The Middle East: regional disorder

by Lawrence G. Potter

U.S. President Donald Trump, First lady Melania Trump (2nd from R), Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (2nd from L) and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (L) put their hands on an illuminated globe during the inauguration ceremony of the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on May 21, 2017. (BANDAR ALGALOUD / SAUDI ROYAL COUNCIL /ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)

As the first term of President Donald J. Trump passes the halfway point, the Middle East remains a region in turmoil. A century after the map of the region was decided by colonial powers, states that never achieved coherence or legitimacy are failing. There is a crisis in leadership, with autocrats condemned for incompetence, corruption and greed. The future of borders and the nation state itself has been increasingly called into question as non-state actors such as Islamic State (ISIS) and Al Qaeda carve out roles for themselves. Hope for democracy and change had been high as popular uprisings broke out in the Arab Spring revolts of 2011. Although the leadership was overturned in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, the uprisings failed. Since then, there has been a feeling of hopelessness and apprehension about the future throughout the region.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq initiated by the administration of George W. Bush (2001–09) have never really ended, and political stability in both remains precarious. The

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People wave Turkish national flags as they stand near the "July 15 Martyrs Bridge" (Bosphorus Bridge) in Istanbul on July 15, 2018. Turkey commemorated the second anniversary of a bloody coup attempt, which was followed by a series of purges in the public sector and changes to boost President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's powers. (OZAN KOSE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

civil war raging in Syria since 2011 has practically destroyed that country, with half a million civilians killed and over ten million displaced. In Yemen, recent estimates indicate 56,000 civilian and combatant deaths between January 2016 and October 2018 in the war which commenced in 2014. In one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in the world, over 14 million people face starvation.

The three most populous states in the Middle East, Egypt (97.0 million), Iran (81.6 million), and Turkey (81.3 million) are all undergoing serious internal challenges. The younger generation that drove the Arab Spring protests has been bitterly disappointed that its aims of democracy and better governance have not been met. This is especially evident in Egypt where President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, in office since 2014, imposed a new authoritarianism after ousting the democratically elected Mohammad al-Morsi a year earlier. The Green Movement in Iran mobilized millions in anti-government protests in 2009 before being crushed by security forces. In Turkey, major anti-government protests in Istanbul were put down violently in 2013 and there have been widespread arrests and purges since a failed coup in the summer of 2016. In the Persian Gulf, rulers alarmed by demands for political reform responded by blaming Iran, seeking to buy off political opposition and stepping up internal repression. A blame game is taking place among governments that, terrified of people power, are acting defensively.

Why is this collapse happening now? According to Lebanese journalist Rami G. Khouri, there is a decline of sovereignty in the Arab world that has led to or exacerbated many current problems. He notes that the continuous development of Arab nations that took place from the 1920s to the 1970s has broken down. "We are now living through a gradual series of simultaneous adjustments at national, regional and global levels that have been taking place across the region since the end of the Cold War in 1990 or so. The Saudi-Yemen situation is important because it captures developments at all three levels at the same time, and possibly marks a historic turning point at which regional powers mature in their self-confidence and capabilities, and step up and take greater charge of political dynamics across the region." Proxy wars have broken out in Libya and Syria as neighboring states seek to impose military solutions for regional instability.

In the Arab world, Khouri believes this crisis is the result of failed statehood, including "stunted citizenship, a non-existent social contract, a lack of meaningful citizen participation in national policymaking, and zero real accountability mechanisms to check the excesses or failures of the state." José Antonio Sabadell, a Spanish diplomat who studies "the politics of frustration in the Arab world," found that it "is in the middle of a process of deep social and political change. It has the potential to alter domestic politics and the regional strategic balance and to re-define political ideologies and identities. The emergence of Arab peoples as key political actors, in combination with widespread, profound and mounting popular frustration, is a game changer."

Iran and Turkey, major non-Arab states, are under duress due to autocratic leadership, corruption, economic collapse, media suppression and human rights abuses. Forty years after the revolution, Iranians are fed up with an intrusive and inefficient state, which has led to an outbreak of anti-government protests throughout the country since the winter of 2017–18. Sadegh Zibakalam, a professor of politics at Tehran University interviewed by *The Guardian,* says the situation has become so bad that "people see no light at the end of the tunnel. In no period of time before this, we've had so much anguish, so much anxiety, so much despair about the future of the country." In Turkey, strongman rule by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, re-elected in June 2018, has sought to increase the role of religion and roll back many reforms and rights previously taken for granted. By the fall of 2018, the collapse of the value of the Turkish currency caused by misguided economic policies imposed by Erdoğan led to a major loss of confidence in the government.

A new political dynamic is at work, where "the proliferation of failed and weakened states has created new opportunities for competition and intervention, favoring new actors and new capabili-

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ties," according to Marc Lynch of George Washington University. "Regional dynamics are no longer determined by formal alliances and conventional conflicts between major states. Instead, power operates through influence peddling and proxy warfare." The interlocking regional crises and terrorist groups that respect no borders are making clear the inability of states to impose order.

Although states remain the primary actors, according to Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a scholar at Rice University, "they now confront an array of non-state actors and processes, following programmes that do not reflect a coherent 'national' vision, including multinational corporations, trans-national networks and diaspora ethnic and religious groups. Hence, in the era of globalisation and trans-nationalism, states no longer are the sole actors and shapers of policy."

Aside from dysfunctional politics, societies throughout the Middle East are under great stress due to environmental reasons such as climate change, drought, overpumping of ground water, deforestation and higher temperatures. These have barely been addressed by governments. Eastern Syria suffered a major drought from 2007 to 2010, forcing one and a half million people to flee to the cities and contributing to the current anti-state revolts. In Iran, drought has forced many farmers to abandon their villages and end up, disgruntled and unemployed, in the cities. Lake Urumieh in Iran's northwest shares the fate of the Aral Sea and has shrunk to a fraction of its original size. Iranians are shocked that the Zayandeh Rud, a major river running through their storied city of Isfahan where people used to swim and fish, has now been reduced to a dust bowl.

Throughout the Middle East, the changing media and information environment, including the rise of satellite tv channels and widespread use of social media, have led to a much better-informed populace and broken the state's historic monopoly on information. Al Jazeera, opened in Qatar in 1996, has fearlessly aired regional problems and criticized most regional leaders. It played a major role in covering the unrest in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, although it was faulted for holding back when it came to protests in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, not to mention the internal situation in Qatar. In 2003 Saudi Arabi launched its own network, Al Arabiya, in Dubai as a counter to Al Jazeera and is now setting up media to target the non-Arab Middle East. In his final column in the Washington Post last October 17, murdered Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi appealed for a free press in the Arab world, saying it is "facing its own version of an Iron Curtain, imposed not by external actors but through domestic forces vying for power."

A general view shows the "Si-o-Se Pol" bridge (33 Arches bridge) over the Zayandeh Rud river in Isfahan, which now runs dry due to water extraction before it reaches the city, April 11, 2018. (ATTA KENARE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

Governments are on notice that they must take public opinion into account with their policies. In the backlash to fraudulent elections in Iran in the summer of 2009, a "Twitter Revolution" attracted worldwide support for the protesters, with over two million tweets by half a million users (many from outside Iran). In the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 Twitter was used to communicate, and helped draw 80,000 protestors to Tahrir Square and the streets of Cairo on January 25. The first thing governments do when faced with protests is disable the internet. States now heavily invest in media wars and propaganda to promote their viewpoint and mold public opinion. In Washington, the battle of the consultants and think tanks rages: wealthy Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have poured millions into trying to mold American opinion in their favor.

The U.S. does not have solutions to these problems and there has been an exodus of experienced hands from the Foreign Service under the Trump administration. Nearly two years into his term, the U.S. still does not have ambassadors in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, although a nomination was recently proposed for the latter. The president has proclaimed his wish to reduce American engagement in the region but, as in the case of President Obama's intention to "pivot to Asia," this has proved to be impossible. "Ultimately, the U.S.' position in the Middle East reflects its broader retreat from global leadership," according to Vali Nasr, Dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C.

The process of making policy toward the Middle East as it has been practiced in Washington for decades has clearly broken down and policymaking has become more politicized than ever before. "The U.S. no longer has the power or the standing to impose a regional order on its own terms," according to Professor Lynch. "In all likelihood, U.S. hegemony in the Middle East will never be restored because the region has fundamentally changed....The damage is too deep."

Many have suggested that it is a good time to take stock of U.S. policies toward the region. Robert E. Hunter, former U.S. ambassador to NATO, notes that "despite intense rhetoric about threats to the U.S. homeland from the Middle East, there are in fact few....continuing U.S. security requirements in the Middle East derive almost entirely from partners' concerns and U.S. responses." James Russell of the Naval Postgraduate School suggests "the Middle East has lost its strategic significance for the U.S., and the landscape is littered with America's many failed attempts to save the region from itself."

A region in turmoil

How did the Middle East reach the crossroads it is at today? The roots of the current regional disorder are usually traced to the aftermath of World War I, when the core of the Ottoman Empire was carved up into six new states: Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Transjordan, with the later addition of Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Many Arabs resented the arbitrary nature of the borders they were allotted. The Qajar Empire which ruled Persia for the long 19th century was replaced in 1925 by the modern state of Iran, ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty. Major groups such as the Palestinians and the Kurds were bitterly disappointed that they did not achieve statehood at this time, which has led to recurrent political tensions.

With the fall of empires in the wake of war, the nation-state became the most common political unit. However, as Prof. Lisa Anderson of Columbia University notes, "the interwar efforts to fasten the institutions of European-style states to the populations of the region introduced several deeply dysfunctional dynamics into modern political life. They established expectations for government that would prove impossible to meet while imposing a system of rule that, far from creating citizens, often reinforced nonstate identities and created deep communal resentment and anger."

Because many people found themselves minorities in newly created states, laws were introduced to protect "minority rights." In a study of French Mandate Syria (1923–43), Benjamin Thomas White concludes that "in many ways, the history of the nation-state is the history of minorities: that is, the history of the processes that lead certain groups to be defined as 'minorities'." Concern for minority rights has been a thread running throughout the 20th century.

A Turkish Youth Corps with a flag marches through the streets of Aleppo, which was part of the Ottoman Empire until the end of WWI. The Sinai and Palestine Campaign was a secondary theater of war between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain during World War I (1915–18). (BERLINER VERLAG/ARCHIV/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES)

Egypt, Iran, and to some extent Turkey, retain well-established historic identities on a par with a few other countries like China, Russia, India and Japan. However, in many Arab states carved out of the multinational and multiethnic Ottoman Empire, identity and loyalty were not so simple. New states tried to invent traditions to lend themselves legitimacy, with the objective of cultivating a sense of nationalism that aimed to subsume differences of religion, tribe and ethnicity. Thus, the political priority for Iraqi governments from 1920 to 1990 was to create an Iraqi national identity that would supersede sub-identities such as Sunni, Shi'a and Kurd. To some extent this was successful: in Baghdad many Sunnis married Shi'as and joked they were "Sushis." Likewise, in Iran, starting in the 1920s the Pahlavi dynasty sought to create a secular national state, led by Shi'i Persians, with little recognition accorded to minority ethnic, tribal, religious or linguistic groups.

The six-day war in June 1967 was a political turning point for the Middle East. Israel delivered a humiliating blow to the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian armies and tripled the size of its territory. It took the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) from Jordan; the Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt; and the Golan Heights from Syria. Over 200,000 refugees, including many Palestinians who had taken refuge on the West Bank in 1948, fled to Jordan. The sense of frustration and despair that was widespread among Arabs was particularly acute among Palestinians.

Pan-Arabism, a movement promoting Arab unity, was popular in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s, but was reckoned to have failed. After another war with Israel in 1973, President Anwar Sadat turned to "Egypt first" patriotism. Many increasingly turned to Islam as an authentic indigenous ideology. "The

ubiquity of Islamism is a thoroughly modern phenomenon and represents a major shift in the political landscape of the Arab world," according to Michael Wahid Hanna, Senior Fellow at The Century Foundation. "Significantly, this rising Islamic religiosity also occurred alongside the withering of liberal political thought in Egypt...."

Religious revival led to the rise of charismatic religious and political figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. The Islamic revival alarmed the U.S. and other Western countries, which previously associated Islam with stagnation and regarded it as a fatalistic faith that impeded economic and political progress. For the West, the new "political Islam" was associated instead with revolutionary activity and violence, and became a rationale for terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS.

This young Iranian soldier shouts "Allahu Akhbar," God is Great, from the trenches during the Iran-Iraq War, in Ein Khosh, Iran, November 1982. (RON EDMONDS/AP PHOTO)

Rise of sectarianism

Three major conflicts in the Persian Gulf—the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), the Gulf War (1990–91) and the Iraq War (2003–11)—were immensely destructive in terms of lives and infrastructure and raised the level of distrust among people in the littoral states. The Iran–Iraq War for the first time introduced a sectarian dimension to regional conflicts. In both countries, but especially the latter, the demonization of the opponent led to a stronger sense of national identity. Both waged a fierce struggle on the ideological and propaganda fronts. They invoked several broad themes: Arab against Persian, Sunni against Shi'a, and pan-Arabism against pan-Islam. Such discourse served to reinforce mutual hostility even after a cease-fire was finally agreed on.

In the wake of the Gulf War in the spring of 1991, violent uprisings of Iraq's Shi'i Arabs (about 55% of the population) and Kurds (around 20%) broke out and were brutally put down. Saddam Hussein's government, in an attempt to divide opponents, then instituted a process of "retribalization" in which subnational identities were emphasized and Sunni Arabs (about 18%) were firmly in control. This policy went against everything Ba'athism, the state ideology, stood for and has contributed to the unraveling of Iraq in the post-Saddam era.

The fall of the Saddam government in 2003 after another war led to a major change in the status of Shi'as throughout the region and enhanced the power of Iran. For the first time, Iraq had a Shi'a-led government, and Sunnis in Iraq, as well as the Persian Gulf monarchies, were on the defensive. In many states the Shi'as were now perceived as a security problem, not just a religious group. Vali Nasr wrote in 2006, "by liberating and empowering Iraq's Shi'ite majority, the Bush administration helped launch a broad Shi'ite revival that will upset the sectarian balance in Iraq and the Middle East for years to come." This warning proved prescient.

The rise of the Shi'a throughout the Arab world coincided with the rise of the Sunni-led Arab monarchies of the Gulf. Long on the periphery of empires, today the Gulf with its mega oil cities like Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha is increasingly regarded as the center of the Middle East, displacing historic cities such as Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad. These centers of Islamic civilization and culture are now impoverished and overwhelmed with domestic problems. The globalization of the Gulf has transformed it at a rapid rate, and people throughout the region have flocked there to work and play.

Arab Spring: a 'false dawn'

The most significant event precipitating the current turmoil in the Middle East was the widespread uprisings of 2010–11, dubbed the Arab Spring.

People demonstrate during a rally in Tahrir Square on February 18, 2011, in Cairo, Egypt. Thousands of people rallied in Tahrir Square calling on Egypt's military to quicken reforms and to celebrate the one week anniversary of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak being forced from power by mass protests. (CARSTEN KOALL/GETTY IMAGES)

One after the other, rulers were overthrown in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, there were major protests in Bahrain, and a popular uprising began in Syria which continues to the present day. These were "the most dramatic sign of mass discontent in modern Arab history," according to Khouri. "Millions of citizens who had reached a breaking point spontaneously rebelled against their ruling elites; yet those elites today with their foreign supporters continue to ignore most of the uprisings' underlying drivers of discontent and disparity."

The uprisings failed due to brutal crackdowns by the security forces, the lack of effective leadership and a realistic program for alternative rule. Steven A. Cook of the Council on Foreign Relations has characterized the Arab Spring as a "false dawn," and found that Egypt's authoritarianism was only reinforced: "the profoundly repressive state of Egypt's politics exceeded anything under Mubarak, but the underlying patterns of politics and the means of establishing control were largely the same." Hanna finds that "amid this current resurgence of Arab authoritarianism and Islamist militancy, both liberalism and secularism have had little traction.…The notion of open and pluralistic societies in the Arab world is more distant than ever."

The popular anger reflected by the Arab Spring and in the wake of the 2009 election in Iran was also reflected in Turkey. Major anti-government protests broke out in Gezi Park in Istanbul and throughout Turkey in the summer of 2013. The original demands were to prevent the destruction of the park, in the heart of Istanbul, and replace it with a shopping mall and restored Ottoman military barracks. They later focused on opposition to President Erdoğan's policies, notably promotion of an Islamist agenda, restrictions on freedom of speech and his increasing autocracy. The occupation of the park by thousands of people was put down violently by Turkish forces. As the official media downplayed the protests, demonstrators turned to social media to communicate with supporters. Like Tahrir Square in Cairo and the Pearl Roundabout in Manama (Bahrain), Gezi park became a large protest camp with thousands of supporters of different political inclinations, all determined to stand up to the state. Clearly, the display of people power at these major protests in Iran, the Arab world and Turkey presage a new kind of politics in the Middle East and the demands of a new generation to be heard.

The feeling of pan-Arab solidarity, thought to be in decline, was clearly a motivating factor in the Arab Spring. It was also a reminder of the artificial boundaries of states. The sanctity of borders had already been breached in 1990 when Iraq sought to take over Kuwait. ISIS, a terrorist group that sought to found a territorial "caliphate," occupied and governed much of Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2017, making the border irrelevant. This was a powerful challenge to the existing state system, as was the attempt by Kurds in northern Iraq to take advantage of widespread disorder by forming their own state. They held a referendum in September 2017 that endorsed independence, but with no outside support they were soon pushed back on the ground by Iraqi forces. Disregard for Yemen's sovereignty has led to a carving up of the state into spheres of influence controlled by outsiders and terrorist groups. This calling into question of regional borders is a new and unsettling feature of modern politics.

Regional roundup

Saudi Arabia in transition

In June 2017 the new Saudi king appointed his son, Mohammad bin Salman (known as MbS) as crown prince. With a reputation for acting impetuously and brooking no criticism, MbS quickly amassed great power. He downplayed the role of consensus and consultation that has always been the trademark of the Al Saud in favor of more autocratic rule. He sees himself as the voice of the younger generation and the reformer that his country needs. Changes such as reining in the religious police, allowing women to drive and opening movie theaters are unprecedented. However, he has struck back harshly at critics, religious or secular, at home or abroad. Mild criticism by Canada of Saudi treatment of two human rights activists led in August to a break in relations. The most egregious example so far was MbS's role, confirmed by the CIA, in the murder Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul last October.

In the face of a serious drop in oil revenues that started in mid-2014, the Saudis have been draining their financial reserves at a rate that cannot be sustained. According to the IMF, by the end of 2018 they will have run through 40% of their massive foreign exchange reserves, worth over $700 billion in 2014. In response, the future crown prince introduced a plan, Vision 2030, in the spring of 2016. This is a major set of reforms that aim to reduce government subsidies, cut dependency on oil, provide jobs for the younger generation, and empower the private sector. The announced intention was to sell off 5% of the shares of Saudi Aramco, the state oil company, which was expected to be valued at $2 trillion and raise $100 million to finance the plan. However, by the fall of 2018 Vision 2030 was in jeopardy and the IPO indefinitely postponed. Many wealthy Saudis are reluctant to invest domestically, fearing the government will confiscate their assets. Although it needed their cooperation to implement Vision 2030, the government sequestered 300 royals and businessmen in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh from November 2017 to February 2018 and subjected them to an unprecedented financial shakedown. Foreign investors

are hesitating to invest in a country with so little transparency and protections under the law.

MbS has been particularly active in foreign policy. The new, more muscular approach is inspired by a desire to take advantage of the regional turmoil and confidence that he has the support of Washington. The Gulf monarchies are challenged by Iranian-supported Shi'i militias in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and fear new demands for political and social recognition on the part of their own Shi'i minorities.

For some time, both Saudi Arabia and Iran have engaged in heated rhetoric couched in sectarian terms. How serious is this war of words? Although Saudi Arabia is obsessed with the Iranian threat, the Iranians do not seem too worried about Saudi but keep their focus on relations with major states such as the U.S., Russia and China, as well as Europe. Such rhetoric, however, plays a role in poisoning public opinion and is a factor used to justify the "proxy wars" around the region. According to Professor Lynch, "although Arab fears of Iranian expansionism are grounded in reality, those anxieties have always been far out of proportion to actual Iranian power. Perversely, however, the more that Arab states do to confront Iran, the stronger it becomes."

Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (L) is welcomed by the U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Mattis (R) during his official visit in Washington, D.C., on March 21, 2018. (BANDAR ALGALOUD/SAUDI ROYALCOUNCIL/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)

Game of thrones

The dispute that broke out in June 2017 between Qatar and a quartet of adversaries—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt—has shuffled regional alliances, benefited Iran, and caused a serious policy dilemma for the U.S. Although ostensibly about Qatari perfidy, it is a continuation of intermittent Saudi attempts over a long period of time to expand their power throughout the Arabian peninsula.

Statements attributed to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the amir of Qatar, on May 23, 2017, allegedly expressed support for Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and Israel. The Qatari government denied such remarks had been made, and claimed, evidently correctly, that hackers were spreading false rumors. Shortly thereafter, their adversaries withdrew their ambassadors from Doha and expelled Qatari diplomats, closed their airspace to Qatar Airways, the national carrier, and sealed the land border between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, denying vital food imports to Qatar. The campaign against Qatar was remarkably mean-spirited: Qataris were even prevented from performing the Hajj, a religious obligation, to Mecca last fall.

The conflict forms part of the fallout of the Arab Spring, in which states took different approaches toward political Islam and the role of elections. Although both Saudi Arabia and Qatar follow the austere Wahhabi school of Islam, the Qataris observe a more moderate version. Like the Turks, the Qataris support the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist democratic movement which is abhorred by the Saudis, who have long promoted the ultra-conservative Wahhabi strain of the faith. The quarrel is not about sectarian issues: for example, Shi'i Iran came to the rescue of Sunni Qatar while Saudi Arabia has taken steps to reconcile with Shi'i leaders in Iraq. The competing versions of Islam promoted by Turkey and Saudi Arabia amount to a struggle for the allegiance of all Muslims.

This attempt to pressure Qatar has now backfired and put Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the back foot. President Trump's military and foreign policy advisers persuaded him that the value of the U.S.'s major air base in the Middle East, Al Udeid near Doha, Qatar, was too high to be jeopardized by this quarrel. Despite U.S. attempts to get the parties to settle, the dispute continued to be stalemated through the fall of 2018 and in all likelihood will not have an early solution. Most concerning, it has led to the virtual collapse of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), made up of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman), supposedly a shield against external threats and a model for regional cooperation.

Iran at a Crossroads

In Iran, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the nuclear accord and re-imposition of sanctions has led to consternation, a feeling of betrayal and serious economic consequences. The Iranian currency rapidly plunged in value, from 43,000 rials per dollar at the start of 2018 to 190,000 per dollar in early October. European companies that had rushed to invest, such as Daimler, Siemens and Peugeot, were forced to pull

Iranians stage a protest against Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal after Friday Prayer at Tehran University's campus in Tehran, Iran on May 11, 2018. (FATEMEH BAHRAMI/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)

out or face secondary sanctions. The French company Total, which planned to develop natural gas in the Persian Gulf, cancelled and the concession was awarded to the Chinese.

Iranian oil exports, which amounted to 2.5 million barrels per day (bpd) in April 2018, have fallen steeply and by October only came to 1.1 million bpd. With fluctuating exchange rates, rampant corruption and lack of protection under the law, many foreign companies were not about to enter or re-enter Iran whether it was under sanctions or not. Iranian banks are cut off from the world financial system and suffer from mismanagement, capital shortfall and a lack of transparency. Although the government blames its economic woes on U.S. actions, the lack of reform has turned away potential investors despite the large consumer market.

The multiplying internal problems have led, since January 2018, to widespread protests. So far they have attracted a different demographic than the Green Movement of 2009, which appealed to the middle and upper classes and was focused on Tehran. At that time initial protests about a fraudulent presidential vote count morphed into demands for a complete overhaul of the political system, with an emphasis on the republican rather than the Islamic part. Today, poorer Iranians who have been the worst hit by government blunders have risen up spontaneously all over the country and condemned clerical leaders for a gamut of woes, ranging from high prices and shortages of water and electricity to ruining the environment and imposing strict Islamic rules. So far there is no clear leadership or agenda and these protests are not a serious threat. However, they amount to a vote of no confidence and demonstrate that, as in other parts of the Middle East, people have lost fear of their government.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (L) presents his official approval to Hassan Rouhani, who was re-elected in presidential elections in May 2017, during a ceremony at Khamenei's office in Tehran, Iran on August 3, 2017. (IRANIAN LEADER'S PRESS OFFICE/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)

Hardliners have increased pressure on President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate, who was chastised by supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei for selling out to the Americans. The Revolutionary Guard has widened its role in foreign policy at the expense of the Foreign Ministry and has been in the forefront of exerting Iran's influence abroad. Iran has created and worked closely with Shi'i militias to implement its goals of being the power behind the scenes in Iraq and keeping President Bashar al-Assad in office in Syria. Because Iran lacks the funds to modernize its army (in 2017 it spent $16 billion on defense while Saudi Arabia spent $76.7 billion), it has specialized in asymmetric warfare, exemplified by small speedboats harassing American warships. According to Nasr, "if Iran's behavior appears more threating today than it once did, that is not because Iran is more intent on confronting its rivals and sowing disorder than before but because of the drastic changes the Middle East has experienced over the last decade and a half."

In light of the anti-Iranian rhetoric emanating from Washington, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv, Iran feels vulnerable. The Saudi crown prince ominously warned in May 2017 that any future battle would be fought inside Iran, not the Gulf states, hinting

at Saudi support for Iranian minorities such as the Arabs, Kurds and Baluch. Iranians were shocked by an attack on Revolutionary Guard forces during a parade in Ahwaz (in southwest Iran) last September 22, claimed by a local Arab liberation group. (The Islamic State dubiously also claimed credit, while Iran blamed the U.S. and Saudi for being behind the attackers.)

Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, is 79 and ailing and at his death all issues will be on the table. The original "reign of the ayatollahs" has now morphed into rule by the security services, above all the Revolutionary Guard, who are expected to fight hard to preserve their power and exclude reformists and moderates. In a recent exchange of vitriol with President Trump, Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force, the section of the guard that operates abroad, said the U.S. should deal with him, not Rouhani, indicating where the real power lies. Over the years Khamenei has built up a "deep state" of loyalists among security, intelligence and economic elements, according to analysts Sanam Vakil and Hossein Rassam. The Guard seeks to preserve Iran's revolutionary legacy and has strong economic interests in a state that has rewarded them well. They will make it very difficult to select a moderate successor, however much the majority of Iranians may wish it.

Brief takes

Iraq and Syria

U.S. forces occupied Iraq from the 2003 invasion down to their exit in 2011, when the Iraq War ended. Many returned in 2014 to battle ISIS, and about 9,000 remained in the fall of 2018. A major U.S. concern is that pro-Iranian militias do not gain the upper hand and the Baghdad government remains friendly. The largest winner in parliamentary elections of May 2018 was a party led by the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr. In October a new government was formed under prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and a new president, Barham Salih, who is Kurdish. They are regarded as capable technocrats who are non-sectarian, have good relations with both Tehran and Washington and are expected to maintain continuity. The future role of Iran in Iraq is problematic, as Iraqi nationalism is rising and many Iraqis resist their influence.

Syria has been tearing itself apart since a major anti-government insurgency broke out seven years ago. There are actually two conflicts taking place, a civil war centered in the west, and the fight against Islamic State in the east. Thanks to major assistance from Iran and Russia, the Bashar al-Assad government is on the brink of regaining control. The U.S. has few troops on the ground (currently about 2,000 to fight the Islamic State). President Trump, like Obama, does not want to commit U.S. troops. In response to use of chemical weapons by the Assad government, Washington mounted airstrikes in 2017 and 2018. The Gulf Arab states, mainly Saudi and the UAE, have funded some of the insurgents, and Turkey, burdened with 3.5 million Syrian refugees, has also sent troops, making it a dangerous and volatile arena. In a "shadow war," Israel has launched airstrikes against military assets of Iran in Syria. The Islamic State is much weaker now than a year ago, and an open question is whether U.S. troops may clash with Iranian troops or pro-Iranian militias there in the future.

Israel and the Palestinians

As soon as he assumed office Trump, noted for his "bromance" with Prime Minister Netanyahu, announced he would focus on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. Progress, however, has stalled. Designating Jerusalem the capital of Israel, cutting aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides support to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and shutting the Palestine Liberation Organization office in Washington reinforced a perceived tilt toward Israel that had been avoided by previous administrations. By late 2018 the peace plan being developed by Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, still had not been announced and it was evident that the U.S. has lost all credibility as an interlocutor. Robert Malley, president of the International Crisis Group, observed "by punishing the Palestinians, the administration unwittingly is liberating them from former restraints under which they had operated since [the] Oslo [Accords of 1993] in order to placate the U.S. and

People walk past signs in Jerusalem on May 13, 2018, that show support for U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to move the country's Embassy to the city. (KYODO NEWS/GETTY IMAGES)

Yemeni soldiers loyal to the Shi'ite Houthi rebels march in the capital Sana'a on October 16, 2018, to protest against the Saudi-led intervention in the country. (MOHAMMED HUWAIS/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

Israel. What gradually removing those shackles from Palestinians will mean in terms of the future is unclear."

Stalemate in Yemen

Perhaps the greatest tragedy in the region is unfolding in Yemen. The war there started in 2014, when the Houthis, a rebel group loosely aligned with Iran but following a different form of Shi'ism, took control of the northwest, including the capital, Sana'a. A military coalition led by Saudi Arabia began bombing Yemen in March 2015 to oust the Houthis and restore the government to power. However, so far this has not been successful and according to the UN, more than 16,700 civilians have been killed or injured. The Saudis regard the Yemen conflict as a war of necessity against a failed state on their border that is a haven for terrorists and nonstate actors that are proxies for Iran. A UN report issued in August 2018 accused the coalition of actions that may amount to war crimes, including air strikes on civilians, torture and rape of detainees. The Houthis, also, came in for criticism and may also have committed war crimes. The coalition has imposed major restrictions on shipping and air travel, preventing the delivery of food and medical supplies and leading to widespread starvation. Water and sewage systems have been disabled and a major cholera epidemic broke out in 2016 which was ongoing in the fall of 2018.

Terrorism

Fighting terrorism was part of the rationale for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, an assessment released by the White House last October concluded that 17 years of counter-terrorism strategy by the U.S. had only been a "mixed success." Although the Islamic State only controls 1% of the territory it formerly held in Iraq and Syria, it remains a global threat and still attracts recruits. It has recently mounted operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sinai peninsula in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Al Qaeda likewise retains a global network of jihadists. Countering terrorism remains a primary mission of the U.S. military and a reason for the U.S. presence in the Middle East.

U.S. policy in the age of Trump

The current disorder in the Middle East poses a formidable challenge to the U.S. This is a reflection of the regional confusion about what to do: all governments feel vulnerable and at the mercy of transnational forces they cannot control. The advent of the Trump administration has made things worse since many states do not know what U.S. policies are and how long they will be in place. *The New York Times* editorialized, "articulations of foreign policy by President Trump may not always be what they seem.... Mr. Trump has a well-established record of undermining [his officials'] pronouncements, and even his own, with a tweet." The result is that, in the opinion of Robert Hunter, "U.S. policy goals in the region, defined primarily in terms of American interests, are still opaque, and may not have been formulated at all, and certainly not in any comprehensive way."

Reversing Obama's legacy

President Trump has been severely criticized for rolling back policies that were supported by a consensus of foreign policy experts, such as the Iran nuclear accord and not moving the embassy in Israel. His overall goal of reversing any policy put in place by President Barack H. Obama (2009–17) is wreaking havoc in the region. "The Trump administration's decision to double down on support for autocratic regimes while ignoring the profound structural changes that stand in the way of restoring the old order will neither produce stability nor advance U.S. interests," according to Marc Lynch. The administration's lack of interest in promoting democratization and human rights has been a stepdown from the Obama and Bush II eras and is out of synch with the wishes of the youthful population that makes up a majority of local societies.

Calibrating the U.S. response to the events of the Arab Spring was one of the greatest foreign policy challenges faced by the Obama administration, and it was not met effectively. Repeatedly, the US was forced to take sides between a popular uprising demanding democracy, and the autocratic rulers it

had long worked with who ensured security and "stability." In the case of Tunisia, few U.S. interests were at stake and it was not difficult to cut ties to the leader. Egypt, however, was a different story. President Mubarak had been a close U.S. ally for 30 years and had kept the peace with Israel. After equivocating at first, eventually the US voiced support for the demonstrators and accepted that Mubarak had to go.

However, events in the Gulf were a different matter. When confronted with the uprising in Bahrain the US held back on criticism of the ruling Al Khalifa due to the island's strategic importance. The US urged them to find a peaceful solution, but this advice was disregarded. In the case of Saudi Arabia, where there were some demonstrations, the US was notably silent and supportive of the ruling family. The Al Saud were greatly angered at the forced departure of Mubarak, and feared that the U.S. would abandon them next. Israel also was distressed at the loss of their longtime partner for peace.

When Syria crossed Obama's redline by using chemical weapons in 2013 and the US did not respond, the Saudis questioned US credibility. Worst of all, it seemed to them that the US preferred Iran to the Sunni Gulf monarchies which historically were the closest US allies in the region. When Obama was asked if he regarded the Saudis as friends, he replied, "it's complicated." Obama pressed the Saudi king to be willing to "share" the neighborhood with Iran—an appeal he did not appreciate. He criticized the kingdom's harsh human rights record, and expressed dissatisfaction with the war in Yemen. Obama also believed that Saudi Arabia and the GCC states in the future needed to rely less on the U.S. for their security.

The U.S. participated in the seven-month long NATO intervention in Libya's civil war in 2011, helping to enforce a no-fly zone. This was an example of the "right to protect" civilians as endorsed by the UN in 2005 and was done without congressional backing. The Libya intervention was remembered in the US for the attack on American diplomats in Benghazi on September 11, 2012 by a militant Islamic group resulting in the death of US Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens. Libya has been divided into competing political and military factions based in Tripoli and the east since 2014 and remains in a state of civil conflict.

In Obama's second term his administration, led by Secretary of State John Kerry, focused on Iran and achieved their signal foreign policy victory. With its partners, the U.S. negotiated a comprehensive agreement that achieved the paramount goal of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, in return for an easing of sanctions and normalization of relations. The agreement was widely praised but also had vocal critics, while as a presidential candidate Trump disparaged it as "the worst deal ever." By the time Trump took office, disillusionment with the U.S. stoked by the invasion of Iraq, U.S. equivocation during the Arab Spring, and the expansion of Iranian influence, was widespread in the Middle East.

Trump's policies

Donald Trump comes to foreign policy with a weak understanding of regional dynamics. "Where his predecessor hoped to win hearts and minds, Mr. Trump champions the axiom that brute force is the only response to extremism – whether in Iran, Syria, Yemen or the Palestinian territories," according to international correspondent David D. Kirkpatrick. "He has embraced the hawks of the region, in Israel and the Persian Gulf, as his chief guides and allies."

Like Obama, Trump would prefer to avoid being hopelessly bogged down in the Middle East. In August 2018 he approved a new defense budget that instead of fighting terrorism there prioritizes countering China and Russia. The U.S. military has reduced its presence in the Gulf, with no aircraft carrier there since March 2018 and the removal of Patriot missile-defense systems from Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan. The problem with a U.S. drawdown is that there is no obvious alternative to maintain regional security. Looking East, where much of the oil now goes, neither India nor China (nor Russia) are willing to provide it.

The primary reason for U.S. involvement in the Middle East since World War II, security of its energy supply, is now less important as U.S. shale oil production has soared. Total U.S. oil production is expected to reach 11.5 million bpd in 2019, up from 9.4

White House Adviser Jared Kushner watches alongside a member of the Saudi delegation during a meeting between President Donald Trump and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Oval Office at the White House on March 20, 2018. (KEVIN DIETSCH/POOL/GETTY IMAGES)

million bpd in 2017, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration forecasts. Imports from the Gulf (which in 2017 amounted to 17.3% of the total) are declining. The price of West Texas Intermediate crude, the North American benchmark, was trading in the $56 range in mid-November. Saudi supplies less than 5% of U.S. imports, but it could opt to cut exports which would lead to rise in prices. The basis of the longstanding understanding in which Saudi provides oil in return for security provided by the U.S. has been increasingly called into question.

Personal diplomacy is a hallmark of Trump's foreign policy, which has been carried out to a large degree on a personal basis between MbS and Jared Kushner, with many U.S. experts on the region sidelined. This likely contributed to the Khashoggi fiasco of last October, as the crown prince probably counted on Trump to look the other way. Senior U.S. experts Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky wrote in an op-ed in *Politico* last August that "the most successful Saudi foreign policy initiative in recent memory is the successful capturing and bamboozling of Donald Trump."

By late 2018, it seemed clear that the expectations of the U.S. on the one hand and the Gulf Arabs on the other were exaggerated and unrealistic. The priorities of the Gulf states lie in preserving regime security at any cost and in persuading the U.S. to take the lead in opposing Iran, plus providing funding if not forces for proxy wars. Trump's comments on banning Muslims from entering the U.S. and use of the term "radical Islamic terrorism" has not helped. He has also said (like Obama) that the Gulf monarchies were "free riders" that were dependent upon the U.S. for their security and have to "pay their way" in return for the U.S. defending them.

The president rejects multilateralism and has always emphasized that his priority is "America First." His personal view runs against military intervention, and instead of sending forces to Syria to counter Russian and Iranian influence he is trying to pressure his Gulf allies to step up their involvement. He is also relying on them to keep oil prices low, confront Iran and persuade the Palestinians to make peace with Israel. The Gulf states complain about American fidelity, but as Lynch points out, "no amount of reassurance from the U.S. can ever be enough."

The Trump administration shares a belief with some of the Gulf monarchs and Israel that Iran is the source of most problems in the Middle East because of its nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and military interventions in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, in addition to its support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Although the national security adviser, John R. Bolton, has denied it, many analysts conclude that the U.S. aim in Iran is regime change. By withdrawing from the nuclear deal in May 2018, reimposing punishing sanctions in August (targeting currency, gold, automobiles and commercial airplane parts and services) and November (targeting banks, petroleum and shipping) and possibly aiding internal opposition groups among Iranian ethnic minorities, the administration appears to believe that it can stoke internal opposition that leads to the fall of the government. Most outside analysts think this is fanciful and will only contribute to regional chaos. U.S. relations with its European allies, who still remain in the deal, have come under unprecedented strain. As former ambassador and leading Iran expert John Limbert has pointed out, "[the U.S.] does not know what it wants beyond the end of the Islamic Republic."

There are a number of key issues over which U.S. policy is being contested, including:

THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Iran and the other signatories, except the U.S., maintain that they are adhering to the deal, although Iran has not received the economic benefits it expected.

Without U.S. participation, Iran will not be able to normalize its relations with the rest of the world and will be tempted to resume its nuclear program. Trump has repeatedly announced that he is willing to initiate negotiations with Iran for a "better deal." But his advisers have issued preconditions that make this a non-starter. A future president might seek to return to the deal, a prospect Iran may be waiting for. Better relations with Iran should not wait, though, as the U.S. needs Iran's help with many regional issues from narcotics and smuggling to keeping the peace in Iraq and Syria. Iran played a key role in defeating ISIS in Iraq. Wendy R. Sherman, who led the team of American negotiators, observed that "Trump has turned Iran into a nearly impossible problem for future administrations. His behavior has given U.S. allies less reason to trust Washington on future deals or to take U.S. interests into account. He has thrown away a hard-nosed nuclear deal that set a new standard for verification, and he punched a hole in a highly effective web of sanctions and international consensus that made the Iran deal—and future deals like it—possible."

RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Although the president has restored strong ties to Saudi Arabia, the Khashoggi affair has led to a crisis in relations. Many urged Trump to step back from tribal politics he does not understand, reduce blanket support for the new Saudi rulers, and push harder for a settlement of the war in Yemen and the quarrel with Qatar. The U.S., in short, should not let the Gulf Arabs dictate the regional agenda. The U.S. could cut back on massive arms sales to Saudi as a sign of displeasure – something Congress may mandate. Although Saudi does cooperate with the U.S. on antiterrorism measures, the Financial Action Task Force, an international watchdog, issued a report last September criticizing it for weak measures against money laundering and financing terrorism. As remarked by F. Gregory Gause III of Texas A & M University, "The U.S. needs a stable Saudi Arabia, as well as a Saudi Arabia that isn't destabilizing the Middle East."

RESET RELATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIANS

The U.S. is no longer seen as a credible interlocutor between Israelis and Palestinians, and as the possibility of

a long-envisioned two-state solution recedes relations between the two can only worsen. Questionable acts such as moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, cutting aid to the Palestinians and closing their office in Washington have led to despair and regular outbreaks of violence in Gaza and the West Bank. If the U.S. has a new peace plan, it should not delay further in unveiling it, and must take actions to rebuild trust with the Palestinians.

CONTRIBUTE TO A SOLUTION IN SYRIA

As we reach the endgame in Syria, it seems likely that President Bashar Assad will prevail over his opposition. Although the U.S. wants to help shape a solution, one may be imposed instead by an evolving axis of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. U.S. troops in eastern Syria are tasked with defeating the Islamic State. Since this has largely been achieved, when will they come home?

ENDING THE WARS IN YEMEN AND LIBYA

Many note that U.S. complicity in arming and advising the Saudis goes against U.S. interests and perhaps U.S. laws. Its role now should be to pressure its allies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to find a face-saving way out. The U.S. has acknowledged providing midair refueling (which it recently announced will end), intelligence support and other advice to the Saudis, but maintains it does not approve target selection. There has been rising concern in military and congressional circles in Washington, however, that the U.S. was getting bogged down in a hopeless conflict. There has been widespread international condemnation of the U.S. role in the war; for example, the charity Oxfam, which provides assistance to civilians in Yemen, declared, "The State Department demonstrated that it is blindly supporting military operations in Yemen without any allegiance to facts, moral code or humanitarian law. This administration is doubling down on its failed policy of literally fueling the world's largest humanitarian crisis."

A child walks among graves of people who were killed in the ongoing war including children killed by airstrikes, at a cemetery on October 12, 2018 in Sana'a, Yemen. A United Nations body has requested Saudi Arabia to halt its deadly air raids against civilians in war-torn Yemen immediately and to prosecute officials responsible for child casualties. (MOHAMMED HAMOUD/GETTY IMAGES)

HUMAN RIGHTS

The state of human rights throughout the Middle East is currently dismal, especially in major states such as Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Although traditionally a concern for U.S. foreign policy, Trump has indicated this is not an issue he is interested in, but a successor might feel differently.

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The current situation in the Middle East is troubling and confusing, and regional leaders are not fulfilling their duty to govern effectively. Instead of working with their neighbors and compromising to get things done and make things better, they engage in blame games and rely on outside powers to provide solutions. States and societies will grow further apart if governments continue to refuse to provide needed reforms, and the possibility of further upheaval is very real.

While solving longstanding internal problems in the region is beyond the ability of the U.S., American policies that are contributing to regional instability can change due to public pressure. Already Congress is forcing the Trump administration to reduce support for the Yemen war, and some have suggested that Saudi Arabia, not Iran, is the most destabilizing force in the region. Many U.S. policies are out of synch with regional realities, and the insistence on "America First" is not practical in today's globalized and transnational world where the state is only one of many actors.

Trump's inclination not to send troops to the Middle East and to reduce U.S. involvement there will find widespread support at home from a public weary of decades of involvement, expense and casualties. However, with a reduced footprint on the ground, the U.S. needs to find a way to work with regional states as well as Europe, Russia and China, plus international organizations such as the United Nations, to achieve the policy results it wants. It seems clear that congressional hearings on U.S. policy and a thorough rethinking of policy by the State Department are in order.

Many believe that the Middle East is at a tipping point, in which all stakeholders must step up and contribute to solutions. While outsiders cannot impose a regional order to their liking, they can provide incentives for all interested parties to come to the table, defuse tensions, and arrive at agreements for the good of all.

discussion questions

1. Is Iran a greater cause of problems in the Middle East than Saudi Arabia? Which country could make a better ally in the future?

2. So far, the U.S. has usually backed autocrats in the Middle East, as long as both had good security relations. Should the U.S. accord higher priority to democracy and human rights, goals that usually get sidelined?

3. Many experts believe that canceling the Iran nuclear deal and reimposition of sanctions was a bad idea. What do you think?

4. Do you agree that the U.S. should increasingly extricate itself from the Middle East and "pivot to Asia" instead?

5. Why are there so many failed states in the Middle East? Is this region an exception?

6. How do non-state actors now challenge the state for influence in the Middle East?

7. Do you expect the state system, and its current borders, to survive in the Middle East, or do you think other arrangements are possible?

suggested readings

Al-Rasheed, Madawi, ed.. **Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia**. 320 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Leading experts explain the transition Saudi Arabia is experiencing under King Salman and his son.

Cook, Steven A. **False Dawn: Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East**. 313 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Surveys the Arab Spring revolts and explains why they did not succeed, while considering the role of the U.S. in the region.

Hanna, Michael Wahid. "Explaining Absence: The Failure of Egypt's Liberals." 24 pp. New York: **The Century Foundation, Report,** March 21, 2017. Explains the lack of liberalism in Egypt and Arab world and its replacement by authoritarianism and Islamist militancy. https://tcf.org/content/report/explaining-absence/

Hiltermann, Joost, lead contributor. **Tackling the MENA Region's Intersecting Conflicts**. 47 pp. Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, December 22, 2017. A major study of the clusters of conflict in the Middle East and policies to tackle them.

Kamrava, Mehran. **Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf**. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018. New study by leading scholar examines the security dilemmas of regional states and why they have led to continuing tensions.

Khouri, Rami G. "The Citizen and the State: The Decline of Sovereignty in the Arab World." **World Policy Journal**, vol. 33 no. 3 (Fall 2016): 114-21. An insightful article by leading Lebanese journalist that distills the true problems of the region, which result from a failure to transition to pluralistic democracies.

Lynch, Marc. "The New Arab Order: Power and Violence in Today's Middle East." **Foreign Affairs**, September/October 2018, pp. 116-26. The disorder in the Arab world created by the failure of the Arab Spring and the Trump administration's mistake in supporting autocratic regimes

Sherman, Wendy R. "How We Got the Iran Deal and Why We'll Miss It." **Foreign Affairs**, September/October 2018, pp. 186-97. The lead negotiator of the deal explains why it was a mistake to cancel it.

Don't forget: Ballots start on page 103!

To access web links to these readings, as well as links to additional, shorter readings and suggested web sites,

GO TO www.greatdecisions.org

and click on the topic under Resources, on the right-hand side of the page.