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THE MIDDLE EAST IN A TIME OF TROUBLES: TRAUMAS OF THE PAST AND CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

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- *The Middle East¹ today epitomizes major global trends: international processes becoming more ungovernable, the resurgence of power as a factor in international relations, the greater role-played by contingency, the world's periphery and semi-periphery gaining in strength amid a crisis in the concept of the nation state and national identity.*
- *The region has been transformed over the last five years, giving rise to trends that pose a threat to the whole world: the weakening or destruction of state institutions, bloody civil wars, conflicts escalating and spilling over into neighboring territories, humanitarian crises, the spread of terrorism evolving into a global threat.*
- *New alliances have replaced the old ones in the reformatted system within the region.*
- *Systemic efforts to influence developments in the Middle East from the outside have not succeeded so far, as the actions of non-Arab countries within the region are viewed as a security challenge for the governing elites.*
- *Overall, many countries in the Middle East are ready for progressive change, but intolerance within these societies and attempts by outside forces to accelerate ongoing processes proved counterproductive.*
- *Countries within the region are not ready to expand political participation due to persisting imbalances in governance systems.*
- *In areas with no state authority, weak governments have to contend with violent non-state actors that are becoming increasingly powerful and assuming some of the administrative and economic functions of the state. Rampant militarization has made competitive violence the dominant form of socio-political interaction.*
- *The role of individuals has gained in importance: often political and military leaders are the only people able to uphold sovereignty within the territories under their control.*
- *The legitimacy deficit of modern states is the prevailing idea in Arab political thinking.*
- *Keeping countries within their borders does not necessarily mean that their administrative or territorial structure should also remain unchanged.*
- *Before the crisis broke out, all the indicators showed that the Middle East was on track to produce an economic miracle.*
- *Rebuilding war-ravaged countries is above all the responsibility of the international community and primarily regional actors, who have the greatest interest in normalizing the situation in neighbouring countries.*

¹ In this article, the Middle East is defined as extending from Iran in the east to Morocco in the west.

- *The overarching political and economic objective for the Arab countries is to make sure that their populations do not feel marginalized by allowing legitimate participation in the political economy of their nations.*
- *The prerequisites for building a security framework in the Middle East are economic rehabilitation of Mid-East countries recovering from conflicts, returning the socioeconomic landscape to normal and facilitating economic development with assistance from the international community.*
- *When Arab governments failed to respond effectively to instability and uncertainty, aggressive non-state actors were empowered to seize the monopoly on violence from state actors. Advances in modern technology have allowed such groups to rapidly proliferate.*
- *Daesh² has grown into more than just another terrorist organization. It has expanded its footprint across the region and beyond with a backward-looking worldview and ideology that appeals to some Muslims.*
- *Russia regards the fusion of modern-day terrorism with state-of-the-art technology as the most serious threat to peace and stability.*
- *Russia is currently viewed in the region as being the most consistent and effective force fighting Daesh.*
- *The fact that global and regional players are working toward differing political ends in the Middle East not only undermines efforts to create a broad coalition, despite a shared formal commitment to fighting international terrorism, but also wastes military power and creates potential risks.*
- *Launching a political process in Syria could enhance trust between the key external and regional players, as well as facilitate a compromise among the key political actors in Syria.*
- *Every major power in the Middle East has its own national interests that run counter to those of other regional and global players.*
- *Regional actors mostly rely on military force, while soft power only extends to traditional ties and commitments, be they ethnic, religious, tribal, or dynastic.*
- *The Syrian conflict showed that global actors such as Russia and the US have for the most part maintained their ability to influence events in the region and are generally capable of productive interaction.*

² В докладе используется несколько названий, относящихся к одной и той же организации. Наименования ИГИЛ («Исламское государство Ирака и Леванта»), ИГ («Исламское государство»), ДАИШ (арабская аббревиатура того же названия) имеют равное хождение, и какого-либо единственного общепринятого стандарта еще не установилось. Вне зависимости от употребляемого названия данная структура является террористической и запрещена на территории России и ряда государств. – **Ed. note.**

- *Leaders attempting to achieve purely self-interested goals have a much greater ability to destabilize international relations than ever before, further undermining mutual trust.*
- *Leaders of global powers should make political decisions based on a more careful analysis of expert opinion on the region, local cultures and history.*
- *Russia's interests in the Middle East are dictated by security concerns and maintaining its status as a global power capable of conducting an independent foreign policy.*
- *Russia should be credited with launching a political process in Syria, helping to stabilize the country and improve relations with global powers.*
- *The ability to produce tension is one of the defining features of regional actors in the Middle East.*
- *In recent years, conflicts in the Middle East have increasingly taken the form of hybrid warfare, blending interstate hostilities between regular armies with civil wars.*
- *The parties to these conflicts are developing network infrastructures by improving financial, informational and logistical ties. This is a matter of particular concern.*
- *The lack of understanding among regional and external forces as to the rules of interaction during conflicts, attempts to act unilaterally, disregard for international norms and a predisposition to use force on every occasion, taken together, create serious obstacles to international efforts to deescalate conflicts.*
- *The policy of overthrowing authoritarian regimes in the name of democracy is discredited by recent developments. A strict set of reciprocal commitments could offer an alternative and, with support from external forces, prevent actors in the Middle East from using military force.*
- *Unilateral action would have to be forbidden under any common security framework. The same goes for military intervention by foreign powers in violation of international law.*
- *Regional issues, such as the lack of a security framework, mass unemployment, the need to reform healthcare and education systems, should be addressed all at once without prioritizing any one problem.*
- *There is cause for hope in the Middle East.*

I. Situation in the Middle East

The wave of protests that swept through Arab countries resulted in a tectonic shift in the Middle East by completely reshaping the system of cultural, social, economic and political relations within the region.

Although experts tend to agree that this transformation was mainly attributable to internal factors, the jury is still out on which were the most important ones. While some point to socioeconomic development as the main cause of the imbalances in the regions (poverty, corruption, unemployment, and the youth bulge), others tend to attach greater importance to political and psychological issues (authoritarian rule, relative deprivation, etc.) or sociopolitical ones, such as lack of social mobility.

Viewed from a regional perspective, the ongoing processes are clearly intertwined with the most alarming global trends. In fact, the Middle East epitomizes these trends: international processes becoming more ungovernable, the resurgence of power as a factor in international relations, the greater role played by contingency, the world's periphery and semi-periphery gaining in strength amid a crisis in the concept of the nation state and national identity.

Unfortunately, so far the outcomes of the ongoing transformation have been quite alarming.

It is true that in some countries political participation has expanded, political systems were modernized and there was some turnover among elites. A number of Arab communities have recognized the need for reform and are finding creative solutions to deal with new threats and challenges. **However, the objective outcome of this period of transformation so far has been the weakening and sometimes destruction**

of state institutions in a number of countries, civil wars leaving hundreds of thousands dead, conflicts escalating and spilling over into neighboring territories, humanitarian crises, the spread of terrorism, and the rise of Daesh as a global threat.

New alliances have replaced the old ones in the reformatting system of international relations within the region. With state authority declining in certain areas, non-state actors are becoming increasingly powerful. In some cases they pursue their own agenda, while in others they serve as agents of outside forces. Countries devastated by civil war have become battlegrounds of proxy wars.

Through Chaos Toward a New Kind of Stability

The transformation process is incomplete on all levels; it has not even reached its apex. The contours of the future regional framework have not taken shape yet, and the old system has not been uprooted. That is why the current pessimistic outlook on the Middle East may be premature. Profound political transformations can take a decade or even longer, as demonstrated by the history of the 20th century. The old system must be dismantled, resulting in a period of chaos that paves the way to a new kind of stability.

For all the chaotic nature of the current situation in the region, some stable trends can be distinguished in its development.

First and foremost, the transformation processes have revealed a certain introversion of the Middle East region even as countries within the region drift further apart.

MIDDLE EAST – WORLD'S LARGEST ARMS MARKET

The US, Canada, France and the UK are the main exporters of defense equipment to the Middle East and beneficiaries of the spending boom



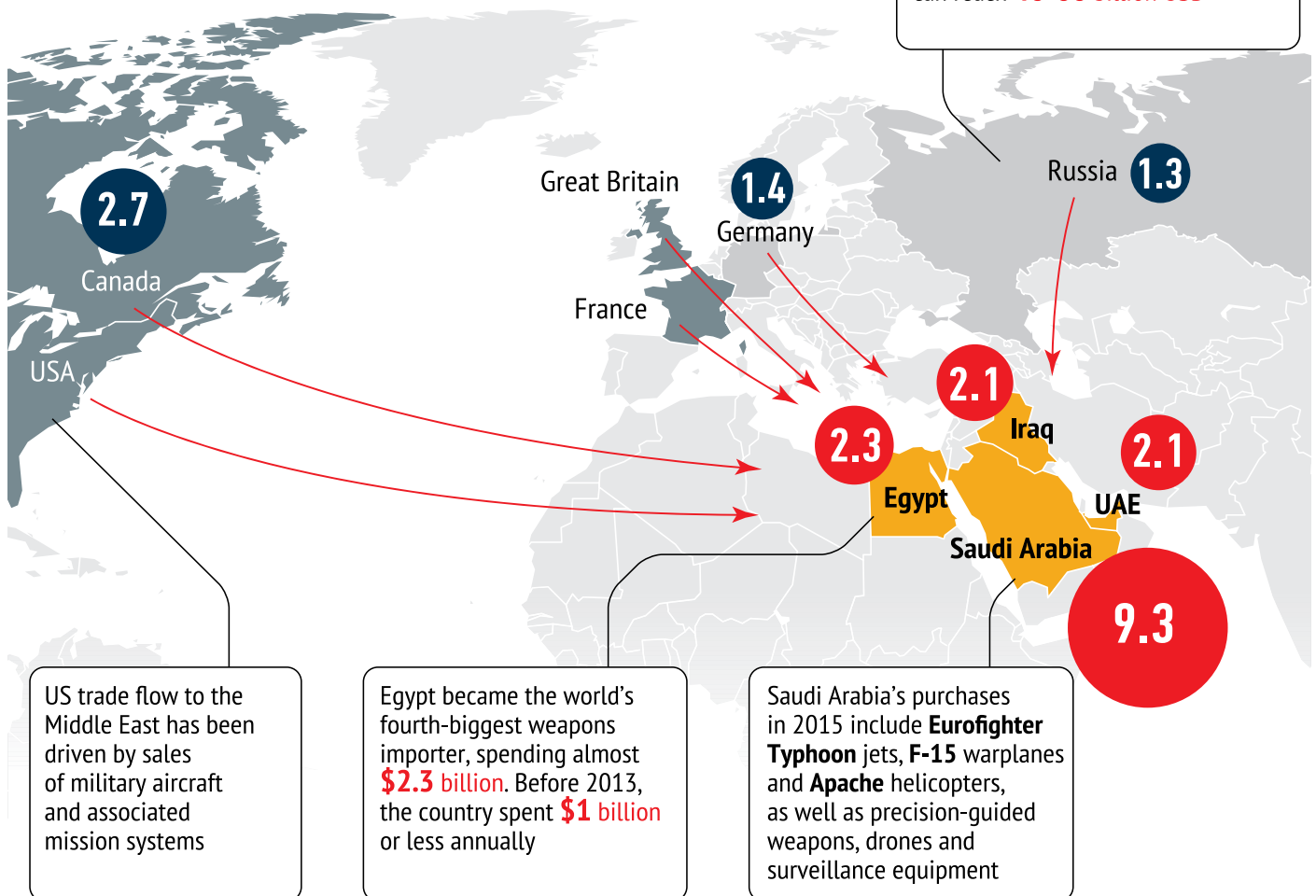
Top Defense Exporters to the Middle East

Top Defense Importers in the Middle East

Armaments import by Middle East countries (in billions USD, 2015)

Armaments Export to the Middle East Countries (in billions USD, 2015)

Russia is likely to increase its trade in the region as post-sanctions Iran begins to replace its exhausted aviation assets. The volume of orders can reach **40-60 billion USD**



Source: HS Jane's the Annual Global Defense Trade Report, Bloomberg

Even the states that at certain stages attempted to merge into various regional sub-systems (European, Mediterranean or otherwise) are increasingly forced to focus on the Middle Eastern agenda. At the same time, **systemic efforts to influence developments in the Middle East from the outside have been unsuccessful.**

There is still a huge divide between Arab and non-Arab countries. In their quest for regional leadership, Iran and Turkey are becoming increasingly active in the Arab world, relying on local actors and trying to manipulate specific ethnic and religious groups. Many Arab regimes view efforts by non-Arab regional powers as a security challenge.

Four Levels of Resilience

Experts taking part in the Valdai Club's Middle East Dialogue divided Arab countries into four groups in terms of their resilience to the current challenges and threats: afflicted by civil war, fragile, vulnerable and stable.

The first group includes Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. Important parts of those countries are controlled by non-state forces, and government institutions lost much, if not all, of their power. In Libya, the revolution destroyed the fragile political system that Muammar Gaddafi built over the years, and real power was seized by paramilitary militia groups, especially in Tripolitania. In Yemen, despite a disruption of traditional interreligious, intertribal and interregional balances, the modern parties continued to coexist with traditional social and religious communities. As a result, while in Libya political settlement in the near terms appears quite problematic, for the simple reason that there are no institutions to promote it, in Yemen

the process could be resumed with support from outside players, despite a failed attempt at national dialogue.

In Syria, government institutions have not been destroyed, and the state authorities proved that they are able to manage territories under their control quite effectively even amid a bloody war. There are also moderate opposition groups, although some have cooperated with terrorist groups. The latter remain active despite heavy losses and still control part of the country's territory.

Finally, the civil war waged by ISIS originated in Iraq and spilled over into Syria, but now seems to be migrating back. However, interreligious strife has not threatened the Iraqi state despite all the issues with the country's federalization.

Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon can be identified as fragile states.

The first two countries have lived through the Arab Spring uprisings, but failed to effect profound political overhaul and lack experience in promoting democratic change, and their governance systems remain inefficient. The main danger in terms of government stability come from unresolved socioeconomic issues, mass opposition movements being excluded from the political process, and terrorist groups, both of local and foreign origin.

Lebanon and Jordan were quite successful in overcoming domestic protest movements, but could still be destabilized by refugees from Syria and Iraq, who now account for 25 percent of the population in Lebanon and 20 percent in Jordan. Lebanon has found itself in a particularly challenging situation, since on top of that it faces a protracted political crisis.

Vulnerable countries are those that were successful in overcoming the challenges of the Arab Spring through effective government

action or by leveraging abundant financial resources, but could still be destabilized. Primarily this applies to Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Given that the latter dominates the Persian Gulf region, it is obvious that unrest in this country could spell disaster for other Gulf monarchies, particularly Kuwait and Bahrain, which had already seen mass protest movements back in 2011.

Finally, experts regard Morocco as a stable state, arguing that its political system has proved resilient to various internal and external challenges, absorbing new shocks by

blending traditional political authority with a modern competitive multi-party system. Although Morocco still faces many challenges, including corruption, unemployment, the complex situation involving Western Sahara, the country has not faced any serious threats so far.

Overall, many countries in the Middle East are ready for progressive change, but intolerance within these societies and attempts by outside forces to accelerate ongoing processes proved counterproductive.

II. Institutions and the Economy

There are several factors behind the rapid escalation of violence, which has become a systemic element of sociopolitical relations in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Egypt. From a social perspective, the growth of violence is related to the identity crisis these nations are undergoing, the reopening of old divisions in society and the emergence of new ones. Politically, the scale of violence increased due to the erosion of the structure of states in the region. These states, which formed during the colonial era, combined a Western system of government with a partially modernized but mostly traditional social structure and a mixed economy. This combination helped preserve traditional identities and freeze social contradictions in place, but ultimately increased social fragmentation in the region.

The forces of social fragmentation were held in check by strong governments, but imbalances in the institutional structure of these

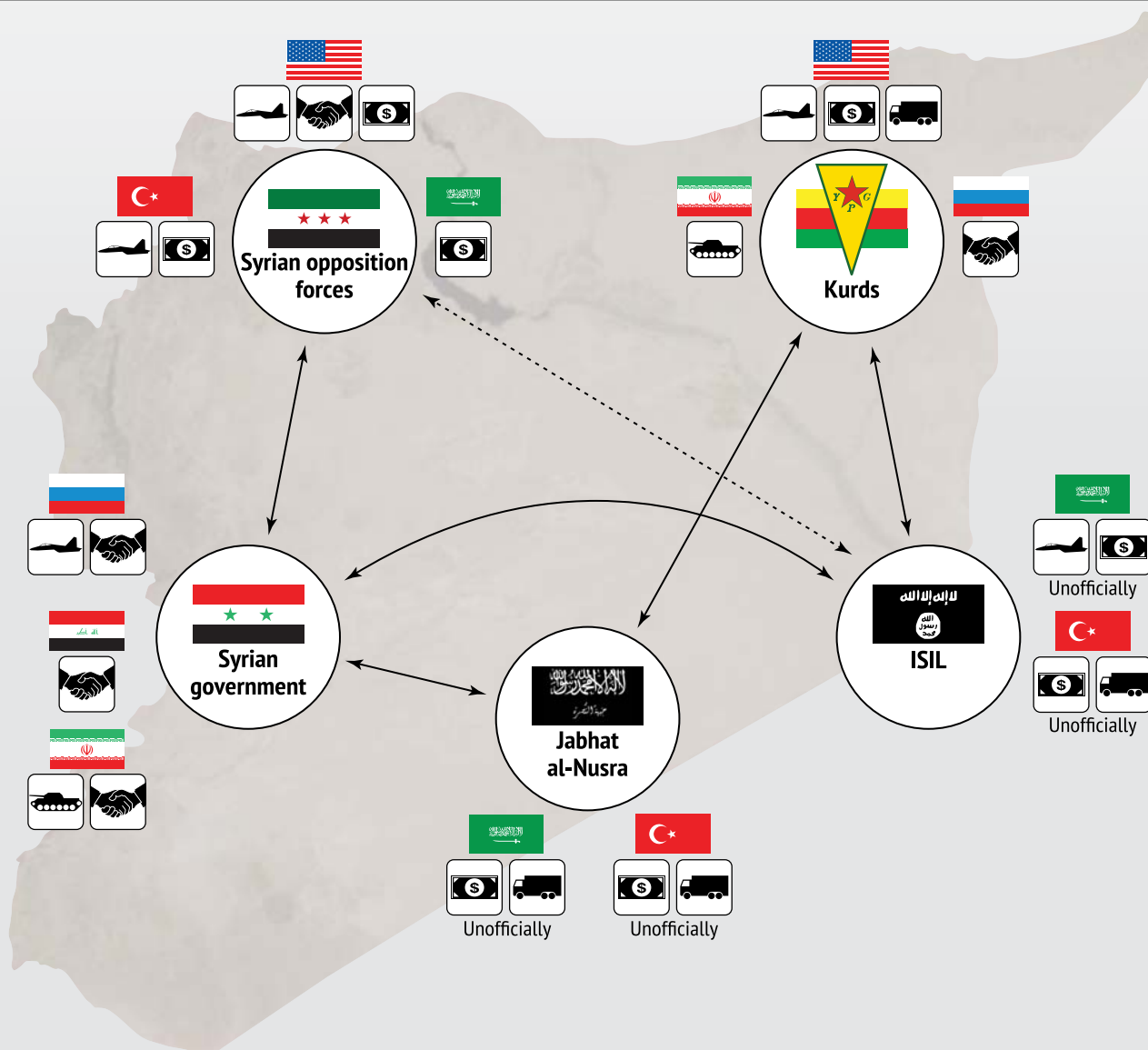
states gradually eroded the governments' capacity to confront new challenges. These imbalances stem from a combination of strong institutions of executive power and a highly developed technocratic bureaucracy, an exclusive role for security bodies, and weak judicial and legislative branches, as well as the nearly complete absence of civil society and the public's overall detachment from the political process.

As a result of this asymmetry, these governments were unable to open up political participation, the need for which was becoming increasingly apparent in modernizing societies where new forms of education had led to the partial acceptance of Western values. It is telling that the growth of living standards in many Arab countries in the 1990s and 2000s was accompanied by the emergence of civil society institutions, including NGOs and volunteer organizations, which more than doubled in number from 1995 to 2007.

WHO IS FIGHTING WHOM IN SYRIA

Parties to the Syrian conflict and powers they are supported by

OPPOSING FORCES	SUPPORT COMES FROM:			FORMS OF SUPPORT	
All-out military confrontation —————→	 Russia	 Iraq	 Iran	 Military	 Diplomatic
Partial military confrontation -----→	 USA and its allies	 Turkey	 Saudi Arabia and Gulf states	 Financial	 Logistical



Expanding Political Participation

Recent developments in the region, both within an institutional framework (Egypt, Tunis and Morocco) and outside of one (Libya), demonstrate that traditional social groups are becoming politically active, resulting in the politics of these countries becoming more archaic.

When state institutions are not being undermined, this change can eventually increase the effectiveness of the state. But as was seen in Libya, Syria and Yemen, the growth of political participation in society can also lead to the destruction or, at least, the degradation of the state and, ultimately, bring about more traditional form of politics. Depending on the situation, traditional can mean tribal (Libya), ethno-religious (Syria), or a combination of the two (Yemen and Iraq).

The destruction of state institutions and economic primitivization, as in Fezzan and to some degree Tripolitania in Libya, or in the interior regions of Syria and Iraq, sometimes reduces sociopolitical relations to fighting over the most readily available resources. Therefore, political processes underway there can be described in terms of potestary societies, or pre-class societies that have no political or social institutions.

Competitive Violence as the Basis of Relations

Weak governments and strong opposition groups come into conflict in regions where the state has withered away, usually located in the country's interior. The need to interact transforms both governments and opposition groups in strange ways. Non-state actors have

to resort to mimicry, acting like states and assuming some state functions. The Islamic State (Daesh) is the most prominent but far from only example of such mimicry, which can be also found in South Arabia, Sinai, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan, Kabylia and Sahara, as well as the desert area of Anbar Province and the whole of the Levant.

This process is accompanied by militarization. The state's tactics and strategy are reduced to the logic and ideology of a militia, and they become as violent as the armed rebel groups. The government goes from being the supreme arbiter capable of resisting or managing non-state actors to just one of the parties to these complex relations. As a result, **competitive violence becomes the key principle of sociopolitical interaction. Considering the large-scale proliferation of weapons, this primitivization of sociopolitical relations allows nearly any organized group to declare itself as a separate political and economic entity.**

Moreover, the role of individuals is becoming more important with the weakening of state institutions. Political leaders often are the only true defenders of sovereignty capable of taking action in emergencies, which only makes the situation more unpredictable. The greater role played by individuals applies not only to legitimate heads of state but also the heads of various non-state actors such as political movements, parties, ethno-religious communities, tribes, clans, etc. Political strategies are primarily informed by personal ambition, the leader's interpretation of the situation, the struggle for power and access to financial resources, and the leader's personal safety.

In light of this, all countries in the region must strengthen civil society and government institutions, and govern more effectively as a precondition for maintaining security in the future.

Legitimacy Deficit in the Region

The system that was developed in the Middle East in the 1920s through the 1950s, and which is now conventionally regarded as a product of the Sykes-Picot agreement, represented an attempt to create nation states in the territories that survived double colonization – the Ottoman (of the 16th – 20th centuries), and the European one (of the interwar period between the end of World War I and the start of World War II). The borders of these new states were often guided by random, if not completely arbitrary, considerations. There has always been room to question the validity of these states. The leading elites in Arab countries either seized power or received it from the colonizers, with the exception of the monarchical dynasties in Jordan and Morocco. These factors explain the deficit of legitimacy which has dominated the Arab political mentality for the past decades.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the region had lived within these borders for nearly a century, during which time new identities, cultures and socioeconomic infrastructure developed within the boundaries of these nation states.

The only alternative to remaining within established borders is complete anarchy.

However, **keeping countries within their borders does not necessarily mean that their administrative or territorial structure should also remain unchanged.**

Obviously, democratization and broader political participation in many of these states will also take on a geographical dimension, leading to their decentralization and possibly even federalization, like in Iraq. Although nearly all Arab governments accept the need for decentralization in one form or another, this process definitely entails major difficulties. Economic development, even within the most prosperous countries in the Middle East, the simultaneous existence of several types of economic management, modernization gaps between different segments of the population, the existence of localized ethno-religious groups and other factors can spur disintegration trends in countries with a weak civil society and a weak central government. As a result, the issue of territorial integrity can be reduced to access to national resources, primarily financial, for elite groups that represent different regions of the country.

In this situation, the government can yield to the temptation of formal decentralization, without delegating real powers to the regions. But this is fraught with a new round of social tensions and can discredit government institutions.

Economic Development Problems

Economic development problems, many of which are of a systemic nature, are playing a major role in this context. For example, food security risks are growing, and droughts, soil erosion and water shortages have become factors driving conflict.

Despite these fundamental problems, the countries of the region were among the global leaders in economic growth and social improvement before the crisis. Before

GLOBAL OIL RESERVES

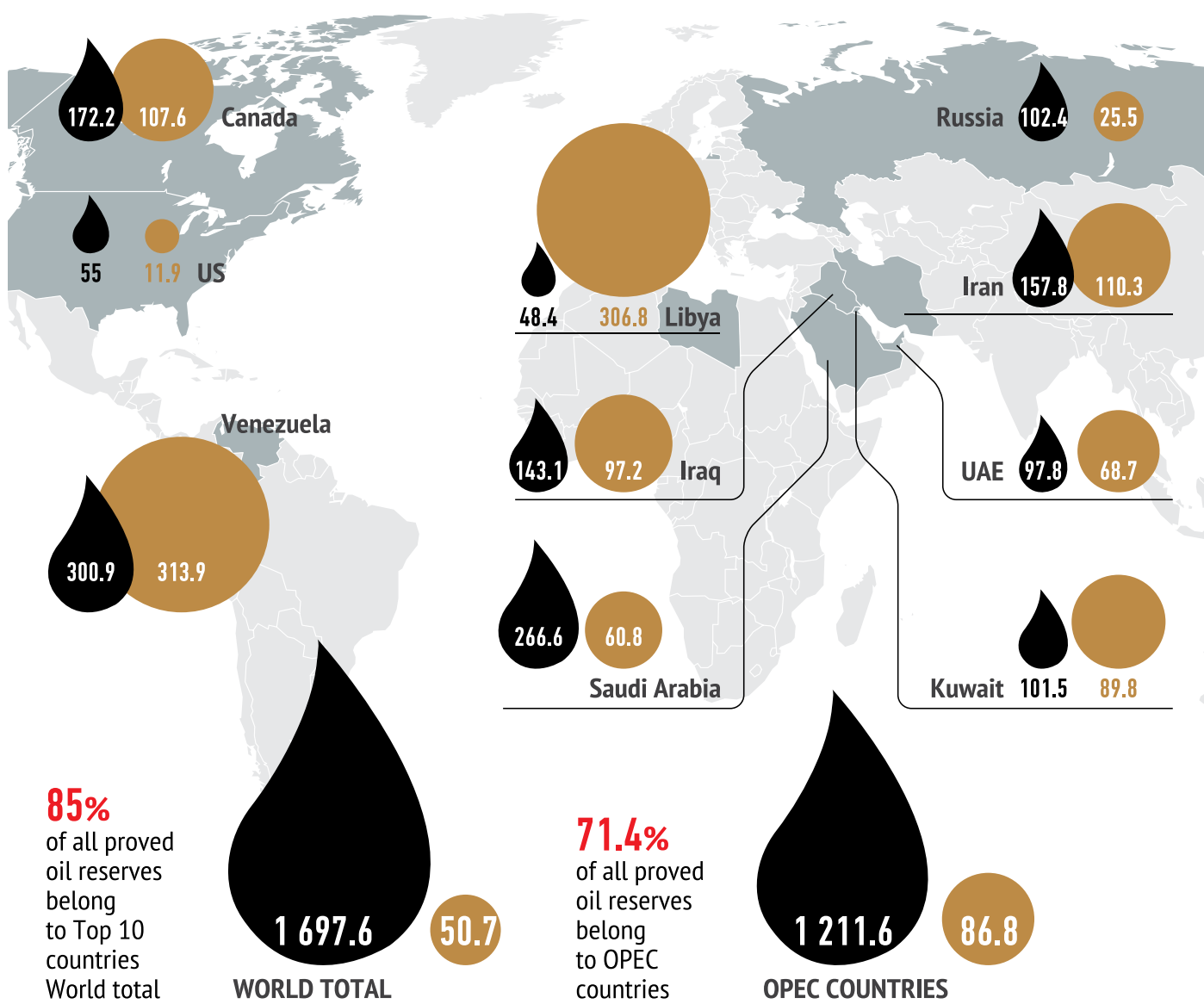
BP experts estimate that the world's proved oil reserves at 1 697.6 billion barrels at the end of 2015 would be enough for 50.7 years at current production and fuel consumption levels



TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH PROVED OIL RESERVES

Proved reserves, end of 2015
(Thousand million barrels)

Reserves-to-production ratios,
2015 level

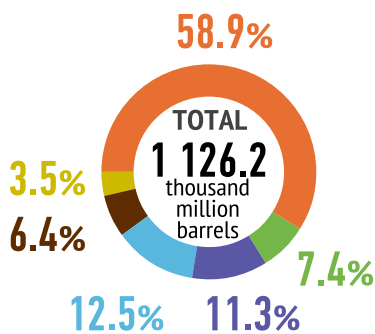


Source: www.bp.com

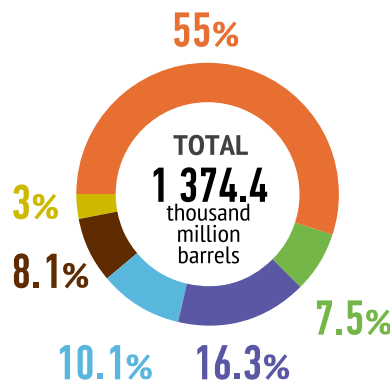
DISTRIBUTION OF PROVED RESERVES



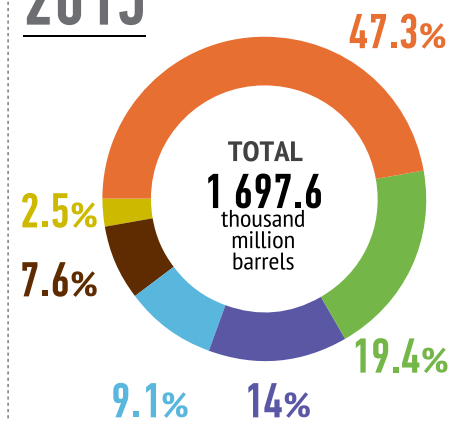
1995



2005



2015



Source: www.bp.com

2010, Oman, Israel, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco and Saudi Arabia were among the world's most successful states. Social and economic inequality and per capita murder rates decreased, and all the indicators showed that the Middle East was on track to produce an economic miracle.

Today, the situation in the region is most influenced by the challenges of political unrest, war and terrorism. In May 2015, the IMF assessed the balance of payments deficit at 52.8% of GDP and 68.2% of the national budget in Libya and at 9.6% and 10%, respectively, in Iraq.

Before the crisis, experts were forecasting that Syria's rapidly growing GDP would reach \$90 billion by 2015. But GDP growth gave way to contraction after the start of hostilities, which have cost Syria over \$250 billion. As of now, the Syrian economy is expected to return to pre-war levels no sooner than in 2025 under an optimistic

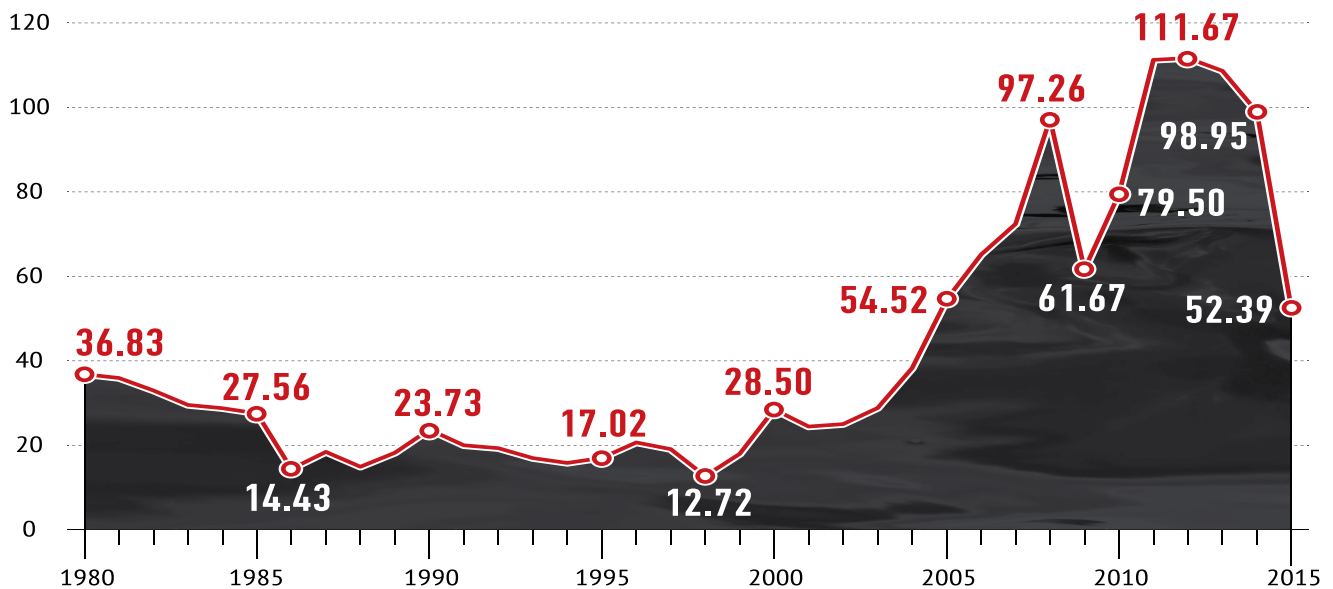
scenario involving multibillion dollar investments and the creation of agencies to distribute funds, monitor their spending, and fight corruption.

Rebuilding war-ravaged countries is above all the responsibility of the international community and primarily regional actors, who have the greatest interest in normalizing the situation in neighbouring countries.

But it is unclear whether Arab oil exporting countries will be willing or able to play the leading role in the economic rehabilitation of these war-torn countries. One of the reasons for this uncertainty is their declining revenues.

The IMF estimated that oil export earnings in 2015 would be \$287 billion lower (21% of GDP) in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries than was calculated when October 2014 oil prices were used. In October 2015, the IMF said it expected Saudi Arabia's

SPOT CRUDE PRICES, BRENT, US DOLLARS PER BARREL*



*1980-1983 Forties, 1984-2015 Brent dated

Source: www.bp.com, Platts

budget deficit to peak at 21.6% of GDP in 2015 and to drop to 19.6% in 2016.

Another issue is the possibility of overcoming the ongoing economic crisis in the oil-importing countries that are undergoing a political transformation, primarily Egypt and Tunisia. The terrorist attacks there have all but destroyed the tourism industry and caused investment to plummet, unleashing a new wave of political instability in Tunisia in January 2016. As for Egypt, it is unclear whether the mega-projects announced by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will alleviate the country's most painful problems, or whether Egypt will become economically dependent on foreign donors.

The ability of these countries to overcome their economic difficulties is directly connected to the stability of their institutional development and the struggle against extremism.

Socioeconomic Objectives

The radicalization of the population in these countries is based on feelings of injustice and deprivation, which undermine (if not completely erode) self-esteem, inspire thoughts of revenge, breed political detachment, and cause mistrust of the government. It is not surprising that there are so many Tunisians in the ranks of Daesh, or that terrorist activity is rampant in Egypt.

The root cause is not simply poverty, because the poverty rate in some African countries is much higher than in Arab countries, but rather the perception of socioeconomic and political marginalization relative to more modernized population groups. Mohamed Bouazizi and many other martyrs of the Arab Spring were small-time vendors who failed to integrate into their countries' legal economy or lacked political leaders who would represent their interests. A considerable percentage

of young people who join Daesh in search of “justice” come from the same class. These people – who represent a large swathe of the economically active population – need comprehensive economic, social and political integration. In other words, they want to live in a society where their small businesses are not endangered by the state through security or tax authorities and other officials, but are protected as well as the businesses of elites.

Some experts believe that **bringing the shadow economy into the light and boosting economic development can be an effective means of deradicalization**. They cite the ideas of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto and Peru’s experience of fighting the ultra-left terrorist organization Sendero Luminoso.

The size of the shadow economy in the Arab countries cannot be reliably estimated, but it is believed that before the crisis it varied between 15–20 percent in GCC countries and 45–50 percent in the relatively prosperous

non-oil-exporting countries. These figures have increased over the past years. Moreover, the **sectors of the shadow economy** (housing construction, transport, and the smuggling of foodstuffs, construction materials and fuel) **constitute the foundation of the economy** in some parts of even relatively prosperous countries, primarily border regions.

Therefore, the overarching political and economic objective for the Arab countries is to make sure that their populations do not feel marginalized by allowing legitimate participation in the political economy of their nations. This will also expand the tax base for socioeconomic restructuring.

As for international community, the drafting of a roadmap for the economic reconstruction in the post-conflict period, economic development measures, and socioeconomic normalization in the Middle East should be viewed as elements of a new security system in the region.

III. Terrorism in the Middle East

Aggressive Non-State Actors

The key contributing factor and consequence of instability has been the rise of non-state actors who usurp the right to violence from the state amid conditions of general instability.

All kinds of ethnic, political, confessional and tribal groups have grown stronger on the ruins of states and have continued to weaken them. A minor change in the traditional ethnic or religious balance of forces in government agencies (Iraq),

the disruption of the balance between movement toward change and national stability as a result of external interference (the NATO operation in Libya), or the rapid internationalization of a civil war (Syria) – all these circumstances led to the emergence of terrorist groups and allowed them to grow stronger.

It is believed that **the number of non-state actors rose on the backs of technological innovations and weak governance**. Actually, non-state actors, including organizations that use terrorist methods, are not unlike

startups, i.e. companies designed to rapidly develop a profitable business model. A clumsy government bureaucracy cannot compete with the non-state actors' influence in society.

Although terrorism has a long history, none of the existing definitions cover all aspects of terrorism or are accepted universally. The high degree of politicization hinders consensus on individual groups, as evidenced by the example of the Syrian opposition.

The Middle East has given rise to local groups that use terrorism to press society into serving their narrow interests, as well as to Islamic State (Daesh), whose proclaimed goal is to create a global alternative to the traditional state. Daesh is using both ethnic and religious nationalism, as well as confessionalism, to attain its objectives.

Daesh: Archaic Answers to Modern Challenges

No terrorist group can rival Daesh in the ideological, propaganda, financial and military aspects of their struggle. The weakening of regional states has strengthened the appeal of the caliphate, an idea proposed by Daesh ideologists as the answer to many modern challenges. Daesh ideologists have turned archaic views into a foothold, which people in the region badly needed amid the general uncertainty. They have strategic objectives, and offer a sense of mission and a feeling of being one of the chosen to those who need it. The ideological appeal and spread of Daesh in Iraq and Syria enabled it to break out the boundaries of an ordinary terrorist organization, which usually has a limited number of fighters and does not have any base on the ground or direct support

in parts of the world where it does not practice its destructive trade.

Organizations that employ systemic terrorism have greatly changed over the past decade, and it appears that this process is not over yet. Modern jihadists have moved away from their radical leftwing predecessors, who did not have a broad network of terrorist cells or infrastructure and didn't have the capabilities to stage a horror movie in the center of the world's most highly advanced and powerful state, as al-Qaeda¹ did in the United States on September 11, 2001. Al-Qaeda used rather primitive methods, which nevertheless clearly demonstrated the frailty of modern civilization.

As al-Qaeda's successor, Daesh has offered a new agenda and new methods of attaining its goals. It is using violence to change society (the Islamist version of Che Guevara) and prepare it for the arrival of the global caliphate. In a globalized world, the challenge of Daesh is viewed as a universal threat despite its civilizational limitations. New forms of terrorism appeared and were incorporated in the hybrid forms of modern international development.

Daesh: a New Stage in Terrorism Evolution

The most dangerous among the new elements of terrorism introduced by Daesh include:

1. *The combination of terrorist acts staged by individuals or small groups with the creation of quasi-armies equipped with modern weapons;*

¹ (banned in Russia – Ed. Note)

TERRORISM-2015

IN THE WORLD

Terrorist attacks

**11,774**

Total deaths*

**28,328**

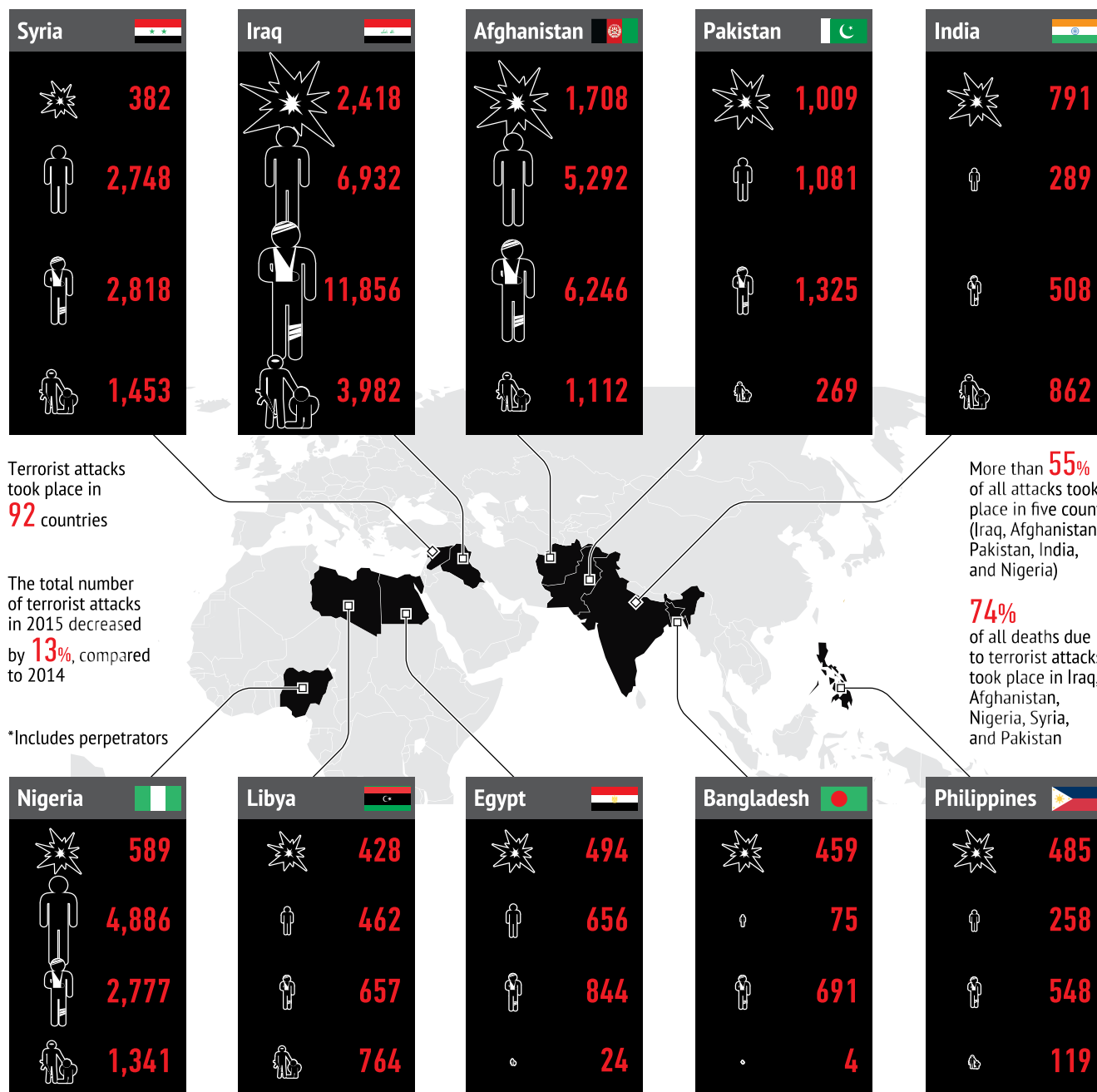
People injured

**35,320**

Kidnapped/taken hostage

**12,189**

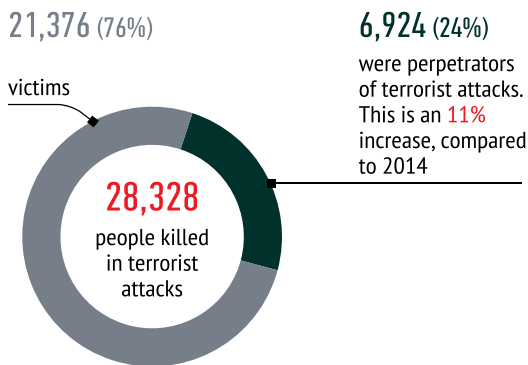
TEN COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST TERRORIST ATTACKS, 2015



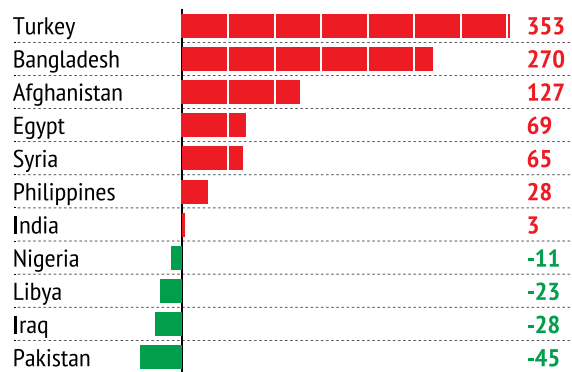
Sources: U.S. State Department (<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257526.htm>), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism

TERRORISM-2015

KILLED IN TERRORIST ATTACKS IN 2015



TOTAL ATTACKS IN 2015, COMPARED TO 2014, %



Sources: U.S. State Department (<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257526.htm>), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism

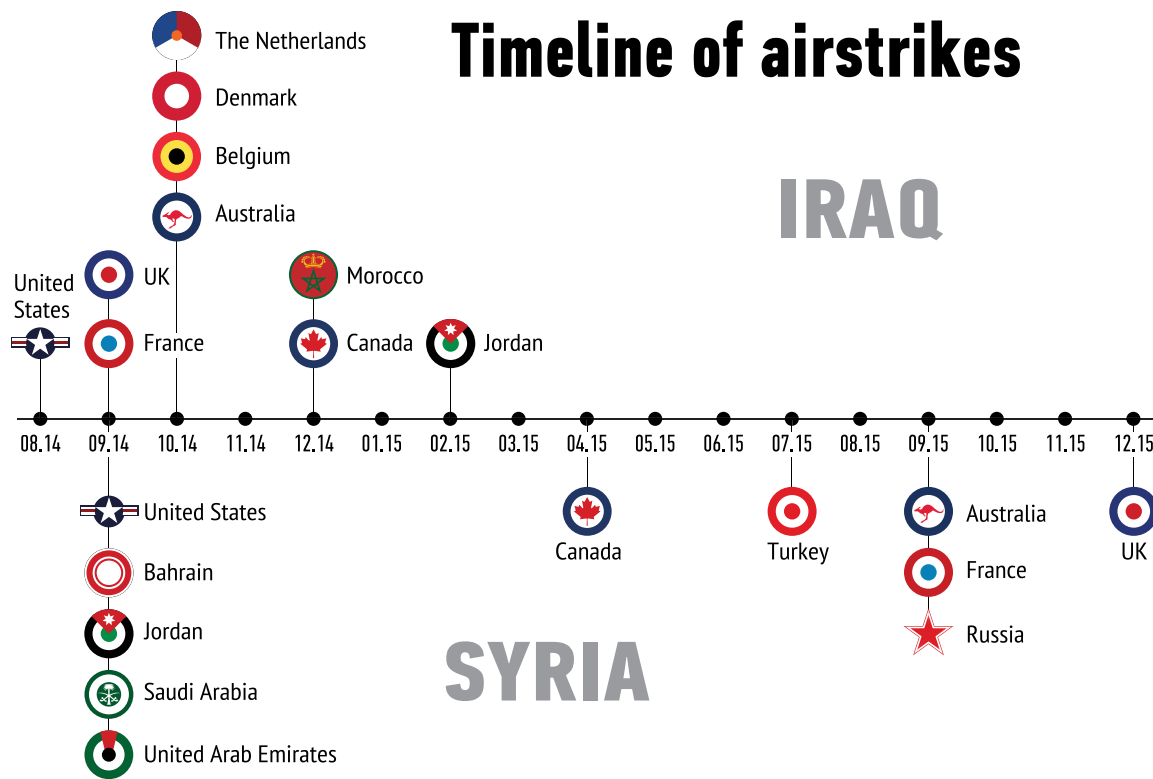
2. Attempts to spread their influence into many regions through a network of sleeper cells and “floating centers”;
3. A powerful recruitment system using modern communication tools, primarily the Internet and social networks;
4. Regular attempts to intimidate society by posting videos of grotesque executions and torture;
5. A franchising system under which groups in different countries proclaim allegiance to Daesh;
6. A justification for violence, the enforcement of an internal culture, and presenting itself as the only means of achieving political goals;
7. Highlighting the global scale of the Daesh project, including in light of the international and age composition of the group’s members.

Daesh: Ambitious but Unattainable Goals

Unlike its predecessors, Daesh seeks to reshape the Middle East and beyond, erase recognized borders, and destroy nation states and the entire system of international and sociopolitical relations. In the case of Daesh, the process is more important than the end result. By establishing footholds in Syria and Iraq and creating a special governance system (archaic in form but nevertheless effective), they are able to maintain the allegiance of their adepts and provide them with material means, safety and self-esteem, albeit in a highly unusual way.

At the same time, different branches of Daesh can adapt to existing political conditions by creating a symbiosis of extremist religious fanatics with political groups that see the jihadist agenda as a vehicle to attain their own goals. In Iraq, these groups comprise former members of the Baath elite and Naqshbandi, a major Sunni spiritual order of Sufism, who have little in common with the ideals of Daesh.

WHO BOMBS ISIS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ



In Libya, these groups include some tribal leaders. However, it would be naïve to think that these groups can use the Daesh brand exclusively for mobilization, consolidation and for gaining a foothold on the international stage, while preserving their structure and limiting their operations to a local agenda. The Daesh branch in Libya, which was initially used to rally small tribes against their powerful enemies, has rapidly become internationalized, and there are very few, if any, Libyans among its leaders.

Russian View of the Problem

Russia regards the fusion of modern-day terrorism with state-of-the-art technology as the most serious threat

to peace and stability. Modern terrorism shows no respect for national borders, bringing destruction and fear wherever it spreads. The main terrorist objective in the Middle East is to attack everything that does not fit their archaic conception of social relations and interaction.

Extremism and terrorism have a domestic political dimension for Russia, which explains its special attitude to these evils. Russia has experienced several bouts of terrorism in its history. It is also considered the birthplace of systemic terrorism, which appeared in Russia in the latter half of the 19th century.

In Russia's recent history, terrorism is primarily connected with the Chechen wars. But extremists recruit adepts from the millions of Muslims in Russia to this day. According

to official data, 2,719 had gone to Syria as of early 2016, including about 200 from the Volga region, 130 from Kabardino-Balkaria, 500 from Chechnya and 900 from Dagestan. It is alarming that the geography has expanded for recruiting fighters for the caliphate. Moreover, migrant workers from Central Asia who live in close-knit ethnic communities in Russia, prison inmates, young people without opportunities for self-realization or social mobility, as well as people from other vulnerable groups have been known to succumb to jihadist propaganda.

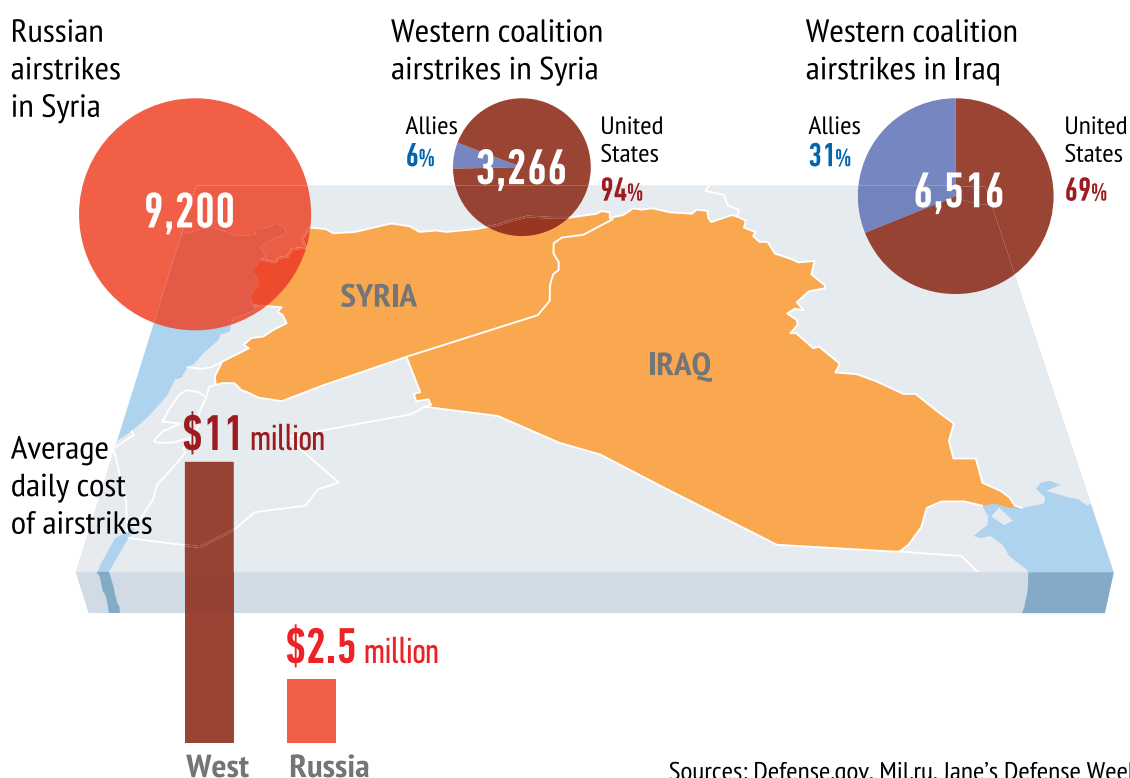
Of particular concern is the possibility that extremists who have trained to fight in the Middle East will return home when the terrorist groups operating in Syria and Iraq are defeated by the national armies with support from international coalitions. **Another major concern is that extremists**

will mobilize Russian citizens from “solidarity groups” that are characteristic of a traditional society. Although they do not accept the jihadist ideology, these people can nevertheless become easy prey for terrorists in their search for self-identity.

Balancing Interests in the Fight Against Daesh

Military force has always been the primary method of fighting terrorism. In light of Daesh’s territorial claims in the Middle East, the parties fighting against it are mostly relying on military force, too. However, a broad counter-terrorism coalition has not yet been created. While it is unlikely that the United States and possibly Saudi Arabia and Turkey would join

Airstrike statistics on January 19, 2016



Sources: Defense.gov, Mil.ru, Jane's Defense Weekly

the fight on the ground, this would seriously change the balance of forces in the area, though it would not necessarily lead to better coordination of the operations conducted by the United States, Russia and the regional members of their two coalitions.

It can be said that Russia is currently viewed in the region as being the most consistent and effective force fighting Daesh.

The fight against terrorism is not the main priority for the majority of external forces involved in the Syrian conflict, although international counterterrorism cooperation can help overcome mistrust. That being said, there are no grounds to believe that such cooperation would promote interaction between the leading world powers outside Syria, in other parts of the world or on other issues. Moreover, the formal commitment of external parties to fight terrorism in the Middle East has not helped create a broad coalition but has rather diluted efforts. **The fact that the United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia have created their own coalitions for political reasons has added a new element to the counterterrorism operations and created potential risks related to a lack of coordination.**

Ultimately, each regional power has its own agenda, and these powers' fight against extremism is ultimately a means of attaining their own goals. Saudi Arabia is concerned about the confrontation with Iran and its allies in the region, which is why the Saudi coalition does not include Shia forces. Iran has been trying to use the situation to strengthen its positions in the Middle East. Turkey is focused on the Kurdish problem, and it is willing to support the ethnic and confessional groups, including terrorist ones, who are holding back and weakening the Kurds. The United

States, which assumed leadership of an anti-Daesh coalition, has not increased its military involvement out of respect for its allies' positions in the Middle East. And lastly, Israel is more concerned about Hezbollah receiving new weapons than the threat from Daesh. **Effective operations against terrorists will be impossible unless all the parties strike a balance between their interests in the region.**

In addition, the development of counterterrorism tactics and strategy is hindered by the absence of an internationally coordinated definition of terrorism. Views of various terrorist groups have always been influenced by politics, above all in regard to certain ethnic groups, which are denounced as terrorists or hailed as freedom fighters depending on the situation. For example, some countries view Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations, while other countries disagree. Likewise, global and regional powers cannot agree on Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham in Syria. Although these groups are not uniform, Russia believes that both of them are terrorist organizations. Since terrorism is essentially a method for achieving one's goals, all attempts to clearly identify groups that use terrorist methods have failed. Besides, fighters from these groups often join organizations that are not viewed as terrorist. In this context, the jihadist army is clearly fluid and can easily move around the Middle East and beyond to evade military strikes.

The divergent interests of those who are fighting terrorism has been further complicated by the tendency to see the coalition of the Syrian Army, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah, which has been waging an

all-out fight against terrorism with support from Russia's Aerospace Forces, as an anti-Sunni Shia bloc. In light of the growing Sunni-Shia confrontation in the Muslim world, some Sunni states and communities have taken to criticizing Russia. The half-hearted involvement of these Sunni states and communities in the fight against Daesh, which is considered a Sunni group that exploits sectarian tensions, is hindering the creation of a broad coalition against this highly dangerous terrorist organization.

Launching a political process in Syria could enhance trust between the key external and regional players, as well as facilitate a compromise among the key political actors in Syria, functioning as a way to build up the trust necessary to fight Daesh and

to strengthen cooperation between military and intelligence agencies.

The soft counterterrorism tools, including ideological and economic ones are of special significance now. They underpin the joint efforts of the global Muslim community, including its Russian component, which has a unique experience of peaceful coexistence with diverse ethnic and religious groups.

In practical terms, this implies elevating Islam's true humanitarian values above the aggressive ideology of Daesh and raising awareness in society. Young people are inundated with information and are unable to fully appreciate the traditional elements of global culture that have constituted the moral foundation for individuals and societies for ages.

IV. The Middle East Transformation at the International Level, and Russia's Interests

Actors

Nearly all conflicts in the Middle East tend to quickly become internationalized. Military interference by a coalition of countries (Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya) has highlighted the role of global powers, which seemed to have growing influence on the situation in the region, at the expense of the influence of regional actors.

The presence of global actors, primarily the United States, in the region has decreased in recent years. The negative experience of the early 2000s forced them to take a more cautious attitude towards intervention and adopt a lower profile in the Middle East. The willingness

to provide military support to any opponents of authoritarian regimes (and there are no other governments in the Middle East) and an unwillingness to assume responsibility for subsequent developments have turned foreign interference into a recipe for destroying states. For example, in Libya NATO supported a local guerrilla movement that was badly organized, had no political strategy, and was composed of traditional actors whose intentions were not clear to their Western allies.

The global actors agree on the need to create a stable subsystem of international relations in the Middle East, but their joint efforts towards this goal have been hindered by several issues. These include the projection

of bilateral relations (primarily US-Russian relations) onto the Middle East, persisting differences over other issues, mutual mistrust, clashing narratives, and opposing approaches to the choice of tactics and strategy.

At the same time, the Syrian conflict showed that global actors such as Russia and the US have for the most part maintained their ability to influence events in the region and are generally capable of productive of productive cooperation in emergencies.

Regional actors, including non-state ones, have become more active in the Middle East since the early 2010s. The discussion of the Libyan issue at the UN Security Council was initiated by Arab states, which have become key actors in the Syrian, Yemeni and Libyan conflicts.

Saudi Arabia is the only Arab country among the regional claimants to leadership – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel. The long history of complicated relations between the regional powers and the Arab world prevents the bulk of the region from viewing their claims as legitimate. Given enough volatility, other states could also claim this role, for example Qatar.

Every major power in the Middle East has its own national interests that run counter to those of other regional and global players. Relations between Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel have been tense for a long time and have deteriorated at times into destructive crises.

We see greater activity on the part of peripheral states – Iran and Turkey – which has increased tensions over long-standing problems and created new causes for confrontation. At the same time, relations between some of the former antagonists have become friendlier. For example, while

Israeli-Turkish relations have deteriorated, Israel and Saudi Arabia seem to have a better understanding now, and the same can be said of the other Gulf countries. The main driver here is not the similarity of their core interests, but the need to fight against a common enemy, whether Iran, Hezbollah or Assad, which is why this trend is unstable and heavily dependent on circumstance.

Overall, the absence of a strategic vision for the region, with regional powers primarily seeking to strengthen their positions, and the failure to recognize “red lines” and the acceptable limits of opportunism have created a situation where the regional actors mostly rely on military force, while soft power only extends to traditional ties and commitments, be they ethnic, religious, tribal, or dynastic. These processes tend to descend rapidly to brinksmanship or military confrontation. Since a large part of the region has been at war for a long time and the overall level of conflict in the world has increased, the threshold of violence has become lower, as evidenced by the actions of radical organizations and even state actors.

Balance of Forces and Mutual Dependence

The balance of forces between regional and global powers is changing. The regional forces recognize their limited capabilities and continue to rely on their global partners. As the ambitions and stakes in the regional battle continue to grow, they are using the global actors' forces and influence to their advantage. During the Cold War, regional countries actively tried to involve their global allies in regional

conflicts. The ongoing rivalry in the fragmenting Middle East, where countries are fighting to preserve the old order or create a new order, has again made global powers vulnerable to the influence of their regional allies.

At the same time, the great power conceit, or global actors' confidence in their ability to rule the region and use the Middle East agenda to their benefit, can backfire. Regional actors have been known to use personal ties to outmaneuver their global partners, who often yield to the charms of personality. However, the opposite can also occur: a reliable strategic partnership can become surprisingly complicated when personal relationships between leaders do not develop.

Attempts by regional powers to attain their goals can now destabilize international relations much more seriously than in the past, because of the high degree of interdependence between regional and global forces, despite their asymmetric capabilities. The will to achieve purely self-interested goals have a much greater ability to destabilize international relations than ever before, further undermining mutual trust.

It should be acknowledged that some regional leaders turned out to be better prepared for the complex political game than their global partners, who sometimes fail to anticipate the reactions of the partners and overlook issues that are of crucial significance for some actors in the Middle East. **Political decisions should be made with due account of expert opinion and the cultural specifics and history of local societies.**

In light of the inability of old regional associations such as the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council to deal with the increasingly complex regional problems, attempts have been made to create new coalitions and associations. However, these are

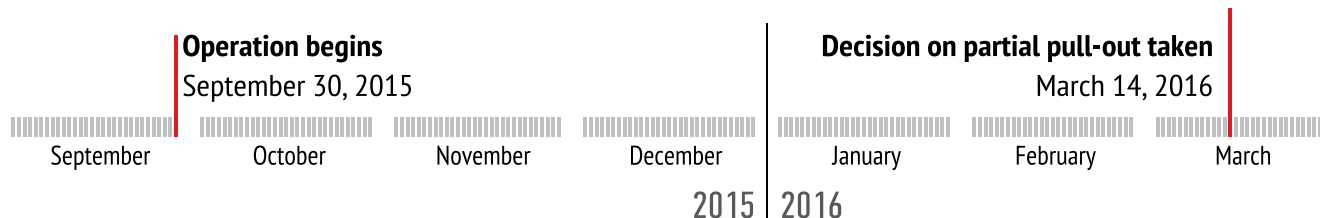
only designed to deal with current issues rather than to coordinate regional efforts. For example, the Saudi-led coalition of about 40 countries only looked good on paper and turned out to be anti-Shia rather than anti-Daesh.

The issue of cooperation of regional and global forces is not just about the Middle East. It's about developing clearer and safer rules of the game to preclude overreaction, the use of military force in crisis situations, or enforcement of decisions on others.

Russia's Interests

The Middle East has always held special significance for Russia due to its geography, political importance and economic potential, including energy. As the legal successor of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited the policy priorities it pursued in the Middle East for decades. However, eventually it had to change that policy. On the one hand, Russia did not have the capabilities of its predecessor and could not claim the status of a great power, which views regional policies as a means to higher aspirations. On the other hand, changes in the paradigm of international relations and the collapse of the bipolar world order undermined the fundamental elements of Russia's regional policies. There was no ideological confrontation where the sides fight to expand their spheres of influence. Bipolarity gave way to the economic and military asymmetry of Russia and the United States, while other states and associations grew stronger and proved capable of providing balance and preventing the rise of a single center of power that would dominate the entire system of international relations.

In Syria, Russia was able to test its newest weaponry in combat conditions



THE SYRIAN OPERATION IN FIGURES:

9,000
sorties in total

70-80
sorties a day

250
targets hit

209
oil production
and transportation
facilities destroyed

2,000
fighters of Russian
origin, including
17 warlords, killed

700
tonnes of food delivered
to besieged towns by air and land

42
groups joined
the ceasefire

400
localities and more than 10,000 sq km (4,000 sq mi)
of land liberated by the Syrian Arab Army

Sources: Russian Ministry Of Defence, Izvestia, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Zvezda Tv

THE RUSSIAN AEROSPACE FORCES GROUP IN SYRIA

70 aircraft**70** drones**4,000** personnel

Different type of aircraft were used

Su-35S
(Flanker-E)The most state-of-the-art
multipurpose fighter jets**Su-30SM**
(Flanker-C)**Su-34**
(Fullback)

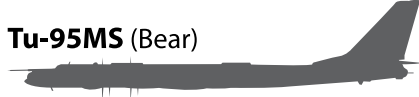
Strike fighters

Su-24M
(Fencer-D)

Upgraded strike fighters

Su-25SM
(Frogfoot)

Attack aircraft

Tu-160 (Blackjack)**Tu-95MS** (Bear)Russia for the first time used its strategic bombers
to hit enemy targets**Tu-22M3** (Backfire)

Supersonic missile-carrying bombers

Mi-24 (Hind)**Mi-8** (Hip)

Helicopters

High-precision weapons were widely used

KAB-500SSatellite-guided
bombs**Kh-25** (AS-10 Karen)

Laser-guided missiles

Kh-29 (AS-14 Kedge)**FAB-500****FAB-250**SVP-24 Gefest sighting complexes
installed on the Su-24M bombers
improved the precision of strikes
with unguided bombs**Kalibr NK** (Sizzler)**Kh-555** (AS-15 Kent)**Kh-101**The Syria operation became the “debut” of Russian air- and sea-based
cruise missiles. Dozens of them were launched from the distance
of more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles)

A powerful air defence system was deployed in Syria

S-400

(SA-21 Growler)

**Buk-M3**

(SA-17 Grizzly)

**Pantsir-S1**

(SA-22 Greyhound)

**Tor-M2**

(SA-15 Gauntlet)



It includes the most advanced systems of the Russian Armed Forces

*NATO reporting names are given in parentheses, when available

Sources: Russian Ministry Of Defence, Izvestia, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Zvezda Tv

Russia's current interests in the Middle East can be divided into two groups. The first one comprises traditional interests based on security issues. These interests can be defined as a desire to prevent instability from approaching Russia's borders. Any threat of war, the concentration of foreign armies, civil wars in the region, conflicts and terrorist attacks can be of concern to Russia, because the borders of the former Soviet republics are not well protected, and the spread of radical ideas and their proponents to the Caucasus, the Volga region or Central Asia would make Russia extremely vulnerable.

The second group includes interests related to Russia's desire to reaffirm its status as a power with its own views on global and regional issues and an independent policy. The ultimate goal is to protect the interests of Russian business (primarily in sphere of energy resources), and of the defense industry, which exports weapons to the Middle East.

Greater attention to Russia's interests in the Middle East has been spurred by the military operation in Syria and the creation of a coalition to fight terrorism on the ground. Russia's actions in Syria were unprecedented from a military and political standpoint, as they combined naval and aerospace operations with a surprise factor in terms of strategy and political decisions, as well as a high level of coordination.

A host of considerations influences **Russia's policy towards Syria.** First, the situation in Syria allowed Russia to demonstrate its departure from the post-Cold War system, which is based on the Western view that the Soviet Union's collapse amounted to defeat. Russia likely interpreted the intention of some Western quarters to formalize its defeat by expanding NATO and its spheres of influence, without any regard for Russia's national

interests, as disrespect for an economically weaker partner. Part of Russian society, political groups and the expert community view the Middle East as an area where Russia can stand up against the Western actions aimed at undermining Russia's influence on the international stage and to elbow it out of the regions and spheres of activity that are of priority importance to Russia. It must be said that this traditional confrontation sometimes flares up due to changes in the political situation. At the same time, Western intrigues cannot explain everything that is happening in the region. Internal tensions, the activity of regional forces and disagreements between them can provoke conflicts as easily as the policies of external actors.

Therefore, it would be wrong, or at least naive, to portray the Russian operation in Syria as an attempt to draw international attention away from the Ukraine crisis. Russia's interest in creating a broad coalition against international terrorism, which threatened the foundations of Syrian statehood and was spreading tensions beyond the Middle East, is based on a desire to improve relations with the West in the areas where they had a common enemy and no major points of contention. Nevertheless, this did not mean that success in the Middle East would automatically extend to other spheres of international relations.

Russia's support for President Bashar al-Assad should not be overstated. Russia could not accept Assad's overthrow in a military coup that would replace his government with Islamic radicals with direct support from external forces.

First, Russia protested efforts to lay the groundwork for a repeat of the Libyan scenario in Syria. The Kremlin looked on with serious concern, even if exaggerated, at the growing tendency to replace governments in military

coups or color revolutions. This tendency does not directly threaten Russia, but this is how Russia interpreted the events in Ukraine and the pressure brought to bear on the legitimate government in Syria.

Second, had the opposition overthrown the Syrian government with the help of external pressure, this would have had a powerful destructive effect on the entire region. The most probable result would have been the chaotic dissolution of Syria with extremely negative consequences, including the seizure of Damascus by Daesh. In practical terms, Russia preferred to deal with a secular Syrian government, which means that Syria should launch reforms and prevent the spread of Islamic radicalism to other countries in the Middle East and beyond. The deployment of Russian forces in Syria can be interpreted as a successful attempt to change the balance of the forces in the war, which was increasingly seen as confrontation between Assad and Daesh. Offensive operations by the Syrian army, Kurdish militia and Hezbollah units, supported by Russia's Aerospace Forces, denied the jihadists' victory, made

the "moderate" opposition more pliant, and created conditions for coordinating a ceasefire agreement with the United States.

Russia viewed the start of the political process in Syria – which helped stabilize the situation and also created conditions for improving relations with global actors – as an achievement justifying the withdrawal of a major part of its Aerospace Forces.

Increased attention to Russia's policy regarding Syria does not mean that Russia's interests are limited to Syria. Relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran are of great significance to Russia, and its ties with Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Israel and several non-state actors are important. The operation in Syria has strengthened Russia's positions in the Middle East, but it has also resulted in losses. The terrorist threat to Russia has not been eliminated, as evidenced by the crash of the Russian passenger plane over Sinai, and relations with Turkey have soured dramatically. It is probably a distinguishing feature of the Middle East that you cannot win a clear victory there, unless you view the shift from violence towards a ceasefire and talks as victory.

V. Regional security

Middle East security is no longer a regional problem, with international relations as a whole increasingly falling victim to the region's growing instability, new and old conflicts, and more concerted action (including military action) by regional powers and non-state actors. As before, the region is internally divided and devoid of checks and balances, and there is no security system capable of translating military confrontations into political arrangements.

It is also rather difficult to define the current situation in the Middle East, which has taken shape under the impact of increasingly complex and chaotic international relations. The gravity and instability of the situation is comparable to Europe during the Thirty Years War or the two world wars. It can also be likened to a new Cold War, which turned various regions of the world into a stage for confrontation between the superpowers as they

sought to avoid a global clash at the expense of the regional agenda. They were not always successful, and the Middle East has provided plenty of examples of regional clients using global players to pursue their own interests and pushing the great powers to the brink of war. At the time, the USA and the USSR found a way out by cosponsoring the Arab-Israeli peace process, one of the longest running conflicts in the world.

The ability to produce tension is one of the defining features of regional actors in the Middle East. In recent years, conflicts have increasingly taken the form of hybrid warfare, blending interstate hostilities between regular armies with civil wars. Many conflicts are asymmetrical, with belligerents possessing different capabilities and potentials. States are confronting groups or movements that use their own methods of causing destruction, including terrorism. Foreign military interference, which most often is done outside of the bounds of international law, is a special case.

The intensification of the transformative processes underway in the Middle East in the second decade of the 21st century has made the security deficit there even larger, while ushering in painful changes at the national, regional and international levels.

Weak regimes and institutions have resulted in disorganized societies and governments that are unable to perform the basic functions, spawning new conflicts as a result. These hybrid and asymmetrical conflicts include both comparatively recent hotbeds of tension (Syria and Iraq, Libya, Yemen) and conflicts that are a legacy of the bipolar world, such as the Palestinian-Israeli and West Saharan conflicts.

Each “new” conflict is a security threat to neighboring countries, and in many cases, the threat is already beginning to materialize.

Epicenters of regional strife – the wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya – are disrupting the balance in the entire Middle East.

The stagnant Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains a stumbling block to the creation of a regional security system. Moreover, it is still a source of inspiration for radical anti-Western political forces in the region.

The parties to these conflicts are developing network infrastructures by improving financial, informational and logistical ties. This is a matter of particular concern. For example, as Daesh grew weaker in Syria and Iraq, it immediately began to grow stronger in Libya.

Despite the high level of tensions, it is still an open question, to what extent local elites realize the danger of the upsurge in violence, which has come in varied forms (from committing national armed forces to provoking a backlash from terrorist groups); how much their interests are affected; and whether they can regard the current situation as favorable to their priorities. Outside forces are taking more even-handed approaches to the developments and playing down threats and challenges by compromising over a narrowly self-interested policy that consists of consolidating their own positions and building up their presence in the region.

The lack of understanding among regional and external forces as to the rules of interaction during conflicts, attempts to act unilaterally, disregard for international norms and a predisposition to use force on every occasion, taken together, create serious obstacles to international efforts to deescalate conflicts.

At the same time, the era when security was based on mutually opposed regional alliances, treaties and military bases, has

receded into the past, and isolated instances of backsliding cannot prevent the emergence of a new international order. This order goes beyond territorial divisions and spheres of influence and creates a balance of interests in different areas.

The US has curtailed its commitments in the Middle East in recent years, as both the United States and the countries of the region have grown weary of each other. Yet another reason is the **obvious bankruptcy of its policy of toppling authoritarian regimes to impose democratic institutions**. Building democracies that are less likely to go to war with each other is too remote a prospect, and it certainly cannot be imposed by military force from the outside. **A likely alternative is a system of strict reciprocal commitments, which, with the support of outside forces, would deter Middle East actors, regardless of how democratic they are, from rushing to use force.**

There is an urgent need to call for measures that would eradicate the propensity towards conflict and for a regional security system. After all, there are common threats facing all players, however divided they may be, and opposing them in unison might form the basis for future collaboration.

Attempts to stop or settle the conflicts include exerting military pressure to change the alignment of forces and seeking political solutions via a national dialogue, a clearly defined sequence of steps (a peace roadmap), international collective mediation, and initiatives advanced by separate states.

Countries in the region have taken the back seat in efforts to solve their problems for too long. Currently, the only way to resolve existing differences is to join the efforts to create a new security system that would establish

a balance between domestic and foreign policies and between compliance with international law and the aspiration of certain states for regional leadership.

In order to build a general security system in the context of a heated rivalry between regional actors, the possibility of unilateral actions in the region must be foreclosed. The same goes for third-country military interference without the necessary mandate and in violation of international law. A regional security system, including the WMD-free zone proposed by Russia, requires renewed efforts to define its framework, principal objectives and parameters. The existing groundwork should be combined with approaches that better reflect the current dynamics of the military-political processes unfolding in the Middle East.

On the Path to a Solution

In a deteriorating situation, unconventional solutions are needed.

- *Introducing external administration when a state functionally no longer exists or is incapable of providing physical and social protection to citizens. This response in itself is fraught with additional questions: Under whose aegis and with what resources? What will be the role of international and regional organizations?*
- *If unitary states are decentralized along ethnic and sectarian lines, the international community should help to establish central and regional administrations to regulate cultural diversity that must not be allowed to devolve into political rivalry.*

- *Preventing the forcible redrawing of borders, as well as providing international assistance for or guarantees of an “amicable divorce,” where border changes are inevitable or under way.*
- *Launching a negotiating process on a regional security system in the Middle East, or a Helsinki process for the Middle East.*

In this context, several specific courses of action based on past experience but adapted to the current reality recommend themselves. In particular, it could be possible to draw on experience of the multilateral talks facilitated by the five-group mechanism that was established by the Moscow Organizing Meeting in January 1992. These five working groups dealt with arms control and regional security; regional economic development; refugees; water resources; and environment.

Specifically, the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS Working Group) was aimed at facilitating stabilization and developing conflict prevention measures. Its work between sessions proceeded on two levels: conceptual (long-term arms control problems) and operational (developing confidence-building measures). Despite certain headway achieved at the multilateral talks, further progress was largely dependent on the general state of efforts toward a political settlement. Since the latter half of 1996, the working groups' plenary sessions have not convened because of complications in Arab-Israeli relations and the stagnation of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Nevertheless, ACRS Working Group proved effective in developing unified measures for security, oversight and confidence building in the region.

A number of ideas suggested during earlier regional security initiatives could be used as well.

For example, it is worth considering the experience of ASEAN and the implementation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Pancha Sheela or Pancasila), as well as the more general possibility of formulating a common “code of conduct” for global and regional actors in the Middle East.

The code could be based on the following main principles: balance in the relations of global actors with all countries in the region; multilateral security cooperation at the UN; global support for regional collective security initiatives; support for strong state institutions possessing a clear vision of development objectives; support for civil society institutions; respect for state sovereignty and political solutions to problems; multilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the situation in the region is not entirely dependent on issues of war and peace. Economic and social processes also play a role. **Regional problems, such as the lack of a security system, mass unemployment, and the need to reform healthcare and education systems, should be addressed all at once without prioritizing certain aspects.**

Keeping all this in mind, it makes sense to follow the Helsinki experience. Among other things, Russian experts have suggested using Helsinki's “three basket” format (security, economic, and humanitarian cooperation), which is universal in structure and applicable to the Middle East.

There is cause for hope in the Middle East. Both local players and outside forces have incentives to work toward a safer and more predictable future. Convening a regional security conference could be the first step towards setting an agenda and forming working groups.



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