The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies
ISSN: 2324-755X (Print), ISSN: 2324-7568 (Online)
Volume 18, Issue 2, 2023
https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-755X/CGP/v18i02/31-55

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA): Fragility, Fragmentation, and Crisis

A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam
Md Mizanur Rahman, Qatar University, Qatar
Diotima Chattoraj, James Cook University, Singapore

Received: 12/23/2022*;* ***Accepted:*** 05/04/2023; ***Published:*** 06/15/2023

Abstract: The paper examines the fragility, fragmentation, and crisis in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by dissecting the region into three subregions–Maghreb, Mashreq, and the GCC–and elaborating on their complex contours, diverse ideological orientations, and unavoidable outcomes. Politically, economically, demographically, and ethnically heterogeneous, and religiously reasonably homogenous, the MENA records high conflict rates. There is a lack of unity in diversity, hurting regional cooperation and cohesion. We argue that fragility and fragmentation lead to persistent inter- and intra-state conflict, high unemployment, water disputes, deepening poverty, recurrent famine, and growing numbers of refugees and displacement. By referring to examples from Maghreb, Mashreq, and the GCC, the paper shows the interplay between fragility and resilience and thus attempts to offer a nuanced understanding of the factors that trigger and sustain fragmentation and conflict in the region. The insights into the dynamics of fragility, fragmentation, and crisis highlight the imperatives of cooperation and cohesion in regional integration.

Keywords: *Middle East and North Africa, Conflict, War, Fragmentation, Fragility, Displacement*

Introduction

Without integration, it is notoriously difficult for countries to maintain their economic and political relevance in today's globalized world. In this interdependent and interconnected world, it is unrealistic to operate in isolation (Hamza 2017; Jehn 1997). Of course, people are born with their own opinions, ideas, beliefs, and views, and they act as they see fit. To accommodate diverse opinions, it is critical to promote diversity, which is often the mother of all disputes. Depending on the complexity of economics, geography, demographics, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and politics, disputes often develop into conflicts of varying degrees.

The twenty-one countries in MENA are politically heterogeneous, such as monarchies (the GCC countries, Morocco and Jordan); republics (Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, and Algeria); Islamist countries (Sudan and Iran); dysfunctional democracy (Lebanon); occupied countries striving for democracy (Palestinian territories and Iraq); as well as democracy itself (Israel) (Ullah 2014; Mckee et al. 2017). Between 1970 and 2019, about a third of all wars between states occurred in the MENA region and over 40 percent of all internationalized civil wars (Sarkees and Wayman 2010; Mundy 2019; Palik, Rustad, and Methi 2020). Over half of the arms imports to developing countries in 1982 came to this region, capturing almost 42 percent of all global arms exports (US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency 1984). The fact that one-third of the total refugees are generated from MENA reminds us of the region's frequency and severity of conflicts (Ullah 2014).

Conflict affects regional cohesion, relations with nonstate actors, human life, and physical infrastructure, leading to fragmentation, violence, and tensions. Kinsman (2016) finds that domestic hostility and foreign intervention are no less responsible for the state of fragility. For example, Palestine has gone from 97 percent in 1946 of the land to about 15 percent in 2020 to Israel. Israel's illegitimate occupation continues aggressively without any resistance or even the meaningful opposition from Arab nations. About 11 percent of the 6.6 million Jews living in Israel today reside in the occupied territories (250 Israeli settlements where 611,000 settlers live outside Israel's borders (Tahhan 2020; Aljazeera 2021).

The ongoing Syrian conflict shows that countries in the region are so fragmented that interregional conflicts are occurring. The Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the Iraq-Kuwait war in the 1990s, the current KSA-Yemen war, and the Palestine-Israel conflict and embargo against Qatar in 2017 are some glaring examples of a fractured region. The recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Saudi Arabia's crackdown on parts of its royal family, the sudden resignation of Lebanon's prime minister, and the Kurds' vote for independence in Iraq contributed to further fragmentation. The Syrian Assad regime's clinging to power consolidated Iranian and Russian influence (Nada 2017).

Following Kivimäki's (2021) findings on the link between state factionalism and conflict, and factionalism and grievances, we examine the mechanisms through which fragmentation in the region leads to persistent inter- and intra-state conflict, high unemployment, water disputes, increasing poverty, recurring famines, and growing refugee and mass displacement crises in the region. Using examples from the three subregions (Maghreb, Mashreq, and Gulf Cooperation Council), we seek to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors that trigger fragmentation, fragmentation-induced conflicts, and their long-term consequences. We therefore examine how fragmented the region is and how deep the fragmentation is. We also highlight the interplay between fragility and resilience in the MENA region.

Scholarship on the MENA, violence, and fragility has generated considerable literature (Kamrava 2016; Bandak and Bille 2013; Cammack et al. 2017; Hinnebusch 2014; Kamel 2017; Kinsman 2016). The majority of the studies focus on the MENA's history and political development and the forces that shape the region today. Existing literature suggests that external influences have molded and continue to mold the region's politics, economy, and societies (Bendebka 2019). However, a paucity of research deals with mechanisms of fragility and conflict the region is inflicted with. This study attempts to fill the gap. Therefore, we intend to answer the following research question: is the lack of unity in diversity hurting regional cooperation and cohesion in MENA? Five sections make up the paper: The upcoming section provides an overview of the three subregions in the MENA and discusses various challenges experienced, followed by a conceptual section on fragmentation and conflict. The following two sections discuss the corollaries of fragility and the emergence of resilient states. The final section concludes with some policy implications.

Research Methods

Historical context, political change, conflict, and relations with neighbors are important in determining the common characteristics that underpin our argument about fragility and conflict across the MENA region. We use a qualitative research method and rely extensively on secondary data sources. To examine the mechanism of how fragmentation in the MENA region leads to ongoing inter- and intra-state conflicts, unemployment, water conflicts, increasing poverty, and growing refugee and displacement crises, we used content analysis (both conceptual and relational) to examine the literature. Conceptual analysis identifies concepts in the text, while relational analysis extends conceptual analysis by examining the connections between concepts. Secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, some previous surveys, and online sources.

We strive to figure out how fragility, fragmentation, and crisis influence the course of the conflict in the MENA. Regional fragmentation and integration in MENA are influenced by historical legacies (colonialism). We identify the nature of state fragility, the phenomena of sectarianism, and the dismal record of regional cooperation in order to make our focus clear. We employ a variety of traits that have been influenced by four causes: how has colonialism influenced geographic proximity as a critical feature of regional cooperation? Also, how have conflict processes influenced the interdependence that characterizes MENA regionalism?

We critically examine existing definitions and terminology of weak and fragile nations, as well as the political consequences of the present discourse in the MENA region. We examine the causes and consequences of conceptual notions of state fragility in relation to politics and security, economics and natural resources, intra- and inter-state relations, population mobility, and the broader regional and global political economies using multidisciplinary perspectives. We argue that many MENA governments are perennially "weak," such as Lebanon, Yemen, and Sudan.

Three Subregions yet Myriad Challenges

The MENA region is traditionally divided into three subregions (Figure 2): the "Maghreb" (the land where the sun sets); the "Mashreq" (meaning "the East" in Arabic and Persian, and which, like "Bilad al-Sham" and unlike all other terms used for the Eastern Mediterranean, originated within the region); and the "Gulf Cooperation Council" (which includes the Gulf of Aden) (Buzan and Wæver 2003; Bilgin 2004, 2019; Brown 1984). The Maghreb, Mashreq, and Gulf have always been composite regions with interconnected security dynamics (Figure 1) (Del Sarto, Malmvig, and Lecha, 2019; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Bilgin 2004, 2019; Brown 1984). Egypt is in a quandary: strict definitions of the Mashreq exclude it, although it is undeniably linked to the subregional framework. Sudan's position within the tripartite framework is also problematic, as it does not belong to any of the three subregions.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a volatile and contentious region with high levels of warfare (Pinfari 2016). Promoting regional order is a top priority for international security because of its geopolitical significance (Hurrell 2007; Fawcett 2018). The name "Middle East" was first used in "The Persian Gulf and International Relations" (by American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, 1902) (Adelson 2012; Russett 1970). These subregions may have some commonalities with regional security complexes (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Viewing MENA through a historical sociological approach is more complicated than the current debate suggests (Hinnebusch 2014). Hinnebusch points to four different levels that are intertwined:

> [The global hierarchy in which the] region is embedded as a periphery of the world system according to the world system model; the interstate regional system with rival states balancing each other; a level of interstate flows, movements, and discourses about identity and legitimacy; and the domestic level where state-makers seek to create bureaucratic structures and legitimacy to secure the loyalty of their populations" (Hinnebusch 2014, 12)

Regionalization thus emerged as a shield to protect against external shocks. States tend to form regional or subregional groupings to combat global challenges. This phenomenon has emerged as both a top-down political process-regionalism-and a bottom-up structural process-regionalization (International Peace Institute 2013). Regionalism describes cooperation in the economic, institutional, defence, or security spheres that takes place at the political decision-making level (Fishlow and Haggard 1992; International Peace Institute 2013).

The Maghreb was established more than two decades ago to build a strong economic bloc in the region. However, the region faces major development challenges such as political and security problems, including extremism, a rapidly growing young population, higher unemployment, economic stagnation, and vulnerability to climate change (World Bank MENA 2010), so it has not been able to achieve strong integration.

The Maghreb—a diverse region in terms of resource endowment, geography, demography and human resources, with 102.87 million people and US$ 328.01 billion in GDP in 2020 (O'Neill 2021; 2021a)—is undergoing economic and political transitions. The economy's poor performance has been attributed to high trade barriers, bureaucratic and logistical bottlenecks, product diversification, and a volatile political atmosphere. Trade between the Maghreb countries represents only 4.8 percent of the total volume and less than 2 percent of the subregion's combined GDP (Hamza 2017; Akhtar and Rouis 2010). The Mashreq consists of two great physical regions: Beneath the great plateau of the Arabian Peninsula are barren deserts. The other part comprises the rich and fertile area known as the Fertile Crescent, which extends from the Nile Valley through Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria to Iraq. The Mashreq countries have much lower trade volumes relative to their GDP than their MENA counterparts. Adjusted for oil, however, non-oil trade is only marginally

lower than in MENA. Nevertheless, the volume of trade with European countries is higher than that of their own region (Akhtar and Rouis 2010).

Figure 1: Selected MENA Countries

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formed in 1981 when six oil-exporting countries united their interests and shared values. The GCC was concerned about military aggression and subsequently formed the Peninsular Shield Force to respond to any security threat against its constituent members in 1984 (Tok 2021). In this context, Saudi Arabia is considered a regional powerhouse, which adds to the heterogeneity (Ulrichsen 2018; Wright 2019; Tok 2021). Abundant wealth coupled with regional political ambition enabled selected emerging Gulf Cooperation Council countries to support and influence like-minded governments and organizations in the Maghreb and Mashreq more than ever before (Ulrichsen 2019; Gray 2018) . Of course, following the Arab Spring and ensuing political and economic changes in the Maghreb and the Mashreq, regional policies in the GCC changed fundamentally (Ulrichsen 2019a; Rahman and Al-Azm 2023).

In terms of their regional political approach, the GCC countries can be divided into three broad groups: (i) pro-democracy and Iran-friendly, (ii) counter-revolutionary and anti-Iran, and (iii) neutral (Tok 2021). Qatar tends to be aligned with Turkey and Islamic movements, and is relatively friendly toward Iran. While Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates tend to be counterrevolutionary and anti-Iranian (Charrad and Reith 2019), Kuwait and Oman tend to adopt a neutral stance in their policies. Thus, the GCC countries follow their ideological positioning rather than unifying forces such as pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are concerned about the instability and regime change caused by the Arab Spring in some countries such as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. The concern for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain also stems from the fear that they are not resourceful to buy citizens' acquiescence like Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE (Tok 2021). The UAE regards any political change in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia as an existential threat to the UAE (Ulrichsen 2018; Tok 2021).

Integration among GCC, Mashreq, and Maghreb occurs via the demand and supply functions, meaning that it is economic; for example, GCC needs labor and Maghreb and Mashreq supply it. While GCC's objectives are ambitious, the recent embargo along with Egypt (not a part of GCC) on Qatar has transpired the fragility of their integration policy. The GCC countries own at least $273 billion of US debt (Amadeo 2021). The historically and culturally connected GCC states aspire to be a more diversified economic bloc (Ullah et al. 2020). In 2021, they had a population of about 54 million and a GDP of about $3.464 trillion (World Population Review 2021).

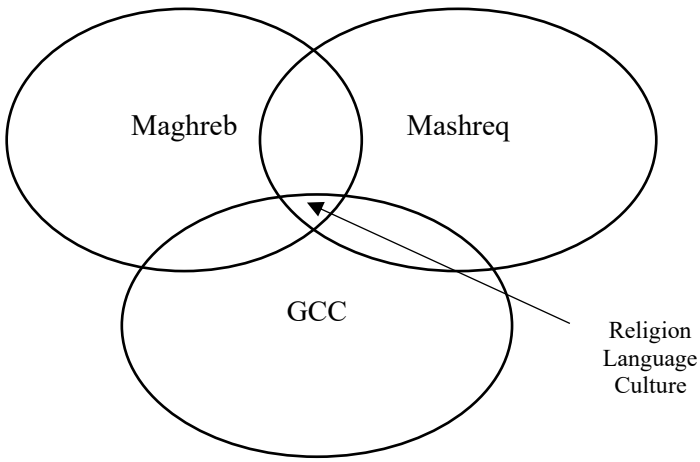

Figure 2: Three subregions in the MENA

Region, Sectarianism and Social Cohesion

A region is a geographical entity consisting of territorial political units linked by ongoing political, economic, security, and cultural interactions and a shared sense of belonging (Adelson 2012; Katzenstein 1997), and Del Sarto, Malmvig, and Lecha (2019) confirm that MENA qualifies as a region. In this view, regions are social constructs shaped by numerous political processes (Katzenstein 2000; Hartshorne 1939; Aarts 1999). States in a region are linked by spatial proximity and some degree of interdependence, contact, and commonality (Russett 1967; Nye 1968; Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Lake and Morgan 1997).

Sectarian tensions have long existed in the region, leading to social tensions that occasionally escalate into open conflict (Haddad 2011; Moore-Gilbert 2016; Del Sarto, Malmvig, and Lecha 2019; Hashemi and Postel 2017). Divide and rule through the instrumentalization of sectarian identities has been one of the ways governments in the region have sought to maintain power and ensure survival. This study contributes to our knowledge of intra-Islamic identity conflict in the MENA region by examining how political economy, geopolitics, intra-state governance, social media, non- and sub-state groups, and clerical elites have influenced the transformation of sectarian identities, rather than viewing the differences between and within Sunni and Shia Islam as primordial. Particular emphasis is placed on how

contestations over the distribution of political and economic power have taken on a sectarian tone and how sectarianism has been instrumentalized by a range of actors.

The sectarianization process is also shaped by class dynamics, weak regimes, and geopolitical rivalry (Hashemi and Postel 2017). Rather than debating whether sectarianism is a myth or a reality, sceptics have admitted that it has become a serious factor in politics. Sectarianism has increased in the region as a result of the Arab upheavals (Gaiser 2017; Malmvig 2014; Gause 2014). The protests in Bahrain, for example, were initially non-sectarian as demonstrators chanted "Neither Sunni nor Shia, we are one." The government and official media reinforced the notion that it was a Shia rebellion planned by Tehran and directed against Sunnis (Matthiesen 2017, 208; Moore-Gilbert 2016; Del Sarto, Malmvig, and Lecha 2019). States in the region were not failed states, although governments lacked popular legitimacy and relied heavily on the repressive security apparatus (Call 2010; Del Sarto, Malmvig, and Lecha 2019). Of course, the character of regional politics had changed. Modernity, democracy, fundamentalism, and nationalism and other prevailing concepts were no longer sufficient to describe politics in the region (Nasr 2006, 82).

The degree of closeness and solidarity between social groups that results from democratic attempts to achieve social balance, economic dynamism, and national identity is referred to as social cohesion (Manca 2014). It is a complicated social construct that is at the core of humanity (Pahl 1991), as different cultures have different geographies, political representations, economies, and challenges (Bruhn 2009). Promoting social cohesion leads to communities where people live in harmony despite their differences (Novy, Swiatek, and Moulaert 2012).

Fragmentation and Conflict

The basis for the creation of the three subregions in MENA is geopolitical coordination and socioeconomic cooperation. Today, however, they are either inactive (e.g., the Arab Cooperation Council) and unable to act (e.g., the Arab League) or exist only on paper (e.g., Maghreb). The GCC was originally formed on the premise that Iran posed a security threat and that an alliance against this threat was important. Consequently, the GCC was formed primarily for political rather than economic reasons. Since its inception, the GCC has performed far better than the other two subregions, at least in terms of economic integration (Ullah 2014). As a result of the colonial legacy, colonial borders are often the source of disputes that continue to occur today. Furthermore, following AKM Ahsan Ullah (2014), this entire region is locked by 'mutual distrust', causing unhealthy relations. As part of the peace process, several agreements and accords were signed (such as the Oslo peace process, Geneva Accord, Camp David Agreement, and Road Map Plan) aimed at bringing peace to this region (Ullah 2014). However, this has little relevance to the political climate of today.

Conflict is often motivated by survival concerns (Jones and Fabian 2006). Humans are generally drawn to conflict on various scales. Hobbes ([1651] 1996) notes that although humans are naturally inclined toward violence, they are constrained from doing so due to

social convention, but for Rousseau ([1755] 1994), the unnatural social constraints of human existence led to the development of violence in men. Conflict begins within one's inner self. The cycle begins with an individual, moves through a family, a community, a region, a state, and finally ends at the global level. Drivers and causes, interests and scale may vary. Conflict and war are triggered by sociocultural forces embedded in the meanings, values, and norms of states. The result of war is the imbalance between these forces in international space and time. Chaos, opportunistic violence, and exploitation due to individual or group interests lead to human suffering, and weak states lose control (Duffield 2001; Gilbert 2003).

Summerfield (1997), Wallensteen and Sollenberg (2001), Gleditsch et al. (2002), and Eriksson et al. (2003) underscored that the series of conflicts in the last two decades since the 1980s dotted the region's and fundamentally reshaped the region's mobility landscape. Among others, the Israel-Palestine conflict is listed as a single armed conflict on the territories of two states, Israel and Lebanon, over land and border issues (Human Rights Watch 2020; Harms and Ferry 2008; Yacobi and Newman 2007). The concepts of "political homeland" and "mythical territory" form the most important part of national identity (Ullah 2014; Yacobi and Newman 2007). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is thus the best example of territorial and border conflicts in the present (Newman 2006; Yacobi and Newman 2007).

In debates about MENA in the politics of religion, Meddeb and colleagues (2017) point to three determinants: a changing society and increasing religious diversity; shifts in the Islamic landscape; and, following the Arab uprising in 2010 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the region has experienced a significant intensification of geopolitical dynamics. A notable element of change, according to Meddeb et al. (2017), is that the Muslim Brotherhood has lost its political relevance due to the fragmentation of Islamism. We observed that in the post-Arab uprising period, Salafis politicized themselves and supported the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This played a role in the fragmentation of political Islam. According to Roy (2017), the issue in this situation is not a radicalization of Islam, but an Islamization of radicalism, which is why the lack of a popular ideology could mobilize protest movements for reform.

There will probably continue to be fragmentation and division in the Islamist landscape. Movements that are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, however, remain an apolitical force for the foreseeable future despite the Brotherhood's diminished organizational capacity (El-Sherif 2014). Syrian and Iraqi wars have given rise to more extreme sectarian religious groups and Salafi-jihadi movements.

Svensson (2013) contends that three major empirical regularities explain the reason why the number of religious civil wars has risen proportionately over time in this region: (1) the looming intra and interreligious conflicts; (2) the spread of short-lived intrareligious disputes; and (3) the growing transnational religious disputes. Conflicts have defined the relations between the two branches of Islam in the region. For instance, the obvious split between Sunnism and Shiism became vivid during the aftermath of the 2011 geopolitical contention between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Of course, the focus has shifted to the Syrian crisis and to

Saudi–the Iranian and Saudi-Yamen conflicts. However, the Israeli-Palestinian permanent conflicts remain significant on the global agenda (Cammack et al. 2017). This partly explains why the number of people at risk from the conflict has doubled in the last decade (World Bank 2020). Ironically, by 2030, two-thirds of the world's extreme poor are expected to live in fragile and conflict-affected countries (World Bank 2020).

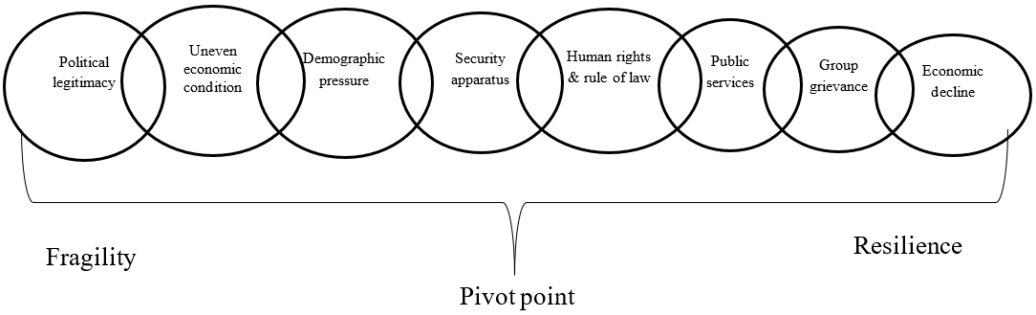

Figure 3: The Fragility/Resilience Model Influencing Factors

MENA's fragility can be seen through Baker's (2017) approach, which examines eight indicators: political legitimacy, demographic pressure, inequitable economic conditions, human rights and rule of law, public services, grievances, and poverty and economic decline (Figure 3). Poverty and inequality lead to motives for conflict, which lead to violence (Anderton and Carter 2019). Baker identifies three critical factors that are likely to cause state decline: lack of political legitimacy, growing grievances, and poor macroeconomic performance. Our research is consistent with Baker's assumptions that these factors correlate with high conflict risk and together represent warning signs of impending instability in MENA. Two elements, such as the lack of efficiency and legitimacy of state institutions, have been shown to make a state fragile (Fukuyama 2011; Lemay-Hébert 2009; Marshall and Cole 2014, cited in Kivimäki 2021).

MENA's fragmentation transpired after the embargo on Qatar was imposed in 2017: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar after accusing the country of supporting it (Zweiri, Rahman, and Kamal 2020; Qiblawi and Salem 2021; Pradhan 2017), financing and harbouring terrorists and extremist groups. Qatar's economic success and growing ties with Iran were perceived as a threat to the region.

They also alleged that Qatar uses its Al Jazeera television station as a propaganda tool to delegitimize other countries in the region. However, the government of Qatar denied all of these allegations and stated that the neighbouring country's behaviour was a violation of its sovereignty (Zweiri, Rahman, and Kamal 2020). Analysts, however, knew that this move was meant to appease Israel. This embargo is seen as, and has brought, diplomatic success for Israel. As a result of this situation, tensions in the region have flared up again, and Israel has taken full advantage of this. Israel established diplomatic relations with several Arab countries.

The subsequent actions and statements by leaders on both sides have further exacerbated geopolitical tensions in the region. It has been interesting to see how Qatar has withstood the threat posed by its allies. For example, Qatar has made numerous policy changes to keep its economy going. After more than three years, the Quartet [define here] finally agreed to resume diplomatic relations with Qatar in early January 2021.

Geopolitical rivalries strongly influence local politics in the region. Regions tend to push their agendas through alliances with local political parties and support on ideological grounds, such as strong military ties. For example, Islamist movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya received support from Turkey and Qatar. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, on the other hand, supported the military coup in Egypt in the hope that their support could herald a return to the same type of rule, i.e., authoritarian rule. This explains how ideological ties are often stronger than political and religious ties.

Iran's support for the Assad regime and Shiite militias in Syria and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates' support for Sunni armed groups speak for themselves (Del Sarto 2017). The Saudi-Iranian rivalry fuels the Sunni-Shia divide, while the Islamist-secular divide is less evident following Salafist support for the coup in Egypt and the Tunisian compromise. It is believed that the blockade against Qatar was also an attempt by the homogenizing Sunni bloc to stand up to Iran. This is a glaring example of the increasing politicization of religious sectarianism in the MENA region. The civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 is another example (Del Sarto 2017; Rummel 1997). International standards shape the economic policies of most MENA countries. Del Sarto (2017) notes that the West has pressured these states to adopt the neoliberal development model. To further its economic interests, the West plays games with dictators. As a result, the population is growing rapidly in the region (except in a few countries), leading to high unemployment, which particularly affects the youth, and higher military spending compared to health and education budgets.

State Fragility and Failure

Fragility is defined as a country that fails or is at high risk of failing in three dimensions: (i) "authority failures: the state lacks the authority to protect its citizens from various forms of violence; (ii) "service failures: the state fails to ensure that all citizens have access to basic services; (iii) "legitimacy failures: the state lacks legitimacy and enjoys only limited support" (Mcloughlin 2012, 10). Many people regard the term "fragile" as a derogatory and fundamentally political term that reflects Weberian views of how a "successful" state should operate (Mcloughlin 2012). Due to the effectiveness of states (Mcloughlin 2012), "state fragility" has become a top priority for the international development community. As a result, an estimated one billion people, including about 340 million of the world's extreme poor, live in this group of 30 to 50 "fragile" countries that are "falling behind" (Ganson and Wennmann 2015).

Although the term "state failure" was coined after the Cold War, it has gained prominence after September 11, 2001, with the new discourse focusing primarily on MENA countries. A significant body of literature addresses "state failure." The literature initially focused on the weak economic performance of certain states, highlighting their shortcomings in creating efficient economic growth and promoting development (Kamrava 2016). Consequently, aid and assistance programs were based on the weakness of the state (Kamrava 2016). In recent decades, economic-based concepts of state weakness have been strongly challenged. Deeper political conditions, such as state legitimacy, are now receiving more attention. Weak states are no longer judged by their economic viability, but rather by their unstable and dysfunctional political systems (Kamrava 2016; Bandak and Bille 2013).

The popular movement had morphed into a dystopia of resurgent tyrants, failed governments, and civil wars after the hopeful Arab uprising. Egypt's historic democratic transition ended in a violent military coup. Yemen and Libya have turned into civil wars, while a sectarian insurgency has erupted in Bahrain. Syria proved to be the most vulnerable country among them, torn by globally funded insurgencies and a bloodthirsty dictatorship. Amid the chaos, a militant group proclaimed the Islamic State, seized vast swaths of land and issued a global call for terrorism.

The fundamental division that has governed the Arab-Israel conflict in the MENA region is between Arabs and non-Arabs, Sunni and Shia, pro-Western and anti-Western, and status quo and revisionist states (Del Sarto, Malmvig, and Lecha 2019). Security dynamics, historical constellations of hatred and friendship, as well as specific factors that trigger conflict or collaboration (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 50). Border disputes, race, philosophy, and religion can all be sources of fear and distrust (Buzan 1991, 190). We agree with Bendebka (2019) that inequality between rich countries and developing countries, and the discrepancy between social aspirations and the ability to fulfil them, lead to an almost permanent state of conflict. This conflict has inseparable bases: ethnic, religious, and socio-political, leading to the spread of conflict processes, extreme politicisation of other social spheres, and exacerbation of the state's legitimacy and development deficits, as well as the spread of the threat of war and instability to other neighbouring countries (Bendebka 2019).

The Corollaries of Fragility

How is MENA different from other regions in terms of its centrality, goals, and achievements? Some existing regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) and ASEAN could be introduced. These organizations have become very important in today's global governance (Jørgensen et al. 2011). The EU aims to promote peace and integration, create a single monetary system, fight discrimination, and facilitate trade and open borders (Wunderlich 2012). The EU and ASEAN are pursuing interesting approaches to achieve their goals. For example, the adoption of "relations-based" (Davidson 2009, 28) is crucial for ASEAN in international relations. The EU functions by combining intergovernmental decision-making with global structures, and ASEAN's focus is on promoting regional trust and decision-

making frameworks that combine intergovernmental and regional features (Henderson 1999; Wunderlich 2012). They have been largely successful in achieving their goals.

Despite the heterogeneity in MENA, they share a number of characteristics mentioned earlier (such as language, culture, heritage, etc.). This region, of course, failed to stand up for protecting their common interest together, underperformed in the growth and exhibited their fragmentation. The MENA has undergone several geopolitical transformations due partly to political and economic realities in the region. Fundamental change was brought about by external powers such as the Europeans, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Civil wars that displaced and killed millions, extremist movements that perpetrated massacres of civilians, terrorist attacks, and the oppression of those under their rule are the grim realities of their internal decay. Today, the three-way struggle between the Iranian, Arab, and Turkish powers plays a central role in the civil wars, making their coexistence a challenge. Because of distrust among themselves, different countries seem to serve the interests of different powerful nations.

The geopolitical competition between the countries of the MENA region has highlighted the region's weaknesses. They seem to be turning their backs on each other. The embargo on Qatar has highlighted this fragility. The region needs a united effort to combat extremist terrorism and the pandemic COVID. Unity and unity are not the same thing. Most MENA countries maintain a unified political system. However, there is no visible unity when it comes to becoming a regional power. In this regard, South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh may be another poor example of unity (Chattoraj 2017).

For national or regional integration, unity is critical in the consolidation of sovereignty. We argue that the MENA's fragility deprives the region of the globalized world's enormous opportunities. For example, MENA does not avail itself of a single market (SM) opportunity. The single market provides higher productivity and lowers markups to member countries under the SM program, while countries outside the common market are in many ways worse off. MENA countries are exposed to the shocks caused by fluctuations in prices and the number of goods and services traded, such as volatility of their export earnings, because their export is concentrated highly on primary commodities (Kivimäki 2021).

MENA is dispossessed of the advantages that a single currency system (SCS) offers. The SCS eliminates exchange rate fluctuation, reduces transaction costs, and ensures price transparency. All prices are quoted in the same currency within the single currency and facilitate easy price comparison. The SCS facilitates market expansion, provides a more stable currency, prevents competitive devaluation by nation-states, and lowers interest rates because the currency is currency stable. The SCS makes a region attractive for third countries to do business (Hettne 2011), thus promoting trade and investment.

Free population mobility within MENA could have gone to their advantage because the region comprises resource-poor but labor-surplus, resource-rich and labor-deficient countries (World Bank 2018; Ullah 2010). A free movement of labor can help diminish unemployment and shortage of labour demands. This is particularly beneficial for cyclical job markets, such

as construction. This region has not been able to exploit this opportunity fully. This region has the highest number of displaced persons and refugees, but no land eligible for resettlement. Approximately 49.7 percent of Gulf residents are foreigners (Ullah et al. 2020). In the early 1970s, there was an influx of foreign labour to the GCC countries due to the oil boom, which led to a shortage of domestic labour (Ullah et al. 2020).

The consequences of the Arab uprisings have been devastating, as several civil wars have broken out in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. As a result, the territorial integrity of states has been compromised by actors with armed capabilities, leading to further disintegration (Del Sarto 2017). Arab uprisings in the region (Ullah 2014, 2018) led to more refugees being displaced, raising serious concerns about refugee rights, security, and identity (RSI). AKM Ahsan Ullah (2018, 2015) further argued that this uprising began with the symbolic act of self-immolation by Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, protesting mistreatment by municipal officials. Eventually, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria were affected by the domino effects of this uprising (Ullah 2018, 2015). Thus, thousands of refugees have fled the region as a result of the conflict sparked by the intense desire for democracy in the region since 2011, resulting in the deaths of thousands (Ullah 2018). However, the experience of individual states varies. For example, militaries in Tunisia and Egypt have gone rogue from the regime, while they were loyal in Libya, Yemen, and Syria (Ullah 2018a).

There have been border disputes throughout the region, with nearly every MENA nation grappling with border demarcation issues. Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and the Gulf monarchies are modern nation-states with borders established by European colonial powers (Kamel 2017). The 1963 Algerian-Moroccan border war remains unresolved, as does the Western Sahara conflict; between 1980 and 1988, Iran fought Iraq for control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway; as a result of the 1990 Kuwait-Iraq border dispute, Iraq invaded Kuwait (the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein considered Kuwait part of Iraq) (Gideon 2012).

The conflicts that contribute most to poverty in the region are the Arab-Israeli conflict, the intra-Palestinian power struggle, territorial claims, border disputes, ethnic violence, and the Arab uprisings. Extreme poverty has increased in this region in recent decades. In 2018, about 18.6 million people in the region lived below the poverty line. And 61 percent of the wealth belongs only to the top 10 percent of the population in the region (Khouri 2019). Either directly or indirectly, conflict, economic ruin, and/or displacement of citizens are responsible for the collapse of labour markets in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. To alleviate unemployment and poverty in the region, 60 to 100 million jobs must be created by 2030 (Khouri 2019). This, however, looks unlikely to happen because the most important sectors, such as tourism services and agriculture, have been devastated by persistent conflicts and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Syria has been isolated since the conflict broke out in 2014 by Western and Gulf countries owing to its pro-Iran foreign policy. Though the claim has been that crises in leadership and other problems are largely self-inflicted (Cordesman and Khazai 2014), foreign and regional challenges are no less responsible. For example, regional actors such as Iran, Syria, and

transnational Islamist movements are an existential threat to the region's stability (Daxue and Wei 2012). There are widespread claims that western interventions are the primary reasons for the divide in the MENA.

Baroud (2016) argues, for example, that the Arabism of the Arab Spring served as a convenient means for Western governments to label Arab nations as identical. From Tunis to Sana, which led to a domino effect. "Who's next?" was the question many asked. Of course, we cannot overlook the fact that the countries of the West have spawned militant chaos, terrorism, and unchecked wars. Baroud (2016) rightly pointed to Libya, Syria, and Yemen as obvious examples.

The division caused by the conflict in Syria was crucial (Michael 2012). "Similarly, a future Syria could be a confederation of several sectors: one largely Alawite, another Kurdish, a third composed mainly of Druze, a fourth composed largely of Sunni Muslims, and then a central zone of mixed groups in the country's main population belt from Damascus to Aleppo" (Baroud 2016, 2). In the modern Arab world, the Arab Peninsula within the Ottoman Empire was divided into various mini-states through political compromises resulting from the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 (Fitzgerald 1994).

The Americans attempted sectarian separation (Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds) in Iraq when resistance went beyond tolerance of them. The same happened in Libya after the intervention of NATO, which led to a bloody civil war. Since then, France, Britain, the US and others have supported some parties against others (Baroud 2016). We concur with the powerful note of Kivimäki (2021, 2) that:

> A country with perfect legitimacy but no effectiveness is like a car with accurate steering but no engine… Effective but illegitimate institutions, which people work against and fail to consider their own, are also not useful for the citizens: they are like a car with a powerful engine but no steering wheel. There is a need, both, for legitimacy and effectiveness of state institutions to be strong: without one or the other, states are fragile.

Resilience

The concept of resilience is coming to the fore in light of the new security challenges that sovereign governments face on a daily basis. In the field of national security, the concept of 'national resilience' has become increasingly important in recent years (Fjader 2014; Joseph 2013; Edwards 2009). The ability to deal with shocks is resilience, and the security responsibilities of a nation-state are resilience (Fjader 2014). Edwards (2009) suggests that resilience can be defined as the ability of individuals or communities to adapt to new situations and maintain a tolerable level of functioning. Individual responsibility for security and a minimal role for government are critical to state resilience (Joseph 2013; Fjader 2014).

In terms of discourse and policy, there are gaps in scholarly knowledge about the period before, during, and after the GCC blockade/crisis. We acknowledge that basic international

principles of conflict resolution do not appear to guide state-state relations. Political and social norms are, of course, often questioned. They underscore concerns about the changing dynamics of interests, identities, values, and behavior in the subregion (Sadiki and Saleh 2020). The 2017 Gulf crisis and Qatar's emergence as a resilient country are probably a case in point for the MENA region. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt imposed a comprehensive blockade on Qatar and severed economic and diplomatic ties. This group of countries closed their airspace to Qatar Airways and banned Qatari ships and vehicles from accessing their territorial waters and countries, which later became the 'Qatar Blockade' (Zweiri, Rahman, and Kamal 2020). However, Oman and Kuwait did not join them; instead, a temporary injunction was issued and crisis management intensified (Ulrichsen 2019). After the Al Ula meeting in January 2021, the blockade end with the restoration of all relations.

More than three years after the blockade began, Qatar has avoided capitulation to its rivals and, as Gengler and Al-Khelaifi (2019, 407) put it, "emerged from the blockade no worse off than before." Despite the air, land, and sea blockades, Qatar has taken decisive steps to find new trading partners beyond the Quartet and support local industry to replace imports from those countries; the Qatari stock market recovered to within a few percentage points of pre-crisis levels; and preparations for Qatar's prestigious hosting of the 2022 World Cup are complete with great success. Scholarly explanations for Qatar's remarkable resilience include its massive financial resources, effective contingency planning, and timely intervention by allies (Gengler and Al-Khelaifi 2019). Despite the Quartet's malicious attempts and propaganda on social media, Qataris united under the current leadership, and a civic silhouette of the Emir titled Tamim al-Majd (Tamim the Glorious) became a symbol of resistance throughout the country. Thus, the blockade has led to positive social and economic outcomes in the form of greater self-reliance, diversification of trade, and greater popular participation in building the country, ultimately giving Qatar a high level of national resilience at the time of the 2017 Gulf crisis (Cochrane and Reem 2022; Zweiri and Al-Qawasmi 2021).

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that internal conflicts and external interventions plague the region. This invites militarized solutions to political dilemmas, further polarizes divided politics and undermines internal efforts in renegotiating and reinforcing social contracts. Fragility and fragmentation in the MENA are believed to be embedded in the regionally specific sociocultural factors like religion or ethnolinguistic composition, notorious geology, border disputes, and heterogeneous economic and political landscape. Whether or not we know the reasons for their fragmentation, the reality is that they are fragmented. We never hear one voice from this region when they are caught up in crisis.

We do not propose uniformity but emphasize the "unity" in uniformity. Southeast Asia or the European Union, for example, are not uniform but unified. Our argument is that regional unity seems to be a strong shield against external threats. Most debates about the

MENA crisis revolve around geopolitics and international interference. However, internal fragmentation and fragility have played a fundamental role in destabilizing the region.

Regional economic integration enhances better trade facilitation. It is crucial to foster a favourable investment climate for the private sector to thrive. Since competition reduces production costs, encourages FDI and expands markets, the opening of trade should be considered a great strategy (Rouis 2013). Despite the abundance of opportunities, we have shown how this region has failed to be more peaceful, integrated, and united. The Western world bullies it. The 2017 Gulf Cooperation Council blockade crisis has led Qatar to find allies outside the region, such as Turkey and Iran, to achieve stability, security, and economic prosperity. As a result, Qatar has gained resilience. The countries that have imposed embargoes have bowed to Qatar's resilience. We do not mean to imply that the Gulf Cooperation Council experience is transferable to other regions.

The region has experienced problems with legitimacy, in particular, factionalism in politics. We concur with Kivimäki (2021) that MENA countries face more problems of political violence because of factionalism and subnational challenges than do other countries. For the GCC states, historical enmities and ideological preferences, coupled with military and economic power, are important for building regional alliances and cooperation (Tok 2021).

The MENA region has experienced significant fragility, fragmentation, and crises in recent years, with many countries in the region experiencing political instability, economic challenges, and conflict. One of the main causes of fragility in the MENA region is the legacy of colonialism and the challenges of state-building after decolonization. Many states in the region have struggled to build stable and effective governance structures that meet the needs of their populations. In addition, the region has faced significant economic challenges, including high youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality. These economic challenges have been exacerbated by political instability, conflict, and external factors such as fluctuations in global oil prices.

The region has also experienced significant fragmentation, with the rise of sectarianism, ethnic and religious tensions, and the proliferation of non-state armed groups. These factors have contributed to conflicts in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, making it difficult for regional actors and the international community to effectively manage these crises. In addition, external powers have played an important role in exacerbating this fragility, with interventions by global and regional powers in the region's conflicts further fuelling instability and fragmentation. Overall, fragility, fragmentation, and crises in the MENA region are complex and interrelated, with political, economic, and social factors all playing a role. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts by regional and international actors to promote stability, good governance, and economic development in the region, as well as a commitment to resolving conflicts through diplomacy and dialogue.

There is no doubt that the future of integration, stability, and cohesion in the region will depend largely on the legitimacy of politics, leadership, and the quality of governance. The lack of trust among leaders in the region appears to be a significant obstacle to cohesion. A

series of inter- and intra-regional dialogues could help find mutually beneficial solutions to the region's major challenges.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of our manuscript and constructive comments and suggestions.

Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this research as no data were generated or analyzed.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

Aarts, Paul. 1999. "The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism?" *Third World Quarterly* 20 (5): 911–925. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599913406.

Adelson, Roger. 2012. "British and US Use and Misuse of the Term Middle East." In *Is There a Middle East: The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept,* edited by Michael E. Bonine, Abbas Amanat, and Michael Ezekiel Gasper, 36–55 . Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Akhtar, Shamshad, and Mustapha Rouis. 2010. *Economic Integration In MENA: the GCC, the Maghreb, And the Mashreq*. Washington: World Bank.

Aljazeera. 2021. "Hundreds Hurt as Palestinians' Protest Evictions in Jerusalem." *Aljazeera*, May 8, 2021.. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/7/al-aqsa-worshippers-protest-palestinian-evictions-in-jerusalem.

Amadeo, Kimberly. 2021. "Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC Countries: Six Rich Countries That Own the World's Oil". *Balance*, February 1, 2021. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries (thebalance.com). https://www.thebalancemoney.com/gulf-cooperation-council-3306357.

Anderton, Charles H., and John R. Carter. 2019. *Principles of Conflict Economics: The Political Economy of War, Terrorism, Genocide, and Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, Pauline H. 2017. *Reframing State Fragility and Resilience: The Way Forward.* Washington DC: Creative Associates International.

Bandak, Andreas, and Mikkel Bille. 2013. *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States*. Leiden: Brill.

Baroud, Ramzy. 2016. "The West has Always been Keen to Divide the Arabs." *Japan Times*, March 2, 2016. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/03/02/commentary/world-commentary/west-always-keen-divide-arabs/.

Bendebka, Ramzi. 2019. "Factors Contributing to Non-Cooperation in The Middle East and North Africa Region." Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Modern approach to Humanities and Social Sciences, November 15–17, 2019. Rotterdam: The Netherlands.

Bilgin, Pinar. 2004. "Whose 'Middle East'? Geopolitical Inventions and Practices of Security." *International Relations* 18 (1): 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117804041739.

Bilgin, Pinar. 2019. *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Brown, L. Carl. 1984. *International Politics and the Middle East. Old Rules, Dangerous Game*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bruhn, John. 2009. "The Concept of Social Cohesion." In *The Group Effect*, 31–48. Boston: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0364-8_2.

Buzan, Barry. 1991. "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century." *International Affairs* 67 (3): 431–451.https://doi.org/10.2307/2621945.

Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver. 2003. *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Call, Charles T. 2010. "Beyond the 'Failed State': Toward Conceptual Alternatives." *European Journal of International Relations* 17 (2): 303–326. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109353137.

Cammack, Perry, Dunne Michele, Hamzwy Amr, Lynch Marc, Muasher Marwan, Sayigh Yezid, and Yahya Maha. 2017. *Arab Fractures: Citizens, States, and Social Contracts.* Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Charrad, Mounira M., and Nicholas E. Reith. 2019. "Local Solidarities: How the Arab Spring Protests Started." *Sociological Forum* 34:1174–1196. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12543.

Chattoraj, Diotima. 2017. "Ambivalent Attachments: Shifting Notions of Home among Displaced Sri Lankan Tamils." PhD diss., Bochum: Ruhr-Universität Bochum.

Cochrane, Logan, and Reem Al-hababi. 2022. *Sustainble Qatar: Social, Political and Environmental Perspectives.* Singapore: Springer

Cordesman, Anthony H., and Khazai Sam. 2014. *Iraq in Crisis.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Davidson, Paul J. 2009. "The Role of Law in Governing Regionalism in Asia." In *Governance and Regionalism in Asia*, edited by Nicholas Thomas, 224–249. London: Routledge.

Daxue, Yao, and Wei Yan. 2012. "The Causes of Syria Crisis and Its Political Scenes in the Future [J]." *West Asia and Africa* 6.

Del Sarto, Raffaella A. 2017. "Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa: Context and Concepts." *International Affairs* 93 (4): 767–787. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix070.

Del Sarto Raffaella A., Helle Malmvig, and Eduard Soler i. Lecha. 2019. "Interregnum: The Regional Order. The Middle East and North Africa After 2011". MENARA Final Reports. No. 1, Barcelona: Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture. https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_fr_1.pdf.

Duffield, Mark. 2001. *Global Governance and the New Wars*. London: Zed Press.

Edwards, Charlie. 2009. *Resilient Nation*, London: Demos.

El-Sherif, Ashraf. 2014. *The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Failures*, vol. 1. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Eriksson, Mikael, Peter Wallensteen, and Margareta Sollenberg. 2003. "Armed Conflict 1989-2002." *Journal of Peace Research* 40 (5): 593–607.

Fawcett, Louise, and Andrew Hurrell, eds. 1995. *Regionalism in World Politics. Regional Organization and International Order.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fawcett, Louise. 2018. "MENA and the EU: Contrasting Approaches to Region, Power and Order in a Shared Neighbourhood." *Contemporary Politics* 24 (1): 65–80 https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2017.1408172.

Fishlow, Albert, and Stephan Haggard.1992. *The United States and the Regionalisation of the World Economy*, Washington D.C.: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Fitzgerald, Edward Peter. 1994. "France's Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915-1918." *Journal of Modern History* 66 (4): 697–725. https://doi.org/10.1086/244937.

Fjader, Christian. 2014. "The Nation-State, National Security and Resilience in the Age of Globalization." *Resilience* 2 (2): 114–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2014.914771.

Fukuyama, Frances. 2011. *The Origins of Political Order from Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. New York: MacMillan

Gaiser, Adam. 2017. "A Narrative Identity Approach to Islamic Sectarianism." In *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, edited by Nader A. Hashemi, and Danny Postel, 61–75. London: Hurst Publishers.

Ganson, Brian, and Achim Wennmann. 2015. "Business and Conflict in Fragile States." *Adelphi Series* 55 (457–458): 11–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/19445571.2015.1189153

Gause, F. Gregory.2014. *Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East*. No. 63. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.

Gengler, Justice, and Buthaina Al-Khelaifi 2019. "Crisis, State Legitimacy and Political Participation in a Non-Democracy: How Qatar Withstood the 2017 Blockade." *Middle East Journal* 73 (3): 397–416. https://doi.org/10.3751/73.3.13.

Gideon, Bigger. 2012. "The Boundaries of the Middle East: Past, Present and Future." *Studies in Geography, Politics and History* 1:61–67.

Gilbert, Paul. 2003. *New Terror, New Wars*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Gleditsch, Nills, Petter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Strand Havard. 2002. "Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (5): 615–637.

Gray, Matthew. 2018. "Theorizing Politics, Patronage and Corruption in the Arab Monarchies of the Gulf." In *Clientelism and patronage in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by L. de Elvira, C. .G. Schwarz, and I. Weipert-Fenner, 59–80. London: Routledge.

Haddad, Fanar. 2011. *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hamza, Wadia Ait. 2017. "The Maghreb Union is One of the World's Worst-Performing Trading Blocs. Here are Five Ways to Change that." *World Economic Forum*, June 1, 2017. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/five-ways-to-make-maghreb-work/.

Harms, Gregory, and Ferry Todd. 2008. *The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*. London: Pluto Press

Hartshorne, Richard. 1939. "The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 29 (3): 173–412. https://doi.org/10.2307/2561063.

Hashemi, Nader, and D. Postel. 2017. "Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East." *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15 (3): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2017.1354462.

Henderson, J. 1999. "Reassessing ASEAN." *Adelphi Paper* 328. London: IISS.

Hettne, Björn. 2011. "The European Union as an Emerging Global Actor." In *The European Union and Global Governance – A Handbook*, edited by J-U. Wunderlich and D. J. Bailey, 28–36. London: Routledge.

Hinnebusch, Raymond. 2014. "The Arab Uprisings and The MENA Regional States System." *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11(42): 7–27.

Hobbes, Thomas. (1651) 1996. *Leviathan*. Editor R. Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Human Rights Watch. 2020. "Israel and Palestine: Events of 2020". *Human Rights Watch*, Accessed May 11, 2021. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/israel/palestine.

Hurrell, Andrew. 2007. *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

International Peace Institute. 2013. *Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle East: Options and Challenges.* https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/162758/ipi_e_pub_regionalism_me.pdf.

Jehn, Karen A. 1997. "A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Organizational Groups." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42 (3): 530–557. https://doi.org/10.2307/2393737.

Jones, Martin, and Andrew Fabian, eds. 2006. *Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jørgensen, Knud Eric, Sebastian Oberthür, and Jamal Shahin. 2011. "Introduction: Assessing the EU's Performance in International Institutions –Conceptual Framework and Core Findings." *Journal of European Integration* 33 (6): 599–620. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2011.606681.

Joseph, Jonathan. 2013. "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach." *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1 (1): 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765741.

Kamel, Lorenzo. 2017. *The Frailty of Authority: Borders, Non-state Actors and Power Vacuums in a Changing Middle East.* Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura.

Kamrava, Mehran. 2016. *Fragile Politics: Weak States in the Greater Middle East.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Katzenstein, J. Peter. 1997. "Introduction: Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective." In *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, edited by Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishiithaca, 1–47. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Katzenstein, Peter J. 2000. "Regionalism and Asia." *New Political Economy* 5 (3):353–368. https://doi.org/10.1080/713687777.

Khouri, Rami. 2019. "Poverty, Inequality and the Structural Threat to the Arab Region." *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, **March 2019**. https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/poverty-inequality-and-structural-threat-arab-region**.**

Kinsman, Jeremy. 2016. "From Failed States to a Failed Region: The Middle East in Crisis." *Policy Magazine* 4 (2): 30–32. http://policymagazine.ca/pdf/18 /PolicyMagazineMarchApril- 2016-Kinsman.pdf.

Kivimäki, Timo. 2021. "The Fragility-Grievances-Conflict Triangle in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): An Exploration of the Correlative Associations." *Social Science* 10: 120. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10040120.

Lake, David, and Patrick M. Morgan. 1997. "The New Regionalism in Security Affairs." In *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, edited by David Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, 3–19. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Lemay-Hébert, Nicolas. 2009. "State-Building Without Nation-Building? Legitimacy, State Failure and the Limits of the Institutionalist Approach." *Journal of Intervention and State building* 3:21–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502970802608159.

Malmvig, Helle. 2014. "Power, Identity and Securitization in the Middle East: Regional Order after the Arab Uprisings." *Mediterranean Politics* 19 (1): 145–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2013.856181.

Manca, Anna Rita. 2014. "Social Cohesion." In *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, edited by A. C. Michalos, 6026–6028. London: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2739.

Marshall, Monty G., and Benjamin R. Cole. 2014. *Global Report 2014: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*. Vienna: Center for Systematic Peace.

Matthiesen, Toby. 2017. "The Iranian Revolution and Sunni Political Islam." *New Analysis of Shia Politics*. POMEPS Studies 28. https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/POMEPS_Studies_28_NewAnalysis_Web.pdf#page=37.

McKee, Musa, Martin Keulertz, Negar Habibi, Mark Mulligan, and Eckart Woertz. 2017. *Demographic and Economic Material Factors in the MENA Region. Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture: Mapping Geopolitical Shifts, Regional Order and Domestic Transformations.* MENARA Working Papers 3. https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_3.pdf.

Mcloughlin, Claire. 2012 *Topic Guide on Fragile States*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham Governance and Social Development Resource Centre.

Meddeb, Hamza, Silvia Colombo, Katerina Dalacoura, and Lorenzo Kameland, Olivier Roy. 2017. *Religion and Politics. Religious Diversity, Political Fragmentation and Geopolitical Tensions in the MENA Region*. MENARA Working Paper 7. https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_7.pdf.

Michael, O'Hanlon. 2012. "Rice: Hitting 'Reset' on Africa Talks". *Reuters*, **December 12, 2012.** https://www.reuters.com/article/idUS319159603720121212**.**

Moore-Gilbert, Kylie. 2016. "From Protected State to Protection Racket: Contextualising Divide and Rule in Bahrain." *Journal of Arabian Studies* 6 (2): 163–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2016.1247521.

Mundy, Jacob. 2019. "The Middle East is Violence: On the Limits of Comparative Approaches to the Study of Armed Conflict." *Civil Wars* 21 (4): 539–568. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2019.1664847.

Nada, Garret. 2017. "The Middle East: Divided, Dysfunctional.**"** *United States Institute for Peace***,** December 13, 2017. https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/12/middle-east-divided-dysfunctional.

Nasr, Vali. 2006. *The Shi'a Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Newman, David. 2006. "The Resilience of Territorial Conflict in an Era of Globalization." In *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, edited by Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter, 1–35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Novy, Andreas, Daniela Coimbra Swiatek, and Frank Moulaert. 2012. "Social Cohesion: A Conceptual and Political Elucidation." *Urban Studies* 49 (9): 1873–1889. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098012444878.

Nye, Joseph S., ed. 1968. *International Regionalism: Readings*. New York: Little Brown.

O'Neill, Aaron. 2021. "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Maghreb Countries from 2010 to 2020 (**i**n Billion U.S. Dollars)." *Statistica*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/796058/gdp-of-the-maghreb-countries/**.**

O'Neill, Aaron. 2021a. "Total Population of the Maghreb Countries from 2010 to 2020 (in Million Habitants)." *Statistica*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/796046/total-population-of-the-maghreb-countries/.

Pahl, Raymond Edward. 1991. "The Search for Social Cohesion: From Durkheim to the European Commission." *European Journal of Sociology* 32: 345–360. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600006305.

Palik, Júlia, Siri Aas Rustad, and Fredrik Methi. 2020. *Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2019*. Oslo. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

Pinfari, Marco. 2016. *Regional Organizations in the Middle East.* Oxford Handbooks Online. https//doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.86.

Pradhan, Prasanta Kumar. 2017. "Qatar Crisis and Challenges to GCC Unity." *Liberal Studies* 2 (2): 241–254.

Qiblawi, Tamara, and Mostafa Salem. 2021. "Arab Countries Agree to End Years-Long Feud with Qatar that Divided Gulf." *CNN,* Januay 5, 2021. https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/05/middleeast/qatar-gulf-embargo-agreement-intl/index.html.

Rahman, Md Mizanur, and Amr Al Azm. (eds.). 2023. *Social Change in the Gulf Region: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.

Rouis, Mustapha. 2013. *Regional Economic Integration in the Middle East and North Africa.* World Bank Document. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/20566/780730BRI0QN950nowledge0note0series.pdf;sequence=1.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. (1755) 1994. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.* Edited by F. Philip. Translated by P. Coleman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roy, Olivier. 2017. *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rummel, Rudolph J. 1997. "Is Collective Violence Correlated with Social Pluralism?" *Journal of Peace Research* 34 (2): 163–175.

Russett, Bruce M. 1967. *International Regions and the International System. A Study in Political Ecology*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Russett, Bruce M. 1970. *International Regions and International Systems.* Chicago: Rand-McNally.

Sadiki, Larbi, and Layla Saleh. 2020. "The GCC in Crisis: Explorations of 'Normlessness' in Gulf Regionalism." *International Spectator* 55 (2): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1747287.

Sarkees, Meredith Reid, and Frank Wayman. 2010. *Resort to War: 1816–2007.* Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Summerfield, Derek. 1997. "The Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions of Contemporary War." *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 13 (1): 3–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699708409311.

Svensson, Isak. 2013. "One God, Many Wars: Religious Dimensions of Armed Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa." *Civil Wars* 15 (4): 411–430. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2013.853409.

Tahhan Zena. 2020. "Israel's Settlements: Over 50 Years of Land Theft Explained." *Aljazeera*, January 27, 2020. https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2017/50-years-illegal-settlements/index.html.

Tok, Evren. 2021. "The Gulf Cooperation Council States: Crystallization of the Regional Cooperation and Alliances Amid Dwindling Resources." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 30 (1): 53–69. https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12226.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2010. *Rationalizing Migration Decisions: Labour Migrants in South and South-East Asia*, 1st ed. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2014. *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety, and Identity*. London: Palgrave McMillan.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2015. "The Independent Migrants: Syrian Separated Children Fleeing War." *Migration Policy Practice Journal* 4: 7–14.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2018. "Geopolitics of Conflicts and Refugees in the Middle East and North Africa." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 5 (3): 258–274. https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798918776751.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2018a. "Conflicts and Displacements in Syria: Exploring Life Trajectories of Separated Refugee Minors." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 12 (2): 2–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2018.1485922.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan, Shirley C. Wei Lee, Noor Hasharina Hassan, and Faraha Nawaz. 2020. "Xenophobia in the GCC Countries: Migrants' Desire and Distress." *Global Affairs* 6 (2): 203–223 https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1738951.

Ulrichsen, Kristian C. 2018. "Lessons and Legacies of the Blockade of Qatar." *Insight Turkey*, 20 (2):11–20

Ulrichsen, Kristian C. 2019. "Perceptions and Divisions in Security and Defense Structures in Arab Gulf States." In *Divided Gulf: The Anatomy of a Crisis*, edited by A. Krieg, 19–36. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ulrichsen, Kristian. C. 2019a. *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis: A Study of Resilience.* Oxford University Press: Oxford.

US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. 1984. *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1972–1982*. Washington, DC: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Wallensteen, Peter, and Margareta Sollenberg. 2001. "Armed Conflict, 1989-2000." *Journal of Peace Research* 38 (5): 629–644.

World Bank. 2018: "Migration and Development Brief 29." April. Washington D.C: World Bank.

World Bank, MENA. 2010. *Economic Integration in the Maghreb.* Washington DC: World Bank.

World Bank. 2020. "Helping MENA Transition Out of Fragility**."** *World Bank*, February 27, **2020.** https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/02/26/helping-mena-transition-out-of-fragility.

World Population Review. 2021. "GCC Countries 2021". GCC Countries 2021. https://worldpopulationreview.com.

Wright, S. 2019. "The Political Economy of the Gulf Divide." In *Divided Gulf: Contemporary Gulf Studies*, edited by A. Krieg, 145–159. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wunderlich, Jens-Uwe. 2012. "Comparing Regional Organizations in Global Multilateral Institutions: ASEAN, the EU and the UN." *Asia Europe Journal* 10:127–143. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-012-0324-4.

Yacobi, Haim, and David Newman. 2007. "The EU and the Israel-Palestine Conflict." In *The European Union and Border Conflicts: The Power of Integration and Association*, edited by Thomas Diez, Mathias Albert, and Stephan Stetter, 173–202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zweiri, Mahjoob, and Farah Al Qawasmi. 2021. *Contemporary Qatar: Examining State and Society*. New York: Springer

Zweiri, Mahjoob, Md Miznaur Rahman, and Arwa Kamal. 2020. *The 2017 Gulf Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Approach.* Singapore: Springer.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah: Associate Professor, Geography, Environment and Development , FASS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Brunei
Email: akmahsanullah@gmail.com; ahsan.ullah@ubd.edu.bn

Md. Mizanur Rahman: Research Associate Professor and Graduate Faculty, Gulf Studies Program and Center, College of Arts and Sciences, Qatar University, P.O. Box: 2713, Doha, Qatar
Corresponding Author's Email: mizan@qu.edu.qa; mizanur.rm@gmail.com

Diotima Chattoraj: Adjunct Research Fellow, School of Social and Health Science, James Cook University, Singapore
Email: diotima.chattoraj@gmail.com; diotima.chattoraj@jcu.edu.au