Democracy and Autocracy

IN THIS ISSUE

Editor's Introduction

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When the Arab Uprisings began in the early 2010s, many scholars pointed to domestic factors. Local grievances animated sweeping protests against governments' failure to provide economic opportunities and protect citizens from police abuse. Domestic constraints of political economy and state capacity influenced how leaders responded to such protests, ranging from access to oil revenue to control over a loyal security apparatus willing to wield coercive power (Bellin 2012; Cammett, Diwan, Richards, Waterbury 2015). Domestic politics also profoundly shaped political transitions after regimes fell. In Egypt, political polarization contributed to a popularly–backed coup and the rise of a brutal military regime that claimed legitimacy based on its repression of the Muslim Brotherhood (Lachapelle *forthcoming*; Nugent 2020). In Tunisia, an apolitical military and elite commitment to consensus produced a fragile democracy (Grewal 2020). In Libya and Yemen, a legacy of state weakness led to state collapse and civil war (Brownlee, Masoud, Reynolds 2015; see also Blaydes 2017 on state building).

Yet as the protests swept through the Arab World, and as some regimes fell while others survived, the role of foreign actors became increasingly noticeable. Saudi Arabia militarily intervened in Bahrain and Yemen to curb what it saw as expanding Iranian influence. Along with the United Arab Emirates, it backed Egypt's coup and supported an armed rebellion in Libya. Turkey sent troops into Syria, as did Iran. Qatar funneled large sums to anti–Assad forces. Meanwhile Arab monarchies strengthened their ties and cooperated in repressing each other's dissidents (Yom 2016). The Arab Uprisings rapidly took on an international dimension.

The contributors to this newsletter enrich our understanding of how international actors shape democracy and authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Hesham Sallam and Amr Hamzawy draw welcome attention to the phenomenon of "democracy prevention" in the wake of the Arab Uprisings, whereby states endeavor to stall or reverse democratization in other states (Brownlee 2012). They explain how, as a result of democracy prevention, politics in authoritarian regimes across the Arab world today is less competitive and more closed than before the Arab Uprisings began. While sobering, their assessment provides a valuable way to understand what a recent wave of protests since 2019, which has toppled leaders and governments in Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq, means for democracy in the region.

Some states in the MENA, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have played especially important roles, as Toby Matthiesen's essay on the "Arab Counter Revolution" shows. He discusses how these regimes worked to prevent meaningful political change elsewhere, including by supporting a coup in Egypt or sending troops to Bahrain to help quell protests. The regimes of the Arab counter-revolution, he argues, were wary that political liberalization regionally would generate pressures for liberalization at home. Along similar lines, Ayça Alemdaroğlu and Gönül Tol reflect on Turkey's emerging role as a regional power in the Arab world. They trace Turkey's more assertive foreign policy to its rising authoritarianism, arguing that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) engaged in military adventurism in Syria to consolidate power. The party's hawkish stance towards the Syrian Kurds helped it gain support from domestic nationalist and anti-Kurdish forces and thereby strengthened its control. Alemdaroğlu and Tol show how Turkish involvement in Syria benefited the Assad regime, as the priority placed on fighting Kurdish forces favored Assad militarily.

Looking beyond the MENA, valuable contributions to this newsletter further emphasize the importance of understanding the impact of other international players, such as the U.S. and China. Lisa Blaydes reflects on what China's new economic assertiveness means for the Middle East and North Africa. As she explains, by prioritizing economic development rather than political reform, China and its large-scale infrastructural projects could very well help stabilize autocratic regimes in the region. Using recent survey data, she demonstrates how Arab publics maintain a positive image of China, and notes the greater demand for strengthening economic ties with China rather than with the U.S. These findings portend a future in which China plays an increasingly important role in Middle East politics.

The United States features prominently in the authors' exchange between Dana El Kurd and Benjamin Schuetze. Dana El Kurd's book, *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine*, is a study of international involvement in Palestinian politics after the Oslo Accords. She demonstrates how the U.S. supported local elites whose interests diverged from those of the population. This led to increased authoritarianism and the polarization and demobilization of Palestinian society. Benjamin Schuetze's *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism: US and European Policy in Jordan* is a critical examination of "democracy promotion" by international organizations operating in Jordan. Schuetze argues that these international organizations

focus on procedure rather than substance, which actually helps sustain the regime. Both studies rely on extensive fieldwork and original data, while providing careful critiques of U.S. involvement in Arab politics that highlight how the U.S. often sustains authoritarianism contrary to its proclaimed objectives. The exchange between the two authors offers a fruitful reflection on the mechanisms through which international involvement can support authoritarianism, and generates exciting avenues for future scholarship on authoritarian practices beyond the nation-state.

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The Arab Uprisings and their Adversaries

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"We, the people, are the red line," chanted Egyptian protesters not long after the onset of the Arab Uprisings and the end of the thirty-year-old rule of Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The phrase evoked the expectation that the state's routinized transgressions against individuals' rights would no longer be tolerated, and traditionally unaccountable wielders of power — be they authoritarian rulers, security establishments, or governing elites — ceased to be untouchable. Egypt was not the only place where "red lines" were being redrawn.

The entire region was experiencing a popular backlash against authoritarian rulers, several of whom were ejected from power in the wake of national uprisings demanding greater political, social, and economic rights (Achcar 2013, Bellin 2012, Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds 2015, Cammett and Diwan 2013, Lynch 2014). And thus was the demise of veteran autocrats like Tunisia's Zine Abdine Ben Ali, Libya's Muammar Al-Qadaffi, and Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh. Meanwhile, as other dictators such as Syria's Bashar Al-Assad, who had ruled their countries with an iron fist, were scrambling to hold onto power, the Arab world finally seemed an unsafe neighborhood for authoritarianism. It was not long, however, before advocates of the status quo struck back, taking advantage of political polarization, civil strife, and populist sentiments to undermine, if not reverse, the limited gains protest movements had made (Feldman 2020, Achcar 2016, Holmes 2019).

Central to that counterattack were a variety of regional powers, which, in alliance with other international actors, sought to shape the trajectories of the Uprisings or prevent them from spilling onto their own turfs. The story of the Arab Uprisings in many countries swiftly turned from one centered on a domestic standoff between authoritarian rulers and their challengers into the story of proxy wars, international power rivalries, and external intervention (Gause 2017, Hassan 2015, Aras and Falk 2015). The earliest sign of that trend was in Bahrain, where Saudi and Emirati troops helped the ruling Al Khalifa family crush a ferocious national uprising in March 2011. That same month, Assad's violent crackdown against pro-democracy protests in Syria led to a multi-sided civil war involving regional and international powers and foreign militias. In July 2013, political gridlock in Egypt gave way to a coup that deposed the elected president, replacing him with a military-backed regime financially sponsored by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and accepted by international actors. Transitional frameworks and reconciliation efforts fell apart in Yemen and Libya in 2014, as both countries descended into civil strife, in which regional and international actors also participated.

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The following three essays in this newsletter emerge out of a broader research project studying how relevant political players in Arab countries, among regimes, opposition movements and international actors, have adapted ten years after the onset of the Arab Uprisings. Through seventeen original studies, which are scheduled to appear in a forthcoming volume in the WCED Book Series at University of Michigan Press titled *Struggles for Political Change in the Arab World: Regimes, Oppositions, and External Actors*, the project addresses the following questions: What strategies have authoritarian leaders adopted in confronting domestic and external pressures for change? How have opposition actors' strategies and modes of mobilization evolved in response to opportunities for advancing political reform agendas and to state-imposed limits on expressions of political dissent? What structural and institutional factors have challenged the prospects for deepening political participation and competition in countries where authoritarian leaders have fallen prey to popular uprisings? How have regional and international powers sought to shape the patterns of political change and stability in the countries of the region?

External Actors and the Confluence of Democracy Prevention Policies

The project's findings underscore that struggles for political change in the region have evolved in the past decade in an environment in which external powers have become increasingly involved in domestic political battles outside of their own borders. The shift in U.S. posture toward democratization has provided a permissive political climate for a host of external

actors interested, albeit for different reasons, in helping authoritarian leaders stabilize their rule.

In 2017, the Trump administration broke from Washington's previous policy of selectively accommodating calls for political reform and respect for human rights in Arab countries under the rubric of so-called "democracy promotion." Indeed, the backlash against the Arab Uprisings had begun during the Barack Obama presidency, and with its tacit support. But it certainly picked up considerable momentum in the wake of Trump's not so tacit embrace of authoritarian rulers in the Arab world and beyond (not to mention his own transgressions against democracy at home). Nothing captures the former president's overt anti-democratic preferences better than his own infamous characterization of Egypt's despotic leader as his "favorite dictator."

Trump's autocracy-promoting approach to the Middle East provided a permissive political climate for democratic reversals and authoritarian consolidation. It also indirectly upheld military and political interventions which external actors had desperately waged during the Obama years to protect their strategic interests, even if by propping up their own 'favorite dictators.' Epitomizing that trend were Iran and Russia's military interventions in Syria in support of the Assad regime. Ultimately, these interventions helped Assad impose a highly repressive victor's 'peace' that handed him free rein to violate the political and economic rights of anyone deemed disloyal or subversive.

On a lesser but still significant scale, Turkey became heavily involved in northern Syria beginning in 2016. Ankara officially presented the military intervention as an attempt to contain the threat of Kurdish autonomy across Turkey's southern border, and to control the stream of Syrian refugees into Turkish territory. Yet there was a lot more to it, as Ayça Alemdaroğlu and Gönül Tol argue in this newsletter. Turkey's military adventure, they explain, was tied to a nationalist turn President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pursued to gather support for his own efforts to further centralize power and silence his opponents. In other words, Syria was not only a theater where external actors fought out their rivalries, but also a victim of the domestic political jockeying of regional powers. And it was not just Syria.

Throughout the Arab world, regional powers have worked tirelessly since 2011 to fend off the diffusion of popular demands for political change into nearby countries. In his contribution, Toby Matthiesen examines the most pronounced example of that

phenomenon, or what he calls the Arab Counter-Revolution (ACR) coalition, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. While the ACR has been engaged in standoffs with rival powers like Iran, Qatar, and — in specific contexts — Turkey, Matthiesen explains that it cannot be reduced to a conventional alliance aimed at balancing against an opposing bloc of states. The ACR, he indicates, is at its core an alliance formed against "the very idea that accountable and democratic government is possible." To borrow Jason Brownlee (2012)'s terminology, this "democracy prevention" axis has thereby emerged to obstruct any meaningful political reforms in countries as diverse as Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya.

The efforts of the ACR coincided with other transnational influences to reinforce the counterattack against the democratic demands of the Arab Uprisings. A case in point is China's attempts at building its own soft-power leverage throughout the region. As Lisa Blaydes explains in her contribution, China has moved in recent years to develop its economic ties to Arab countries by expanding trade relations while pursuing a variety of politically lucrative investment opportunities. In many instances, she shows, these growing relations have backed the efforts of autocratic governments to achieve greater stability. Blaydes' findings raise the question of whether future expansions in China's Middle East role could potentially help authoritarian regimes resist pressures for political reform.

Together, these regional and international trends give important context to recent shifts in the modes of authoritarian governance in the Arab world, especially the growing prevalence of coercive tactics, legal engineering, and personalist tendencies within authoritarian regimes.

From Liberalized to Closed Authoritarianism

The rising centrality of repression and highly restrictive legal engineering strategies as instruments for managing and preempting political dissent is one of the key trends this project brings to focus. That phenomenon is evident in countries like Egypt and Syria, where authoritarian states have reacted vengefully to post-2011 experiences of popular mobilizations against these regimes. Even in countries that were once associated with relatively greater tolerance for opposition voices and political pluralism, including Morocco, the state has elevated its reliance on repressive strategies in dealing with proponents of political change. In a similar vein, the project shows that in many countries previously available space for managed dissent or participatory decision-making has

eroded considerably. Ten years after the onset of the Arab Uprisings, only Tunisia represents — or at least "represented" until recently — a notable exception to the prevailing closure of political space in the countries impacted by the post-2011 wave of popular protests. Even in the widely celebrated Tunisian 'success story,' the constitutional coup orchestrated by President Kais Saied in July 2021 has put the future of country's democratic process on uncertain terrain.

Generally speaking, multi-party life has become less inclusive, elections less competitive, and elected bodies less relevant. In monarchies, palaces are centralizing power and marginalizing once vocal legislatures, as is apparent in Kuwait. The tradition of family rule is taking a backseat to a more personalist form of authoritarianism, as exemplified in Saudi Arabia by the political ascendancy of Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman.

Thus, regimes throughout the region have been gradually backtracking on earlier commitments to maintaining some semblance of pluralist politics or consensus-based modes of governance. Prior to the shock of the Arab Uprisings, many authoritarian regimes had relied on survival strategies featuring limited forms of political liberalization. These include state-managed multi-party politics and pluralism, engineered electoral contests enjoying some degree of competitiveness, and representative legislative or advisory bodies with limited powers (Posusney 2002, Herb 2002, Blaydes 2010, Brownlee 2011). This led to the proliferation of "liberalized autocracy" as a model of authoritarian governance in the Arab world (Brumberg 2002). The trajectory of the past decade thus raises the pressing question of whether liberalized autocracy is being replaced with more closed, repressive, and personalist forms of authoritarian rule. That Egypt and Morocco, once quintessential cases of the region's liberalized autocracies, are now turning to closed forms of authoritarianism mirrors that reality. In investigating the conditions that facilitated these shifts, external actors' democracy prevention policies — in their diverse manifestations — must not be ignored.

Popular Mobilization and its Limitations

Just when it seemed as though the spring of Arab autocrats and their foreign sponsors was taking hold, a fresh wave of popular mobilization erupted in 2019 and challenged the status quo in multiple countries. In Algeria, weeks of anti-corruption and pro-democracy protests forced President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to drop his bid for reelection and to step down after spearheading a corrupt ruling establishment for twenty

years. In Sudan, the thirty-year rule of Omar Al-Bashir came to an end. Al-Bashir, who was implicated in war crimes in Darfur and other regions of the vast Sudanese territory, was deposed by his generals in response to a months-long popular uprising featuring leftist, feminist, and liberal social movements. Nationwide protests erupted in Iraq expressing popular anger at government corruption, economic mismanagement, political sectarianism, and systematic Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs. The events resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Adil Abdel-Mahdi and the election of an Iraqi nationalist, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, as the new prime minister. In Lebanon, weeks of cross-sectarian protests against deteriorating living conditions, corruption, and poor economic performance forced Prime Minister Saad Hariri to step down. The protests quickly morphed into a large-scale popular movement demanding the end of the confessional political system, widely perceived as the protective shield of an unaccountable class of sectarian leaders. These leaders are also viewed as responsible for rampant corruption, nepotism, the systematic marginalization of low-income segments of the population, and decaying state institutions and public services since the end of Lebanon's civil war in 1990.

Despite the initial breakthroughs, the fate of this wave of popular mobilization remains largely inconclusive in most of these countries. Transitions following the ouster of incumbent autocrats in Algeria and Sudan remain heavily contested. Whether protest movements in Iraq and Lebanon can bring about the end of sectarian politics and yield meaningful reforms in the long run is yet to be seen. The project's findings, however, point to a host of challenges ahead. Notable among them are the limits of popular mobilization, the ferocious resistance of sectarian leaders and elites, and the increasing tension between formal politics and contentious political action.

Ironically, authoritarian leaders are not the only actors who seem to have lost interest in state-managed political contestation. Pro-democracy activists are distancing themselves from organized politics and in some cases steering clear of formal political parties, which are often viewed as complicit in sustaining exclusionary, corruption-ridden policies, and limiting the representation of marginalized voices. The discrediting of formal political processes, including elections, although understandable, imposes serious limitations on the long-term ability of protest movements and leaders of pro-democracy popular mobilization to advance meaningful political change. In fact, the divide between protest movements and formal politics has important implications for the prospects of

political change in the region.

The project's findings suggest that such movements tend to be most successful as "veto actors" capable of paralyzing political processes, forcing the hands of leaders, and bringing down governments and possibly dictators, as recently observed in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon. More questionable, however, is the ability of these movements to negotiate the terms of political and institutional reforms needed for democratic change and to see through their implementation in the long run. These considerations raise the question of whether popular mobilization by itself could advance meaningful political change in the Arab world.

Permeating that concern is the lurking but imminent danger posed by a variety of enterprising external actors, who have a vested interest in limiting the uncertainty of political outcomes in these countries, even if by resorting to democracy prevention policies. That danger only adds to the importance of this research agenda.

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The Arab Counter-Revolution: The Formation of a Regional Alliance to Undermine the Arab Spring

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Why did the Arab Spring fail? A large part of the answer lies in what I call the Arab Counter Revolution (ACR) — an effort taken by a coalition of states and Arab regional forces since the start of the Arab uprisings. In addition, regional politics became polarised between three main forces that sought to intervene across the region to strengthen their position.

Some dictators fell, others lost control over parts of their territory, while a third group of countries, including the wealthy Arab Gulf States, above all the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar, but also non-Arab powers such as Iran, Israel and Turkey, strengthened their position in the region. The Arab uprisings further weakened an Arab state system already in disarray since the 2003 Iraq war and increased rivalries between states that weathered the storm (Gause III 2014).[1] Two major alliances of political Sunnism, one led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the other by Turkey and Qatar, vied for supremacy. Saudi Arabia, who had historically and during the Cold War been a major supporter of political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), now became the leader of the anti-MB camp, alongside the UAE. The Brotherhood in turn found well-organised and resourceful supporters in Turkey and Qatar. The third alliance was the so-called "Axis of Resistance" of Iran, Syria, Hizbullah in Lebanon and pro-Iran forces in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Palestinian Islamists such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The two coalitions of political Sunnism clashed amongst each other and with the Axis of Resistance, as the region became polarised by rivalry between these three axes.

This article deals specifically with one of these three axes: the one led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which spear-headed the Arab Counter Revolution. The actors of the ACR saw the early demands of the Arab uprisings, from social justice to more accountable government, as a threat, and worried about the trajectory of mass protests. They also worried about the ideological forces that could be brought to power by the uprisings, fearing that non-Arab regional powers might strengthen their position as a result (especially Turkey and Iran and their respective axes, or small Arab States such as Qatar). The ACR deepened its influence on a Middle Eastern regional system already characterised by a high degree of penetration of domestic politics by regional and international powers (Hinnebusch 2015 and 2016, Valbjørn and Bank 2007). The ACR is thus both directed against other states and rivals, and at the domestic politics of Arab states. The ACR tries to penetrate the domestic politics of all Arab States to ensure pro-Arab uprising forces don't come to power (e.g. the failed uprisings in Bahrain and Sudan) or remain in power (e.g. the aftermath of triumphant uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia).

In fact, all three axes have intervened or tried to intervene in the domestic politics of Arab states, in part to prevent their relative rivals from gaining more power in those states, as in the case of the ACR to prevent both the "resistance" bloc and the MB from increasing their power. The ACR and the Axis of Resistance have both at times appropriated the discourse of the Arab Spring (the former in Syria, and the latter in Bahrain and Yemen) when it suited their interests. But in general, the ACR and the Axis of Resistance have intervened against civilian political movements in Arab countries to ensure that the people do not break out of the cycle of authoritarian rule and counter-revolutionary policy. Arab protesters have understood this, with anti-Saudi and anti-UAE slogans widespread in many of the protest movements — for example, in the 2019 protests in Algeria and Sudan. They have also shouted slogans against the Axis of Resistance when that alliance supported entrenched regimes in Syria, in 2019 in Iraq, and to a certain extent in Lebanon. In Sudan, neighbourhood discussion groups apparently sought to educate the population on the regional interference of ACR states such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[2] While these blocs rival each other, they are both counter-revolutionary, just in a selective fashion. The Turkey-Qatar-MB axis, on the other hand, has largely embraced the Arab uprisings, and sought to support them, while pushing for MB gains across the region.

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[1] Qatar and the UAE, too, tried to influence transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and expand their influence in and relations with Morocco and Algeria. Their rivalry became another important feature of post-2011 regional relations (Matthiesen 2017). See also Marc Lynch. 2016. *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East.* New York: PublicAffairs.

[2] For more on the Sudan and Algeria protest movements, see the respective chapters by Khalid Medani and Thomas Serres in the forthcoming volume, *Struggles for Political Change in the Arab World: Regimes, Oppositions, and External Actors.*

The ACR constitutes an alliance against an idea, a mode of politics, a way of speaking and protesting, against the very idea that accountable and democratic government is possible. These states have adopted harsh online and offline legislations against the discourse and goals of the Arab uprisings and any criticism of ACR policy. For example, criticism of the Qatar blockade or the war in Yemen has been punished with long prison sentences in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The seriousness with which ACR autocrats seek to stifle dissent, including on Twitter, which in the period 2010 to about 2013 was akin to an Arab public sphere relatively free of censorship, can only be understood if we acknowledge that this is not just an inter-state rivalry, but one of states against ideas, meaning that the mediums through which these ideas were disseminated need to be controlled. The satellite TV channels, which in the early period of the Arab uprisings were also important, by and large discredited themselves as being partisan to this or that cause or political party. Even al-Jazeera, though covering most of the Arab uprisings through newly established channels al-Jazeera Mubasher and al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr (the latter focusing exclusively on Egypt), eventually became seen as a Qatari government mouthpiece openly favoring the MB. This tendency was reinforced after the blockade on Qatar. Al-Jazeera continues to be one of the strongest Arab-language counter voices to the ACR, however, albeit with diminished repute and viewership.

Ideologically, the forces that the ACR sought to counter varied. It spanned from the leftist and liberal intelligentsia and tech-savvy youth of the early "Arab spring," who were heirs to different ideological trajectories and country-specific political movements but also saw themselves as part of a pan-Arab Spring youth, to more Islamic, but anti-ACR, forces such as the MB, who were generally against the notion of mass politics outside of state control. Over the course of the 2010s, the more secular group started to fade in importance, and failed to institutionalise itself as a pan-Arab regional organisation, not managing to hold power in any of the Arab states, and so the ACR ended up primarily battling the MB. This was in part because the MB emerged in many contexts as the winner of the protests and then in elections in the countries that saw partial transitions, where its strong regional organisation allowed it to take advantage of the situation. That the ACR positioned itself against both the Iran and Turkey-led alliances at times led to a rapprochement between the latter that gained further traction after the blockade on Qatar from 2017 to late 2020 forced that country closer to Iran and Turkey, who established a military base in Qatar.

The core states of the ACR have established formal international alliances, including the Arab Coalition (al-Tahaluf al-Arabi) that has been involved in the Yemen war, as well as a coalition to combat terrorism,[3] and one supporting the blockade of Qatar, which in some ways can be seen as the institutionalisation of their ideas.

The ACR also allied itself with Israel. In fact, the ACR and Israel were battling both a transnational political movement and moment (the Arab uprisings), as well as state adversaries such as Iran, Turkey, and Qatar (AbuKhalil 2018). The axis of resistance, however, while counter-revolutionary in many contexts, sees itself as resisting Israel first and foremost, so relations with Israel intensified rivalries between the three major axes.

The Interventions of the ACR: Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia

Saudi Arabia from early on tried to align the ACR with its bid to counter Iran and Shiism in the region. This contributed to military interventions in Bahrain and Yemen. Because of Riyadh's long and ambiguous relationship with the MB, its ascent in a number of Arab states posed a difficult challenge; when Brotherhood supporters became too vocal in their support for the Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi Arabia turned against the Brotherhood in the region (with the exception of Yemen). Saudi Arabia's regional strategy thus aimed not only to counter the Arab uprisings, but more specifically Iran and the MB as well.

The ACR's first major intervention was in Bahrain, when Saudi troops crossed the causeway to support the crushing of dissent.

In the Bahrain intervention, anti-Shiism legitimised the crushing of what was described as a Shii uprising, a narrative that remained prominent in Saudi Arabia as a way to gain support for anti-Iranian actions (Matthiesen 2013). Other ACR members put less emphasis on the anti-Shii aspect, and in the second half of the 2010s, a certain outreach towards Iraqi Shii actors required a toning down of the anti-Shii narrative, replacing it with an anti-Iranian one, despite the considerable overlap between the two. Jordanian and Moroccan security personnel had long supported the Bahraini regime, and probably participated as well in the crackdown. But when King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia floated the idea of an expanded Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that would include Jordan and Morocco, the latter were not interested. Both countries only half-heartedly supported the ACR, although both are

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[3] Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, founded on December 15, 2015, http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/usa/ EN/PublicAffairs/Statements/Pages/Joint-Statement-on-the-Formation-of-the-Islamic-Military-Alliance.aspx.

heavily reliant on governmental and private funding and investment from the GCC states. Despite being fellow monarchies, and with a shared interest in seeing the Arab uprisings stifled (both have experienced at times substantial protest movements), they differ on the strategy to achieve this aim.[4]

The next major arena was Egypt, and to a lesser extent Tunisia, where the ACR became worried about the gains of the MB, who were supported by Turkey and Qatar. In 2012-13, the key actors of the ACR were planning to bring down the Mursi government, as the MB in Saudi Arabia started to be emboldened by the success of their counterparts in Cairo, and visited Egypt frequently. Al-Sisi, who had previously been the Egyptian military attaché in Saudi Arabia, and in that capacity would have built up good relations with Saudi state officials, was seen as a suitable replacement.[5] Qatar and the UAE first participated as regional partners in the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, but then swiftly fell out and built up local allies on different sides of the political and regional divide. This foreign sponsorship exacerbated rivalries in the country, and was a key factor enabling its eventual division into two administrations, who were backed with arms, money, and diplomatic and media support by Qatar and Turkey (but also by the UN) on one hand and by the ACR, as well as Russia, on the other.[6] This foreign patronage turned the conflict in Libya into a proxy war between the ACR and its rivals.

In Syria, Saudi Arabia saw an opportunity to support players it had a connection to, such as the Salafi Army of Islam, and to undermine a strategic rival, the Baath regime. Saudi Arabia's Syria policy would, however, put it at odds with other partners of its alliance, notably Egypt under al-Sisi, as well as the UAE, for whom the anti-MB angle outweighed other concerns (Perry *et al.* 2018).[7] With the Baath regime winning militarily after a massive counter-revolutionary effort by the Axis

of Resistance, the forces of the ACR sought to extract themselves from their failed Syrian adventure.

As a result of the Arab uprisings, the protest movement in Tunisia initially succeeded, and with Moncef Marzouki, it managed to get a long-time human rights advocate elected President. Initially, the ACR did not devote significant efforts to Tunisia, but as Tunisia became a model in the region for change, its opponents accused a secularist party of getting significant support from ACR states in the 2014 presidential elections, and of being part of a long-planned and well-funded strategy to bring the old regime back to power (Marzouki 2018). The ACR states also applauded the suspension of the Tunisian parliament in July 2021 (Parker 2021).

Saudi Arabia, King Salman, and MBS

The 2010s witnessed changes in leadership in the core states of the ACR. Muhammad bin Zayed (MBZ) consolidated his position as the strongman in the UAE, and became the driving force behind the hawkish UAE foreign policy that, on issues such as relations with Iran, contrasts with the business-minded approach of Dubai. In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, a succession occurred. It was under King Abdallah that the Saudi policy to counter all the Arab uprisings except in Syria was implemented, and the military intervention in Bahrain took place. A strategy to stop the Arab uprisings and reverse perceived gains made by state adversaries such as Iran, Qatar and Turkey was thus in place. But under King Salman and Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), a shift occurred towards a more open embrace of Israel, an outspoken friendship and alliance with US President Trump (as opposed to the sometimes tense relationship between President Obama and King Abdallah), and a seeming U-turn on support of Islam in various forms at home and abroad to legitimise the Saudi state, as well as large-scale military intervention. Related to this are social reforms, and some foreign policy adventures, as well as a makeover in the traditional avenues for Saudi power projection abroad such as the Muslim World League.[8] The arrest and trial of what remains of the MB-related Sahwa leadership that did not embrace the patronage of the state wholeheartedly, most prominently Salman al-Awda, perhaps the most important pro-Arab uprisings MB leader in Saudi Arabia, drove this to its logical

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[4] A lot of work has focused on the monarchy vs. republic divide, and explaining monarchical resilience with them being monarchies. In our case, however, the ACR is led by two monarchies (KSA and UAE) against another monarchy (Qatar) and an idea (Yom and Gause III 2012). While initially participating reluctantly, Morocco then withdrew from the Yemen war (see *Al Jazeera* 2019a). In 2019, Morocco and Saudi Arabia even disagreed publicly over Yemen, Qatar and the Western Sahara/Polisario questions, though by 2020 that rift may have been healed (see Reuters 2019, Chahir 2020).
[5] *Abdel Fattah el-Sisi Fast Facts*, CNN Library, April 10, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/01/world/africa/abdel-fattah-el-sisi-fast-facts.
[6] For general background, see (Matthiesen 2017).
[7] Less importantly, but still interestingly, Bahrain officially also took a different view on Syria, one that was more pro-Baath than anti (Barakat 2018).

[8] By appointing Mohammed Al Eissa head of the Muslim World League, for example (Hubbard 2017). The body also saw a significant decrease in funding, and the religious police was abolished.

conclusion.[9] The new Saudi project became related to MBS's bid to outdo all his rivals in the succession to the throne, and it took a generally anti–Islamist outlook. MBZ and MBS took the unprecedented step of launching a major military confrontation with conventional armed forces in a neighbouring country, Yemen, as opposed to checkbook diplomacy, subversion or the use of irregular proxies, as had been the norm. This intervention has been the most costly and wide-ranging intervention of the ACR to date.

The Yemen War and the Gulf Crisis

The Yemen War exposed the inherent contradictions in the UAE-KSA alliance. In its military strategy in the North of Yemen, KSA relied on cooperation with the Islah party, an umbrella party that includes the MB in Yemen, whom the UAE and anti–MB forces in KSA loathed.[10] To counteract that, the UAE built up significant influence in Southern Yemen, in Aden, with the Southern Transitional Council (STC), leading in 2019 to a partial drawdown or rearrangement of UAE forces and clashes between allies and proxies of UAE (STC) and KSA (forces loyal to the government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi) for control of Aden (McKernan 2019, Beaumont 2019). Subsequent agreements between Hadi's government and the STC brokered by the UAE and KSA sought to put aside those differences (*Al Jazeera* 2019b).

The Houthis, meanwhile, tried to present themselves at least discursively as trying to carry out the promises of the Arab uprisings, though little action followed that rhetoric, and the war, their brutal tactics that turned not least against the Yemeni youth that had led the 2011 protests, and their re-empowering of the old caste of Zaydi Sayyid families, alienated many. While the extent of ties with Iran is debated, they became part and parcel of the Axis of Resistance's propaganda strategy (and the latter's claim to support the "downtrodden" in Yemen).

Tensions that had been simmering between Qatar and KSA, UAE and Bahrain came to the fore in the first years of the Arab uprisings. There were long-standing bilateral issues, such as the notion that Qatar should not be able to play an outsized role, but they were exacerbated by Qatar's support for the Arab uprisings, in general and through its support for the MB. This would culminate in the blockade of Qatar in 2017 by the KSA, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. An invasion was

threatened but made impossible by the presence of US and Turkish troops in Qatar, and Qatar quickly turned to Iran for food imports at the start of the blockade, cementing ties between the Qatar-Turkey and the pro-Iran axes. This undermined the ACR's strategic premises for countering those two axes simultaneously (Ulrichsen 2020).

The Horn of Africa and Sudan

Because the UAE suffered heavy casualties early on in the Yemen intervention (which they then blamed on Qatar), and the KSA also sought to minimise casualties, much of the fighting in Yemen was done by bombing from the air, or by Yemenis or foreign mercenaries, often from Sudan. It was not only the regular army that took part in the Yemen war, but also the Rapid Response Forces, parts of which were formerly known as the Janjaweed, who had become notorious for their role in Darfur. Significant political and financial capital seemed to have been accumulated by its leader, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also called Hemetti, who played a key role in the events in Sudan in 2019 (Wilson and England 2019, International Crisis Group 2019).

Protests against long-standing dictator Omar al–Bashir grew in size in 2019 and soon became too big to repress. Al-Bashir had been adept at managing domestic tensions, and playing regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia against each other. Previously in the pro-Iran camp, Sudan shifted its position to a pro-Saudi one, and King Abdullah gave al-Bashir a slush fund for his personal use (Burke and Salih 2019). At the same time, however, the fact that al-Bashir's regime was built on an alliance with the MB, and that he maintained links with Qatar, meant the ACR states were not unhappy to see him replaced.

But the UAE, KSA and Egypt worried that the protests in Sudan would reawaken the Arab uprisings and that a civilian government would fully undermine the war in Yemen and also the broader appearance of an Arab authoritarianism as the only solution forward (Medani 2022). Hemetti and the Rapid Response Forces were key in repressing protesters early on, after visits to meet MBS in Jeddah and to the UAE. The UAE and KSA also promised to send aid to Sudan's Transitional Military Council to the tune of $3bn (*Arab News* 2019). In Sudan, the ACR thus also stands in conflict with the African Union and a desire among African countries to see strongmen in Africa replaced by democratic leaders (Woldemariam and Young 2019). The military and civilian forces signed a power-sharing agreement in August 2019, involving a long transitional period (Wilson 2019).

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[9] Al-Awda was first arrested because of a tweet urging harmony between KSA and Qatar, after positive indications to that effect, indicating the punishments that could be meted out against those not adhering to the strict lines of the state. He also authored a famous book in favour of the Arab uprisings.
[10] I thank Stacey Philbrick Yadav for clarifying this point.

The developments in Sudan are an example of how the ACR and its military adventures can influence political developments in third countries. The Horn of Africa, for example, has been directly drawn into the orbit of the Gulf states, and of the Gulf rivalries as well. Its proximity to Yemen has also meant that it has become a logistics hub for the war, one that can also be used for peaceful and military activities once that war ends. The UAE has built up its footprint there, securing military bases along the sea routes that are vital for UAE shipping and for the security of shipping lanes connecting ports owned by Dubai World (Styan 2018, de Waal 2019).

Partisan Support: The ACR, the US and Europe

The Obama administration was, broadly speaking, at least rhetorically supportive of the Arab uprisings, and seemed willing to accept MB governments coming to power in key Arab states. It intervened militarily in Libya and Syria, and welcomed the election of Muhammad Mursi, while allowing the ACR military intervention in Bahrain. This partial support for the Arab uprisings, and for the MB, became a major source of friction between the US, especially among Democrats, and the UAE and KSA, and ensured that the latter two countries were keen to see a more pro-ACR president in the White House. They would quickly establish close ties with the Trump administration.

In the international arena, the war in Yemen and the atrocities committed by the belligerents have led to much international outcry (Wintour 2019a). At the same time, however, the massive arms purchases and the funds flowing into war-related sectors, from consultancy to logistics as well as the building up of a local arms industry, has meant that the UAE and KSA have strengthened alliances with the arms industry and parts of the political establishment in their core weapons suppliers, namely the USA, UK and France. Here, right-wing or centrist administrations have placed the importance of arms exports above human rights or a values-driven foreign policy and have supported the countries involved in the Yemen War.

In 2019, the US redeployed troops to Saudi Arabia in an official and public capacity, in the wake of the disturbances in the Gulf and explosions on oil tankers, pipelines and port facilities. US troops had officially withdrawn in the 1990s after their deployment had led to the broad protest and indignation movement that would be called the Sahwa, the Awakening, and in which a local amalgam of MB and Wahhabi/Salafi networks were key (Al Omran 2019). The Trump administration thus supported the ACR, but this support

had its limits. The ACR states started their blockade of Qatar immediately after President Trump's first foreign visit (to Saudi Arabia). Some assume he gave some sort of green light for a punishment of Qatar, himself being apparently little aware of the strategic interests the US has there. The US army had relocated from KSA to Qatar after the above-mentioned Saudi public critique of US troops there in the 1990s, and established a regional headquarter of the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM or CENTCOM). Some of his tweets seem to have endorsed the blockade (Wintour 2017, Landler 2017).

This made support for Saudi Arabia a partisan issue in the US and across Europe, with positions on Saudi Arabia dividing opinions according to old left–right binaries (Wintour 2019b, Cook 2019).

The Trump administration's key Middle East peace plan was the Abraham Accords. The countries of the ACR took the lead in endorsing the plan, which involved normalising relations with Israel, and pushing for Arab support, further alienating the Arab publics from the authoritarian rulers of the ACR, and strengthening the Washington–Tel Aviv–Abu Dhabi–Riyadh–Cairo axis, even though the prospects for the plan were slim. It was, however, the strongest sign of a real alliance at the global level, and one that crossed religious and identity divides, continuing along patterns established during the Cold War. And the plan gave a sense of the ACR's long-term strategy: no political rights, but infrastructure development, neoliberal investment strategies, real estate projects, tourism, and technology hubs. MBS' utopian city Neom located close to Israel in Saudi Arabia's North-West fits right into that strategy. Many of these projects have brought windfalls for foreign supporters of ACR states, and continue a pattern of petrodollar recycling in return for political support (Spiro 1999).

A significant amount of authoritarian learning could also be observed, and was shared by the countries of the ACR and their non-Arab allies. Importantly, because the aim was in part to crush the ideas of the Arab uprisings and prevent connectivity and mobilisation, much of which had taken place online, digital surveillance technologies were sold from Europe and Israel to the countries of the ACR. These also helped to influence debates on social media through the large-scale use of bots and Twitter troll farms, one of which was said to have been directed in Riyadh by Saud al-Qahtani', the MBS aide deemed responsible for Jamal Khashoggi's murder. His murder, a very public act of enforcing the acceptable limits by the ACR, occurred because Khashoggi was a regime insider who had defected;

because he was embraced by the MB–Turkey–Qatar axis and grew close to Erdogan; and because he was advocating the original ideas of the Arab uprisings and criticising the core of the ACR's economic and political project — the rise of MBS and his economic reforms. In sum, a shared discourse, and legislation and practices intended to police deviations from this discourse, were put in place across the ACR states.

Conclusion

In 2019, Egypt's former president, Muhammad Mursi, died in an Egyptian jail, six years after being deposed in a coup: a word the ACR despises, and prosecutes people for using, insisting on calling Egypt's coup a second revolution in response to popular demand. Egypt also saw protests in September 2019, and in their wake, mass arrests of the remnants of the intelligentsia and independent activists. The ACR had by this point become adept at learning the techniques of the Arab uprisings and at adopting and using tactics such as mass protests to paralyse hostile governments, legitimise political takeovers, or to justify repression that would otherwise be hard to rationalize. The ACR has thus driven the Arab Spring ad absurdum.

The same year, Zayn al-Abidin Ben Ali died in exile in Saudi Arabia, where he had fled in 2011 as Tunisians were taking down his government. Few events could symbolise more clearly the alliances of the ACR. Ben Ali was not allowed to return to Tunisia and died in a cushy exile. But by the time of his death, the ACR had put in place a regional order that had also strongly intervened in Tunisia to ensure that the depth of transition was limited and large paths of the old elites survived, and had set as its goal the crushing of the movement that started in a provincial Tunisian town in late 2010. The success of the ACR was exacerbated by the fact that the so-called "axis of resistance" had itself adopted strongly counterrevolutionary measures, first in Syria and then in Iraq and Lebanon, where the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) implemented tactics it had employed against Iran's Green Movement of 2009.

Simultaneous to the spread of the first protests as part of the Arab uprisings since late 2010, a coalition of countries, political blocs, personal networks and individuals united to spearhead the Arab Counter-Revolution. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were key in this political bloc, and have shaped its strategies and tactics and bankrolled it ever since. The ACR is directed both against an axis of regional states — Turkey, Qatar, Iran and the MB — as well as the general notion of the Arab uprisings, and the attempts by Arab countries to transition from authoritarianism to other forms of government.

The efforts by the ACR to intervene even in small countries such as Tunisia have reinforced the notion that the Arab world is indeed a regional system, and that countries inside of it matter more to its members than countries outside of it. This is so because the Arab uprisings shared ideas and discourses that resonated in Arabic and across the Arab world. The ACR is thus not only an alliance aimed at countering the two rival axes, but also at shaping the domestic politics of the Arab states, using tactics such as denunciation and demonization of opponents, mass surveillance of online communication and a strict control of the public sphere, coupled with promises of authoritarian stability and hydrocarbon-fuelled oligarchic neoliberalism.

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Turkey in Syria: From Soft-Power Projection to Militarist Expansion

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Turkish foreign policy towards Arab countries has changed significantly over the last decade under the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rule. Compared to previous governments, the AKP leaders have been much more concerned about Turkey's image and influence in the Middle East. The AKP's growing interest in strengthening relations with Arab countries was to assert Turkey's power as a regional leader — a vision encouraged in international policy circles and by the U.S. government under Presidents George Bush and Barack Obama. Solid economic growth and democratic reforms as part of the E.U. accession process helped refashion Turkey in the early 2000s as a model for development and democracy in the region. Turkey formulated an increasingly ambitious foreign policy orientation based on soft-power projection to reconnect Turkey with other Muslim countries through increasing economic cooperation, political patronage, and cultural influence.

However, Turkey's new approach and projected pathway to global influence did not pan out as envisioned. After the early days of Arab uprisings, which fueled the AKP government's aspirations to shape political transformations in the region, particularly in Egypt and Syria, Turkey found itself in a profoundly tricky position. The government's commitment to empowering Muslim Brotherhood-linked groups and uncompromising response to political developments in Egypt and Syria post-2011 have left Turkey with no allies or friends — other than Qatar — in the neighborhood.

Furthermore, mounting domestic economic and political problems, aggressive nationalism, and military expansionism became President Erdoğan's strategy to preserve his increasingly authoritarian regime. Today, Turkey has a military presence in several Arab-majority countries, including Syria, Iraq, Qatar, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia. It is also part of the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and the Balkans. Not since the demise of the Ottoman Empire has the country's military footprint been this extensive. A significant part of this expansion has taken place since 2015.

> *"Turkey formulated an increasingly ambitious foreign policy orientation based on soft-power projection to reconnect Turkey with other Muslim countries through increasing economic cooperation, political patronage, and cultural influence."*

This military expansion was inherently connected to growing domestic opposition to the AKP's populist authoritarian regime. This culminated in the party's loss of its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 elections, which compelled the AKP to form an alliance with ultra-nationalists to regain a majority in snap elections that November. Turkey's military expansion in Syria, the country's largest and most combat-heavy mission, sits at the intersection of the AKP's expansionary foreign policy and its domestic political and economic troubles. Turkey's involvement in Syria began as military and organizational assistance to Syrian opposition groups. Since 2016, the Turkish military has conducted several operations. The Turkish Army, together with Turkish-backed rebels, gained control over vast stretches of territory in Syria's north, home to nearly four million people. In three areas, including the cities of Al-Bab, Jarablus, and Tel-Abyad, Turkey exercises direct rule, runs schools, repairs hospitals, trains security forces, and appoints bureaucrats, and has recently included these areas to the Turkish lira zone.

Many international media outlets analyze Turkey's military expansion as part of a neo-Ottomanist grand strategy. However, notwithstanding its appeal as a shortcut description of Turkey's new ambitions, this overused concept fails to explain the changing dynamics of Turkish foreign policy, particularly its heightened militarism, newfound expansionism, and troubled entanglement with the domestic crisis of Erdoğan's authoritarian regime.

Scholars have long recognized domestic politics' role in shaping foreign policy (Hobson 1975, Snyder 1991, Tilly 1985). A growing emphasis on domestic politics shifted Turkey scholars' focus from the international order to social, economic, and ideological sources of foreign policy. Several studied the role of ideological and pragmatic politics in shaping the AKP's foreign policy revisionism (Cağaptay 2019a, Hintz 2018, Kirişçi 2009, Zarakol 2012).

Our analysis takes one step further to examine Turkey's changing relation with Arab countries, particularly

its involvement in Syria in connection with the developments in domestic politics and the survival tactics of a populist authoritarian leader. It lays out the historical and domestic background to Turkey's recent opening toward Arab countries and explains why this policy became untenable following the Arab uprisings. It offers a closer look at the conditions of diversion from the initial "soft-power" and "zero-problems with neighbors" approach. It explains the conditions underlying Turkey's military and administrative expansion in Syria. While President Erdoğan and the Turkish military have justified this policy primarily by the "myth of security" — the idea that Turkey's safety can only be maintained through expansion (Snyder 1991) — this policy stemmed from Erdoğan's strategy change to prolong his rule. Finally, we examine the costs of Turkey's involvement in Syria in terms of deepening ethnic cleavages, radicalization, and fragmentation.

Turkey's Foreign Policy Post-2011

Under the AKP's rule, Turkish foreign policy has fundamentally shifted from following a conventional pro-transatlantic agenda to a pro-active and pragmatist approach to diversify its international partners and influence. However, this initial soft-power proactive agenda, often dubbed as neo-Ottomanism, reached an impasse with the onset of Arab revolutions in 2011.

The fall of secularist authoritarian regimes, together with the AKP's power consolidation in domestic politics, provided Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2009 and 2014 and the Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016, with newfound confidence to push the pro-Islamist ideological agenda both at home and in the region. Erdoğan's strong support for the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government in Egypt and his repudiation of Abdel Fatel-Sisi's presidency were the epitome of this ideological push. Turkey hoped to bank on the rise of the MB government to expand its clout in the region, but Ankara's pro-MB, interventionist policy produced the opposite result. It dealt a blow to Turkey's image as a soft-power player, clashed with the interests of major regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, and strained Ankara's ties with its Western partners, leaving Turkey more dependent on Russia (Selcen 2019, Erdemir and Koduvayur 2019, Çağaptay 2019a).

Turkey's changing relations with its neighbor Syria offer an important insight into understanding Turkish foreign policy's links to domestic power politics. The two countries shared a long history of tension due to territorial disputes, conflict over water, and Syria's

decision to host the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Özkan 2019, Marvar 2019). But bilateral relations improved significantly after 1999 when Syria expelled the PKK leader and agreed to cooperate with Turkey in the fight against terrorism. Erdoğan and Bashar al-Assad's ascendance to power in the early 2000s paved the way for further rapprochement.

However, the Syrian uprising changed all this, once again turning the two countries into each other's source of insecurity. Erdoğan saw the uprisings as an opportunity to consolidate his rule at home. To topple the Assad regime and replace it with an MB-led government, Ankara quickly became a party to the civil war, providing shelter, arms, health services, and military training to the Syrian opposition. Turkey's 2016 failed coup and the changing dynamics between Erdoğan and the military paved the way for a more robust Turkish military involvement in Syria. A month after the coup attempt, Turkey launched its first military incursion into Syria, Operation Euphrates Shield, to curb Kurdish influence in northern Syria. In 2018, Turkey took over Kurdish-controlled Afrin. In 2019, Turkey launched the third incursion into Kurdish-controlled territory between Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ain after the U.S. decision to withdraw its troops from the country's northeast.

As Turkey's military actions in Syria continue to stifle Kurdish military forces, the Turkish government has achieved a tenacious dominance outside its southern border, through direct rule in Tel Abyad, Jarablus, and Afrin, and an autonomous administration in Idlib (Aydıntaşbaş 2020). Reports from the field indicate that the Syria Assistance and Coordination Center (SUDKOM), a new government agency linked to Sanliurfa Governate in southeast Turkey, helps coordinate the Turkish administration in what is designated as "Operation Peace Spring Region." The SUDKOM, together with Turkey's Red Crescent and the Presidency of Disaster Management and Emergency under the Minister of Interior, coordinates public services, such as general hygiene, provision of basic needs such as food and clothing, as well as services for the reconstruction and betterment of public buildings, streets, and the environment. Recently opened courthouses, hospitals, schools, and higher education institutions, run either by bureaucrats appointed from Turkey or in consultation with them, are akin to Turkish state formation in the region (Adar 2020b). With the renewed signage on public buildings in Arabic and Turkish, and the creation of the Turkish lira zone replacing the Syrian pound in Turkish-controlled areas and Idlib, these developments raise questions about the future of Turkish occupation and its effect on the post-war settlement in Syria.

Myths of Expansion and Erdoğan's Political Survival

International media portrays Turkey's military undertaking in Syria as yet another epitome of neo-Ottomanist foreign policy. Used to capture a wide range of policies towards Syria — including Erdoğan's rapprochement with Bashar al-Assad in the late 2000s, his subsequent support for the Syrian opposition post-2011, and finally, military incursions and direct rule in northern Syria — this term hinders a nuanced understanding of Turkish foreign policy. More specifically, it obscures its heightened militarism and domestic sources, particularly the role of war-making in the survival of Erdoğan's authoritarian regime.

In *Myths of Empire*, Jack Snyder (1991) examines why some states overexpand in a way that the cost of expansion supersedes its benefits. According to Snyder, counterproductive aggression builds on the idea that state security can be protected only by expansion. The myth of security through expansion, Snyder argues, justifies the policies of domestic political groups, who have parochial interests in expansion, militarism, and economic control. These groups logroll their various imperialist or military interests and self-serving policies. Pro-expansionists create myths or "strategic rationalizations" to gain broad support from the public about the significance of threats and the benefits of offensive strategies. A state overexpands because expansion always benefits a few people greatly and costs many people only a little.

The timing of Turkey's first full-fledged military incursion in Syria in 2016 provides us important clues about the domestic interests invested in the expansion. Launched in August 2016, a month after the bloody coup attempt in Turkey, the first operation took place amid the government's extensive purge of state institutions and the military. This resulted in the removal of a third of the armed forces for their alleged connection to Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based Turkish cleric, whom the government accused of masterminding the 2016 coup attempt. This purge allowed Erdoğan to restore his power by incorporating various military and security factions in his bloc and allowing them to shape foreign policy (Adar 2020a).

Turkey's war in Syria helped Erdoğan consolidate the nationalist-militarist alliance he struck following the AKP's loss of its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 elections. In the same elections, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) made historic gains by winning 13 percent of the votes. To sustain his power, Erdoğan turned to the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), embraced its anti-Kurdish stance, ended the peace process he had launched in 2013 with the PKK, and began criminalizing the legitimate Kurdish opposition.

Erdoğan's nationalist turn at home changed his priorities in Syria. U.S. cooperation with the PKK's Syrian offshoot, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), made it easier to justify his anti-Kurdish platform inside Turkey. By repressing Kurds on both sides of the border, Erdoğan rallied the Turks around the flag and built a new power bloc with military and nationalist interest groups to ensure his political survival. However, true to Snyder's argument about the myth of expansion, Erdoğan speaks of Turkey's hard-power interventions in the Middle East as a struggle for national unity and survival, likening its involvement in Syria to the Turkish independence war against occupation forces following World War I.

While the government points at an array of rivals justifying its hard-power policy in the Middle East, ranging from the U.S. support for Fethullah Gülen to the competition over new hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean, the Kurdish issue remains its most enduring survival myth. Military operations in Syria since 2016 proved to be a helpful policy to boost the nationalist vote and a nationalist coalition for Erdoğan's survival. But that is not all. Military operations and newly controlled lands also mean business for Turkish construction companies to rebuild cities and towns, a continued armed presence to boost military industry, and access for various sectors to new markets (Karataşlı 2019). Hence, the Syria theater helps Erdoğan manage the political and economic crises of his regime. Turkey's support for anti-Assad rebels in Syria and its ambitions to create a zone free of Assad forces and Kurdish-led SDF bear many troubles for Turkey in its regional position. But the conflict in Syria has helped Erdoğan reconfigure a new domestic alliance that places narrow interest groups in charge of shaping foreign policy (Adar 2020a). Erdoğan used the policies of the PYD to justify his nationalist turn, which then helped him win election after election, finally getting the vote in a referendum to transform Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential one, thereby becoming its first president with extensive powers.

However, overall, the costs of Turkey's expansion supersede its benefits for Erdoğan. Its most notable adverse impact was the surprising vulnerability of Erdoğan in the 2019 local elections. The AKP lost almost all major cities to the opposition. Two main interconnected reasons for the loss were the nationalist backlash against the presence of 4 million Syrian

refugees living in Turkey at a time of worsening economic hardship. Many, including Erdoğan supporters, blame the government's open-door policy for the growing economic and social problems they link to the refugees.

The costs of the war are not limited to its impact on Erdoğan's political survival. Erdoğan's Syria policy deepened Arab-Kurdish tension, strengthened radical Islamist factions, and exacerbated the civil war in Syria. At the same time, it further strained ties between Turkish and Kurdish communities in Turkey and thwarted Turkey's chance of resolving its own "Kurdish problem."

The Impact of Turkey's Intervention on Regional Politics

When the Arab uprisings started, the AKP elites spoke about "being on the right side of history" while "supporting democratic aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East." To support the "democratic revolutions," they positioned Turkey as the organizational hub for the Syrian opposition and its principal foreign backers. Ironically, however, Turkey also became one of the leading outside actors that destroyed the very "revolution" that it so fervently supported.

After Erdoğan's domestic strategy shifted in 2015, so did his priorities in Syria. As he embarked on an anti-Kurdish platform at home, resuming the fight against the PKK and criminalizing legitimate Kurdish opposition, toppling the Assad regime took a back seat to curbing Kurdish influence in Syria. To that end, Turkey pushed the Syrian rebels fighting the Assad regime in Aleppo to join its fight against Kurdish forces in the north. Turkey's move sapped the rebellion of its fighters and eventually contributed to Aleppo's fall in 2016. That year, Turkey launched its first military incursion into northern Syria to curb Kurdish advances. By 2017, Ankara was working with the Assad regime and its allies, which helped Assad consolidate his territorial gains. In return, Damascus and its allies acquiesced to Turkey's second military intervention into Afrin, a Kurdish enclave, in January 2018 (Tol 2019).

Turkey's policies in Syria also galvanized radical Islamist groups. Turkey's indifference towards and even tacit support for the Islamic State (IS) and other jihadists accelerated the conflict's jihadization. Turkey, for example, allowed jihadist groups to establish their cells in Turkish cities. Syria-based jihadists such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly known as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra) and Ahrar al-Sham quickly recruited Turkey's own radical

Islamists. As Ankara refused to close its long border with Syria, citing humanitarian concerns for refugees, jihadists exploited the security vacuum. According to jihadist accounts, Turkish officials turned a blind eye to the cross-border jihadi traffic. Thousands of Turkish jihadists, many under the pretense of doing humanitarian work, traveled to Syria to join radical groups. Ankara was also slow to take action against the Islamic State and dragged its feet in allowing the US-led anti-IS coalition to operate from its NATO airbase (Tahiroğlu and Schanzer 2017).

Finally, Turkish policies also intensified ethnic friction in Syria. Turkey pressured the Syrian opposition not to address Kurdish concerns and enlisted its Arab proxies to fight the Kurds. After its military interventions, Turkey pursued policies to change the ethnic make-up of Kurdish majority towns, such as Afrin. After Turkey and its Arab proxies swept into Afrin in 2018, nearly all of its Kurdish residents were forced to flee as their homes were seized and redistributed to Arab families from areas captured by Assad forces, which led to growing resentment among Kurds towards Arabs, deepening Arab-Kurdish tensions. To uproot Kurdish self-rule in northern Syria, Turkey transferred hundreds of people to the northeastern city of Tel Abyad from the territories it controls. There are widespread reports that Turkey's Arab proxies engage in looting and abuse against the Kurds in the areas they seize.

Conclusion

After it came to power in 2002, the AKP built on past efforts to cultivate closer ties with the Middle East using trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. Analysts have dubbed this turn as "neo-Ottomanism," indicating Turkey's newfound ambition to revive influence in regions that the Ottoman Empire ruled. The term prevents a more comprehensive understanding of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP in two crucial ways. First, it blurs how the AKP's priorities and strategies have changed towards the Arab Middle East over the years. And second, it obscures how these changes are linked to power dynamics in domestic politics, particularly the survival tactics of Erdoğan's authoritarian but crisis-laden regime.

Our analysis builds on these two points by explaining the circumstances and outcomes of Turkey's increasing interactions with Arab countries, its new soft-power vision, and the opportunities and challenges created by the Arab uprisings. By focusing on Turkey-Syria relations, it explains how the Syrian uprising and the ensuing civil war pushed a fundamental change, replacing soft-power vision with hard-power tactics

to expand Turkish influence. The leading cause of this shift was Erdoğan's alliance with the ultra-nationalist party to preserve power after its defeat in the June 2015 elections. The AKP's shift to militarist nationalism, especially vis-a-vis the Kurds on both sides of the border, brought not only an end to the so-called peace process with the PKK at home but also paved the way to unilateral military incursions and Turkish control over a long stretch of territory encompassing about 4 million people in northern Syria.

While Erdoğan justified Turkey's operations in Syria in terms of national survival and security, in reality, these operations aimed to sustain his power by solidifying the support of fringe nationalist groups and his voter base through the "rally around the flag" effect. However, Turkey's Syria policy has neither served Erdoğan to the extent he projected nor Turkey's national security in the long run. Although Erdoğan remains a popular leader in the Arab street, the policies he pursued after the uprisings strained Turkey's ties with many countries in the region, dealing a blow to Turkey's economic and geostrategic interests. These policies not only prolonged the civil war, deepened ethnic tensions, and strengthened radical groups in Syria, but they also inflicted a significant toll domestically. Turkey lost an unprecedented opportunity for reconciliation with the Kurdish population living within its borders, and Turkey's involvement in Syria increased the financial and humanitarian burden on the Turkish government. The AKP's significantly weakened electoral support in the 2019 local elections, due to growing resentment towards Syrian refugees and economic problems, indicated that the costs of Turkey's involvement in Syria have far exceeded its benefits even for Erdoğan. As the financial crisis further deepens due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the costs of Turkey's overexpansion will continue to rise.

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Competing Visions, Escalating Rivalry: What does US-China Competition Mean for Arab Political Development?

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In an address to a joint session of Congress on April 29, President Joe Biden clearly positioned the US as fending off a global challenge from China in a bid to "win the 21st century" (White House 2021). Just a month earlier, Biden suggested the need to create a US-led international infrastructure scheme to rival China's Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping's signature multi-billion dollar development and investment plan to connect China to societies across Western Asia and beyond (*Al Jazeera* 2021). Following a meeting with Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, Biden said that, "we talked about China and the competition they're engaging in with the Belt and Road Initiative…and I suggested we should have, essentially, a similar initiative coming from the democratic states…China is out-investing us by a long shot…because their plan is to own that future" (Sanger 2021). With commentators suggesting that poor relations between Beijing and Washington are likely for the foreseeable future (Haas 2021), US-China political and economic competition has the potential to influence the struggle for democracy and development in Arab societies — key targets of Belt and Road Initiative investments.

In the last decade, China has moved decisively to exercise greater influence in Arab countries, from Egypt to Iraq and Saudi Arabia. While scholars have suggested that China's short-term aspirations only seek a "gradual modification of Pax Americana" (Schweller and Pu 2011, 53), Chinese elites may be updating their beliefs about Beijing's ability to win new alliances in the region. Wu (2021) makes the case for the emergence of a "new Middle East" characterized by increased geo-strategic competition among regional and global actors, with China playing a leading role.

> *"US-China political and economic competition has the potential to influence the struggle for democracy and development in Arab societies – key targets of Belt and Road Initiative investments."*

The growth of Chinese leverage in the Arab world points to influence that the United States stands to lose (Simpfendorfer 2009, 5). China's vision may be particularly appealing to Arab authoritarian regimes as it does not rely on the sorts of liberal values that the US has long sought to promulgate, if only rhetorically.[1] China's growth and investment model may also lead Arab governments and societies to be skeptical about the benefits of democratizing reforms and the associated role of the US as the leader of a Western-dominated, liberal economic order. This paper explores the potential for successful Chinese power projection in Arab countries. I describe the nature of Chinese interests in the Arab region; the ways that China and existing autocratic regimes mutually support one another; and the attitudes of people in Arab societies toward economic cooperation with China versus the US.

China's Middle East Gambit

In recent years, China has pursued a more assertive foreign policy, promulgating investment initiatives and economic partnerships with countries of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. Arab countries have been major targets of Chinese investment as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Anticipated to increase Chinese investment across dozens of countries, the BRI is a complex and multi-faceted effort with a variety of goals, including policy coordination, trade integration, and improving cross-cultural relations.[2] The organizations set up to implement the BRI go beyond the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Silk Road Fund, dedicated to investment in infrastructure projects and businesses respectively, to include the University Alliance of the Silk Road, founded with the goal of fostering cultural and academic exchange.

To a greater extent than previous Chinese foreign policy initiatives, the BRI has been viewed by scholars as a proactive foreign policy in contrast to prior outward-looking efforts which were seen as non-interventionist (Miller 2011). China's first major foray abroad involved $20 billion in investments across sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2014, funds used to finance pipelines, power plants, roads, and railways (Frankopan 2018, 114). While the BRI builds on experience China gained

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[1] Scholars have made it clear that US democracy promotion programs do not effectively confront dictators (e.g., Bush 2015) and in some cases even empower authoritarian tendencies and increase intensity of state repression (e.g., El Kurd 2019).

[2] From a Chinese perspective, soft power projection includes anything outside of the traditional security domain including development assistance, economic cooperation and cultural cooperation (Schweller and Pu 2011, 57).

as a result of investment experience in Africa, the rhetoric surrounding the BRI has taken on a different tone. Chinese leaders have been keen to emphasize that the BRI represents a revival of trade and commercial ties across Eurasia that enjoyed important historical precedent.[3]

Why a particular interest in building infrastructural and economic connections in the Middle East? And why now? Kastner and Pearson (2021) argue that China promotes foreign economic ties with multiple objectives, including to strengthen the Chinese national economy; to advance the commercial interests of certain firms; and to forward the foreign policy and geostrategic goals of Beijing. China's oil consumption is growing and, as a result, it is highly vulnerable to energy disruptions; this has led Beijing to pursue policies with the goal of enhancing China's access to oil and gas (Lind and Press 2018, 171; Frankopan 2018). A number of factors contribute to this vulnerability, including China's relatively limited influence in Arab Gulf states and its inability to militarily defend its oil supply chain (Lind and Press 2018, 187). With ports planned across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the BRI represents a major investment in China's energy security (Lind and Press 2018, 194).[4]

Frankopan (2018, 100–103) points out that in addition to its needs in the domain of energy security, China has considerable excess capacity in terms of steel, cement, and metal production alongside a large workforce skilled at infrastructure building that might be effectively exported abroad. In order to maintain those industries and to keep construction workers employed, building infrastructure abroad is viewed as preferable to increased investment in construction of Chinese infrastructure, which may be overbuilt. Economic ties abroad are thought to increase Chinese influence in a number of ways, including through a strengthening of Beijing's bargaining power; the generation of new pro-China interest groups within target countries; the shaping of positive public and elite opinion about China; and the development of structural power which allows Beijing to set standards and shape markets (Kastner and Pearson 2021).

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[3] Blaydes and Paik (2021) describe the historical economic interconnections between China and the Middle East with a particular focus on how political fragmentation damaged commercial exchange.
[4] Ironically, "American military preponderance in the Persian Gulf has provided China with a low-cost entry into the region, allowing it to develop its deeper presence without a corresponding security role" (Fulton 2020a, 492).

Mutually Supportive Autocratic Regimes

China has placed economic development, rather than political reform, front and center in its global engagements. This sentiment extends to China's involvement in the Middle East and is reflected, for example, in one Chinese official quoted as saying, "the root problems in the Middle East lie in development, and the only solution is also development" (Fulton 2018). The Chinese have also signaled their support for a global order that is more inclusive and less focused on generating dominance over other societies (Schweller and Pu 2011, 60), a factor many Arab countries may find appealing given the recent history of US military involvement in parts of the Middle East.

Chinese ventures provide funding for risky and expensive infrastructure projects that have the potential to stabilize the economies of existing regimes. For example, China has shown a willingness to invest in post-conflict Syria in a way that could bolster the Assad regime. Syria is unable to finance reconstruction domestically, and political partners Iran and Russia do not have sufficient resources to rebuild the country given the devastating effects of the civil war (Burton *et al.* 2021). Gulf states and Western countries are reluctant to provide aid or loans to the Assad regime for political reasons; as a result, Chinese support has emerged as a priority for Damascus (Ibid).

Chinese officials have made multiple visits to Syria in recent years to discuss projects and extend loans. In September 2017, the Syrian Ambassador to China told Chinese investors that "only China can play a leading role in helping Syria realize its reconstruction" (Calabrese 2019). Scholars have also suggested that China's reliance on state-led development makes the "Beijing Consensus" a more suitable model for Syrian economic development than the "Washington Consensus" (Burton *et al.* 2021). Major projects discussed include highway, railway, and pipeline construction with China potentially following the Iraq post-war model for rebuilding where Chinese state-owned enterprises made investments in high-value projects in sectors like energy, logistics, and transportation (Ibid). In particular, China helped rebuild the Iraqi oil infrastructure and restore telecommunications service; Iraq subsequently became one of the first Arab states to publicly support the BRI (Shahbazov 2021).

China and Syria also share mutual interests with regard to dissident groups and populations. China has opposed censuring the Assad regime or referring Syrian regime officials to the International Criminal Court for abuses against civilian populations (Calabrese 2019). Instead,

it has pursued a flexible, non-coercive policy stance toward Syria. Commentators have suggested that Beijing's interests are more secure if Assad remains in power (Cafiero 2020). Indeed, according to Chinese officials, anti-terrorism is the foundation of a political settlement to end the Syrian conflict (Ibid). Beijing is sympathetic to the labeling of political dissidents as terrorists, offering support for the use of state repression by the Assad regime. In addition, Beijing and Damascus have developed resources for sharing intelligence on Chinese citizens in Syria, including Uyghurs from Xinjiang who are thought to have joined ISIS (Ibid).

Beyond Syria, China has also shown interest in developing stronger economic ties with Egypt, including in the Suez Canal Zone. Egyptian officials have described China as the largest investor in the canal region (Wood 2018). For example, Chinese developers associated with the Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area have invested in a fiberglass fabrication facility that has made Egypt a major fiberglass production location. In addition, the six-day blockage of the Suez Canal in March by the container ship *Ever Given* showed the vulnerability of the international shipping routes upon which China relies heavily, as well as the need for possible infrastructural upgrades to the canal itself.

Chinese firms have also been associated with work on Egypt's proposed new capital city project located east of Cairo. Since being announced in 2015, few foreign investors have shown an interest in the project other than the Chinese. Chinese banks have committed to lending the majority of required funds, including for an associated light rail system (Wood 2018). Chinese investments in Egyptian infrastructure have the potential to support the Sisi regime in a way that insulates the leadership from popular pressure. With more than 20 million Egyptians living in Greater Cairo, population growth has put a strain on the city's infrastructure. A relatively remote, newly constructed capital city reduces pressure on the need to upgrade Cairo's crumbling infrastructure while simultaneously insulating the government from existing urban populations that have shown a willingness to engage in protest mobilization.

China and Egypt have supported each other in other domains. An inflow of Chinese tourists helped prop up Egypt's hospitality industry when US and European tourists were reluctant to visit as a result of political instability. China and Egypt have also coordinated in the arrest of Uyghur students studying at Al-Azhar. In some cases, the students were sent back to China

for "re-education" or held in Egyptian prison, often without charge (Wood 2018).

Countries of the GCC have also sought Chinese investment as they have worked to reform their domestic economies with the goals of improving state capacity and encouraging labor force participation on the part of nationals. These aspirations are summarized in a series of national vision programs including *Saudi Vision 2030*, *New Kuwait 2035*, *Abu Dhabi 2030*, *Qatar National Vision 2030*, *Oman Vision 2040*, and *Bahrain Economic Vision 2030*. If Chinese investments support national economic visions of Gulf regimes, this has the potential to support status quo governments. Chinese investment in Saudi Arabia comes at a time when Riyadh has had difficulty managing its relationship with its long-time US-based construction partner, Bechtel. Saudi Arabia reportedly owes Bechtel about $1 billion for previous work on the Riyadh metro system (Nereim and Martin 2021).

BRI-affiliated states have also provided support for repression within China. In 2019, dozens of countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, and Algeria, signed a letter supporting China's Xinjiang policies (Cumming-Bruce 2019). This took place shortly after a number of European countries urged China to stop the arbitrary detention of Uyghurs. On a 2019 trip to Beijing, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated his support for China's right to engage in deradicalization measures in Xinjiang while also signing $28 billion worth of economic cooperation agreements (Amor 2021).

Winning Support for China's Economic Rise

The role of the US as a global political and economic hegemon following the end of the Cold War spurred a large literature on the determinants of anti-Americanism around the world (e.g., Chiozza 2007; Keohane and Katzenstein 2007; Baker and Cupery 2013) and particularly in Muslim societies (e.g., Gentzkow and Shapiro 2004; Lynch 2007; Blaydes and Linzer 2013; Jamal *et al.* 2015; Corstange 2016; Andrabi and Das 2017). Increased Chinese foreign investment abroad has drawn attention to broader questions about China's global standing, including in world regions long influenced by the United States. Unlike major Western powers like the US, UK, and France that have maintained a leading role in the Arab region for decades, Chinese influence and involvement were relatively minor until recently (Shahbazov 2021).

One of the stated goals of the BRI is to increase cross-cultural cooperation and mutual understanding between China and citizens of countries receiving BRI investments. Scholars have further suggested that China seeks to make allies in Western Asia with the goal of building a community of "shared destiny" through the creation of informal alliances reinforced by Chinese investment (Miller 2017, 11). Yet, there has been relatively little analysis of attitudes toward China among citizens of countries in the Middle East, raising questions about whether Beijing will be able to achieve its objectives. Allan *et al.* (2018) argue that China's alternative order may not be ideologically appealing, potentially blocking the ability of China to challenge the current international order.

Analysis of Arab Barometer data by Michael Robbins suggests that there is a significant political opening for China in the Arab region (Robbins 2020). In particular, he provides evidence that China is the most popular global power in Arab countries, with which citizens are more open to stronger ties than with either the US or Russia (Ibid). It is also possible to compare attitudes toward increased ties with China relative to the US with the goal of seeing how large of a differential emerges and for whom that difference is largest.
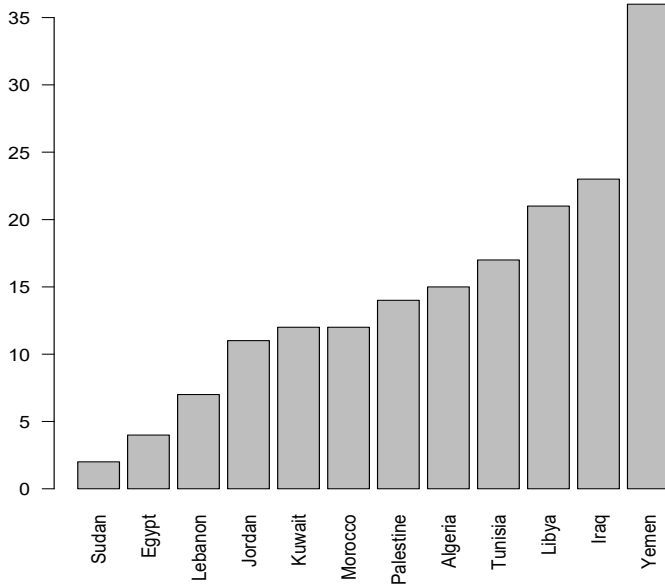

Figure 1: "Difference in Support for Status Quo or Stronger Future Economic Relations with China versus the US (larger values indicate preference for China), Wave 5 Arab Barometer (2018-19)"

Figure 1 shows the country-level, average difference between support for future economic relations between the respondent's country and China versus the US using data from Wave 5 of the Arab Barometer (collected in 2018-2019). I consider the following question: "Now I would like to ask you questions about the Arab world and international relations. Do you prefer that future economic relations between your country and [China/US] become stronger than they were in previous years; remain the same as they were in previous years; or become weaker than they were in the previous years." Positive values indicate a desire for stronger relations with China (relative to the US). While Yemenis show the strongest preference for future economic relations with China, Egyptians and the Sudanese are relatively indifferent when it comes to whether future economic ties are cultivated with the US or China.
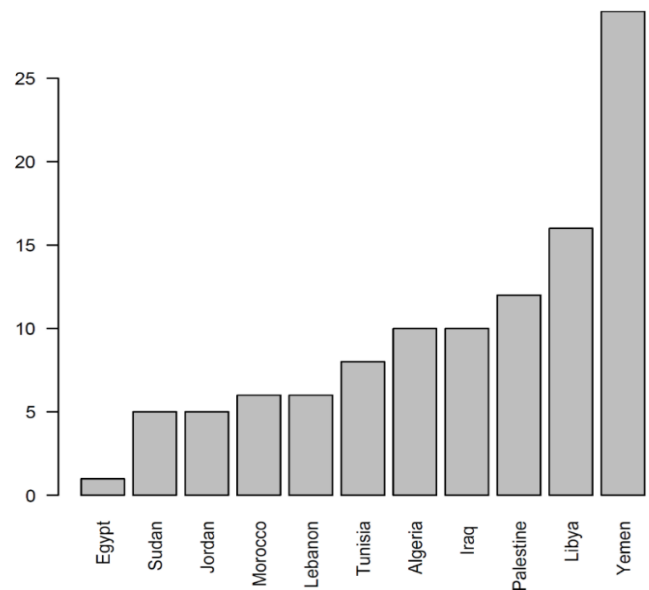

Figure 2: Difference in Support for Increased Foreign Aid from China versus the US (larger values indicate preference for China), Wave 5 Arab Barometer (2018-19)

Arab Barometer respondents were also asked, "Do you want foreign aid from [China/US] to increase, decrease, or remain the same in the future?" Figure 2 shows the difference between how Arab citizens view aid from China versus the US. Again, Yemenis show a strong preference for foreign aid from China. Libyans, Palestinians, and Iraqis also prefer future Chinese aid rather than US aid. Given the hand that the US has had in recent conflict in these societies, it is not surprising that citizens of Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Palestine all exhibit a pro-China preference in terms of where foreign aid might come from in the future. On the other hand, countries like Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco show a less intense preference for aid from China rather

than the US. In sum, the evidence presented here suggests that Arab citizenries are highly sympathetic to economic relations with China and in almost all cases, prefer aid and future economic ties with China rather than the US.[5]

Scholars have argued that China's economic growth and political influence are seen as less threatening than US influence, factors that could be particularly resonant in Arab societies that have borne costs and strains associated with US policy. Bianchi (2019, 3) argues that "part of China's appeal in the non-Western world is that many people see it not as a superpower, but as another developing country that remains highly vulnerable to external disruptions and domestic divisions...because China seems so overextended economically and so limited militarily that weaker nations regard it as a pliant and manageable partner." For less developed countries, China also provides a model for growth that is accessible while at the same time less disruptive than that promoted by the US. Beyond that, as one analyst notes, "for less prosperous countries that may not meet conditions attached to 'mainstream' development initiatives from the west, China offers an attractive alternative" (Saigal 2017).

There may also be more of a values overlap with China relative to the US for Arab societies. For example, scholars have argued that the US–Saudi relationship is not based on shared values but rather is an interest-based partnership; on the other hand, while the Sino-Saudi relationship is also interest-based, the values gap is not as pronounced (Fulton 2020b). In addition, Riyadh and Beijing are taking steps to try to narrow the values gap at the societal level (Ibid), but it is unclear if the US has a vision in this regard.[6]

Discussion

There is intense scholarly debate regarding whether the liberal international order is robust to changes in global material capabilities and if a US-led hegemonic order even carries the meaning often attributed to it.[7] If global material capabilities increasingly favor China over the US, scholars have suggested the emergence of

a more pluralistic world order that involves a diversity of ideas, actors, and leaders (Acharya 2014) and new claims for cultural recognition (Reus-Smit 2017). China has a record — virtually peerless in world history — of lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, so it is unsurprising that a Chinese development initiative should be of great interest to developing countries. Even if China achieves a relatively slim percentage of its objectives with the Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI still represents a major opportunity for Beijing to influence the economic trajectories of Arab countries.[8] China has positioned itself as the main challenger to the existing international order, forging its own alliances, including in countries the US has traditionally held sway (Myers 2021). The public opinion data that I have presented suggests that China is already viewed more favorably than the US as an economic partner and foreign aid donor across Arab societies.

Middle Eastern political actors are also aware of the growing rivalry between China and the US (Khedr 2021). On the one hand, this competition has the potential to generate forms of bargaining leverage for regimes that are targets of both US and Chinese influence schemes. On the other hand, US-China rivalry also has the potential to generate forms of precarity, especially if this competition encourages risky borrowing or spills into security domains (*Middle East Monitor* 2021).

How do these findings relate to existing work on transnational soft power projection? Andrabi and Das (2017) find that trust in Westerners was markedly higher among Pakistanis exposed to a major earthquake and subsequent disaster relief, suggesting the malleability of attitudes and the potential positive impact of aid and investment. Baker and Cupery (2013) examine anti-American attitudes in Latin America finding that economic exchange with the United States promotes goodwill, rather than bitterness, toward the US. To the extent that Chinese engagements in the Arab world resemble US aid and investment (Andrabi and Das 2017) or trade and remittance flows (Baker and Cupery 2013), China's growing economic and cultural influence has the potential to eventually translate into political leadership and forms of state power.

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[5] This analysis says nothing about absolute levels of support for increased economic connectedness in favor of focusing on the preference differential in the context of increasing US-China competition.

[6] With regard to the Saudi case, Leber (2020) offers something of a counterpoint, arguing that Saudi government officials and members of the elite classes continue to see the United States as an irreplaceable security partner.

[7] See Paul Staniland. 2018. "Misreading the 'Liberal Order:' Why We Need New Thinking in American Foreign Policy," *www. lawfareblog.com*, July 29, 2018, for more on this debate.

[8] China's weakened economic position means that the BRI may enjoy the financial resources needed to fulfill promises and expectations (Shepard 2020).

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Author Exchange
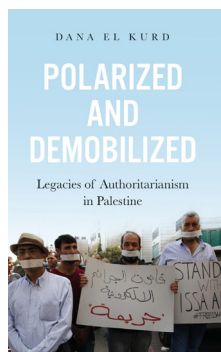
Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine. By Dana El Kurd. Oxford University Press. 2020. 226p. Hardcover and eBook.

Review by Benjamin Schuetze, Senior Researcher, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute (ABI)

In *Polarized and Demobilized*, Dana El Kurd provides a much-needed analysis of the role of international involvement in facilitating authoritarian power in Palestine. El Kurd explores how the Palestinian Authority (PA) has demobilized Palestinian society, even after years of Israeli occupation had failed to do so. The book makes a compelling contribution to the field, given the state-centric nature of most political science literature on authoritarian power. While the role of Israel's occupation and settler colonialism in repressing Palestinian society is blatantly obvious, the corrosive effects of international aid operate in a more subtle manner. Some of the dynamics explored by El Kurd include an aid-induced divergence between Palestinian elites and the public they purport to represent, the facilitation of authoritarian practices via a lack of public accountability, and an ensuing polarization of society and decline in political mobilization.

Based on quantitative data analysis and qualitative assessment of protest movements, El Kurd powerfully demonstrates that "counterintuitively [...] political mobilization today is actually more prevalent in areas under direct Israeli occupation" (p. 92) than in those where the PA has more direct control. Pointedly describing the PA as "a subcontractor of the Israeli occupation" (p. 76), El Kurd provides a strong critique of the so-called "peace process." This has only deepened the occupation and authoritarian conditions in Palestine, as El Kurd convincingly shows, by, for instance, encouraging PA officials to adopt deeply Orientalist narratives of Palestinians as being "'unsuitable' for democracy" (p. 64) and hence requiring repression (p. 14).

The book focuses on international involvement, rather than on the Israeli occupation. But is it possible to discuss the former without centering the latter? How do Israeli authorities channel and/or control international aid? How do PA officials make sense of a situation in

which they both repress (Palestinian activists) and are repressed (by Israeli occupation forces)? As the book is very methodology-driven — analyzing causal paths, mechanisms and effects, causal-process observations, as well as the results of a field experiment — political scientists may find it more informative than those interested in more interdisciplinary approaches. While El Kurd's overall analysis is compelling, more direct use of interview data could have shed further light on the above-mentioned questions and the ways in which donors, PA officials, and Israeli occupation forces interact. For instance, Carapico (2013) has explored the implementation of international aid in *Political Aid and Arab Activism*. A similar approach could have allowed El Kurd to complement her methodological rigor with more empirical richness.

El Kurd argues that attempts at mapping authoritarian power into neat spatial units disregard the way in which the international community bears responsibility for authoritarian conditions in Palestine and elsewhere. Exploring "both regime and societal outcomes, such as internationally backed authoritarian practices at one end, and decreasing social cohesion and mobilization at another" (p. 139), her book provides a much needed corrective to the predominance of regime-focused political science. Throughout the book, but particularly in the last chapter, El Kurd demonstrates the applicability of her argument beyond the case of Palestine, to Iraqi Kurdistan and Bahrain, making it a valuable source for researchers with a different geographic focus. Indeed, many aid-dependent regimes in the Arab world and beyond function — similar to the PA — as a "buffer" (p. 75) that represses dissenting voices on behalf of external actors, thereby rendering (external) control more efficient.

Building on the above, I want to raise the following questions: What are the spaces in which acts of resistance against the production of authoritarian conditions in Palestine are possible and/or most needed? The argument that authoritarian power in Palestine is — at least in part — internationally produced implies that the struggle for liberation can only succeed if it relies on international strategies of resistance. What role does the continued predominance of regime- and state-centric understandings of authoritarianism in political science play in obfuscating the ways in which authoritarian power is (re-)produced?

While El Kurd demonstrates powerfully how the PA renders Israeli occupation more efficient, she remains ambiguous about whether a potential end of the PA would constitute a step forward. Despite detailing how elections in 2006 led to a US-supported coup against

HAMAS and a crackdown on legitimate dissent, El Kurd nevertheless argues for elections (in the diaspora and the territories) as a way of reactivating the Palestinian National Council (PNC). Are elections in a context of occupation an effective means of increasing mobilization and holding Palestinian leadership accountable?

Finally, regarding recent developments: Do the latest protests around Sheikh Jarrah, incursions in the Al-Aqsa compound and the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, as well as increased activism by Palestinian citizens of Israel, confirm the book's argument that Palestinian mobilization is more likely to occur in areas that are not under the control of the PA? Instead, are we witnessing the beginning of a new type of Palestinian mobilization that has the potential to overcome the forms of polarization discussed in the book?

El Kurd's book provides an indispensable foundation for any discussion of the detrimental effects of internationally-backed indigenous authoritarian regimes. Its rigorous political science methodology should convince scholars in the discipline, which has hitherto not been particularly open towards some of the questions raised, of the importance of acknowledging and further exploring the international dimension of authoritarian power in Palestine and elsewhere.

Response from Dana El Kurd

Thank you to Dr. Benjamin Schuetze for his important and thoughtful analysis of my book. He raises a number of thought-provoking questions that are crucial in illuminating how the book's argument can be applied to what we see in Israel-Palestine today.

Dr. Schuetze's first question on my choice to focus on the international, and particularly American, role in facilitating authoritarian conditions in Palestine — with less analysis devoted to the Israeli role — is a fair one. I decided to focus more on the international impact for two reasons: first, because work by Kareem Rabie (2021), Ibrahim Shikaki & Joanna Springer (2015), Jeremy Wildeman & Alaa Tartir (2013), Manal Jamal (2020), and others dealt exclusively with the aid dimension, and thoroughly outlined the ways in which the Israeli government impacts and skews the allocation of aid to the Palestinian Authority. Instead of just focusing on aid, I attempted to broaden the scope of my project to look at a greater variety of mechanisms of international intervention. This also included security involvement (in the form of intervention in the decision-making of the PA's coercive apparatus), diplomatic pressure, and finally the impact of international powers on public

opinion. Secondly, I chose to focus on the role of the US in particular — building off of Amaney Jamal's important work using other cases in the region — to highlight specifically how the Americans are implicated in worsening conditions for Palestinians in the occupied territories. We all know that the U.S. supports Israel, provides funding, etc. — but the specific mechanisms of the day-to-day intervention have not been fully spelled out.

Dr. Schuetze also raises an important question regarding the struggle for liberation, and whether heavy international intervention in the Palestinian struggle implies an internationalization of the solution. The internationalization of the Palestinian cause is almost inevitable; not only does the issue continue to be of major importance to Arab publics across the region (to the chagrin of Arab regimes), but also Western publics are recognizing the ways in which their governments are implicated in the maintenance of the status quo, and are increasingly involved in challenging this state of affairs. One only needs to look at the latest wave of solidarity protests that erupted all over the world in response to the attack on Gaza. Some of the largest, such as the one in London, reached over 180,000 participants.

Nevertheless, what I hope my book makes clear is that the biggest obstacle to Palestinian resistance to the occupation is the polarization and division wrought by the Oslo paradigm. No amount of pressure on the Israeli government from abroad can substitute for the pressure of a coordinated and highly mobilized Palestinian public at home. The lack of such a mobilization is indeed the reason living conditions for Palestinians have worsened, with illegal settlement activity and Israeli repression reaching new heights.

This brings me to Dr. Schuetze's final point regarding where we see mobilization today, particularly in reference to the latest wave of mobilizations nicknamed "the Unity Intifada" by Palestinian activists. The Unity Intifada did indeed confirm the trends I showed in my analysis of Palestinian mobilization. Palestinians in Jerusalem, recipients of the most direct and most accelerated forms of Israel's settler-colonialism and unaffected by the PA, were responsible for igniting the country-wide events. They were also comparatively coordinated, working within the city as well as with Palestinian communities across the green line. In comparison, Palestinian cities in the West Bank also saw protests, but in sporadic form and much less widespread. They often erupted without planning — simply young frustrated Palestinians gathering to face a checkpoint or military watchtower. Throughout these

events, the PA played the same role I discuss in my book: it stopped protesters on a number of occasions from approaching Israeli military installments, and suppressed activists trying to call for a coordinated strategy.

Nevertheless, there is something new about this wave of mobilization: the unprecedented level of coordination between Palestinian citizens of Israel and their counterparts in the occupied territories. I only touched on the role of Palestinian citizens of Israel briefly, in my conclusion, by noting that their actions represent new opportunities to challenge the occupation. But the ways in which this particular community of Palestinians will impact future mobilization patterns is indeed a dynamic to focus on in future research, especially given their unique relationship to the Israeli political authority and the range of authoritarian practices used against them.
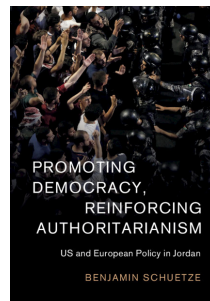
Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism: US and European Policy in Jordan. By Benjamin Schuetze. Cambridge University Press. 2019. 288p. Hardcover and eBook.

Review by Dana El Kurd, Assistant Professor, University of Richmond

Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism by Benjamin Schuetze is a fascinating study of democracy promotion initiatives and professionals, as well as their internal justifications for the work they do. Schuetze focuses on the case of Jordan, arguing that it represents "a state of the art," indicative of the myriad ways in which democracy promotion is used to reinforce authoritarian practices. The level of detail he provides on the various aid organizations, tracing which are responsible for what types of aid, as well as offering examples of their activities and impacts, makes this book indispensable for those interested in Jordan as a case, and in the wider region insofar as these dynamics are replicated in other contexts.

Schuetze essentially makes two arguments. The first concerns the self-understanding of democracy promoters and their internal justifications. Schuetze provides evidence that the interaction of a "universal narrative of democracy" (pg. 2) with the Jordanian context leads to "moral hierarchies that serve as an efficient rationale for political control" (pg. 3). The second argument is that this interaction reinforces authoritarianism in Jordan.

The first argument is well-documented. Schuetze's use of interviews as well as primary documents in meticulous detail reveals the way democracy promotion professionals conceive of the state that is the target of their work, as well as the society that bears their impact. The author convincingly shows how donors focus on the procedural aspects of democracy while obfuscating the substance of these promotion programs, leading democracy promoters to believe society is simply deficient when their initiatives inevitably fail. For instance, a focus on party and electoral politics on the part of international donors garners weak engagement from the Jordanian public. This is precisely because such aid emphasizes the logistics of party politics without addressing the authoritarian structure of the political system, meaning Jordanians do not see any use in engagement. The explanation for such failure, however, is that Jordanian society is deficient — rather than that the aid programs are based on false premises.

The second argument — that this has a material impact on authoritarianism — raises a few questions. First, the size of the impact of such democracy promotion programs is not always clear. In many instances, programs seem to have only a tangential effect — either by focusing on almost irrelevant political parties or NGOs lacking in broad support. It is undoubtable that U.S. security interests lead to the reinforcement of authoritarianism across the region, either materially or ideationally. But *how much* of the reinforcement is happening through these programs specifically?

As to why these democracy promotion programs persist, Schuetze focuses predominantly on the fact that they are based on asserting Western moral superiority, and that these internal justifications perpetuate the continued existence of democracy promotion efforts even when faced with evidence that they are not succeeding. But this misses an elephant in the room: *why* U.S. security interests are as they are in Jordan and in the region more broadly. In the Jordanian case, its role in maintaining Israeli security, keeping its large Palestinian population demobilized, as well as acting as a base for American military exploits seems to be a crucial component of the story. Upholding Western notions of moral hierarchies and superiority is certainly a factor, but readers would have benefitted from Schuetze's linking the micropolitics of democracy promotion aid to U.S. regional strategy more generally.

Moreover, some assessment of how indicative Jordan is of the wider region would have been useful to the reader. Democracy promotion programs play out differently in different regions; Manal Jamal's *Promoting*

Democracy (2019) provides an example of this in her analysis of El Salvador and Palestine, for example. In some cases, democracy promotion has opposite effects, and stems from entirely different motivations, than what occurs in the Middle East. What does Jordan tell us about these trends?

Finally, some questions emerge regarding the most recent developments. How have things changed since the rounds of protest we saw in Jordan — first in 2018, and then after the large-scale teacher's union protests in 2020? Have democracy promotion programs scaled down since the regime's turn to more naked repression? Are there new justifications for their existence?

There is much to be learned from Schuetze's work. His contributions to our understanding of democracy promotion programs, with such careful and impressive qualitative data, make the book essential reading for those concerned with democratization processes — or lack thereof.

Response from Benjamin Schuetze

I am very thankful to Professor El Kurd for her thoughtful discussion of my book and the important questions she raises. I take pride in El Kurd's remark that the book's "careful and impressive qualitative data" make it "essential reading for those concerned with democratization processes — or lack thereof." El Kurd is right in noting that I do not provide a comprehensive assessment of US and/or EU strategy in the region. Instead, I explore the latter through the lens of what 'democracy promoters' do when they promote democracy and the ways in which their work ends up reinforcing authoritarian power structures in Jordan.

In response to El Kurd's question about the precise "impact size of democracy promotion programs," it is helpful to contrast my approach to studies that explicitly attempt to measure impact (see Finkel *et al.* 2007). Unlike such approaches, I do not think that the latter can in a meaningful way be quantified, nor that it is possible to measure how much of the reinforcement of authoritarian power occurs via 'democracy promotion'. I see attempts at answering such questions as inevitably futile, as answers depend on initial definitions of key terms, many of which are heavily contested. The questions I find much more insightful revolve around the kind of democracy that is promoted, the ways in which the promotion of narrow liberal notions of democracy deepens socio-economic authoritarianisms and the mechanisms via which a politics of intervention perpetuates itself.

I analyze in my book not only the promotion of liberal democracy, but also challenge the notions of political economy and security that 'democracy promoters' deem to be reinforcing of the latter. Descriptions of the Jordanian military as an important regional ally and the assumption that U.S.-Jordanian security collaboration makes Jordan "safe for democracy" are present among 'democracy promoters', policymakers, and select scholars. However, they ignore the role of the Jordanian military in suppressing oppositional activism, and the intersecting dynamics of militarization and commercialization, which fundamentally contradict ideals of democratic control and are directly triggered by U.S. military assistance. In my discussion of a U.S.-funded special operations training center, I unpack the role of Jordan as regional sub-contractor for U.S. imperialism.

While El Kurd writes that training programs for irrelevant political parties and NGOs "seem to have only a tangential effect," I see such initiatives as crucial for the reinforcement of authoritarian power behind a façade of constant democratization. They are also key in perpetuating the Orientalist notion that Jordanians are "not yet ready for democracy" and require ongoing external intervention. As 'democracy promoters' interact with a narrow segment of Jordanian politics and are unable and/or unwilling to engage with Jordan's professional associations, the movement against normalization with Israel and the *ḥirāk* (new popular movements that emerged in 2011), they reproduce in their activities a distorted and self-confirming image of Jordan and Jordanians at large. The perception that further external training is needed to make parties and civil society strong enough to overcome authoritarianism is reproduced as Jordanian politics is pressed into a conceptually narrow Western liberal democratic mold. The Jordanian regime, however, which co-organizes many such initiatives, can continue to portray itself as an agent of, rather than a barrier to, democratization.

Regarding the question of why 'democracy promotion' persists, my response is twofold. First, the main character in 'democracy promotion' in Jordan is neither Jordan, nor democracy, nor even an imagined Jordanian democracy, but instead a Western self-understanding as "democratic" vis-à-vis "the Jordanian non-democratic other." Second, such programs must be analyzed as the continuation of an established politics of domination, with democracy constructed as a means of social control that does not challenge socio-economic inequalities. While a politics of domination has traditionally relied on the open threat and/or use of violence, culturalist narratives of being "not yet ready"

for democracy, economic exploitation, and processes of militarization now have similar effects and remind us of the difficulty of separating coercive and consensual means of social control. The framing of Western foreign policies under a narrative of 'democracy promotion' has rendered support for authoritarian regimes such as Jordan even more effective. I fully agree with El Kurd regarding the centrality of Israeli security to U.S. and E.U. strategic interests and provide ample discussion of the ways in which 'democracy promoters' attempt to control and demobilize the Jordanian public towards that goal.

Regarding El Kurd's question about how indicative the case of Jordan is of the wider region, it is worth noting that Jordan is one of the main recipients of 'democracy promotion' funds worldwide. As the interventions I discuss are part of a universally applied and free-floating body of knowledge that operates irrespective of specific contexts, I am confident that the two above outlined arguments also hold up elsewhere. It is, however, certainly useful to distinguish between countries like Jordan or Morocco, which attempt to collaborate with 'democracy promoters' in reproducing a narrative of constant reform, and countries like Egypt and the U.A.E., which openly resist attempts at 'democracy promotion'. I discuss the variation highlighted by El Kurd in my analysis of Eastern European staff of the American National Democratic Institute office in Jordan, and of the ways in which U.S. support for the color revolutions in Eastern Europe took a very different shape than 'democracy promotion' in Jordan.

While I am not entirely up-to-date regarding the latest programs, 'democracy promoters' have in the past been highly adept at interpreting both — steps at liberalization, as well as increased repression — as requiring further funds and bigger programs. The popular narrative of Jordan as a supposed "oasis of stability" and a "regional model for progress" has certainly been tarnished by the state's crackdown on the teachers' union in August 2020 and the alleged coup plot in April 2021. However, as both the regime and U.S. and European policymakers have for several decades invested in it — regardless of political developments — this narrative still continues to shape U.S. and European policy vis-à-vis Jordan.

Joint Conclusion from El Kurd and Schuetze

Thank you to the editors for the opportunity to have this discussion. Despite differences in our respective methodological approaches, our books complement each other in many ways, and these reviews demonstrate

some common takeaways.

First, in the study of international intervention — particularly in the Arab world — there is understandably a great deal of focus on the U.S. and, to a lesser degree, the E.U. This reflects not only the extent to which powers in the Global North are implicated in consolidating authoritarian power in the region, but also to some degree the availability and legibility of certain data for scholars based in the Global North. The focus on the U.S./E.U. also stems from a general state-centric approach to our analysis of politics.

The questions raised in both of our reviews point to missing pieces of the puzzle, however. The role of Israel in both cases — Palestine and Jordan — is not the main focus of either argument, but it nevertheless looms large in the background. Future research should widen the scope of our analysis, recognizing that authoritarian linkages in the MENA region go beyond the usual culprits. The role of Israel for instance in reinforcing authoritarian practices should also be studied outside the scope of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Moreover, the focus on the microfoundations of authoritarianism — how authoritarian practices are facilitated by actors outside the regime or state — is another major implication of both books. Such practices are facilitated by and within private corporations, as well as aid and civil society organizations, in addition to state bureaucracies. As our understanding of authoritarianism deepens, it is crucial we recognize the many spaces in which authoritarian practices emerge.

Our books emphasize that authoritarian power in Jordan, Palestine, and elsewhere is to a large extent reproduced by actors beyond the nation-state. Regime-centric approaches fundamentally fail to acknowledge this international dimension of authoritarian power and the extent to which U.S. and E.U. interventions in the name of democracy may actually help to maintain authoritarian power. A focus on transregionally connected authoritarian practices (see Jenss & Schuetze 2021), rather than on individual regimes, allows us to see authoritarian actors that have not yet received adequate attention in the established body of political science literature. These include developmental aid agencies, transnational corporations (TNCs), as well as formally democratic states such as Israel.

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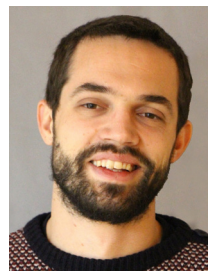
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Guest Editor

Jean Lachapelle is an Assistant Professor at the University of Oslo's Department of Political Science. He was previously a research fellow at Harvard's Middle East Initiative, the University of Michigan's Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies, and the University of Gothenburg's V-Dem Institute. His research examines the causes and consequences of state violence in authoritarian regimes. His first book project theorizes autocrats' decision to use repression, based on in-depth fieldwork in Egypt and novel event data. More broadly, he is interested in issues of repression, military coups, revolution, and the relationship between violence and political order, with a regional focus on the Middle East and North Africa. His work appears or is forthcoming in the *Journal of Politics*, *World Politics*, *Social Science and Medicine*, and *Comparative Politics*.

Managing Editor

Derek Groom is an Academic Program Specialist with the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies. In this role, he manages the programming, administration, and research/outreach activities of WCED. Before coming to U-M, Derek worked in Washington, DC at American Councils for International Education, administering the Overseas Flagship Programs and Flagship Language Initiatives in Eurasia and Africa. In 2013, Derek completed the Russian Overseas Flagship Program in St. Petersburg, Russia as a Boren Scholar.

About *Democracy and Autocracy*

Democracy and Autocracy is the official newsletter of the American Political Science Association's Democracy and Autocracy section (formerly known as the Comparative Democratization section). First known as *CompDem*, it has been published three times a year since 2003. In October 2010, the newsletter was renamed *APSA-CD* and expanded to include substantive articles on democracy, as well as news and notes on the latest developments in the field. In September 2018, it was renamed the *Annals of Comparative Democratization* to reflect the increasingly high academic content and recognition of the symposia.

About WCED

Housed in the International Institute at the University of Michigan, the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies (WCED) began operation in September 2008. Named in honor of Ronald and Eileen Weiser and inspired by their time in Slovakia during Ambassador Weiser's service as U.S. Ambassador from 2001-04, WCED promotes scholarship to better understand the conditions and policies that foster the transition from autocratic rule to democratic governance, past and present.

WEISER CENTER FOR EMERGING DEMOCRACIES
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Section News

In Memoriam — Ronald Inglehart

ANN ARBOR - Ronald F. Inglehart, 86, died on May 8, 2021, after a long illness. One of the world's most cited political scientists, Inglehart published over 400 peer-reviewed articles and authored or coauthored fourteen books during his career. His books have been translated into many languages, and his theories have been analyzed and studied in most global and regional contexts.

Inglehart was born on September 5th, 1934 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was raised in Glencoe, Illinois. He earned his undergraduate degree at Northwestern University, and his Master's and PhD at the University of Chicago. In 1963-1964, he was a Fulbright Scholar at Leiden University in The Netherlands. He taught political science from 1966 to 2021 at the University of Michigan, where he was the Amy and Alan Loewenstein Professor of Democracy, Democratization and Human Rights, and Research Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Social Research. He also was the founding director of the Ronald F. Inglehart Laboratory for Comparative Social Research at the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Inglehart's research transformed the way that social scientists understand the role of human values and cultures in societies worldwide. In his seminal work, *The Silent Revolution* (1977), he used extensive survey evidence to argue that, in contrast to their parents and grandparents, younger generations growing up in secure and affluent post-industrial societies, developed "post-materialist" values. This orientation, he wrote, "emphasizes self-expression and quality-of-life over economic and physical security." These notions have become commonplace in the social sciences, largely because of Inglehart's groundbreaking research. He refined his ideas of societies' changing values and culture.

"He was truly a pioneer in using survey data to measure and compare culture across countries. Thousands of researchers have used data from the World Values Survey (WVS), which he founded and directed until recently. Widely referenced and very influential, too, are his conceptual contributions, including the value dimensions he identified and used to situate each country in a two-dimensional cultural map," says Mark Tessler, Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of Political Science.

Inglehart helped found the Euro-Barometer surveys, and is recognized internationally for his work as the founding president of the WVS, conducting longitudinal representative national surveys of over 100 societies since 1981. For these last four decades, the WVS has gathered data about the values of ordinary people, and what they think about their lives, societies, economies, and politics.

"Inglehart's ideas have been central to our understanding of public opinion and cultural change," says Ken Kollman, Director of the Center for Political Studies at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. "He had a remarkable way of analyzing cultural change across time and space that helped people contextualize their own societies and compare countries."

A Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Inglehart received honorary degrees from Uppsala University in Sweden, the Free University of Brussels in Belgium, Leuphana University in Lueneburg, Germany, and was a co-winner of the 2011 Johan Skytte Prize in Political Science, the most prestigious international academic award in political science. He was a visiting professor or visiting scholar in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Nigeria and New Zealand, and served as a consultant to the U.S. State Department and the European Union.

In collaboration with Christian Welzel, University of Leuphema, Germany, Inglehart proposed evolutionary modernization theory, the idea that as sectors of society become more comfortable materially, they abandon traditional cultural values and orient their everyday lives and their politics toward securing personal freedoms, autonomy from traditional power structures, and modern ideas of a well-lived life.

Says Welzel, Inglehart "was in each and every aspect a role model: as a thinker, researcher, teacher, supervisor, mentor, companion, friend, father, husband — in short as a human being. We lose a great thinker and beautiful mind."

Working with Pippa Norris, Harvard University, Inglehart applied these concepts to understand several contemporary issues. This included religious decline worldwide, and the impact of existential security for

these developments. Using WVS data, *Sacred and Secular* chronicled a global decline in religious belief and practice, especially in affluent societies. With Norris, he also examined transformations in gender equality and roles for women and men. More recently, he also sought to understand the rise of populism and the Trump phenomena, arguing with Norris in *Cultural Backlash*, that surges in these developments were manifestations of a backlash among social conservatives feeling status anxiety, triggered by cultural shifts moving post-industrial societies in a more liberal direction. In Inglehart's latest book, *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next*, he uses global data to explore under which conditions religiosity declines and its implications for the future.

Ron "was a pioneer in expounding bold conjectures about social change which captured the contemporary zeitgeist and then also gathering large-scale cross-national survey data monitoring attitudes, values, and behaviors, to test the comparative evidence for key claims in these social theories" says Norris.

Despite his prominence, Inglehart was known to be modest and down-to-earth, generous with his time, and an excellent citizen of his department and university. He chaired or served on numerous Ph.D. dissertation committees, as well as many other committees. He was also a dedicated instructor and taught courses ranging from large introductory lecture classes to research seminars for doctoral students. Above all, he was warm and friendly, always cheerful, full of good ideas, and always ready to help.

"In addition to creating the intellectual and organizational infrastructure for decades of work in the social sciences," says Nancy Burns, Warren E. Miller Collegiate Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan, "Inglehart trained generations of scholars in comparative politics. These amazing students — former graduate and undergraduate students who lead the world over — were inspired by Inglehart's breadth, by his warmth and generosity, by his deep commitment to teaching and mentoring, and by his passion for ideas."

The impact of Ron's commitment to giving back to these scholars is immeasurable. If you would like to make a gift in memory of Ron, his family has asked that *donations for a student research scholarship be directed here*.

Ron is survived by his wife Marita R. Inglehart, his sister Jane Kase, his daughters Sylvia Evers, Elizabeth Inglehart Miller and Rachel West, his sons Ronald Charles and Milo Inglehart, and nine grandchildren.

Leslie E. Anderson (*Research Foundation Professor, Political Science, University of Florida*)**,** along with co-authors **Lawrence C. Dodd** (*Manning J. Dauer Eminent Scholar in Political Science, University of Florida*) and **Won-ho Park** (*Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Seoul National University*)**,** recently published the following article, which is a condensed version of several of the arguments they are developing in a book manuscript under revision this summer:

Anderson, Leslie E., Lawrence C. Dodd and Won-ho Park. 2021. "AQUIESCENCIA Y RESISTENCIA: EL RÉGIMEN DE ORTEGA EN NICARAGUA (Acquiescence and Resistance: Ortega's Dictatorship in Nicaragua)." *América Latina Hoy* 87: 151–170.

Michael Bernhard (*Raymond and Miriam Ehrlich Eminent Scholar Chair in Political Science, University of Florida*) is pleased to announce that Varieties of Democracy has a new battery on regime legitimation strategies. The team that developed the battery has published a study that describes the data and how it performs in light of how we would expect different varieties of rule to legitimate themselves. Interested colleagues can find the article here.

Tannenberg, Marcus, Michael Bernhard, Johannes Gerschewski, Anna Lührmann, and Christian von Soest. (FirstView 2020). "Claiming the Right to Rule: Regime Legitimation Strategies, 1900 to 2019." *European Political Science Review* 13 (1): 77–94.

Paula Clerici (*Political Science, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella-CONICET*) published the following article with co-author Dr. Alejandro Bonvecchi (*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella-CONICET*):

Clerici, Paula and Alejandro Bonvecchi. 2021. "Vote Switching in Multiparty Presidential Systems: Evidence from the Argentine Chamber of Deputies." *Legislative Studies Quarterly.*

Abstract: Why do legislators switch their votes between the committee and floor stages in multiparty presidential systems? The literature on the US Congress has argued that switches are conditional on cross-cutting pressures by competing principals (i.e., party leaders and interest groups), partisanship, electoral competitiveness, ideology, seniority, and informational updates. This article argues that unlike in the US two-party system, in multiparty systems electoral competitiveness increases the likelihood of switching. Read more.

Calvert W. Jones has been promoted from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor with tenure in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland.

Yao Li (*Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminology & Law, University of Florida*) recently published the following:

Li, Yao. 2021. "Official Framing—Portraying the Implementation of an Unpopular Policy as Responsive Governance." *Social Movement Studies* (online first, doi. org/10.1080/14742837.2021).

Li, Yao and Harvey L. Nicholson Jr. 2021. "When 'Model Minorities' Become 'Yellow Peril'—Othering and the Racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Sociology Compass* 15 (2): 1–13.

Li, Yao and Manfred Elfström. 2021. "Does Greater Coercive Capacity Increase Overt Repression? Evidence from China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30 (128): 186–211 (2020, online first).

Xiao, Wenming and Yao Li. 2020. "Building A 'Lofty, Beloved People's Amusement Center': The Socialist Transformation of Shanghai Dashijie (1950–1958)." *Modern Asian Studies*: 1–42 (online first).

Shamiran Mako (*Assistant Professor of International Relations, Boston University*) is thrilled to share that her book, *After the Arab Uprisings: Progress and Stagnation in the Middle East and North Africa*, was published in June with Cambridge University Press. It is co-authored with Valentine Moghadam (*Professor of Sociology and International Affairs, Northeastern University*). Shamiran is also pleased to announce that her article "Subverting Peace: the Origins and Legacies of de-Ba'athification in Iraq" is available in the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, with one more article forthcoming in June.

Anne Meng (*Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, University of Virginia*) will be visiting the Government Department at the University of Texas, Austin as the Harrington Faculty Fellow for 2021–2022.

Jack Paine (*Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Rochester*) was promoted to associate professor with tenure and published the following article on authoritarian power sharing:

Paine, Jack. 2021. "The Dictator's Power-Sharing Dilemma: Countering Dual Outsider Threats." *American Journal of Political Science* 65 (2): 510–527.

Paul Schuler (*Associate Professor, School of Government and Public Policy, University of Arizona*) published his first book, *United Front: Projecting Solidarity Through Deliberation in Vietnam's Single-Party Legislature*, with Stanford University Press. The book provides a detailed account of the development and functioning of the Vietnam National Assembly, making the argument that it is largely used to project strength and rationalize lawmaking.

Ben Smith (*Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Florida*) has two new publications with David Waldner (*Associate Professor of Politics, University of Virginia*):

Waldner, David and Benjamin Smith. 2020. "Survivorship Bias in Comparative Politics: Endogenous Sovereignty and the Resource Curse." *Perspective on Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1–16.

Smith, Benjamin and David Waldner. 2021. *Rethinking the Resource Curse*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Daniel M. Smith (*Associate Professor, Department of Government, Harvard University*) has been appointed as the Gerald L. Curtis Visiting Associate Professor of Modern Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy at Columbia University, as of July 1, 2021.

Etel Solingen (*Distinguished Professor, Thomas T. and Elizabeth C. Tierney Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies, University of California Irvine*) was awarded the Berlin Prize named after Richard C. Holbrooke. The Berlin Prize recognizes U.S.–based scholars, writers, composers and artists for excellence in their respective fields, and includes a residential stay at the Academy's Hans Arnhold Center in Berlin. Etel also has a new book out:

Solingen, Etel, ed. 2021. *Geopolitics, Supply Chains, and International Relations in East Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Milada Vachudova (*Associate Professor of Political Science, Jean Monnet Chair of European Politics, UNC Chapel Hill*) has published the following article in the latest volume of the *Annual Review of Political Science*:

Vachudova, Milada. 2021. "Populism, Democracy and Party System Change in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24: 1–28.

Ashutosh Varshney *(Director, Center for Contemporary South Asia; Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences; Professor of Political Science, Brown University)* guest-edited the peer-reviewed special issue of *Studies in Comparative International Development* (June 2021). One big point raised is whether populism is possible in non-democratic settings. Or is it intrinsically connected to, and can only develop in, democracies? It includes two of his own articles:

Varshney, Ashutosh, Srikrishna Ayyangar, and Siddharth Swaminathan. 2021. "Populism and Hindu Nationalism in India." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 56 (2): 197–222.

Varshney, Ashutosh. 2021. "Populism and Nationalism: An Overview of Similarities and Differences." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 56 (2): 131–147.

Members of the **Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute** at the University of Gothenburg published the following report and peer-reviewed articles. You can also view the impressive list of recent working papers written by V-Dem members here and the latest policy briefs here on their website.

Alizada, Nazfia, Rowan Cole, Lisa Gastaldi, Sandra Grahn, Sebastian Hellmeier, Palina Kolvani, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Lührmann, Seraphine F. Maerz, Shreeya Pillai, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2021. "Autocratization Turns Viral." *Democracy Report 2021*. University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.

Altman, David. 2020. "Checking Executive Personalism: Collegial Governments and the Level of Democracy." *Swiss Political Science Review* 26 (3): 316–338.

Arrington, Nancy, Lean Bass, Brian Delgado, Adam Glynn, Jeffrey Staton, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2021. "Constitutional Reform and the Gender Diversification of Peak Courts." *American Political Science Review, First View*: 1–18.

Boese, Vanessa, Amanda Edgell, Patrik Lindenfors, Anna Lührmann, Seraphine Maerz, Juraj Medzihorsky, and Staffan I. Lindberg. *Forthcoming*. "Episodes of Liberalization in Autocracies: A New Approach to Quantitatively Studying Democratization." *Political Science Research and Methods*.

Boese, Vanessa A., Staffan I. Lindberg, and Anna Lührmann. 2021. "Waves of Autocratization and Democratization: a Rejoinder." *Democratization*.

Boese, Vanessa A., Amanda B. Edgell, Sebastian Hellmeier, Seraphine F. Maerz, and Staffan I. Lindberg. *Forthcoming*. "How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-Stage Process." *Democratization*.

Edgell, Amanda, Vanessa A. Boese, Patrik Lindenfors, Seraphine F. Maerz, and Staffan I. Lindberg. *Forthcoming*. "The Institutional Order of Liberalization." *British Journal of Political Science*.

Dahlum, Sirianne and Tore Wig. 2020. "Peace Above the Glass Ceiling: The Historical Relationship between Female Political Empowerment and Civil Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 64 (4): 879–893.

Fjelde, Hanne, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Håvard Mokleiv Nygård. 2020. "Which Institutions Matter? Re-considering the Democratic Civil Peace." *International Studies Quarterly* 65 (1): 223–237.

Gerring, John, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Matthew Maguire, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jan Teorell, and Michael Coppedge. 2020. "Democracy and Human Development: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement." *Democratization* 28 (2): 308–332.

Gerring, John, Tore Wig, Wouter Veenendaal, Daniel Weitzel, Jan Teorell, and Kyosuke Kikuta. 2021. "Why Monarchy? The Rise and Demise of a Regime Type." *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (3-4): 585-622.

Hellmeier, Sebastian, Rowan Cole, Sandra Grahn, Palina Kolvani, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Luhrmann, Seraphine F. Maerz, Shreeya Pillai, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2021. "State of the world 2020: Autocratization Turns Viral." *Democratization*.

Kavasoglu, Berker. 2021. "Autocratic Ruling Parties During Regime Transitions: Investigating the Democratizing Effect of Strong Ruling Parties." *Party Politics*: 1–12.

Keremoglu, Eda, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Nils B. Weidmann. 2021. "Thin-skinned Leaders: Regime Legitimation, Protest Issues, and Repression in Autocracies." *Political Science Research and Methods, First View*: 1–17.

Lachapelle, Jean, Steven Levitsky, Lucan A. Way, and Adam E. Casey. 2020. "Social Revolution and Authoritarian Durability." *World Politics* 72 (4): 557–600.

Lindenfors, Patrik, Matthew Wilson, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2020. "The Matthew Effect in Political Science: Head Start and Key Reforms Important for Democratization." *Palgrave Communications* 7 (1): 1–4.

Lleshi, Sokhol. 2020. "Reconstructing the Past in a State-Mandated Historical Memory Institute: The Case of Albania." *European Politics and Society* 21 (3): 277–291.

Marquardt, Kyle L. 2020. "How and How Much Does Expert Error Matter? Implications for Quantitative Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 57 (6): 692–700.

McMann, Kelly M., Brigitte Seim, Daniel Pemstein, Jan Teorell, and Staffan I. Lindberg. Forthcoming. "Assessing Data Quality: An Approach and An Application." *Political Analysis*.

McMann, Kelly M., Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Matthew Maguire, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2021. "Explaining Subnational Regime Variation: Country Level Factors." *Comparative Politics*.

Mechkova, Valeriya and Steven L. Wilson. 2021. "Norms and Rage: Gender and Social Media in the 2018 U.S. Mid-Term Elections." *Electoral Studies* 69: 1–13.

Steele, A. Carie, Daniel Pemstein, and Stephen A. Meserve. 2021. "Democracy Promotion and Electoral Quality: A Disaggregated Analysis." *Governance* 34 (2): 505–521.

Szu-Ning Ping, Yi-Ting Wang, and Wen-Yang Chang. 2020. "The Effects of China's Development Projects on Political Accountability." *British Journal of Political Science*: 1–20.

Vuellers, Johannes and Sebastian Hellmeier. 2021. "Does Counter-Mobilization Contain Right-Wing Populist Movements? Evidence from Germany." *European Journal of Political Research*.

Wilson, Matthew C. and Carl Henrik Knutsen. 2020. "Geographical Coverage in Political Science Research." *Perspectives on Politics, First View*: 1–16.

Wilson, Steven Lloyd and Charles Wiysonge. 2020. "Social Media and Vaccine Hesitancy." *BMJ Global Health* 5 (10).