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The Afro-Arab Enclave Conflicts - A Cataclysmic Armageddon in the Making

Balochistan, Egypt, Emirates, Iran, Qatar, Saudi, Sudan, Turkey, Yemen

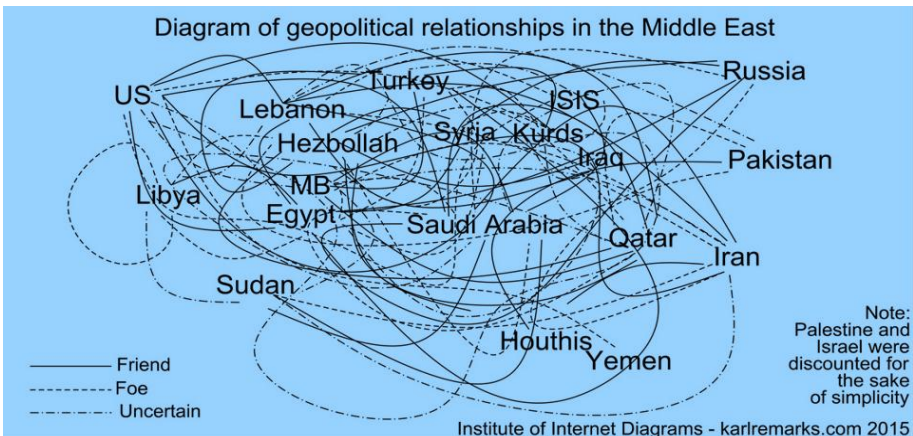
Sustainable Peace in the Middle East will come not because of a Martial Confrontation, but good old Diplomacy - Détente amongst the “Shia-Sunni family” and “Arab-Israel Proxy” hostilities

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“Global Powers have thrown a monkey wrench into a schisms-laden constituency with callous intensity. They continue to stock the inferno with weapons of mass destruction, fuelling the schisms and asymmetric conflicts with thermobaric incendiaries that have converted the cradle of civilisation into phantom polities. An immediate détente will go a long way to sustain the prosperity of the oil rich nations and the Gulf Monarchies”.

Abstract

Contemporary geopolitical episodes in the Middle East have, once more, made it the centre of global attention with the rising tensions turning The Gulf into a maritime powder keg. Recent events leading to the tension are marked by downing of a US drone, seizure of ships in the Gibraltar straight and Gulf of Hormuz and tanker Kokuka Courageous bombed. The roots of all tis conflicts stem from the cancellation of the Iran nuclear deal, the Iran- Saudi (Shia-Sunni) standoff, the Yemen Armageddon and the omnipresent Israeli-Palestinian quest for peace. Baloch National Movement's, recent militant attacks on Iranian, Chinese and Pakistani targets and air raids in Syria in the country's last rebel-held enclave have killed and displaced thousands..

The UN & US have proposed close to a dozen Israeli-Palestinians peace plans since the seventies. The two state solution has been the centrepiece of U.S. Middle East policy but efforts to implement it have so far miscarried. President Trump's new Middle East Plan, according to Jared Kushner, senior advisor, is based on four basic principles: freedom of religion, freedom in life and professional opportunities, freedom of movement and freedom of political opinions, as well as Safety and Security, but dead on arrival. Hence a unilateral solution by Israel to operationalise this along the lines of the Oslo Accords, has been proposed if Israel is comfortable with it, since the US and Israel have an upper hand in all this which the Palestinians and the UN must endorse to clear the stalemate.

Sudan has appointed a new prime minister as the country embarks on a three-year transition to civilian rule, but the Middle East has become more violent and more radicalised by asymmetric conflicts.

The paper proposes détente in the Saudi-UAE-Egypt axis vs. the Iran-Qatar-Turkey axis, because détente saved the world form a nuclear war between the US and USSR that began tentatively in 1971 and took decisive form in Moscon, May 1972. The late 1960s and early 1970s would see the most productive period of détente. An immediate détente in the Middle East will go a long way to sustain its prosperity and the Gulf Monarchies.

Key words: détente, Saudi-UAE-Egypt axis vs. the Iran-Qatar- Turkey axis, Israel, Palestine,

1. Introduction

1.1. Saudi & Iran

Recent geopolitical developments in the Middle East have shaken the gulf hegemon's long-standing ideational *pillars* that underpin its domestic and foreign policies. For Muslims globally, where its soft power influence is significant, the advances can create the conditions for a variation of the *Sunni* landscape.

Saudi authorities in 2016 received Iranian delegates who came to negotiate Hajj arrangement for Iranian pilgrims, in what was the first bilateral dialogue since Saudi severed diplomatic and commercial ties with Iran. Iran's emboldened stance is reflective of recent geopolitical developments in the region, which have shaken the gulf hegemon's long-standing ideational "pillars" that underpin its domestic and foreign policies. These developments have affected Saudi's more than they have Iran, which in turn results in Saudi responses that contribute to the political tension with Iran. It also underscores the sectarian nature of the on-going conflicts in the Middle East. One key event is the outbreak of the Iraq civil war between the majority Shia and the minority Sunni population, which was sparked off by a series of missteps after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the deposing of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (Saleem, 2016).

The missteps included the unchecked rise of Iranian political influence in Iraq, and the subsequent Sunni Iraqi marginalisation and persecution by the Shia-dominant Iraqi government. This localised Sunni-Shia power struggle in Iraq had spill over effects elsewhere in the region as civil conflicts surged in Syria and Yemen. Not only was Iran arming *Shia Iraqis* against the *Sunni Iraqis*, it also openly sided with the *Shia* such as *Basbar al-Assad* in *Syria* and *Abdul Malik al-Houthi* in *Yemen*. The *Sunni* perception that Iran's involvement was a planned intervention toward regional hegemony grew. While the gulf hegemon stayed neutral in Iraq, it supported Sunni factions in Syria and Yemen. The civil wars took on a more pronounced *Sunni-Shia divide*

with the involvement of *Iran and Saudi hegemons*.

1.2. Shaken "Pillars"

Saudi did not interfere in Iraq. This would have contradicted US policy there, and would have affected one of Riyadh's key foreign policy "pillar" – the long-standing alliance with the US, based on a tacit agreement where Arabia catered to the energy needs of the US, in exchange for support against inherent threats. This pillar is shaken today as *Europe, China and Japan normalise diplomatic and trade ties with Iran and potentially, the US engages it toward restoring stability in the region;*

Even though there are serious points of contention for the US, given Iran's stance against Israel and alliance with Russia, the Arabian Peninsula

has to contend with the possibility that the US regards Iran as a beneficial ally. Another pillar that is being shaken is the Wahhabi pillar that has been inculcated as part of its national identity. The strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam rejects those who undermine legitimate authority and helps protect the position of the Saudi royals at the domestic level. Wahhabism is also critical of certain Shia practices, which keeps possible influences of Iran at bay. However, since the emergence of ISIS, the perception of Wahhabism and Salafism in general, as a contributory factor to extremist ideology, has become re-ignited globally. While the gulf hegemon has stakes in retaining the Wahhabi religious establishment for legitimacy at home, heightened criticism about Wahhabism brings about an increased level of scrutiny over the numerous Saudi-funded institutions around the world.

This affects the Saudi gulf hegemon's soft power, which it had financed through aid to governments, charities, religious schools, mosques and cultural centres globally for decades. In doing so, the gulf hegemon propagated the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, which was aimed at diminishing Shia Islam's appeal to the broader Sunni world. Money from robust oil sales, which has been one of the gulf hegemon's strong pillars, has been shaken with two years of prolonged oil price slump at a time when Riyadh has to deal with the high costs of financing the various wars in the Middle East. This could potentially shake the gulf hegemon's ability to maintain the same level of soft power influence through aid and charitable giving.

2. Escalating conflict in the Gulf

2.1. Tension in the Gulf: not just Maritime Powder Kegs

A recent interview in which Baloch National Movement chairperson Khalil Baloch legitimized recent militant attacks on Iranian, Chinese and Pakistani targets is remarkable less for what he said, more for the fact that his remarks were published by a Saudi newspaper. Speaking to Riyadh Daily, the English language sister of one of Saudi Arabia's foremost newspapers, Al Riyadh, Mr. Baloch's legitimisation in the kingdom's tightly controlled media constituted one more suggestion that Saudi Arabia may be tacitly supporting militants in Balochistan. This is a troubled Pakistani province that borders on Iran and is a crown jewel of China's infrastructure and energy-driven Belt and Road initiative (Dorsey, 2019).

Riyadh Daily interviewed Mr. Baloch against the backdrop of heightened tensions between the United States and Iran. Many fear tis could escalate

into military conflict, past indications of Saudi support for religious militants in Balochistan, and suggestions that coun-

tries like the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are united in their opposition to Iran but differ on what outcome they want maximum pressure on the Islamic republic to produce. The interview followed publication in 2017 by a Riyadh-based think tank with ties to Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman of a call by a Baloch nationalist for support for an insurgency in the Baloch-populated Iranian province that borders Pakistan and is home to the crucial Indian-backed port of Chabahar on the Arabian Sea. It also juxtaposes with Pakistani anti-Shiite, anti-Iranian militants who operate madrassahs along the Iranian-Pakistani border reporting stepped up Saudi funding. The monies are believed to come in part from Saudi nationals of Baloch descent, but the militants suggest the funding has at least tacit government approval.

Balochistan has witnessed multiple attacks on its Hazara Shiite

minority as well as in May on a highly secured luxury hotel frequented by Chinese nationals in the Chinese-backed Baloch port city of Gwadar and a convoy of Chinese engineers as well as the Chinese consulate in Karachi. Militants killed 14 people in April in an assault on an Iranian Revolutionary Guard convoy and exploded in December a car bomb in Chabahar. Saudi Arabia is also suspected of supporting the Mujabedeen-e-Khalq, a controversial Iranian exile group that seeks the fall of the Iranian regime and enjoys support of senior Western politicians and former officials as well as US national security advisor John Bolton prior to his appointment and ex-Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki al-Faisal. For now, tacit Saudi support for Baloch militants is likely to be more about putting potential building blocks in place rather than the result of a firm decision to wage a low-intensity proxy war. “The recent escalation in militant attacks is a direct reaction to Pakistan army’s growing atrocities in Balochistan and China’s relentless plunder of Baloch resources,” Mr. Baloch said. Asserting that the Pakistani part of Balochistan has been occupied by Pakistan since 1948, Mr. Baloch insisted that the “Baloch nation is resisting against this forced accession. This insurgency is the continuation of that.”

The alleged Saudi support coupled with plans for a US\$10 billion Saudi investment in a refinery in Gwadar and



a Baloch mine has sparked discussion in Beijing about the viability of China's US\$45 billion plus stake in the region's security and stability. Iranian officials see a pattern of foreign support for insurgents not only in Balochistan but also among Iran's Kurdish, Arab and Azeri minorities. Their suspicions are fuelled by statements by Mr. Bolton prior to his appointment calling for support of insurgencies and Prince Mohammed's vow that any battle between the Middle East's two major rivals would be fought in Iran rather than Saudi Arabia. Complicating the situation along Iran's borders is the fact that like in the waters of the Gulf where naval assets are eyeing one another, it does not take much for the situation to escalate out of control. That is particularly the case with Iran having shifted tactics from strategic patience to responding to perceived escalation with an escalation of its own.

Iran moreover has been preparing for a potential covert war waged by Saudi Arabia and possibly US-backed ethnic insurgent groups as well as the possibility of a direct military confrontation with the United States by building a network of underground military facilities along its borders with Pakistan and Iraq. This is according to Seyed Mohammad Marandi, an Iranian academic who frequently argues the Tehran government's position in international media. Iran recently released a video showcasing an underground bunker that houses its missile arsenal. In a further

heightening of tension, Iran's Revolutionary Guards attacked on Friday Iranian armed opposition groups in the Kurdistan region of Iraq with drones and missiles. Iranian artillery separately shelled villages in a region populated by not only armed anti-Iranian and anti-Turkish Kurdish groups, but also smugglers. The strikes followed the killing of three Iranian revolutionary guards. A spokesperson for the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) denied responsibility for their deaths.

The risk of escalation is enhanced by the fact that while the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel agree on the principle of maximum pressure, they do not necessarily see eye to eye, on what the end goal is. While US President Donald J. Trump appears to want to force Iran back to the negotiating table, Israel and Mr. Bolton are believed to advocate gunning for regime change ignoring the risk that the effort could produce a government that is even less palatable to them.

That outcome would suit Saudi Arabia that does not want to see a regime emerge that would be embraced by Western nations and allowed to return to the international fold unfettered by sanctions. A palatable government would turn Iran into a Middle Eastern powerhouse with a competitive edge vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia and complicate the kingdom's ambition to become a major natural gas player and sustain its regional leadership role. Writing in the

Pakistan Security Report 2018, journalist Muhammad Akbar Notezai warned: "The more Pakistan slips into the Saudi orbit, the more its relations with Iran will worsen... If their borders remain troubled, anyone can fish in the troubled water."

2.2. Pakistan/Balochistan (1947-present)

Crisis Phase (August 12, 1947-May 17, 1973. *Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, the Khan of Kalat, declared Balochistan's independence on 12 Aug 1947. The Balochistan parliament rejected merging with West Pakistan on several occasions between December 14, 1947 and 25 Feb 1948. The Khan of Kalat agreed to the accession of Balochistan into West Pakistan on 27 Mar 1948. Government troops entered Balochistan on 15 Apr 1948, attacked the residence of the Khan of Kalat in the city of Kalat on 6 Oct 1958 and*

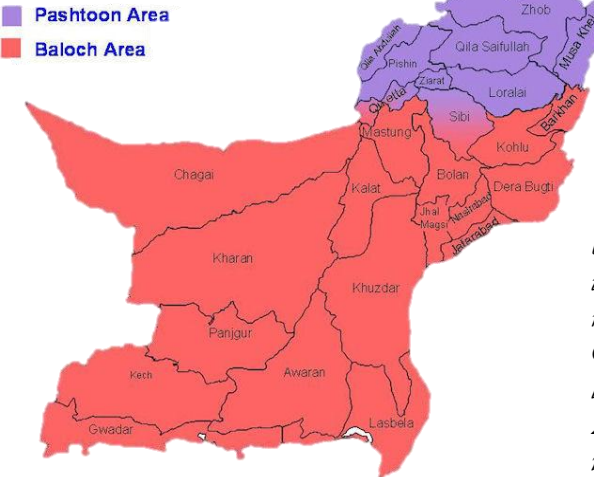
arrested the Khan and several hundred Balochi political leaders on 6 Oct 1958" (Sayeed, 1980).

Post-Crisis Phase (December 31, 1985-May 31, 2000) - The Balochistan State Assembly was dissolved in December 1988. Balochis and Pashtuns clashed in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, on October 12, 1991, resulting in the deaths of 13 individuals.

Crisis Phase (June 1, 2000-present) - Members of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) bombed several locations in Quetta in June 2000, resulting in the deaths of some 26 government soldiers and 5 civilians. BLA rebels fired mortar shells into Quetta on July 22, 2000, resulting in the deaths of nine government soldiers. BLA rebels bombed a military truck in Quetta on December 10, 2004, resulting in the deaths of eleven individuals. BLA rebels attacked the Sui natural gas field, January 7-11, 2005. Government troops and BLA rebels clashed on March 17, 2005, resulting in the deaths of some 50 BLA rebels and 8 government soldiers.

BLA rebels attacked and killed 42 government soldiers on November 8, 2005. Government troops launched a military offensive against BLA rebels beginning on December 17, 2005. Six individuals were killed by a landmine near Dera Bugti on January 25, 2006. Government troops killed Balochi tribal leader Nawab Akbar Bugti on August 26, 2006. Some 21-government troops were killed in clashes with BLA rebels

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on August 24-27, 2006. Some 1,000 individuals have been killed, and some 150,000 individuals have been displaced during the crisis.

2.3. UAE scales in Yemen

The United Arab Emirates, a key member of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen, is scaling back its military presence there as worsening U.S.-Iran tensions threaten security closer to home, four western diplomatic sources said. The UAE has pulled some troops from the southern port of Aden and Yemen's western coast, two of the diplomats said, areas where the Gulf state has built up and armed local forces who are leading the battle against the Iran-aligned Houthi group along the Red Sea coast. Three of the diplomats said Abu Dhabi preferred to have its forces and equipment on hand should tension between the United States and Iran escalate further after attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf and Tehran's downing of a U.S. drone (El Yaakoubi & Barrington, 2019).

"It is true that there have been some troop movements ... but it is not a redeployment from Yemen," a senior Emirati official told Reuters, adding that the UAE remains fully committed to the military coalition and "will not leave a vacuum" in Yemen. The official would not provide details on the movements, the numbers involved or specify whether it was happening inside or out-

side Yemen, where the alliance intervened in 2015 to try to restore the government ousted from power by the Houthis. It is not clear how many Emirati forces are in Yemen. One Western diplomat said the UAE withdrew "a lot" of forces from the Arabian Peninsula nation over the last three weeks. Asked whether tensions with Iran were behind the move, the Emirati official said the decision was more related to a holding ceasefire in Yemen's main port city of Hodeidah, now held by the Houthis, under a U.N.-led peace pact reached last December. "This is a natural progression," the official said, reiterating the UAE's support for U.N. efforts to implement the deal in Hodeidah, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis, to pave the way for talks to end the war. Hodeidah became the focus of the war last year when the Western-backed, Sunni Muslim coalition tried to seize the port, the Houthis' main supply line. Under the Stockholm deal, which has yet to be implemented, both the Houthis and pro-coalition Yemeni forces would withdraw from Hodeidah.

Two of the diplomats said progress on Hodeidah made it easier for the UAE to scale back its presence in Yemen to reinforce defences at home in the wake of attacks on four oil tankers off the UAE coast in May that was followed by strikes on two more vessels in the Gulf of Oman a few weeks later. A spokesperson for the Saudi-led coalition did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Washington and Riyadh

have publicly blamed Iran for the explosive blasts, a charge Tebran denies. A UAE investigation said a state actor was behind the attacks, which have not been claimed by anyone, but Abu Dhabi has not named any country. Washington is in talks with allies for a global coalition to protect vital oil-shipping lanes in and near the Strait of Hormuz and the subject was broached during a visit by Secretary of State Pompeo to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

In his meeting in Abu Dhabi, Mr. Pompeo pressed on increased maritime security but the UAE has a smaller army compared to bigger regional allies like Egypt and Saudi Arabia and has called for de-escalation of tensions in the region, which have raised concerns about a direct military confrontation that could spark a war in the region. The Houthis have stepped up missile and drone attacks on Saudi cities, further fuelling tensions. The group denies being a puppet of Iran and says its revolution is against corruption. Diplomats said the UAE could always send troops back to Yemen, where Abu Dhabi has built strong local allies with tens of thousands of fighters among southern separatists and coastal plains fighters. The Yemen conflict, which has killed tens of thousands of people and pushed the country to the verge of starvation, is largely seen as a proxy war between Saudi and Iran.

2.4. Syria air raids, UN

UN human rights chief Bachelet condemns 'apparent international indif-

ference'. Air raids by the Syrian government and its allies in the country's last rebel-held enclave have killed more than 100 civilians, according to the UN, which said the three-month campaign has displaced more than 400,000 people. The 103 dead from the recent air attacks on schools, hospitals, markets included at least 26 children, she said, adding that *the rising toll had been met with apparent international indifference. The targets of the attacks were civilian objects, and it seems highly unlikely, given the persistent pattern of such attacks, that they are all being hit by accident* (Al Jazeera, 2019).

Backed by its main ally, Russia, the Syrian government began its offensive against the rebel enclave in northwest Syria - the last area of active opposition to President Bashar al-Assad - at the end of April, saying it was responding to violations of a ceasefire. Since then, "more than 400,000 people have been displaced," David Swanson, spokesperson for the UN office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs (OCHA), said on Friday. The region under attack is home to some three million people, nearly half of them already displaced from other parts of the war-ravaged country. It covers nearly all of Idlib province and parts of neighbouring Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia provinces. Idlib and surrounding areas of the northwest were included in a "de-escalation" deal in September between Russia and Turkey, which backs some rebel groups, to

reduce warfare and bombardment. However, the accord was never fully implemented after fighters refused to withdraw from a planned buffer zone. Instead, the bombardment increased in intensity in recent weeks. The region is mostly controlled by Hay'et Tabrir al-Sham, led by al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate. A Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, has said more than 730 civilians have been killed in aerial bombardment and shelling of the region by the Syrian government and its allies since the end of April. In a statement, Bachelet put the number of civilians killed since the start of the campaign at 450.

'Deadliest days'

In a statement, OCHA described it as one of the 'deadliest days' in the

region since the start of the flare-up, with 60 people killed in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo provinces, including 39 in an air raid in a busy market in Maarat al-Numan. It also said that most of the displacement was from southern Idlib and northern Hama, the two areas that have been hit hardest by the flare-up. "The majority of those fleeing have displaced within Idlib governorate while a smaller number have moved into northern Aleppo governorate. Roughly, two-thirds of people displaced are staying outside camps'. The agency said it had documented 39 attacks against health facilities in the region since the end of April. At least 50 schools have been damaged. Syrian and Russia deny targeting civilians or civilian infrastructure.

3. Sudan's Power-Sharing Agreement –

3.1. Towards Transition or a Game of Tajility?

With Sudanese protesters still shouting, *Madaniyya* (civilian), only time will tell if the recently signed power-sharing accord will be a true step in the direction towards democratic transition or simply another manoeuvre in Sudan's longstanding tradition of *tajility* and unfulfilled promises. One particularly original Sudanese contribution to the political dictionary is the term *tajility*, a refashioning of the Arabic *tajil* meaning delay. The term was coined by Sudan's colonial rulers to describe the art of prevarication and procrastination emblematic of Sudan's elite politics. Depending on one's perspective, *tajility* could be interpreted as a *sly strategy* to elude confrontation and allow the heavyweight of the *status quo* to mould angry souls into compromise, or as the favoured political manoeuvring of an avaricious political class that rarely honours an agreement (El-Gizouli, 2019).

Regardless, *tajility* won the day on 17 July 2019. The two main contenders of the post-Bashir dispensation, the ruling Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the Forces of Freedom and

Change (FFC), a wide alliance of political parties and professional associations, formally signed the broad outlines of a power-sharing deal that is supposed to govern a three years and three months

transition towards elected government. The optics of the agreement are possibly more instructive than its content. On behalf of the TMC came forward Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (Himeidti), the commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) while the FFC seconded Ahmed al-Rabie, a physics teacher and activist of the Sudan Professionals Association (SPA). The two men faced the cameras with glum faces to exchange a handshake after signing the document while the two mediators, the African Union's Mohamed Al-Hassan Labbad and the Ethiopian envoy Mahmoud Direr, stood behind them clapping. Direr shed a tear or two to mark the emotional moment and the pro-Himeidti press said the RSF commander did the same. Behind the scenes were representatives of the powerful forces jostling to dictate the future of Sudan, the US envoy Donald Booth, who had met the TMC chairman Burhan a day before, UK and EU diplomats and the Emirati and Saudi ambassadors busy whispering to all sides. Both Himeidti and al-Rabie are outsiders to Sudan's political establishment proper.

Himeidti is the commander of the formidable private militia that grew out of Khartoum's counter-insurgency campaign on the cheap in Darfur and the SPA's al-Rabie is a brave activist but a politician by circumstance without a political party to underwrite his adventure into the halls of power. Jubilations followed the signing of the power-sharing document, but as Himeidti headed out

of the spacious hall in Khartoum's Corinthia Hotel, the egg-shaped structure that dominates the city's skyline where the last lap of negotiations took place, some among the press corps shouted "madaniyya" (Arabic for civilian) at his back. For months now, "madaniyya" has been the slogan of the protest movement that forced Sudan's military and security bosses to oust President Bashir in a palace coup on 11 April and snatch power under the title of the TMC. Since then, the TMC and the protest movement spearheaded by the SPA and its allies in the umbrella FFC have been locked in a tug of wills over the nature of the post-Bashir era.ⁱⁱⁱ

The 17 July 2019 document dubbed "The Political Agreement on the Formations of the Structures and the Institutions of Government in the Transitional Period between the Transitional Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change" failed to resolve key issues and in some ways.

Nevertheless, to define it by its omissions risks becoming a normative judgment about its worth – when it is still too early to pronounce a final judgment. Besides lofty pronouncements regarding goodwill, a spirit of cooperation and commitment to dialogue, the deal provides for three main structures of government: a sovereign council, a council of ministers and a legislative council. In addition, it sketches the issues and duties to be tackled by the transitional authorities. The sovereign council, a recreation of the all-powerful presidency minus

Bashir, is to be composed of 11 members, five from the military to be chosen by the TMC and five civilians from the FFC in addition to an 11th civilian member to be agreed on by the two sides. Leadership of this body shall be in the hands of the military for the first 21 months after the signing of the deal while a civilian member shall assume the position in the remaining 18 months of the transitional period. The FFC shall nominate a prime minister and a maximum of twenty cabinet ministers barring the ministers of defence and interior who will be appointed by the military. The sovereign council, however, retains authority to endorse the FFC's nominees.

This power-sharing formula basically encapsulates the content of the deal, islands of principal understanding in a sea of unknowns. The basic skeleton of the arrangement had been in place since late June and corresponds largely to the proposal put forward by Sudan's business moguls by way of backdoor mediation in the immediate aftermath of the 3 June massacre. Opaque and unsettled remain the prerogatives and authorities of the sovereign council and the cabinet and their decision-making procedures within and between them. Further, the composition of the legislature and its functions, which the TMC chair Burhan had declared had no business legislating since it is an unelected body of representatives, remains a bone of contention. The agreement spells out to the FFC's demand of a two-third share of the house and the TMC unwillingness

to abide thereby^{iv}. Much more significant is the discord and disillusion in the "neighbourhood resistance committees", the novel and wildly successful organisational formula devised by Sudan's protesters who continue to face the deadly wrath of the security establishment. While talks proceeded in the, protesters in al-Suki, al-Diein and elsewhere were dodging bullets, not always successfully. Some committees announced the Corinthia accommodation a counter-revolutionary blow and affirmed their commitment to continue struggling for true "madaniyya". Others argued that it was a first step in the right direction, words taken right out of Himeidi's mouth. The greater of cynics said Bashir was glimpsed waving his trademark stick to the FFC-redux crowd that assembled on 18 July 2019 to celebrate the Corinthia deal in Khartoum's Green Square, aptly renamed Freedom Square. Ultimately, the Corinthia deal was truly a step in the right direction not a chapter in Sudan's longstanding tradition of tajiility.

Thanks to the efforts of the AU and Ethiopian mediation, the transitional government has been formed.

3.2. Ripple effect

A Transitional Military Council (TMC) had taken control of Sudan and arrested its long-time president, Omar al-Bashir, the country's military said Thursday. The move comes after opposition protesters gained new momentum in demanding al-Bashir leave office. The defence

minister, said the *regime* had been removed (Duobek & Wamsley, 2019).

The TMC would rule the country for two years before any democratic elections would take place. Sudan awoke early to word from the state news agency that the military would be making an announcement — news that sent thousands of people flooding to the site where protesters have been calling for al-Bashir's ouster for months. There has been so much anticipation for this moment, some people were cheering but not really knowing what they were cheering for, and what was going to happen. In one sign of change, activists said many of their colleagues had been released from state prisons. For protesters, the moment is bittersweet. Their primary demand has been for al-Bashir to step down. Nevertheless, their second demand was for a transitional government to move the country toward a democracy, so far, there were no indications of that happening'. We want a civilian council to head the transition." Media reports say the current swell of protesters is largely peaceful. The SPA said it advocated a peaceful "approach to revolution and change". Al-Bashir had been in power almost 30 years. The ICC in The Hague issued warrants for al-Bashir's arrest for crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Sudanese protesters seek civilian rule as Transitional Military Council retains power after Omar al-Bashir's removal. Protests began in Sudan in December 2018 over soaring bread prices, but quickly grew into anti-

government rallies demanding the removal of then-President Omar al-Bashir. Weeks after the removal of Omar al-Bashir as the president of Sudan, the fight for civilian rule continues as the Transitional Military Council (TMC) refuses to give in to the protesters' demand to cede power. The TMC, led by *Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan*, says it will oversee a transitional period that will last a maximum of two years. Amid continuing protests, security forces are doing everything possible to end a sit-in protest in the capital, Khartoum. (Al Jazeera, 2019b)

Will Khartoum Become the Centre of a New African Order or an Appendage of the Gulf? It is the end of an era in the Horn of Africa. After three decades in power, Sudanese strongman Omar al-Bashir fell in April. Mass anti-government protests erupted, and a military coup soon followed. Now the remnants of Bashir's security state are locked in a protracted standoff with an indefatigable pro-democracy movement over control of the country. The governing *Transitional Military Council* has cracked down violently, killing more than 100 protesters in a wave of repression that began on June 3, 2019. Nevertheless, it has also promised to facilitate a transition to civilian rule as part of a tentative power-sharing agreement with the Forces of Freedom and Change (Woldemariam & Young, 2019).

The upheaval in Sudan comes at the same time as Ethiopia's reform-minded Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, is dramatically expanding political space in his country, while battling an attendant surge in ethnic violence. Together with subtler stirrings in Eritrea and elsewhere, the historic transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia could change the trajectory of a volatile corner of Africa for decades to come. The question that now hangs over the region is what the next era will bring: Will it usher in a new, more democratic order built on a shared foundation of national sovereignty and collective security? Or will it bring a closed, authoritarian order that is beholden to extra regional powers? Sudan, in particular, is a microcosm of this broader struggle to reshape the regional order, as well as a likely harbinger of its outcome. On one side of that struggle is a coalition of African states, bound together by the African Union and an important East African regional bloc. On the other are the oil-rich monarchies of the Persian Gulf.

The Horn of Africa has remained steadfastly authoritarian since the dying days of the Cold War, during which the United States and the Soviet Union vied for dominance by arming the region's despots. Over the last three years, the edifice of that old order has begun to crack. A prime minister with reformist zeal rode a wave of popular protest to power in Ethiopia and ended the two-decades-long feud with neighbouring Eritrea. A

similar uprising in Sudan sank the region's longest-serving dictator. The political transitions in both countries—the region's two largest, most powerful, and economically important—will have ramifications for Eritrea, Djibouti, and South Sudan, where looming succession crises, among other pressures, are placing autocracies under stress. Shifting external forces have accompanied—and to some extent caused—the changes in the Horn.

Under Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, U.S. influence has waned across Africa, but especially in the Horn and the adjoining waterways of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Washington's competitors and newly assertive allies have stepped into the breach, each of them keen to carve out a foothold in a critical maritime region. China, Russia, Turkey, and even the European Union have made gambits. Nevertheless, the most formidable bids for regional dominance have come from the middle powers of the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Crown Princes Mohammed Bin Zayed and Mohammed Bin Salman have sought to transform radically their countries' relationships with their neighbours across the Red Sea^{vi}. The Horn's two most important African-led bodies have set quietly but persistently themselves against the region's emerging Gulf-led order. The African Union and IGAD, seek to craft a regional order that rests on the sovereignty and collective

security of African states. The commitment to democracy within these institutions remains weak, as evidenced by the many authoritarian leaders in their ranks, but the organisations do embrace norms of constitutional governance and civilian supremacy in politics far more than the leaders of the Gulf States. The Gulf States, on the one hand, and the African-led organisations, on the other, have sought to formalise their competing visions in recent years. For more than two years now, the African Union and IGAD have also sought to foster dialogue and cooperation on Horn and Red Sea issues—including Gulf interventionism^{vii}.

The battle lines in Sudan have been drawn. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have lined up behind the ruling TMC, offering the post-coup government their political and military support. (Egypt and Eritrea, two important African allies of the Saudi-Emirati axis that share long

borders with Sudan, have adopted a similar stance.) The TMC's leaders—Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, (Hemedti) commanded Sudanese troops in Yemen and so have long-standing ties to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.^{viii} What happens in Sudan will likely determine the future of the Horn for the next decade or more. If the TMC had clung to power, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi would not only have secured an important political and military ally; they will have positioned themselves as regional kingmakers, capable of imposing their foreign policy on the Horn, forestalling democratic transitions.

Now that the AU and Ethiopia have shepherded a transition to civilian government in Sudan, they have laid the groundwork for a different regional order, one that can deliver peace, development and accountable government.

4. The “Bully Who Cried Wolf”-

“A habitual liar cannot be believed even when telling the truth”

Did Iran attack the Japanese tanker *Kokuka Courageous* with limpet mines - as claimed it did on June 13? Does the video the US army produced indeed prove the accusation? The US, Saudi Arabia, and the UK say it does, Iran says it does not, and others have expressed doubts. So, who is telling the truth? Iran or the US and its allies? Moreover, why does it matter? The urgency of these questions is now a matter of war and peace, of life or death. After that accusation, the potential military confrontation between the US and Iran has increased exponentially. On June 20, the *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps* announced that it had shot down a US surveillance drone that it said had violated its airspace. US Central Command confirmed the drone was shot down by Iranian surface-to-air missiles but denied that it had violated Iranian airspace (Dabashi, 2019).

President Donald Trump called the downing of the drone a "big mistake", and then ordered a military attack on Iran only to reportedly change his mind and cancel it. There would have been approximately 150 Iranian casualties, Trump said, and that would have been "disproportionate". As the US and Iran inch ever closer to a military confrontation, the question the world faces at large is who to trust, what to believe, where to place our critical judgement? An average of 12 lies a day! As of June 10, by Washington Post's estimates, "President Trump has made 10,796 false or misleading claims over 869 days." That is probably a dictionary definition of a congenital liar. The newspaper further states: "The president crossed the 10,000 thresholds on April 26, and he has been averaging about 16 fishy claims a day since then. From the start of his presidency, he has averaged about 12 such claims a day." In this context, it would be a mistake to judge the particulars of politics with the proverbial "Sunday School" sense of morality that is farthest removed from the abiding concerns of those who habitually lie.

States, particularly the most powerful states, lie and these lies are for the best interests of the ruling elites in charge of those states. From Vietnam to Iraq,

the US has lied systematically and consistently to advance its own warmongering objectives. Nevertheless, the US is not the only state that lies habitually. Right now, the interests of the US, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel all coalesce around targeting Iran and dismantling its share of regional power. Each one of these forces has its own internal reasons to wish Iran harm. They, therefore, manufacture lies, exaggerate facts, take a smidgeon of truth and weave a long tale around it, all to turn Iran into a demon, the way they did with Iraq and Afghanistan in the past. The US media is complicit in this charade. The first casualty of war they say is the truth. Is the explosion of this Japanese tanker in the Gulf of Oman the lie that will result in yet another calamitous war?

The regime of deception now code-named "post-truth" or "alternative facts" is predicated on what the French philosopher Guy Debord called "the society of the spectacle", where an image has assumed a reality of its own and it no longer matters what it actually means. We see a ship burning, we read the story that the US imperial narrative ascribes to it, and its media regurgitates. What actually caused that fire and what proof there is for the claim are all entirely irrelevant questions.^{ix}

5. Détente among the Shia-Sunni and Arab-Israel Proxy Hostilities

5.1. Détente between the United States and the Soviet Union

Détente is a period of improved relations between the US and USSR that began in 1971 and took decisive form when President Nixon visited

the Soviet leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, in Moscow, May 1972. Both countries stood to gain if trade could be increased and the danger of nuclear warfare reduced. In addition, Nixon—a candidate for re-election—was under fire at home from those demanding *social change, racial equality, and an end to the Vietnam War*. The trip to Russia, like his historic trip to China a few months earlier, permitted him to keep public attention focused on his foreign policy achievements rather than his domestic problems. Nixon’s trip to China had also heightened the Soviets’ interest in détente; given the growing antagonism between Russia and China, Brezhnev had no wish to see his most potent rivals close ranks against him (History.Com Editor, 2019).

On May 22, 1972, Nixon became the first U.S. president to visit Moscow. He and Brezhnev signed seven agreements covering the prevention of accidental military clashes; arms control, as recommended by the recent Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (salt); cooperative research in a variety of areas, including space exploration; and expanded commerce. The salt treaty was approved by Congress later that summer, as was a three-year agreement on the sale of grain to the Soviets. In June 1973, Brezhnev visited the United States for Summit II; this meeting added few new agreements, but did symbolize the two countries’ continuing commitment to peace. Summit III, in June 1974, was the least productive; by then, the salt talks had ground to a halt, several commercial agreements had been blocked in Congress because of Soviet treatment of Jews, and the Watergate investigation was approaching a climax. Nixon’s successor in the talks, President Jimmy Carter, supported salt ii, but also pressed a military build-up and a human rights campaign, which cooled

relations between the countries. With the election of Ronald Reagan, who emphasized military preparedness as the key to Soviet-American relations, détente as Nixon had envisioned it came to an end.

5.2. Cold War Successes of Détente

From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, the Cold War was highlighted by a period known as “détente” – a welcome easing of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. While the period of détente resulted in productive negotiations and treaties on nuclear arms control and improved diplomatic relations, events at the end of the decade would bring the superpowers back to the brink of war. Use of the term “detent” in reference to an easing of strained geopolitical relations dates back to the 1904 *Entente Cordiale*, an agreement between Great Britain and France that ended centuries of off-and-on war and left the nations strong allies in World War I and thereafter. In the context of the Cold War, Presidents Nixon and

Ford called détente a *thawing out* of US-USSR nuclear diplomacy to avoid a nuclear confrontation (Longley, 2018).

While U.S.-Soviet relations had been strained since the end of World War II, fears of war between the two nuclear superpowers peaked with the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Coming so close to Armageddon motivated leaders of both nations to undertake some of the world's first nuclear arms control pacts, including the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963. In reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis, a direct telephone line – the so-called red telephone – was installed between the U.S. White House and the Soviet Kremlin in Moscow allowing leaders of both nations to communicate instantly in order to reduce the risks nuclear war. Despite the peaceful precedents set by this early act of détente, rapid escalation of the Vietnam War during the mid-1960s increased Soviet-American tensions and made further nuclear arms talks all but impossible.

By the late 1960s, however, both the Soviet and U.S. governments realized one big and unavoidable fact about the nuclear arms race: It was hugely expensive. The costs of diverting ever-larger portions of their budgets to military research left both nations facing domestic economic hardships. At the same time, the Sino-Soviet split – the rapid deterioration of relations between the Soviets and China – made becoming friendlier with the US look like a better idea to the USSR. In the US, the soaring costs

and political fallout of the Vietnam War caused policymakers to see improved relations with the Soviets as a helpful step in avoiding similar wars in the future. With both sides willing to at least explore the idea of arms control, the late 1960s and early 1970s would see the most productive period of détente. The First Treaties of Détente were

- Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968
- Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I) from November 1969 to May 1972 talks yielded the Antiballistic Missile Treaty capping ICBMs
- Helsinki Final Act
- Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties of 1991 and 1993

5.3. The Shia-Sunni entangle

The Battle of Karbala was fought in central Iraq in 680 AD, with most religious scholars agreeing that the violent clash went a long way to settling the question of The Prophet Mohammed's succession. This is important because the two opponents came to represent the *Sunni and Shia* origins within Islam.

Until recently, the two groups seemed to co-exist within an awkward kind of avoidance, although on a few occasions, the international community has been given a glimpse of the emotions involved in the Sunni-Shia schism. Following the first Gulf War, once it became apparent that President George H. Bush was not going to force Saddam from power, Saddam fired-up what was

left of his war machine to butcher thousands of Shia in areas south of Iraq. Saddam was legitimately concerned that the Marsh Arabs, as these particular Shia were called, were rising up to possibly threaten his hold on power. Simply put, since Karbala in 680 AD, the Shiats have been looking for a little respect.

In the last fifty years, the Shia, who are the majority in only two countries, have fought fiercely for causes that they support. Following the 1979-1980 revolution in Iran, which deposed the Pahlavi Dynasty, the Shia-led government threw everything but the kitchen sink at Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War. Since then, the Shiats seem to be comfortable standing up for their interests.^x The Iranian government, and the Guardian Council in Qom, must be pleased by the expression of free will exhibited by the Shia Houthis of Yemen. The Houthis have been around for some time, and to their credit, they tried a number of non-violent approaches to former governments for years, in an attempt to end discrimination against their community. Eventually they were compelled to resort to violence where the Yemeni government, already under siege from al-Qaeda, was a bit of an easy target (Burkhart, 2015:1).

Vast religious differences, stemming from a split that occurred in the seventh century, separate these groups. They still give a sharp edge

to the conflicts of the present day, most obviously in Iraq, where thousands of lives have been lost in *Sunni-Shia* violence. In its doctrine and ethos, the simple, back-to-basics *Sunni Islam* from which al-Qaeda sprang is about as different as any *Muslim* practice could be from the sophisticated, scholarly world of the Iranian *Shiats*, with their elaborate clerical hierarchy and long tradition of studying and adding to a corpus of texts.

However, when it comes to operational matters, especially against Israel, terrorist groups sponsored by Iran have no qualms about tactical cooperation with their *Sunni* counterparts. *Hamas*, for example, has good working relations with the *al-Quds Force*, an external arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. *Hezbollah* an *Iranian-backed, Shia* movement based in Lebanon probably inspired at first the suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, now regarded as a *Hamas* trademark (Morris, 1999 & Hughes, 2009:314–354). Yet, doctrinal, ideological and religious belief differences really matter in the interpretation of participation in a plural society.

5.4. Israeli-Palestine fiasco

The 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine or Great Arab Revolt was a nationalist uprising by Arabs in Mandate Palestine against British colonial rule and mass Jewish immigration (Hughes, 2009.) Although

the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine was unsuccessful, its consequences affected the outcome of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Initially, the conflict with Zionism helped to make Palestinian Arab society more conservative in cultural, social, religious and political affairs. This was because people were highly motivated to preserve their distinct heritage and identity against the dual impact of *British colonialism and Jewish invasion*. During the 1930s, new political organisations and new types of activists appear, marking involvement of a far broader cross-section of the population (Morris, 1999).

Moncef Marzouki, Tunisia's former president in an NYT Op-Ed (2012:32) underscores the fact that the *Arab Spring* **Error! Bookmark not defined.** is still blooming but the hostility towards Israel remains at large.

Iran, the country whose 1979 revolution put political Islam on the modern map vows to destroy Israel. Its nuclear researchers have defied the world. The Hamas triumph has brought delight to all its fellow members of the international fraternity known as the Muslim Brotherhood—from the refugee camps of Amman in Jordan, where sweets were eagerly handed out by Brotherhood leaders, to their well-organised Islamic diaspora in Europe.

The old certainties that governed Middle East politics for decades are being turned on their head,

as much of the Arab world descends into a self-destructive maelstrom of bloody violence.

Syria and Iraq, Algeria, Libya and Yemen have all succumbed to sectarian savagery. Egypt is fighting Hamas-supported jibadists, whose activities spill over from Sinai into attacks in Cairo, Alexandria and Suez. Lebanon is torn apart by bitter Sunni-Shi'ite conflict. Even Jordan is combating Islamist factions, intent on destabilising, if not overturning, the regime. There is a civil war within Islam between moderation and extremism, said Jordan's King Abdullah. If the military battle takes a brief time, the security and ideological war might extend for 10 or 15 years. Abdullah's remarks come amid heightened fears of increased radicalisation in Jordan, prompted by Amman's participation in the anti-Islamic state coalition. Maruf al-Bakbit, has warned that up to 4000 Jordanians support the extremist and violent Salafist ideology preached by al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian behind multiple attacks against US, Iraqi and Jordanian targets, and who the CIA claims beheaded two US citizens in Iraq.

Among the few islands of stability to be found in this turbulent Arab ocean are, perhaps, Tunisia, and the economically and politically stable Morocco. Also holding out against the increasing chaos in the Arab world are the authoritarian, and often brutally draconian, Gulf states – the antiquated monarchies and emirates, whom the US and the

West now look to help stem the apparently irresistible rise in the power and influence of Islamic state. They, together with Egypt, are also the elements within the Arab world, which Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had in mind in his speech to the UN on September 29, when he suggested the idea of a working alliance between Israel and those Arab states opposed to militant Islamists in general, and Iran in particular. Egypt and the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia among them, do now realise that they and Israel face many of the same dangers – the most pressing being a nuclear-armed Iran and militant Islamist movements gaining ground in the Sunni world. Netanyahu, building on this new political reality, tried to turn a cherished belief on its head: many have long assumed that an Israeli-Palestinian peace can help facilitate a broader rapprochement between Israel and the Arabs. Nevertheless, it may work the other way around – a broader rapprochement between Israel and Arabs may help facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian peace (Teller, 2014:5).

In 2002, what became known as the Middle East Quartet came into being – EU, Russia, UN & US. *The conclusions are sobering, pointing to the fact that, while the EU has been the principal driver behind the Quartet, the latter has neither become a genuinely multilateral forum, nor has it been effective in pursuing the goal of a two-state solution (Tocci, 2013: abstract). Foreign engagement in the Middle East world seems to*

harvest negative impact leading to failed states rather than democracies.

Led by Western self-interest, NATO and its regional allies and local collaborators embarked on a massive military intervention in Libya in 2011 that leaves many lessons for the Global South: it cannot bring about the desired change, but rather creates failed states. It took seven months for the world's most powerful military alliance - with a combined military spending of just under one trillion per year - to fully destroy the Jamahiriya and it took a joint British-French-Qatari Special Forces operation to finally win control of the capital. In total, 10,000 strike sorties were rained down on Libya, tens of thousands killed and injured, and the country left a battleground for hundreds of warring factions, armed to the teeth with weapons provided directly by NATO and its allies. Britain, France and the US had led a war, which had effectively transformed a peaceful, prosperous African country into a textbook case of a 'failed state'. The lessons are

- *Whilst appearing to be an improvement in relations, may actually be a 'long game' to lay the groundwork for naked aggression, by building up intelligence and sounding out possible collaborators, effectively building up a fifth column within the state itself.*
- *Many in both Libya and Syria now regret having acted as NATO's foot soldiers in sowing*

the seeds of destruction in their own countries. Anyone expecting future 'regime change' operations conducted by the West to result in stable democracies – or even stable Shari'a theocracies for that matter – need look no further than Libya. Western military power cannot change regimes; they can only destroy societies.

● *The US resolution only authorised the establishment of a no-fly zone and the prevention of Libyan state forces entering Benghazi. This was achieved within days. Everything that NATO did subsequently was beyond the terms of the resolution and therefore illegal; a point that was made vehemently by many who had supported the resolution, including Russia, China, South Africa and elements in the Arab League.*

● *Regardless of the pretext, once the NATO is militarily involved in a country on their hit list, they should not be expected to stick to that pretext. The Libya war opened the eyes of many – or should have. Nevertheless the overriding lesson – if it needed reiterating - should be the realisation that the US, UK, France and their allies will stop at nothing, including even imposition of total societal collapse, in order to attempt to reverse their declining global economic position by military obliteration (Glasebrook, 2014:1-2)*

The US has been engaged in combat in the Middle East for some time now. *An increasing number of Americans now think that the US should make efforts to rebuild its economy and society and spend much less time on other people's problems and more on helping America realise its true promise.*

We have spent enough to rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan, they insist, and it is past time for these countries to stand on their own, no more responsibilities overseas that threaten our safety, solvency and self-confidence. Let us invest in America, spend fewer tax dollars on badly designed foreign policy adventures, and speak to the world not from the moral mountaintop but through the power of a positive example. This point of view has much to recommend it. Others insist that we cannot simply retreat and expect the world's problems to leave us alone. There are certain things Americans can and should do to pursue and defend US interests overseas. The central flaw in our current strategy, they insist, is that we have no real priorities, that we think we can afford to make up our foreign policy as we go, and that our plans are designed to meet the world's needs before our own. We need to stop wasting so many lives and so much money, they argue, in a foolish attempt to remake their world in our image. We need a foreign policy that is designed to make America safer and more prosperous, not to prepare other countries for democracy and rule of law. China's leaders are not exporting Chinese values. They

are promoting and protecting China's interests. Washington ought to do the same.

Still others warn that in today's interconnected world, it is dangerously naïve to believe that America can ever really be safe in an unsafe world. We cannot create jobs and grow our economy without a stable global economy. No nation can do more than the US to promote and protect this better world, and it is America's values, not its economic weight or military might, that we leave behind when the troops head home. Values that help others stand on their own. Washington, they argue, must get its financial house in order, invest in a stronger America, and pursue US interests around the world. Nevertheless, it is short-sighted to believe that we can only build lasting strength at home by retreating from the world or by renouncing our faith in the power of democracy, and freedom from poverty and fear to create broadly shared peace and prosperity. Americans have real options. The US can play global policeman if it wants to or we could build an ambitious foreign policy designed to put America first, one that risks American lives and devotes our resources only toward plans that will make America more secure and prosperous. Or let other countries get along the best they can, and invest in rebuilding American strength from within. Which is the right choice? What do Americans really want? There is no more important question facing America's leaders (Bremmer, 2015:1).

The two-state solution is still the only game in town - even after America's Jerusalem decision, there is no feasible alternative.

US President Donald Trump's announcement of his decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was a real shock not only for Palestinians but also for the international community as a whole. For many people, this decision was the final nail in the coffin for the two-state solution. Nevertheless, even before Trump's controversial announcement, some western politicians were arguing that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no longer feasible due to Israel's expansionist policies in the West Bank. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reacted to Trump's Jerusalem decision with fury and went so far to say that the Palestinians would no longer accept the United States as a mediator in the peace process. Abbas also refused to meet with US VP Mike Pence when he visited the region. The international community joined Abbas in condemning Trump's decision, with a resounding majority of UN member states voting to declare the US's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital null and void. However, in the end, neither Abbas nor other world leaders were successful in convincing Mr. Trump to reverse his decision^{xi} (Shoukri, 2018:1-3)

For all his talk about brokering the “ultimate deal” between Israelis and Palestinians, the long-awaited peace plan has yet to arrive, even as

Palestinians and other critics insist it will be dead on arrival.

Moreover, although Israel's government is overjoyed by Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital — with a US embassy set to open in the holy city in May — misgivings are percolating under the surface over Iran, where Israel sees Trump's efforts to date to crack down on Israel's archenemy as lacking. One major, growing concern: that the United States is acquiescing to Iran's growing presence in Syria and influence in Lebanon — two Israeli neighbours. Swirling legal investigations^{xiii} distracting both leaders at home and a stunning fall from grace for Trump's son-in-law and would-be peace negotiator, Jared Kushner, have added to the mix of politics, personalities and historical grievances that have always hindered Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. An already volatile situation now looks even more combustible than normal (Lederman, 2018).

5.5. President Trump's Middle East Plan

The US proposed close to a dozen Israeli-Palestinians peace plans since the seventies. The two state solution has been the centre-piece of its Middle East policy but efforts to implement it have so far miscarried. The Middle East has become more violent with the invasion of Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, etc. and asymmetric conflicts. President

Trump's new Middle East Plan, according to his senior advisor, Jared Kushner, is based on four basic principles: **freedom of religion, freedom in life and professional opportunities, freedom of movement and freedom of political opinions**, as well as **Safety and Security** – in life and work. It augurs on **Respect among people** and **Respect for Religions, Parties and ethnic groups**, the archetypal twosome of US foreign policy and a souvenir to Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

In economic and operational terms, Trump's Plan focuses on infrastructure, especially in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This is the central idea in Trump's Plan, i.e. diluting, dissolving and finally eliminating the conflict between Israel and Arab States through a vast mass of investment. This can create the best climate for a stable peace between the Jewish State and the Islamic (but also secular) universe surrounding it. There is no precise data on the investment to the new Middle East Plan. The most authoritative and reliable sources mention a total amount of \$25 billion for the West Bank and Gaza, in addition to an investment of \$40 billion in Egypt, Jordan and, probably, the Lebanon, to made conditional upon a series of intermediate results to be assessed. The investment will be made over a decade (Elia Valori, 2019).

5.6. Epilogue

5.6.1. Sudan

Sudan has appointed a new prime minister as the country embarks on a three-year transition to civilian rule. *Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdock said achieving peace and solving the economic crisis were priorities. His appointment comes as Lt-Gen Abdel Fattab Abdelrahman Burhan was sworn in as leader of the new Sovereign Council. The new government will run the country until an election. There have been months of turbulence including the deaths of dozens of protesters. The opposition hopes the new appointments will usher in an end to military rule* (BBC, 2019).

5.6.2. Détente among Iran, Qatar, Turkey vs. Egypt, Saudi and UAE

An immediate détente in the Middle East will go a long way to sustain its prosperity and the Gulf Monarchies. Besides the war in **Yemen**, the Middle East alignment of political trajectories is made of the Saudi-UAE-Egypt axis vs. the Iran-Qatar-Turkey axis. Sudan had allied with the Qatar-Iran-Turkey axis, because it has an on-going land claim against Egypt - **The Hala'ib Triangle**. Ongoing tensions in the Red Sea region came to the fore when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Sudan as part of his Africa tour. Among these agreements was a deal to temporarily hand over the Red **Sea island of Suakin** (in Sudan) to Turkey.

5.6.3. The Israeli-Palestinian stalemate

*The **two state solution** has been the centrepiece of U.S. Middle East policy but efforts to implement it have so far miscarried. Other solution offered include **confederation—cohabitation**, not divorce and a **unilateral solution by Israel** to operationalise this along the lines of the Oslo Accords¹³,*

There is little question that a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians is the best way to end that protracted conflict, in theory. The failure to bring about such an agreement, however, after decades of effort, means that Israel needs to look elsewhere. It has been proposed if Israel is comfortable with it; a unilateral move by Israel has one great advantage: It does not necessitate the involvement of any other entity. Under what might be called the “our state, not our state” proposal, Israel would declare, both in terms of legal claim de jure, and effective control de facto, what constitutes borders of the State of Israel. Naturally, debate would have to take place over what would be annexed and what would be renounced. When one eliminates the political and religious extremes, there is a great deal of agreement on where the borders should lie (Roth, 2017)

Ambitious and imaginative visions have emerged on the argument that Westphalian sovereignty¹⁴ is anachronistic and inappropriate, at least as it came to be associated with national states. Based as it is on an assumption

of territorial integrity and homogeneity of people, it can be criticized as incongruent with Israel and Palestinian realities.

One of the architects of the Oslo process, Yossi Beilin, acknowledged, 'in hindsight, it is clear that we should have been looking all along at confederation—cohabitation, not divorce' (Beilin, 2015 in Djerejian, et al., 2018). By that, he meant a settlement that left Israel and Palestine intertwined rather than separated, an idea that was mooted early on in informal talks with Palestinians and was then dropped. Thus, the idea was not fully developed. Under such models, the entire land of historic Palestine again becomes one where Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs both claim the whole land as theirs.

Time will tell how, when and with what miracle will the Israeli and Palestinian challenge will be resolved. *Twenty-five years of diplomacy—including the Oslo Accords, the Camp David Summit and the Clinton Parameters, the Taba Summit, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Middle East Road Map, the Olmert-Abbas talks within the Annapolis process, the Kerry peace efforts, and others—have done little to stop the negatively shifting status quo. Yet, the Israeli-Palestinian issue is not going away. Rather, demographic trends and settlement construction mean that the two communities are growing ever closer physically while remaining separated politically, socially, and economically (Djerejian, et al., 2018).*

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Woldemariam, Michael & Alden Young *What Happens in Sudan Doesn't Stay in Sudan* (Foreign Affairs, 19 Jul 2019)

ⁱ The political standoff between the Middle East's main Sunni and Shia powers had occurred after Iranian protesters attacked a Saudi embassy in Tehran following the peninsular hegemon's execution of prominent Saudi Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. Reports indicate that the Iranians pressured the Saudi government to allow a Shiite ritual during the Haj, which includes political protests against the West and Saudi. The negotiations reached an impasse after Saudi rejected Iran's demand on grounds that such an allowance would disrupt the Haj process, which involves some two million pilgrims from around the world. Iran now has barred its citizens from participating in the Haj (*Ibidem*).

ⁱⁱ The government declared martial law on October 7, 1958. Nawab Nauroz Khan (Mir Naroz Khan) led a rebellion against the government beginning in October 1958. Balochi tribesmen led by Sher Mohammad Marri rebelled against the government in the tribal areas of Mengal, Marri, and Bukti between 1963 and 1969. The Baloch Students Organisation (BSO) was established in support of Balochi independence in 1967. Government troops and Balochi rebels clashed in 1967 and 1968, and Balochi rebels were largely suppressed in 1969. Elections were held in 1970 and 1971, and the NAP won eight out of 20 seats in the Balochistan Legislative Assembly. The government announced the formation of the province of Balochistan on July 1, 1971. Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto appointed Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo of the NAP as governor of Balochistan in April 1972. Iraq and Afghanistan provided military assistance to Balochi rebels beginning in 1973. Government officials found weapons and ammunition in the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad on February 10, 1973 (*Ibidem*).

ⁱⁱⁱ The protesters who dominate the streets and have guaranteed the FFC its position at the negotiation table with their lives, distilled the complexity of Sudan's political scene into a primary demand for civilian over military rule. Expectedly, many were aghast to see their champions' compromise on their main demand of civilian government and agree to an accommodation with the TMC and its strongman Himeidti. It was the same generals who just weeks ago ordered the violent dispersal of the massive sit-in around the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) headquarters on 3 June, for months a Mecca of emancipatory demands, urban creativity, and citizens' solidarity, brutally killing over a hundred protesters. To address the grievances of the protestors, the deal offered a committee of investigation with the possibility of drawing on regional African support but no concrete procedure of accountability (*Ibidem*).

^{iv} The unknowns of the Corinthia deal, its actual flesh, were surrendered to the traditional rationale of "tajility" and kicked forward to be negotiated in a future "constitutional declaration". The two sides initially announced Friday 19 July as their deadline for a final act. The FFC, shaken to the core by divisions over the document it just signed, has considerable homework to tend to in this brief eternity of political time. The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), an umbrella of armed movements, which had been engaged with FFC representatives in talks in Addis Ababa, parallel to the Corinthia negotiations, seemed to be deeply disappointed and accused the FFC of replaying the standard Khartoum record of excluding Sudan's peripheries when political benefits are ripe for the pick (*Ibidem*).

^v The woman who has become an icon of the protests, Alaa Salah, tweeted that the military's announcement was unacceptable: "The people do not want a transitional military council. Change will not happen with Bashir's entire regime hoodwinking Sudanese (*Ibidem*).

^{vi} Faced with expanding Iranian influence, the destabilising precedent of the Arab Spring, and a shrinking American security umbrella, Crown Princes Mohammed Bin Zayed and Mohammed Bin Salman have sought to transform their countries' relationships with their neighbours radically across the Red Sea. In 2015, the UAE established a military base in Eritrea, from which the Saudi-Emirati alliance has waged war in Yemen—often relying on Sudanese troops and paramilitaries for ground operations. The UAE is now building a second military base in Somaliland's port of Berbera while the Saudis are planning their own military facility in neighbouring Djibouti. Both countries have also expanded their commercial ties to the Horn, and provided large cash infusions

to Sudan and Ethiopia. A major goal of these efforts is to align the Horn states with the Saudi-Emirati axis against Iran, Qatar, and Turkey. To that end, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi find it useful to protect the region's autocratic regimes, because the Gulf States' interests do not always align with popular opinion in the Horn. In Sudan, for example, the government has supported the Saudi-Emirati intervention in Yemen despite vocal criticism from across the Sudanese political spectrum (*Ibidem*)

^{vii} The African Union expanded the mandate of its special panel on Sudan and South Sudan to address broader regional issues, and IGAD recently extended the mandate of its Special Envoy for Somalia to include the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. IGAD's Council of Ministers also strongly endorsed a common approach to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and in April, it established a task force to begin formulating one (*Ibidem*).

^{viii} In fact, the two Gulf monarchies encouraged the generals to overthrow Bashir, whom they viewed as unreliable because of his warm relations with Qatar and Turkey, and his Islamist leanings. They backstopped the TMC with \$3 billion in aid immediately following Bashir's ouster, and the UAE appears to have supplied Hemedti's Rapid Support Forces with Emirati armour. And although they have tempered their public support for the TMC after Hemedti's troops massacred civilian protesters in early June, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh have continued to provide political cover to Sudan's generals as they battle for control of the transition. IGAD and the African Union have taken the side of Sudan's democracy movement and pushed the TMC to relinquish power to a transitional civilian administration. The efforts of these African-led organisations have at times been haphazard and uncoordinated, but the groups' position is clear. The African Union's powerful Peace and Security Council initially demanded in mid-April that Sudan's military cede power to a civilian government within 15 days of toppling Bashir. Roughly a week later, it extended the grace period to three months. But after the slaughter of the protesters, the council suspended the TMC's AU membership and threatened to impose further sanctions if an agreement on a civilian-led transition was not reached by the end of that month. The Ethiopian prime minister then brokered a deal for a civilian-led transition, using the AU and IGAD position. The two sides eventually agreed to share power for three years until elections can be organized, alternating leadership of a council made up of an equal number of military and civilian representatives (*Ibidem*).

^{ix} The US launched a massive military attack against Iraq and wreaked havoc in the region, all based on a factual error that Saddam Hussein had WMDs. One such sustained course of lies was directed against democratically elected Iranian PM Mohammad Mossadegh during coup of 1953. The UK refuses to back UN inquiry into 'war crimes' amid fears it will damage trade Britain's Middle East and North Africa minister Alistair Burt argued that the Saudi-led coalition itself should investigate any atrocities it committed in its conflict against rebel forces in Yemen. Can we really trust a treacherous regime that has an equally causal relationship with truth and can turn a blind eye to facts when it suits its purposes? What about Saudi Arabia, which too has claimed Iranians, did it. Certainly, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) could be a trustworthy source - except, he and his backers have repeatedly lied to the public in the face of facts about the tragic fate of slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. None of this is to exempt Iran from being part and parcel of the self-same scene and engaging in its own game of lies. Despite the death toll in Syria surpassing half a million, it has continued to fabricate a story about supporting a "legitimate government", while Bashar al-Assad has continued in a sustained course of murderous mayhem. Indeed, the Iranian authorities may very well have planted that mine in the Japanese tanker. The issue we face is not the guilt or innocence of any party involved, but, instead, the complete collapse of any moral authority standing on the side of truth. Nietzsche famously said, Truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors that have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour. In the Gulf of Oman, the truth has dived into the lowest depths of the sea in search of new, more convincing, metaphors.

^x *In Iraq in 2005, the Shia were quick to create militias to defend Shia communities and Holy Sites, when it became apparent that certain anti-US groups were going to incite various causes to violence. The Iranians were more than happy to provide training and equipment to these militias, who are as powerful and active today than they were during the insurgency* (*Ibid*).

^{xi} *After the storm of anger dissipated, the world came to its senses, and most leaders realised that no peace process in the Middle East could ever advance without the support and approval of the US. This was clearly put by EU foreign policy Chief when she said, 'Nothing without the US, nothing with the US alone'. Despite attempts by the EU to change the current mechanism and create a negotiations framework that would involve multilateral brokers, the Palestinians were disappointed to find out that this was nothing more than wishful thinking. This was*

especially true after senior Palestinian officials, who were dispatched to Moscow, Beijing and several Arab capitals after the Jerusalem announcement to find new international sponsors for negotiations, returned home empty-handed. This meant that the role of the US is and will be central to any peace process in the Middle East regardless of Palestinians' perception of US as a dishonest broker (Ibid).

^{xiii} In a pointed reminder of his troubles at home, Netanyahu and his wife were questioned separately by police for hours on Friday before the prime minister left the next day for Washington. Those interviews were part of an investigation into a corruption case involving the country's telecom giant, and police have recommended indicting Netanyahu on corruption charges in two other cases as well. The Trump family has legal problems of its own too. Kushner, Trump's point-man for the Mideast, is under intense scrutiny over his business dealings as special counsel Robert Mueller barrels forward with his Russia probe. Kushner has also been stripped of his top security clearance in another blow to his credibility as an international negotiator (Ibid).

¹³ The **Oslo Accords** are a set of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): the Oslo I Accord, signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993; and the Oslo II Accord, signed in Taba, Egypt, in 1995. The Oslo Accords marked the start of the **Oslo process**, a peace process aimed at achieving a peace treaty based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and at fulfilling the "right of the Palestinian people to self-determination." The Oslo process started after secret negotiations in Oslo, resulting in the recognition by the PLO of the State of Israel and the recognition by Israel of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as a partner in negotiations. The Oslo Accords created a Palestinian Authority tasked with limited self-governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and acknowledged the PLO as Israel's partner in permanent-status negotiations about remaining questions. The most important questions relate to the borders of Israel and Palestine, Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, Israel's military presence in and control over remaining territories after Israel's recognition of Palestinian autonomy, and the Palestinian right of return. The Accords, however, did not create a Palestinian state.

¹⁴ Westphalian sovereignty, or state sovereignty, is the principle in international law that each state has exclusive sovereignty over its territory. The principle underlies the modern international system of sovereign states and is enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which states that "nothing should authorise intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state." According to the idea, every state, no matter how large or small, has an equal right to sovereignty. Political scientists have traced the concept to the *Peace of Westphalia* (1648), which ended the Thirty Years' War. The principle of non-interference was further developed in the 18th century. The Westphalian system reached its peak in the 19th and 20th centuries, but it has faced recent challenges from advocates of humanitarian intervention