Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

POWER BEYOND THE STATE

NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE BROADER SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN

Authors: Cornelius Adebahr | Benedetta Berti | Mohamed Eljarh | Kristina Kausch

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The state system in the Arab world is being challenged from within. Weak institutions, hollowed out for decades under successive authoritarian strongmen, are besieged by a myriad of newly empowered non-state actors. Spanning across widely diverse groupings, from peaceful political and social grassroots movements to violent extremists, non-state actors can put pressure on flawed states by demanding accountability, justice, revolutionary change, or power.

Deficient state institutions and enhanced socio-economic and security challenges have created governance vacuums in which prospective alternative providers have been able to thrive. However, the deterioration of state-citizen relations not only rests on the states' failure to deliver services, but also on its fading value as a provider of a cohesive national identity. As sources of higher authority – such as Arab nationalism or royal families – lose ground, sectarian and communitarian sources of identity gain traction. States' lacking capacity to provide social services and security has pushed many people to seek shelter and assistance within their traditional communities. At the same time, the strengthening of local identities makes consensus on how the shared state should be designed in order to accommodate the various communities' needs and preferences increasingly difficult.

Governments have reacted to the global rise of non-state challengers in many different ways. The rise of the Islamic State (IS) as an expansionist territorial project and the spread of violent jihadi movements have led to military responses of different kinds and magnitude. At the same time, incumbent regimes have utilized the tangible security threat posed by violent extremism to justify pre-emptive repression of political and social grassroots movements which they perceive as a threat to their rule and privileges. Non-state actors have also increasingly become proxy agents in national conflict scenarios by state players who seek to further a larger regional agenda.

Who are the emerging influential non-state actors in the Southern Mediterranean; and how does their interplay with state institutions of a given territory affect local and regional security?

Assembling a wide array of heterogeneous actors, literature groups non-state actors into a number of categories, ranging from close partners to direct challengers of the state and/or the incumbent regime. For the purpose of this report non-state actors will be grouped by whether or not they use violence to achieve their aims. Among non-violent groupings, important state and/or regime challengers include political parties and civil opposition groups, as well as traditional governance entities based on ethnicity and kinship, such as tribes and clans. Violent non-state actors include terrorist organizations, organized crime groups, quasi-military organizations, militias, national liberation movements, pirates, and guerillas.[1]

That said, increasingly blurred demarcations between state and non-state actors show that a clear-cut dichotomy of state and non-state actors is increasingly insufficient as a framework to assess power relations. A grey zone in-between both categories is gaining ground as some groups, such as Hezbollah or IS, combine features of both state and non-state actorness.

Based on these premises, the present report will look at a number of non-violent (kinship, religious and civil groupings) and violent (armed militants) non-state actors, and how each of these have seen their influence and their relationship to the state evolve. The report will then assess the main state responses to the rise of non-state challengers – military, instrumental, repressive and containing – before concluding on the potential of non-state actors as both spoilers and partners.

Kinship, Religious and Civil Groupings

Traditional kinship-based governance structures play a powerful role in local politics, often in parallel to formal state institutions. Religious, tribal, ethnic and sectarian affiliations are key to local loyalties and regional identity politics. Organized civil society such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties and unions, broader societal movements, as well as tribes and clans, increasingly challenge the prerogatives and state institutions and demand accountability or better representation, and in some cases demand to share power or wealth.

Traditional kinship-based governance structures have always played a role in Arab politics to varying degrees, and were often exploited by ruling regimes to their advantage. These informal structures were further empowered following the 2011 Arab uprisings. The emergence of new local actors and new alliances among them led to significant shifts in the balance of power between formal and informal governance centers and Arab world politics more broadly. Especially in those places where the 2011 uprisings were followed by violent conflict, non-state actors have grown more powerful as parallel structures to formal state institutions as people retreated to their most basic enclaves of tribe, city, group or family in search of security and protection. Such a retreat happened due to the political uncertainty and chaos following the ouster of the regime in Libya, the failure of the transitional arrangements in the case of Yemen, and in the context of full-fledged civil war in Yemen and Syria.

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[1] Carmit Valensi: 'Non-State Actors: A Theoretical Limitation in a Changing Middle East', *Military and Strategic Affairs*, Vol. 7 Nº 1, March 2015.

In Syria, groupings with ethnic, sectarian or ideological identities have been strengthened, often at the expense of a diminishing and contested central authority. Since Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970 and his Alawite clan controlled the state apparatus, the President tried to consolidate his power by winning over other minority groups to reinforce his position vis-à-vis the Sunni majority. As a result, minority groups, and especially those hailing from the Alawite community, enjoyed privileges under the Assad rule of Syria, leading to a strengthening of sub-national identities.

With the beginning of the armed conflict in 2011, these sectarian fault lines became more visible. The regime of Bashar al-Assad has purposefully exploited those pre-existing fault lines to galvanize its support base. Partly as a result of this, the Syrian civil war has to date acquired a starkly sectarian dimension. Within the regime's ranks, local Alawite militias and foreign Shiite fighters are flocking in to support the Assad regime from the Middle East and beyond. On the opposition's side, sectarian tones have also grown stronger, especially with the progressive affirmation of violent extremist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra.

In Libya, tribes have been able to exert increasing influence on societal and political levels by means of their social safety nets that provide certain levels of security, protection and social justice to local populations. Libyan tribes are well-established societal structures with their own traditions and legal provisions (including a penal code to settle disputes and criminal cases outside of Libya's formal court system). During the Qaddafi years, ethnic and kinship-based groupings proved to be more resilient in Libya's post-2011 context than conventional civil society organizations, which were more frequently silenced by assassinations, kidnapping, intimidation or self-imposed exile. Colonel Muammar Qaddafi purposefully exploited tribes to secure his rule in Libya and created what was known as *Fayliat Shabyia*, or tribal associations, as part of his model for 'direct democracy'. These tribal associations were formal institutions that played a key role in maintaining social peace in Libya's various governorates under the Qaddafi regime, and by doing so, their tacit support helped ensure the survival of the regime for over 40 years.

Following the fall of the Qaddafi regime, tribes felt sidelined and saw the rise of Islamist groups and violent extremists as a direct threat to their own influence. Nevertheless, tribes as well-established, non-violent non-state actors quickly consolidated their position as an important political player. In a context of surging violence following the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime, individuals sought security and protection in their most basic enclaves, thereby politically empowering Libya's already strong tribal landscape. Among Libya's tribal structures there is an increasing awareness that Libya can only be ruled through the employment of tribal politics or religious ideology. Tribal leaders, therefore, are going great lengths to ensure that tribal structures become a key element in any future governance framework in Libya, including by supporting decentralized governance by means of federal or con-federal governing arrangements.

After 2011, successive governments repeatedly sought tribal support or assistance in resolving local conflicts between various groups, cities or tribes. Additionally, tribes gained significant leverage over formal authorities as the latter regularly required tribal backing for addressing matters of national interest in parts of the country where tribal authority was dominant over formal institutions. For example, during the 2013 oil terminals crisis, tribes did not trust the central authorities sufficiently to support them in reopening the oil terminals that had been closed down by a local armed group. By contrast, in September 2016, the head of the Magharba tribe (located in the oil producing areas where Libya's four main oil terminals are located) gathered the support of tribal leaders in Libya's oil crescent area to actively support the re-capture of the oil terminals by forces loyal to the government led by General Khalifa Haftar.

Tribes also played a key role in local reconciliation and peace efforts throughout Libya particularly in the western and southern regions of the country. For example, when a tribal war broke out in the town of Sebha in November 2016, tribal leaders and delegations were able to broker a truce between the two warring tribes within a week. The United Nations' (failed) efforts to bring tribes together under the banner of the UN-led political dialogue process showed, on the one hand, the international recognition of the rule of tribes in Libya, and on the other hand illustrated the difficulties faced by international agencies in managing their engagement with tribes as a key

actor on the ground. This will require more work on the part of international institutions to understand the functioning of and the sensitivities within Libyan tribal structures.

Unlike armed conflict scenarios such as in Syria and Libya, Tunisia's mostly peaceful democratic transition provides a more fruitful environment for non-violent non-state actors. Tunisia's relative ethnic and religious homogeneity does not mean that Tunisian society is free of cleavages. Kinship is key in Tunisian politics where a small number of dominant families still play an outsized political role. In a political system still dominated by a vast patronage apparatus, being part of a clientelist network remains key. Shared family and regional ties provide a basis for trust and reciprocity in these networks. One of the most important cleavages separates the more developed coastal areas from the poorer interior. At the same time, post-2011 Tunisia is witnessing an in-formalization of politics, whereby not the formal political actors but informal backstage actors are the true bearers of power in many cases. This shadow governance structure is favored by the strong political clientelism and corruption at the highest level and helps to exacerbate cleavages among certain societal groups such as businessmen, justice, media and unionists. The trend of in-formalization, or shadow politics, directly impacts the quality of governance in Tunisia's new political order.

Non-violent non-state actors are playing an increasing role in governance across the MENA region especially at the local levels. This role has been empowered by the inability of central governments and central political institutions to address issues of security, justice, political and economic representation of local communities. This reality makes it imperative that MENA governments pursue a decentralized approach to governance. This approach should seek to constructively engage and embed such actors in a formal governing structure to jointly advance sustainable political and economic stability and security.

Armed Militants

As insecurity has empowered non-violent non-state actors, growing regional instability, state fragility and conflict have contributed to the rise of armed groups across the MENA region. Analyzing the evolving relations between state and non-state armed groups in the region is rendered more complex by the significant differences among the distinct armed organizations across the Middle East and North Africa. Non-state armed groups' interest in and capacity to challenge the state depend on several factors, including:

- Their ideological orientation and the nature and scope of their agendas (local vs. transnational);

- The degree of their governance and state-building aspirations, including their interest in controlling and holding territory;

- Their financial, governance and military capacity; and

- Their relationship with the civilian population and their sources of legitimacy.

Within this framework, armed groups in the MENA vary widely, from local and cross-regional criminal networks exploiting the context of insecurity and fragility; to local militias focused on armed struggle and/or security provision; to more sophisticated organizations with the skills and desire to invest in directly providing governance.

Under the latter category falls Hezbollah, a complex social, political and military organization active as a non-statutory regional armed force in Syria, whilst being also a mainstream political party and an established provider of social services in Lebanon. Elsewhere, within Syria and Iraq, provision of governance by non-state armed actors has also taken root, albeit in different forms. On the one hand, the 'IS model' of governance has articulated clear state-like aspirations and attempted to create an alternative 'statelet' in opposition to the surrounding states and the regional order. On the other hand, within Syria, other groups—such as the former al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra—have implemented a more gradual and localized governance model, with the group progressively increasing its ability to rule over territory and population, often through complex alliances with other local actors. Within the broader southern Mediterranean and the Sahel region, other organizations (such as the Somalia-based

al-Shabaab) have also gradually extended their role from an initial apparatus geared at the mere provision of security and justice towards a provider of governance. Finally, in Libya, the proliferation of non-state armed groups with political agendas and claims profoundly challenges the stability of the political order.

Understanding the differences in the orientations, agendas, capabilities and legitimacy of these actors as well as the extent of their state-like functions and aspirations is the first step to recognizing the shifting power dynamics between states and non-states at the regional level.

Crucially, numerous non-state armed groups active in the broader Mediterranean region are increasingly more able to effectively exploit their environment. For instance, in recent decades, easier access to sophisticated technology, weapons and communication systems which increases their lethality and effectiveness has benefited the rise of non-state armed groups.

Beyond the better access to resources, the rise of armed non-state groups is largely due to the changed regional political context marked by instability and fragility, both exacerbated by the contested nature of the state and the growing vacuum of governance. Some of the trends unleashed by the regional mobilization processes of the 2011 Arab uprisings —including the further weakening of nation-state and centralized political institutions— are of particular significance to the development of alternatively governed areas.

Adding to these dynamics, regional borders are also increasingly more contested. The proliferation of cross-regional illicit networks and economies, focused on smuggling of drugs, people and contraband goods, contribute to this trend. In addition, numerous armed-political actors in the region focus on contesting and re-drawing regional borders, as reflected in the case of IS in Syria and Iraq, but also in the rise of new or de facto states in places like South Sudan or Somaliland. Finally, most regional challenges—from illicit smuggling economies, to terrorism, to migration—are deeply transitional in their nature, rendering borders less significant and inherently more contested. These trends result in two parallel processes of regionalization and decentralization of power, both of which weaken central states and empower non-state challengers, including non-state armed groups.

But how do these armed groups challenge the state? All throughout the region, a process of 'militiafication' is resulting in the proliferation of non-statutory, irregular forces. While some of these groups focus solely on fighting the state and/or supporting illicit economies; many others are also operating as de facto security providers at the local level. In addition to eroding the state's monopoly on the use of force, non-state armed groups can further challenge the state's authority and legitimacy by governing. At the same time, armed groups' relationships to the state and the regional order vary widely and are not always marked by confrontation and competition.

At one end of the spectrum is a group like IS, whose *raison d'être* is to contest the local, regional and international state-based order and to replace it with an alternative one. This group is inherently anti-systemic and its mission has led it to fully fledged confrontation with virtually all regional states. In Libya, most armed groups—with the exception of those affiliated with IS—do not aim to reject the international order as such, but rather to contest and redefine their domestic political context.

At the other end of the spectrum are groups that do not directly confront but complement the state. An organization like Hezbollah often cooperates and shares sovereignty with the Lebanese government, operating both as an insider political party, an external service provider and an autonomous armed group. By a similar token, in the Syrian civil war, the rise of pro-Bashar al-Assad militias reveals a symbiotic relationship between the state and the non-state; one where the regime devolves some of its governance functions and power to local armed actors, in exchange for military support. In other words, what we see is a process of collusion between the state and the non-state, a further extension of the grey zone between (clearly identifiable) governmental and non-governmental groups.

States' Responses

States' responses to the rise of both armed and unarmed non-state challengers range widely from war to repression to co-option and patronage. Non-state groups can be challengers or partners to their government, with a large grey zone in between. Governments can benefit from non-state actors who complement government functions in service delivery. Often governments feel threatened by political opposition, pressure groups and public mobilization and will seek to undermine them. At the same time, states may benefit from influential non-state actors whom they manage to co-opt or instrumentalize. By contrast, violent non-state challengers may seek to weaken state institutions and/or overthrow the incumbent government via direct military confrontation. Some states respond to the rise of non-state challengers in purely defensive ways, others are acting more strategically. In short, state responses to non-state challengers include containing, repressive, military and instrumental responses.

Morocco has chosen to respond with containment to keep non-violent non-state challengers at bay, via a combination of selective inclusion and subtle coercion. Under pressure from protests in 2011, King Mohamed VI launched a flawed Constitutional reform which did however serve as a valve to defuse public anger as protests eased quickly afterwards. The first elections in the aftermath of 2011 brought the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) to power, and its head Abdelilah Benkirane was named prime minister of the first Islamist-led government from the Arab Spring, ruling in a coalition of eight parties including the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), a formation close to the Palace. Observing the fragmentation of the opposition into a moderate and a subversive part, the regime sought to integrate and co-opt the moderate part –the PJD– as a vaccine against the open challenge from the outlawed Islamist *Al Adl Wal Ihsane* movement.

The regime's language of moderation, however, clashes with Morocco's decreasing socio-economic development indicators. Morocco is a negative outlier in terms of youth unemployment, and in order to provide short-term employment the regime has purposefully allowed the informal sector to explode. As the October 2016 outburst of protests over the death of a fish vendor at the hands of local police has shown, however, Morocco's approach of containment of political non-state challengers is not sustainable. Recent moves from subtle to more coercive forms of repression are likely to fuel the potential for renewed public mobilization.

Unlike Morocco, the government of Egypt under President Abdelfattah el-Sisi has chosen an outright repressive response against political dissent in what has become the country's biggest crackdown on political opposition since the Nasser era. A civil society response to Egypt's politically restrictive environment built up since 2003 leading to a common agenda between Islamists and secular civil society aimed at confronting the Mubarak regime. This eventually led up to the mass mobilization that ousted President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Following the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power, identity politics came to the fore while socio-economic demands were pushed in the background. Successive Egyptian regimes have benefitted from the divisions among Egypt's opposition by driving a wedge between the liberal and Islamist camps. Under Sisi, the military establishment was able to play its traditional and structural clout and re-empower itself with the help of a nationalist security discourse. The legitimacy of the military did not last, however: since el-Sisi's peak of popularity in 2013-14, the socio-economic crisis has sharply dampened people's enthusiasm for the president. As Egypt's military has built up a highly personalized regime, however, another military person may likely replace Sisi when his public support levels become unsustainable.

The harsh crackdown on the non-violent opposition has been mirrored by the army's repressive military approach against violent actors operating in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. While jihadists had been notably unsuccessful in recruiting among Sinai Bedouins previous to 2011, hawkish policies from Cairo post-2011 reinforced Sinai residents' opposition to the central government. The tough military approach by the Egyptian army on the Sinai, therefore, not only failed to produce the desired military successes, but exacerbated the challenge by facilitating rebel recruitment. Repression, the Sinai example shows, often becomes a vicious circle: it can turn bystanders into challengers, and state efforts to violently repress these challengers only enhance their power.

The analysis of military responses to the rise of armed non-state actors is complicated by the increasingly blurred demarcation between (state) armies and (non-state) militia. In many contexts, traditional armies are no longer the main or decisive military player. In Lebanon, Hizbollah, not the Lebanese Army, is the main national security provider. In Libya, the absence of a single central authority means that the armed forces of the competing factions all claim to be the state army while being considered non-state militia by their contenders.

In addition, technological advances paired with easy access to weapons have enabled non-state actors to recur to means of warfare that have traditionally been reserved for state armies. Opposition troops in Syria use tanks and anti-tank-missiles, and shoot down helicopters. Black markets and deliveries from outside powers such as Russia have provided some non-state militia with weapons that are not even available to Arab armies. The use of weaponry traditionally reserved for state armies by non-state fighters means conventional state-non-state battleground dynamics are increasingly fading away.

The international efforts to combat the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq represent a prominent case study of military strategies used by a number of states against a violent non-state challenger. The biggest effort in scope in this regard, the US-led coalition against IS, assembled contributions from 17 states and cost about 9 billion dollars by October 2016. The coalition supported local armed non-state groups (including the Iraqi Peshmerga and the Syrian Democratic Forces) to fight IS on the ground. Russia's parallel military intervention in Syria – also involving active support to local militias including the Syrian Kurdish militia YPG) also claimed to be targeting IS, but massive strikes on non-IS targets provided evidence that the Russian military engagement was primarily aimed at safeguarding its ally Bashar al-Assad. Anti-IS operations via the Iranian Quds forces, aided by Hezbollah, have similarly played into Assad's hands but focused less on targeting their nominative adversary IS.

In addition to the challenger role of non-state actors within a given state, governments also use non-state groups abroad in an instrumental way to challenge other governments in their place, with proxy wars as the military result. Non-state actors are increasingly becoming trans-national actors with a regional influence, and as such increasingly attractive for regional powers as partners and proxy agents.

Iran has systematically provided support to non-state proxies to further its interests in the region for decades. According to the US State Department, which has listed Iran since 1984 as a state sponsor of terrorism, Tehran directly supports non-state actors in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Iraq.[2] In Western discourse, Iran is often portrayed as having given birth to modern militias through its contribution to establishing the Lebanese Hezbollah in the early 1980s. While Iran is probably the state actor with the longest track record in the instrumental use of non-state proxies, it is nevertheless keen on working with governmental partners provided they are capable and non-threatening to Iranian strategic interests. Over three decades, Tehran has successfully used Hezbollah simultaneously as a threat and deterrent against the US and Israel. Given the opaque nature of Tehran's support to local proxies, however, the precise scope of its activities is impossible to determine.[3]

From an Iranian point of view, the battle in Syria and Iraq will shape the Middle East for the next fifty years. The conquest of a geographical corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean lies at the core of Tehran's efforts to expand its regional influence in the region. Although the Quds force is Iran's main military arm tasked with implementing its decisions in the Middle East, the country is also supported by the fighters of Hezbollah, which has turned from a local militia into a de facto sectarian regional army. An actor of agency rather than merely an Iranian puppet, Hezbollah's agreement to Tehran's request to fight in Syria against considerable internal opposition however illustrates Iran's significant influence over the movement.

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[2] US State Department: 2015 Country Reports on Terrorism, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015

[3] Karim Sadjadpour, Behnam Ben Taleblu: 'Iran, Leveraging Chaos', in: K. Kausch (ed): *Geopolitics and Democracy in the Middle East*, FRIDE, Madrid: 2015, pp. 35-49.

Iran has not been the only regional/global state actor to instrumentalize non-state actors, however. Russia's, the United States' and other Western powers' provision of weapons and other material, financial and political support to different factions in the Syrian war are cases in point. Drawing lessons from the active external empowerment of Afghan fighters in the 1980s, which later contributed to the rise to al-Qaeda would suggest that Western powers, if serious on containing the power of violent non-state actors, should be very cautious in militarily empowering non-state armed groups for instrumental short-term purposes.

EU and US' Responses to the Rise of Non-State Actors: Is Transatlantic Cooperation Still Possible?

In the face of a relative loss of state control to the benefit of non-state challengers, transatlantic partners could work hand in hand to a) empower constructive non-state actors (supporting democratic development and state-building), and b) preventing an erosion of state power in the MENA region to the benefit of violent non-state spoilers (conflict resolution).

The election of Donald Trump as the next US President is likely to put further strain on an already difficult transatlantic partnership. To date, the difficulties of the United States and Europe to agree on a common framework for how to respond to the rise of non-state actors and their interplay with the MENA region rest on at least three elements. First, the United States and the European Union have in the past proved to be structurally incapable of joint strategizing on global challenges. Second, the so-called 'stability syndrome'[4] – a preference for the 'stable' status quo to the unpredictable risks of political change – is still the dominating mind-set for policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic when formulating an approach to the Southern Mediterranean. Third, the transatlantic partners have each severe distractions to deal with (such as Brexit, the populist surge or the immigration challenge) that impede their ability to appropriately respond to the challenges from the region.

Why are the transatlantic partners structurally incapable of joint strategizing? When looking at the three levels of foreign policy – interests, strategies, and actions – of the United States and the European Union towards the Southern Mediterranean, there is both overlap and divergence at each level. With regard to the interests, the two sides declare to uphold the same principles, such as promoting democracy and the rule of law, or supporting human rights and open societies (the latter includes the empowerment of non-violent non-state actors). However, both tend to prioritize their respective narrower interests with regard to certain countries (e.g. the US in Egypt or the EU in Morocco).

In terms of strategy, both profess – in the latest installments of the 2015 US national security strategy[5] and the 2016 EU global strategy[6], respectively – to strive to work with non-state actors on issues like counter-radicalization, government accountability or research. The underlying rationale of such cooperation is to build social resilience through the inclusion of civil society actors, such as advocated by the EU's neighborhood policy. However, far from constituting any shared policy approach, transatlantic policy coordination is surprisingly meager in strategizing, which happens largely in parallel and unrelated.

With regard to the two side's actions on the ground, there are both positive and negative signs. In the Ukraine crisis, Europe and the United States did coordinate their actions because of the 'Russia factor' driving the crisis, making its containment a shared key priority. On Egypt, by contrast, such coordination is lacking. The Iran deal of 2015, often referred to as a transatlantic success, is an example of hard-won policy coordination after years of divergence, but whose prospects to be continued under the new US administration are increasingly dim. Adding to

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[4] Powel, Brieg Tomos (2009), The stability syndrome: US and EU democracy promotion in Tunisia; in: *Journal of North African Studies*, Volume 14, Number 1, March 2009, pp. 57-73.

[5] 2015 US National Security Strategy, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf

[6] EU Global Strategy, https://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

the general lack of transatlantic policy coordination, conceptual differences between the transatlantic partners when it comes to the meaning of democratization or of specific instruments such as capacity building among civil society actors pose further obstacles to closer cooperation.

Both the US and some EU member states also provide direct support to violent non-state actors such as militias and rebel groups in an ongoing conflict, most visibly in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, the US continues to work with the 'moderate' (aka non-Islamist) opposition while countries like France and the United Kingdom deliver air strikes against IS. In Iraq, Washington backs the central government (including with military advisors and direct support for the liberation of Mosul) while Berlin has delivered weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in the country's North.

Moreover, Western policymakers have on numerous occasions proved to prefer stability over democratic change; from refusing to engage with Hamas following its electoral victory in the Palestinian territories in 2006, to privately longing for the times when Libya was ruled by an unelected military putschist. This 'premium on stability' reflects not only political short-sightedness but also, in particular on the side of the EU, a built-in penchant for intergovernmental relations, even if this means working with autocrats. While the United States sometimes acts as an entrepreneur, supporting emerging non-state actors (both civilian and armed) in autocratic states, the EU's external relations are structured much more firmly along government-to-government lines. Despite repeated pledges to engage civil society more systematically, the EU still remains extremely cautious of working with non-state actors abroad whenever this is seen as a betrayal by its governmental partner.

In addition to this rather rigid intergovernmental precondition, the EU's relations with its member states also complicate its cooperation with non-state actors abroad. The 28 EU member states retain their own foreign policies towards third countries, within the limits of the EU's general approach but with more freedom to support individual actors. At the same time, the EU is confined to a rules-based, government-oriented approach. This regularly leads to intra-European clashes over countries with which some member states have a special relationship. For example, as was described above, in Libya the different groups and clans competing for power offer EU member states such as France, Italy, and the United Kingdom (alongside other regional powers such as the United States, Turkey, Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) opportunities to influence, on their own terms, the potential post-conflict order. However, the terms and interests of these different foreign powers are mostly in conflict with each other, fueling Libya's instability through their political, military and/or logistical support of the various actors on the ground.

Finally, in addition to structural and internal policy-making constraints and the challenges on the ground, both US and EU policy capacities are constrained by a number of severe distractions. The EU has faced strenuous internal crises over the past decade, from fiscal instability to migration inflows to the question of Brexit. The United States, by contrast, is going through a period of global retraction, which under President Trump could turn into outright isolationism coupled with aggressive outbursts. At the time of writing, little is known about the foreign policy approach of US President-elect Donald Trump, except a desire to depart from the Obama years of cautious (dis-)engagement in the Middle East.

Against this background, it is realistic to expect both sides of the Atlantic to focus on 'quick fixes' to tangible threats while neglecting long-term challenges. The question will be whether this short-term approach will help or hinder both conflict resolution and state-building in a region which desperately needs both. When it comes to conflict resolution, the transatlantic partners need to contain violent challengers of the state order; with regard to state-building, they need to foster those non-violent non-state actors that may challenge the existing (non-democratic) order but are crucial to establishing a more pluralistic polity. Both the United States and the EU should favor an approach to empower regional powers (also called 'lighthouses' in development policy) whose own interests would be tamed by multilateral rules. What the West could and should still offer are educational opportunities, liberal visa regulations as well as sufficient protection for those fleeing from conflicts and persecution.

Conclusion

Projecting the near future of a changing regional landscape, power and sovereignty will continue to be both contested and shared between states and non-state actors. These parallel trends will likely deepen both the localization and the regionalization of power dynamics within the broader Southern Mediterranean.

Authoritarian governments in the MENA have been largely unable to channel the potential of non-state challengers in mutually beneficial ways. Instead, they have sought to reduce their power, appeal and capacities, be it through military confrontation, repressive coercion or containment. Only where non-state challengers took the role of proxies abroad, states have sought to bolster their position in order to maximize their value of instrumentalization.

In large parts, the rise of non-state actors is a reaction to the deficiencies of Arab governance. As long as democratic development and socio-economic opportunities in the Arab world are set aside, regimes' attempts to quash the role and influence of non-state challengers will remain a fight against windmills. While violent non-state spoilers must be contained, the power and potential of non-violent non-state actors should be seized as an opportunity by governments in the region and beyond. The EU and the US, while perhaps less likely than before to find much common ground under the incoming US Administration, should join hands on both conflict resolution and state-building.

The Authors

Cornelius Adebahr is Non-Resident Fellow at Carnegie Europe (CAdebahr@ceip.org).

Benedetta Berti is Robert A. Fox Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (benedettab@gmail.com).

Mohamed Eljarh is a Security and Political Analyst at the Rafik Hariri Centre for the Middle East of the Atlantic Council (MEljarh@atlanticcouncil.org).

Kristina Kausch is a Senior Resident Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States (kkausch@gmfus.org).

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean

Contact person:

Dr. Canan Atilgan

Director

Regional Office South Mediterranean

Telefon: +216 70 029 460

E-Mail: canan.atilgan@kas.de