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The Syrian Crisis: An Analysis of Neighboring Countries' Stances

Nerouz Satik and Khalid Walid Mahmoud | October 2013

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Series: Policy Analysis

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Introduction

The Arab Levant region has significant geopolitical importance in the global political map, particularly because of its diverse ethnic and religious identities and the complexity of its social and political structures. This diversity makes the region a suitable arena for the interplay of numerous competing regional and international interests, which has deeply influenced how politics in the Levant have been shaped over time. Political changes in the region tend to go beyond the borders of the state in which they occur, affecting society and politics in surrounding states. The Syrian revolution is no exception to this pattern. Syria's neighboring countries have been affected by the ongoing political and security fluctuations, and these, in turn, have influenced the events in Syria, by pushing for policies that serve the internal and external determinants of their respective stances on Syria.¹

The Lebanese Position toward the Syrian Revolution

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005, Syria was isolated internationally and regionally among Arab states, which intensified following a number of regional shifts—most notably President Ahmadinejad's assumption of power in Iran in 2005, the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in July 2006, and the subsequent alliance that was struck between Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The country's isolation was apparent in the US, European, and Saudi negative stances toward Syria and its policies in Lebanon. Following the outcome of the Israeli aggression on Lebanon in 2006, and the internal conflicts among Lebanese parties regarding Hezbollah's use of weapons and controversial communications network,

¹ This study examines the Lebanese, Iraqi, and Jordanian stances toward the Syrian revolution prior to the use of chemical weapons on August 21 and the repercussions of the incident; we would like to acknowledge researchers Raghid al-Sulh and Yahya al-Kabeesi for the help that they provided.

Hezbollah besieged many of its political opponents' positions and imposed a *fait accompli* through military force. This led to a Turkish-Qatari-Iranian intervention that resulted in the Doha Accord, enabling Lebanon to hold presidential elections, after a consensus was built around President Michel Suleiman, as well as parliamentary elections, which the March 14 Coalition won in June 2009. In addition to the March 8 and March 14 parties, the Doha Accord allowed the formation of a "national unity" cabinet on November 9, 2009,² headed by the leader of Lebanon's Future Party, Saad al-Hariri.³ This development led to the rejuvenation of a modicum of Saudi-Syrian understanding and coordination, often referred to as "the S-S deal" in Lebanon, which resulted, in turn, in the near-normalization of relations between the Future Party in Lebanon, Walid Jumblatt, and the Syrian regime. An improvement in relations was confirmed when the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri visited Damascus on December 19, 2009, followed in September 2010 with Hariri's implicit apology for "past mistakes" and declaration of Syria's innocence in Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination.⁴ Walid Jumblatt's successive visits to Damascus, which continued until August 2011, further affirmed this improvement.

Conversely, in order to form a sustainable consociational government in Lebanon, the dissolution of Saad al-Hariri's cabinet on January 12, 2011 represented a breach of the Syrian-Saudi understanding and the balances it put in place. During that time, the March 8 coalition decided to pre-emptively withdraw its ministers from the cabinet before issuing the international tribunal's indictment, which would have accused members of Hezbollah of the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri.⁵ The president appointed Najib Mikati to form a new cabinet after Walid Jumblatt and his parliamentary block voted

² Syria exited its international isolation following the four-party meeting in early September 2008, which joined Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with French President Nicholas Sarkozy, Qatar's Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, and the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Press Conference for Summit Attended by Presidents Assad and Sarkozy, the Emir of Qatar, and the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *Sana* (Syria), September 4, 2008, <http://sana.sy/ara/3/2008/09/04/pr-191739.htm>.

³ The Lebanese Army, "Formation of New Cabinet".

⁴ "President Assad and the Servant of the Holy Shrines and President Suleiman during the Beirut Summit: to confront the conspiracies and plans that are being hatched for the region in order to destabilize it with sectarian and religious seditions," *al-Thawra Daily* (Syria), July 31, 2010, <http://thawra.alwehda.gov.sy/archive.asp?FileName=27920162420100731012918>. Saudi Arabia's king visited Damascus from July 29-30, 2010; he then accompanied President Assad to Beirut, where they held a tripartite summit with the Lebanese President Michel Suleiman. Also, on September 6, 2010, in an interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Hariri said that the Lebanese "have committed mistakes in some areas" regarding Syria, and that "the political accusation" directed at Syria for the assassination of his father Rafiq al-Hariri was over. See: "Saad al-Hariri: Accusations over My Father's Assassination Are Over," *al-Arabiya Net*, September 6, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/09/06/118606.html>.

⁵ Policy Analysis Unit, "The New Cabinet Appointment," April 28, 2013.

in favor of Mikati to replace Hariri, in line with the March 8 coalition. The new cabinet, which did not include any ministers from the March 14 party, was formed on June 13, 2011.⁶

The Government's Policy

Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government presented the parliament with a ministerial statement on July 5, 2011 that briefly referenced Syrian-Lebanese relations, asserting that the government will work to develop relations with Syria and implement the agreements signed between the two countries, in accordance with the government's commitment to the Taif Accord that calls for the establishment of "special relations" between the two countries.

The government also announced that it will stay away from the politics of Arab axes, while committing to Arab solidarity within the framework of the Arab League. Such pronouncements appeared as a step backwards from the relationship that previously existed between the two countries. Oftentimes in Lebanon, the demand to "stay away from the politics of Arab axes" is interpreted as a call for the dismantling of the close relationship that links Lebanon and Syria. The meaning of "Arab solidarity," as established during the time of Syrian military presence in Lebanon, was the extent of Lebanon's solidarity with Syria, not the upgrading of relations with Arab brethren countries in general, as phrased by the Lebanese government in this context. When the UN Security Council voted in favor of the August 3, 2011 presidential statement condemning the use of force against civilians in Syria, Lebanon did not oppose the motion, declaring instead that it "distances itself" from the resolution. The call to "distance" Lebanon from the conflict in Syria prompted a split of the Lebanese political forces into two camps.⁷ The

⁶Associated Press, "Lebanese Minister Resigns from Newly Formed Cabinet," *France 24*, June 13, 2011, <http://www.france24.com/en/20110613-middle-east-lebanon-hezbollah-and-allies-are-majority-in-new-cabinet>.

⁷ It should be noted here that some parties have modified their stance toward the Syrian revolution, especially the Phalanges Party, which was enthusiastic about the popular revolution in Syria at the beginning, but later began to express reservations regarding its demarche after the appearance of Islamist movements. The Progressive Socialist Party also shifted position, starting with a centrist stance at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, and then taking a fully supportive position. On June 8, 2011, for example, the party leader, Walid Jumblatt, met with al-Assad in Damascus. See: "President Assad discusses with Jumblatt the situation in Syria and Lebanon and expresses his hope that the Lebanese will overcome their differences and form the cabinet", June 10, 2011,

centrist camp includes Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister Najib Mikati, and head of the National Struggle Front Walid Jumblatt, each of whom was careful to maintain working relations with the Syrian government, without affiliating themselves with either of the warring parties. The call to “distance Lebanon from the conflict” emerged from this camp based on realistic calculations. Lebanon, as Mikati said when explaining the distancing doctrine, suffers from a vulnerable political and social makeup, as well as deep divisions among its people. Those who wanted Lebanon to distance itself from the conflict spoke of the wars that Lebanon endured during the 1970s and 1980s, when the Lebanese were divided regarding whether to allow the pro-Palestinian military activities in Lebanon, a division that ended in an eruption, one that was catastrophic and harmful not only for the Lebanese, but also for the Palestinians and the resistance. Those in favor of distancing Lebanon warned against a repeat of the same experience failing Lebanon’s pursuit of a centrist policy. However, according to this policy, if the Lebanese choose to distance themselves from the conflict, they would be able to offer all forms of humanitarian aid to the Syrians, and to lessen the sufferings caused by war. In essence, this is what has taken place, evidenced by the million Syrians currently take refuge in Lebanon.

The “Marchers” is a camp made up of two antagonistic parties, the March 8 and March 14 coalitions, both of which decided that taking a stand on the conflict in Syria represented an ethical choice, and a practical must, despite the existence of currents, within each group, that leans toward the “distancing” policy.

For a brief period, these two camps were united around a collective policy described in the Baabda Declaration, which was issued by the Lebanese national dialogue session on June 11, 2012. The declaration, which resembled something akin to a roadmap for the implementation of the distancing policy, was an attempt to curb the intervention of Lebanese parties in Syrian affairs, and reflected an agreement among Lebanese leaders over the following:⁸

<http://thawra.alwehda.gov.sy/archive.asp?FileName=105333144520110610024600>. On February 2012, Jumblatt said that “Stalin, Ceausescu and Saddam Hussein had ‘more tact’ than the Syrian president,” see: “Jumblatt in his staunchest attack on Bashar al-Assad,” *al-Quds al-Arabi*, February 20, 2012, <http://goo.gl/FnL2py>.

⁸ To view the entire text of the Declaration, see: The Lebanese Presidency, “The Declaration of Baabda Issued by the Dialogue Table,” June 11, 2012, <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/News/Pages/Details.aspx?nid=14483>.

- Distancing Lebanon from the politics of regional and international axes and conflicts, thereby sparing it the negative repercussions of regional tensions and crises, except when it comes to the necessity of abiding by international and regional law.
- Focusing on controlling the borders with Syria, and preventing the establishment of a “buffer zone” in Lebanon, or the use of Lebanon as a base, passage, or staging ground for the smuggling of weapons and gunmen.
- Committing to work toward defusing security, political, and media tensions, while stressing the right to express humanitarian solidarity and the public’s freedom of expression in politics and the media, which Lebanese law guarantees.

This session, and its resulting declaration, held a special significance in how the Lebanese approached events in Syria and attempted to formulate a stance; the Baabda Declaration was particularly important due to the following factors:

- It was written in such a way to distinguish between the government’s commitment to the “distancing” policy—which necessitated that it refrains from any stance or behavior that is partial to or might provoke one of the sides in the Syrian conflict—and the Lebanese citizen’s right to peacefully and responsibly express their opinions on the situation in Syria through political forums and media outlets. Moreover, the declaration made a precise distinction between politically, publicly, and morally supporting any of the parties involved in the Syrian conflict, and intervening in the conflict by offering material, military, logistical, or combat support to one of the warring parties in Syria. The Declaration viewed the latter form of support as a threat to Lebanese people and interests and to the security and stability of Lebanon.
- The political factions that participated in the dialogue and supported the Baabda Declaration represented the strongest and most influential currents and coalitions in Lebanese politics.⁹ Furthermore, the declaration was not a mere expression of

⁹ The list of attendees included representatives of three currents: the centrist current, including Prime Minister Najib Mikati and the National Struggle Front headed by Walid Jumblatt. It should be noted that while General Suleiman participated in the dialogue as its sponsor and as the president of the republic entrusted with the implementation of the constitution and the preservation of Lebanese national unity, the Lebanese president appeared, in fact, as the real leader of the centrist bloc, and the prime defender of its propositions and policies. Next, the March 14 current was represented by the former Prime Minister Fouad al-Sanyura for the Future bloc, the former President Ameen al-Gemayyil for the Phalanges Party, Michel Farun for the Free Decision bloc, and MP Jean Ogassipian for the Armenian Accord; Samir Gaga, head of the Lebanese Forces, was absent from the session for security reasons. The March 8 current, which included Nabih Berri, Parliament speaker and head of the Amal Movement, former Prime Minister

political leaders' stances, but was, first and foremost, a package of mandatory resolutions that these leaders must adhere to, along with their parties and communities. The Lebanese Union of the Chambers of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce, and many spiritual leaders, including the Maronite Patriarch Bishara al-Rai, all supported the declaration and the distancing policy.¹⁰

Little time had passed since the Baabda Declaration was issued when the March 14 and March 8 coalitions began to move away from it, and increasingly criticize the distancing policy. Of the three movements that contributed to the drafting of the Baabda Declaration, the March 14 coalition, with the exception of former President Amin Gemayel, appeared to be the least committed to the declaration. From Saad al-Hariri's perspective, ethical considerations such as commitment to democratic principles forced him to stand on the side of the Syrian opposition. According to Hariri, the distancing policy contradicts the democratic history of Lebanon and its exceptional role in the Arab East as a beacon for freedom and the freedom of expression. In addition to the democratic argument, al-Hariri—realistically speaking—felt that Assad's regime in Syria is bound to fall, and when the opposition takes over, it will likely punish Lebanon and the Lebanese for their support of Najib Mikati's centrist stance on the conflict. Aside from these pronouncements, however, Hariri did not propose a practical position regarding the war in Syria.

The March 8 alliance's stance toward the declaration was similar to its previous positions on the Syrian conflict; however, since it was the main coalition in the government, it was invested in the cabinet's success and the support of its policies, including the Baabda Declaration. This position, however, changed when Hezbollah began engaging in direct military activities inside Syria.

Unofficial and Popular Stances

In theory, the Baabda Declaration was an attempt to halt the interference of Lebanese forces in Syrian affairs; in practice, the March 14 forces were involved in the affairs of

Michel Aoun, representing the Reform and Change Coalition, MP Mohammad Raad, representing Hezbollah instead of the party leader Hassan Nasrallah who was absent for security reasons, MP Suleiman Franjeh, representing the Marada Party, and Asad Hardan representing the Syrian Socialist National Party. Also present in the session was MP Hagop Baqradian representing the Armenian Tashnaq Party, which has close links to the Change and Reform Coalition.

¹⁰ "The Maronite Archbishops: In favor of Amending the Electoral Law," *al-Bina newspaper*, December 13, 2012, http://www.al-binaa.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73196.

the Syrian revolution from the very start of its eruption. On the media front, on March 22, 2011, Syrian opposition figure Mamun al-Humsi, an ally of Saad al-Hariri, accused Hezbollah of participating in the repression of protests in Daraa through a military force numbering 3,000 fighters.¹¹ At the same time, actors close to the Future Movement began to slowly and steadily smuggle weapons into Syria in April 2011.¹² The March 8 forces, on the other hand, remained silent, with no statements made condemning the security forces repression of the protesters. Moreover, the March 8 forces in the media appeared to support the Syrian regime and present their version of events, despite acknowledging the legitimacy of the protesters' demands for reform in Syria. The Syrian revolution's transition toward an armed revolution in the beginnings of 2012 was accompanied by indications that members of Hezbollah were present in Syria, and that they were coordinating with the Syrian Army, especially in the regions along the Lebanese-Syrian borders, such as al-Zabadani and al-Qusair. In the last months of 2012, this relationship had grown to such an extent that Hezbollah sent battalions to Syria under the pretext of defending the holy shrines;¹³ this intervention became public on May 25, 2013 when Hassan Nasrallah, their party leader, announced Hezbollah's collaboration with the Syrian Army in Qusair since April 2013.¹⁴

The stances of Lebanese political forces were made in accordance with their sectarian makeup, which went along with trends in public opinion. The public opinion surveys conducted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) on the Lebanese stance toward the Syrian crisis show that 89 percent of the Shiite population in Lebanon oppose the stepping-down of Bashar al-Assad, while 77 percent of the Sunnis and 76

¹¹ "Syrian Opposition Figure: Assad is using Hezbollah in order to repress protesters," *Islam Memo*, March 22, 2011, <http://www.islammemo.cc/akhbar/arab/2011/03/22/119673.html>. Al-Humsi focused on turning the Syrian people's demands for freedom and democracy into questions that are also related to the position vis-à-vis Hezbollah in the attempt to create an anti-Hezbollah public sentiment in Syria by repeatedly accusing the movement of repressing protests in Syria. This is the reason why al-Humsi systemically focused his media appearances and statements on Hezbollah's role in the repression of protests. See: "40 buses exit Syria under the pretext of performing pilgrimage," *Elaph*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2011/4/650222.html?entry=homepagemainstory>.

¹² Anonymous interview by the research team in Cairo, May 7, 2013. The first operation to smuggle weapons from Lebanon into Syria took place through one of Abd al-Halim Khaddam's men in the city of Banias in April 2011, according to the testimony of a political activist in the "Ma'an" movement from the city of Banias who spoke under condition of anonymity. The activist is closely linked to the events in question; after that, weapons began to gradually enter into Homs.

¹³ "Shia Fighters in the Front Lines of the Regime Battles in the Damascus Countryside," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 1, 2013, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=12472&article=713811>.

¹⁴ "Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah's Speech during the Anniversary of Resistance and Liberation," *al-Manar*, May 25, 2013, <http://www.almanar.com.lb/adetails.php?eid=498299&cid=61&fromval=1>.

percent of the Druze supported his stepping down.¹⁵ Christians of all denominations were split—42 percent supported his removal while 44 percent of Christians were opposed.¹⁶ The Syrian revolution added new conflict to the Lebanese society, leading to repeated popular and political tensions and clashes, especially in the Lebanese city of Tripoli that borders the cities of Homs and Tartous in Syria.

Factors behind the Lebanese stances

The Lebanese Political and Social Structure

Due to the central authority's weakness and the frailty of Lebanese state institutions—in comparison to the strength of existing mediating groups between the citizen and state—the country's main priority throughout the Syrian crisis has been the prevention of civil war. The conflict in Syria has sharpened divisions in Lebanon with the Lebanese finding themselves split: those who support the Syrian government and those who support the Syrian opposition. Had the Lebanese government officially joined one of these two camps, deep divisions and schisms would have developed within Lebanese society, no doubt leading to civil strife. These divisions and political stances were but a reflection of the sectarian character of Lebanese society, which links groups of citizens to a sectarian-political system, enshrined in the Lebanese constitution as an "institution," within the confines of the sect.

Additionally, some political forces in Lebanon treat the Syrian refugee issue in Lebanon as a source of insecurity and social instability that can threaten the demographic balance in Lebanon. This perspective is not new in Lebanon; in fact, it echoes the manner with which many Lebanese have dealt, currently and historically, the question of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

¹⁵ The Arab Opinion Index Project is an initiative put forth by the ACRPS. For more information: <http://english.dohainstitute.com/content/4ad7eae8-3774-4af0-b9fa-0a3d965b8808>.

¹⁶ Al-Masri, "Public Opinion Trends," p.133.

Local Attachments to Regional Axes

Lebanese sectarian political communities, frequently in competition, are largely linked to external powers often from the same sect as these groups. The March 8 forces are allied, within “the axis of rejection and resistance,” with the Syrian regime and in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The March 14 forces are allied, as part of “the axis of moderation,” with the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia in particular. Consequently, these forces and political groups have determined their position vis-à-vis the Syrian revolution in a manner that goes along with their regional alliances and interests within the framework of competing regional axes. Since the regime targeted by the Syrian revolution was part of the “rejection and resistance” axis, following the felling of several “moderate” regimes, the March 8 forces have attempted to delay the coming changes resulting from the revolution. On the other end of the spectrum, the March 14 forces have supported the revolutionary process in the hope of bringing back a measure of balance to the Arab regional system, though the foreign policies of the post-revolutionary regimes are unclear.

In principle, the parties that signed the Baabda Declaration were expected to support and develop this political pact, and turn it into an entryway for the establishment of a broad national coalition that could result in a government that could bring stability to the country and lead it on the path of economic development. Such a national unity government would have performed, where possible, a positive role in the Syrian question by seeking to formulate a political solution to the Syrian conflict. However, events in Lebanon led to the opposite outcome; instead of the parties that signed the Baabda Declaration working to execute the agreement, their efforts focused on examining the behavior of the competing coalitions in order to extract proof that the others were in breach of the declaration; they then used this information as a pretext to avoid adhering to the declaration’s principles. Moreover, in March 2013, the Lebanese president’s plight in front of the Arab League summit in Doha did not result in any tangible Arab efforts to help the Lebanese state revive the Baabda Declaration, nor did it pressure Lebanese parties to abstain from taking any action that could turn Lebanon into a base or a passageway for the interference of domestic and foreign powers in the Syrian conflict, in an attempt to keep Lebanon away from the changing regional axes.

Iraq's Stance

The positions of Iraqi political forces on the Syrian revolution cannot be separated from the nature of the conflict that governs the relationship between Iraqi political forces since the US occupation of the country, particularly in terms of the two largest political coalitions in the country: the State of Law coalition, allied with some sectarian political parties in Iraq, and the Iraqi List, which is primarily secular.

The Iraqi List used to enjoy good relations with the Syrian regime, which has always supported its political project. However, relations between the State of Law coalition and the Syrian regime remained strained due to their ideological differences and the Baathist character of the Syrian regime, despite its historic enmity toward the Iraqi Baath regime. Following the 2005 elections, during Nouri al-Maliki's tenure as Iraq's prime minister, relations between the two countries worsened to the extent that Iraq withdrew its ambassador from Damascus after bombings targeted the Iraqi foreign ministry on August 19, 2009. After the attack, Iraq publicly accused Damascus of standing behind it, going as far as to demand that the Security Council form "an international criminal court in order to try war criminals who planned and executed war crimes and crimes against humanity targeting Iraqi civilians".¹⁷

When the Iraqi parliamentary elections were held on March 7, 2010, the Iraqi List led the electoral contest by garnering 91 parliamentary seats, followed by the State of Law with 89 seats. The Syrian regime supported the Iraqi List in forming a political coalition that would have permitted it to lead the government. In coordination with Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Syria tried to convince Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist movement, to ally himself with the Iraqi List. However, Iranian pressures on both camps prevented the realization of that plan. The Syrian regime eventually backtracked, agreeing to al-Maliki's continuation as Iraq's prime minister in exchange for Iranian promises to improve relations between the two sides.¹⁸

¹⁷ Iraq Government, "The Council of Ministers Decision," 2009.

¹⁸ "President Assad receives Allawi," *al-Thawra* (Syria), March 5, 2010, http://thawra.alwehda.gov.sy/print_veiw.asp?FileName=102316799420100305005908. Three days prior to the elections, the Syrian president received the head of the Iraqi List, Ayad Allawi; on September 17, 2010, he met with the head of the Sadrist movement, Muqtada al-Sadr. Two days later, on September 19, he met once again with Ayad Allawi. However, he also received a delegation from the State of Law

The deal that resulted in the formation of the Iraqi cabinet was a moment of transformation in the Syrian regime's policy in Iraq, bringing it in line with Iran. At that point, prior to the Arab Spring, deals and links between the State of Law and the Syrian regime began to gradually develop.

The Government's Policy

During the beginning, peaceful stage of the Syrian revolution, the Iraqi government presented a neutral position to the media, calling for dialogue and the formulation of a centrist political solution that would create equality between the political regime and the opposition in Syria.

On November 27, 2011, when the Arab League began taking diplomatic action, suspending the Syrian government's delegation in the Arab League's council meetings and all the organizations affiliated with it, Iraq abstained from voting on the resolution.¹⁹ Iraq also held reservations about the resolution as it imposed economic sanctions on the Syrian government.²⁰ Iraq, however, voted in favor of the second Arab initiative made during the League's meeting on January 22, 2012, which indicated that the Syrian president should delegate his powers to the vice-president in order to form a national unity government,²¹ and expressed reservations about offering Syria's seat in the Arab League's March 2013 summit to the opposition, viewing it as a "dangerous precedent" that contravenes the Arab League's charter. Iraq was also hesitant to arm the opposition.²²

Coalition on September 14, 2010 who carried a message from al-Maliki. During the meetings of the UN General Assembly in New York, the foreign ministers of the two countries agreed to reinstate diplomatic relations and return the ambassadors. See: "A Panorama of President Assad's Most Notable Activities for 2010," *Sana*, January 1, 2011, <http://sana.sy/ara/313/2011/01/01/324289.htm>. On September 29, 2010 President Assad received an Iraqi delegation from the Iraqi List headed by Allawi. See: "Assad Expresses His Keenness to Maintain Good Relations," *al-Thawra* (Syria), September 30, 2010, <http://thawra.alwehda.gov.sy/archive.asp?FileName=47617431720100930001536>. On November 2010, it was announced that the Iraqi cabinet will be formed under the leadership of al-Maliki.

¹⁹ Policy Analysis Unit, "Is the Arab League Capable," 2011.

²⁰ The Arab League, "Lebanon Maintains Neutrality," November 2011.

²¹ The Arab League, "Outcomes Regarding Syrian Developments," January 22, 2012.

²² "Minister of Foreign Affairs Heads the Iraqi Arab League Delegation," *Iraq's Foreign Ministry Website*, March 6, 2013, <http://www.mofa.gov.iq/EN/Articles/archives.aspx>.

In terms of humanitarian aid, the Iraqi government refused to receive Syrian refugees until July 23, 2012, when military battles intensified in the cities of Deir Ez-Zour, Hassaka, and Aleppo—provinces that are close to the Syrian-Iraqi borders.²³ As of March 28, 2013, there were 121,000 Syrian refugees registered in Iraq, ninety percent of whom are concentrated in the Kurdistan Region, and the majority of the new refugees belong to families that come from the city of al-Qamishli, with others coming from Hassaka, Aleppo, and Damascus.²⁴

Domestically, al-Maliki's government adopted an exclusivist attitude toward the various social and political components in Iraq that were inspired by the revolutionary mood in Syria. In December 2012, demonstrations in Iraq called for equality and participation in the political process; in response, the government warned the demonstrators of the repercussions of the Syrian revolution, linking the Iraqi uprising and the Syrian revolution and its developments. On February 27, 2013, in an interview with the Associated Press, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki cautioned that a sectarian war could flare in Iraq and the region if the Syrian opposition succeeds in bringing down Bashar al-Assad's regime. Soon after, on March 2 and 3, 2013, Iraqi forces participated in the battles against Syrian opposition fighters at the Yarubiya border crossing, which is located between the regions of al-Yarubiya in Syria and al-Rabia in Iraq.

According to al-Maliki, the restive social and political forces in Iraq cannot be convinced to halt their protests or roll back their demands because they are creating a state of social polarization in Iraq that could lead to a civil war resulting from the consequences of the Syrian revolution. Thus, instead of working to achieve a historic internal reconciliation, and reproduce a political system in which all Iraqi social and political forces are accepted and participate,²⁵ the political authority in Iraq chose to cling to the gains it garnered as a result of regional and international deals and balances.

²³ "Government Agrees to Receive Syrian refugees," *Buratha News Agency*, July 23, 2012, <http://www.mofa.gov.iq/ab/articles/display.aspx?id=D+cw6KZmgME>.

²⁴ UN Refugee Agency, "UNHCR Concerned for Syrian Refugees," April 2, 2013.

²⁵ Yahya al-Kabeesi, "Iraq and the Syrian crisis," *al-Iraq Electronic Newspaper*, April 1, 2013, <http://iraqnewspaper.net/news.php?action=view&id=19944>.

The Popular Stance

The stance of Iraqi political forces on the Syrian revolution and the Iraqi populous are distinctly different, though this difference should not be based on a preconception that assumes Iraqi Shiites are with the Syrian regime, and, therefore, opposed to the Syrian revolution, nor that the Sunni population is supportive of the revolution. Some of the sectarian media in Iraq has presented the Syrian revolution in a manner that parallels al-Maliki's government's stance toward the revolution; this media effort proved effective among some partisan Iraqis and sectarian fanatics. This was affirmed by the many statements and pronouncements made on social media networks by Salafist extremists who not only make threats against Shiites in Syria, but also against Iraqi Shiites. Conversely, there is a broad sector of Iraqi Shiite who, while having concerns as to the possibility of the extremists taking over in Syria and the potential repercussions of the Syrian revolution, sympathize with the revolution in Syria.

In November 2011, Muqtada al-Sadr directed a letter to the Syrian opposition expressing his support for those he termed "the revolutionaries of Syria," in light of his opposition to the policies of the United States and Israel in the region, calling upon them not to depose al-Assad.²⁶ The senior religious clerics in Najaf also expressed their disapproval in sending Shiite fighters to Syria when the military confrontations in Syria began to escalate.²⁷ The results of the annual ACRPS Arab Index survey supports this proposition, revealing that 53 percent of Shiite respondents said that the optimal solution for the Syrian crisis is in changing the regime, compared to 52 percent of Sunnis; moreover, 35 percent of the Shiite respondents were in favor of Bashar al-Assad abdicating power, compared to 72 percent of Sunnis, who view this as the best solution for ending the conflict in Syria.²⁸

²⁶ "Al-Sadr supports the revolutionaries of Syria and the persistence of Assad in his position," *al-Jazeera Online*, November 17, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/86c8ef9a-e6df-42f5-8704-f2ca0c50737a>.

²⁷ "The Syrian conflict deepens 'tensions' between the clerical establishments of Najaf and Qom," *Shafaq News*, July 21, 2013, <http://www.shafaq.com/sh2/index.php/reports-investigations/61120--qq-q-q-.html>.

²⁸ Al-Masri, "Public Opinion Trends," pp. 134, 139.

Factors behind Iraq's Position

Internationally

The lack of a unified international stance toward the Syrian regime has permitted the Iraqi government a margin of maneuver and action in terms of formulating its position on Syria, particularly since the US refrained from directly interfering in the Syrian revolution. This has also allowed the Iraqi government to comprehensively coordinate with Iran, its regional ally. As a result, the majority of Iraqi decisions on Syria are in line with the Iranian policy toward the Syrian revolution.

Domestically

Domestically, the Iraqi government's decisions vis-à-vis the revolutionary phenomenon in Syria can be attributed to the following factors:

- The region along the Syrian-Iraqi borders has a homogenous and closely-linked social environment that is dominated by a number of influential Arab tribes (Tayy, al-Uqaidat, Shammar, al-Jubbur, and al-Baqqara). The Iraqi government feared that these social ties could lead to a revolutionary movement in Iraq, particularly if the revolution in Syria was to be victorious. These concerns were clearly expressed during the events in the Yarubiya border crossing, which, unlike other border crossings linking uninhabited desert regions on both sides of the borders, constitutes a link between peasant communities in Iraq and Syria. Had the Syrian opposition armed groups controlled the crossing, the path would have become open for a geographic continuity between the uprising in Iraq and the revolution in Syria. Such a scenario would have provided greater momentum for the popular protests in Iraq as well as for the Syrian revolution in terms of the ease of transporting weapons to the Syrian opposition.
- The Iraqi government fears that the Syrian opposition fighters' control over areas close to the Iraqi-Syrian borders would lead to an increase in the influence of Islamist groups since they are present among the Syrian opposition fighters. Consequently, this could lead to the deterioration of the security situation in Iraq, particularly since the country is already witnessing fierce political conflict.

The Syrian revolution brought to light the fact that Iraqi state representatives view events in Syria through the perspective of the divided Iraqi communities. Through the institutions of the state, the representatives of these communities have affirmed their affiliations and

political reference points as well as their individual positions,²⁹ which have made them incapable of producing a state discourse that goes beyond their narrow partisan interests. Iraq's future position on the Syrian revolution will likely be linked to the domestic Iraqi stance, as crystallized through the protests occurring in the Western Region of Iraq (al-Anbar), which may or may not spread further. If the protests come to an end, either because the protesters lose hope or because their demands remain unfulfilled, the end of the protests would signal a victory for al-Maliki and a continuation of his support for the Syrian regime. If the protests continue, on the other hand, the domestic situation would escalate, and Iraq would remain in a state of caution and wariness as to the evolution of events in Syria. It goes without saying that al-Maliki's government position is also linked to its extensive network of relations with Iran.

The Jordanian Stance

Since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, Jordanian diplomacy has been characterized by ambiguity and endless debate on Syria. The Jordanian monarchy continues to publicly favor a political solution as the best option to ending the crisis, and refrains from promoting any military solution to the Syrian crisis.

Early in their tenure, Jordanian King Abdullah II and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad inherited a legacy of tense relations between the two countries, though they were able to navigate through these difficult relations because of their mutual interests. Political tensions between the two countries increased in 2004 when King Abdullah warned of the formation of an Iranian-led "Shiite crescent" in the Arab Levant, including Syrian. One could argue that the regional split between the two axes—that of moderation and that of resistance—was the main reason behind Syrian-Jordanian political relations since the American occupation of Iraq in 2003; however, this does not deny the existence of cooperation on the economic level and on trans-border security issues.

²⁹ Yahya al-Kabeesi, "Iraq and the Syrian crisis," *al-Iraq Electronic Newspaper*, April 1, 2013, <http://iraqnewspaper.net/news.php?action=view&id=19944>.

Evolution of the Jordanian Position

The Syrian revolution turned into yet another tumultuous episode that has historically framed Jordanian-Syrian relations. During the first months of the Syrian revolution, the Jordanian regime tried to isolate itself from the revolutionary ambiance in the neighboring Arab countries, particularly Syria, fearing that its domestic situation would be further influenced by its surroundings, and that the ongoing peaceful protests in Jordan could escalate toward demanding political reform or a parliamentary monarchy. As a result, the Jordanian government rarely commented on the ongoing events in Syria, and abstained from offering moral or material help to either the regime or to the opposition. With the escalation of violence in Syria, the Syrian Army's entrance into Hama, the Saudi's position shifting toward supporting the Syrian revolution, and US President Barak Obama's call for the Syrian president to step down on August 15, 2011, the Jordanian government stepped up its tone, expressing concerns toward the spike in violence and bloodshed and the disproportionate use of force by the Syrian forces. The government, however, kept reiterating that Jordan would not interfere in Syria's domestic affairs and that it regards Syria's unity, security, and stability as a "red line" not to be crossed.³⁰

Jordan also voted in favor of all the Arab League resolutions that were issued on the Syrian crisis, only expressing reservations on the question of economic sanctions, which Jordan publicly stated it would not adhere to. Furthermore, unlike the Gulf countries and some other Arab states, the Syrian ambassador remained in Amman, and diplomatic relations between the two sides were maintained. In November 2011, the Jordanian king stated in an interview with the BBC: "If I were in his shoes, I would have stepped down after being certain that the person who will replace me will be capable of changing the reality that we are witnessing." The Jordanian news agency *Petra*, however, made sure to affirm that these statements were not a call for Assad to step down.³¹

By mid-2012, when the Syrian revolution became armed, Jordan warned against the potential threats that can be brought about by the ongoing war between the regime and

³⁰ "Analysts: the official Jordanian position has changed due to the escalation in violence and killing against the Syrian people," *al-Ghad newspaper*, August 9, 2011, <http://alghad.com/index.php/article/491606.html>. These statements were made during an interview with the Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasir al-Jawda on the Ruya Satellite Channel on August 7, 2011.

³¹ "The King calls on Assad to step down," *Amman Net*, November 14, 2011, <http://ar.ammannet.net/news/133089>.

the opposition forces, especially in terms of the ascendancy of Islamist fighters within the armed opposition and the concerns that Syria may break up as a result of the conflict.³² At the same time, however, Jordan insisted on allowing Syrian refugees to cross the border to take refuge in the Tal al-Zatari camp in northern Jordan. The Jordanian government has also shown relative flexibility in terms of allowing weapons to be smuggled into Syria, such as the Saudi-financed Croatian arms deal.³³ It was also clear that the Jordanian government selectively armed Syrian opposition groups, supporting specific groups with whom the Jordanian authorities had established relations of understanding or cooperation. The scale of these trans-border issues also necessitated direct security coordination with the United States, which sent 200 soldiers in April 2013 to form a potential combined force for military operations.³⁴ These developments led President Bashar al-Assad, during an interview with the official Syrian News Channel on April 17, 2013, to caution Jordan that the “fire” may spread within its borders. Even so, during a CNN interview on May 21, 2013, Jordanian Prime Minister Abdallah al-Nusur announced that Jordan was seeking to deploy Patriot missiles along the Syrian border. On May 22, 2013, Jordan hosted a conference for the Friends of Syria group, but insisted on naming the meeting the “Amman ministerial meeting on Syria in preparation for the Geneva 2 conference”.³⁵

Factors behind the Jordanian Stance

In the formulation of its foreign policy on Syria’s crisis, Jordan was influenced by regional and international elements in general, and by the nature of Jordanian-US relations specifically, in addition to its domestic circumstances and vital interests and the need to preserve its internal stability.

³² See King Abdullah’s statements in a statement issued by the Royal Office: “The Jordanian King warns against the collapse or division of Syria,” *Syria News*, May 12, 2013, http://www.syria-news.com/readnews.php?sy_seq=159584.

³³ Martin Chulov and Ian Black, “Syria: Jordan to spearhead Saudi Arabian Arms Drive,” *Guardian*, April 14, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/14/syria-jordan-spearhead-saudi-arms-drive>.

³⁴ “Al-Moumny confirms to Ammoun the arrival of 200 US soldiers,” *Ammoun News*, April 17, 2013, <http://www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=150330>.

³⁵ “Al-Nusur: Patriot Missiles Deployed Along Syrian Borders will be Allowed,” *Elaph*, May 22, 2013, <http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2013/5/813556.html?entry=Syria>.

Regional and International Influences

The international environment and the special relationship between Jordan and the US are by and large the main factors behind Jordan's foreign policy in general. In fact, relations with the US are the most influential component of all the external factors that influence Jordanian political decision-making.³⁶

Washington left Jordanian diplomacy with room to maneuver in dealing with Syria, particularly since the US kept all options open in its stance toward the Syrian revolution, while focusing on political settlement as one of the best solutions for Syria's predicament.³⁷ The harmony between the US and Jordanian positions is reflected in their opposition to military intervention and their shared concerns regarding the increased influence of extremist Islamist groups, such as the al-Nusra Front, and the flow of fighters close to al-Qaida into Syria. Both the US and Jordan express fears regarding the impact of these factors on stability in Syria and beyond, that the collapse of the local authority in Syria will likely lead to the flaring of a civil war in a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian country. This situation would no doubt be exacerbated by the rise of Islamists in the country, which would certainly impact US and Jordanian interests.

Within the framework of the pro-US "moderation axis," regional factors are also influential in affecting Jordan's stance on the Syrian revolution. For example, the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, are pressuring Jordan to intervene in the Syrian crisis by facilitating the smuggling of weapons into Syria. Saudi Arabia possesses tools that can influence the Jordanian decision, such as the financial aid that the Saudi government provides to the Jordanian treasury and the large Jordanian labor force in the Gulf.³⁸ Simultaneously, Jordan sought to adapt to the new facts on the ground in terms of the Islamist rise in the region, taking steps of rapprochement with the countries, such as

³⁶ Abd al-Hayy, *Decision-Making in Arab Regimes*, p.63.

³⁷ The Jordanian stance brings with it memories of the Jordanian rhetoric during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which differed from the views of the US foreign policy and its public discourse despite the fact that Jordan provided logistical support for Washington during its campaign against Iraq. Jordan's abstention from supporting the US during the Kuwait War and, then, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq left Jordan with "worrisome memories" because Jordan's stance in these instances led to sharp economic repercussions for the Kingdom. In 2003, Jordan took an ambiguous position due to the requirements of the international environment, as it is doing these days with Syria. Jordan had publicly opposed US military intervention in Iraq, while secretly providing logistical aid to the American forces without participating directly in the military action. Subsequently, Jordan's policy became focused on establishing relations with the new Iraqi government and training the cadres of the Iraqi army and police.

³⁸ "The Jordanian Parliament Puts an End to the Discord with the Gulf states," *al-Arab Newspaper* (London), September 9, 2013, <http://www.alarab.co.uk/?p=26249>.

Iraq, that oppose the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁹ In sum, Jordan has attempted to balance regional and international influences so as to distance itself from any direct involvement in Syria in favor of any side; thus, the only Jordanian positions that were explicitly critical of the regime came under the cover of the Arab League resolutions.

Internal Stability

Jordanian reservations during the first months of the Syrian revolution, despite the protests peaceful character, were an attempt to not only guarantee the security of the regime amidst the wave of change sweeping the Arab Homeland, but also keep Jordan away from the revolutionary atmosphere. Another influential factor was the existing economic links between Syria and Jordan, an issue in Jordanian decision-making that was made clear during the Syrian revolution. Economic interests constitute a central determinant for the extent of Jordan's decision-makers' freedom to decide between potential options.⁴⁰ Jordan's limited economic resources means it cannot ignore the broad network of commercial and economic interests that link it to Syria, nor can it disregard the vitality of Jordan's northern borders for trade as they are the cheapest import path for goods into the Jordanian market.⁴¹ According to official figures, the inflation rate in Jordan reached 7.8 percent in February 2012, compared to 6.7 percent for the same period in the previous year. This rate is likely to increase with the increasing flow of Syrian refugees.⁴² In light of these developments, and the economic and security repercussions of Syrian refugees on Jordan, the country's focus during international conferences

³⁹ The Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki visited Jordan on December 24, 2013, see: "al-Maliki visits Jordan to discuss the Syrian crisis and commercial relations," *al-Hayat*, December 23, 2012, <http://alhayat.com/Details/465420>. Jordan also signed an agreement to extend an Iraqi oil pipeline from the city of Basra to the port of Aqaba in April 2013. See: "Jordan Signs Agreement to Build Iraqi Oil Pipeline," *al-Rai newspaper* (Jordan), April 10, 2013, <http://www.alrai.com/article/578863.html>.

⁴⁰ The experience of the economic crisis that afflicted Jordan due to the severing of Jordanian-Kuwaiti and Jordanian-Iraqi relations is ever-present in the minds of Jordanian decision makers. Economic calculations force Jordan to think twice before changing its strategy in dealing with the repercussions of the Syrian revolution and drawing post-Assad scenarios. This is even more so the case because the Jordanian experience during the economic sanctions against Iraq had extremely negative repercussions on Jordan; it is expected that Jordan would also pay a price if it becomes implicated in the ongoing conflict in Syria.

⁴¹ Fahd al-Khaytan, "Will Jordan sever its diplomatic ties to Syria?," *al-Ghadd Newspaper*, February 9, 2012.

⁴² "The Jordanian economy deteriorates due to the Syrian crisis," *Jarasa News*, March 15, 2013, <http://www.gerasanews.com/index.php?page=article&id=101997>.

remains geared toward the necessity of resolving the refugee question, with the Jordanian government's persistence in placing this issue on the Security Council's agenda.

The Syrian refugee dilemma, coupled with the rise of Jihadi movements within the ranks of the Syrian opposition, necessitated strict control over security along the Jordan's northern borders in an effort to preserve Jordanian national security.⁴³ Jordan is now treating the refugees issue with a degree of caution that was not present during the country's experience with Iraqi refugees in previous years.⁴⁴ It is also expressing worries about the Syrian opposition's control of regions along its northern borders. It would be of no surprise, then, if Jordan were to continue to design its policy toward developing events in Syria in a manner that best serves Jordan's national security, economics, and security by ensuring its control of trans-border movements.

The Populace

The majority of Jordanians agree on the need for regime change in Damascus and the stepping down of Bashar al-Assad, but oppose that such a change take place through foreign intervention.⁴⁵ The Islamist political forces are especially supportive of the Syrian revolution, organizing marches and demonstrations with slogans against the Syrian

⁴³ Jordan has relatively long borders with Syria, with a stretch of more than 375 kilometers with cities and villages on both sides that are characterized by a similar social and tribal make up, which led to the building of economic and social links between the two sides of the borders.

⁴⁴ "Syrians now represent 9 percent of the total population in Jordan", *al-Maqarr Newspaper*, April 27, 2013, <http://www.maqar.com/?id=14835>. According to Jordan's official figures, the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan has reached 9 percent of the total population of the Kingdom. This percentage rises in certain governorates that are witnessing a dense presence of Syrian refugees, exceeding 25 percent in some cases. The total number of Syrian refugees who have entered Jordanian territories since the beginning of the Syrian crisis has reached 830,514 refugees. The Zatari refugee camp alone houses 175,230 Syrian refugees. Moreover, Jordan received between 2000-3000 new Syrian refugees on a daily basis. If the current rate of the flow of refugees that was registered in the first quarter of 2013 (206,000 refugees) continues throughout the year, the numbers of Syrian refugees in Jordan will greatly increase, with more than one million refugees expected to enter the country by the end of the year. Jordanian official statements estimate the cost of hosting 460,000 refugees who have entered the country, 330,000 of whom are spread throughout Jordanian cities and villages, at 380 million Jordanian Dinars (one US Dollar is equivalent to 0.708 Dinars) for the year 2013. This cost will greatly increase, to more than a billion dollars, if the numbers of refugees in the Kingdom increases as expected. It is worthy to note that the main costs right now are related to the subsidies for staple goods, which are equivalent to 130 million Dinars, followed by the cost of energy (55 million Dinars), health (40 million), security (35 million), education (13 million), water (15 million), and others. See: "Al-Nusur: Syrian Refugees Will Cost More than 1 Billion US Dollars," *al-Ghadd Newspaper*, March 28, 2013.

⁴⁵ Al-Masri, "Public Opinion Trends".

regime and escalating their political pressures in order to prod the government to take a firmer and clearer stand toward the regime in Syria. On the other hand, there is a nationalist and leftist political elite that is worried by the evolution of events in Syria and continues to caution the Jordanian government against escalating its position on Syria or responding to Western and Gulf pressures. As such, the official and popular consensus in Jordan calls for a distancing from any military arrangements that target Syria or any foreign military presence on Jordanian soil. There remains an ongoing incompatibility between popular demands that support the revolution and sympathize with it, calling for al-Assad's overthrow, and a lack of a consensus within the Jordanian government as to the appropriate stance that should be adopted toward the Syrian regime.

In light of the above ambiguities, Jordan's stance on Syria's predicament, ultimately bases itself on political, security, and economic considerations. Jordan strives to lead a balanced policy that stems from realistic factors that could help the country strike a balance between its interests and its alliances at the lowest possible cost. One constant element in Jordan's official position on Syria, so far, has been its refusal to engage in any military intervention or provide facilities for foreign troops planning an intervention. At the same time, the Jordanian government has consistently preferred a solution that guarantees that Syria will not be divided and turned into a haven for extremist groups, the Islamist extremists will not take power after al-Assad. This represents the essence of the current Jordanian political posture, so long as the US is unwilling to change its policies toward Syria. It is likely that the Jordanian policy toward the Syrian revolution will remain unchanged unless:

- Jordan is pressured to exit the "grey area" in which it has skillfully remained throughout the duration of the Syrian revolution, especially if a shift in Jordanian strategy becomes a US demand.
- Amman concludes that the southern region of Syria, which is only a few kilometers away from its northern borders, has become a threat to its national security.

The potential for developments of Jordan's position on Syria are endless, regardless of whether the Syrian regime falls. However, the deepening of the crisis, the continuation of the conflict, and Jordan's geographic location will make it harder for the country to deal with the Syrian question in the future in the same ambiguous manner it has adopted to date.

The Syrian Revolution and the Arab Levant

The political input from neighboring Arab countries continually intersects with Syria's domestic environment, influencing the Syrian revolution and being influenced by it. This may be an unavoidable fact in the case of neighboring states with complex identity make-ups; however, these political inputs should be formulated in a rational manner that contributes to the general welfare of society. Moreover, these political initiatives should be decided by the political authority, and everyone must, consequently, submit to the will of the state. By reviewing the positions of Arab countries that border Syria, one can find that the homogenously-sectarian political communities do not abide by the decisions of their states, or that certain communities exclude others and monopolize the political decision. There is also the possibility that the ruling regime's security will become intermixed with the state's national security in the framework of US sponsorship and the management of regional balances. The Syrian revolution has made it clear that, by all standards, the concept of national security is lacking in the countries of the Arab Levant because of:

- The lack of the edification of the concept of state: Newly-created nation-states that were the result of colonial deals and agreements had barely earned their independence when they fell under the grip of despotic totalitarian regimes. These regimes merged the institutions of the state with those of the political regime, turning these institutions into a tool for repressing the people. These regimes operated through an independent institutional logic rather than working to build a cohesive national state. Furthermore, they worked to build non-civic social alliances that became the main pillar of the political regime, reinforcing the power of tribal, sectarian, and ethnic groups, thus preventing the enshrinement of a national state.
- The frailty of national identity: Ruling regimes in the Arab Levant have sought to control the identity-based societal diversity in order to gain loyalties and ensure the longevity of their rule, instead of working to enshrine national identity. While these regimes occasionally disseminated Arab national sentiments, they have failed in achieving economic development, obfuscated freedom and democracy and social justice, and deprived citizens from most human rights, allowing the persistence of segmentary identities that were inherited from the colonial period, and have overcome the national identity itself.

- Foreign intervention: Foreign intervention is largely the result of the Levantine states' inability to guarantee their national security in the absence of an Arab concept of national security, particularly since neighboring countries share a similar sectarian or ethnic makeup to the Levantine states. Coupled with the weakness of national identity, such conditions inevitably lead to external interferences in local and Arab affairs in accordance with the national interests of these foreign powers. These powers have regional agendas that serve their national security and vital interests in the Arab Levant region. The question becomes even more complex when these external states become organically linked to the Levantine political and sectarian communities, making democratic transition in the Arab Levant an almost fantastical possibility. This would be the case even if these local communities acquiesced to an agreement on the basis of building a democratic regime, but they would nonetheless risk falling prey to the competition and struggle between competing external powers, which would once again lead to the pitfall of political sectarianism.

Given that sectarianism has been institutionalized in Lebanon and Iraq, and with its central position in the Arab Levant, Syria represented a role model that could be counted upon in building a political system that did not politicize sub-identities. In the future, Syria could become capable of building a genuine democratic regime that can constitute a model to follow for neighboring countries. However, if local Syrian elites fail to achieve this, the entire Arab Levant would be threatened with disintegration, and the Palestinian cause could also fall victim to this collapse. The outcome of the Syrian revolution and its impact on the neighboring Levantine countries is likely to shape the coming regional system, and the new cleavages in the region will be either based on ideological divisions, sectarian divisions, or regional axes that have shared interests.

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