When the National Assembly went ahead with ratifying the drafted agreement between the American and Iraqi government, the Iran-linked militias vowed to sabotage it. "Our religious and national responsibilities call upon us to fight against the occupation and its collaborators who help it to stay; and, you know our arm reaches everywhere in

Iraq," the Kataib warned (Kataib Hezbollah, 2008a). As the Iraqi government ratified the security treaty, the group escalated its armed activities. Accordingly, as an expression of it a practical objection to the agreement, the militant organization targeted various Coalition's military bases such as Calso, Liberty, Victory, and Siler with Karar and al-Ashtar rockets (Kataib Hezbollah, 2011) to which the remaining Coalition troops had withdrawn in accordance with the agreement.

By the end of 2011, a combination of the withdrawal of Coalition troops, the sustained crackdown by the Iraqi national army, and the outbreak of civil war in Syria, the pro-Iran militant groups in Iraq mostly disappeared from the public scene either quit armed activities or left for Syria to join Iran's fight in there.

Syrian Expansion

The revisionist Syria also became one of the regional powers that attempted to expand into Iraq following the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime. Yet, as it will be shown, among the intervening powers, the Syrian involvement remained relatively limited in scope and time—probably due to its limited resources to influence the developments in Iraq and build up leverage, but also due to its own decline into the state failure in 2011. Unlike Iran, for example, there is no evidence indicating that Syrian military used its own operatives to carry out military activities or leading some loyal militants inside Iraq. And unlike Turkey, which deployed its regular army into the country after 2014, Syria did not conduct direct military involvement into Iraq. Instead, Syria's intervention remained limited to providing facilities and supports from inside its territory for Iraqi Sunni insurgency: Ba'athists and Jihadists.

Following the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003, Syria quickly became a safe-haven for the opposition to the Shia-dominated rule in Baghdad. Sections of the Sunnis, who refused to accept their subordinate status in the post-Ba'ath Iraq, took from Syrian territory a launch-pad to stage resistance into Iraq. In this context, remnants of the banned **Ba'ath Party** including some high-rank officials, who were now fugitives from Iraqi authorities and who vowed to fight for reclaiming their lost power in Baghdad, began to reorganize their ranks in bases inside Syria. Thus, the Syrian-Iraqi border became the major conduit from which fighters streamed into Iraqi territory to wreak havoc on the nascent political structure in Baghdad through a sustained campaign of bombings

and shootings. The increasing flow of Sunni fighters unsettled the new government in Baghdad and its backer the US-led Coalition authorities, the de facto ruler of the country. In response, the US government tightened the screw on the Syrian government by imposing a host of economic and financial sanctions. The punitive measures forced Syria eventually to engage in security talks with Iraqi authorities in 2004 which concluded with some pledge of cooperation by the Syrian government to stem the flow of fighters from its territory into Iraq. As a concrete step, Syria allowed Iraqi authorities to arrest the former head of the Iraqi Security Intelligence who had been organizing and directing Sunni insurgents from inside Syrian territory. Syria acted under "tremendous pressure on them," as Iraqi officials in commenting on the Syrian cooperation in the arrest (BBC News, 2005). Moreover, as a new sign of improving ties, the two countries agreed to restore full diplomatic relations—ruptured in 1980 when Syria sided with Iran against its ideological brethren in Iraq in the eight-year war between the Ba'ath Iraq and the Shia Iran. For a while, the Assad government had eventually ceased its support for the insurgency toward constructing neighborly relations with the struggling government of Baghdad.

However, Syria continued to play the double game: preach diplomacy publically and fanning insurgency covertly—even sometimes openly. While it reiterated its security cooperation with Iraqi authorities, it also continued its support for the insurgency simultaneously. President al-Assad found no contradiction in supporting "resistance to occupation" in Iraq while denying responsibility for the violence. In a speech to a gathering in a city near Iraqi border, **al-Assad** asserted, "We support our Arab brothers in some places such as in Iraq… You are in direct contact with your brothers in Iraq, sympathize with them and support them as every Syrian supports the resistant people of Iraq" (Syrian Days, 2007). Still, when it would come to determine the source of "terrorism" in Iraq, al-Assad branded any such charges against Syria as "immoral accusations" (Syrian News Agency, 2009). Indirectly, al-Assad declared its presence of Coalition troops in Iraq as the cause that provoked "the resistance" and therefore repeatedly called for "setting a schedule for the withdrawal of the occupation force" from Iraq (Al-Thawra, 2007). However, even after the security agreement of 2008 was signed between the US and Iraq that set a schedule to the withdrawal, Syria continued backing the Sunni armed insurgency. In August 2009, a series of massive bombings rocked the government compounds in the capital which caused hundreds

of causalities. Investigations by Iraqi authorities pointed fingers to the **Ba'ath Party** operatives living in Syria. The bombings heightened the Iraqi security concern into a new level. Iraqi officials considered the escalation as "an existential threat," and that the disagreement with Syria "could no longer be treated with routine diplomacy…," as they told American officials in private meetings (Wiki Leaks, 2009a).

While in the past, the Iraqi government had been trying to obtain Syrian cooperation through a conciliatory approach, now grew in public frustration. "Since 2004 we have been providing Syrian authorities with names of and evidence on the operations of those terrorists and takfeeri (jihadist) groups, and their locations, their routes of infiltrating (into Iraq) through Syrian territory, and the logistical aids they receive from the Ba'ath leadership which holds its gatherings on Syrian territory and plan operations from there with the aim of restoring the rule of the dictator…," Prime Minister **al-Maliki** protested, revealing that 90% of attacks were carried out by fighters coming from Syria (Council of Ministers, 2009). Still more directly, Prime Minister al-Maliki charged the Syrian intelligence agency of sponsoring the operations of Ba'ath Party members and Jihadi fighters through organizing meetings between them inside Syrian territory (Al-Alam, 2009). Powerless to force Syria to comply with its demands, the Iraqi government to mass officially requested the United Nations' Security Council intervention to protect Iraq from "aggression by some neighboring states." However, Syria declined to hand over Ba'ath members or other insurgency figures that Iraq demanded their extradition.

Syrian was not ready to accept an Iraq dominated by the Shia—not at least to the exclusion of the Sunni Ba'athists. In private Syria officially disagreed with its otherwise regional ally Iran on the new rule in Baghdad. According to some leaked document from Syrian official source, for example, Syria rejected an Iran's request in 2009 "to focus on co-opting Shia politicians and to drop our support for the Sunnis and former Ba'athists," instead it insisted "on the reintegration of former Iraqi Ba'athists into the political system" rather than turning Iraq into "a Shia-dominated state made of up of mini-states" (Wiki Leaks, 2009c). This Arab nationalist-inclined position was pronounced publically Syrian official rhetoric. Syria framed its support for "Iraqi resistance" (the Sunni armed insurgency), in terms of its old-held espousing of the wider cause of Arabism. In this regard **al-Assad** remarked:

If we have made concession over the resistance in Lebanon, uprising in Palestine, or the independence of Iraq, the honor of our nation, there would have not been any tension with those people (in the west). The problem of some people with Syria and Syrian problem with them is the Syrian loyalty for Arab nationalism. Nationalism is our identity and history… Syrian position stemmed from its historic (Arab) responsibility given its geopolitical location and its direct connection with the areas of conflict… What is going in Iraq worries every Arab. This Arab country is descending into fragmentation and dissolution… The primary threat to Iraq is the erasing of its Arab identity and landmarks under various pretexts that stand against the history of Iraq and its people... We all should back Iraqi people with all our force to maintain its Arab true identity. (Al-Thawra, 2005)

Syria's support for Iraqi insurgent groups can also be understood in the context of its conventional approach for cultivating regional power leverage. To begin with, since the coming of al-Assad the father to power, Syria began cultivating basically a tradition of posing security distress to its neighbors as its chief modus operandi in its regional dealings. In this pursuit, harboring and assisting armed opposition from its neighboring countries had been invariably a persistent component of the regional strategy of the Assad's Syria. It supported then Iraqi opposition against the Ba'ath regime to the end, it supported the Kurdish armed movement in Turkey, and in Lebanon it supported **Hezbollah** against both Israel and against the anti-Syrian groups in Lebanon and as political-military leverage to keep the country within its orbit. Thus, Syria's approach toward its four immediate neighbors had been one of either covert hostility or outright domination. In brief, through this policy of insecurity making to its neighbors, Syria had successfully carved out an outsize regional weight for itself—an effective compensation for its lack of a strong military muscle, or sufficient economic resources. The Syria's intervention in post-Ba'ath Iraq can be understood as a continuation of this al-Assad's Syrian strategic tradition.

But also, during this period the Syria's regional power status suffered a heavy loss when it was forced to pull out its military-political occupation out of Lebanon under a sustained international and regional pressure in 2004 which also ended its de facto rule over its chronically fractured tiny neighboring state. Therefore, **Syria** clearly needed to make up for his lost of regional power in Lebanon, and it found in the failed state of Iraq both

reason and opportunity to expand into it in order to recover some of its regional power leverage.

To conclude, Syria continued providing military and political assistance for armed "resistance" in Iraq under the name of supporting the Arab cause and Iraqi "independence." Even while the "foreign occupation forces" were pulling out following the security agreement of 2008 and thereby Iraq had steadily been restoring its empirical sovereignty, Syria sustained its intervention. On its side, Iraqi diplomacy failed to convince **Syria** to terminate its support for the Sunni insurgency. And also, plagued by communal and political fragmentation and possessing only a fledgling army, it lacked the military muscle to protect itself from its power-seeking neighbor. As a result, Iraqi border areas with Syria remained the safe-haven for the Sunni insurgency where they established military camps and hideouts and continued to wage hit-and-run warfare against Iraqi security forces. Time will never tell what the Syrian long-term behavior or end-goal would have been in Iraq. Its bid to establish some military-political foothold inside Iraq was cut short when it itself plunged into state failure in 2011.

Turkey's Joining Expansion

Compared to the other two revisionist powers, Iran and Syria, Turkey was a late comer to the post-Ba'ath Iraq. Occupied by its domestic power rivalry with the military establishment during 2003–2011, the AKP government was basically unable or unwilling to undertake a sustained military involvement abroad, including in the failed state of Iraq. However, this was to change in the coming years.

To give a sketchy history background, since the early 1990s, during the escalation of Kurdish armed insurgency led by Parti Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK), which took from the Turkey-Iraqi mountainous border areas as its hideout, Turkey began to securitize its relations with its southern neighbor. The hallmark of this development was the 1994 security agreement between Ankara and Baghdad which granted Turkey the right to conduct "hot pursuit" military operations up to 15 miles deep into Iraqi territory. Following this arrangement, the Turkish army regularly conducted cross-border operations between 1990 and 2010s. Also, as part of this military policy, Turkey set up a number of military bases and outposts in mountainous border areas, primarily the Bamarni Base 30 miles north of Duhok Province in the north. Yet, those military

operations and outposts remained limited to border areas and for obser-
vatory purposes to check the guerilla activities of the PKK. This security
approach continued with the rise of the Islamic-leaning **AK Party** (the
AKP) to power in 2001.

The AKP under Erdogan's leadership was to transform Turkey from
its traditional Kemalist inward approach toward an assertive revisionist
power, pressing to conduct expansionist intervention into its neighboring
countries. Ultimately it would thrust the country into the rank of active
regional power, stimulated by a strong sense of historical revivalism and
aspiration for power aggrandizement. Yet for nearly the first decade of its
rule, the AKP government was preoccupied with securing its home power
base vis-à-vis a military takeover as happened to the previous Islamic-
leaning parties in the past. During this period, the regional policy of
Turkey was one of advancing peace with its surrounding. Toward that
end, it advanced Zero Problem Approach with its Middle Eastern neigh-
bors. Formulated by its theoretician-turned-politician Foreign Minister,
Ahmed Davutogolu, the new policy pushed for "cooperative track" with
the aim of "developing economic interdependence between Turkey and
its neighboring countries" (Davutoglu, 2010). As part of this diplomatic
offense, Turkey and Iraq signed a series of agreements including coop-
eration in fighting the PKK and boosting trade ties. It seemed that a
new era of neighborliness ushered in between the insecure AKP govern-
ment in Ankara and the nascent Shia-dominated government in Baghdad.
In other words, the decade of 2000s was the time of the AKP Turkey's
height diplomatic overture for building friendship abroad while securing
its power base at home. And Iraq was in the forefront of this Turkey's
diplomatic offense.

However, the relations between the two sides never had a real chance
to grow into a sustained cooperation. As the region burst into political
upheavals in 2011–2012, a new reality of regional alignment began to
take shape with sectarian polarization between Shia and Sunni Islamism
emerged as its defining hallmark. Turkey sided with the Sunnis. This
stance became evident when in late 2011 the Shia-dominated govern-
ment of Nuri al-Maliki began cracking down on Sunni protest movements
in Sunni provinces and prosecuting their political figures in the govern-
ment under the name of terrorism charges. As mentioned above, the
Sunni Vice-President **Tariq al-Hashimi** was a key target. Now under
arrest warrant from Iraqi court, al-Hashimi found political refuge in
Turkey where he was received with the pledge of unconditional support

and permanent protection, as Foreign Minister Davutoglu suggested. Following issuing death sentence in absentia against al-Hashimi, Prime Minister Erdogan categorically rejected the charges and declined to hand him over to Iraq asserting that "we cannot accept the concept that al-Hashimi is in any way related to the terrorist attacks in the nation (Iraq)" (Daily Sabah, 2012). Thus, Turkey gradually became an active player in Iraqi politics by backing the Sunnis. The Turkey's support for the Sunni uprising incensed the Iraqi government and strained their newly inaugurated bilateral relations.

To be sure, Turkey's ambition to build up an influence in Iraq and in **Nineveh Province** particularly can be traced back to the early days of the post-Ba'ath era. According to some evidence, during that period Turkey provided financial assistance to Sunni political parties such as al-Hudba Movement, one of the key political players in the province (Wiki Leaks, 2009b). By 2012, a combination of the AKP's consolidation of its power base at home and the deterioration of domestic order in Iraq presented a favorable ground for Turkey to extend its influence into the heart of Iraqi domestic conflict. In this sense, the support for Sunni political leaders such as al-Hashimi constituted the first Turkey's public intervention in Iraqi domestic conflict.

The resurgence of the **ISIL**-led armed insurgency of 2014 and the collapse that it caused to the Iraqi army put Baghdad in a desperate security position—in urgent assistance to salvage its very existence. Simultaneously, having consolidated its power base at home, Turkey was ready to project power more assertively abroad. Thus, across the border in Iraq, the event represented an auspicious occasion for it to secure a stake in what would come out of the state failure in there. The subsequent Baghdad's appeal for military assistance from the outside world including Turkey officially opened the opportunity for Turkey to involve militarily. Moreover, the ascension of a new prime minister, **Haidar al-Abadi**, to power in Baghdad as the replacement of the Turkey's Iraqi archenemy of the hard-line al-Maliki, potentially removed the last obstacle for ushering in a new era in the bilateral relations between the two countries. Heeding the Iraq's call for military assistance, Turkey declared its readiness to provide "all necessary support to ensure the security of Iraq" (Daily Sabah, 2014). To deliver on its promise, Turkey deployed some hundred military personnel to train Iraqi volunteers in the newly established training camp of Bashiqa several miles outside of the ISIL-controlled Mosul city in Nineveh Province.

However, the deployment of trainers proved to be just the first step in a larger military intervention. Shortly after, Turkey deployed a reinforcement of several hundreds of troops equipped with tens of armored vehicles and tanks into to the camp, and thereby effectively upgraded the camp into its own military base. Turkey tried to assure Iraqi authorities by claiming that the reinforcement deployment was non-combatant force aiming to provide protection for the training mission "against a possible attack from Daesh (the ISIL)" (Daily Sabah, 2015a). Unconvinced by the Turkey's justification, the Iraqi government objected. Considering it "an outright intervention… that has been carried out without the agreement or awareness of the Iraqi government," **Abadi** warned, issuing a 48-hour ultimatum for the troops to pull out before taking further reaction (Shafaq News, 2015). When Turkey did not comply with its request, Iraq took its protest to the UN's Security Council. Although Iraqi attempts failed to force Turkey to remove its troops, the disagreement descended their bilateral relations into a new era of crisis.

As it failed to extract consent from Baghdad, Turkey found it compelling to search for alliance elsewhere within Iraq as an alternative interlocutor and counter pressure to the Iraqi central government. The alternative expectedly was not hard to find given the fragmentation of the country along rival sources of power and projects—a typical case of state failure. For this purpose, it opted for strengthening ties with **the Kurdistan Regional government** in Erbil in northern Iraq—a de facto independent government from Baghdad. To give a brief background, in the Post-Ba'ath Iraq, the relationship between the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdish government remained consistently conflictual due to perpetual mutual mistrust which was compounded by the lack of compromise solutions for enduring disputes over control of territory and natural resources, with occasional teetering to the point of an open military clashes. Although, the federal constitution offered a broad roadmap for organizing the relations between the two governments, political power calculus always prevailed over legal frameworks.

Within this Iraqi internal power struggle, Turkey was never totally absent. Its role fluctuated between occasionally mediating in the Baghdad-Erbil disputes to partially backing this or that side as circumstance arose. But it gradually moved to cultivate a pragmatically transactional informal, albeit unbalanced and at times unstable, ties with the Kurdish government, including signing a 50-years oil deals in 2014. By signing the oil deal, Turkey effectively provided the Kurdish government

with access to export its oil to the global market and thereby collect its revenue independently from Baghdad albeit at the price of furthering the Turkey's hand over the policies of the Kurdish region in the north. The move expectedly further infuriated Iraq as Turkey practically became part of Iraqi domestic conflict, Therefore, as the crisis with Baghdad heightened over its unauthorized military deployment, Turkey found in the Kurdish government a useful partner to align with in Iraq in the service of its objectives.

In December 2015, **Erdogan** hosted the Kurdish President **Masud Barzani** at the highest levels in Ankara with a red carpet laid out and Kurdish flag flown—unprecedented display of upgraded friendship by Turkey in its history of relations with the Kurdish region. The invitation was to brief the Kurdish leader on the issue of "the reinforcement of Turkish troops in Bashiqa camp" as well as "the contributions that Turkey can offer the Kurdish army in the struggle against the DAESH (**the ISIL**) from now on," according to Turkey's officials (Kaplan, 2015). Following a series of closed-door meetings, Barzani came out to declare his satisfaction "with the outcome of my meetings with Turkish officials," thanking Turkey for its "military contributions in the war for Nineveh region" (Rudaw, 2015). Turkey obtained what it sought. The Barzani's approval of the Turkish intervention in Nineveh had more than rhetorical importance for Turkey. Besides bestowing a semblance of Iraqi public legitimacy upon the Turkey's military involvement, it also contained operational importance. Since the area of the deployment lied under military control of the Kurdish army, the Barzani's cooperation amounted to a military assurance for Turkey that had its troops come under attacks by the Iraqi army or Iran-linked Shia militia groups, Kurdish troops would be there to support them. In brief, by successfully counteracting Baghdad's resistance with the Kurdish government's cooperation, Turkey was able to secure a military foothold in the strategic Nineveh Province.

Balancing Against Expansion into Iraq

The early expansion into Iraq provoked a balancing intervention. The indirect, yet growing accelerating Iran's expansion into Iraq caused alarm in Saudi Arabia early on. Due to a combination of resourcefulness, geographic proximity, and historical worries, the conservative Sunni Arab Kingdom was to become the chief regional power to counter the expansion. The Saudi monarchy had always considered a functioning, though

not too powerful, Iraq a key for regional stability. In particular, in its regional strategy Iraq had been the bulwark against the revisionist Iran, virtually the first line of defense against the Shia Iran's ambition toward the Gulf area. This became evident during **the Iran-Iraq War**. As soon as it ascended to power in 1979, the Iran's Islamic Revolution inspired riots and militant activities in various Gulf countries from the Shia-populated Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia, to Kuwait, and the Shia-majority Bahrain. By attacking various high profile targets such oil installations, places of worship, foreign interests, and government officials, pro-Iran groups shook the tranquility of the kingdoms on the Arab Peninsula during 1980s—the years of the Islamic Republic.

Realizing the magnitude of this newly rising revolutionary threat from its neighbor across the Gulf, the Kingdom began to take certain concrete measure to preserve stability in its surroundings. The formation of the inter-government organization of **the Gulf Security Council** among the monarchic regimes in the Peninsula was the major step toward this direction. Still of more immediate urgency for Saudi Arabia was its military-economic assistance for Iraq to ensure that it would withstand the revolutionary onslaught by the much powerful Iran. While it was Iraq that initiated the first shots of the war, it was the Iran's intransigence to accept ceasefire that dragged it on. The Kingdom's approach toward the belligerents was driving first and foremost by the maxim of balance of power. The Kingdom did not have any love for the Ba'ath's Iraq as did not hold any principle animosity toward the revolutionary Iran. "We knew that Saddam was a brutal and murderer but the point is Khomeini declared publically that he would proceed to liberate Iraq first and then march on to liberate the Gulf with force… Therefore, there were only two choices for the Saudi leadership: bad and worse and it sided with the bad," then the Saudi head intelligence agency **Bandar bin Sultan** later revealed (Al-Ahmari, 2019).

The Saudi worries heightened as Iran was able to turn the tide of the war in its favor by 1982. Therefore, as the balance of war dramatically shifted in favor of Iran, the frightening prospect of the rising of a Shia revolutionary power to its north prompted Saudi Arabia to rush to the aid of the struggling Iraq. Besides financial aids, the Kingdom gave Iraq an urgently needed life-line for its economy: a secure oil export outlet. During the course of the war, the two oil-dependent belligerent countries exhausted each other with constant airstrikes on each other's oil installations and export facilities including oil tankers in which the Gulf

waterway, Iraq's only seaport to the global market, became the major theater. At this moment, Saudi Arabia gave Iraq permission to export oil via its territory as the two countries started constructing an oil exporting pipeline to carry Iraqi oil via Kingdom's territory to safe ports on the Red Sea. Moreover, according to Iraqi sources, even before the completion of the pipeline, the Kingdom started selling its own oil on behalf of Iraq as well as giving shipment priority to those tankers that carried Iraqi oil (Al-Hamdani, 2007, 113).

Effectively, Saudi Arabia saved Iraq from an imminent economic collapse under the staggering cost of the war by ensuring that Iraq would continue to sustain its war effort through oil revenues. This is while Iraq kept pounding Iran's oil export facilities in the Gulf. This pro-Iraqi position by the Saudi monarchy disturbed Iranian leadership to the extent that it threatened to "shut off the oil" in the Gulf if the Arab kingdoms continued their war support for Iraq (Middle East Journal, 1984, 105). In the end, Iraq survived the Iran's revolutionary crusade when Iran eventually acquiesced to the unconditional cessation of war, and, thus, regional status quo equilibrium was effectively preserved to the satisfaction of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, predictably, even when Iraq turned its military might on Arabs in the Gulf in summer 1990 by invading the Saudi's tiny neighboring Kuwait and threatening to march on into the Kingdom's territory itself, Saudi officials tried to spare Iraq from being severely weakened. In this respect, as the US-led international coalition was building up military requirements to force out Iraq from Kuwait in 1990, Saudi officials proposed that any military attack on Iraq should be limited to destroying its offensive capabilities only rather than obliterating all its capabilities (Middle East Journal, 1991, 300). It was for the same concern over the inevitable upset of the regional balance of power that the Kingdom did not endorse or support the US-led regime change intervention in Iraq in 2003—against the wish of its American ally. In the end, the operation delivered the very outcome that Saudi Arabia had long worked to prevent: Iraq in the state of failure.

While the three revisionist powers of Iran, Syria and Turkey found in the failure of the Iraqi state an opportunity to expand into it through various indirect or direct military involvements, the most powerful Arab country, Saudi Arabia, initially remained on the sideline. However, as Iraq became increasingly a target of regional expansion, primarily by Iran, the Kingdom grew in worries. In September 2005, Saudi Foreign Minister conveyed this worry to American officials. "Iraqis are suffering from

Iranian intervention" he warned, "which it pours personnel, arms, and money into the country and meddling in its political affairs… Iranians are rushing to places that get secured by US soldiers to set up police forces and arm local militias in there… Iraq is in a serious danger and generates a grave threat" (Al-Mawri, 2005).

Moreover, in an attempt to dissuade Iran from carrying on its involvement in Iraq, Saudi authorities decided to talk to Iranians directly. According to Saudi officials, during a meeting with Iranian officials, Saudi **King Abdullah** charged, "we believe you are doing something very dangerous," as he refused to accept the Iranian denial of undertaking any intervention in Iraqi domestic conflict (Wiki Leaks, 2006). Simultaneously with its diplomatic overture toward Iran and while civil war continued to escalate in Iraq, **Saudi Arabia** proposed the formation of an expeditionary military force drawn exclusively from Muslim countries to be deployed to the country to help with restoring security.

However, in the end neither its proposition of deploying contingency forces nor did its political overture toward Iran yield an outcome. The ascension of Shia Islamist hard-line figure of **Nuri al-Maliki** to power in 2006 and his increasingly authoritarian tendencies, particularly toward the Sunnis, only intensified the Saudi's rising concerns, and thereby pushed it to adopt reversing of the Iranian rising expansion into Iraq "a strategic priority". As a step in this direction, the Kingdom tried to isolate the Iraqi government through cutting off all ties with it due to its "Iranian connections" and "sectarianism" against the Sunnis, as Saudi officials summed it up in private meetings with US officials (Wiki Leaks, 2008), aiming to pressure it into changing its policies. For example, it declined to reopen its diplomatic mission in Baghdad, considering it a legitimizing move for the Iran-backed Baghdad government—in an open opposition to the persistent request from the US. The Saudi's boycott frustrated al-Maliki government which sought also to engage with the Arab Gulf countries. "We have succeeded in re-engaging with many states, but Saudia maintains its negative position. We have been seeking to build normal and positive relations (with the Kingdom), still our initiatives were declined and taken as signs of weakness. Therefore, we just sit and wait for any Saudi initiative because on our side we exhausted our attempts and it would be no use to try again unless Saudi (Arabia) expresses the desire in rebuilding ties," al-Maliki admitted (Al-Rukabi, 2009).

The Saudi government maintained that given its sectarian discrimination and marginalization, the Maliki government was only further

fueling the ongoing civil war and thus undermining state rebuilding in the country. "The Kingdom wishes no less than prosperity and stability for the Iraqi state in every aspect, but if those in Iraq who act against the interests of Iraq and still expect the Kingdom to stand with them, this will never happen," Saudi officials reiterated (Al-Jazeera, 2009). In their meetings with US officials, Saudi officials privately confirmed that "the Kingdom's problem was not with al-Maliki as a person but rather with the conduct of the Iraqi government" (Wiki Leaks, 2008). Accordingly, the Kingdom cautiously welcomed the Iraqi government's crackdown on militias in 2008. Still, Saudi officials found it difficult to trust the Maliki-led government in Baghdad; and even cast doubts on its moves against the militias as basically a result of "US prodding rather than change in Iraqi attitudes" (Wiki Leaks, 2008), an assessment that the events in the post-US military withdrawal proved right when Iraqi descended into a sectarian tension anew.

Moreover, the Saudi-Iraqi 500 miles-long desert border had become a major crossing point for Jihadis to join the Sunni insurgency in the war on the Shia government in Baghdad and its backer of the US-led Coalition troops. What drew more attention to Saudi Arabia in relation to the Sunni insurgency in Iraq was certain anti-Shia fatwas coming out from Saudi religious circle. For example, in 2007 a prominent Saudi Wahabi cleric charged the Shias of posing "a greater danger to Islam than that of the Jews and Christians… We should be cautious in order to not to be deceived by what they call the victory for Islam" (Elaph, 2007). The statement aroused resentment among the Iraqi Shias. Iraqi Shia leaders charged Saudi religious establishment of waging war on their people. For example, the leader of one of the major Iraqi Shia party decried, "we are paying the price for our imamah faith, and a sectarian genocide is being waged against us… One of the criminals who considers himself a Saudi religious figure issues deplorable fatwa that condemns the Shia imamah as infidels and legitimizes taking our lives and our properties" (Al-Akhbar, 2007).

Bogged down in a relentless insurgency war, the US government sought Saudi's help for curbing the flow of fighters from the Kingdom. In addition to asking for taking preventive financial and legal measures, US officials also requested Saudi authorities to have both the government and the religious establishment to issue statements condemning suicide jihadist activities as cultural and religious transgression (Wiki Leaks, 2005). As a result, Saudi authorities tightened state monitoring

on financial transactions by setting up an oversight body to inspect charity activities that were suspected of covertly funding Jihadist groups (Middle East Journal, 2004, 490). Despite the common belief that holds Saudi authorities responsible for the al-Qaida-led Sunni suicide attacks in Iraq during the period, there is currently no available evidence to indicate that the Kingdom officially sanctioned or provided assistance for Jihadi insurgency. Anyway, the Kingdom itself came under waves of attacks by Jihadi militants during the period in which security forces, government officials, and foreign interests became targets for shootings, suicide bombing, and kidnapping.

What is backed by available documents is that as the Iran's expansion into the failed state of Iraq, the Kingdom began actively seeking to influence Iraqi domestic politics. For this pursuit, as usual, the Kingdom was to employ its conventional means, financial resources, to check the expanding Iranian involvement in the country through backing the opponents of the Shia ruling leadership in Baghdad. In an assessment on the Saudi involvement in Iraq, for example, the US Embassy in Baghdad wrote "the Saudis are using their money and media power... to support Sunni political aspirations, exert influence over Sunni tribal groups" to counteract Shia political leadership with ties to Iran including the government of al-Maliki (Wiki Leaks, 2009a). As part of this endeavor, the Saudi government built ties with some leading Iraqi political leaders such as the Vice-President **Tariq al-Hashimi**, a Sunni Islamic leader, **Ayad Allawi**, a Shia secular figure, whose short premiership in the interim government of 2006 brought him under the spotlight as a political heavyweight within the new Iraq, and Kurdish President Masud Barzani. In this pursuit, on one occasion in 2007 as sectarian violence was escalating, the Saudi government invited both those two Iraqi leaders to meet with King Abdullah simultaneously to hold talks on "the latest developments in Iraq" (Fayadh, 2007). Alawi and Barzani were both staunch opponents of al-Maliki and the Iranian growing expansion into the country.

To conclude, the Kingdom's goal of curtailing the Iran's rising expansion into Iraq remained limited in both its means and its success. It mostly concentrated on pressuring the Iraqi government to change policies which the Kingdom considered sectarian and pro-Iran. However, even that limited goal did not meet much or permanent successes. If the success is measured by the extent that those attempts checked the Iran's growing influence inside Iraq or secured a foothold inside Iraq for the Kingdom, then Saudi-Iraqi strategy was a failure. By 2012, the

two leading political figures with the potential to become Saudi allies in Iraq, Allawi and al-Hashimi, were either forced into political sideline or personal exile. The key opportune moment for the Saudi strategy in Iraq came when the Allawi-led electoral coalition, the Iraqiya, won the national elections of 2010 against the Maliki-led of Shia Islamist coalition. Yet, the Alawi's chance for change was quickly waned when the Maliki faction and other Iran-backed Shia parties formed coalition with pressing from Iran, thereby created a parliamentary majority which secured the al-Maliki's control of power. As a result, the Allawi party suffered irreversible decline of political influence within the new Iraqi political structure. As for al-Hashimi, as mentioned above, he was forced out from the country after being prosecuted by al-Maliki government on terrorism charges.

Other potential allies were not much able, to various reasons, to aid the Saudi's effort to balance against Iraq either. The Barzani's influence and power reach remained basically limited to the de facto independent Kurdish region in the north, without much king-making leverage within the politics at the center in Baghdad. As to the reliability of Sunni tribes as potential force for the Kingdom to ally with in Iraq, by 2014 they were politically and militarily incapacitated by the al-Maliki crackdown and then by the resurgence of Jihadist insurgency of the ISIL. Therefore, when Iraqi descended into a new round of security collapse in 2014 which created a new and further ground for regional expansion into Iraq, the Kingdom did not possess much means of power leverage left at its disposal to influence the domestic developments in Iraq. Accordingly, it practically opted for staying on the sideline.

Israel too, another status quo power, acted against Iran's expansion into Iraq, particularly after 2015 when the Iran's power gain in the region became more visible. Similar to Saudi Arabia, the Iran's expansion into Iraq caused worries to Israel. From the Israeli regional perspective, Iraq represented nothing less than a stepping stone in Iran's bid for regional hegemony. "Iraq is under growing influence of **the Quds Force** and Iran," the chief of Israeli military intelligence pointed out, warning that Iran aimed to use "Iraq as a convenient theatre for entrenchment, similar to what they did in Syria, and to use it as a platform for a force build-up that could also threaten the State of Israel" (Reuters, 2019b).

Therefore, to thwart the threat, Israel started conducting balancing intervention. It remains unclear when Israel started to act against Iran in Iraq; yet, by 2019 it became public that Israel had been carrying out airstrikes on Iran-linked military positions inside Iraq such as arm

depots, warehouses, and supply routes belonging to those groups (Times of Israel, 2019a). This was the time that Iran had also expanded into civil war-torn Syria on Israeli border, using Iraq as a route and station for shipping men and weapons to there (the subject of Chapter 7). Therefore, the major target of Israeli attacks in Iraq was particular locations such as the Balad Airbase near Baghdad where pro-Iran Iraqi Shia militia forces used as weapon depots (Reuters, 2019a). Since Iran used Iraqi territory as a transit for shipping weapons to **Syria**, Iraqi-Syrian border crossings also became a target of Israel attacks. In this respect, al-Bu Kamal town on Iraq-Syrian border, where the militia groups built up compounds of stockpile of stores and which Israel considered a station in the Iran's corridor to Syria, repeatedly came under airstrikes (Times of Israel, 2019b). Following its ambiguity approach, Israel mostly continued to refraining from directly and officially taking or denying responsibility. Still occasionally, Israeli officials implicitly recognized that the Israeli army indeed stood behind those strikes—further confirming the already common suspicion. "We are operating in many areas against a state that wants to annihilate us… I gave the security forces a free hand and instructed them to do anything necessary to thwart Iran's plans," Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed in response to the growing speculations that Israel had been attacking Iran-linked forces and positions in the region including Iraq (Tercatin, 2019). Thus, Israeli balancing intervention in Syria preceded its official admission by a couple of years. Still, at this writing there is not much information on the scale of Israel's intervention in Iraq, given the high covertness with which it conducted it. The Iran's gradual expansion from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon right on Israel's northern borders, it is highly possible that Israel will undertake broader and further measures to counter the threat, more than it is known at the moment as the development unfolds.

Climax of the Power Struggle

By 2018, five of the regional powers of the period had, to various degrees and with different objectives, intervened in the failed state of Iraq. The three revisionist powers (Iran, Syria, and Turkey) had made attempts to expand into it, to various ways and to various degree of success, while two of the status quo powers (Israel and Saudi Arabia) had reacted with to balancing intervention.

Iran was the most successful in attempting and solidifying its expansion. A major advance toward that end would prove to be the formation of the paramilitary forces **the Popular Mobilization,** as discussed previously. The PMF fighters made major contribution to the anti-ISIL war. In this respect, those forces played a leading role in retaking of the city of Tirkit, the hometown of the former President Saddam Husein in the Sunni heartland– a demonstration of the rise of Shia militancy over Sunni insurgency. The PMF came out from the ISIL war as a populous and well-equipped armed formation. According to some estimate, by 2018 it had burgeoned into a formidable force with 150 thousand fighters (Rasheed, 2018). Moreover, in terms of weaponry according to its own released data, it possesses various types of weapons including the American-made Abrahams Tanks and the Russian T72 Tanks, armored personnel carriers, Grad missiles, AT4 Rockets, and also drone systems (Al-Khanadeq, 2021). Still, as the **ISIL** war drew to an end, the calls for demobilizing the PMF and integrating into the national army began to grow. For example, Muqtada al-Sadr, the leading Shia Iraqi nationalist and the commander of the militias of *Saraya al-Salam* (or Peace Brigade, a rebranded version of **the Mahdi Army**), proposed that the government should dissolve the paramilitary forces because "security should be exclusively under the Iraqi army" (Steele, 2017). Even the Shia highest religious authority of **al-Sistani**, the author of the fatwa (decree) that resulted in the formation of the paramilitary, called for the integration of the PMF militiamen into state security establishment to restore "the exclusive control by the state over arms" (Al-Mada Paper, 2017a).

However, Iran had a different position. It saw "the PMF as a great force for Iraq today and tomorrow," calling on the Iraqi government publically, "it should be preserved and strengthened," Iranian Supreme Leader **Khamenei** stated in a meeting with a group of Iraqi leaders (Tasnim News, 2016). While the volunteers who followed al-Sistani's call to arm formed the foundation of the PMF (latter came to be known as the Brigades of the Marjai'ia), the pro-Iran militia groups, of their various brands, also inserted their fighters into the new paramilitary forces.

Desperate to assemble a defense force to fight off the relentlessly advancing **ISIL** insurgency, the Iraqi government welcomed the previously banned or suppressed militia groups into the PMF. In this respect, the ***A'asaib Ahlualhuq,*** **al-Badr Organization,** *Kataib Hezbollah,* **and the Peace Brigade** joined in. However, while they joined in, those groups were never to merge. Instead of merging their fighters under a unified

command structure, each one of those groups practically maintained its own structure of leadership and political allegiance. The PMF, therefore, had become an umbrella organization of a constellation of armed groups, rather than an integrated army with a single leadership of command and control. For one, although the leader of the Kataib Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis officially was chosen as its commander-in-chief, the PMF continued to be run by consultation and consensus among top commanders of its constituting member groups, prominent among them are al-Muhandis, al-Amri, and **Khazali** (Al-Maselah, 2019). In other words, the PMF remains merely as a loosely federated union among otherwise self-commanded separate militant groups. Although later, some smaller militia groups from other communities joined its ranks, the paramilitary forces remained predominantly of Shia militia groups. Still more, the majority of those Shia groups adhered in their ideological allegiance to wilayat al-fiqih in Iran by 65%, while 25% to Shia religious authority of **al-Sistani** (Al-Hashimi, 2016). Soon afterward, the latter dissolved its milita faction into join the national army.

Pro-Iran factions acquired top commanding positions within the **PMF** and as the Iraqi nationalist factions of al-Sistani and al-Sadr exited it, the paramilitary formation became predominantly, if not thoroughly, a pro-Iran armed organization in Iraq. Therefore, the preservation of the PMF had now become imperative for Iran's power leverage in Iraq. From this standpoint, the Iran's request from Iraqi authorities to preserve the PMF represented a reminiscent of its similar and successful attempt with then Lebanon-dominated Syrian authorities to allow its Lebanese ally militant group of **Hezbollah** to remain as an armed formation after the end of the Lebanese civil war, as mentioned in Chapter 4. What behind-closed-door pressure Iran exerted on Iraqi leaders to allow the continuation of the PMF remains unknown. Subsequently, the Iraqi National Assembly enacted a law that granted the PMF the status of "legal entity" as part of the national armed forces (Al-Hashed, 2017), in a session that was boycotted by the Sunni factions who charged that the legislation would "empower the militias as a substitute for the state" (Asharq al-Awsat, 2016). Thus, the legislation saved the PMF from the imminent disbanding, the pressure for which was mounting both regionally and internationally, and granted it the status of a separate army beside the national army. Furthermore, soon, it moved to translate its military might into political influence. "As it has proved itself at the battlefield, the PMF has decided to make its presence in politics… The PMF will remain

and expand and will never be dissolved," one of the top commanders of the paramilitary formation vowed (Al-Manar, 2017). Now with the Iran' backing it was about to secure its future from any disbanding or demobilization attempt.

Iran had been organizing and leading those militia factions within the **PMF** for years. Now, assured of their operational capability and survivability, it began to delivering heavy weapons to its loyal factions within the PMF as part of its design to build up military extension in the. "We have bases like that in many places and Iraq is one of them. If America attacks us, our friends will attack America's interests and its allies in the region," an Iranian military official recognized (Irish & Rasheed, 2018). Still more, the Iran's long-term design in Iraq extended to other activities. As mentioned previously, Iran had been working to build virtually a military silk road westward to Syria and, thereby, Lebanon to re-enforce its newly acquired power foothold in those areas where its proxy Hezbollah militant organization had been operating and bolstering its status for decades, and thereby to secure a strategic maritime position on the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. In this military project, Iraq constitutes a critically necessary territorial link. Seizing upon the ISIL war, the pro-Iran factions deployed their fighters to take positions in the strategic Iraqi-Syrian border areas. Since then, those factions, primarily the **Kataib Hezbollah**, established military bases in Qaim town in Anbar Province on the Iraqi side of the border with Syria and al-Bu Kamal town just across the border inside Syria. Iran would later use this transborder linked military control to transport men and weapons to bolster its newly acquired power expansion in Syria and beyond, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Turkey also continued to reinforce its power foothold inside Iraq. Turkey's objective in Iraq proved to more ambitious than what it initially stated, i.e. making a contribution to the anti-ISIL war in Nineveh Province. Turkey continued to resist Iraq's continuous opposition to its military deployment. As it turned out in the post-ISIL war, Turkey not only maintained its forces in the province but also it a gradual bolstered its military expansion in the country by building further bases throughout the northern region. By 2020, its military bases and outposts stretched from Zakho and Amedi in Duhok in the far north, to Soran in Erbil and Sinjar in Nineveh Province in northwest. According to some estimate, the number of its military locations reached as many as 30 in Iraq (Al-Mada Paper, 2020). Ankara jutsified its military intervention in Iraqi on national security ground on one level; but also, in the face of growing

opposition from Baghdad to its military settlements on Iraqi territory, Turkey redefined its military mission in Iraq, on another level, by introducing a sectarian element in a way that it presented itself as a provider of protection for the Sunnis, not least by training and arming them. "In the area, there are Sunni Arabs, Sunni Turkmens, [and] Sunni Kurds. What about their security?" President Erdogan asked rhetorically in a remark as he tried to justify on his country's objective in Iraq (Paksoy, 2015).

At any rate, in order to secure some power leverage within Iraq, Turkey needed to keep its troops within the country. The challenge facing Turkey's ambition in Iraq was that it was never able to cultivate a local alliance with a substantial influence over the center of power in Baghdad. True, through its policy of economic openness with the Kurdish Region, Turkey was able to establish influence in northern region since early years of post-Ba'ath era. As mentioned previously, it was through its alliance with the Kurdish government that Turkey basically succeeded in resisting the Baghdad's pressure to pull out its troops in 2015. Yet, the power of the Kurdish government remained confined to Kurdish region itself in the north with not much leverage over Baghdad. Still more importantly, the Kurdish government pursued its own objectives which did not always line up with the Turkey's desires in Iraq. In fact, as the Kurdish referendum on independence of 2017 demonstrated, the Kurdish region-Turkey relations could descend into full-blown antagonism overnight. Rather, the pivot of their bilateral relations was governed by economic transaction, rather than strategic partnership. This left the Arab Sunnis as the only potential force for Turkey to build alliance with in service of its objective in Iraq.

However, unlike their demographic predominant position in Syria, the Sunnis represented only a minority of around 25% of the population in a country with roughly 50% of Shia. Still more critically, what potential power and political initiative they retained in the post-Ba'ath Iraq had been severally exhausted and weakened by miscalculated political boycotts, years of insurgency warfare, global Jihadism invasion, and internal divide along ideological, personal, and tribal loyalties which left the sect without a dominant force to hold it together and lead it as a communal political block vis-à-vis the other two communities: The Shias and the Kurds. Their last attempt to reclaim some power position within the Iraqi state was the mass uprising of 2011–2012, which only ended them up in a weaker position due to a combination of the coming of the ISIL and the subsequent arrival of Shia militant groups. As a result of

all those development, the Sunni region suffered massive devastation and dislocation, physically and demographically. Above all, for the first time, the region became vulnerable to incursion and expropriation by various Shia armed groups.

During the war, a Sunni militia formation emerged under the name of *al-Hashed al-Ashairi* (**Tribal Mobilization Forces**) with the training and arming from Turkey. Estimated to be around 25 thousand fighters (Al-Hashimi, 2016), the purpose of this Sunni forces was to take over the security of the Sunni-majority provinces of Anbar, Nineveh, and Salahhadin in post-ISIL war. However, this militia formation never developed into some established military entity similar to the **PMF** due to domestic disunity among the Sunnis themselves but also the lack of political-military support and sponsorship from the region—an advantage that the PMF enjoyed from Iran.

In late 2015, under pressure from anti-ISIL international coalition, the Iraqi government presented a bill to the National Assembly to reorganize the state security apparatus including devolving certain security powers to local authorities of the provinces. According to the proposed legislation, a new military force was to be formed "in each province from local population" and its "its commander will be appointed by the province in which it was formed" with the approval of the commander-in-chief (Jaridat al-Zawra, 2015). Being the only communal component without its own army, the Sunni factions supported the bill. It would transfer the control over the security affairs of Sunni-majority provinces to local Sunni forces, and thereby the Sunni region would establish a degree of security autonomy from the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad and the **PMF**. However, some Shia parties blocked the legislation, threatening to use force if the bill was passed, branding it as a conspiracy to "undermine and divide the unity of our homeland, territory and people into warring sub-states," as the *A'asaib Ahlualhaq* group vowed (Ahlualhaq, 2015). The Sunnis' aspiration for security autonomy was aborted when the **Tribal Mobilization Forces** were incorporated into the national army, or joined the pro-Iran forces-dominated PMF.

From a comparative perspective, the dissolution of the Sunni's forces was as much a loss for Turkey as the legal recognition of the PMF was a win for Iran. The disbanding of Sunni forces denied Turkey the only potential ally group, among the various non-state armed groups in the country, to work with in Iraq. Thus, lacking a reliable local ally in Iraq, **Turkey** ended up with only one option: to deploy its own regular army

into Iraq to exert some effective power leverage over the developments inside its fragmented neighbor. But the Turkey's open military presence on Iraqi territory guaranteed the continued resistance from Iraqi Shia groups, especially those with links to Iran. Having secured a comfortable power base in Iraq, Iran attempted to keep other powers out of the country. Therefore, it objected to Turkey's military intervention. Considering it a "wrong act," the Iranian government warned that "that move not only will not help suppress terrorism, but it will also lead to chaos and insecurity in the region" (Tehran Times, 2015). In inside Iraq itself, its ally groups vowed to wage open war against Turkey's troops. For example, in a statement in December 2015, the **Kataib Hezbollah** declared to counter "this new occupation with armed struggle until it is ended without trace" (Kataib Hezbollah, 2015). Soon, the groups translated its threat into action. In late 2015, Turkey's military base near Mosul came under rocket attacks. Although initially, the attack was blamed on the **ISIL** given the proximity of the base to the ISIL-held territory, the Kataib came out to declare its responsibility for it (Tasnim News, 2015). The rocket attacks proved to be just the beginning of armed operations by pro-Iran forces against the Turkey's troops. Since the end of the ISIL war, the Bashiqa military base, which represented the forefront of the Turkey's military presence inside Iraq, has come under frequent rocket attacks. Turkey sensed the Iran's hand behind the armed resistance to its military presence in Iraq. Voicing his country's unease over the Iran's role in post-ISIL war, President **Erdogan** charged, "The aim of Iran is to increase its influence in Iraq. The country (Iran) is trying to chase ISIL from the region only to take its place," warning that the ambition was unacceptable (Daily Sabah, 2015b).

From a historical perspective, the Turkish-Iranian conflict in Iraq represents the resurgence of an ancient rivalry between two ambitious powers. Their predecessor empires, the Ottoman Turks and the Safavid Persians, bitterly contested the territory of modern Iraq during 1514–1639, through a series of wars which ended with the victory of the Sunni Ottomans. The Ottomans' victory was ratified in the Treaty of Qasr Shireen of 1639 according to which the Shia Safavids conceded the loss of Iraq. Now in 2010s, as the two now neighboring regional powers bending on regional expansionism came to the point of showdown again in Iraq, even if through proxy actors. Being the largest Sunni province in Iraq still outside of Iran's power reach, geographically close to the Turkey's borders, and with sizable Turkmen ethnic population, Mosul

City attracted the Turkey's attention and ambition in Iraq. Therefore, as Iran continued to bolster its power reach over Baghdad, Turkey also aspired to keep the strategic Province of Nineveh out of the influence of Iran and its Iraqi local militia allies. For this purpose, it called upon the US-led military coalition to exclude the Shia-dominated PMF from involving in the war campaign for liberating the province. It feared "the intention of the PMF to set up a Shia crescent by connecting Iran with Syria via Iraq and (the town of) Talafar (which) will facilitate the provision of the Bashar al-Assad's regime with Iraqi and Iranian militias, and transferring military equipment and logistical assistance to Syria" (Daily Sabah, 2016b). For the purpose of creating that "Shia crescent," Turkey alerted, those militias would engage in sectarian cleansing and depopulation of the area from its local Sunni people, which would ultimately affect the balance of power in the wider region. "Turkey realizes clearly the important position of Mosul which is a key city in the balances in the Middle East in the coming era," a Turkey's official remarked (Daily Sabah, 2016a).

As public quarrel escalated between Turkey and Iran-led Shia groups, President Erdogan went further by evoking the Ottoman Empire's legacy in the area. "They should understand," he claimed addressing the Shia opposition to the Turkey's military presence in Nineveh, "in the past Kirkuk and Mosul were ours… We did not accept the (existing) borders of this state voluntarily" (Bursa Port, 2016). In open defiance to the Turkey's desire, the Iran-linked Shia militias insisted on participating in the campaign to retake Mosul city. "The Turkish military is an aggressor forces and its intervention is unacceptable… Our participation (in the campaign) is necessary, at least to prevent Turkey from achieving its ambition," the commander of *A'asaib* **Ahlualhaq**, Khazali asserted (Al-Alam, 2016). Ultimately, the Shia militias succeeded in establishing a foothold in the province through a collaborating with and co-opting of certain local groups.

As the ISIL war drew to close and the Shia militias grew in assertiveness, Turkey tried a new attempt to counteract the Iran-linked militia forces in Iraq in cooperation with Arab regional countries, in particular the status quo Saudi Arabia. As discussed previously, the Iran's archrival Arab power even more eager to curtail the Iran's sprawling expansion into Iraq—something its strategy failed to achieve previously prior to 2015. Therefore, concurrently with Turkey, the Kingdom considered **the PMF**

as no less than an Iran's arm in Iraq that should be prevented from establishing a foothold in the Sunni region. "The PMF, that institution is a sectarian militia group with loyalty to Iran. It has caused and committed crimes in various areas in Iraq, and it would cause disaster if it entered Mosul," Saudi foreign minister stated, as he called on the Iraqi government and its international war coalition to exclude the Iran-linked militant groups from the military campaign, fearing they would use as a pretext to establish presence in Nineveh Province (Akhbar al-Khaleej, 2016). Therefore, Turkey and Saudi Arabia came together against the PMF through backing Sunni parties. Toward that end, in March 2017 major Iraqi Sunni political parties held "a consultative conference" in Turkey "on the situation of the post-ISIL Mosul" (Al-Mada Paper, 2017b). Later reports came out that one of the subjects of the meetings was to deal with the question of the Shia militias in the post-war Iraq. In this context, in addition to the creation of a Sunni region within Iraq, the participants also called for disbanding the PMF paramilitary forces (Azzaman, 2017).

In the end, however, the Turkey-Saudi attempt failed to prevent the pro-Iran militias in establishing military footholds in Nineveh Province, much less to disbanding it. One reason is that the two countries did not undertake any concerted military effort to translate their indirect and second track attempts into some concrete joint action to curtail the expanding Iran's influence in Iraq. One explanation is the lack of shared regional strategic objective between the two Sunni regional powers—Turkey being revisionist while Saudi Arabia status quo. But also, Iran outdid its regional rivals by successfully cultivating a network of ideological and operational connections and control in indirect fashion in Iraq, instead of directly employing its own military forces which would have incurred political and military costs, an advantage that neither Turkey nor Saudi Arabia possessed, at least not with the same degree of efficiency or effectiveness.

Nonetheless, the open quarrel and conflict between Iran and its Iraqi militia allies on one side and Turkey on the other has effectively turned Iraq, particularly its strategic Nineveh Province, to a contested sphere of influence in the region, at least in the long-run. For Turkey, Nineveh represents a territorial legacy of the imperial past and security and strategic sphere. With any new opportunity under more favorable equilibrium of force, it is expected to renew its attempts to further extend its power into the area. For Iran, Nineveh, with its location adjacent to Syrian border, constitutes a major link in its land-bridge to the Mediterranean

Sea and Lebanon. For Saudi Arabia, Iraq was traditionally a security buffer and power balancer against Iran. Therefore, it is likely to renew attempts through employing its conventional means of influence: financial resources, to rebuild power leverage in Iraq by supporting Iraqi nationalist groups among the Sunni and Shia factions with opposing stance against the Iran's pervasive leverage over the Iraqi state. Finally, as for the status quo Israel, it is likely to continue to its balancing behavior through sustaining, and even stepping up, its airstrikes and other forms of preventive measures against Iran's positions and its loyal groups in Iraq. The bottom line is Iraq, with its critical location right in the heart of the Middle East with bordering at least three regional powers, is likely to remain a major battleground in the struggle over the regional balance of power. The power that dominates Iraq gains leverage to threaten the security and interests of the rest.

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Yemen (2004–2020): A New Round of State Failure

Insurgency, Mass Protest, and Elite Infighting

The cause of the Yemeni state failure is essentially rooted in an armed insurgency by the Houthis against the central government in San'a'a. The war, which started precipitously with limited and intermittent skirmishes since 2004, gradually escalated into a wider insurgency war that occurred in the form of several rounds over years that would culminate in the takeover of the state by the insurgency in late 2014. The emergence of the Houthi insurgency both met and compounded the chronic economic weaknesses, the lasting social fragmentations along tribal lines, and lasting regional discontents of the country—the confluence of all ultimately brought the state into failure.

To begin with, the Houthi rebellion rose among the Zaydi population, a sect of followers of a branch of Shia Islam that has comprised around 40% of the Yemeni's population (Minority Rights, 2018), in the northern region of the country. The movement (officially known as *Harakat Ansar Allah*, or the Movement of Followers of God) was rooted in the Shabab al-Mu'min (Faithful Youth) organization founded in 2001 by leading Zaydi religious-political figures who returned from Iran and Syria, a prominent among those figures was Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi (Hence, **the Houthi movement**). Initially a theological educational gathering of a class of sectarian activists, the organization developed its own political ambition; both aspired by the legacy of the sect's political

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predominance under the monarchical rule of Imamah which ruled Yemen until it was overthrown in 1962 in a military coup, and agitated by a deep sense of communal marginalization within the sect due to the policies of the central government.

At the beginning of its emergence, the movement's popular base and objective were basically limited to its stronghold of the northern region of the Zaydi-majority Province of Sa'ada with focus on the preservation of cultural and traditional way of life of the Zaydis from encroachment by outside influence such as Sunni Islam (Crisis Group, 2014, 1). However, by 2004 as it expanded its popular base, the movement ratcheted up its activities. Now the Houthis Movement began actively challenging the authority of the central government in the northern region. Steadily, the tension between the two sides boiled into armed clashes. The year 2004 marked the first major military confrontation between **the Houthi Movement** and the Yemeni government. In the first round of the fighting some 600 soldiers and rebels were killed (Middle East Journal, 2005, 130). The event marked the beginning of the decline of Yemen into a years-long civil war. As in many other cases of civil, the Houthi-government war did not occur as one continuous event. It rather occurred in the form of a series or rounds of inconclusive battles. Every round was followed by a period of cessation of hostility. Also, in every round, the government's heavy-handed approach succeeded in keeping the militants at bay, without securing crushing the insurgency once and for all. For example, in the war of 2004, the army was able to neutralize the leader of the insurgency, **Hussain Badradeen al-Houthi**. However, it did not destroy its ability to regroup and relaunch its armed attack.

The insurgency war escalated into a new level by 2009. Whereas heretofore largely being in the defensive position, the Houthis went on the offensive by 2009. With the failure of the government to crush it after years of intermittent fighting and as it acquired more warfare experience, the movement broadened its demands. The demands were no longer limited to basic cultural and economic rights, but it extended to include political changes at the center of power. As the ceasefire broke down, a new round of the war began to break out. The government accused the Houthis of constant violation of the terms of the ceasefire by conducting "activities of disturbance" (Yemen Press, 2009a). Still more, it charged the movement with plotting to bring about regime change. More specifically, the opinion had become that the Houthis' end-goal was no longer limited to achieving some cultural-communal rights to the Zaydies, but

toppling the government in Sana'a in order to restore the Zayadi-ruled Imamah regime (al-Bayan, 2009).

From its side, **the Houthi Movement** charged the government with the lack of will to deliver a political solution for broader rights for the group. Rather it used ceasefire as a temporary convenient step due the pressure of "the military and political circumstances," rather than a sincere move toward a final settlement (Asharq al-Awsat, 2009). Such mutual accusations proved to be the precursor of a new round of war. In summer of 2009 a new but larger scale round of war erupted. Code-named Operation Scorched Earth, the government launched a new military campaign on the Houthi-held area with the first time deployment of fighter jets and long-range artillery (Yemen Press, 2009b) with the declared aim was to end the insurgency once and for all. "The state will strike these elements … with an iron fist until they surrender themselves to justice," the top Yemeni security body asserted (Reuters, 2009). Soon, the war ended with another inclusive outcome. Although the months-long lasted military campaign delivered another blow to the insurgency movement by killing some of its top military commanders, the movement not only survived the onslaught, it also proved capable of forcing the government to accept a new ceasefire.

Unable to defeat them militarily, the Yemeni government proposed the Houthi rebels another peace offer in early 2010. The deal which was accepted included six major points: "the opening of the blocked roads, the removal of landmines, ending entrenchments on mountains and on the road sides, withdrawing forces from city offices, abstaining from interfering in local authorities, returning the civilian and military booties belonging to the Yemeni and Saudi Arabia governments, releasing the civilian and military detainees of Yemeni and Saudi nationals, and respecting law and order" (al-Thawra, 2010). After months of truce that was marred by sporadic fighting between government or its loyal tribes and the Houthis, eventually in August of 2010 the two warring parties signed a new peace deal in Qatar. Although some partial steps were taken toward the implementation of the deal such as releasing some war prisoners and returning some military equipment to the government, the deal proved to be just another failed attempt toward a lasting peace. With the failure of the peace attempt, the occurrence of a new round of war became a matter of time as both sides maintained their fighting positions on the ground. This opportunity arrived when mass protest movements started in the neighboring countries in spring 2011.

The Disintegration of Central Authority

Although the insurgency and rounds of wars of 2004–2011 marked the beginning of the failure of the Yemeni state, the central government was still mostly able to maintain its control over public order—it sustained its ability to contain the Houthi insurgency largely within the Sa'ada region far away from the capital. This reality would unravel soon. In spring 2011, following the outbreak of mass protest-induced political upheavals in the neighboring countries, Yemenis took to the streets with demands for political change. Meanwhile the opposition parties rode the wave in their jockeying for power. Various political factions from tribes to the Houthi Movement, the Southern Secessionist Movement, and the Islamic extremist groups began mobilizing their respective forces for the cause of regime change.

Meanwhile, unwilling to relinquish power, the government tried deescalating measures through delivering promises for certain reforms. The measures failed to decrease the momentum of the protests, however. Thus, the government's unwillingness to carry out genuine political change on the one hand and the determination of the anti-regime mass protests for political and, increasingly, regime change on the other hand further pushed the country to the brink of security implosion. By the end of March, the Yemeni armed forces split along rival political lines. While the army pledged support for the protest movement, the National Guard headed by President **Abdullah Saleh's** son sided with the government. This split took on a confrontational turn when the latter began using force against the army in a retaliatory measure for its anti-government allegiance. The sparks of violence literally reached the corridor of power when President Saleh himself was seriously injured in a bomb attack on his presidential palace in June 2011. He survived enough to cling to power for the time being.

The looming risk of state collapse in their neighboring state prompted the countries of **the Gulf Cooperation Council** (GCC) to initiate mediation between the rival camps. As a result, in November 2011, after months of mounting pressure from the GCC, Saleh signed the power transferring deal according he conceded power in favor of his long-time vice-president **Abd Rabo Hadi**. Additional to the power transferring, the agreement also proposed certain reforms as steps to restore stability to the country. Primary among those steps was holding "a comprehensive Conference for National Dialogue for all forces and political actors,

including youth movements, the Southern Movement, the Houthis, other political parties, civil society representatives…" to address long-standing sources of conflict in the country (United Nations, 2011). For a while, the agreement seemed to have saved the country from a total collapse of the state.

The prospect of stabilizing the chronically fragile Yemen proved elusive, however. As the new president sworn-in, power struggle went on. In a bid to consolidate his newly acquired power position, President Hadi initiated "military reform" which tended to break up the former president's network of cronies and allies within the army. The primary target was the powerful special forces of the Republican Guard closely linked to the ousted president. As part of this reform, the government was removed the Saleh's son from the command of the forces and sent him abroad for an ambassadorial position. The move infuriated the former president who showed no sign of abandoning his informal networks within the state institutions, particularly the military. Even while he officially stepped down from power, Saleh continued to command forces within the military. At any rate, the Saleh's reluctance to relinquish power would soon prove to be effectively the last push to throw the central authority in the country into the brink of total disintegration. Although it is unclear whether he directly ordered his followers within the military to stage rebellion, the political disagreement between him and the new president soon spilled over into armed rebellion. In summer 2012 the central government tried and failed to defeat the rebellious brigades of the Republican Guard as it declared mutiny against the government (Yemen Press, 2012). With the slow disintegration of the military flaring up, the power transition suffered another setback.

Meanwhile, **the Houthi Movement,** which had been officially in truce with the government since 2010, effectively stayed on the margin of the power transition politics, eividently by choice. Yet, it proved to be the quiet elephant in the room. With power transition under way, another key issue at stake was the question of decentralization of power. During the National Dialogue Conference in early 2014, the Yemeni political factions signed an agreement on federalization of the country according to which the country would be divided into six regions. The Houthi Movement rejected the system considering it "a conspiracy to divide the country" (Yemen Post, 2015). Instead, the movement pressed ahead with its military ambition to expand its power reach in the shadow of the

ongoing public upheaval and security turmoil around the center of power in Sana'a.

Since summer 2012, Houthi fighters had tightened their exclusive control over their home province of Sa'ada after they forced out the government forces. The takeover was proved to be a springboard from which to launch offense to advance toward the center of power in Sana'a. Also, the ongoing military rebellion played right into the hands of **the Houthi Movement.** In this context, the ousted President Saleh and his disaffected followers and networks within the military provided the Houthis with a convenient ally at the center of power and resources that it urgently needed to expand its power base against the government of Hadi. Eventually, in collaboration with the Saleh loyalists, the Houthi insurgency succeeded in establishing its control over Sana'a' in September 2014. Besieged in his presidential palace, President Hadi handed over his resignation to the Houthi leaders. Thus, now the Houthis became the de facto ruling group of Sana'a.

However, the Houthi's takeover of the capital would not be the end of the decade-fought civil war. As soon as he escaped his house arrest toward the southern port city of Aden, **President Hadi** retracted his resignation and vowed to wage counter-war to restore his rule. Calling on the now disintegrated Yemeni armed forces to rally around him, President Hadi asserted that "we have relocated to Aden… for preserving the legitimate institutions of the state… We will fly the Yemeni flag again over the Mountain Maran (in the north) in the place the Iranian flag. The Yemeni people will never forgive the Houthis for collaborating with Iran…" (Yemen Press, 2015). Thus, the toppling of the Yemeni government turned out to be just the beginning of a new round, albeit on a larger scale, of the decade-long civil war. The difference this time would be to ousting the insurgent movement from Sana'a and restoring the old regime.

Expansion into Yemen

The first regional power that began expanding into the failed state of Yemen was Iran. Prior to the Houthi war, the bilateral relations between Iran and Yemen were generally characterized by growing cooperation and transaction. According to some official sources, during 1990–2000, the two countries signed as many as 40 agreements and understandings (al-Motamar, 2003). Particularly, with the beginning of 2000s, Iran

increasingly pushed to expand bilateral ties with Yemen. In May 2003, then Iranian President Muhamad Khatami paid a visit to Yemen, the first visit by a president of Iran since the 1979 revolution. During the visit the two countries signed "seven documents to cooperate on security, trade, development, culture, as well as shipping" (Tehran Times, 2003). Iran eagerly pushed to expand ties with the country on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Although it remains unclear to what extent those agreements actually delivered practical results on the ground especially in regard to sovereign matters such as security, the two countries seemed to have set their bilateral ties on the course of long-term cooperation.

Predictably, the outbreak of the **Houthi** insurgency progressively strained the seemingly booming ties between Iran and Yemen. Since the outbreak of the first round of the Yemeni civil war in fall 2004, Yemeni authorities indirectly and implicitly grew in suspicion of Iran's hand behind the Houthis' rebellion. For example, in spring 2007 as the civil war continued to flare up, the Yemeni interior ministry announced the arrest of a number of "Iranian elements" in the country and asked the Iranian government to "publically clarify its stance regarding the events of Sa'ada Province," the epicenter of the insurgency war (Mareb Press, 2007). At first, the Yemeni government tried to address its concerns through bilateral diplomatic channels. For example, in March 2007, Yemeni President sent a letter to the Iranian Supreme Leader and Iranian President in regard to the war with the Houthis, obviously to persuade Iran to stay out of the internal war. In a reply letter, the Iranian government reiterated "Tehran's resolve to promote ties with Sana'a" (Tehran Times, 2007). However, as the **Houthi** insurgency spread, Yemeni officials went public in protesting the Iran's involvement in their civil war. For example, in a protest statement coated in diplomatic language, Yemeni foreign minister stated, "the Iranian brothers officially reiterate that they are with the unity and independence of Yemen, that they support the security of Yemen, but we want this position to be translated into practice" (al-Bawaba, 2007).

During the new round of the war in fall 2009, the Yemenis' suspicion of the Iran's assistance for the Houthis grew to confirmation. While up to this point it had not presented much by the way of material evidence to back up its claims about Iran's involvement in the country, as the war intensified in fall 2009, the Yemeni government announced the seizure of a boat manned by an Iranian crew with a load of weapons headed to the Houthi-held area through the port of Midi in Sa'ada Province

(BBC, 2009). As a result of the discovery, Yemen authorities canceled a planned visit by an Iranian foreign minister to the country for the second time in fall 2009, threatening to cut off all diplomatic ties if Iran did not change its position on the Houthi insurgency. Still, the Iran's expansionist intervention in Yemen gained wider public exposure when in early 2011 Yemeni authorities sentenced several men on charges of carrying out "activities serving Iranian interests in Yemen," in a reference to supporting the Houthi insurgency (Saba, 2011). From the perspective of Yemeni officials, the Iran's design in Yemen was simply to use the insurgency against the state to advance its interests as part of its wider bid for setting up proxy forces on the Arabian Peninsula. "They're trying to use Shi'a communities in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen like they use Hezbollah (in Lebanon) as a political card" through using religious and cultural ties, a Yemeni foreign ministry official told US officials (Wiki Leaks, 2009c).

As noted previously, as a consequence of the anti-government mass protests in 2011, the power of the central government suffered further erosion. With this new vacuum, Iran stepped up its efforts to establish further influence in the failed state of Yemen. It was during this period that the number of reported Iranian arm shipments bound to the Houthis grew with a greater frequency than before. While heretofore the information regarding Iran's arm shipments mostly came out from the Yemeni government and its allies in the region, now international sources also came to confirm those reports in consistent details. For example, in March 2012, some US officials in contact with Yemeni authorities confirmed, "Iranian smugglers backed by **the Quds Force**… are using small boats to ship AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades, and other arms to replace older weapons used by the rebels (the Houthis)" (Schmitt & Worth, 2012). In a bold escalation against the charges of militarily assisting the Houthi Movement, Iran only ratcheted up its arm supply to the Yemeni insurgency on a greater scale. In February 2013, in coordination with the US Navy in the area, Yemeni authorities seized an Iran-originated shipment of heavy weapons including Russian-made SAM 2 and SAM 3 anti-aircraft missiles bound to Houthi-held areas in the country (Reuters, 2013).

Besides weapons, Iran was reportedly dispatching military personnel too. In this regard, in summer 2014, Yemeni authorities announced the uncovering of a network of Iranian agents in the country who worked to "recruit young men to send them to Beirut where they will receive military training in the **Hezbollah** camps under the direct supervision of

officers from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard" (Jameeh, 2012). These increasingly growing Iran's expansion in Yemen prompted the struggling government of al-Hadi to officially accusing Iran of carrying out acts of intervention in the country. "My country is facing foreign intervention especially from Iran… The Iranians are seeking a foothold in my country due to its strategic location…," President Hadi protested in a public speech (Woodrow Wilson Center, 2012). Plunged in state failure, the Yemeni government effectively remained unable to back up its protests against the Iran's expansion with some concrete action.

The question of the extent of the Iranian assistance for the Houthi insurgency remains unclear. Beyond the Yemeni and international reported arm shipments or uncovered networks of military operative, there is little revelation from the Iranian government itself in this regard. However, occasionally Iranian officials went open in admitting their country's support for the Shia movement in Yemen. For example, in October 2014 as the Houthi militants closed in to encircle the Yemeni capital, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard boasted, "one of the achievements of the Mobilization Forces is the unification of popular forces defending the revolution in Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen" (al-Alam, 2015).

The charge by Yemeni officials that the Iran's purpose in Yemen was part of its larger regional design was backed up by occasional statements from within Iranian official circles who considered the Houthi Movement as another reproduction of the Shia organization of **Hezbollah** in Lebanon. In this connection, the representative of the Supreme Leader in the Revolutionary Guard asserted that "Ansarallah in Yemen is a copy of the Hezbollah of Lebanon which is about to join forces against the enemies of Islam… The Islamic Republic is indirectly supporting the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and popular forces in Syria and Iraq… Some years ago Hezbollah was formed in Lebanon as a popular force in the form of the Basij Forces (Iranian paramilitary forces), then popular forces were formed in Syria and Iraq, and today we witness the birth of a similar formation: Ansarallh in Yemen" (Defa Press, 2015). In brief, Iran saw in supporting the Houthi insurgency in the failed state of Yemen as another opportunity to extend its regional power reach—this time onto the strategic Arab Peninsula.

Another Revisionist Power Involved

Turkey's Involvement

There are some indication pointing to Turkey's involvement in the failed state of Yemen, especially during and following the domestic upheveals of 2011. Turkey's connection with Yemen stretches back centuries when the Turk-ruled **Ottoman Empire** was the far flung empire over the Middle East including the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen was one a vilayet (province) of the Empire well until the Arab revolt forced out the Turks during the World War One. With the dissolution of the empire, the Western-oriented Kemalist kept Turkey out of the region's power game including Yemeni affairs.

With the strategic reorientation that it experienced under the Islamic-leaning AK Party, Turkey advanced renewed interest in Yemen. As early as 2005, during a visit by then Prime Minister **Erdogan** to Yemen, the two countries signed three economic agreements including on gas and oil as the first step toward expanding their bilateral ties "in all fields" as Erdogan stressed (al-Motamar, 2005). Soon, the two countries further cemented their bilateral ties with the signing of a new set of agreements in "security fields, fighting terrorism, organized crimes and drug" (al-Motamar, 2006). In January 2011, Turkey's President Abdullah Gul made history when he became the first Turkey president to visit Yemen. Symbolically signifying the Turkey's attempt to reconnect with the area by invoking its Ottoman past as its political heritage was the inauguration by Turkey's president of the Turkish Martyrs Memorial to honor the Ottoman imperial soldiers who fell in Yemen during the World War One.

When Yemen started its political transition process after the ousting of President Saleh and the coming of President Hadi to power, Turkey became actively involved in the process. For this purpose, Turkey's Foreign Minister **Ahmed Davutoglu** visited Yemen to convey his country's support for the process, defining the process as critical for political transformation in the region, emphasizing, "If this process was completed successfully, it would be a good example for the new democracies in the region" (Anadolu Agency, 2012). In this sense, the AKP's Turkey saw in the failed state of Yemen as another focal point for realizing political and regime change that had been sweeping through the region during the **Arab Spring** of 2011.

But also, there is some unconfirmed evidence, indicating some military intervention from Turkey in Yemen, mainly in the form of supplying

arms to the country. The first reported Turkey-originated arm shipment to Yemen occurred around the start of the breakout of political upheavals in the country in spring 2011. During this time, security sources in the Gulf reported that they had seized a shipment of mostly light arms from Turkey bound to Yemen (Reuters, 2011). That would not be the only incidence of its kind. A cargo of Turkey-sourced of weapons, mostly rifles, was seized by Yemeni authorities at the Port of Aden (Maritime, 2013). According to one account, at least five Turkey-originated shipments of weapons to Yemen were intercepted Yemen during 2011–2013 (Yemen Press, 2013a). While the weapon smuggling was largely limited to light weapons, its steady follow and size made the Yemeni government to take notice. Suggesting the potential risk of to the bilateral ties with Turkey, Yemeni president warned of "attempts that conspire to… sabotage the relations between the two brotherly countries" as he made reference to smuggling of arm shipments from Turkey to his country (Mareb Press, 2013); he stopped short of voicing charges or open protest, however. One possible explanation as to why the arm shipments from Turkey did not provoke much public protest from the Yemeni government compared to its reaction to those coming from Iran can be found in the fact that Turkey-originated shipments were lower in size and frequency. Moreover, evidently the Yemeni government did not determine whether the weapon smuggling from Turkey was sanctioned by the official authority, or it was a non-government actor stood behind the operation.

The intended recipient of the Turkey-originated weapons also remained undetermined. Turkey did not enjoy a certain ally inside in Yemen, anything close to the kind of relationship between Iran and the powerful Houthi Movement. There is sketchy evidence that some ties developed between Turkey and the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, the Islah Congregation Party. For example, in the aftermath of military coup in Egypt against the short-lived Muslim Brotherhood rule in 2013, Turkey's government invited major **Muslim Brotherhood** parties around the region for a closed-door crisis conference to discuss challenges facing the Sunni Islamic movement in the region. According to Yemeni media, the Islah was one of the participants at the conference (Yemen Press, 2013b). Furthermore, according to some Yemeni security source, Turkey sought to form a militia force from members of the Islah Party. The source claims that in early 2013 the head of Turkey's intelligence agency visited Yemen to meet with officials of the Islah Party with the proposition for recruiting and training

fighters (Shabwaah Press, 2013). The Turkey's intelligence operation in Yemen further came to spotlight when in June 2015 Houthi authorities claimed that they arrested a group of spy operatives in Yemen, including members of Turkey's spy agencies (Fars News, 2015). Still, the whole evidence on the Turkey's intervention in the Yemeni conflict—whether in the form of delivering arm shipments or forming a militia force—remains sketchy and unconfirmed at this writing.

Balancing Against Expansion into Yemen

Expansion into the failed state of Yemen sparked fear in other regional powers. Across the border from the target country, the status quo Saudi Arabia was particularly alarmed. With its over 1000 miles of shared border with Yemen, the Saudi Kingdom came to the leading balancing intervening power into Yemen—namely against Iran—with the stated purpose of restoring the toppled Yemeni regime to power.

Juts to give a brief background, since the outbreak of the Houthi insurgency in Yemen in 2004 and in particular after its escalation in 2009, Saudi officials watched with worries as the Yemeni government kept failing to squash the growing insurgency. It had long thought of **the Houthi Movement** as a threat to the regional order given its link with the revisionist Iran. Privately but increasingly, the Saudi government grew in worries. For example, in a meeting with US officials in October 2009, Prince Turki bin Saud expressed concern that Iran had been involved in the ongoing civil war in Yemen by providing Houthi rebels with money and weapons, while its regional ally groups providing them with training them (Wiki Leaks, 2009b). With the escalation of the Houthi insurgency after 2009, the Kingdom officials went more public in voicing worries over the Iran's military intervention in its neighboring failed state. For example, in January 2010, then its outspoken Foreign Minister Saud al-Faysal expressed his country's unease of the Iran's evident backing of the Houthi rebels and questioned the purpose behind it:

> Undoubtedly there is Iranian involvement in Yemen. The government of Yemen itself says so. There are even pictures, and pictures speak louder than words, of Iranian people in the terrorist area (the Houthi-held area) … What are the Iranians got to do with Yemen? It (Iran) is not a neighboring country, it's never been involved with Yemen before. What is the purpose

of their coming there? And why is it that since they came there has been these incursions (by Houthi fighters) into Saudi territory? (Bahnam, 2010)

Saudi officials recognized that the Iran's military involvement in the armed conflict would undermine, if not make it impossible, any real prospect of realizing a political settlement in Yemen through accommodating **the Houthi Movement** (Wiki Leaks, 2009a). Still more to add to the heightening sense of insecurity was that from Saudi's perspective, the Iran's intervention in Yemen was only part of its systemic design to establish regional domination. Foreign Minister surmised this perspective when he stated:

> It is important to understand the reasons that pushed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Gulf to commit to resist the Iranian expansion and adopt a policy of reaction to confront the aggressive behavior of Iran. The policy of Iran is the same since its revolution in 1979. Its constitution calls for the export of its revolution. It supports the extremist and violent groups including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and sectarian militias in Iraq. This (Iran's behavior) has caused the coup by al-Houthis against the legitimate government of Yemen, the outbreak of war that cost the lives of thousands. (Asharq al-Awsat, 2016)

With the growing specter of the collapse of central authority under the burden of the Iran-linked Houthi insurgency, Saudi Arabia decided to lend assistance to its struggling neighbor. It is unclear what sort of military assistance, if any, the Kingdom provided to the Yemeni government. There is basically no evidence that the Kingdom carried out such operation in any significant volume. It is true that at times, the sparks of the Yemeni civil war spilled over into its territory, which occasionally dragged the Kingdom directly into the war. For example, in fall 2009 the Houthi militants' attack on Saudi border posts and occupying border villages provoked a Saudi's a military operation. A two-month operation ended when the Saudi army forced out Houthi rebels from the area.

Still, there is no evidence to indicate a Saudi's military aids for the Yemeni government in the fight against the Houthi insurgency at this stage of the war. In contrast, from the evidence made available recently, there is some suggestion that the Kingdom pursued a policy of conflict-avoidance toward the domestic conflict with its neighbor, at least militarily. For example, some US official source in contact with the Saudi government stated in 2009 that it was not clear whether the Kingdom was

"prepared to provide weapons recently requested by Saleh," even though it appeared to be "willing to provide some logistical support along the border…" (Wiki Leaks, 2009a). Rather, in this case, as in other cases, it was its financial power that the Kingdom primarily made use of its financial power in order to exert influence over the developments in its surroundings.

Therefore, it was on economic assistance that the Kingdom focused its effort to save its chronically impoverished neighbor. Toward that end, the Saudi government announced an economic initiative called "the Strategic Vision for Yemen 2025" in the framework of **the Gulf Cooperation Council** for rehabilitating the Yemeni crumbling economy. Later in 2010, the initiative gave rise to the Friends of Club, manifesting the internationalization of the Yemeni developmental efforts. Through continuously hosting meetings and soliciting international aids, the Kingdom remained in the lead of the efforts. There is no official data on the total financial aids that the Kingdom delivered to the Yemeni government during the period. However, according to some estimate the aids stood at billions of dollars. At the conference of 2012 alone the Kingdom contributed by some $3.25 billion of a total $4 billion raised (Asharq al-Awsat, 2012). Additionally, according to Yemeni media source, the Kingdom offered $1 billion deposit to save the Yemeni central bank from collapsing during this period (Saba, 2012).

In addition to economic aids, Saudi Arabia equally employed its political leverage to help preserve the status quo in Yemen. Following the eruption of anti-government mass protests in spring 2011, the Kingdom embarked on a mediating effort, known as the Gulf Initiative, between the contending political parties and the embattled President Saleh, with the aim of finding a common ground that would prevent a radical transformation. Toward that end, after several months of arduous mediation that marred by stalemate and reverses, the initiative came to fruition when a compromised deal was hammered out according to which transferring of power from Saleh to his Vice-President al-Hadi came about—at least on paper. In other words, the deal fundamentally saved the ruling system in Sana'a by securing a peaceful intra-elite power transition— a clear success for the Kingdom. The degree of urgency to which the Kingdom approached the crisis was evident in the personal involvement of the Saudi King Abdullah himself in the mediation and the subsequent signing of the power transition agreement.

In the end, however, neither the financial aid and nor the political mediations saved the Yemeni state from takeover by the Iran-backed Houthi militants. The failure of the efforts to revive the struggling Yemeni government spelt in the Houthis's takeover of the capital city of Sana'a in December 2014. For the Kingdom, the Houthis' takeover of Yemen was the climax of a threat that had been growing in momentum since 2004. Given the Iran's involvement behind the rise of the **Houthis Movement** over the past several years, the victory of the Shia movement indirectly effectively extended Iran's power reach right on the southern border of the Kingdom. Perhaps, Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi government journalist and a senior advisor to the royal family, expressed more than his own personal opinion on the Houthis takeover of Sana'a when he succinctly put, "Look, for Saudi Arabia it is a 1939 moment", he said, clearly comparing the Iran-backed Houthi's takeover of Yemeni capital with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, adding, "In Saudi Arabia, we are at that moment. We either accept Iranian hegemony, control over Yemen and over our destiny, or freedom" (Taddonio, 2019).

Indeed, the rise of Iran-allied regime right on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula was a direct attack, if not open dismantling, of the Saudi's unpronounced policy of keeping out any major regional power from the Peninsula as its exclusive sphere of influence or security. From this standpoint, realizing the magnitude of the emerging threat, the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council issued a statement in which they accused the Houthis of "staging a coup in Yemen" characterizing the overthrow of the government a dangerous and unacceptable move (Saudi Press Agency, 2015). The statement expressed the statement of intent by the Kingdom and its Gulf allies. On the ground, the Kingdom started mobilizing its ally countries for a collective military operation into Yemen with the stated aim of reversing the Houthi's victory. Toward that end, the Saudi government started what he dubbed **Operation Decisive Storm**—its first ever military operation into another country for bringing about political change. In the declaration of the operation, King Salman declared:

> All our peace efforts have been faced with total rejection of the coup-makers of the Houthis who are continuing their aggression in attempt to control the rest of the areas especially in the south (Aden). This behavior by this group who do not recognize neither Islamic principles nor international rules and norm represents an unprecedented threat to the Yemeni

Republic and Yemeni people... This group is aided by some local and regional forces that aim to dominate the country and make it a base to extend its influence in the region which creates not only a threat to Yemen but also to the peace and security of the region and the world. (al-Jazirah, 2015)

Based on this threat analysis, in alliance with a number of other regional states, Saudi Arabia launched its balancing operation into the failed state of Yemen to remove the Houthi Movement from power and restore the rule of President al-Hadi. According to Saudi official source, the operation included the deployment of 100 fighter jets, 150,000 soldiers, and other navy units (al-Riyadh, 2015).

Other countries also participated. Most prominently was the Arab's largest power and close ally of the Saudi Kingdom, the status quo Egypt. Egypt shared, at least to some degree, the Saudis' sense of security concern over the spread of the Houthi insurgency and Iran's suspected role in its escalation; "it is not a secret that Iran is supplying the Houthis with large amounts of arms," Egyptian officials affirmed in meetings with US officials (Wiki Leaks, 2010b). Additionally, Egypt also expressed the views voiced by the Kingdom about the lack of a realistic prospect for political settlement of the conflict, advocating, instead, a military approach, warning, that past peace attempts only allowed "the Houthis time to regroup and rearm" (Wiki Leaks, 2010a). As to military assistance to Yemen, while Egypt offered training to the embattled Yemeni army, there is not much data at this writing on the type or size of such as assistance during this period of the Yemeni civil war.

However, when Saudi Arabia decided to move ahead with military intervention campaign, Egypt stood with it. The fact that the Arab League summit on the crisis of Yemen was held in Egypt was an early indication of the support by the Arab most powerful country for the anti-Houthi military action. On the ground, with the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm kicked off, Egypt decided to join in "for the purpose of restoring stability to the brotherly state of Yemen... and rectify the situation and restore its legitimate rule that has been overthrown by the Houthi group..." (State Information Service, 2015).

The Kingdom also tried to secure the support of Turkey in the anti-Houthi-Iran's alliance, a request that Turkey publically accepted. In a sense the conservative KSA and the revisionist Turkey were unlikely candidates for alliance. Yet, at least they had one challenging power rival in

common: the revolutionary Iran. Turkey had been locked in an increasingly power struggle with Iran in Iraq (as discussed in the previous chapter) and Syria (as will be discussed in the next chapter). Predictably therefore, concurring with the Saudi's position, Turkey saw in the rise of the Houthi Movement to power as another manifestation of Iran's bid for regional expansionism. Therefore, it could only have been expected that when the Saudi anti-Houthi military operation started, **Erdogan** declared Turkey's support for it. While there is not much evidence on what tangible assistance to indicate that Turkey actually contributed to the operation, Erdogan pledged "logistical support based on the evolution of the situation" (Anadolu Agency, 2015). While it is unclear whether Turkey actually delivered any military assistance to the Saudi military intervention in Yemen or not, the public concurrence between the two regional powers was a measure of their shared worries of the Iran's successful regional expansion, including into the failed state of Yemen, and the urgency of countering it.

Climax of the Power Struggle

With the Saudi-led military operation against the Iran-backed Yemeni Houthi movement, the failed state of Yemen became another epicenter of the struggle for balance of power among regional powers. As the Operation Decisive Storm started, Iranian Leader **Khamenei** vowed that "the Saudis will never come out of this (war) victorious... They will be bogged down in a quagmire (of Yemen)" (Khamenei, 2015).

For Iran, Yemen represented a focal point where a new regional equilibrium could be remade. In this respect, a senior Iranian official remarked that "Yemen is where the real proxy war is going on and winning the battle in Yemen will help define the balance of power in the Middle East" (Saul et al., 2017). For, by securing a military foothold in Yemen Iran would achieve a strategic gain in two ways. First, it could use Yemen as a stepping-stone to expand further on to the rest of the Arabian Peninsula and establish power base through tapping into sizable, but largely marginalized, Shia minorities in those countries to form more branches of **Hezbollah** as it did previously in Lebanon and recently Iraq. Secondly, the strategic location of Yemen on the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea would enable it to acquire a greater maritime reach that it sought. The chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces recognized this value when he stated that "We need distant bases, and it may become possible one day to have

bases on the shores of Yemen or Syria…" (Reuters, 2016). Therefore, it could have only been predicted that Iran would ratchet up its assistance for the Houthis after they took over power in Yemen. For example, only few months into their victory, Iran signed agreement with the Houthi government on aviation cooperation. As it soon became clear, the agreement facilitated the use of air transportation to deliver military assistance from Iran to the new government in Sana'a. "There are obviously supplies that have been coming from Iran… There are a number of flights every single week that have been flying in (to Yemen)," a US official in Yemen revealed (House of Representatives, 2015). While the Saudi-led military coalition was fairly quick to shut down the Yemeni airspace, the weapon shipments continued on the ground, now including heavy weapons. In this regard, a senior advisor to the Iranian leader revealed that his country had been attempting to supply Houthis with Surface-to-Surface missiles (Apart, 2017).

Evidently, eventually the attempts met some success. Thus, at least by the end of 2017, the Houthi was able to launch its first major Ballistic missile attacks on Saudi territory including the capital city of Riyadh (Fars News Agency, 2017). Moreover, the movement began increasingly to use new war technology: Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. With this new capability, the group increasingly took aim at strategic locations inside the Kingdom, primarily its oil infrastructure (the soft and vital targets). During 2019–2020, at least two major UAV attacks were carried on Saudi territory, mainly its oil refineries and installation. At first, **the Houthi Movement** refrained from declaring responsibility. With its increased deployment of the technology, the movement came out to claim responsibility, such as in the case of the bombing an oil installation in the Red Sea city of Jizan in July 2020 (Reuters, 2020). Between 2019 and 2020, the group launched multiple attacks of similar kind on Saudi territories. Although Iran never admitted its responsibility for delivering the war technology to its Yemeni ally group, the Houthi's increasing frequent and efficient deployment of it raised questions about the sources of the supplies. The result of investigations carried out two years previously by a United Nation panel identified Iran as the source of the equipment. The report stated that the investigation "identified missile remnants, related military equipment, and military unmanned aerial vehicles that are of Iranian origin and were brought into Yemen after the imposition of the targeted arms embargo… particularly in the area of short-range ballistic missile technology… and unmanned aerial vehicles" (United Nations, 2018, 1–24).

On its side, Saudi Arabia has sustained its military operation even in the face of its challenging prolongation. The airpower superiority has been its major mark. According to some estimate, the coalition carried out over 22,000 airstrikes on various targets in the Houthi-held Yemen (Yemen Data Project, 2021). Concurrent with its ongoing military campaign, the Kingdom maintained its official stance that refuses to give Iran a place at any negotiation table on Yemen. "The Kingdom has not and will not hold talk with the Iranian regime on Yemen," Saudi Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated (al-Riyadh, 2019). The Kingdom has succeeded in containing the Houthi rule to a portion of the country and denying it juridical sovereignty; in line with the Kingdom's interests other states have maintained their recognition of the government in Aden as the only legitimate authority of the country.

How long more the Kingdom would be investing in its prolonging military campaign while the mission has failed to accomplish (to dislodge the Houthi Movement from power) after five years into the war remains unclear at this writing. This failure only compounded by the increasing vulnerability of the Saudi territory itself to enemy attacks. As it is commonly the case in state army versus irregular army warfare, air superiority by itself does not guarantee victory. To defeat the insurgency, there needs to be boots on the ground to translate disruptive strikes from above into some permanent defeats on the ground. This has been a primary Saudi's dilemma in its anti-Houthi military campaign. Its expensive campaign has proved also to be inefficient due to its failure to rebuild the Yemeni army into an effective fighting force to operate as its boot on the ground for the anti-Houthi campaign. Rather, its local allies remain deeply divided along contending regional and tribal lines including the renewed struggle by the southerners to reestablish their independent state in Aden which could only further solidify the Houthi rule over the rest of the country. Iran has been conducting its proxy war Yemen on cheap. Through merely supplying assistance for its Yemeni ally, it has been trying with tangible successes to keep its Gulf rival power preoccupied and overwhelmed with protecting its very territorial security from increasingly Houthis' stealthy air attacks with increasingly affordable and cheaply available technology of UAV bomber. This is all the while the Houthi's regional backer Iran itself has largely avoided any consequences for its expansion into Yemen. This condition has given rise to a military stalemate. The dilemma that will continue to face Saudi Arabia in Yemen is how to reconcile between its inability to remove the Houthi Movement

from power on the one hand and on the other hand its need of roll back the Iran's influence in the country, and reassure its Monroe Doctrine to the Arabian Peninsula.

To conclude, as of this writing, the Yemeni war is still a case in unfolding although it seems it has reached a stalemate in favor of Iran's camp. Therefore, any conclusion drawn at this moment remains tentative. What is certain is that Yemen became another battleground in the struggle over the regional balance of power following the Iran-backed Houthi Movement's takeover of power which in turn provoked Saudi Arabia direct military intervention with the aim of restoring the toppled government to power. The Houthi's grip on the capital would not survive Iran's withdrawal of support, while the fragile juridical government in the south would not withstand Houthi's onslaught without Saudi's military support. In brief, in this regional scramble, Yemen, a failed state, is reduced to a contested sphere of power whose territorial-political sovereignty is effectively governed by the relations of force between the involved regional powers—the revisionist Iran and the status quo Saudi Arabia. And, similar to 1960s, its political future would likely be determined by those relations of force in a broader regional context. For now, the Saudi primary concern will remain to be the upholding of its unpronounced version of Monroe Doctrine to the Arabian Peninsula against the Iran's strategic offensive to establish a foothold in there.

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Syria (2011–2020): From a Revisionist Power into a Conquered State

Mass Protest and Armed Insurgency

The slide of the Syrian state into civil war and state failure was as an predictable as it was dramatic. At least partly, this outcome can only be explained by the organic incohesion between the respective share of each of the country's two main sects (Shia vs. Sunni) within the national population on the one hand, and the sectarian composition of the state's governing elite on the other; but also, the regime's display of method of collective repression, instead of an accomodative one, to deal with political/sectarian grievances can also give an explanation.[1] The bacdrope to the upheveal is that for nearly four decades this potential source of domestic dissension had been both suppressed by the autocratic policing of the state and, at least traditionally, absorbed by the regime's Arab nationalist discourse—which was politically nationally encompassing with the vast majority of the population being of Arabic ethnic. Yet, the surge of sectarianism in 2000s in the region had gradually displaced the nationalist discourse of the regime as a unifying ideational force; and, the outbreak of anti-regime Sunni protests in early 2011 and the regime's resistance to accommodate the demands of the majority for change came

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[1] In this respect, Syria has been the reverse equivalent of Iraq in that the tiny Shia Alwaite minority to which al-Assad family belonged ruled the state to the exclusion of the Sunni majority.

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together to sink the country from its proud rank of regional power status down to the conflagration hole of state failure.

In March 2011, mass street protests broke out in Syria. Inspired by the anti-regime mass protests in neighboring countries and motivated by the desire to change the decades-long autocratic one party system of the Ba'ath Party under the Assad family, Syrians poured into the streets throughout the country. At the outset, the demands were largely limited to certain economic and political reforms. According to a report issued by the UN, at the initial period of the protests, the calls concerned around the issue of ending poverty and corruption, respecting the freedom of expression and political associations, in addition to releasing political prisoners (United Nations, 2011).

The official position of the government was made clear by President al-Assad when he came out with a mixed message of threat of crackdown and a promise of reform:

> It cannot be denied that today Syria has become a target of conspiracies hatched by countries far and near with support from inside the homeland… They started with fomenting disturbance weeks before the disorder broke out in Syria. They started inciting through television stations and websites, but failed… They succeeded in encouraging people into the streets but we were able to avert dissension. Then they enter arms and started killing people randomly to shed blood and this makes the situation difficult… We have been able to expose only part of the scheme but it seems to be an organized one. There are support people in various provinces and abroad… The Syrians are peaceful people but we do not hesitate even for one day to defend our cause, our interests and our principles". (General Organization of Radio and TV-Syria, 2011)

Sensing the seriousness of the protest flare-up to his regime, al-Assad promised to carry out certain reforms. He declared his intention to reopen the "recommendations" issued by the ruling **Ba'ath Party** conference of 2005 which suggested lifting decades-old national emergency and allowing for political party pluralism. Still, he predicted that the translation of those recommendations into some legislation might take months and years. Instead, following the step of other autocratic republican regimes in the region under the strain of their publics, al-Assad announced the formation a new government in order to "fill the existence gap between the state institutions and ordinary citizens…," as he characterized it (Syrian News Agency, 2011). The measure did not

touch the organizing principles of the regime (mainly the single party system of the Ba'ath), and therefore it failed to address the key demands: opening up the system for political party pluralism—the critical call of the anti-government movement that the regime showed no tangible sign of conceding on. Predictably, therefore, the governmental reshuffling proved to be a cosmetic step that failed to deescalate the rising public agitation. The anti-government activities kept gained further momentum as it spread to various regions of the country in open defiance to the regime's ban on unauthorized demonstrations.

Lacking constitutional-institutional mechanisms to carry out political changes and unwilling to deliver the demanded political concessions by relinquishing the four decade-long **Baath Party's** monopoly over the state, the government began employing its conventional means to crush the rising mass protests: the use of force. In this pursuit, the regime sent in the army to hotspot areas with a campaign of bombing and blockade with the aim of subduing them into submission or starvation. Places like Daraa region where the first spark of the anti-government movement emerged became open targets for the military crackdown. The army began laying siege to the city by cutting it off from the rest of the country while security forces from within began to unleashing indiscriminate violence on its residents (Human Rights Watch, 2011). With the employment of violence, the human cost began to accumulate. Given the regime's practice of blockade it is hard to determine the scale of death tools with any certainty. However, according to the Amnesty International within the first month of the protests nearly 400 people were killed by security forces (Amnesty, 2011). The uprising gained a new momentum when it spread into other cities such as Hama, the historical bastion of anti-government movement when in 1984 it experienced a major anti-government revolt which ended after tens of thousands causalities after the government's use of scorched earth policy. Again the protests in the city triggered massive violence from the government. According to some estimates, around 80 civilians were killed by the army in a single of crackdown in July (Reuters, 2011).

The government's unwillingness to yield for political transformation would soon meet its inability to quash the protests. Instead of ending the protest movement, the violent crackdown further instigated it across the country and radicalized the demands from reform to regime change. By July 2011, what initially started as street protests had been evolved into an armed insurgency for toppling the Assad regime. The first major shift

toward armed insurgency took place when the army began to crack. In late March, as defection began to spread within the national army when a clique of officers led by Husein Harmosh announced the formation of the Free Officers Brigade with the aim of "defending peaceful protesters from violence by elements of security, military and the Shabiha (government loyalists) (Al-Jazeera, 2013). Although the government intelligence operatives soon succeeded in capturing the leader of the munity force, the defection already fractured the army. As the number of defectors grew, the larger army called **the Free Syrian Army** (the FSA) was formed. "We announce the formation of the Free Syrian Army to work hand in hand with the people to achieve freedom and dignity and to bring down this regime… for establishing a free national democratic system," the commander of the FSA announced (Asharq al-Awsat, 2011). Thus, by summer of 2011, Syria was effectively split into two opposing fighting forces. On one side, pro-Assad forces began to emerge from the remnants of the national army and the new militia forces including the Shabihas. On the opposite side was the FSA as an umbrella armed organization which included under its command a constellation of religious and secular militia forces both of former soldiers and new elements. Syria had effectively entered a full-fledged civil war. With its internal implosion, Syria was about to become another epicenter for a power struggle among the neighboring states.

Expansion into Syria

As Syria descended into civil war, both the revolutionary Iran and the AKP Turkey waited little time before initiating intervention into it. With its over 500 miles shared border and deep historical tie with its failed neighboring state, Turkey quickly grew interests in Syria. Like its relations with the rest of the countries in its former imperial domain of the Middle East, the Kemalist Turkey limited its relations with Syria basically to the minimum. At any rate, their mutual ties remained strained by enduring tension as Syria provided safe-haven for the Kurdistan Workers' Party insurgency in Turkey while Turkey built close military-security ties with the Syria's regional adversary, Israel. With the rise of the Justice and Development Islamic party to power and its regional diplomatic offense, Turkey had been working to construct closer and closer ties with the Assad's Syria.

As a result, an unprecedented era of comprehensive cooperation developed between the two regional powers. By 2009, the bilateral ties between the two had been cemented with "50 agreements, memoranda of understanding, and cooperation protocols" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009b). The hallmark of this upgraded relationship was the establishment of the Strategic Cooperation Council in September 2009 following summit level talks between the two countries. According to a joint statement, the Council aimed "to establish a long-term strategic partnership to expand and solidify their cooperation on a wide range of areas of mutual concern and interest… on a strategic basis and realizing their common vision regarding a number of bilateral and regional issues" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009b). As a material demonstration of their new found cooperative ties, the Syrian army joined its Turkey's counterpart in carrying out several joint military operations against the PKK guerillas during summer 2010 (Middle East Journal, 2010, 638). In brief, with initiative from the AKP's Turkey, the two regional powers charted the course of multi-facets strategic cooperation. In a remark on their bilateral relations, al-Assad described Syrian-Turkey relations as "an example of fraternal relations among peoples and countries" (General Organization of Radio and TV-Syria, 2009). On its side, Turkey considered its relations with Syria just as a gateway toward the wider region. "Turkey saw Syria as a door opening to the Middle Eastern market of 320 million, not a market of only 20 million populations," Erdogan declared (Anadolu Agency, 2009).

However, with the outbreak of anti-government protests and the resultant civil war in Syria, Turkey's attention shifted toward its southern neighbor. As the developments in Syria turned into civil war in mid-2011, Turkey gradually threw its weight behind the cause of regime change in the country. Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoglu, the architect of this Turkey's new grand strategy, was articulate on the Turkey's objective in Syria. For example, in speech he delivered to the Syrian Opposition Conference in July 2012, Davutoglu affirmed that "Turkey's policy vis-à-vis Syria has been very clear. Right from the outset, Turkey has sided with the Syrian people who have been struggling for their legitimate demands (regime change). We have the resolve to continue this policy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012b). The Turkey's declared support for the Syrian opposition was the result of the failure of its attempt to engender political change in the country through persuading al-Assad. Since the beginning of the outbreak of the protests, Turkey had been urging al-Assad to carry

out political reforms such as ending the monopoly of **the Ba'ath Party**. For instance, in March 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan revealed that his government had been pressing the Assad government to lift the state of emergency in order to pave the way for a multi-political party system in the country (Daily Sabah, 2011).

Such steps toward political liberalization of the system would have opened the path for Syrian opposition parties such as the Turkey-allied Muslim Brotherhood, arguably the most organized opposition party, to acquire a power share within the suggested post-transition Syria. The party had already been a major player behind the unfolding upheaval in the country since its outset (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2011). In fact, according to some sources, Erdogan presented a behind-the-scene proposal to the embattled al-Assad according to which Turkey would help the Syrian government in dealing with the protest movement in return for allocating certain key power positions within the government to the members of the **Muslim Brotherhood** (Today Zaman, 2011). Later as the relations between Syria and Turkey broke down, President al-Assad reflected, "Before the crisis (civil war) Erdogan never raised the issue of reform of democracy (in Syria) even once… He had one goal and for him that goal came first over relations with Syrian-Turkish which was returning the members of Muslim Brotherhood to Syria… He was persistently trying to make (Syrian government) to make reconciliation (with them)" (General Organization of Radio and TV-Syria, 2013b). In the end, al-Assad declined to negotiate on sharing power with the Islamic party in the government, or even to allow it to operate as an opposition force.

Now that the door for political reform was quickly shut and the protests escalated into civil war, Turkey came out in full of the growing armed insurgency. Toward that end, as early as summer 2011, Turkey hosted major Syrian opposition factions in Istanbul for organizing their policies and operations against the Assad regime. The efforts came to fruition when in October 2011 opposition groups agreed to unify their ranks in **the Syrian National Council** (SNC) which would work as a political representative body in exile for the armed insurgency at home. In its declaration, the Council stated that it would "embody the aspirations of toppling the regime; achieve democratic change; and build a modern, democratic, and civil state" in Syria (Syrian National Council, 2011). Clearly, in the expectation of a near end of the Assad rule, opposition groups announced the formation of "the Interim Syrian Government" in

Istanbul, which Turkey immediately recognized; "The only interlocutor for Turkey in Syria is now the Syrian people and their representatives, that is, the Syrian opposition," Foreign Minister Davutoğlu announced (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012b). In this manner, Turkey officially became the main regional backer of the Syrian armed opposition.

In keeping with its political support, Turkey also extended military assistance to the Free Syrian Army. As it is commonly the case in covert operations, the exact date or full extent of Turkey's military involvement in the Syrian civil war remains unclear, particularly at the early stage of the war. During an interview in 2013, al-Assad suggested that in late summer 2011 "they began increasingly arming and sending fighters to the streets" when he referred to "the Qatar's money and Turkey's logistical support" as the cause for the spread of the armed opposition against his government (Al-Mayadeen, 2013). Still, the available material evidence indicates that at least by early 2012, Turkey had become active, even if indirect, party to the Syrian internal war. In this respect, as the number of the Syrian military deserters amounted, Turkey opened training facilities where they received fighting and planning skills before crossing back into Syria to wage their revolutionary war against the Syrian government (BBC, 2012; Daily Star, 2012).

Moreover, Turkey began also delivering arm shipments to the opposition. In an attempt to keep the operation in the dark, Turkey put its intelligence agency in charge. Turkey aimed to keep its operations covert to the extent it even did not allow its border security authorities to carry out inspections on the shipments on the ground of "state secret" (Tastekin, 2014). According to available data, during 2013 and 2014, Turkey delivered various types of arm shipments to Syrian armed opposition through its intelligence agency (Pamuk & Tattersall, 2015). In addition to training and arming opposition fighters, Turkey also deployed its own military operatives. The evidence of this type of intervention surfaced when in Feb 2012, pro-Assad forces announced the arrest of some 49 Turkey's military officers, which the Assad government tried to trade their release in Turkey for handing over FSA fighters, closing their training camps, and preventing militia infiltration (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2012).

Turkey's increasingly open support for the armed opposition prompted protest from Syrian authorities. "The Erdogan's government is fully responsible for the killing of tens of thousands of Syrians. It is responsible for the destruction of Syrian infrastructure. It is responsible for disturbing

regional stability, not that of Syria alone. It is clear that it intervened in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia and other countries in the region, and it dragged Turkey and its people into tensions and wars…," al-Assad decried (General Organization of Radio and TV-Syria, 2013a).

Turkey's support for the FSA proved effective. The Assad forces' hold on territory began to shrink rapidly throughout Syria in the north and the south, the east and the west. By late 2012, the FSA took control of major Syrian city centers and close in on the capital itself, Damascus. Turkey's objective of regime change in Syria seemed to have arrived within reach. The rapid military gains prompted Prime Minister **Erdogan** to prematurely announce that the toppling of the Assad regime was just a few days away. In a meeting with his party members, he expected, "Soon we will be in Damascus shortly; we will embrace our brothers and sisters there. That day is coming near… and we will also pray at Umayyad Mosque (in Damascus)" (Hurriyet, 2012). Thus, Turkey found in the civil war in its southern neighbor both a cause and an opportunity to move into it to bring about regime change and reshape its domestic order. Turkey's bid, however, would not go without competition. Another revisionist power was also about to move in pursuit of its ambition and on the opposite side of the civil war.

Expansion of Another Revisionist Power

Iran too did not wait long before initiating to expand into the civil war-torn Syria—a traditionally an ally state. Iran and the Assad's Syria had cultivated a relatively stable strategic relationship since their agreement over Lebanon in the late 1980s as a shared sphere of domination, as discussed in chapter four. For over two decades, the Islamic revolutionary Iran and the Ba'athist Syria had maintained close bilateral ties in the region. United in their mutual desire to bring about regional change, Iran and Syria had cultivated an enduring close ties. Al-Assad summed up the state of their bilateral relations when he remarked in 2008 that "the relations between the two countries are highly strong and solid.

The strategic ties between the two countries in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution did not come about simply as a result of an agreement between Imam **Khomeini** and President **Hafiz al-Assad**. Rather, their bond grew out of objective realities and common pasts. The two revisionist powers have cemented their strategic ties with various agreements.

The most recent step in that direction was signing an agreement for military cooperation in June 2006 "against common threats" (Tehran Times, 2006). More importantly still, beyond formal state-to-state declared mutual defense, they also sustained their bilateral operational cooperation. In Lebanon, the concentration point of their regional alliance, Iran and Syria continued their mutual military support for Hezbollah militant movement. For example, in November 2009, Israeli military officials announced that they had seized an arm shipment originated from Iran to Hezbollah via Syria (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009a). In brief, the revolutionary Iran and the pre-civil war Ba'athist Syria had built and maintained decades-long alliance despite the existence of inherent ideological incompatible—a rare exception of a stable alliance in a region of ever-shifting relations of amity and enmity.

The fall of the Syrian state into civil war put the relations between the two countries at a crossroad. The development presented Iran with both threat and opportunities simultaneously. As a threat, the failure of Syria potentially cost Iran the loss of the closest and only regional ally that could fall under the domination of another regional power—with Turkey being the most likely winner if its ally Sunni armed insurgency succeeded in toppling the Assad government. But also, the failure of the Syrian state also constituted a potential opportunity for Iran in order to expand its power into it and thereby turn its erstwhile ally state into a sphere of dominance. As the developments continued to evolve, Iran opted for the latter objective, not least to avert the former eventuality. Thus, it would intervene on the side of the Assad government. In this regard, Supreme Leader Khamenei vowed to support al-Assad's Syria by declaring that "the Islamic Republic of Iran will defend Syria for its support for the camp of struggle…" (Khamenei, 2012).

Given its public support and given their decades-long close ties, the Iran's military intervention in Syria could only have been anticipated. Similar to Turkey's approach, Iran's intervention in the war-engulfed Syria was also shrouded in secrecy. The Iran's tendency to maintain the covertness of its involvement was further enhanced by its indirectness. As it turned out later and as it was seen in other cases (in Iraq in particular), Iran started by deploying its Lebanese proxy forces of **Hezbollah** virtually as its boot on the ground. And its close cultural and social connections with Syria only helped Hezbollah to hide its battlefield role in Syria for quite a while into the war. At any rate, based on available data, Iran

started its involvement in Syria since the outbreak of the protest movement. At this point of the development, Iran's effort focused mainly on providing certain controlling techniques for the Syrian government in its crackdown on the mounting mass protests as such monitoring and policing equipment (Tisdall and Staff, 2011). How quickly Iran expanded its involvement in Syria from policing support to an active participant in the civil war remains unknown.

Yet, at least by mid-2012, it became an open secret that Iran had been an active party in the ongoing civil war through deploying Hezbollah fighters. In June, the commander of the **FSA** claimed that **Hezbollah** fighters were "involved in events inside Syria" in the fight against his forces (Daily Star, 2012). As the war escalated and casualties mounted, Iran's indirect military intervention in Syria became too extensive to remain covert. This is in particular when body bags of Hezbollah militants killed in the war began to return home with an increasing frequency in summer 2012. Hezbollah itself, unwilling to admit its participation in the bloody civil war across the border, persisted in maintaining its an approach of ambiguity and secrecy. However, soon, as the war began to cost the militant organization some of its high profile commanders, Lebanese media sources came out with confirmed reports on Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian civil war on the side of pro-Assad forces against the armed opposition (Nahar, 2012).

Although the militant organization of Hezbollah constituted the Iran's spearhead combat force in the failed state of Syria, it would not be the only Iran's foot soldiers in the war. Soon Iran bolstered its fighting power in Syria by forming a constellation of militia formations. Toward that end, Iran began to recruit fighters among Shia communities in various countries in the region such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan - virtually the mobilization of a multinational militia force along sectarian line conducted by its regional military operation forces of the Quds Forces of the Revolutionary Guards Corps. The second to Hezbollah forces were Shia militant groups from Iraq. As discussed in chapter five, Iran had supported the formation of several armed groups in Iraq including Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahluhaq, among others.

With its mission of expansion into Syria underway, Iran had new military assignments for its loyal militant fighters from Iraq. Similar to the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iran-linked Iraqi militia groups initially denied their deployment of fighters into the Syrian civil war. However, with

the rise of death tolls among their fighters, they too came to acknowledge that their fighters were indeed in Syria to perform "legitimate duty" (Yacoub, 2013). With their numerical size, which was believed to stand at around several thousands during the period (Syrian Reporter, 2016b), as well as years of fighting experience, the Iraqi Shia militias proved similarly instrumental in the Iran's war effort in the face of rapid advance of the Turkey-backed FSA. With their years of fighting experience from their home country, the Iraqi Shia militias particularly proved instrumental in the Iran's war effort in the face of rapid advance of the Turkey-backed FSA.

Besides, the Lebanese and Iraqi militia forces, Iranian authorities also recruited fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan, including among Shia refugees in Iran itself. For example, the World Human Rights Watch reported that Iran had "recruited thousands of undocumented Afghans living there (in Iran) to fight in Syria since at least November 2013..." (Human Rights Watch, 2016). By 2014, the size of the militias of Afghani origin in Syria swelled in number big enough to form a separate force under the name of the Fatemiyon Brigade (Syrian Reporter, 2015a). Similarly, according to Pakistani intelligence sources, between 2015 and 2017, "about 4,000 Shia pilgrims from Pakistan entered Iran and never came back" (Kakar, 2017). Later reports surfaced that Iran recruited them for the war in Syria when it formed yet another militia force for fighters of Pakistani origin under the name the Zainabiyoun Brigade (Syrian Reporter, 2015c). In the end, the Islamic Iran had effectively assembled a multi-national constellation of militia forces inside the war-torn Syria. There is no official data from Iranian or Syrian source on the exact size of those pro-Iran forces. However, according to some Syrian opposition source, by 2016 Iran had buttressed its forces in Syria by some 60,000 fighters including its own officers from it's the Quds Forces of Revolutionary Guard Corp (Syrian Reporter, 2016a).

In this manner, with tens of thousands of fighters effectively under its command in the country, Iran was on the verge of turning the failed state of Syria into part of its sphere of dominance. In this endeavor, saving al-Assad as the head of the government would be the immediate step. The long-term objective would go beyond that. But as a basic math of politics, if a party depends on another for its security or survival, it cannot act independently from it. Granting protection cultivates leverage. Therefore, for an ambitious power like Iran, the consideration of raison d'état can always propel the push to turn its protection into domination. For example, the

commander of the Revolutionary Guard claimed that his country's objective in Syria was not simply to keep President al-Assad in power. "The struggle in Syria is not for keeping Syrian President al-Assad in power; rather, the struggle will determine whether the struggle of the Islamic Revolution succeeds or fails" (Al-Alam, 2017). Another Iranian military general went further by basically turning the role al-Assad into merely an actor within Syria in the service of the Iran's broader regional strategy. "Bashar al-Assad is fighting on behalf of Iran and Iran is fighting to save him," a Revolutionary Guard commander boasted (Annahar, 2015). Still, a senior aide to Supreme Leader Khamenei suggested that Syria had become a new security frontier for his country. "If the enemy attacks us and wants to capture Syria or Khuzestan (a western Iranian province), the priority is for us to keep Syria, because if we keep Syria, we can take back Khuzestan, but if we lose Syria, we will not be able to protect Tehran," he explained (Student News Network, 2013). Regardless of the underlying motives, whether revolutionary crusade or national security requirement, the revolutionary Iran increasingly and rapidly expanded into Syria in the shadow of the embattled Assad government.

Balancing Against Expansion into Syria

The simultaneous expansion of the two regional powers assured the rise of power rivalry between them. In Syria, Turkey found in the anti-Assad insurgency an ally while the revolutionary Iran rushed to protect the embattled the Assad regime using its regional loyal militant formations such as the Lebanese **Hezbollah**, Iraqi militia groups mainly **Kataib Hezbollah,** and some other newly formed one. For Turkey, supporting the opposition was a venue to topple the Assad rule and bringing about a new Syria under the rule of an ally group; while Iran found in saving the reign of its traditional ally a pathway for establishing a power foothold in the country.

At the outset of the Syrian internal uprising, some attempts were made between Iran and Turkey to reach an agreement on the future of Syria. In this pursuit, Turkey sought to persuade Iran to cease its support for the Assad government. For example, in March 2012 Prime Minister Erdogan visited Iran to hold talks with Iranian officials on the unfolding crisis in Syria. "It is known that Iran's stance on Syria differs (from that of Turkey), was it possible at all to align views? Let's see, we are working on

it. It is now about to turn around. It would be premature to say anything before we hold meetings," Erdogan recognized (Daily Sabah, 2012a).

The attempts to reconcile their differences on Syria ended in failure as the two regional powers held on to their opposite goals. Therefore, slowly but increasingly, the two powers came to see each other as rival powers. From the Iranian perspective, Turkey was bent on a campaign of destabilization in the region in order to extend its power and political system into the neighboring countries in the region. For example, a senior assistant to the Iranian Supreme Leader **Khamenei** charged, "the Turks seek to present a secular model to the countries that have revolted in order to replace the model of the Islamic government of Iran… They are trying to destabilize the situation in Syria… Turkey wants to play a major role in various areas, politically and economically, in the Middle East … If Turkey's political leaders fail to clarify their foreign policy and relations with Iran, they will run into trouble…" (Hamshahri Online, 2011). Turkey shared Iran's antagonistic view. As mentioned in the case of Iraq, Turkey had been seeing Iran as a hegemonic power that embarked on extending its power across the Middle East, including in Syria. Public quarrels, thus, came to express their conflicting ambitions in the region, including Syria.

As the diplomatic option was eliminated, the two expanding powers pressed on backing opposite sides of their allies in the war. Now that war remained as the only recourse, the balance of fighting capabilities becomes the only arbiter of the power struggle. It soon became evident that the war was going rapidly in favor of the Turkey-backed alliance. For example, by late 2014 the Turkey-backed forces had reached the verge of total victory when they closed in on Damascus to the degree of proximity that the city center came within the range of their mortar fire (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2014). By spring 2015, the territorial gains of the opposition forces expanded so rapidly that even al-Assad came out to acknowledge the desperateness of the state of his military when he declared retreating pro-government forces from certain areas to bolster the defense of other areas closer to his power base, clearly to reverse the imminent fall of his remaining hold on power. "Sometimes, in some circumstances, we are forced to give up areas to move those forces to the areas that we want to hold onto… We must define the important regions that the armed forces hold onto so it doesn't allow the collapse of the rest of the areas," he admitted (Syrian News Agency, 2015).

With the looming defeat of its forces in Syria continued to grow, Iran began seeking outside military alliance. For this purpose, in October 2015, the Iran's regional military commander and the commander of the **Quds Forces** General Qasim Solemani visited Moscow during which he held a three-hour meeting with Russian officials including President Vladimir Putin (Defa Press, 2015). There is not much detail on the contacts. However, following the Iranian official's visit, President al-Assad was invited to meet with President Putin. In a communiqué issued after the meeting, Russia declared sending military assistance to Syria in order "to provide effective aids to the Syrian people in fighting the international terrorists who have unleashed a genuine war against Syria" (Kremlin, 2015).

Following its decision, Russia began pouring military forces into Syria for bolstering the struggling Assad-Iranian front against the Turkey-backed FSA. There was no much data on the quality or quantity of the Russian assistance. However, its major contribution turned out to the deployment of airpower According to Russian defense officials, by late 2015, Russia had stationed over 50 fighter jets in addition to other type of aircrafts such helicopters to the war-ravaged Syria (Russian Television, 2015). The Russian joining the Syrian war was a critical military relief for Iran. The Russian deployment of air force was exactly what Iran-led forces needed to secure a decisive battlefield advantage. Simultaneously, to seize upon the new gained advantage, Iran was able to further bolster its ground forces by deploying new batches of militia reinforcement in preparation to expand its ground campaigns (Syrian Reporter, 2015b). In a series of offenses in late 2016 and early 2017, the Assad-Iran forces drove out the FSA forces from around the capital and strategic western and southern areas. As a result, with Iran's cumulative victories the tide of the war began to turn against the Turkey-led forces from which they would never recover. For the first time in four years, the cause of toppling the Assad rule seemed doomed.

Now that the current of war had tipped in favor of its rival power, Turkey ratcheted up its efforts to make alliance to build counter force. Since the outset, Turkey's involvement in the Syrian war was backed by some regional states like the wealthy and tiny Qatar, as al-Assad revealed. However, now that Iran's war effort was strengthened by the far superior Russia, Turkey needed to build a stronger alliance. For this purpose, the revisionist Turkey approached the status quo Saudi Arabia, an improbable candidate, for alliance.

As a traditional status quo power that actively identified its strategic interests with the preservation of stability in the region, the Kingdom did not support regime change in Syria. Instead, consistent with its desire of maintaining regional stability, the Kingdom sought to secure regime continuity through political accommodation. In this sense, unlike Turkey, the Saudi government took a basically supportive position toward the Assad government. The Saudi head of Security Council Bandar bin Sultan later reflected on his country's position on the Syrian domestic uprising during its early period. He remarked:

> King Abdullah dispatched an envoy to meet Bashar (al-Assad) with a message that he should take some urgent political measures in order to defuse the situation before it went out of control. He (al-Assad) promised follow, but unfortunately he continued his repression. Then King Abdullah dispatched another envoy for the second time to warn Bashar of a continued deterioration of the situation. His response was that he understood what was going on and he would take necessary reform measures but suggested that the process requires economic reform and rank promotions within the army. Then King Abudllah sent him $200 millions in emergency aid to defuse the crisis and deal with political and economic issues. However, Bashar, with his incredible delusional min, thought that he was capable of deceiving everyone including his people; he accepted the aids without doing anything (of reform). (al-Ahmari, 2019)

Clearly, the Saudi's attempt to help al-Assad prevent the escalation through reform failed. Still, there is no evidence to indicate that the Kingdom immediately started intervening against the Assad government. As a measure of its heightened concern of the slide of the country into civil war, the Saudi government proposed the formation of "a collective of Arab and international forces for maintaining peace and security in Syria" (Al-Riyadh, 2012). The proposition was in line with the Kingdom's conventional method to deal with domestic conflicts in neighboring countries—first it was tried and failed in Lebanon in 1970s and it was discussed but never materialized in the case of Iraq after 2003.

However, the proposition of deploying a peace-making contingency force to Syria never saw light as the country rapidly descended into a full-blown civil war. The Saudi's non-intervention in the Syrian civil war in its initial period is corroborated by al-Assad himself when he revealed, "it was not until two years or little bit under two years (into the war) before Saudi Arabia intervened" (al-Mayadeen, 2013).

At any rate, following the recalibration of its calculation on Syria, by 2013 the Saudi's stance began to shift against al-Assad rule. The Kingdom gradually abandoned its position of non-intervention toward active, even if indirect, intervention by sending assistance for the FSA forces. The main explanation for such shift of the Kingdom's strategy can be found in the Iran's expansion into the failed state of Syria. Iran had historically constituted the most proximate security worries for the Saudi government. As discussed in the previous chapter, Iran's influence through the backing of the Houthi Movement had already effectively arrived on the Saudi borders. Now by expanding into war-torn Syria, Iran took the Saudi's regional threat perception into a new level. Considering the Iran's role in Syria as tantamount to outright occupation, the Kingdom felt the urgency of conducting a balancing intervention against the revolutionary Iran through backing the anti-Iranian forces. "The Kingdom considers Iran's and Lebanese Hezbollah's intervention in Syria a threat that should not go without response… This intervention is nothing less an occupation of the Syrian territory…," Saudi foreign minister charged (Al-Riyadh, 2013).

Historically, one of the Saudi's regional chief objectives toward Syria has been to decouple it from its close ties with Iran, or at least not to push al-Assad to further into Iran's orbit. Therefore, the Kingdom disapproved of the West's tightening screw too much on the Syrian government. For example, during American punitive economic sanctions against Syria due to its support for Iraqi Sunni insurgency during 2000s, then Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faysal warned US officials of potential counter-productivity of those measures because he believed, "the more Syria feels isolated, the more it will strengthen its ties with Iran" (Wiki Leaks, 2009). From the Saudi perspective, such ties would only serve Iran's objectives more. This Saudi position was confirmed by Syrian officials. Al-Assad later revealed, "several states including Saudi Arabia proposed (to cut ties with Iran), not only in the outset of the (civil) war but during various periods. They proposed that if Syria cut ties with Iran, the situation in Syria will return to normal. But we rejected the proposition" (Al-Alam, 2018).

Now, that the expansionist Iran had extended its power into Syria with Assad's invitation, the Saudi government had come to consider the Assad regime as virtually an enabling actor of the Iran's power ambition. Therefore, in order to remove Iran from Syria, the Assad regime might have to be removed too. King Abdullah assigned the Saudi's head of intelligence service, Bandar Bin Sultan, to lead a covert operation of delivering arm supplies and logistical support from the Kingdom's as well as

from other countries to anti-Assad-Iran's armed groups (Usborne, 2013). Thus, by mid-2013 the Saudi-delivered weapons became an established fact. For example, in June 2013, reports came out that **FSA** fighters had indeed received arm shipments from the Kingdom including heavy weapons (Bakr, 2013). In brief, by 2013, the Kingdom had become indirectly active military participant in the Syrian civil war against Assad-Iran forces.

With the Saudi's shift of policy from accommodating al-Assad to supporting the Syrian armed opposition, the condition for alignment began to emerge between the status quo Saudi Arabia and the revisionist Turkey to jointly work out a balancing intervention into the civil war-ravaged Syria—a cooperation which had only become more urgent by their mutual fear of the Iran's growing relative power gain in Iraq and Yemen, as discussed in previous chapters. To be sure, since the outbreak of anti-regime protests in the region, the strategic divergence between Saudi Arabia and Turkey had come to the open, even if officially unpronounced. The Islamic-leaning AKP Turkey emerged as the regional backer of the transformations, while the conservative Kingdom took more defensive with a counter-change tendency. This divergence became more manifest in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood Movements, relatively the leading force within the political upheavals. Turkey embraced the movement where it succeeded in gaining power as was the case in Egypt where Turkey found the prospects of alliance. In a speech in Cairo in September 2012, for example, Turkey's foreign minister promised, "we will build a new Middle East in cooperation with Egypt…" (Daily Sabah, 2012b). In contrast to this Turkey's position, Saudi Arabia openly embraced the subsequent military coup against the Brotherhood government in Cairo (Al-Arabiya, 2013). Not only that, it took unprecedented step when in March 2014 it officially designated the movements a terrorist group on the same footing as the Houthi Movement of Yemen.

Still, for a while it seemed that the two Sunni powers had transcended their strategic differences for countering the immediate threat from Iran. The hallmark of this development was the formation of the Strategic Cooperation Council in December 2015. The purpose of council was to work as a governing body for cooperation and coordination in various areas: security, military, economy, trade, energy, and investment, according to the final declaration (Daily Sabah, 2015). On the question of Syria, a focal point of their alliance, the two sides agreed that the Assad's step down was the only way to end the civil war. Toward

that end, while Turkey sustained its military support for the FSA, the Kingdom was now to contribute with further military assistance to the armed opposition in coordination with Turkey. By fall 2015, the supply of weapons by the Kingdom to Syrian insurgency had "intensified in an unprecedented way," according to reports from Syria (Bassam & Perry, 2015). Thus, the stated alignment between the two Sunni regional powers seemed to have set an operational ground to balance the Shia Iran in Syria.

Israel's Assertive Balancing

It was the status quo power of Israel that came out as the most assertive balancing interventionist power in the failed state of Syria. As waves of mass protests began to destabilize domestic politics in various countries in the region, the Israeli leadership grew in concern that the development might eventually create conditions for regional expansionism. Now that its neighboring country to the north had become a ground for regional power play, the situation acquired more urgency for Israel. To be clear, Israel became alarmed by the outbreak of anti-Assad protests since the outset—given the potential of instability that it carried. "We are closely monitoring what is happening (in Syria) … and we are prepared for any possible development," the prime minister declared (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012a).

Over the prior four decades, Israel and Syria had been in what could be called the passive state of hostility; there was no war between them, but no peace deal had been struck either. However, practically the frontline remained frozen given the military edge that Israel had maintained over the war defeated Syria. Now, the specter of having Syria falling into the control of an assertive expansionist power like Iran threatened to unfrozen the state of war. And as Iran built up a growing military foothold in the war-torn Syria, this Israeli worst worry of having the neighboring Syria taken over by an actively enemy power was closer to become an actual threat. "Iran is expanding its activities in Syria as we speak. Just today, thousands of Iranian soldiers arrived in Syria, not far from our northern border…," Prime Minister **Netanyahu** warned (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). The Israeli sense of security threat from the revisionist Iran had already been established even prior to the Syrian war. As discussed in chapter four, through forming and supporting the militant organization of Hezbolah, Iran had well established a power foothold

in Lebanon on the border with Israel whose destruction had long been part of the Iran's regional design since the rise of the Islamic Republic to power following the 1979 revolution. Practically, Hezbollah had been engaging the Jewish state with recurring limited wars since 1990s. Now that Iran was seeking to add Syria to its sphere of regional power foothold only heightened the Israeli sense of insecurity. Therefore, to abort a similar eventuality in Syria, Israel began preparing for balancing intervention. "We will not allow that regime (Iran) to entrench itself militarily in Syria," Israeli leader affirmed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Soon, Israel translated its heightened insecurity into counter intervention. Given the Israel's ambiguity in conducting its approach, it is hard to determine the exact starting date or full scale of its activities in the Syrian civil war. Still, as in similar cases of covert military operations, the Israeli military involvement did not stay secret for long. The first reported Israeli military action in Syria occurred in January 2013 when a military site near Damascus was bombed, which was suspected of being used by pro-Iran forces for weapon manufacturing (Yacoub Oweis, 2013). Although in line with its ambiguity approach Israel remained quiet, the suspicion grew that Israeli military stood behind the recurring airstrikes on Iranian positions in Syria. The suspicion was only boosted by tacit admission by some Israeli officials. For example, in a remark on the Iranian ongoing expansion into the failed state of Syria, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister alluded to his country's responsibility for the attack when he stated, "I cannot add anything to what you have read in the newspapers about what happened in Syria several days ago. But I keep telling frankly that we said—and that's another proof when we say something, we mean it…" (Munich Security Conference, 2013). It was Iran itself that openly removed the doubts when it declared that its forces had been targeted by Israeli airstrikes, when the head of its National Security Council vowed that "the regime (Israel) would regret the attack on Damascus, as it did in Lebanon," in reference to Hezbollah's attacks on Israeli territory from in Lebanon (Al-Alam, 2013).

The bombings proved to be the beginning of Israeli military countermeasures against pro-Iran forces in Syria. Their military bases, arm depots, high profile commanders, logistical facilities, and transportation routes all became open targets for Israeli airpower. One major target was arm shipments to and from Syria. An example of such attack occurred in May 2016 when Israeli fighter jets struck a convoy of weapons on its way from Syria to Lebanon by **Hezbollah** operatives (Jerusalem Post, 2016). In other

instances, it was high profile military commanders that became targets. A prominent example was the killing of Allah Dadi, a general of the Revolutionary Guard, in an air-raid in 2015. Concomitantly with the consistent Iran's effort to secure a power foothold in Syria, Israel also sustained it's counteract of bombing campaign to disrupt the attempt.

Climax of the Power Struggle

At this writing, the Syrian civil war seemed to have reached a state of stalemate, which is induced by a combination of equilibrium and exhaustion. The Assad-Iran camp has regained the military upper-hand by removing the armed opposition from most part of the Syrian territory. The armed opposition has survived, however. Both Iran and Turkey keep seeking to consolidate their respective sphere of dominance in certain areas. Iran continues to concentrate its weight in that area that extended from Iraqi-Syrian border in the east to southwest on Syrian Lebanese border.

As mentioned in chapter five, the Iran's aim is to secure a corridor from its territory to Syria and Lebanon by using Iraq as its land-bridge. In this design, the pro-Iran Iraqi militias such as **the Kataib Hezbollah** played a vital role. With a fighting force of around 10,000 militiamen, those groups lead the Iran's effort to establish a military silk road-like route from Iranian border through Iraqi territory on to southeast Syria (Dehghanpisheh, 2017). A critical station in this route from Iraq into Syria is the Syrian border town of al-Bu Kamal which has effectively become a distribution center of shipments of men and weapons coming via Iraq (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2021). While it has not relinquished its ambition in other parts of Syria such as Damascus, Iran has concentrated its military buildup in this spot inside Syria. To turn its military presence into permanent political rule, Iran started working on extending its state culture in areas under its military control through establishing and financing educational institutions such as schools and universities with the aim of spreading "Shisim" among the non-Shia local population (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2019b). In other words, Iran attempted to localize its external military intervention in Syria through cultural assimilation of local population into its official ideology. The consummation of this endeavor has been the emergence the Syrian franchise of Hezbollah, or of **the Syrian Hezbollah** whose formation was pronounced by commanders of the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in early 2015 (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2015c),

even though it was not officially pronounced, evidently awaiting further preparations.

Accordingly, Iran, thereby, found a similar opportunity in the failed state of Syria to replicate the experiment. According to Syrian source, the organization, with around 5 thousand fighters under its command of Syrias and also naturalized Iranians and Iraqis, operated under the direct leadership of the Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (Al-Khaleej Online, 2015). At this writing there is not much detailed evidence on the operation and size of this pro-Iran militant organization in Syria. At this writing, the formation or operations of the organization has not yet enjoyed official declaration and has received little publicity as a separate armed organization. Some Syrian source attributed the absence of such an official declaration to objections by the Assad regime on account of concern over the Hezbollah's "religious ideology and the potential threat that it poses to its (Al-Assad rule's) future" (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2015a). Although the nascent Syrian Hezbollah still remained largely out of public notice, some Iranian officials went public in welcoming its formation. For example, the former Iranian Minister of Intelligence Hujjatul Islam Muslahi went public in applauding the accomplishment when he said "today we are in a situation where… in addition to Hezbollah in Lebanon, another Hezbollah has been formed in Syria…" (Mehr News, 2015). In this account, by founding a branch of Hezbollah in the war-torn Syria, Iran had succeeded in adding one more armed organization to its military arsenal for its regional operations, in addition to laying the ground for long-term power base in the failed state of Syria.

Turkey further aggrandized its sphere of dominance since 2016; and this time through carrying out direct deployment of its army in an increasingly expansive campaign of incursion and occupation. Since the intervention of Russia on the side of the Assad-Iran front, Turkey-backed FSA forces had been in a constant retreat. To compensate for its loss in anti-Assad-Iran front, Turkey opted for moving into territorial spots of areas outside of the Assad-Iran-Russian dominium: areas held by the Kurdish forces of the People's Protection Units in the north and northeast of the country. In preparation for the operations, Turkey demanded the exclusion of the Kurdish forces-held territory from the ongoing ceasefire in Syria which had been worked out between the two powers in Syria (Hurriyet Daily News, 2016). With the collaboration of its Syrian militant ally groups of the FSA, Turkey carried out at least three large-scale military invasions into Syria during the period 2015–2020, each time

expanded its area of control by several miles in collaboration with FSA fighters as its boots on the ground.

As pro-Turkey FSA forces proved unable to withstand the Assad-Iranian assaults backed by Russian airpower, Turkey itself decided to act directly in order to secure a power foothold inside Syria by deploying its own regular army. By 2019, it had reinforced its power position in Syria by the deployment of nearly 10 thousand soldiers backed up by heavy weapons (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2019a). In spite of its failure to bring about regime change, the Turkey's objective in Syria remained essentially unchanged. "Bashar Assad is a terrorist who leads state terror, and it is not possible to work on a solution in Syria with him," Erdogan reiterated in 2017 (Daily Sabah, 2017). Now that the civil war has reached its climax, achieving regime change in Syria seems remote. Yet, with years of military involvement and political investment in the Syrian civil war, it is unlikely that Turkey will pull out its troops and influence; at least not as long as Iran maintains its strong foothold in there. Seeing Syria as a gateway to the heart of the Middle East, Turkey is expected to hold on to its power base in its war-devestated neighbor.

On its part, Israel has turned its airstrikes on Iran-linked positions inside Syria basically into routine military acts. With the success of its frequent bombing campaign against Iranians in Syria, Israel came out more open in admitting its responsibility. For example, in June 2018, Netanyahu officially recognized that his country had indeed been bombing Iran-linked forces in Syrian when he asserted, "Obviously we are not going to let them do it. We'll fight them… and we have bombed the bases of these Shi'ite militias…" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). With this admission of responsibility, more information became available. According to Israeli military source during 2017–2018 alone Israel bombed more than "200 Iranian targets in Syria" (Ari Gross, 2018). Determined to abort the Iran's expansion into Syria, the status quo Israel has racheted up its bombing campaigns. In November 2020 alone Israel carried out eight strikes on facilities of Iran's Quds Forces as "a message to Iran to leave the country," as the army declared (Ari Gross, 2020). Although Israeli balancing operation has not succeeded in removing Iran-linked forces from Syria, it has incurred increasingly heavy costs to the Iran's project in there.

As in regard to Saudi Arabia, it clearly abandoned its short-sought plan for regime change against al-Assad. Consequently, the Saudi support

for Turkey against Iran proved short-lived. Although the Saudi government aimed to abort the Iran's attempt to establish its power in Syria, the specter of having Syria fallen to the hands of a Turkey-backed party of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, a movement which the Kingdom had already designated a terrorist organization, should have equally worried it too. The Kingdom had evidently been quietly but growingly suspicious of the Erdogan's Turkey regional moves. As of this writing, not much evidence is available to demonstrate this Saudi's inner unease. What is known now is that the outspoken Saudi Crown Prince **Mohammed Bin Salman** expressed such a sentiment when he compared Turkey to Iran in that both being part of the same "triangle of evil", charging it of harboring an expansionist ambition for restoring its Ottoman Empire (Hussein, 2018). The crown prince's statement was evidently a disclosure of the Kingdom's long-held but unpronounced fear from the Turkey's championing of regional transformation and support for the Brotherhood Movement—a hidden concern which also recoiled the kingdom from providing critical assistance for regime change in the failed state of Syria.

Instead of regime change, the kingdom tried to bring about policy change in Syria. The Kingdom went back to its conventional policy of encouraging the Assad government to decouple itself from its traditional ally the revisionist Iran in one form or another. For example, during an unannounced meeting with the Chief of the Syrian National Security Ali al-Mamlouk in Saudi Arabia in August 2015, Saudi officials offered a deal to the Assad government according to which the Kingdom asked "as the first condition the withdrawal of Iran and its affiliated Shia militant forces in return for halting its (**Saudi Arabia**) support for the opposition" (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2015b). Along the same policy line, the Kingdom presented a peace paper to factions within the FSA as a roadmap for ending the civil war in the country. The settlement proposal outlined five major points: the continuation of al-Assad in power for a transition period of 18 months with the right of reelection, preserving the state security institutions, disarming groups including in Idlib Province, and cooperation between the FSA forces and the Syrian state army in the fight on "terrorism" (BBC, 2017). A key word in this proposition was allowing President Assad to remain in power during the transition period with the right of running for reelection in post-transition period, and integrating the armed opposition forces into the national army. The Saudi's

peace plan has not met an immediate materialization. For one, the Assad government can no longer commanded the ability to act independently from Iran, its main protector, let alone to work for removing its power influence from its territory. Still, the attempt indicated the return of the Kingdom to its initial approach of balancing to counter-expansion into the country: helping and pressing the regime to resolve the sources of domestic conflict in the country, not pushing for regime change.

This approach seemed to have been advocated by the status quo Egypt as a course of balancing intervention. To be sure, during this period Egypt itself had been rocked by domestic political and economic instability caused by a double regime change: the first one of Mubarak in 2011 and of the second one was the short-lived one of the Muslim Brotherhood (2012–2013). However, Egypt began to restore a relative state stability slowly. Expectedly, therefore, Egypt had been particularly alarmed by the disintegration of domestic order in various Arab countries and the communal conflict and external interventions that accompanied it. To prevent or reverse the spread of state failure trend, Egypt proposed an Arabic collective intervention in the form of the deployment of a contingency force from Arab states to help restore peace to Syria and settle its conflict. In this respect, Egyptian President Abdul-Fatah al-Sisi "There is an urgent need for cooperation and coordination on the basis of an Arab vision in order to save Syria and the security of the region… through forming a collective Arab force to be deployed in accordance with the charters and principles of the UN and the Arab League in full respect to the sovereignty and independence of the Arab states" (Ahram Gate, 2015). In this context, the Egyptian government called for the removal of all foreign forces from Syria and reconstituting its national authority (State Information Service, 2016). Moreover, the Egyptian government started pushing for readmitting the Assad government into the Arab fold, the Arab League. As a practical step toward that end, the chief of Syrian national security was officially received in Cairo for reestablishing security and political coordination between the two countries (Reuters Staff, 2016). Still, whether Egypt actively intervened in the Syrian conflict remains uncertain. According to some source, Egypt deployed at least one unit of military pilots to the Hama Airbase to work with Assad-backed forces, reportedly as the forefront of a larger military deployment to the country (Bilut, 2016). Beyond this piece of information, there is sufficient much material evidence at this writing to draw a definite

conclusion on an Egypt military intervention into Syria. Yet, given the Egypt's official policy of supporting the Syrian state as an intervention approach to counteract regional expansion into the country, such a military assistance cannot be ruled out. Indeed, a consensus seems to have emerged among the status quo powers, mainly between the two Arab ones (Egypt and Saudi Arabia) that seeks to help the Syrian state restore its central authority, as both a less risky and more realistic approach in order to enable the country to pull itself out from regional expansion and domination.

To conclude, the failure of the Syrian state following its civil war drew four regional powers into it with conflicting or counteracting objectives. Turkey moved in to topple al-Assad regime in order to enable its ally forces to take over, Iran rushed to save the head of al-Assad regime under its shadow it gradually established a power base, Saudi Arabia moved in to remove Iran's expansion through targeting the Assad's regime, and Israel countered Iran's expansion Iran's power expansion through direct military targeting. At this writing, the regional struggle over the failed state of Syria is not over yet. Turkey is on the defensive in its sphere of dominance in the north directly through using its army as well as indirectly through its allies of militants within the FSA; on its part, Iran keeps enforcing its own sphere of dominance in the east and south with continuous deployment of men and weapon. The power struggle over Syria is far from over. Lately, the two sides worked out some agreement on creating "de-escalation zones" (Russian News Agency, 2017). The agreement on de-escalation, however, did not terminate the fighting altogether. Each one of those powers attempts to expand its respective spheres of power wherever and whenever possible.

The failed state of Syria remains a battleground of struggle over the regional balance of power among the region's major players. Now that the war seems to have reached its climax, the struggle is likely to continue by other means besides military force, including economic and financial resources. According to the United Nations, the now eight-year long civil war has caused over $442 billion damage to the resource-poor Syria (United Nations, 2020). Thus, in the course of the regional struggle, the Ba'athist Syria has been reduced into its former shell. Economically devastated, territorially divided, military dismembered, and nationally fragmented, a Syria with or without al-Assad has no real potential to recover and rebuild itself in any near future.

The power struggle is not over yet, but the war has produced its own winners and losers. Iran has successfully and growingly solidified its power foothold in the country. Turkey's power foothold has shrunk, but is still holding on to it. Israel has sustained its disruptive air campaign to reverse the power expansion of its regional archenemy, Iran. Saudi Arabia, still overwhelmingly preoccupied by its counter-expansion military intervention in Yemen against the Iran-backed Houthi ruling group in Yemen, might relaunch attempts to balance Iran in Syria, mostly likely through employing its economic and financial resources. In this sense, the failed state of Syria is likely to remain frozen in a perpetual state of fracture, pushed and pulled by competition among the regional powers.

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Conclusion and Final Remarks

One major conclusion can be drawn from the analyses is that in the past six decades failed states, states that experienced the breakdown of central monopoly over the means of organized violence represented by the outbreak of domestic armed conflict have become contested power values between revisionist powers and status quo ones in the Middle Eastern balance of power system. The revisionist powers, in their bid to increase their power values within the regional system or to dominate the whole system, carried out expansionist intervention into those states; those expansionist attempts were countered by balancing intervention from the status quo powers which seek to preserve their power values within the system.

To begin with, not all states acted according to the interests of their pronounced grand strategies in every case of state failure; yet, the available data demonstrate that as a general pattern the majority of them did in most of the cases. Nearly every revisionist power act upon its power preferences: they all initiated expansionist intervention into at least one failed state at any particular period. When Yemen failed in 1962 following the republican military coup, the Pan-Arab Egypt moved into the country by deploying its regular army on the side of the coup government. Similarly, when Lebanon descended into state failure in 1975 as a result of the outbreak of communal war, the Ba'athist Syria moved in with a full-scale military expansion. Later, following its transformation into a revisionist power after the 1979 revolution, Iran also initiated its own expansionist

intervention into the country through forming the Hezbollah. When Iraq declined into failure as the externally conducted regime change in 2003, various neighboring revisionist powers moved into it. The revolutionary Iran proved the most successful in its expansionist intervention into Iraq through cultivating alliance with local militant parties as well as forming new ones. Still, other regional revisionist powers also joined the competition to different degrees and during different periods. The Ba'athist Syria made its own expansionist attempts through backing the Ba'ath Party-Sunni insurgency until around 2011. By 2015, the AKP Turkey also expanded into Iraq through direct military intervention, mainly into the strategic province of Nineveh, close to its borders. As Yemen progressively descended into state failure beginning in 2004 and 2009 following the outbreak of the Houthi-led insurgency and civil unrest that climaxed in 2014, the revolutionary Iran through its alliance with the Houthi Movement successfully extended its power reach into the country. Finally, when it dramatically dissolved into state failure following the eruption of mass protest that escalated into armed insurgency in 2011, Syria too became a target of regional expansionist intervention from both Iran and Turkey through a combination of deploying their armies and supporting their respective local ally and proxy forces on the opposite side of the war.

Further support for this general pattern comes from the cases in which the grand power strategy shifted from one type to the other. For example, as a revisionist state under President Nasser, the Pan-Arab Egypt initiated expansion into Yemen; however, when Sadat shifted it to status quo after 1970, a strategic transformation that maintained by the succeeding rulers, Egypt avoided any expansionist intervention in any subsequent cases of state failure. The case of Iran offers an example of the opposite. As a status quo power under the Shah, Iran avoided expansionist intervention in Yemen and also in Lebanon until 1979. However, it shifted revisionist under Imam Khomeini following the 1979 revolution, a strategic transformation that maintained by his successor, the revolutionary Iran initiated expansionist intervention into every case of state failure: Lebanon (after 1979), Iraq, Yemen, and Syria. Similarly, Turkey is another example of this strategic shift from status quoism to revisionism. As a status quo power, albeit a passive one, status quo Kemalism Turkey avoided intervention in failed states. However, with the ascension of the Islamic-leaning AKP to power under President Erdogan in 2001, Turkey began gradually and progressively to transform into an active revisionist regional power, particularly since 2011. Accordingly, it expanded into at least two of the three

cases of state failure of the period: Iraq and Syria. In brief, these examples illustrate that a shift in grand strategy from one type to the other leads to correspondent change of intervention approach toward failed states. Therefore, the transformation from status quoism to revisionism alters the approach from non-expansion to expansion.

Unlike revisionist states, not all status quo states acted upon the provision of their grand strategy, i.e. conducting balancing. To illustrate, the Egypt's direct expansion into Yemen was counteracted with balancing intervention from the neighboring status quo Saudi Arabia in which two other status quo powers (Iran and Israel) also participated. Yet, the status quo Turkey stayed out of the struggle. The Syria's expansion into Lebanon was met with balancing intervention from the status quo Israel across the border. Yet, other status quo powers effectively stayed out in the conflict. True, Saudi Arabia involved mostly economically but also politically for ending the communal conflict which was the root cause of its state failure. Still, the Saudi involvement does not seem to clearly qualify as a balancing intervention. There is no evidence of a Saudi government's pursuit of a decided attempt to remove the Syrian expansion from Lebanon during the war, even though if it had succeeded, its economic-political assistance for the Lebanese government could have gradually helped to pave the ground for an ultimate Syrian removal from the country. It should be added that in the later decades, the kingdom would build a close alliance with one of the Lebanon's major political component, namely the Sunni party led by Rafiq al-Hariri, to counter Iran-Syrian power in the country which is beyond the scope of this study.

Another clear example of status quo intervention is in the case of Iraq. The Iran's expansion into the country after 2003 through certain Shia militant factions was counteracted by balancing intervention from Saudi Arabia. Still, other status quo powers largely avoided involvement. Israel would also act to check Iran's power in Iraq, but it came late and remained limited. Similarly, the Iran's indirect expansionist intervention on the back of the Houthi insurgency in Yemen was checked by direct balancing intervention from the neighboring status quo Saudi Arabia. The status quo Egypt also participated to some extent and for a period in the Saudi-led counteraction. However, there is no evidence of an Israel balancing intervention in Yemen. Syrian case seems to be the most intervened case of state failure compared to other case. Not only both revisionist powers of the period (the revolutionary Iran and the AKP Turkey) expanded into it, but also almost all status quo powers

conducted balancing intervention in one way or another at some point. Israel conducted direct balancing intervention (using air force). Saudi Arabia tried indirect balancing intervention, first in support of the government, then later in support of the insurgency, aiming at the Iran's growing expansion into the country. Even the status quo Egypt, not least in view of its unequivocal public support for the Syrian state, there is a strong reason to conclude that it at least tried to intervene on the side of the government to balance against the expansionist intervention into the country, even though the material evidence available at this point remains sparse.

Given the stated prediction of the relevant hypothsis, this inconsistency in balancing intervention on the part of the status quo powers warrants some discussion. In most cases, there seem to be two types of status quo states: passive status quo and pro-status quo. While the latter actively defends the existing power distribution, the former simply prefers its preservation without necessarily committing to its defense. One major factor that seems to account for this outcome is geographic proximity (the most constant in international relations). Location seems to play a determining effect on whether a status quo state conducts balancing intervention or not. In every case of expansion, it is the status quo state with a shared border with the target failed state that acted more consistently against the expansion. Thus, this finding confirms the known connection between geographic proximity and threat intensity: the closer the source of the threat the bigger the threat projection. Domestic economic-political strength also plays a determining effect. An economically weak or politically divided status quo state tends to be less likely to commit to a balancing intervention than a strong or stable state. Buckpassing, the policy of staying aside while others shoulder the cost of balancing, can also account for the irregularity of balancing by status quo states. For example, when the status quo state A both shows asserted resolve and possesses considerable resources for counteracting a particular expansion, the status quo state B or C finds no urgency to commit itself for balancing at least not until the status quo state A is defeated, even if its capabilities and resources afford it.

Another conclusion can be drawn is that revisionist states also balance against each other when they expand into the same failed states unless and until they reach an agreement on dividing or sharing its power values. This pattern can be detected in three of the cases: Lebanon (1975–1989), Iraq (2003–2020), and Syria (2011–2020). In the first case, the expansion of the Ba'athist Syria and the revolutionary Iran, the former through

direct military intervention and the latter later on through the formation of Hezbollah militant organization, eventually led to military confrontation between the sides, mainly through their respective ally militant forces in the country. The clashes continued with varying degree of intensity until the two revisionist powers reached an agreement to accommodate each other's power shares in the war-torn country. In the second case, the mutual expansion into Syria and Iraq brought the two revisionist powers of Iran and Turkey into clashes, again mainly indirectly. In particular, their balancing was intense over Syria where each side committed heavily to their respective strategic design; Iran sought to carve out its own power foothold under the shadow of the Assad regime, while Turkey pressed for toppling the regime. Similarly but to lower degree, the two revisionist powers also struggled over Iraq. After 2014, the simultaneous growth of the Iran's power extension into Iraq following the formation of the paramilitary forces of the PMF, and Turkey's expansion into the country from the north, primarily to the strategic Province of Nineveh in the northwest of the country, brought the two revisionist powers into the brink of, if not actual, balancing. The fact that the Turkey sphere of domination remained limited in reach to the north while the Iran's to the south, the east, and, later, to the west of the country was the main reason that their power competition did not grow into an open clashes, similar to the case of Syria. In the final analysis, the fact that revisionist powers share the interests of altering the established regional order does not mean they combine to bring about the changes or agree on the form of the alternative order. Each revisionist power seeks to remake the new regional order according to its own design.

Last but not less important, in almost all cases the would-be expanding states made persistent diplomatic-political overture to build close ties with the target states prior to the occurrence of state failure. The Egypt's policy toward Yemen before 1962, the Ba'athist Syria's policy toward Lebanon before 1975, the revolutionary Iran's policy toward Iraq before 2003 and toward Yemen before 2004, and the Iran's and Turkey's policies toward Syria before 2011 are all instances of expressed demonstration of interests by revisionist states in building close bilateral ties with pre-state failure countries through various security, economic, or cultural-ideological fields. This pattern means that the revisionist states had already sought to extend their influence into those countries in one way or the other. Therefore, it can be explained as a support to the claim made in

chapter one that the occurrence of state failure creates merely opportunity power expansion, it does not make states revisionist by itself. That is, the occurrence state failure is only a facilitating context for power expansionism, not its original cause.

These power struggles for failed states inevitably produce winners and losers; but it is the failed states themselves, by becoming contested power values within the regional play of power, that pay a high cost. They predictably suffer long-term erosion of their state capacity and, thereby, overall empirical sovereignty. For one, a historical rule of power relations is that expanding states are unlikely to pull out voluntarily short of decisive military defeats. The case of Yemen (1962–1970) falls into this comparatively lucky category when it effectively broke free from regional power struggle when the expanding power, Nasser's Egypt, exited it following its defeat in 1967 war with Israel, which in turn persuaded the leading balancing power, Saudi Arabia, to withdraw as well. Otherwise, expanding states commonly resist any push toward giving up their domination or power foothold in the target failed state(s). Even if their troops are forced out of the country, they might still be able to leave behind leverages of power to exert political-military influence over the politics of the country. This is particularly in the presence of ideological-cultural ties between the expanding state(s) and local-societal forces in the target state. The continuation of the expansion means, in turn, the continuation of balancing by the status quo states. Thus, the target failed states become trapped in the game of regional power struggle, even long after the end or cessation of active domestic war. In this context, their resources including territories, the form of their political systems, their external alignments and alliance memberships might all remain targets as manipulable or obtainable power values in the struggle for regional balance of power among those intervening powers.

If the main assumption in international relations literature about the state is its unitariness, the long-term reality of those failed states is the state of fracture: a state of chronic political-institutional fragmentations. In all of the five cases discussed in this book, the states were all more or less in control of their territories and sovereign decisions before their fall into state failure. More tangibly, there were no organized militant organizations within their territory before their failure. They might not have been strong states; nevertheless, they were variably "hard" in control. However, having become contested power vacuums, their prospect of

reconstitution of the authority of monopoly over the means of organized violence—the primary precondition to the recovery of its empirical sovereignty—remains distant. In this sense, state fracture is the continuation of state failure. It is a stabilization or institutionalization of state failure. Fractured states display certain characteristics. In a fractured state, the national government including its political-constitutional structure might formally be in place; yet, it is either dictated or, at least, penetrated by external powers either directly through their own military presence, or indirectly through ally or proxy forces on the ground. Each intervening power constantly tries to ensure that the government does not make a decision or take a position counter to its preferences or interests in the country or broadly regionally. In the pulls and pushes of contending external powers, institutional paralyses become a regular occurrence. Often, ending a governmental-institutional deadlock is contingent on a regional rapprochment.

More critically, national army may exist and even be formally in control; still, its authority and order are commonly and systematically challenged or even resisted. A peace might have been restored, but the former combatants more or less keep their forces. They continue to operate practically outside of the control of the central authority, if not totally against its order. The use of violence, actual or potential, remains the face of politics. The war lords may have rebranded their factions' names, but they do not disband them. The political weight of each party is not necessarily determined by the size of electoral constituency but by their individual military strength, which is reinforced by their respective external backers. Thus, the hallmark of this condition is the persistent inability of the central government to reimpose its monopoly over the means of organized violence given its lack of power to dissolve or disarm the war-era militant forces. Political disagreements can easily and recurrently spill over into street protests and even escalate into violence as a venue for settling the disputes. As a result, domestic order remains chronically uncertain and unpredictable, which also generates broader socioeconomic repercussions.

Since foreign policy is the extension of domestic politics, a state that is unable to reestablish effective central authority over its territory as its supreme organizing power is also unlikely to be able to restore its independence in foreign policy realm. The failure to overcome political-institutional fragmentations means that the central authority continues to be rivaled by contending local power actors, often linked to and backed

by intervening states. Therefore, a fractured state finds it sovereign decisions and preferences, for example entering into security-military treaties, become mandated or, at least restricted, by the intervening states. Even, its decisions on matters of war and peace could well be coerced, in one or the other, by those states. Under such a situation, the fractured state virtually becomes informal sphere of dominance. For example, its territory could be effectively turned into a frontline by the intervening states in a regional war, in disregard of neutrality or objections from its central authority.

As discussed in chapter one and demonstrated in empirical chapters, failed states fall to domestic disorder and wars and they might even experience a complete breakdown of their central governments; still, they do not die. This follows that they will, at least theoretically, stand a chance to recover from their failure to become institutionally functioning and politically soverign bodies once again. However, when a failed state becomes a contested power value between revisionist and status quo powers, its chance of recovering its sovereignty over its territory and policies remains low. This continuation of regional power struggle, in turn, tends to create regional security volatility with constant possibility of escalation into full-scale wars among the involved powers. As a bottom line, unless a new regional consensus is reached among the statesmen of the major powers, by adjusting or reordering the existing system, those failed states remain battlegrounds in the struggle for preserving or remaking the existing balance of power.

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