



CENTER FOR HOMELAND
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL



HSx: MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY FUELS EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM



February 2017

CONTEXT: HOW WE GOT HERE

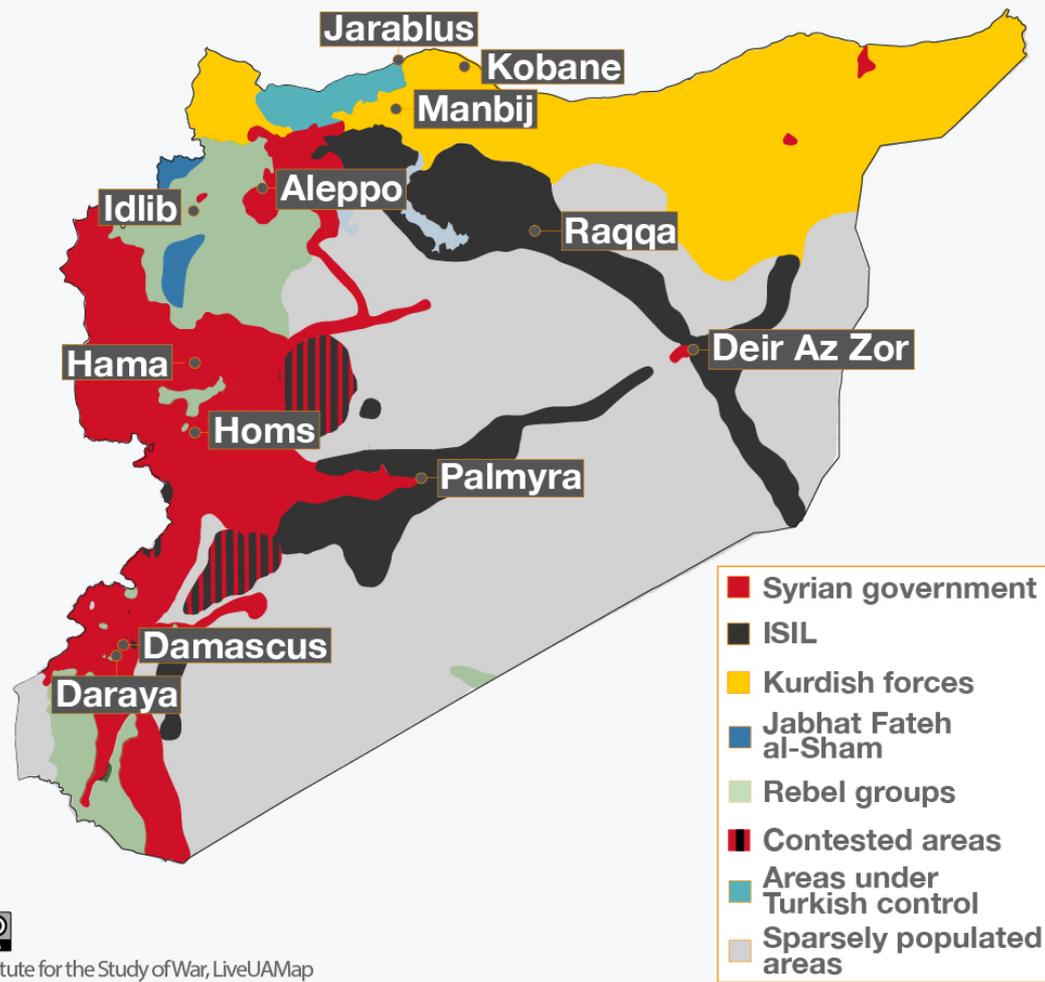
- Middle East instability has been driven by several intertwined political, social, economic factors, including:
 - The **collapse of a patronage system**, which had created cultures of dependency and hampered the development of institutions that could have promoted inclusive governance.
 - Unemployment of young adults due to **youth bulge**.
 - Youth bulge—larger proportion of young adults compared to any other age group. This is historically associated with civil conflicts, compounding the need for countries with youth bulges to achieve rapid economic growth to keep pace with abundance of young worker.
 - **Increased access to information via technology**, and
 - **Failure of governance**
- Rise of ISIS and collapse of states into civil wars are symptoms of broader deterioration.
 - Terrorism in the region has increased substantially due to the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the regional collapse of governance following Arab Spring in 2011.
 - Repression of dissent drives citizens to other external groups for protection (sectarian, identity-based, or extremist groups).

CONTEXT: WHERE WE ARE NOW

- Continuing patronage system breakdown.
 - Social contract between citizens and government, particularly authoritarian is strained.
 - Economic and social goods (e.g., security, healthcare, education, social services, employment) are provided in exchange for acceptance of regime authority.
 - Status quo being challenged by demographic bulge of young adults.
 - Previous attempts at reform only empowered wealthy elites, generating more grievances against regimes.
 - Elites resistant to change that would cause them to lose privileged status.
- Low energy prices drive an unmet need for economic reforms and private sector growth.
- Continuing refugee crises strain neighboring countries, causing vulnerabilities.
- Increasing temperatures, decreasing air quality, and reduced water supply are further stressors.
- Unresolved Palestinian issue unites all Arabs - remains a driver of Middle East conflict.

CASE STUDY: COMPLEXITY OF CONFLICT IN SYRIA

Syria: Who controls what?



Source: Institute for the Study of War, LiveUAMap
Updated: March 2017



CASE STUDY: SYRIA (CONT.)

- Repression began under presidency of Hafez al-Asad, and continued under his son Bashar al-Asad's control.
 - The state's domestic and regional strategies and behavior are designed for regime survival.
- Crackdowns on reformist movement in 2001 weakened regime's power base and gave economic benefits to smaller group of elites.
 - This move resulted in increased sectarian resentment.
- Frustrations within society over lack of social mobility.
 - Large influx of educated young adults without jobs.
 - Agricultural and economic policies failed.
 - Severe drought (2007-2010) pushed 1.5mil to cities.
- The Arab Spring arose in Syria when the regime chose brutality over reform, leading to further polarization.
 - Factions within rebellion split, leading to the eventual rise of ISIS.
- Islamization of the revolution followed.
 - Conflict now viewed within lens of either with Asad or with ISIS.
 - Radicalization and polarization on both sides.
- Massive refugee crisis spilling into the region and beyond.

CASE STUDY: TUNISIA, SUCCESSES POST-REVOLUTION BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

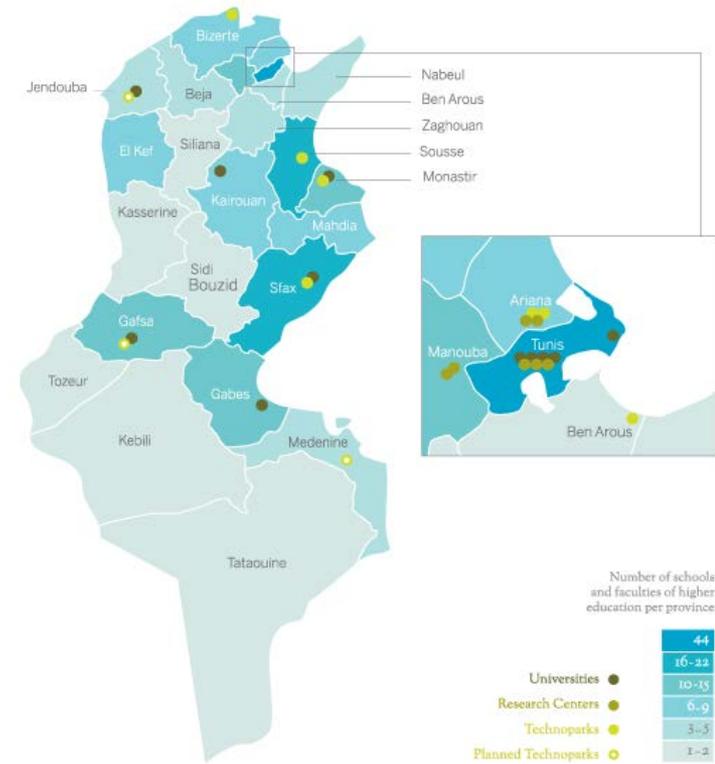
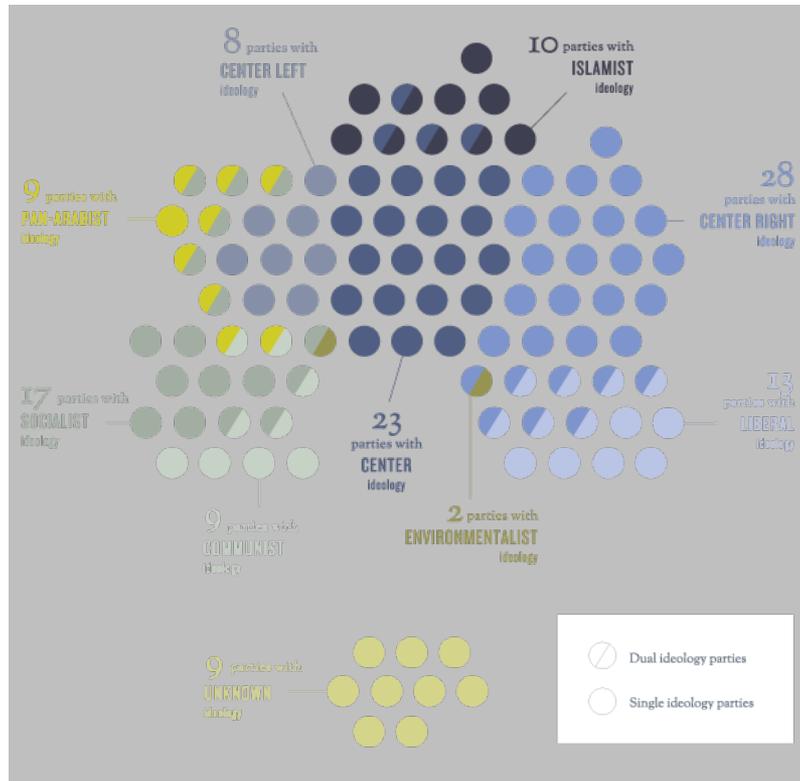


Image source: World Bank and Reboot, "Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions." 2012. <https://reboot.org/tunisia/>

The number of political parties has exploded since the end of the Ben Ali regime...

...but there are still inequalities that need to be addressed, such as in educational opportunities in traditionally disenfranchised areas of Tunisia.

CASE STUDY: TUNISIA (CONT.)

- Tunisia was a trigger country for Arab Spring; the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouazizi sparked revolution. Other contributing factors included:
 - Economic marginalization of rural populations.
 - Economic dependency on smuggling and peddling.
 - Citizens vulnerable to harassment and extortion by local officials.
- New constitution was agreed upon by both secular and religious groups.
 - Tunisia's history of investment in human development aided with the transition of power.
- However, the new government has not addressed social and economic problems.
 - Remains a need for new economic vision and a need to address corruption.
 - Economic wealth still held in hands of small number of elites.
 - Need for devolution of governance to local level.
 - Services available to citizens varies based on location, led to polarization and fueling political protest and violent extremism.

CASE STUDY: TUNISIA (CONT.)

- Polarization has continued —those in privileged regions with public-sector jobs and formal employment vs marginalized regions with less access to formal employment and government services.
- Proposals for and attempts at decentralization measures have been repeatedly pushed back – passage would improve services and economy within rural/non-coastal area by shifting decision making and control of funds to local areas.
- However, Ben Ali has allowed development of human capital and social activism, some independent institutions and civil society groups prior to uprising.
 - Civil society has grown since uprising and helped to broker political compromise in 2013.
- Tunisia has slowly been generating policy ideas and bridging social and political differences
 - New avenues for participation in government decision making and economic accountability improving governance.
 - Has led to some reduction in polarization and factors driving population to extremist groups.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: OVERVIEW

- State failure opens up opportunities for new strands of jihadi operations.
- Linkages between internal conflict and global terrorism, refugee flows, and humanitarian disasters.
 - Without addressing conflicts, they will overwhelm all other regional challenges.
 - Prolonged conflicts allow terrorists to recruit and operate on large scale.
- Systemic economic, political, social transformations needed to rein in unaccountable spending but transformations could increase possibility of domestic unrest.
- Local power struggles subsumed into broader regional divides (Sunni/Shia, Islamists/secularists).
- Proxy wars undermine democratic transitions, drive fragile states into civil war, exacerbate sectarianism and violent extremism.
 - Combination of ideologies like Salafi-jihadism in a region experiencing vast and rapid political change and economic disparities creates nexus for violence.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: OVERVIEW (CONT.)

- Iran vs Saudi Arabia
 - Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Yemen seen through lens of this rivalry
- Qatar and Turkey vs United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia
 - Revolves around Islamists (especially Muslim Brotherhood)
- Israel vs Palestine
 - Unresolved, could become more dominant as other conflicts recede
- Salafism-jihadism vs Arab states
 - Each state has a different perception of the threat; state failure opens up opportunities for new strands of jihadi operations
- Extremists exploit anger and link injustices with common identity of deepening religious affiliation.
- Without major reforms, instability will continue; popular discontent will drive disenfranchised to sectarian groups or terrorist organizations for support.
 - Breakdown of state structures creates gaps that terrorist organizations can infiltrate.
 - Proxy wars fuel Sunni-Shia divide.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: POLITICS

- Without reforms, public spaces closed to dissent; governments forced to choose between regime security/“legitimacy” and genuine political development.
- Increasing polarization, both ideological and political.
 - As individuals fall back to lower-order identities (religious or sectarian), it provides the government with scapegoats on whom to pin socioeconomic failings.
 - Those groups then can become radicalized to the point of legitimizing political/sectarian violence.
 - Polarized systems allow rejectionist voices to dominate, extreme discourse leads to radicalization or religious extremism.
 - Extremism and terrorism becomes appealing for underprivileged/marginalized groups.
- Continuing conflict can lead citizens to choose stability over reforms, leading to greater authoritarian power.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: ECONOMY

- Extensive cross-border economies in conflict zones feeding off forced migration
 - Black markets, large-scale industry for organized crime, sale of weapons, food/essential items smuggling.
- Lower oil prices drive countries to diversify, potentially causing increased instability during transition.
 - Oil prices also affects ISIS's ability to operate, as oil provides a significant revenue source for operations.
- Oil producing countries likely to face massive challenges as they attempt to build private sector capable of keeping up with demographic youth bulge.
 - Sharp cuts in domestic spending and energy subsidies, moving toward value-added taxes, need for economic diversification.
 - Likely to create counter-reactions with calls for transparency, openness, accountability.
- Non-oil exporters susceptible to fiscal shocks.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: SOCIETY

- If efforts to address human development are not successful, demographic trends will continue to be a source of problems
 - Young adults will turn to non-state actors, including extremist groups or terrorist organizations, for social and economic support.
- Continuing conflict leads to massive population movements, including dramatic reduction in number and range of professionals remaining.
 - Doctors, engineers, lawyers, educators
 - Those countries receiving refugees face increasing strain, unable to provide for their own populations, lead to gaps that terrorist organizations can fill
- People continue to fall back on primordial identities (religious, tribal), leading to breakdown of more states without governments granting additional power to local/tribal groups.
- For example: Jordan and Lebanon could provide case studies for further reading on this topic as they have both faced decline in crucial social services (health, education), depression in wages, expansion in informal sector and youth unemployment, and a rise in child labor with increase in refugees.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: TECHNOLOGY

- Continued use of technology and social media to link up protest movements.
 - ISIS provides inspiration for freelance terrorists and recruits through social media.
- Terrorist organizations able to use increasing access to gain supporters
 - Facilitates terrorist communications, recruitment, logistics, and lethality.
 - Further decentralized threats, posing challenges to counterterrorism efforts.
- Governments use of technology as tools of repression and control.
 - Will struggle to dominate the flow of information.
 - Increased repression by government will push more to support non-state actors/resistance.

IMPLICATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST INSTABILITY: ENVIRONMENTAL

- Climate change will have direct and indirect effect on the Middle East.
 - Temperatures on the rise, making some areas uninhabitable.
 - Profound effect on water and food supplies.
 - Already scarce water resources, needs new desalinization techniques (too expensive and environmentally harmful), droughts likely more frequent.
 - Negative effects on air quality, including desert dust in the air increasing caused by desertification.
- Environmental factors add to strain on governments and societies, fueling support for non-state actors (including terrorist organizations), as people look to those groups for protection and resources.

ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE ISSUES

- Economic reform programs have not paid attention to social dislocation and tended to benefit small elite rather than general population, and have therefore been largely unsuccessful
- Privatization of state industries to move away from patronage led to perception (often justified) of corruption.
 - Populations have associated economic reforms with corruption and economic abuse, not prosperity.
- Saudi Vision 2030
 - Aims to end Saudi Arabia's dependency on hydrocarbons in fifteen years.
 - Acknowledgment that economic modernization and diversification is needed for long-term prosperity.
- Tunisia has had some successes but still faces challenges.
 - Growth of civil society, increase in number and variety of political parties.
 - Address polarization and discrepancies in available services by location.

RESOURCES

- The following resources provide further information on this topic:
 - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “Arab Fractures: Citizens, States, and Social Contracts.” 2017.
 - Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Stability in the MENA Region: Beyond ISIS and War, Part One: Regional Trends.” April 21, 2016.
 - National Intelligence Council, “Global Trends: Paradox of Progress.” January 2017.
- Additional research materials and information sources regarding this topic can be found in the associated *Literary & Scholastic Resource List*.

Literary and Scholastic Resources –Middle East Instability Fuels Extremism & Terrorism

Date of information: February 2017

Overview: While not exhaustive, the following resources provide a roadmap to understanding the relationship between the factors creating instability in the Middle East and the potential for an increase in extremist or terrorist activity. These resources provide a baseline of understanding, but as the strategic environment continues to evolve, new data will become available and resource lists will require updates.

Module Resource Lists to Cross-Reference: Asymmetric Population Growth, Changing Role of the Individual, Convergence of Terrorism & Criminal Organization

Organizations:

- **Center for Strategic and International Studies:** The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a nonprofit policy research institution that provides strategic reports covering defense and security, regional studies, and transnational challenges (e.g. energy, trade). CSIS provides research and analysis and develops policy initiatives that look to the future. www.csis.org
- **National Intelligence Council:** The National Intelligence Council (NIC) supports the Director of National Intelligence in the role as head of the Intelligence Community (IC) and is the IC's center for long-term strategic analysis. The NIC publishes many reports, including a quadrennial trends publication that includes information on demographic shifts. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/national-intelligence-council-who-we-are>
- **Brookings Institution:** The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit policy organization that conducts in-depth research on local, national, and global issues. Brookings focuses on independent analysis that provides ideas on how to solve problems facing society. www.brookings.edu

Recent Publications and Journal Articles:

- **Arab Fractures: Citizens, States, and Social Contracts:** This report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace lays out the major trends in the Middle East, dividing them into subcategories within the Human Landscape, the Political Landscape, and the Geopolitical Landscape. There are case studies throughout that demonstrate the factors driving instability in the region.
 - ***Citation:*** Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Arab Fractures: Citizens, States, and Social Contracts." 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/02/01/arab-fractures-citizens-states-and-social-contracts-pub-66612>
- **The Underlying Causes of Stability and Instability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region:** This report has two volumes, the first a broad regional look at causes of stability and instability in the region, and the second covers each country in the region individually. The first volume includes surveys, statistical evidence, and analysis of trends across multiple fields, all of which affect MENA countries' levels of stability.
 - ***Citation:*** Center for Strategic and International Studies. "The Underlying Causes of Stability and Instability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region." April 19, 2016.

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/underlying-causes-stability-and-instability-middle-east-and-north-africa-mena-region>

- Global Trends: Paradox of Progress: A publication of the NIC, this trends report includes references throughout to instability in the Middle East as continuing to build momentum for terrorist organizations. It also includes a region-by-region highlight of trends over the next five years, which expands on issues specific to the region.
 - *Citation*: National Intelligence Council. “Global Trends: Paradox of Promise.” January 2017. <https://www.dni.gov/files/images/globalTrends/documents/GT-Full-Report.pdf>

Other Resources:

- Palestine: Still key to stability in the Middle East: The Brookings Institution provides analysis on a range of issues, including Middle East politics and stability in the region. This op-ed, written by a senior fellow on foreign policy, argues that the Palestinian issue remains at the heart of extremism in the region.
 - *Citation*: Fraihat, Ibrahim. “Palestine: Still key to stability in the Middle East.” <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/palestine-still-key-to-stability-in-the-middle-east/>
- 10 Demographic Trends that are Shaping the U.S. and the World: The Pew Research Center takes on emerging trends in demographics in their “Fact Tank” series, which summarizes the research and analysis of Pew’s social scientists. This page uses a series of infographics to study the impacts of population change.
 - *Citation*: Cohn, D’Vera and Caumont, Andrea. “10 Demographic Trends that are Shaping the U.S. and the World.” March 31, 2016. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>
- Oil & Terrorism: Why Now Is Worse Than After 9/11: This article discusses the links between terrorism in the Middle East and oil, explaining how the oil market serves as a barometer of regional tension. The author also discusses the role of the oil industry, particularly oil revenue and ransom money from kidnapped oil workers, in financing terrorism.
 - *Citation*: Piotrowski, Matt. “Oil & Terrorism: Why Now Is Worse Than After 9/11.” December 15, 2015. <http://energyfuse.org/oil-terrorism-now-is-worse-than-after-911/>
- Want to stabilize the Middle East? Start with governance: This article from Brookings lays out the role that the collapse of the patronage system played in the decline in regional stability. It also details how improving governance within the Arab states will improve security and reduce the threat of terrorism.
 - *Citation*: Cofman Wittes, Tamara. “Want to stabilize the Middle East? Start with governance.” November 22, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/11/22/want-to-stabilize-the-middle-east-start-with-governance/>