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Insurgency Revisited: The Case of Vietnam

Daniel Shibley

Introduction

When President Wilson announced his Fourteen Points in 1918, he encouraged the idea of self-determination—the notion that people can only be governed with their own consent. The United States' foreign policy approach all throughout the twentieth century highlights the tension between anti-colonialism and anti-communism. This is evident in their interventions during the twentieth century. Fearful of Vietnam becoming entirely communist in a Cold War environment, the United States supported the South Vietnamese. What became known as the Vietnam War in the United States was known in Vietnam as the American War.¹ Labeling the war as an insurgency—as has become popular among many policy makers and historians—ignores the Vietnamese narrative of self-determination. It assumes the narrative of the United States. Understanding the nature of an insurgency is therefore crucial—an uprising against a justly constituted government²—how the Vietnam War became an insurgency, and why that definition is not useful in this case.

The Vietnam War was a struggle for independence, the presumption of an insurgency is incorrect and based on a flawed understanding of insurgencies. Such a serious error of history relies on several fallacious assumptions regarding the context and contours of the war. Since the Republic of Vietnam was not a justly constituted legitimate national government, opposing it is therefore not an act of political insurgency. The great powers, hoping to further their ideologies, imported the Cold War politics to the Vietnamese peninsula. The United States, as will be discussed, violently opposed the popular will of the people. The insurgency label justified the amount of force used by the United States; limited applications of force were the result of the insurgency label at the war's outset. On the other hand, overwhelming force was the result of the insurgency label in the war's later years.

National Independence Movement

Vietnam's national story is crucial to contextualizing the war. Vietnamese citizens were accustomed to fighting for their independence for millennia. Four waves of Chinese imperialism molded the political landscape in Vietnam until the early fifteenth century. Burbank and Cooper³ use empires as the unit of analysis in their study of global history. Significant support for their thesis, that history is the study of the interaction of empires, applies in Vietnam. From imperial

¹ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

² Joint Chiefs of Staff and Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2007), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf.

³ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

expansion; to the politics of difference, that empires govern disparate polities;⁴ to revolutions;⁵ and post-war development projects,⁶ Vietnam experienced them all. Centuries of resistance contributed to the national identity—this identity fueled the *esprit de corps*⁷ of guerillas during the Vietnam War.

Various colonial powers arrived from Europe in the sixteenth century and did not depart for five hundred years. Portuguese ships began landing in Vietnam in the early sixteenth century, but local resistance deterred a lengthy stay. Dutch attempts to penetrate Vietnam date as far back to the seventeenth century—their efforts were met unfavorably by the local population—a further rejection of external influence. British inroads into Vietnam were also rebuffed with violence, though a limited British presence was later permitted. When Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence in September 1945, he borrowed language from the French Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen and the United States Constitution; ironically, both were guilty of imperialism in Vietnam.⁸ The struggle for independence resonated with the assembled crowd.

French involvement in Vietnam began late in the seventeenth century and continued until 1954. French traders and missionaries established a destabilizing presence that, “brought profound disruptions to the political and social organization of Vietnamese society and to the lives of indigenous peasants and elites.”⁹ Vietnamese sovereignty, to the extent a concept of sovereignty existed, was undermined as French domination was all encompassing. The French framed national resistance as symptomatic of a xenophobic and uneducated polity who needed the support and guidance of French colonists and missionaries. Rebellions against French rule were suppressed and demands for self-determination were ignored. In addition to violently repressing protests, the established plantation economy ensured a regular supply of profitable commodities to France. Independence from colonialism was the goal of Vietnamese violence—from the days of colonialism to the reunification in 1975.

Ho Chi Minh was among the leaders of the Vietnamese communist independence movement beginning in the 1920s. Amid growing nationalist independence sentiment, Vietnam fell to Japan in 1940. Nguyen Van Thieu formalized the National Liberation Front (NLF), a nationalist party rooted in communist ideology that drew upon the popular support of rural peasantry. Ho Chi Minh offered military training that contributed to his increased influence. Vietnamese resistance to US intervention reminded many of their own anticolonial revolutions, not insurgencies. Ho Chi Minh's acceptance of Soviet support was more for the gain of his independence movement than a Soviet endorsement.

Instead of granting self-determination to Vietnam, the French, with permission from the international community, returned to Vietnam after World War II. Marks explains, “The global

⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁵ Ibid, 408.

⁶ Ibid, 413.

⁷ A feeling of pride or fellowship, often in the face of hardship.

⁸ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

⁹ Ibid, 15.

scale of World War II created the conditions not only for decolonization but also for revolutions, mostly led by communist or other leftist parties.”¹⁰ In that regard, Vietnam was no different than other liberation movements with socialist leadership. Ho Chi Minh led the August revolution in August 1945, which fundamentally shifted the political realities in Vietnam; communists were now in power.¹¹ In September 1945, the NLF held Hanoi and proclaimed independence. Nine more years of “a people’s war”¹² for independence from the French finally concluded in 1954 with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Even after twenty additional years of fighting the United States and its South Vietnamese proxy army, millions of deaths and devastation, Vietnam was still far from its independence.

Labelling the Vietnam War as an insurgency versus counter-insurgency struggle fails to recognize the Vietnamese drive for independence and the political will of the rural peasantry. No single legitimate government entity is found in the course of Vietnamese history, from the Chinese to the French, Japanese to the Americans. North Vietnam was a justly constituted and internationally recognized polity with a uniformed army and established political leadership. The NLF and their Northern backers, comprised of socialist Vietnamese peasants, fought for liberation from a series of illegitimate governments whose backers provided funding and training to an army for the explicit purpose of opposing the communist will of the people—this is the story of Vietnam, not the story of an insurgency.

Insurgency?

An insurgency is more than guerilla tactics; it is a matter of political perspectives and desired outcomes. Insurgencies are linked to the small wars in which they occur. *Guerilla* comes from the Spanish resistance to the 1808 French occupation of Spain—they were resistance fighters, not insurgents against a legally constituted national government. Limited wars are a trend in global conflict and labelling them as insurgencies is a convenient pejorative, “ ‘small wars’ in Greece, Algeria, Malaya, and elsewhere and in Venezuela and Vietnam, to cite two current examples, are essentially insurgency and counter-insurgency types of warfare.”¹³ Atkinson posits that nuclear capabilities are responsible for maintaining a general peace while increasing the likelihood of insurgency and counter-insurgency warfare.¹⁴ Atkinson does not specifically address the Vietnam War; he instead connects it to a collection of small-scale conflicts. Ahmad counts as many as fifty insurgencies in 1969.¹⁵ Inherent in such an analysis is the danger of muting national narratives of liberation, presuming a Euro-centric perspective, and

¹⁰ Robert Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World* (3rd ed.) (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 192.

¹¹ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37.

¹² *Ibid*, 47.

¹³ James D. Atkinson, “Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in the 1960’s,” *World Affairs* 126, no. 3 (1963): www.jstor.org/stable/20670356.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 185.

¹⁵ Eqbal Ahmad, “Revolutionary War and Counter Insurgency,” *Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 1 (1972), www.jstor.org/stable/24356753.

denying self-determination. An insurgency is connected more to political perspective than military tactics.

Insurgency is a term for defining guerilla conflicts where the insurgency is attempting to replace the legitimate government.¹⁶ The fluid definition of insurgency allows government legitimacy to determine the labeling of militant actors as insurgents. A government is legitimate when it reflects the popular national will. Guerilla then, according to Javed, is a tactical methodology while insurgent refers to the political dimension.¹⁷ The application of such a label in Vietnam runs counter to popular support for the Vietnamese nationalist-communist movement throughout Vietnam.

Some historians are unsatisfied with this simplistic terminology of tactics and motivations, instead they base their language in terms of revolution. In his 1965 article, Bernard Fall writes that an ignored element of “[insurgency] is the combination of guerilla warfare and political action.”¹⁸ Atkinson focuses initially on the tactical dimension, “[insurgents] are characterized by sabotage, assassination of leadership elements...hit and run raids by guerilla bands, ambushes, and larger-scale guerilla operations.”¹⁹ Atkinson goes on to suggest and justify a tactical response. Later, he addresses the strategic level, blaming the Soviets for fomenting revolutionary communist sentiment,²⁰ although that ignores the decades of rising communist ideology cultivated by Ho Chi Minh.²¹

Revolutionary and nationalist sentiments motivate fighters to continue fighting even while suffering heavy casualties, suggesting that political ideologies are not the determining factor. Combatting guerilla tactics is challenging for large militaries accustomed to a frontal enemy who is similarly equipped, uses familiar tactics, and who acts to preserve its personnel to fulfill a political goal. Tactical considerations do not make an insurgency either. Oppressed people around the world adopt guerilla fighting methods because it allows them to maximize tactical effectiveness with limited means. Guerilla warfare is increasingly identified as a weapon of the weak, and a disenfranchised fight against an established government. When a government is justly constituted and representative of the people’s will, we may refer to the conflict as an insurgency, but a justly constituted government assumes a certain approach to the narrative.

John Nagl traces the development of the insurgency idea over several centuries, from theorists to historians.²² Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini, according to Nagl, addressed conventional warfare and the methods required to achieve victory. Jomini focused on complete enemy destruction in order to prevent reconstitution, a tactic adopted by the United

¹⁶ Ambreen Javed, “Resistance and its Progression to Insurgency,” *Strategic Studies* 30, no. 1 (2010), doi:10.2307/48527670.

¹⁷ Ibid, 175.

¹⁸ Bernard Fall, “The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” *Naval War College Review* 18, no. 3 (1965) <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol18/iss3/4>.

¹⁹ James D. Atkinson, “Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in the 1960’s,” *World Affairs* 126, no. 3 (1963): www.jstor.org/stable/20670356.

²⁰ Ibid, 185.

²¹ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

States in Vietnam to serve a political end. Clausewitz, by contrast, valued the power of nationalist armies who fought for a closely-held set of ideals—not dissimilar to the North Vietnamese and NLF. Mao Zedong wrote of the power of this kind of nationalist warfare, one where the power to wage war is determined by the will of the people.²³ Mao applied these principles in fighting the Japanese during their occupation of China. While they were certainly guerillas, Mao and his fighters—like the Spanish—were not insurgents. They were defending their homeland and aspirations for self-determination which is parallel to Ho Chi Minh’s actions in Vietnam.

Southern Governance

Armed with an understanding of the contours of insurgency, attention can be shifted to the government in the Republic of Vietnam. When Ngo Dinh Diem’s government faced questions of legitimacy, he attempted to harness support through coercion:

Throughout the late 1950s Diem unleashed a series of campaigns aimed at consolidating his hold on power... They gradually prompted DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] support... one that by the early 1960s had launched an increasingly successful political and military challenge to Diem. The authoritarian and dictatorial nature of Diem’s government also produced widespread opposition from the urban middle class and the Buddhist protests...²⁴

A referendum offered voters the choice between Bao Dai or Ngo Dinh Diem. Election irregularities, campaign restrictions, and dubious vote tallies contributed to the illegitimacy of the elections. Diem then refused to hold scheduled elections intended to unify the North and South based on an assumption that free elections were an impossibility in the communist North. Diem’s fears were well founded. The NLF had “gained control over 70 percent of rural Vietnam during 1957–1962.”²⁵ Diem consolidated power under the auspices of the constitution but grew more dictatorial over the course of his premiership. Diem’s political motivations were meant to align with the broader Vietnamese project of independence. Despite his apparent commitment to independence and national legitimacy, Diem’s government was largely illegitimate.

Insurgencies, as discussed, are a matter of political perspective. Vietnam’s national independence movement was stunted by France and the United States. The 1954 Geneva agreement divided Vietnam in two, although the political aspirations of independence were unified nationally. National unification was promised in 1956 but, “The United States supported a client regime and Vietnam remained divided.”²⁶ A divided Vietnam was beset with challenges, “When the US supported southern regime had difficulty governing itself and maintaining popular support against the northern and NLF guerilla fighters (not insurgents), the United States first

²³ Ibid, 22.

²⁴ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 77-78.

²⁵ Eqbal Ahmad, “Revolutionary War and Counter Insurgency,” *Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 1 (1972), 8. www.jstor.org/stable/24356753.

²⁶ Robert Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World* (3rd ed.) (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 177.

sent advisors and then combat troops to support the south.”²⁷ The illegitimacy of the government in South Vietnam makes it difficult to view the Viet Minh and NLF as insurgents. The United States denied the political will for independence and self-governance by the Vietnamese because of its own domestic political priorities, Vietnamese priorities were ignored. Fighting for the will of the people and against an unjustly constituted government does not qualify as an insurgency.

Southern governance throughout the three decades following World War II is pockmarked with poor governance and authoritarianism. Diem’s removal in a 1963 coup caused further deterioration, leading to twelve different governments between 1963 and 1965. “The NLF took full advantage of this political instability to make further gains in territory and popular support.”²⁸ President Johnson, motivated by a widely-held American desire to modernize the global economy, in an era when the administration pursued policies of development, called for the establishment of a Mekong Valley Development Authority. Local populations suffered due to the “forced relocation of thousands of farmers in the strategic hamlets scheme.”²⁹ Presidents Kennedy and Eisenhower understood that total self-governance would result in a unified Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh.³⁰ Vietnam was denied self-determination because of the inevitable results of holding a vote; this is consistent with Westad’s understanding that great power interventions in the Third World were driven by a drive to spread ideologies.³¹ Presumptions of an insurgency in Vietnam suggests government legitimacy while ignoring the instability caused by foreign-supported client leadership.

Tactical Excuses

The mislabeling of the Vietnam War as an insurgency, combined with its goal to prevent communism in South East Asia, led the United States to make tactical decisions that require evaluation. For example, initial troop commitments in Vietnam are a result of the insurgency label. A massive troop build-up would have been inappropriate for an insurgent enemy; sending smaller numbers of soldiers is the result of a flawed enemy assessment. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were reluctant to commit combat troops; they preferred to rely on advisers to construct a robust South Vietnamese army. When the policy failed, the United States deployed combat soldiers. Merom summarizes the military approach as a three-pronged attack.³² First, airpower was deployed against the North—intended to punish the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for its support of NLF communists, and for its alliance with the Soviet Union and China. Air power was also used to bomb the Ho Chi Minh trail—aimed at denying supplies to NLF guerillas. Counter-guerilla operations in the south—aimed at neutralizing communist forces and their political influence—failed to deliver substantive gains.³³ NVA and NLF tactical abilities were not

²⁷ Ibid, 177.

²⁸ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104.

²⁹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World* (New York: Penguin Books 2012), 295.

³⁰ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180.

³¹ Ibid, 4.

³² Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

³³ Ibid, 232.

significantly affected by the bombing raids; their high levels of motivation also contributed to suppressing American tactical successes.

Subsequent escalations in troop commitments reflect updated understandings of the situation in Vietnam—a stubborn insurgency. The alleged insurgents would not be defeated, and the United States would have to change tactics. President Johnson’s strategy of attrition could be justified by escalating the killing of suspected communists. Secretary of Defense McNamara proposed that the United States and the Army of South Vietnam should aim to kill more NLF fighters. The idea was that if the insurgents were killed faster than new ones were indoctrinated to communism, the United States should prevail. Well-armed and coordinated communist forces functioned more as an army than McNamara and Johnson could admit, and the insurgency label blinded them to the situation on the ground.

The Tet Offensive is the best example of the tactical considerations in Vietnam. Via the Ho Chi Minh trail, NLF fighters spent months preparing and training. American intelligence sources pointed to a military build-up by local communist forces and North Vietnam. On January 30, 1968, North Vietnam and the NLF launched a coordinated attack against provincial capitals, such as Cholon and Hue, and on Saigon. North Vietnamese participants, numbering approximately half a million, were told by the communist leadership that they were participating in the writing of a new history for Vietnam. United States Army officials were convinced that their fight was against an insurgent enemy incapable of major maneuvers. Blindness to the truth left the United States unprepared and resulted in heavy losses. Once they overcame the initial shock, the United States and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) unleashed unrelenting firepower on the communist forces. Casualty numbers on the Vietnamese side among combatants and civilians were staggering. This was the cost of winning a war that was incorrectly assumed to be an insurgency. Although South Vietnam and the United States achieved a tactical victory, the Tet Offensive was a propaganda victory for the communist forces, who could claim that they took the fight to the Americans, and began to turn American public opinion against the war.³⁴

Dubbing the Vietnam War an insurgency created conditions where tactical miscalculations were possible. By not granting the appropriate status to the hostilities in Vietnam, this mislabeling allowed for military miscalculations and perpetuated a lie to the public. Paradoxically, the insurgency label justified limited forces and overwhelming firepower. Limited forces were best for fighting a limited insurgent enemy while overwhelming force was required to suppress brutal and dangerous insurgent communists. The labeling of the Vietnam War as an insurgency instead of a national independence movement allowed for the destruction of life and property on both ends of the Vietnamese Peninsula.

³⁴ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 152-153.

Importing the Cold War

Global geopolitics, in the form of the Cold War, were imported to Vietnam in early 1950. Westad remarks that the “interventionist mindset” of both great powers was responsible for turning Vietnam into a Cold War battleground.³⁵ Referring to the Vietnam War as an insurgency ignores the fact that the Vietnam War was transformed from an independence struggle into “a central battleground of the Cold War.”³⁶ It is important to remember that the primary goal from a Vietnamese perspective was shedding French rule, against whom they engaged in a protracted guerilla war. Establishing an independent Vietnam was of utmost importance to Ho Chi Minh and his followers, not becoming Cold War puppets for a great power.

Mutual recognition between the People’s Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations sent political shockwaves across the Pacific Ocean. By the end of January 1950, as the great powers faced off on the Korean peninsula, the Soviet Union also diplomatically recognized the DRV. Vietnam’s place in the Cold War was not of its own choosing, and it likely would have preferred to declare independence and remain on the sidelines. Military aid, however, was desperately needed. During the Cold war, aid from one of the superpowers or their allies was a welcomed rescue package for many Third World countries. The diplomatic recognition of Vietnam by the two largest communist countries was an opportunity for Vietnam to exercise its own agency and decide its future by extracting military support for ideological brethren. They were, however, not seeking an endorsement of any great power for internal legitimacy or political gain. Vietnamese communists were similarly disinterested in a confrontation with the United States.

In January 1950, the Cold War arrived in Vietnam. The great powers brought conflict and destabilized the region. United States officials, as Bradley explains, understood that the former emperor of Vietnam ruled without legitimacy.³⁷ Questions about legitimacy indicate that policy makers in the United States feared Ho Chi Minh’s “commanding nationalist following in Vietnam despite their opposition to him.”³⁸ His legitimacy and commitment to self-determination frightened the United States. Ho Chi Minh was committed to the post-colonial independence project and enjoyed support from the rural Vietnamese peasantry. Self-determination, allegedly a foreign policy priority for the United States, was subsumed when the United States turned an independence movement into a Cold War struggle.

President Eisenhower contributed to dragging Vietnam into the Cold War when he proclaimed his domino theory—that a Vietnamese communist state would result in the neighboring countries becoming communist—in 1954. President Eisenhower characterized the threat as a *fall* to communism instead of the realization of a popular political will. North Vietnamese citizens and the communist leadership were happy to receive military aid from the Soviet Union and the PRC but not, as mentioned, because they were interested in an alliance.

³⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180.

³⁶ Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 56.

³⁷ Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000)

³⁸ *Ibid*, 179.

Neither the Soviet Union nor the PRC wanted to provide too much aid because they feared a confrontation with the United States. Undeterred by potential confrontations, the United States saw a growing communist problem, a so-called “insurgency”. Foreign powers thrust Cold War politics on Vietnam even as the Vietnamese were attempting to rid themselves of French control in 1954; an insurgency narrative was born.

When we consider that Vietnam was dragged into the Cold War by foreign powers and the fact that insurgents are understood as violent uprisings against justly constituted governments, characterizing the Vietnam War as an insurgency denies the contours of history. Eisenhower’s words contribute to the presumption that democratic governments and market economies are the will of all peoples and that communism is the antithesis to freedom. Public opinion in Vietnam indicates that Eisenhower’s underlying assumptions were incorrect. Vietnamese communists enjoyed wide ranging support and were successful in ousting the French. Efforts of communist suppression and containment coupled with the language of *falling* to communism demonstrates two problematic historical positions on behalf of the United States. First, it presumes a historical narrative that is West-centered—that the natural progression of humanity is towards democracy and market economies. Such a teleology is fundamentally flawed. There are no predetermined outcomes to history. Second, it assumes the superiority of one political system over another while ignoring Wilson’s commitment to self-determination and the will of Vietnamese peasants. Imported Cold War politics that destabilized a region cannot be responsible for an insurgency. The factors that breed such a view are a fallacy.

Conclusion

As we have seen, a conglomeration of factors is responsible for the Vietnam War becoming known as an insurgency. Such a characterization is dubious because it fails to account for historical intricacies. An insurgency is an illegal uprising against a justly constituted national government; guerilla tactics are employed by insurgents because it allows them to maximize the tactical yield. However, the constitution of the government of South Vietnam from the years of 1954 until 1975 was decidedly unjust because it did not reflect the national will of the people of Vietnam. Guerilla fighters in Vietnam were committed to ousting foreign influences and obtaining independence.

Casting aside the context of an anti-colonial independence war allows us to forget that the global Cold War was forced upon Vietnam by external powers, whose influence they were attempting to escape. Excuses are developed for tactical decisions by the United States. Presumptions of political legitimacy in South Vietnam presupposes democracy as superior despite the support by rural peasantry for communism. Ho Chi Minh requested a meeting with President Wilson to discuss the issue of independence in Vietnam following World War I. It would take nearly six more decades until those dreams were realized. References to Ho Chi Minh’s followers as insurgents denies their agency for affecting postcolonial change and obfuscates the role of the United States in destabilizing the region. That is the true historical crime of a so-called insurgency.

Tehran's Water Crisis: Bad Luck or Poor Management?

Isabella Nemer Remor

Iran is facing one of the most significant water crises in the world, specifically in its capital city of Tehran. Experts estimate that if water consumption does not change soon, Tehran's supply will be unable to meet the city's needs by 2026.¹ Until recently, Tehran succeeded in meeting its population's water needs despite low levels of rainfall and frequent droughts. In fact, Iran was once considered "the pioneer of sustainable water management for thousands of years" and was home to one of the most sophisticated water management systems in the world. Now it ranks among the most water-stressed countries in the world.² The government routinely blames this deterioration on climate change and other periodic factors instead of water policy changes. However, resilient water management systems are expected to withstand such external challenges. How have changes in water usage and management led to and worsened Tehran's water insecurity? I argue that the most significant factor is a systematic state-led reorientation of the water management system away from sustainability and towards rapid development to support the state's desire to modernize and establish itself as a competitive actor in the global economy.³

Literature Review: *Enclosure* by Gary Fields

Throughout this paper, I will be drawing on a framework of analysis established by Gary Fields in his book, *Enclosure*. Fields uses historical examples of land enclosure in England and colonial America to examine the dispossession of Palestinians from their land to assert that the "establishment of a Jewish landscape in Palestine is part of this same lineage of creating exclusionary spaces."⁴ Land enclosure is a process of consolidating communal land into individually owned farms which became the norm in 17th century England.⁵ The aim was to improve agricultural production and increase the value of the land. Fields argues these "virtues of improving land" were rooted in an "imagined vision of the landscape in which land lying empty could be improved and thus redeemed by those willing to work it."⁶ Fields discusses John Locke's belief that "land 'poorly cultivated' was akin to land laying in waste."⁷ Fields argues

¹ Kayla Ritter, "Tehran Faces Crisis as Iran's Water Supply Runs Low," Michigan State University, 19 December 2018, www.circleofblue.org/2018/middle-east/tehran-faces-crisis-as-irans-water-supply-runs-low/.

² Jason Rezaian, "Iran's Water Crisis the Product of Decades of Bad Planning," *The Washington Post*, 2 July 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/irans-water-crisis-the-product-of-decades-of-bad-planning/2014/07/01/c050d2d9-aeeb-4ea1-90cc-54cef6d8dd10_story.html.

³ Adam Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*. Cambridge University Press, 2018; *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*, by Asef Bayat (American University in Cairo Press, 1998).

⁴ Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror* (University of California Press, 2017), xiii.

⁵ "Enclosing the Land," *UK Parliament*.

⁶ Fields, *Enclosure*, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

this imagined vision of improved land led to a shift in power between the cultivators and the land owners. This power dynamic leads to the core draining the periphery of its resources. This same lens can be applied to the water crisis that Iran's capital faces today. The Iranian government sought to urbanize quickly, so it privatized farmland in the periphery of Tehran to increase agricultural productivity. This forced newly disempowered farmers to migrate *en masse* to Tehran. The increased water demand in Tehran coupled with industrial water extraction for agricultural production has led to the water crisis we see in Tehran today.

A Historical Overview of Water Management in Iran

Water availability has always been a significant concern in Iran because of frequent droughts. However, historically they have not presented a significant issue. This is largely due to what is sometimes considered “one of the greatest hydrologic achievements of the ancient world:” *qanats*.⁸ Ancient Persians developed Qanats as a “water transfer system . . . wherein groundwater from mountainous areas, aquifers and sometimes rivers [were] brought to points of re-emergence” for collection and use.⁹ Qanats were used extensively in the periphery of Tehran. The city sits at the base of the Alborz mountains where water was mined and utilized. In place for more than 2000 years, the innovative system maintained Tehran's water supply at a relatively stable level for agricultural and domestic use, even during the frequent droughts the region experienced.¹⁰ However, as the state began to prioritize Iran's transformation from an agrarian society to a more industrial one, the government slowly but systematically phased out the use of qanats.

Today, Iran has only half the number of qanats it had 50 years ago.¹¹ This is likely due to changing perceptions of modernity and the desire to establish self-sufficiency in an increasingly globalized world.¹² In the 1960's, the Shah of Iran began mass efforts to modernize Iran's agriculture. He implemented widespread land reforms to improve the production of Iranian sugarcane, wheat, rice and tea – all water-intensive crops. Policymakers hoped these reforms would modernize Iran's economy and orient the use of land towards international markets while establishing the peasantry's loyalty to the state rather than the landowners.¹³ The Shah's reforms resulted in widespread enclosure of land. While intended to increase production, enclosure led to

⁸ Homayoun Motiee et al., “Assessment of the Contributions of Traditional Qanats in Sustainable Water Resources Management.” *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2006, p. 575., doi:10.1080/07900620600551304.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Najmeh Bozorgmehr “Iran: Dried Out,” *Financial Times*, August 21, 2014, www.ft.com/content/5a5579c6-0205-11e4-ab5b-00144feab7de.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Begum Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 121–57.

¹³ Nikki R. Keddie, “The Iranian Village Before and After Land Reform,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3, no. 3 (196): 88., doi:10.1177/002200946800300305; Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*, 121–157.

“absolute property rights in land and differences in crop patterns that disrupted proper cultivation of land.”¹⁴ Privatization of land also rendered much of the lower class unable to own land.

The Impact of the Shah’s Land Reforms: Rapid Development and Mass Rural Exodus

The Shah’s land reforms had two major impacts on water management in Tehran. First, the reforms inadvertently forced many people to migrate to urban centers of Iran, namely Tehran. With national lands privatized, many farmers did not receive enough land to cultivate crops or received no land at all. Without a way to generate income, they migrated to cities like Tehran in search of living wages. Mass rural-to-urban migration led to much higher demand for residential water in the city of Tehran. It also meant the industrial sector could grow at a faster pace, also increasing the demand for water in the city. Like many stories of modernization, the population who suffered most from these reforms were those they claimed to help, the lower class. Known to have negative repercussions for the lower classes, enclosure policies are often still pursued because of their association with successful development and modernization. Economic and political institutions that arise from enclosure strategies generally positively impact policymakers and those already in positions of power.¹⁵

Second, once land was privatized, the Shah was determined to increase production of key agricultural exports. High capacity diesel water pumps were installed across farmlands. These pumps allowed faster water extraction, with the intention of stimulating growth in the agricultural sector. Deep well pumps replaced some qanats because of their potential to increase productivity. However, these pumps have led to a steep “decline of water tables, which has resulted in a large number of the Iranian qanats having been abandoned over the last 50 years.”¹⁶ The degradation of many qanats is not only a cultural and historical tragedy, but it left entire villages deserted because their inhabitants relied upon qanat irrigation and maintenance-based jobs for their livelihood. Without the qanat they were forced, like the farmers, to migrate to cities like Tehran. With the intention of enabling rural farmers to cultivate more efficiently, this attempt at modernization resulted in mass migration to cities.¹⁷ In turn, this increased Tehran’s water demand, led to further underground extraction, and lowered the water tables. Tehran drained the water tables so aggressively the city now sinks at a rate of 25cm per year.¹⁸

¹⁴ Keddie, “Iranian Village Land Reform,” 70

¹⁵ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 54–79.

¹⁶ Motiee et al., “Assessment of the Contributions of Traditional Qanats,” 583.

¹⁷ Keddie, “Iranian Village Land Reform,” 88; Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*, 74.

¹⁸ Mahmud Haghshenas Haghighi and Mahdi Motagh, “Ground Surface Response to Continuous Compaction of Aquifer System in Tehran, Iran: Results from a Long-Term Multi-Sensor InSAR Analysis.” *Remote Sensing of Environment* 221 (2019): 534.

Water Management Under the New Islamic Republic

Tehran's water problems did not go away with the deposition of the Shah. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the new government reorganized the system of water governance and created a hierarchy of experts with the expectation they would advise officials on proper water management procedures. However, because of the nature of this hierarchical system, these experts were at odds with each other. They competed to maximize water extraction instead of putting forward sustainable practices.¹⁹ This meant these experts were highly motivated to take bribes, so corruption within this committee ran rampant. Former President Ahmadinejad exacerbated these problems with his reforms of the water management system. To capitalize on natural surface-water runoff, watershed boundaries previously determined water management boundaries. President Ahmadinejad removed and replaced these boundaries with political or provincial boundaries, "accentuating interprovincial competition and the tendency of water to 'flow toward power,'" with no regard for long term environmental consequences.²⁰

In attempts to spark growth, the government heavily subsidized water and energy used for agriculture. This removed any motivation farmers had to increase their water efficiency, as seen in Iran's average irrigation efficiency of less than 35%.²¹ The government exacerbates the problem with its unwillingness to change traditional crop choices and practices to match available water conditions. In order to continue producing the crops the government wishes to sell on the international market at the rate it wishes to produce, it cannot rely on rainfall or surface-level water collection alone. Because of this, even more deep well pumps have been installed across Iran, specifically on industrial farmlands. The Iranian agricultural sector is "responsible for more than 90% of the groundwater consumption (compared to the 8% domestic groundwater consumption and 2% of industrial groundwater use)."²² Especially concerning for Tehran, the surrounding water systems are now being tapped into to support these water-intensive crops.

Over time, the Iranian government has recognized these inefficiencies, and gradually increased the price of energy and decreased its water subsidies to minimize excessive economic and water losses. However, these policies have negatively affected the remaining farmers and lower-class workers. Public discontent with these policies is thought to be one of the significant factors that led to the massive protests that occurred in the periphery of Tehran and across Iran in the summer of 2018.²³ The Iranian government prioritizes immediate economic relief in order to quell discontent among the lower and middle class, but these policies are rarely effective.

¹⁹ David Michel, "Iran's Impending Water Crisis," *Water, Security and US Foreign Policy*, ed. David Reed (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 176.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kaveh Madani, "Water Crisis in Iran: A Desperate Call for Action," *Tehran Times*, December 14, 2016, www.tehrantimes.com/news/301198/Water-crisis-in-Iran-A-desperate-call-for-action.

²² Motiee et al., "Assessment of the Contributions of Traditional Qanats."

²³ Thomas Erdbrink, "Protests Pop Up Across Iran, Fueled by Daily Dissatisfaction," *The New York Times*, The New York Times, August 4, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/08/04/world/middleeast/iran-protests.html.

Government Accountability and Long-Term Environmental Impact

The Iranian government has yet to claim responsibility for its role in creating the acute water crisis in Tehran and around the country. The government escapes responsibility for remedying the crisis by advancing the narrative that it simply results from worsening climate conditions. It allows the government to minimize all social, political and economic implications of the problem, externalize fault, and avoid accountability.²⁴ Without government accountability, nothing will compel the Iranian government to change course in time to avoid environmental catastrophe.

Of course, droughts will be detrimental to any water management system. It is necessary to adapt water management systems to effectively deal with a drought. A study on average annual rainfall in Iran found “a consistent decreasing trend in annual rainfall” across the country between 1951 and 2000.²⁵ However, Iran increased its water extraction and built seven dams between 1990 and 2000.²⁶ This extreme water extraction increase led to the high levels of subsidence in the periphery of Tehran due to the draining of water tables by industrial deep well pumps.²⁷ Iranian authorities reported last year that parts of the Tehran plain are sinking at a rate of 22cm per year, which many experts believe will result in catastrophic damage to some of Tehran’s crucial infrastructure, including its international airport and oil refinery.²⁸ In 2017, Issa Kalantari, head of the Iranian Environment Department, criticized Iran’s Sixth Development Plan, saying, “Such plans are forced on the government without taking soil and water capacities into account . . . We are using our resources in excess without thinking about how to sustain them.”²⁹ Kalantari raises the visibility of this issue, but this water crisis likely requires a government-wide effort to change course.

Conclusion

Changes in water usage and management led to and worsened Tehran’s water crisis. This sheds light on the scale of corrective action needed to address the crisis. To achieve an imagined vision of improvement and modernization, Iranian leadership embarked on a state-led, systematic reorientation of the water management system. To support the state’s desire to modernize and establish itself as a competitive actor in the global economy, water management moved away from sustainability and towards rapid development. The Shah implemented various

²⁴ Jan Selby, Omar S. Dahi, Christiane Fröhlich, and Mike Hulme, “Climate Change and the Syrian Civil War Revisited,” *Political Geography* 60 (September 1, 2017): 232–44.

²⁵ R. Modarres and A. Sarhadi, “Rainfall trends analysis of Iran in the last half of the twentieth century,” *Journal of Geophysical Research* 114, no. D3: 238.

²⁶ Amin Alizadeh and Abbas Keshavarz, “Status of Agricultural Water Use in Iran,” *Water Conservation, Reuse, and Recycling: Proceedings of an Iranian-American Workshop* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2005), 97.

²⁷ Mehdi Fattahi. “Drought-Stricken, Parched Iran Is Sinking – Literally,” *The Times of Israel*, January 24, 2019, www.timesofisrael.com/drought-stricken-parched-iran-is-sinking-literally.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Iran’s Water Crisis Passes Tipping Point,” *Radio Farda*, Iran News by Radio Farda, December 13, 2017, en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-water-crisis-serious-soil-erosion/28914002.html.

land reforms to modernize Iran's agricultural sector and orient it towards a global market. To increase production of key agricultural exports, high capacity diesel water pumps were installed across newly privatized farmland, displacing thousands of former farmers. This sparked a mass rural exodus to Iran's city centers, namely Tehran.

After the Islamic Revolution, the pursuit of rapid development continued as the government heavily subsidized water and encouraged competition among farming provinces to maximize gains and production. However, this discouraged water efficiency, leading to even more reliance on heavy groundwater extraction. Rapid agriculture development coupled with rising population in Tehran's periphery led to an increase in water demand. However, current levels of water extraction threaten the long-term stability of Iran's agriculture and Tehran's water supply. Iran prioritized development over sustainability, and with water so heavily extracted, subsidence now threatens the very development projects Iran sought to advance. To prevent environmental catastrophe in the future and move forward, the Iranian government must not place modernization at odds with sustainable resource use. Maximizing agricultural gains by orienting this sector of the economy towards an international market may benefit Iran in the short term. However, those benefits are unsustainable if water consumption for agriculture does not change and continues to threaten the integrity of Tehran's infrastructure and the water security of its people.

The Birth of Digital Panopticon: How AI Surveillance Undermines Democracy

Myungha Kim

Introduction

The digital transformation of today's economy, also known as the fourth industrial revolution, has not only led to productivity growth but also empowered individuals in the public arena. Information, the development of social media, and open-source systems, have transferred the power of state government and other major governing institutions to individuals.¹ This can be clearly seen in the case of the Arab Spring, where social networks enabled mass mobilization against the Egyptian government.² Individuals have better access to information and can even modify and distribute information. Social media has the potential to bolster democracy, as power is decentralized, empowering citizens to more easily express their thoughts.

At the same time, the development of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and surveillance have the potential to violate individual privacy. Bigger entities—government or corporations—can amass and control personal data.³ In the US, private tech giants, like Google, Facebook, and Amazon, gather big data of users' preferences and behaviors in cyberspace and use the data to maximize their profits and target digital advertisements.⁴ In China, the central government uses information technology to monitor every aspect of people's lives and behaviors, such as consumption patterns, drunk-driving, and builds a digital surveillance system called "social credit scores."⁵ Surveillance tech giants and China's digital authoritarianism constitute new threats to democracy around the world. In this paper, democracy and net (internet) freedom are used interchangeably to refer to civil liberties enjoyed by citizens in cyberspace.⁶ Global governance in the digital era presents a new paradigm. While countries race for technology leadership, net freedom is disrupted by tech giants and public authorities.

Extensive surveillance occurs regardless of political regimes, creating a digital panopticon. This panopticon, a building traditionally used for surveillance with the presence of watchmen, exists today in an intangible form.⁷ Increased surveillance activity is an unexpected

¹ Sean Illing, "War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the 21st Century," *Vox*, December 8, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/12/8/16690352/social-media-war-facebook-twitter-russia>.

² Zeynep Tufekci, "The road from Tahrir to Trump," *MIT Technology Review* 121 no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2018): 10–7.

³ Steven Feldstein, "The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/17/global-expansion-of-ai-surveillance-pub-79847>.

⁴ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), <http://www.meta-activism.org/net-delusion-review-the-authoritarian-trinity/>.

⁵ Christina Larson, "Who needs democracy when you have data?" *MIT Technology Review* 121, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2018): 50–5.

⁶ Freedom House, "Freedom on the Net 2019," <https://www.freedomonthenet.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media>

⁷ Thomas McMullan, "What Does the Panopticon Mean in the Age of Digital Surveillance?" *The Guardian*, July 23, 2015, sec. Technology.

side effect in this digital era, where disruptive technology like AI proliferates.⁸ This paper first introduces the underlying mechanism of surveillance systems in attenuating democracy. It then proceeds to argue that the US and China, as the biggest exporters of AI surveillance, are responsible for eroding net freedom.

How does surveillance threaten democracy?

The development of the data industry can disrupt democracy in multiple forms, including the creation and spread of disinformation, fake news, manipulation of elections, and violation of individual privacy.⁹ Disinformation and fake news are germane to governments and corporations because both surveil people's thoughts, preferences, and behaviors and use data thereof to control dissent and manipulate public opinion.¹⁰ This in turn threatens democracy in cyberspace. Corporations have the largest reach and can influence public authorities to mold public opinions via social media platforms.¹¹ Citizens enjoy less freedom of expression online, less data privacy and less transparency because of the use of data by companies and governments.¹²

In autocracies, surveillance enables political elites to constantly monitor people's behaviors and distort opinions. Spreading fake news is a useful and manipulative governing tool for the elites to secure their interests.¹³ They can also deploy surveillance technology— facial/voice recognition, GPS tracking, internet intelligent services,¹⁴ allowing them to preemptively obviate dissidence by blocking access to certain information.¹⁵ Unlike the Arab Spring, in many cases, information technology has assisted, rather than thwarted, non-democratic regimes.¹⁶ This reinforces surveillant governing culture and consolidates authoritarianism abroad with the exporting of surveillance technologies.¹⁷ Autocratic leaders are now more likely to utilize information technology that helps their political survival through repression. As government control of content increases, net freedom of expression, data privacy, and democratic norms are undermined.¹⁸

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/23/panopticon-digital-surveillance-jeremy-bentham>.

⁸ Steven Feldstein, "The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance."

⁹ Tufekci, "The road from Tahrir"; Qiang "President XI's."

¹⁰ Freedom House, "2019."

¹¹ Ronald J. Deibert, "Three Painful Truths About Social Media," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no.1 (2019): 25–39, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0002>.

¹² Larry Diamond, "The Threat of Postmodern Totalitarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 30 no.1 (2019): 20–24, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0001>.

¹³ Larson, "Who needs democracy"; Deibert, "Three Painful Truths."

¹⁴ Morozov, *The Net Delusion*.

¹⁵ Deibert 2019; Xiao Qiang, "President XI's Surveillance State." *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (2019): 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0004>.

¹⁶ David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends* (London: Profile Books, 2018).

¹⁷ Larson "Who needs democracy"; Deibert "Three Painful Truths"; Qiang "President Xi's".

¹⁸ Freedom House, "Freedom on the Net 2018: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism," <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2018>

The surveillance activities can also occur in democratic regimes. The power of deploying the technology falls on individuals or entities, those who want to use it for their sakes alone.¹⁹ Liberal democracy is threatened by the rise of tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon, who own and collect data on their digital platforms.²⁰ These companies' business models are based on the collection of very detailed user data and predictions of consumer behavior.²¹ Although the model has yielded high profits, it has also violated individual privacy. At the same time, democratic governments can store massive amounts of personal data such as, on voting behavior, health records, and other personal identifying information in real-time. This has been deemed a violation of individual freedom and privacy.²² "Plenty of private companies are already collecting data—mostly for marketing purposes—that governments, both authoritarian and democratic ones, would find extremely useful."²³ While on the surface democratic states strive to build information freedom and transparency, surveillance remains an issue.²⁴ Governments in liberal democracies misuse digital technology and conceal data from the public.²⁵ In democracies, the incentives to build big data systems is largely economic. Surveillance technology is accused of violating individual privacy, free flow of information, and decreases perceived political rights and civil liberties. Furthermore, the use of surveillance systems can be used for foreign policy purposes such as spreading digital authoritarianism.²⁶ Regardless of political regime, digital supervision leads to declines in individual rights and freedoms particularly in cyberspace. The annual "Freedom on the Net" report from Freedom House serves as empirical evidence on declining internet freedom across borders.²⁷ Freedom House rates each country's internet freedom status with a score out of 100, where higher scores represent more freedom on the internet. The 2018 annual report found that there have been global declines in net freedom for eight consecutive years.²⁸

The US and China: The Biggest Exporters of AI Surveillance

The US and China have gained public and scholarly attention due to their intense rivalry and trade war characterized by a competition for global technological leadership. They are particularly racing hard for the dominance in AI technology.²⁹ While the race has promoted innovation in technologies, in its process, innovation leaves room for exploitative use of technology. The U.S. and China are the two biggest exporters of AI surveillance technology in

¹⁹ Morozov, *The Net Delusion*; Runciman, *How Democracy Ends*; Deibert, "Three Painful Truths."

²⁰ Runciman, *How Democracy Ends*.

²¹ Chase Johson, "Big Tech Surveillance Could Damage Democracy," *The Conversation*, June 3, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/big-tech-surveillance-could-damage-democracy-115684>.

²² H. Akin Ünver, "Politics of Digital Surveillance, National Security and Privacy," *Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies* (2018), JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17009>.

²³ Morozov, *Net Delusion*, 166.

²⁴ Diamond, "Threat of Postmodern Totalitarianism."

²⁵ Ünver, "Politics of Digital Surveillance."

²⁶ Freedom House "2018."

²⁷ Freedom House "2018"; Freedom House "2019."

²⁸ Freedom House "2018."

²⁹ Tom Miles, "U.S., China Take the Lead in Race for Artificial Intelligence: U.N.," *Reuters*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tech-un-idUSKCN1PP0U6>.

the world.³⁰ It is safe to say that the two countries are the most responsible countries for undermining net freedom in the world.³¹ US companies like IBM, Palantir, Cisco, export AI surveillance to 32 countries, and Chinese companies including Huawei and ZTE sell their technology to 63 countries worldwide.³² The sales of the technology from the two countries cover more than 50 percent surveillance deployment around the world.³³

The Freedom on the Net reports from the last two years found that China has strengthened its censorship and surveillance, making it the worst abuser of internet freedom over the past couple years.³⁴ China has abused net freedom not only domestically but also globally: “Democracies are struggling in the digital age, while China is exporting its model of censorship and surveillance to control information both inside and outside its borders,” a remark from the president of Freedom House.³⁵ Domestically, China got worse scores on the “violations of user rights” as government officials have removed individual social media accounts.³⁶ For instance, WeChat users were removed for producing provocative contents on dismantling the party leadership. By employing surveillance technology, the government is better positioned to control citizens through prescreening any “deviant” behavior and “harmful” contents.³⁷ China’s surveillance systems enter Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) participating countries such as Ethiopia, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, arming autocratic governments with the Chinese surveillance capabilities.³⁸ For instance, Ethiopia utilizes ZTE’s telecommunication technologies that allow them to control dissent by tracking opposition’s phones and internet activity.³⁹ In the United Arab Emirates and Kenya, Huawei provides an extensive city surveillance system called “Safe Cities” to the local governments so that the public authorities can easily gather personal data from their citizens.⁴⁰

The U.S., despite its generally free and diverse cyberspace, is also experiencing worsening net freedom due to partisan disinformation in elections and monitoring of social media content by immigration and law enforcement agencies.⁴¹ American citizens are constantly surveilled by government agencies for collecting personal data without robust oversight. People are misguided by information manipulated by politicians that can bias election outcomes—such as Russia’s interference in 2018 midterm elections.⁴² Surveillance is also initiated by the private sector. Companies constantly monitor their employees, violating workers’ privacy.⁴³ Similar to

³⁰ Feldstein, “The Global Expansion.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Freedom House “2018”; Freedom House “2019.”

³⁵ Freedom House “2018.”

³⁶ Freedom House “2018”; Freedom House “2019.”

³⁷ Freedom House “2019.”

³⁸ Daniel Kliman and Abigail Grace, “Addressing China’s Belt and Road Strategy,” Center for a New American Security (2018).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Freedom House “2018”; Freedom House “2019.”

⁴² Freedom House, “2019.”

⁴³ Ellen Sheng, “Employee Privacy in the US Is at Stake as Corporate Surveillance Technology Monitors Workers’ Every Move,” *CNBC*, April 15, 2019,

China, the U.S. is also responsible for exporting its surveillance technology. In other liberal democracies such as Germany, France, United Kingdom, the technology is used for smart policing and smart city plans to ensure public safety.⁴⁴ However, these advanced democratic countries are ensuring their security interests at the expense of worsening citizens' privacy.

Conclusion: The Danger of Proliferating Data Governors

There is a decline in the overall level of net freedom due to presence of surveillance in the country regardless of the regime type. The fourth industrial revolution characterized by spreading disruptive technology like AI has brought on declines in net freedom, particularly in individual data privacy and access to contents. Governments use surveillance technology to gather for online manipulation.⁴⁵ China lacks robust oversight of surveillance and allegedly provides the private sector access to data.⁴⁶ What is hopeful for the U.S. and other liberal democracies, is that there are safeguard measures against extensive government surveillance.⁴⁷ Yet it is important to make such measures operate as a reliable regulatory framework to protect democracy in cyberspace.⁴⁸

The proliferation of data governors through surveillance embodies the panopticon. The watchmen of this cyber panopticon, aided by surveillance technology and the power of inspection, strengthen as they gather more data. We cannot defy the ongoing digital transformation. Politicians should contemplate how our societies can manage negative repercussions—the erosion of democracy—of innovation. Is privacy violation and information manipulation the inevitable cost for technological growth? It is crucial for public authorities in liberal democracies to enforce regulatory legislation to ensure net freedom. Even more than that, they must stop exporting surveillance capabilities abroad and strive to curb digital authoritarianism. Failure to do so erodes hard earned freedoms and risks democratic backsliding.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/15/employee-privacy-is-at-stake-as-surveillance-tech-monitors-workers.html>.

⁴⁴ "AI Global Surveillance," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/ai-surveillance>.

⁴⁵ Diamond "Threat of Postmodern Totalitarianism."

⁴⁶ Ira S. Rubinstein, Gregory T. Nojeim, and Ronald D Lee, "Systematic Government Access to Personal Data: A Comparative Analysis," *International Data Privacy Law* 4 no.2 (2014): 96–119.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/idpl/ipu004>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Feldstein, "How Artificial Intelligence is Reshaping Repression."

Saudi Arabia's Opportunities to Promote Security and Stability in Iraq

Daniel Gulda

After the fall of ISIS in 2017, civilian protests, sectarian divides and the fight over influence by the two main regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia have plagued Iraq's security and stability. This essay analyzes Saudi Arabia's role in security and stability in Iraq over the next two years. Specifically, this paper argues that the kingdom, aligned with US interests, is likely to support political cooperation, security and stability in Iraq.

Background

Since 2005, Iraq has been a federal parliamentary republic adhering to democratic division of power. Division between multiple ethnic and religious groups is among the key challenges in governing Iraq. Ongoing civil demonstrations stemming from factors such as Iraq's sectarian divide, lack of economic opportunity, and the aftermaths of the terrorist group ISIS—have put the government's stability under pressure.¹ Although Iraq declared victory against ISIS in 2017, approximately 2 million individuals remain internally displaced² and ISIS still claims responsibility for regular local attacks.³

Due to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Iraq had a troubled relationship with its southern neighbor, Saudi Arabia, until 2014.⁴ To achieve security and stability in the region, new leaders on both sides made efforts to establish closer ties, leading to a milestone in April 2019, when the two signed 13 political and economic agreements.⁵ Saudi Arabia's main interests in Iraq include countering Iran in the region and denying the country as a battleground to radical terrorist groups.⁶ In addition, the kingdom anticipates Iraq will see new trade relationships as an alternative to its dominant regional and economic partners, Iran and Turkey.⁷

¹ Ghassan Adnan and Isabel Coles, "Protesters Rise Up Over Iraq's Missed Economic Opportunities," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 6, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/protesters-rise-up-over-iraqs-missed-economic-opportunities-11570366801>.

² "Iraq," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019, accessed Nov. 3, 2019, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/iraq>.

³ Alissa J. Rubin and Falih Hassan, "Bus Bomb Kills 12 Iraqis Near Major Pilgrimage Site," *The New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/21/world/middleeast/islamic-state-bus-bomb-iraq.html>.

⁴ Renad Mansour, *Saudi Arabia's New Approach in Iraq*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (2018), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181105_RM_Gulf_analysis.pdf?AWXv0HPipY0ev0TR2M08I_PbRCQQSY99.

⁵ Mina Aldroubi, "Iraq and Saudi sign 13 new agreements to deepen economic and political relations," (April 17, 2019). <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/iraq-and-saudi-sign-13-new-agreements-to-deepen-economic-and-political-relations-1.850034>.

⁶ Ronen Zeidel, "Iraq-Saudi Relations 2017-18: Expectations and Limits," (2018). <https://www.mepc.org/journal/iraq-saudi-relations-2017-18-expectations-and-limits>.

⁷ Mansour, *Saudi Arabia's New Approach in Iraq*.

Saudi Arabia's interests in the region overlap with US interests in general, including building peace and stability, fighting ISIS, and countering Iran.⁸ The main problem is that peace and stability depend on a unified Iraq that is able to recover from the aftermath of ISIS preventing the group's resurgence and reconstructing Iraq without aggravating sectarian tensions.⁹ The United States has stationed troops to train Iraqi forces, and sent foreign aid and security assistance to strengthen Iraqi institutions and support operations against the resurgence of terrorist groups.¹⁰ After the United States' strike on Qassim Soleimani, the Iranian commander of the Quds Force, the Iraqi parliament voted to expel US forces from Iraq. However, Iraq is yet to formally order the withdrawal of US troops. For now, the United States continues to operate in Iraq to conduct counterterrorism operations against remaining ISIS fighters in ungoverned territories.¹¹

The Potential for Iraq-Saudi Arabia Cooperation

Saudi Arabia's increasing presence in Iraq has the potential to improve Iraq's stability. Iraq needs foreign investment and technical assistance to develop its economy. Presently, the main economic opportunities for Iraqi citizens depend on trade with Iran. Most goods and resources across the country originate in Iran.¹² Iraq also depends heavily on Iranian natural gas to meet Iraqi electricity demands. Despite the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign, the United States has granted sanctions waivers for Iraq to continue imports.¹³

Through closer alignment, Saudi Arabia can diversify Iraq's economy by boosting trade links, developing Iraqi infrastructure and investing in the private sector.¹⁴ Such prospects suit US interests because Iraq can become more stable through a stronger economy, making it less reliant on US support. A stronger Iraq with better relations with Saudi Arabia could also reduce its dependence on Iran. Iraq would prefer to cooperate with both countries. Baghdad has been making efforts to mediate between the two regional rivals and will likely continue to do so as Soleimani's death has made the region more unstable.¹⁵ Yet, as long as Saudi Arabia sides with the United States, it is challenging to appease both sides.

⁸ Paul R. Pillar, "Iraq and Iran, Sharing a Neighborhood," (2017). <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/paul-pillar/iraq-iran-sharing-neighborhood-22937>.

⁹ "Political Instability in Iraq," Council on Foreign Relations, updated Nov. 6, 2019, accessed Nov. 6, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/political-instability-iraq>.

¹⁰ Christopher M. Blanchard, *Iraq and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service (2019), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IF10404.pdf>.

¹¹ Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Military Reviewing Iraq Operations After 2 Troops Die Fighting ISIS," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/world/middleeast/marines-killed-iraq-isis.html>.

¹² Tim Arango, "Iran Dominates in Iraq After the US 'Handed the Country Over'," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-iraq-iranian-power.html>.

¹³ Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Samya Kullab, "Iraqi officials: US will grant vital Iran sanctions waiver," *AP News*, Feb. 10, 2020, <https://apnews.com/bd4e3e6e737344ccb6a0b12866790e01>.

¹⁴ Mansour, *Saudi Arabia's New Approach in Iraq*, p.4.

¹⁵ Jackie Northam, "Saudi Arabia Fears Being Drawn Into U.S.-Iran Conflict," *NPR*, Jan. 8, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/08/794704361/saudi-arabia-fears-being-drawn-into-u-s-iran-conflict>.

Iraq's Sectarian Divide factor

Building economic opportunities is crucial, but to ensure successful political cooperation in Iraq, Saudi Arabia must consider Iraq's sectarian divide. Saudi Arabia's Sunni majority has posed a challenge to efforts in dealing with Iraqi Shiites. Many Iraqi Shia factions are backed by Iran and although their views on Iran's influence diverge, Soleimani's death has brought Iraq's Shias closer together and pulled them towards Iran.¹⁶ Factors drawing a negative image of Saudi Arabia included the kingdom's support for political rivals of the Shia-led government and regional controversial issues such as the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen.¹⁷

Today, the Shia-led government in Iraq is open to stronger ties to Saudi Arabia, but ongoing civil conflict threatens Baghdad's political stability. Shia protesters took to the streets last year to express their frustration with their government's corruption and inability to bring prosperity to Iraq and blamed the country's structural problems on Iran's foreign influence.¹⁸ The seven-month-old movement has waned off in recent weeks due to a number of setbacks such as a Shia cleric shifting positions to an apathetic political class as well as the coronavirus outbreak.¹⁹ However, problems such as the lack of economic opportunity will persist. Iraq's government is likely to remain incompetent in addressing the protester's demands, given the ongoing quest for choosing a prime minister shows.²⁰ Saudi Arabia can make use of the narrative, in which Iran serves as a scapegoat for Iraq's problems and gives hope to frustrated Shiites by investing into the country.

Saudi Arabia, also known as the Sunni kingdom, is at an advantage in dealing with Iraqi Sunnis due to common religious values. Iraq's Sunni tribal leaders generally welcome Saudi Arabia's increased role in Iraq.²¹ However, the kingdom's attempts to improve its image among the group, such as pouring money into specific Sunni clerics and tribes between 2003 and 2014, have failed to produce unity. Instead, divisions among Iraq's Sunnis increased and led some of them to boycott Iraq's political process.²² Today, Sunni leaders are mainly concerned with rebuilding the cities that ISIS destroyed.²³ In some cases, they hold Saudi Arabia responsible for

¹⁶ Isabel Coles, "Killing of Iranian General Brings Iraq's Divided Shiites Closer," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 6, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/killing-of-iranian-general-brings-iraq-s-divided-shiites-closer-11578354849>.

¹⁷ Daniel Benaim, "The Next Phase in Iraq's Transition," *Center for American Progress*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/07/02/453034/next-phase-iraqs-transition/>.

¹⁸ Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Joseph Krauss, "Protests in Iraq reveal a long-simmering anger at Iran," *AP News*, Nov. 6, 2019, <https://apnews.com/13c1f4d0ffdd4908ba340abf9631a3cb>.

¹⁹ Samya Kullab and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraq's protesters struggle to keep waning movement going," *abc News*, March 14, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iraqs-protesters-struggle-waning-movement-69594651>.

²⁰ Steven A Cook, "Nobody Can Help Iraq Anymore," *Foreign Policy*, April 24, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/24/iraq-new-prime-minister-mustafa-al-kadhimi>

²¹ Taylor Luck, "In Saudi diplomatic shift on Iraq, a hand to Sunnis ... and Shiites," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 24, 2017, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2017/0824/In-Saudi-diplomatic-shift-on-Iraq-a-hand-to-Sunnis-and-Shiites>.

²² Mansour, *Saudi Arabia's New Approach in Iraq*, pp.2-3.

²³ "Saudi Arabia: Back to Baghdad," International Crisis Group, updated May 22, 2018, 2018, accessed Nov. 5, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/186-saudi-arabia-back-baghdad>.

the rise of ISIS through the kingdom's promotion of extremist Sunni movements.²⁴ By supporting reconstruction through economic cooperation, the Saudis will have a better chance of avoiding past mistakes and gaining popularity among the bloc, if they consider Sunnis' concerns as a whole.

Unlike Iraq's Sunnis and Shiites, the majority of Iraqi Kurds resist the authority of a central Iraqi government and prefer their northeastern territory to be independent and autonomous.²⁵ The kingdom officially supports a unified Iraq including the Kurds, but past actions make Saudi ambitions appear inconsistent. At the time of the Kurdish independence referendum, Saudi officials voiced their support for Kurdish ambitions to establish the autonomous region Kurdistan. The underlying motivation was strategic and aimed to prevent a power vacuum from inducing regional destabilizing behavior from Iran, Turkey or the Iraqi central government.²⁶ Saudi Arabia will need to adopt a more consistent approach to avoid upsetting both the Kurds and the Iraqi government. For now, the Kurds are anticipating Saudi investments in the region to boost the local economy.²⁷ At a meeting between Kurdish local officials and Saudi diplomats in Kurdistan in 2018, the Kurdistan Region offered over 1,500 projects in tourism, agriculture, and other sectors to Saudi investors.²⁸ If Saudi Arabia succeeds in establishing strong trade links with Iraqi Kurds, the Saudis' bargaining position will improve, enabling Saudi Arabia to potentially mediate between the Kurds and Iraqis.

The Persistent Problem of Terrorism in Iraq

Iraq's terrorist cells are likely to continue to be a vital concern to Saudi Arabia.²⁹ ISIS inflicted significant damage to Iraq's infrastructure and even though US forces killed the group's leader, al-Baghdadi, the underlying conditions that led to the rise of ISIS namely, bad governance, corruption, and repression persist in Iraq.³⁰

With the most capable military force of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),³¹ Saudi Arabia has the potential to strengthen Iraq's security framework and pick up on previous security

²⁴ "Saudi Arabia: Back to Baghdad."

²⁵ David Zucchino, "After the Vote, Does the Kurdish Dream of Independence Have a Chance?," *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/30/world/middleeast/kurds-iraq-independence.html>.

²⁶ David Hearst, "How Saudi tried to use the Kurds to clip Iran's wings," *Middle East Eye*, Oct. 23, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-saudi-tried-use-kurds-clip-irans-wings>.

²⁷ Ramadan Al Sherbini, "Saudis, Iraqi Kurdistan agree on cooperation," *Gulf News*, July 25, 2018, <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/saudis-iraqi-kurdistan-agree-on-cooperation-1.2256762>.

²⁸ "Saudi Arabia eyes Kurdistan as starting point for investing in Iraq," *Rudaw* July 24, 2018, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/business/240720181>.

²⁹ Mina Aldroubi, "Saudi Arabia drafts security agreement with Iraq," *The National*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/saudi-arabia-drafts-security-agreement-with-iraq-1.893122>.

³⁰ Charles Thépaut and Matthew Levitt, "The Counter-ISIS Coalition Has Much to Do After Baghdadi's Death," *Washington Institute*, Nov. 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-counter-isis-coalition-has-much-to-do-after-baghdadis-death>.

³¹ "Middle East," The Heritage Foundation, updated Oct. 30, 2019, 2019, accessed Nov. 4, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/assessing-the-global-operating-environment/middle-east>.

cooperation channels that predate Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.³² Regional military cooperation will allow for training of Iraqi forces. The United States favors such developments because stronger regional allies reduce the need for US forces.³³ That being said, the US will likely need to remain engaged, because despite Saudi Arabia's regional strength, its capabilities rely on US arms sales, training and service support.³⁴

Besides fractured groupings of ISIS, the caliphate no longer holds any formal territory in Iraq and Syria and its threat to the region's security remains diminished.³⁵ Nevertheless, although Saudi Arabia has potential to boost Iraq's economy and increase internal security, some problems will persist. Saudi Arabia is unlikely to overcome the terrorism-related challenges of transitional justice in Iraq. Courts struggle with judging those guilty of supporting ISIS in the country. In addition, Iraqi security forces often execute individuals, including Saudi fighters, believed to be supporters of terrorist groups.³⁶ To address this challenge, a good start is to improve the rule of law in Iraq. However, Saudi Arabia is probably not the best candidate to make Iraq's courts fairer.

Iran's involvement in Iraq

Despite Iran's varying popularity within Iraq's Shiites, Iran's overall grip on Iraq persists as Iran heavily influences Iraq in military, political, economic and cultural affairs. In southern Iraq, Iran trains Iraqi militias; delivers food, household products and drugs; and in some places such as Najaf even provides garbage-pickup services.³⁷ Iran is also Iraq's main provider of electricity.³⁸ Saudi Arabia may be able to serve as an alternative for Iraq by providing civilian security, building infrastructure and investing in Iraq's economy.

Although it is in Saudi Arabia's interest to thwart Iranian influence in Iraq, the kingdom will not be able to achieve it fully. Iran's control over proxy groups and political affairs is too advanced. Iraq included the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a group of Iranian backed Shia militias, in the Iraqi armed forces in 2016.³⁹ The PMF has since then influenced Iraq's political

³² Caline Malek, "What strengthening Saudi-Iraq relations means to the region," *Arab News*, May 7, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1493621/saudi-arabia>.

³³ Anthony H. Cordesman and Max Molot, *U.S. Strategy—Strategic Triage and the True Cost of War: Supporting Enduring Commitments versus "Endless Wars"*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (Nov. 1, 2019), p.16, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/191101_True_Cost_of_War.pdf.

³⁴ Christopher M. Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service (2018), p.20, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf>.

³⁵ The Wilson Center, "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State," (October 28, 2019). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>.

³⁶ Ben Taub, "Iraq's Post-ISIS Campaign of Revenge," *The New Yorker*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/12/24/iraqs-post-isis-campaign-of-revenge>.

³⁷ Tim Arango, "Iran Dominates in Iraq After the US 'Handed the Country Over'."

³⁸ Robert Bryce, "Iran's power over Iraq includes electricity," *The Hill*, Sept. 9, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/477371-irans-power-over-iraq-includes-electricity>.

³⁹ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Pitfalls of the paramilitary paradigm: The Iraqi state, geopolitics, and Al-Hashd al-Shaabi," *Brookings*, June 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/pitfalls-of-the-paramilitary-paradigm-the-iraqi-state-geopolitics-and-al-hashd-al-shaabi/>.

processes by taking control of key ministries and governmental authorities.⁴⁰ At the same time, Iraq's government has been unsuccessful in controlling the PMF and Baghdad is a spectator as US forces and the PMF are exchanging regular missile attacks on Iraqi soil.⁴¹ Even if Saudi Arabia somehow managed to minimize Iran's control in Iraqi political affairs, it is unlikely that Iraq will cut ties with Iran. Iraq and Iran share a deep interest in maintaining cordial relations because the two learned the consequences of their hostile relations in the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, one of the deadliest Middle Eastern wars of the century.⁴²

Conclusion

Increasing political cooperation with Iraq depends on Saudi Arabia's ability to appeal to Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds without alienating any of them. Each ethnic and religious group poses unique challenges, but the kingdom can appeal to each party's economic demands. How Saudi Arabia changes the perception that it is a former backer of ISIS among Sunnis remains unclear, and how the country will continue to address Kurdish separatist ambitions is likewise uncertain.

The US is likely to benefit from Saudi-Iraqi willingness to increase joint security efforts. Iraq can expect to gain advantages from Saudi Arabia's military, its intelligence services and allies, which will improve Iraqi counterterrorism efforts. It remains outside of Saudi Arabia's capabilities to tackle all terrorism-related problems. Issues such as giving former members of ISIS a fair trial will depend on Iraq's ability to develop strong government institutions. While Saudi Arabia may be able to counter Iran's economic influence in Iraq, it will unlikely remove Tehran's political and military footprint. Iraq is struggling to control forces such as the PMF itself and Iraq has a vested interest in maintaining a friendly relationship with Iran for historic and geopolitical reasons.

Saudi Arabia is likely to promote security and stability in Iraq over the next two years. The kingdom's planned economic assistance coincides with US interests because it has the potential to address weaknesses of Iraq's underdeveloped economy and it gives Iraqis an attractive alternative to Iran.

⁴⁰ Michael Knights, "Soleimani Is Dead: The Road Ahead for Iranian-Backed Militias in Iraq," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 1 (2020), <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CTC-SENTINEL-012020.pdf>.

⁴¹ Crispin Smith, "It's Time Iraq Accepts Legal Responsibility for Its Iran-Backed Militias," *Just Security*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/69273/its-time-iraq-accepts-legal-responsibility-for-its-iran-backed-militias/>.

⁴² Paul R. Pillar, "Iraq and Iran, Sharing a Neighborhood."

From the Red Line to R2P: Why neither Force nor Negotiations Worked on Stopping Chemical Attacks in Syria

Wendy Xiaonuo Niu

Introduction

The enduring Syrian civil war is a perfect representation of how unprecedentedly complex a conflict can be in a multipolar world. As states, terrorist organizations, and ethnic minority groups struggle to eliminate each other's existence, indiscriminate airstrikes and chemical attacks on civilians in Syria have flagrantly violated the most basic principles of international law while posing threats to the global progress on weapon of mass destruction (WMD) control and non-proliferation. Despite the preexisting and provisional measures against the usage of chemical weapons, why did military and diplomatic tactics in Syria fail? This study identifies three key problems that have plagued the global community's responses to the recurring WMD crisis in Syria — the inconsistency of the US military strategy, the underestimation of the difficulty of chemical weapon removal and a lack of priority and understanding of motives at the Geneva talks.

Historical Overview

Reports of the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons appeared as early as 2011.¹ In the following two years, President Obama announced that the use of chemical weapons constituted a "red line"² while Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 2013.³ According to Article IV of the CWC, the regime was supposed to have the weapons transported out of the country and destroyed, yet blatant chemical attacks like the ones that occurred in Ghouta in 2013 continued.

In the UN Security Council, long-standing divides among the permanent members made it unlikely for any meaningful resolution to be passed to address the issue on a united front. Despite the existence of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle that allows states to use force for humanitarian purposes,⁴ the use of force in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire also undermined the credibility of the UN's action in Syria.⁵ In fact, part of the Chinese and Russian rationales in

¹ Sarah Almukhtar, "Most Chemical Attacks in Syria Get Little Attention. Here Are 34 Confirmed Cases," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2018.

² Margaret Talev and Nayla Razzouk, "Obama Says Chemical Weapons Use by Syria 'Red Line' for U.S.," *Bloomberg*, Aug. 21, 2012.

³ Almukhtar, "Most Chemical Attacks in Syria Get Little Attention."

⁴ "Responsibility to Protect – Office of The Special Adviser on The Prevention of Genocide," United Nations, www.un.org.

⁵ Simon Adams, "Libya and the Responsibility to Protect," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect Occasional Paper Series, No.3/2012.

refusing to authorize the use of force in Syria was based on the abuse of Security Council authorization in the previous R2P crises.⁶

Suffering from a lack of consistent domestic strategy and cohesive international support, the US and its allies quickly adopted the deconfliction proposal made by the Russian foreign minister Sergey V. Lavrov, which was supposed to provide “a diplomatic alternative” to military intervention.⁷ However, later development in Syria proved that the proposal was likely a delaying tactic, and thus the possibility of fostering further diplomatic progress was greatly diminished.

Meanwhile, after the UN’s multiple failed attempts to bring the warring sides to the negotiation table at the Geneva Talks,⁸ the alternative Sochi peace conference sponsored by Russia, though heavily tilted towards the Assad's regime and its chosen participants, did not yield much result either.⁹ The absence of necessary pressure or consistent strategy on the regime and opposition groups aroused criticism in the global society, who have been calling for a more focused policy instead of the empty rhetoric like “redline” or “breakthrough” that encouraged renewed usage of chemical weapons by the Assad’s regime.

Theoretical Overview

According to Peter Coleman, protracted conflicts are rife with systemic complexities that are resistant to change¹⁰. The age-old struggle in the Middle East is a perfect example of how difficult it is for a complex system to overcome its reinforced status quo of prolonged conflict even with a collection of stimuli, such as the 2011-2014 Arabs Revolution that toppled multiple authoritarian regimes and affected the lives of hundreds of millions of people. As ‘waves of democratization’ swept through the whole region, the deep sectarian, ethno-national and class-based divisions stoked rapid escalation of domestic turmoil and extreme fragmentation¹¹ in Syria. The results were violent counter-revolution by the government and even counter-counter revolution in the form of jihadist Islam. The ensuing consequences have been unprecedented and devastating, with more than half of the Syrian population fleeing the country and tens of

⁶ Muditha Halliyadde, “Syria - Another Drawback for R2P?: An Analysis of R2P's Failure to Change International Law on Humanitarian Intervention,” *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equity* 4, no. 2 (2016): 215; Gareth Evans, “R2P and RWP after Libya and Syria,” Keynote Address at GCR2P/FGV.

⁷ Michael R. Gordon and Steven Lee Myers, “Obama Calls Russia Offer on Syria Possible ‘Breakthrough,’” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2013.

⁸ Nick Cumming-Bruce and Somini Sengupta, “Syria Talks Are Suspended,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2016.

Nick Cumming-Bruce, “Agreement Elusive on Syria Peace Talks in Geneva,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2016, June 5, 2013.

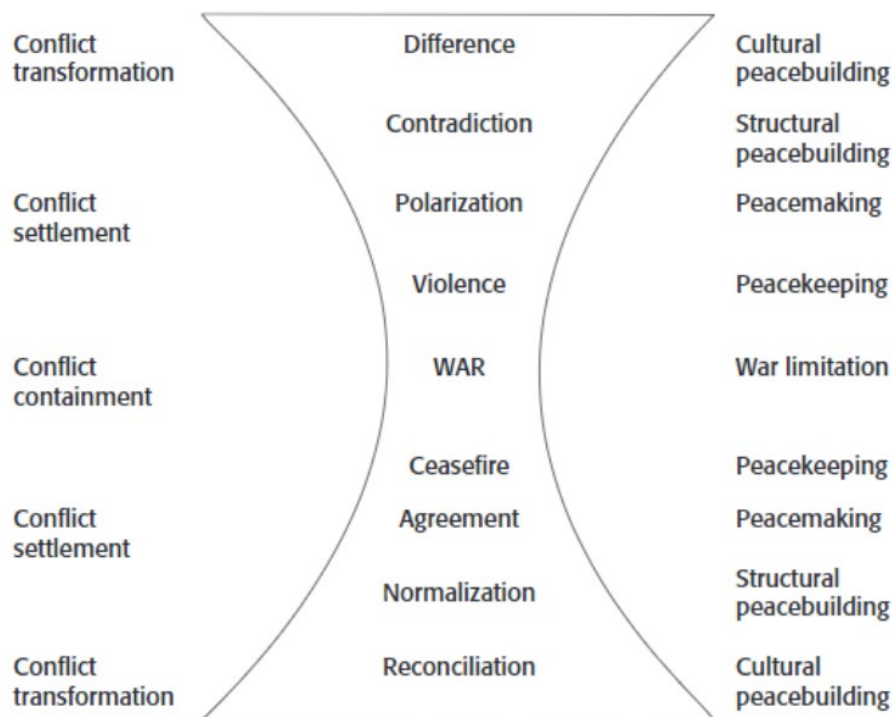
⁹ Anne Barnard, “Syrian Peace Talks in Russia: 1,500 Delegates, Mostly Pro-Assad,” *The New York Times*, Jan 30, 2018.

¹⁰ Peter Coleman, “Characteristics of Protracted, Intractable Conflict: Toward the Development of a Metaframework-I,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 9 (2003): 1–37.

¹¹ As many as 1,200 armed opposition groups exist or existed as a result of post-Arab Spring militia proliferation, According to Themnér, Lotta & Peter Wallenstein (2014) ‘Armed conflict, 1946-2013.’ *Journal of Peace Research* 51(4).

thousands of international neo-jihadists joining the fight.¹² The world has also been witnessing a surge of populism and nationalism, as well as the renewed usage of chemical weapons against civilians.

In terms of containing the sprawling conflicts in the Syrian civil war, the US-led allied force and the UN have played the most important roles as, respectively, the guardian of the liberal international order and the biggest international peacekeeping institution. The regional power dynamics are also further complicated by Russia’s interests as the sponsor of the autocratic Syrian government. Before delving into the deep underlying reasons of the prolonged conflicts among the combatting groups, it is important that we refer to the Hourglass model of Ramsbotham and Woodhouse for a systematic overview of the situation (see the figure below).¹³



Note: in de-escalation phases conflict resolution tasks must be initiated at the same time and are nested. They cannot be undertaken sequentially as may be possible in escalation phases – see chapters 5 and 8. We suggest that what is sometimes called deep peacemaking (which includes reconciliation) is best seen as part of cultural peacebuilding.

Figure 1.3 The hourglass model: conflict containment, conflict settlement and conflict transformation

The model suggests that all conflicts begin with difference and contradiction within a community, which then gradually evolve into a polarized situation. Without early conflict transformation or cultural/structural peacebuilding efforts, intragroup dissents could escalate into violence and full-blown war. The hourglass shape represents the narrowing of available political space as tension magnifies. Yet unlike real hourglasses where sand comes down the funnel

¹² “How many IS foreign fighters are left in Iraq and Syria?” *BBC*. Feb 20, 2019.

¹³ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (New York: Polity Press, 2016), 208–9.

automatically, opposing parties mired in violent conflicts are often stuck in the middle of the ‘hourglass’ until the damage becomes too much to bear. According to the *ripeness theory*¹⁴, this is also the best time for the warring sides to come to the negotiation table as no party would be able to gain any benefit from prolonging the conflict.¹⁵ From then on, continuous and simultaneous peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts would be able to foster an agreement between the opposing sides, thus successfully resolving the conflict.

In the Syrian case, the foundation for the domestic unrest, or the ‘difference’, is the fundamental rift between the Sunni majority - represented by the opposition Free Syria Army - and the Alawite Shia minority that has been dominating the army and administration since the advent of Hafez al-Assad in the 1970s.¹⁶ As there was hardly any effective cultural peacebuilding approach implemented in the region before the emergence of mass terrorism attacks, the ethno-sectarian confrontation within the nation was left to simmer in entrenched frustration and animosity, only to be escalated into an all-out war in the wake of the Arab Spring.

The Assad’s regime’s violent crackdown on the opposition force resulted in serious sanctions from the global society. Nevertheless, with the support from Russia¹⁷ and the US unwillingness to intervene decisively in the Post-Iraq era, the Syrian government was emboldened to launch attacks and even utilize chemical weapons without suffering too much blow either economically or militarily. Meanwhile, the extreme fragmentation within the state means that there was no consensus within the opposing parties, thus making the UN-led Geneva talks unlikely to yield any result at the first place. As a matter of fact, the first few rounds of the Geneva talks and the Russia-led Astana talks all resulted in fruitless situations where no meaningful agreement was reached between the warring parties. The very core condition of the proposed agreements - a democratic transition in Syria - was never an acceptable option for the Assad regime, whereas in some cases the opposition even refused to come to the negotiation table without Assad stepping down.¹⁸ As a result, the negotiation never found its way out of the stalemate; despite the number of civilian casualties kept creeping up, the situation in Syria seemed never ‘ripe’ enough for an effective negotiation to take place. In the following sections, this study looks at the various failed attempts made by the Obama administration and the UN community to explain the underlying factors that have sustained the deadly impasse.

Inconsistency of US Military Strategy and Questionable Cooperation with Russia

Within the US government, the executive branch was supposed to be the dominant force in setting strategies on Syria. Yet in face of congressional opposition, unfavorable public sentiment toward military interventionism and lack of support from allies, the Obama

¹⁴ I.W. Zartman and S. Touval, “International Mediation: Conflict Resolution and Power Politics,” *Journal of Social Issues* 41 (1985): 27–45.

¹⁵ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 208–9.

¹⁶ Martin Chulov, “The fear-filled minority sect that keeps Syria’s struggling dictatorship alive,” *The Guardian*, June 16, 2012.

¹⁷ “Why is Russia engaged in Aleppo?” *BBC*, Nov 16, 2016.

¹⁸ “What is the Geneva II conference on Syria?” *BBC*, Jan 22, 2014.

Administration found itself cornered and with no one with which to work except Russia. Moreover, since Secretary of State Kerry was playing a crucial role in setting the U.S.' Syria strategy,¹⁹ diplomatic solutions became a more likely choice than strictly military ones.

As pointed out by Phil Carter, the director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program for the Center for a New American Security, “there’s no agreement on the fundamentals” of the US strategy in Syria.²⁰ Asking the Congress to pass the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) would certainly invite a time-consuming debate about “expiration dates, boots on the ground, drones, the legacy of the Iraq War”²¹, all of which would depend on highly-convincing and well-rounded arguments offered by the White House. Yet instead of emphasizing the urgency and significance of bringing US forces to Syrian ground, Secretary of State John Kerry chose to focus on the size of intervention as his main argument; in his remarks, Kerry told reporters that any US military attack on Syria would be “unbelievably small”, which would allow the US “to hold Bashar Assad accountable without engaging in troops on the ground.”²²

His claims, immediately blasted by members of Congress who were at least supportive of the retaliatory air strikes, were later reversed by President Obama, who said any attack would not be felt like a “pinprick” in Syria. Nevertheless, according to a Washington insider, “the idea of asking for a congressional vote had never been discussed at length” in most of the White House meetings about Syria, making it unusual in the sense that such an important decision would be made “without first being thoroughly pored over in the interagency process”.²³

As of April 2017, the U.S. has bombed both of the “two main players” in the Syrian war — the government military and the Islamic State²⁴, arousing concerns about the U.S. fundamental objectives in the war — Should the U.S. focus only on defeating the Islamic State? What is the attitude of the U.S. toward Assad? Should the U.S. rely on cooperation or on itself? For years, President Obama refrained from getting the U.S. involved in Syria and insisted that Syria “isn’t of great strategic importance” to the U.S. until Syria started reusing chemical weapons.²⁵ On multiple occasions, He stressed that his main concern was to take out Assad or to wait for Assad’s ultimate loss of power.²⁶ It is understandable, or even advisable, that he changed course and drew the “red line” given the seriousness of the nature and impact of chemical attacks. However, such a forceful warning was only to be followed by a surprising seeking-of-approval directed at a Republican-controlled Congress.²⁷ Even with the following

¹⁹ “Kerry to meet Putin to push peace in Syria, Ukraine” *Gulf Times*’ March 22, 2016; D. McAdams, “White House schizophrenia—Kerry: ‘Assad can stay’; Obama: ‘Assad must go,’” *Global Research*, December 20, 2015.

²⁰ Amber Phillips, “President Obama’s push for military authorization to fight ISIS won’t go anywhere in Congress. Here’s why,” *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2015.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² David K. Li and Kate Sheehy, “Kerry: US strike on Syria would be ‘unbelievably small,’” *New York Post* September 9, 2013.

²³ Derek Chollet, “Obama’s Red Line, Revisited,” *Politico*, July 19, 2016.

²⁴ Greg Myre, “What Is the U.S. Goal in Syria?” *NPR*, April 8, 2017.

²⁵ David Greenberg, “Syria Will Stain Obama’s Legacy Forever,” *Foreign Policy*, December 29, 2016.

²⁶ McAdams, “White House schizophrenia.”

²⁷ “Obama Seeks Approval by Congress for Strike in Syria,” *The New York Times*, Aug 31, 2013.

counterattacks, the Obama administration's inconsistent claims about "a brief strike" that will teach the Syrians a lesson would mostly likely be interpreted as a "symbolic use of power."²⁸

Traditionally, post-war presidents tended to rely more on their national security advisers for policy formulation in lieu of the secretaries of state. Both of President Obama's secretaries of state, Clinton and Kerry, however, assumed a larger than usual role than their predecessors. In the negotiations with Russia, Secretary Kerry occupied a key position as he was found frequently engaged in conversations with his Russian counterpart. As his interaction with Russia was much followed and reported, great expectation was also put on his role as the bridge between the two stakeholder countries and as a crucial factor that can determine the flow of the situation in Syria.

Interestingly, Secretary Kerry initially favored the use of military force in Syria and was surprised when President Obama announced that he would seek congressional support. In some earlier occasions, Kerry expressed several times that he would prefer "not to bar the use of ground troops in Syria"²⁹ in order to preserve the options available to the President, and that diplomacy and the deal with Russia were his second choice once the use of force was ruled out. Yet in the end, his repeated backtracking and ultimate reversal of stance indicated that the President still dominated in the policy-making process, which leaves the mystery of why the latter made the "red line" announcement but then decided to seek approval from Congress that he was very unlikely to obtain. Besides the congressional dissent, a public that was generally anti-war and ill-informed about the foreign policy might also have pressured the President and the Secretary to adopt a cooperative strategy in haste.

Underestimating the Difficulty of Chemical Weapon Removal and Institutional Challenge

To further complicate the situation, the pacifism demonstrated by the American head-of-state was also coupled with the negligence of the time-consuming nature of the chemical weapon removal, which does not guarantee complete elimination of threat either.³⁰ When asked whether there was anything the Syrian President could do to avert a U.S. attack, Secretary Kerry said that the former "could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week — turn it over, all of it, without delay and allow the full and total accounting." While there has been a lot of speculation that those seemingly offhand commitments were actually intentional and calculated to open the door to deal with Russia,³¹ they also indicated the necessity and urgency of U.S. military action in the area and pulled the administration into a situation where hasty decisions were made in an effort to live up to its word.

²⁸ David E. Sanger, "British Vote, Unusual Isolation for U.S. on Syria," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2013.

²⁹ Susan Cornwell and Patricia Zengerle, "Kerry opens door to 'boots on ground' in Syria, then slams it shut," Reuters, Sept 3, 2013.

³⁰ "Why the Syrian Chemical Weapons Problem Is So Hard to Solve," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2017,

³¹ Michael R. Gordon and Steven Lee Myers, "Obama Calls Russia Offer on Syria Possible 'Breakthrough,'" *The New York Times*, September 9, 2013.

Considering the severe nature of using chemical weapons against civilians — which constitutes a severe violation of the basic principles of CPC and deserves the harshest sanctions and punishment by the global community — the U.S. first sought for multilateral action from other nations. After several unsuccessful attempts to persuade Russia and China to agree to a UN resolution authorizing military action against the Syrian regime, in October 2016, the U.S. tried to gather support for a resolution condemning Syria’s use of chemical weapons at OPCW and to “strip Damascus of its voting rights at the agency” if it refused greater international inspection.³² Despite the efforts and hopes of the U.S. and European countries, the latest measure was again thwarted by Russia and some developing countries.

The unfavorable situation may have left the U.S. with few options to choose from. However, by settling for a Russian proposal that would merely dismantle Syria of its weapons stockpiles, the U.S. essentially allowed Syria to escape retribution for its war crimes. In Europe, countries like France felt “exposed”³³ as they had already declared their willingness to strike in Syria and subsequently suffered from Islamic State-related terrorism attacks. The credibility issue is likely to be prolonged as many allies wonder whether they could trust the U.S. to honor its commitments in the future - even after the chemical weapon matter was hopefully eradicated.

Lack of Priority and Understanding of Motives at the Geneva Talks

Peacebuilding efforts in Syria started as early as November 2011 when the Arab League proposed a peace plan that demanded no violent crackdown against peaceful demonstrators. Despite the presence of over 50 peace monitors and the threat of having its Arab League membership suspended, the Syrian government continuously breached the promise by killing demonstrators and dissidents in what was essentially a ‘genocide’, as pointed out by an AL monitor.³⁴ Since then, numerous formal and informal talks backed by the UN and Russia were held among different parties, yet most of them ended up in the same fruitless situation as the previous ones.

Among the various peace plans and initiatives proposed during this period, the Geneva talks stood out as the most prominent and promising platform for conflict resolution in the region. In June 2012, the Geneva I Conference initiated by the then UN peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan issued a communiqué that focused on the need for a “transitional government body” with full executive powers and participation of both the members of the Syrian government and the opposition.³⁵ All five permanent members of the UN Security Council initially supported Annan's efforts. Yet the US and Russia disagreed on whether Assad should remain in power. Similarly, after Lakhdar Brahimi replaced Kofi Annan as the UN special envoy to Syria, the Geneva II Conference aimed at bringing Syrian government and opposition together also failed in the same manner as the US and Russia could not reach any consensus. The impasse continued

³² Colum Lynch, “U.S. Scraps Plan to Punish Syria for Using Chemical Weapons,” *Foreign Policy*, Nov 11, 2016.

³³ Derek Chollet, “Obama’s Red Line, Revisited,” *Politico*, July 19, 2016.

³⁴ “Arab League Observer: Assad Committing Genocide in Syria,” *Haaretz*, December 26, 2011.

³⁵ Raymond Hinnebusch, I. William Zartman, et al., “UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: From Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi,” New York: International Peace Institute, March 2016.

as the Syrian government and opposition refused to be in the same room together during the Geneva III Conference in January 2016.³⁶ As pointed out by the Russian foreign minister Lavrov, the opposition was not interested in a constructive negotiation but rather ‘tried to put forward preconditions’. Rebel commanders were also cited as saying that they hoped the collapse of the peace talks would encourage their foreign backers to send them more powerful weapons³⁷.

With rampant terrorist activities and atrocious human rights violations left out of the picture, the first three Geneva talks were inevitably oriented toward a superficial peace agreement that did not address the core motives of the different parties. While Damascus has long pursued to develop its WMD arsenals and was sanctioned economically by the US as early as 2004, the focus was never put on addressing the underlying motives of Syria’s pursuit of WMD, which, according to Jouejati, was ‘neither for status nor for aggrandizement’, but rather stemmed from the country’s need for national defense as it is surrounded by American power and allies. Therefore, without recognizing Syria’s motives of pursuing WMD and facilitating the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the first place, a one-sided approach towards Damascus may be counterproductive as it would only further inflame anti-American sentiment in the region.

On the other hand, the determination of both sides to continue fighting also indicated that the conflict was never ripe enough for reaching a compromise – as the UN special envoy and the UNSC members struggled to bring the delegations to the negotiation table, the efficiency of the talks were greatly impaired by the developments on the ground. Intriguingly, most of the ceasefire plans were brokered by the Russia-led Astana talks, albeit their much-criticized tilt toward the Assad regime. Despite the rebel representatives’ rejection of the de-escalation zones as leaving too many loopholes for the Syrian government’s future bombing and the Democratic Union Party’ claim that the ceasefire zones were ‘dividing Syria up on a sectarian basis’³⁸, the Astana talks were believed to have made "clear progress"³⁹ to reduce violence in Syria according to the UN’s special envoy Staffan de Mistura. Meanwhile, during the Geneva IV peace talks that began in February 2017, a deeper split emerged as the Syrian government delegation sought to focus on counterterrorism while the opposition sought to focus on political transition. Considering the numerous failed lessons of previous peacebuilding efforts, the struggling negotiations repeatedly staged by the UN raised the fundamental question of whether ‘traditional’ peacebuilding approaches are still applicable to the deeply intertwined modern conflicts.

³⁶ “Syria conflict: Sides trade blame over talks’ suspension.” *BBC*, February 4, 2016.

³⁷ Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, “Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq.” Policy Paper, Brookings Institution, November 2014; Edwin Bakker, Christophe Paulussen, and Eva Entenmann, “Dealing with European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Governance Challenges and Legal Implications,” *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 4, no. 8 (2013).

³⁸ “Syrian Kurdish PYD denounces Syria deal for ‘de-escalation zones,’” *Reuters*, May 5, 2017.

³⁹ “Note to Correspondents: Transcript of the press conference by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura.” United Nations, July 5, 2017.

Lessons from the Syrian Civil War

For contemporary conflict studies, the Syrian civil war shows how important it is to develop a new generation of peacekeeping methods to cope with the increasingly complex ethno-national and regional conflicts. The proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) is among the direst global security concerns that every nation should be a stakeholder. Within the U.S. government, the President and the Secretary of State were supposed to be the dominant force in setting strategies in Syria and were in an enabling situation to do so, as demonstrated by the uniqueness and exclusiveness of national security problems. Nevertheless, in face of congressional opposition, unfavorable public sentiment toward military interventionism and lack of support by allies, the executive branch rushed to make decisions that were fraught with inconsistencies and never clearly explained the objectives of U.S. participation in the war.

By agreeing to work with Russia to ship chemical weapons out of Syria and destroy them, the U.S. shifted its focus from punishing the regime to eliminating the chemical weapons. The latter was unsuccessful either as the list provided by Syria did not include chlorine gas.⁴⁰ The result, demonstrated by the later flagrant attacks ordered by the Syrian government, ultimately forced the US to re-order air strikes and give up the idea of cooperating with Russia, whom the current administration has accused of making false narratives.

In addition, the UN-backed institutional efforts also suffered huge setbacks as the organizers failed to set up priorities or bottom lines for the meetings. The P5 aimed at reaching an agreement without addressing the core concerns of the warring parties or even trying to de-escalate domestic violence first. Moreover, along with numerous other human rights violations, the usage of chemical weapons was hardly mentioned during the mostly indirect talks,⁴¹ making the US' previous threatening speech on the usage of chemical weapons even less credible.

Overall, the complexity of the continuous chemical weapon attacks in Syria is demonstrated not only by the unreliability of the regime's commitment, but also by a series of political and institutional loopholes. Despite the existence of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) mechanism that commits all governments to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, the abuse of R2P in Libya had ignited widespread criticism. The strategic standoff among the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the general lack of enforceability of the UN resolutions further emboldened Assad to violate the CWC. When taken together, these partisan and institutional problems have hindered the global community from developing effective strategies against usage of chemical weapons.

⁴⁰ Krishnadev Calamur, "How Is Syria Still Using Chemical Weapons?" *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2017.

⁴¹ Sam Heller, "Geneva Peace Talks Won't Solve Syria—So Why Have Them?" The Century Foundation. June 30, 2017.

National Identity-Building in Lebanon (1516–1990): A History of Contradictions

Zeinab Fayad

Introduction

From the 17th century onwards, a gradual historical process of shifting the primary mode of politics from empire-states to nation-states defined the European continent. Fast forward to 2020, nation-states continue to be the most desirable mode of governance, with national self-determination projects usually being predicated on statehood aspirations. These political projects, which begin as political imaginaries, rely on two assumptions: the people who are to be ruled by a state constitute a nation and identify with said nation, and people who constitute and identify with a nation have the right to be ruled under their own state. The feeling of identification with a nation can be labeled a national identity. However, national identity is not merely defined at the individual level; collective consciousness, state politics, international politics, material interests and historical contingencies all interact to form a national identity. Furthermore, national identity is not the sole mode of self-identification, as humans often define themselves along subnational identities (sect, ethnicity, class, etc.) and supranational identities (pan-Arabism, Islamic Ummah, etc.). Given the complexity of a national identity and its importance in the process of state-building, this paper seeks to explore how Lebanese national identity -if there even is one- was constructed.

Through historical research, I argue that there has been no solid construction of a single Lebanese national identity. In fact, I posit that competing visions of Lebanese national identity - or competing ‘national *identities*’ as Farid el-Khazen puts it - have existed and continue to shape the Lebanese socio-political sphere. These opposing visions of a Lebanese nation compete within the sectarian (or multi-confessional; the terms will be used interchangeably) socio-political system. Sectarianism is not only the result of opposing visions of national identity, but it also acts as an amplifier of polarization between groups with competing national identity visions. Furthermore, I argue that international politics significantly influence the process of Lebanese national identity-building: the Lebanese state inherited the sectarian politics of the French mandatory system. Furthermore, the National Pact of 1943 which founded the independent Lebanese Republic guaranteed French, Syrian and Egyptian interests as much as it did for the Lebanese. The regional dynamics of the Middle East in 1975 contributed to the protraction of the Civil War, which involved several foreign actors. Historically, international politics in Lebanon have entrenched sectarianism and thus hindered the consolidation of a non-sectarian Lebanese national identity. The contradiction of sectarian identities and Lebanese national identity is the cornerstone of the historical process of identity-building in Lebanon.

National Identity: A Socially Constructed Imaginary

Before defining ‘national identity,’ it’s important to define the term ‘nation.’ Benedict Anderson defines nations as political communities which are imagined as limited and sovereign.¹ But how do nations transcend human imagination and materialize? Since the state is the primary source of political power in a realist framework, nations often seek statehood to materialize their boundaries and sovereignty, meaning nations precede statehood. However, there are also cases where statehood is the precedent and wherein the nation is not consolidated. In these cases, the nation is either divided along ethnic, sectarian or other subnational lines, or the state must make substantive efforts to consolidate a singular national identity. This is applicable to Lebanon: the state of Greater Lebanon founded in 1920 ruled over a variety of sectarian communities which did not necessarily identify with a singular Lebanese national identity. In the context of a nation-state, the people governed by the state are assumed to identify with the nation, and thus have a *national identity*. However, this assumption is not a given.

National identities are socially constructed. Different groups within a nation interpret the meaning of national identity differently. Jorge Larraine argues that “the meaning of national identities is never static or given, but subjected to competing interests and are always, therefore, a terrain of conflict.”² Applying this definition to Lebanese national identity is analytically useful; the plurality and contradictions of Lebanese national identity can be explained by the fact that different religious communities of Lebanon have competing interests rather than a singular national interest. Many other states rule over different religious, tribal or ethnic communities, and many have succeeded in constructing a solid, singular national identity. The peculiarity of Lebanon lies in the deep-rooted institutionalization of sectarian identities and the unique sectarian design of the Lebanese political system.

Sectarianism and National Identity-Building in Lebanon

There is a wide range of literature on the Lebanese political system and its relation to national identity. Farid el-Khazen discusses national *identities* that entered a communal pact in 1943.³ He emphasizes the plurality and communal nature of Lebanese identities. Arend Lijphart defines Lebanon as a consociational democracy, a political situation where social stability is achieved through power sharing among elites.⁴ Therefore, she analyzes the Lebanese system through the lens of power relations. Rola el-Husseini builds on Lijphart’s definition to characterize the Lebanese political system as a power-sharing system between the elites of different religious communities.⁵ She incorporates the sectarian aspect of identity groups in

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

² Sergio Catignani and Clive Jones, *Israel and Hizbollah: An Asymmetric Conflict in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 138.

³ Farid el-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact*. London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991), 2.

⁴ Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy”, *World Politics*, 21, no. 2 (Jan 1969): 207-225.

⁵ Rola el-Husseini, *Pax Syriana: Elite Politics in Postwar Lebanon* (Syracuse University Press: 2012), 22.

Lebanon in Lijphart's power sharing definition. El-Khazen, Lijphart and El-Husseini have a similar interpretation of the Lebanese national identity as a pluralistic one.

The academic consensus is that the Lebanese identity is pluralistic, and since Lebanon's political system is a multi-confessional republic, it's important to discuss sectarianism in relation to national identity. Sectarianism is a conceptual problem in and of itself. This paper will build on Max Weiss' concept of "sectarianisms" in the plural form. Specifically, it will understand sectarianism as "the structured feeling that produces particular forms of cultural identity or social solidarity, [...] a political system in which sectarian criteria are institutionalized as the basis for administration of government, [and] an expression of violent, even murderous, tendencies."⁶ Similar to tribalism and ethnic identity, sectarianism is opposed to nationalism and internationalism, because it is a subnational mode of identification.⁷

Thus, sectarianism hampers the prospects of a singular, cohesive national identity. To support this argument, this paper will first explore the history of sectarian tensions in Ottoman Lebanon. Then it will argue that sectarianism was essentially institutionalized by the French and became a pillar of the Lebanese mandatory system.

The Early Days of Sectarianism in Mount Lebanon: An Imperial and Colonial Creation (1516–1918)

What is known as Lebanon today was once a mere part of *Bilad ash-Sham*, meaning Syria (or Greater Syria). The first founder of "Lebanon" was Fakhreddin I. In the early sixteenth century, he founded the Maanid dynasty which would rule over the Mount Lebanon Emirate, an autonomous subdivision of the Ottoman Empire, until the end of the seventeenth century. The Shehab dynasty then took over and ruled the Emirate from the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire began to decline. This Emirate is considered the historical precursor to the Mount Lebanon governorate. Under the Ottoman Empire's *Tanzimat* reforms, the *Mutasarrifyat Jabal Lubnan* (Arabic for governorate of Mount Lebanon) was created in 1861 following a brief but devastating civil war between the Druze and Maronite Christian communities in 1860. This conflict erupted after decades of tensions between the two groups as the Maronite peasantry was revolting against their Druze overlords.⁸ The sectarian tensions weren't rooted in prejudice or hatred against the other, but rather in material and economic interests that intersected with sectarian or communal modes of identification.

In 1842, Ottoman authorities, using a proposition by representatives of European powers, tried to address these tensions. They divided the Mount Lebanon Emirate into two districts: a northern Christian one and a southern Druze. This measure clearly didn't address the root of the problem, as the 1860 conflict lasted for several months. Following these events, the French,

⁶ Max Weiss, "The Matter of Sectarianism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle-Eastern and North African History*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Amal Ghazal (Oxford University Press: 2016), 1.

⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁸ Leila Fawaz, *Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, 1995), 47.

British, Austrian, Prussian, Russian and Ottoman Empires formed an international commission to establish a new judicial and administrative system that would prevent the recurrence of such conflict. Under diplomatic pressure from the European powers, Ottoman authorities decided to separate the Mount Lebanon governorate from the remainder of Syria, to reunite the northern and southern districts under a Christian *mutasarrif*, and to give the governorate further autonomy. This *Mutasarrifiyah* is the historical precursor to the Lebanese Republic. Following the defeat and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and under the framework of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the victorious French and British Empires gained control of Ottoman territories: Lebanon and Syria became French mandates, Palestine became a British mandate, and Transjordan and Iraq came under British rule. In 1920, French General Gouraud announced the formation of the state of Greater Lebanon, expanding the previously autonomous Mount Lebanon governorate. Mandates were essentially “the legal trusteeship of territories”, a concept that historian Micahel Provence likens to adult guardianship over minor children.⁹

In line with Anderson’s concept of nationhood, one deduces that Lebanon was first an Ottoman *invention* known as Mount Lebanon, and later became a European colony (under the guise of a ‘mandate’) curated to be Western-friendly via the deliberate ascension of the Maronites to power at the expense of the remaining communities. Furthermore, one can conclude that Lebanon has a history of sectarian tensions that predates Western encroachment. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs will explain how French mandatory rule played on these tensions and solidified sectarianism as a pillar of the Lebanese political system.

Colonial Legacy (1918–1943): Institutionalizing Sectarianism and Asserting French Supremacy

The French established the state of Greater Lebanon under its mandate, the historical precursor to the Lebanese Republic. Colonizing the Middle East wasn’t merely an interest-driven venture, it was “a matter of national destiny” for French politicians.¹⁰ It was a matter of national destiny and of religious ‘civilizing’ objectives interlaced with material interests: “A potent popular historical narrative combining mythic Frankish Crusaders, Catholic missionaries, the right-wing cadres of the colonial army, and provincial business interests had evolved to advocate a French Mediterranean empire.”¹¹ By establishing a French empire in Ottoman lands, the French’s civilizing mission “would bring Francophone enlightenment and civilization” all the while “[asserting] the supremacy of French power, prestige and culture.”¹² The national identity of the Lebanese would be heavily influenced by French identity through language and legislation. French influence is still present today. For example, many streets in Beirut are named after French public officials and generals such as Gouraud and Clemenceau. Loyal colonial subjects accepted French supremacy, often embracing francophonia and choosing Latin names as opposed to Arabic names for their children. Their ‘special relation’ with the West, based on

⁹ Provence, “The Levant Mandates”, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹¹ Ibid, 2

¹² Ibid, 2

shared Christianity, was part of their identity. As such, French identity became interlaced with Lebanese identity. Lebanon thus became a French colony (or ‘mandate’), and this naturally birthed political resistance from Arab Ottomans: “The earliest petitions to the League of Nations were in opposition to Zionism, the Balfour Declaration, and the assignment of French and British mandates in Syria and Palestine.”¹³ The contradiction lies in the fact that two equally significant parts of the Lebanese population were at odds: one was a colonial subject and the other was anti-colonial. As a response, the French designed the ‘multi-confessional’ system of Lebanon in a way that would privilege the ‘better’ colonial subjects.

The Maronite Christians of Lebanon were assumed to be more ‘civilized’ colonial subjects than the Muslim communities.¹⁴ General Gouraud and his chief strategist Robert de Caix considered the educated Ottoman Arabs as their main enemies, therefore the separation of Lebanon from the rest of Muslim-majority Syria was necessary in safeguarding the colonial interests of the French.¹⁵ However, the French did not install a Maronite-majority population in Lebanon- at least not demographically. The state of Greater Lebanon expanded the Mount Lebanon governorate’s geographical borders quite significantly, thus “[diluting] a Maronite majority in a larger territory.”¹⁶ The cities of Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Akkar, and the regions of the Bekaa Valley and *Jabal Amel* had either significant Muslim populations or a Muslim majority. In other words, Maronite Christians did not constitute the majority of the population within the Lebanese borders. Nonetheless, Gouraud and De Caix overrepresented Maronites in high power positions. For instance, the administrative council was two-thirds Christian. In 1926, the French High Commissioner appointed a constitutional committee for Lebanon, which had three pro-French Christians and one pro-French Muslim. After 1922, the Chamber of Deputies was also dominated by Christians, who accounted for 58% of its seats.¹⁷

Sunni Muslims initially rejected this *fait accompli* and sought unification with Syria, whom they viewed as “the bastion of Arab nationalism.”¹⁸ In 1923 and then in 1926, Sunni leaders expressed their grievances to General Weygand, Gouraud’s successor, and held conferences on the matter. Their political activism continued well into the 1930s, but aspirations for Syrian unification faded. The idea of uniting different communities of Lebanon as a first step to achieve greater Arab unity prevailed over the idea of directly unifying with Syria.¹⁹ Although the Shi’as of Lebanon had little power compared to the Sunnis and the Christians, they also engaged in anti-colonial political activism. They took the same stance as Sunnis, meaning they rejected the separation of Lebanon from Greater Syria.²⁰

We can thus deduce another contradiction in Lebanese national identity: the proximity to French and Christian identities versus the proximity to Arab and Muslim identities. Lebanese

¹³ Ibid, 5

¹⁴ Ibid, 7

¹⁵ Ibid, 13

¹⁶ Ibid, 14

¹⁷ Ibid, 15

¹⁸ El-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities*, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid, 13-14.

²⁰ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 77-78.

national identity does not exist in a vacuum; it is linked to other national, subnational and supranational identities. The meaning of Lebanese national identity is relative to broader identities: French and Christian identities, and Arab and Muslim identities. The powerful Maronite community imagined Lebanon as close and friendly to Western Christian states whereas the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims imagined Lebanon as a part of the greater Syrian (or even Arab) nation. Moreover, the political system was built on the notion of power-sharing along sectarian lines and blatantly placed Christians atop of the system; the French institutionalized sectarianism under the guise of 'multi-confessionalism'. This institutionalized sectarianism would entrench sectarian identities, with the groups having contradictory Lebanese national imaginaries.

Lebanese 'Independence' (1943–1975): National Identity or Identities?

On November 22nd, 1943, the Lebanese Republic gained its 'independence' from France but remained subjugated by the sectarian system installed during their rule. Lebanon's first President was Bechara el-Khoury, and his Prime Minister was Riad el-Solh. Their government was formed under the framework of the 'National' Pact of 1943. However, this Pact could not be further from 'national': Political scientist Farid el-Khazen describes it as a "Communal Pact" consisting of "identities" rather than a singular national identity.

There was a need to bridge the gap between Christians and Muslims--more specifically, between Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims--and to end mandatory rule and seek independence. Farid el-Khazen posits that the 'National' Pact was the only possible political formula for Lebanon given all the historical contradictions of its national identity.²¹ However, like in earlier periods, international politics influenced the National Pact even more than intra-national politics did. In fact, the Pact did not concern merely Lebanese political actors. As el-Khazen puts it: "Rather, it was an arrangement involving Lebanese politicians (mostly Maronite and Sunni), Arab leaders (mainly Syrians and Egyptians), and western powers (the French and the British in particular)."²² The unwritten 'National Pact' thus had the function of a power sharing agreement between the sectarian communities of Lebanon. Furthermore, it was an indirect agreement between Arab leaders (who supported the Sunnis of Lebanon) and western powers (who supported the Maronites). However, it also served to define --or at least attempted to-- the meaning of the Lebanese nation and the Lebanese national identity. The contest over imagining and creating a Lebanese nation is tied to broader questions about Lebanon's position in the world, notably vis-a-vis the imagined Arab nation and Western powers.

Essentially, the Maronite community -- and Christians in general-- had to accept the Arab aspect of Lebanon's identity, and the Muslims had to accept that Lebanon was an independent state with a 'special relation' with the West. They also had to abandon any aspirations for unification with Syria. It was essentially a compromise between the 'colonial identity' of Lebanon--a country carved out of Greater Syria that is friendly to European powers-- and its

²¹ El-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities*, 5.

²² *Ibid*, 5.

‘anti-colonial’ identity that identified with an imagined Arab nation. It’s important to note that Lebanon is home to eighteen officially recognized religious sects. Yet, for a long time, power sharing mainly involved the Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim and Druze communities. Relatively little power was given to the Shi’a Muslims. The formula posited by the National Pact is as follows: the Presidency was given to the Maronite Christians (a historical continuation of the privilege they enjoyed when the *Mutasarrif* of Mount Lebanon was of their kin), the Prime Minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and the Parliament Speaker position is reserved for a Shi’a Muslim. The Speaker position was mostly symbolic as the President had much more power, but later came to play a more significant role.

Political representation was also sectarian and parliament seat proportions were based on the findings of a 1932 population census. The interpretation and analysis of these findings back in 1932 embody “issues of contest regarding the identity of the Lebanese state and who its members should be.”²³ Indeed, the domination of Maronite Christians was systematically sustained. As political scientist Rania Maktabi notes, “The restrictive citizenship policy practiced by the Maronite-dominated regime until the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 is understood as a means to sustain political domination in an ethnically divided society.”²⁴ Even after ‘independence’ from France, Lebanon inherited the power dynamic which favored the Maronite community, reflecting the legacy of French colonial practices in Lebanon. This dynamic was sustained through citizenship policy. Since it determines who belongs to Lebanon and who does not, citizenship policy is an effective tool in the contest over the meaning of Lebanese identity. The restrictive policy would inaccurately represent the Lebanese nation, just as the French empire did. Unsurprisingly, restrictive citizenship policy and more generally the disproportionate power held by the Maronites would brew tensions along sectarian lines.

Given its sectarian divisions, one can apply the notion of ‘consociational’ democracy to Lebanon. It is defined as “a political situation in which a variety of groups, none of which are large enough to constitute a majority, are able to achieve social stability by means of a [power sharing] pact among the elites of the various groups.”²⁵ However, social stability in Lebanon before 1975 is not a given, as tensions between Christian and Muslim groups continued. In 1958, American troops invaded Beirut because the country was on the brink of civil war. The Muslims of Lebanon were outraged by Western attacks on Nasser’s Egypt following the Suez Crisis and by Pro-West President Camille Chamoun’s decision to join the Baghdad Pact. They viewed these events as a threat to Arab nationalism, whereas the majority of Christians sought to keep the pro-West status quo. Three months later, Chamoun’s presidency ended, and Prime Minister Rachid Karami formed a national reconciliation government. However, efforts to maintain ‘peace’, social and political stability would only last until the late 1960’s.

In other words, the National Pact of 1943 -the foundation of the Lebanese system- was a power sharing arrangement aimed at bridging the gap between Christian and Muslim identities. It

²³ Rania Maktabi, “The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who are the Lebanese?” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 26, no.2 (Nov 1999), 219.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 220.

²⁵ El-Husseini, *Pax Syriana*, 1.

constituted “a political system in which sectarian criteria are institutionalized as the basis for administration of government.”²⁶ Furthermore, it was a pact that suited Syrian, Egyptian and French powers, once again emphasizing the role of international politics. International politics, particularly Arab nationalism, played a big role in mobilizing Lebanese Muslims who knew that Maronite Christians were disproportionately powerful. Later down the line, when Maronite power was threatened by the influx of Palestinians - who are mainly Sunni Muslims - national identity would be completely fragmented.

The ‘Civil’ War (1975–1990): Sectarianism, (Anti-)Zionism and Syrian Hegemony

Before going into the details of the ‘Civil’ War itself, the national memory of this conflict is very telling of Lebanon’s inability to consolidate different historical narratives. To this day, educational curriculums in Lebanon don’t provide any in-depth history of the ‘Civil’ War since different communities disagree on the details of how events developed. If Lebanese people can’t come to a consensus as to how and why the ‘Civil’ War occurred, is it surprising that they can’t come to a consensus as to what Lebanese national identity is?

Many authors are reluctant to label the 1975-1990 conflict in Lebanon as ‘civil’ since regional and international politics played a very significant part in its protraction. As the previous section details, the period from 1943 until 1975 was somewhat stable due to compromise rather than real social cohesion. Tensions gradually built up, as evidenced by the 1958 American invasion. Once the balance formulated by the National Pact was jeopardized, so was social and political stability.

Following the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Jordan during Black September, its leadership and guerrillas settled in South Lebanon in 1971. Christian political parties, from the Kataeb (Phalanges) to the Lebanese Forces, were vehemently opposed to Palestinian presence. Their view of Lebanese national identity was separate from an Arab identity, and thus anti-Zionism was not of great importance to them. In fact, they went on to collaborate with Israel and called for Israeli invasion to crush the PLO in 1978 and later in 1982. As for the Muslims of Lebanon, their identities were closer to the larger Arab identity. Anti-Zionism was a crucial component of this identity. Arab nationalists, Syrian nationalists, Communists, Lebanese Muslims and Druze alike were dedicated to anti-Zionism. Once again, international politics played a huge role in the protraction of the conflict and in the fragmentation of the Lebanese identity. One part of the population was anti-Zionist, and the other was willing to collaborate with Israel. Nonetheless, not all Christians in Lebanon were collaborators: many joined the ranks of the Lebanese Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and other political parties which opposed the pro-Western and collaborationist politics of right-wing Christian parties. Furthermore, many Lebanese Muslims had joined the ranks of the South Lebanon Army, an Israeli proxy militia. Therefore, when discussing the opposition between Muslim and Christian identities, it’s important to keep in mind that it stems from competing interests and differing national imaginaries, not from religion itself. Islam and Christianity, like

²⁶ Max Weiss, “The Matter of Sectarianism,” 1.

the concepts of East and West, are not fundamentally contradictory. Rather, the contradictions lie in the expression of national imaginaries by political actors from each community.

In 1976, Syria intervened in Lebanon with the purpose of limiting the PLO's power, a decision welcomed by the Maronites of Lebanon. By the end of the year, Syria completely reversed its policy and established an Arab Deterrent Force. As a result, two rival factions were formed: a military administration headed by Michel Aoun in East Beirut, the other a civilian force headed by Salim el-Hoss and supported by Syrians in West Beirut. The complete fragmentation of the Lebanese state was a result of the complete fragmentation of the already contested Lebanese national identity. This further fragmented Lebanese national identity. Under Tilly's war-making and state-making theory, each religious community fought 'the others', established its own authority, and solidified "the structured feeling that produces particular forms of cultural identity or social solidarity"²⁷ along sectarian lines. Syrian presence in Lebanon would last until 2005; the Syrians played a crucial role in ending the war through the Ta'if Agreement in 1989. Furthermore, Syria and Lebanon signed the "Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination" treaty in 1991, legitimizing Syrian military presence and consolidating Syrian power in Lebanon. Syrian presence in Lebanon would also further divide the country and entrench sectarian divisions. These divisions would culminate into the Cedar Revolution of 2005 and create the two main blocs that dominate Lebanese politics today: March 8 and March 14, the former being a coalition of parties united by their pro-Syria stance and the latter being a coalition of anti-Syrian parties.

Sectarianism of the street was at its highest during the war. Identity-based killings were conducted by all militias at their checkpoints, as Lebanese identity cards have the citizen's religious sect printed on them. Under the tutelage of the Israeli Defense Forces (who invaded Lebanon in 1978 and would continue to occupy South Lebanon until 2000), right-wing Christian militias massacred Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims in the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps. The Damour massacre which targeted Christians was conducted by Lebanese Muslims and left-wing militias in coordination with the PLO. In this instance, sectarianism was "an expression of violent, even murderous, tendencies"²⁸ interlinked with regional political interests.

We can thus conclude that the 'Civil' War was a result of sectarian tensions. However, the war did not occur simply because of competing interests; it was also a conflict over the meaning of the Lebanese nation - who belongs to it, who leads it, who are its friends, who are its foes? This was amplified by the contradiction in Lebanese national identity regarding the question of Zionism and Palestinian presence, and the proximity to Arab identity and the question of Syrian presence. In other words, international politics informed the war more than national politics did.

²⁷ Ibid, 1.

²⁸ Ibid, 1.

Conclusion: A History of Contradictions

Lebanese national identity, like all national identities, is a field of contestation and contradiction. However, the peculiarity of Lebanon's case lies in the systematic institutionalization of sectarian identities. Like Farid el-Khazen, many argue that Lebanese national identity isn't singular; competing views of Lebanese national identity exist. Contradictory imaginaries and interests eventually culminated into bloody conflict. However, opposing views of Lebanese national identity don't exist in a vacuum. They are inextricably linked to broader visions of regional and global order, notably the vision imposed by Western imperialism and the vision of anti-imperialism taken on by Arab nationalists. Anti-Zionism, because of its centrality in Arab nationalism and because Lebanon shares its southern border with Israel, was and continues to be a divisive issue in Lebanese society. Thus, national identity in Lebanon is shaped by international politics just as much, if not even more so, than by national politics.

Sectarianism, in its various forms and manifestations, has been a feature of Lebanese society and politics since the early nineteenth century. These "sectarianisms" have hampered the construction of a singular, cohesive, united national identity. The opposing visions of Lebanese national identity, which are linked to broader visions of world order, compete along sectarian lines. Therefore, sectarianism in Lebanon must be understood not as a mere historical or inherent feature of Lebanon, but also as a system inextricably tied to regional and global developments.

In summary, Lebanese national identity was shaped by a history of contradictions. These contradictions concern Lebanon's position and relations with the West and with the Muslim/Arab world and that international politics were more important in the national identity-building process of Lebanon than national politics.