NO CLEAN HANDS:
THE INTERVENTIONS OF MIDDLE EASTERN POWERS, 2010-2020

MATTHEW PETTI
TRITA PARSI

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STATECRAFT

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Executive Summary

Middle East instability is not due to a sole 'malign actor'…

- Instability in the Middle East has often been blamed on a single expansionist U.S. opponent, whether that be Libya, Iraq, or Iran. However, a qualitative and quantitative view of the region's conflicts over the past 10 years shows several states to be interventionist to roughly the same degree, contradicting the argument that regional instability is primarily caused by a single "malign actor."

… nor are U.S. partners innocent — far from it

- Six states have shown themselves the most able to project armed power beyond their borders: Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Iran is highly interventionist, but not an outlier. The other major powers in the region are often as interventionist as the Islamic Republic — and at times even more so. Indeed, the UAE and Turkey have surpassed Iran in recent years.

The U.S. role is also highly problematic

- Washington is not sitting on the sidelines: It is an active player in these regional interventions. In fact, five of the six most interventionist powers in the Middle East are armed by the United States — and also enjoy significant political support from Washington. Fully a third of U.S. arms exports from 2010 to 2020, measured in trend-indicator value, went to the major Middle Eastern powers considered in this study.

Hate the game, not the player

- The data suggest that the most important driving factor in interventionism is regional instability. That is, regional instability appears to drive interventions more often than interventions cause instability.

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You can't blame the Iran nuclear accord for this...

- There is no evidential support for the argument that the 2015 nuclear agreement between five world powers and Iran caused an increase in interventionism driven by Iranian aggression. Iranian intervention remained consistent from the high-water mark of the Arab Spring onward, while other powers' increasing interventionism was often entirely unrelated to Iran. In fact, much of the regional escalation since 2011 has taken place in battlefields where Iran is not involved, but where Turkey, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are jousting for power.

... although U.S. partners' reaction to the Iran deal appears to have aggravated instability

- One tempting explanation is that the U.S.–Iranian rapprochement as the nuclear accord was negotiated and concluded created the perception that the United States was abandoning regional powers to Iran, incentivizing those powers to act more aggressively in pursuit of their perceived interests. Even so, much of the escalation occurred in conflicts that had little to do with Iran.

What to do? 'First, do no harm'

- The United States should take no actions that would make matters worse and, in particular, avoid policies that cause any state to collapse, given that the collapse of state authority is a major driver of interventions and instability. In large part, this means simply resisting the temptation to begin new wars. The U.S. should also stay clear of policies that prolong ongoing civil wars or broad-based sanctions that intensify the process of state collapse, and in so doing elicit interventions.

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Then, help resolve destabilizing quarrels among our friends

- Given the extensive, destabilizing feuding among U.S. strategic partners, Washington should help manage and resolve rivalries among these partners. The United States has unfortunately been too passive in this regard and has failed to use its extensive diplomatic leverage to bring its friends to the negotiating table — this to the detriment of overall stability in the region.

Finally, focus on systemic change, not specific interventionist states

- The United States should support regional diplomacy with an eye toward the creation of a new, inclusive security architecture since, as noted, instability may drive interventions more than interventions are the sole cause of instability. This will likely be more effective than focusing solely on specific intervening states. A promising burst of regional diplomacy is now evident, and the Biden administration should signal its support for this trend by encouraging those engaging one another to institutionalize this embryonic regional dialogue.

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About the Authors

Matthew Petti is a researcher at the Quincy Institute and an investigative reporter at *Responsible Statecraft*. Before joining the Quincy Institute, he worked as a national security reporter for *The National Interest* and a freelance journalist. His work has been published in *The Intercept*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Reason*. He graduated from Columbia University with a Bachelor of Arts in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African studies. He is also a 2021–22 fellow at the Center for Arabic Study Abroad and a 2022–23 Fulbright awardee.

Trita Parsi, Ph.D., is an award-winning author and the 2010 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order. He is an expert on U.S.–Iranian relations, Iranian foreign policy, and the geopolitics of the Middle East. He has authored three books on U.S. policy in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Iran and Israel. He is the cofounder and former president of the National Iranian American Council. He received his Ph.D. in foreign policy at Johns Hopkins' School for Advanced International Studies, a master's degree in international relations from Uppsala University, and a master's degree in economics from the Stockholm School of Economics.

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Introduction

A central pillar of U.S. policy in the Middle East since the 1980s has been the containment of "rogue" or "pariah" states. While today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is *the* alleged wellspring of terrorism, previous villains have included Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and the Assad family's Syria. In 1986, President Ronald Reagan called Gaddafi the "mad dog of the Middle East," with "a goal of a world revolution."[1] A few years later, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said, "Wherever you look, you find the evil hand of Iran in this region."[2] Nearly a decade after that, Iran's archenemy, Iraq, became the "source of instability in the world's most unstable region," as then–National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice put it.[3] As the U.S. military was smashing the Iraqi regime to bits, Bush administration officials began to blame growing instability on Syria, a "rogue nation" that exports "killers" and needs "to think through where they want their place to be in the world."[4]

Now, more than a quarter-century after Christopher first made Iran the central villain of the region, Tehran is once again cast in this role; General Kenneth McKenzie, who heads the Central Command, calls its "pursuit of regional hegemony… the greatest source of instability across the Middle East."[5] Former officials have gone further, arguing as recently as June 2021 that "Tehran's destabilizing role in the region is the common factor" behind conflicts from Palestine to Yemen.[6]

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[1] Reagan, Ronald. "The President's News Conference," April 9, 1986. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-959.

[2] Parsi, Trita. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* New Haven. Yale University Press, 2007. 185.

[3] "Bush, Senior White House Officials Defend Iraq War." *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, October 9, 2003. https://www.nti.org/gsn/article/bush-senior-white-house-officials-defend-iraq-war/.

[4] Hess, Pamela. "Bush Officials in Lockstep on Syria." United Press International, April 14, 2003. https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2003/04/14/Bush-officials-in-lockstep-on-Syria/85971050364988/.

[5] McKenzie, Kenneth F., Jr. "National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Greater Middle East and Africa: Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee," April 20, 2021. https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/Transcripts/Article/2589135/general-kenneth-f-mckenzie-jr-testimony-house-armed-services-committee-april-20/.

[6] Jeffrey, James, and Dennis Ross. "The Iran Nuclear Deal Isn't the Problem. Iran Is." *The Atlantic*, June 29, 2021. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/06/iran-nuclear-deal-middle-east/619307/.

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Syrian President Bashar al-Assad meets with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, Iran in this handout released by SANA on February 25, 2019. SANA/Handout via REUTERS

So does conventional American wisdom about the region tend to focus on a singular villain whose purported *raison d'etre* is to export chaos.

What generally receives less attention is that the United States has actively supported other states trying to project military power outside of their own borders. Oftentimes, the two objectives of rolling back rogue states and supporting U.S. partners have been linked. For example, U.S. support for the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen and for some Turkish interventions in Syria were justified in terms of rolling back Iranian influence in those countries.[7] The interventions of pro–U.S. states often look very similar to those of the so-called renegade regimes. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have made ample use of proxies and foreign fighters. Meanwhile, Israel and Turkey are both

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[7] Malley, Robert, and Stephen Pomper. "Accomplice to Carnage." *Foreign Affairs*, February 22, 2021. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-09/how-america-enables-war-yemen; Demirtaş, Serkan. "Turkey, US Share Common Vision for Syria: US Syria Envoy." *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 4, 2020. https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-us-share-common-vision-for-syria-us-syria-envoy-160566.

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resettling territory conquered through war — a forcible redrawing of borders that few other states have undertaken in the past half-century. Indeed, research suggests that the U.S. military presence in the Middle East actually emboldens U.S. partners to act more belligerently.[8] The promiscuous involvement of multiple different states in each of the region's conflicts undermines the narrative that any one state can be called the source of regional instability.

> *Conventional American wisdom about the region tends to focus on a singular villain whose purported raison d'etre is to export chaos.*

This paper addresses the question of interventionism in the Middle East with a comparative study of the involvement of different Middle Eastern powers in armed conflicts outside their borders. In addition to our extensive analyses, it includes a qualitative study of how states project hard power and a quantitative comparison of different levels of state interventionism over time. While there are many criteria by which interventions can be quantified, this study focuses on the number of armed conflicts each state is involved in outside its own borders as well as the nature of each state's involvement. Is any state or bloc in the region a particularly destabilizing presence? Or do all of the regional states, U.S. friends and foes alike, share some responsibility for regional instability? These are the questions this paper engages. If the goal of U.S. policy is truly to reduce instability in the Middle East, decision-making needs to be grounded in an objective understanding of what and who causes instability.

The past decade has provided many (unfortunate) data points. What began as the hopeful revolutions of the Arab Spring ended with the collapse of the Arab state system. Nations have been turned into blood-soaked battlefields, killing hundreds of thousands

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[8] Pillar, Paul, Andrew Bacevich, Annelle Sheline, and Trita Parsi. "A New U.S. Paradigm for the Middle East: Ending America's Misguided Policy of Domination." Quincy Paper No. 2. The Quincy Institute, July 2, 2020. 18–19. https://quincyinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/QUINCY-PAPER-No.2-JULY-2020-PILLAR-BACEVICH-SHELINE-PARSI.pdf.

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of innocent people and rendering millions homeless. Several states have waded into the chaos, launching direct military interventions and proxy wars in hopes of reshaping the outcome of ongoing conflicts. Six states have shown themselves the most able to project armed power beyond their borders: Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. These six powers fall into three loose blocs: Iran leads its "resistance axis," Qatar and Turkey line up behind Sunni Islamist movements, and the UAE aligns closely with Israel and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, they each conduct markedly independent foreign policies. All of these blocs have engaged in a range of interventions into local conflicts, from launching drone strikes and financing mercenaries to sending troops directly into conflict zones.

This paper finds that all of the powers in question became more interventionist throughout the post–Arab Spring decade and that the greatest spikes in intervention occurred during periods of state collapse. According to the quantitative scores, every power ended 2020 with a higher level of interventionism than it had in 2010, although Iran was cumulatively the most interventionist power of the decade. Three of them — Iran, the UAE, and Turkey — showed comparably high levels of interventionism, especially in the latter half of the decade. These three powers have adopted qualitatively similar methods for intervention, extending the reach of their own forces with local proxies and transnational mercenary armies. And they have often reacted to rather than provoked events on the ground.

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Methodology

This paper builds on a preexisting conflict-scoring system to measure the number of conflicts a state is involved in and the depth of that state's involvement in these conflicts over a certain period of time.

As noted, the six powers measured are Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. The Arab Spring of 2011 was a turning point in the configuration of Middle Eastern power, and the study examines the subsequent decade of intervention. On one hand, "traditional Arab power centers" such as Egypt and Syria ceased to be "agents of regional change" and became battlefields for outside powers.[9] On the other, several powers escaped large-scale internal turmoil during the Arab Spring and became active players in the contests for power that followed. Four of them — Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia — were longtime pillars of the regional order. The others — Qatar and the UAE — were newly empowered in the years leading up to the Arab Spring.[10] These powers have engaged in and led large-scale military interventions over the past decade, including in territories beyond their immediate neighbors. Although some Middle Eastern powers other than the big six have conducted foreign interventions, they have done so only in neighboring territories, or only as junior members of coalitions. For example, Egypt's only major intervention has been in Libya, while several smaller Arab states entered Yemen as adjuncts to the Saudi-led coalition.

This paper builds on earlier research by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. The HIIK Conflict Barometer classifies all political conflicts around the world

[9] Ryan, Curtis R. "Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East." In *Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East*. Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. Project on Middle East Political Science Studies 34, 2019. 7–13. http://pomeps.org/pomeps-studies-34-shifting-global-politics-and-the-middle-east.
[10] Soubrier, Emma. "Global and Regional Crises, Empowered Gulf Rivals, and the Evolving Paradigm of Regional Security." In *Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East*. 63–66. https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/POMEPS_Studies_34_Web.pdf.

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in a given year on a scale from 1 through 5, with levels 4 and 5 representing limited war and war respectively.[11]

The authors examined every conflict recorded by the HIIK Conflict Barometer from 2010 to 2020 in which one or more of six powers was involved. The barometer's evaluations of these conflicts, as well as media reports, were used to determine whether an outside power was involved. The authors then coded the interventions, with the assistance of Quincy Institute associate Arafat Kabir on a year-by-year basis according to the following scale.

> *These powers have engaged in and led large-scale military interventions over the past decade, including in territories beyond their immediate neighbors.*

If a state was involved in limited war or war, its intervention was given one of the following codes:

5. Territorial conquest: A state exerts direct control and/or is attempting to absorb another state's territory captured by force. Such an intervention can include occupation, formal annexation, and/or the resettlement of civilians from the conquering power in the conquered territory. This type of intervention is the most disruptive, as it directly threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the targeted state. Therefore, it is given the highest score.

4. Direct warfare: A state introduces ground forces into combat in support of one side of a war. (Sporadic incidents of cross-border fire are not counted.) Interventions of this type are a level below territorial conquest, as they usually leave local authorities in

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[11] *Conflict Barometers 2011–2020*. Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. https://hiik.de/conflict-barometer/bisherige-ausgaben/?lang=en.
For how conflicts are classified as limited wars or wars, see Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. "Methodology — HIIK." https://hiik.de/hiik/methodology/?lang=en.

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place. They nonetheless represent a significant projection of power outside of a state's borders and can have a significant effect on the balance of forces within a conflict.

3. Indirect warfare: A state materially intervenes on behalf of one side of a war without introducing ground troops into combat. This type of intervention can include material relationships with proxy forces, operations by proxy forces, airstrike campaigns, and/or the introduction of military advisers/trainers who do not participate in combat. These interventions are nonetheless disruptive, if less directly so than those involving ground forces participating in combat.

If a state was involved in a conflict below the level of a war, its intervention was given the following code:

2. Low-intensity intervention. This category designates actions that would otherwise fall into one of the categories above but are part of a low-intensity or frozen conflict short of war.

Note: As an artifact of an earlier version of this coding system, there is no category 1 for interventions.

The codes for each of a state's interventions in a given year were added up to produce the state's intervention score for that year.

In cases where a power intervenes in a territory with multiple conflicts, all of the conflicts that the power or its proxies are involved in are counted as a single conflict and assigned the highest intensity of the group, unless otherwise noted. Conflicts are counted separately if they lack significant overlap in actors, territory, or the issues at stake. See the appendix for an explanation of each conflict counted separately in this way.

This coding system does not distinguish between "invited" and "uninvited" interventions. Almost every intervention considered was "invited" by a local authority, and intervening states often got around the absence of an official invitation by

recognizing a different government than the one previously in control of the territory intervened upon. In many conflict zones, the governing states simply became "mostly symbolic placeholders, with limited practical role in governing."[12]

In some cases, states attempted to conceal or downplay their involvement in a conflict. In others, states attempted to fabricate or exaggerate their rivals' culpability for a conflict. This study establishes a set of criteria for filtering through such claims:

- States' claims about themselves or their allies are taken as credible unless proven otherwise; claims about rivals are not taken as credible unless backed by other evidence.
- The claims of neutral parties — such as U.N. expert panels or states uninvolved in the conflict — are taken as credible unless proven otherwise.
- Anonymous claims in the media are taken as credible only if they are backed by at least three sources, and those sources are officials speaking about their own state or their state's ally.

A state's support for a proxy is considered to have begun with the first credibly reported instance of material support reaching the proxy. It is considered active for each subsequent year until there is a credibly reported break in the relationship, according to the above criteria, or an end to the conflict.

If a state does not admit to having troops engaged in combat, such an intervention is considered to have begun with the first credibly reported combat casualty according to the above criteria, and to have ended after the last credibly reported combat casualty in a year. Land forces deployed to a territory at war but engaged in noncombat support (such as training) for one of the combatants are considered to be part of a proxy intervention.

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[12] Ahram, Ariel. "Hybrid Security, Frozen Conflicts, and Peace in MENA." Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. Project on Middle East Political Science, October 27, 2020. https://pomeps.org/hybrid-security-frozen-conflicts-and-peace-in-mena.

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Meet the interventionists

U.S. partners are increasingly interventionist

The data provide three key takeaways about intervention by Middle Eastern powers over the past decade. First, they suggest that instability was a cause as much as an effect of regional powers' interventions. The overall increase in interventions became a self-sustaining process once it was set in motion. Interventions rose after the intensity of regional violence increased, and continued to rise and then level off after violence began to subside. Second, Iran is highly interventionist, but in this it is not an outlier. The other major powers in the region are often as interventionist as the Islamic Republic and at times more so. Iran is the only member of a cluster of highly interventionist powers that has not received significant U.S. support.

Third, there is no support for the narrative that the 2015 nuclear agreement between five world powers and Iran caused an increase in interventionism driven by Iranian aggression. Iranian intervention remained consistent from the beginning of the Arab Spring onward, while other powers' increasing interventionism was often in arenas entirely unrelated to Iran.

Three Middle Eastern powers — Turkey, the UAE, and Iran — all have comparably high levels of involvement in foreign conflicts over the past decade. Iran's level of involvement has been consistently high, while the interventionism scores of the UAE, Turkey, and Israel have increased significantly over time, especially within the past six years. Israel's level of involvement has also risen over time, but less quickly than those of the other powers. Many of these interventions have taken place in conflicts following or related to the Arab Spring, although a few interventions have taken place in unrelated arenas, such as the Afghan war and Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Among the region's major powers, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have had consistently lower levels of military involvement. Israel occupies a place between the two clusters. Overall, none of the six

Middle Eastern Powers' Interventions (2011-2020)
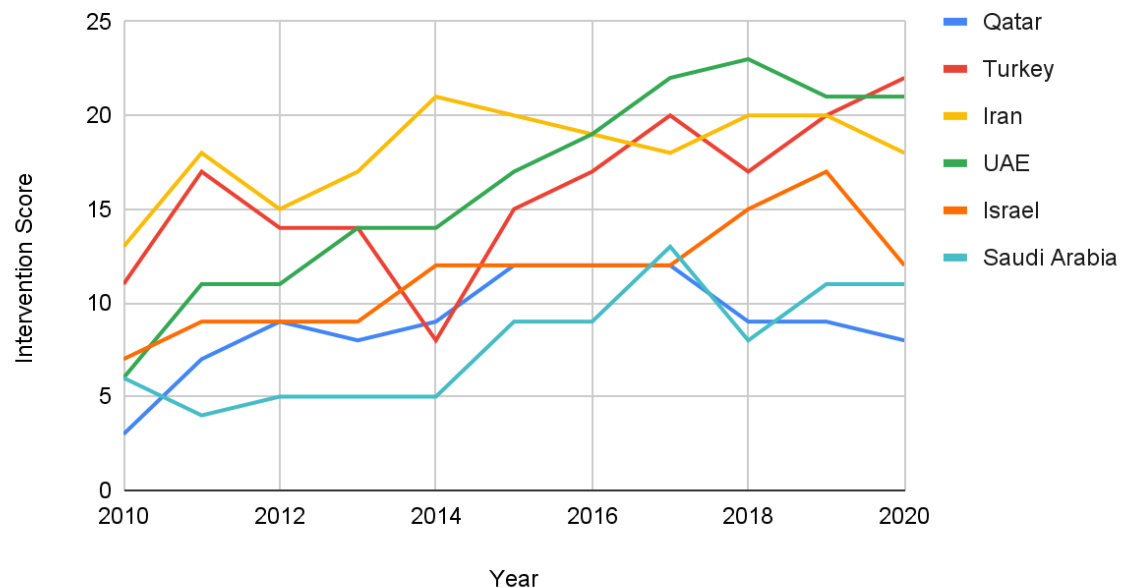
powers has stayed out of the post–Arab Spring fray, and all have participated in direct and proxy conflicts beyond their own borders.

The data both corroborate and refute conventional U.S. wisdom about the region. If the traditional U.S. view of the Middle East were true, the data would have shown that one power was significantly more interventionist than the others. The data show that Iran was indeed an aggressively interventionist power, especially in the first few years after the Arab Spring. However, Iran is part of a cluster of other highly interventionist powers. Additionally, Iran's total interventionism score declined after 2014; the data do not provide evidence to support the claim, made by some American and regional commentators, that Tehran escalated its interventions after the 2015 nuclear agreement.[13] In fact, the interventionist activities of the UAE and Turkey have surpassed Iran's in recent years. In other words, there is no single interventionist actor, but a set of competing interventionists that have jostled to the front as the decade went on.

All of the major interventionist powers in the Middle East, except for Iran, have received extensive U.S. support for decades. The United States has not backed all of their

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[13] Jeffrey and Ross. "The Iran Nuclear Deal Isn't the Problem. Iran Is."

interventions, but it has continued to protect and arm these states nonetheless. Fully a third of U.S. arms exports from 2010 to 2020, measured in trend-indicator value, went to the major Middle Eastern powers mentioned in this study. Saudi Arabia was the world's largest importer of American weapons in this time period.[14] Of these powers, Turkey is the only U.S. treaty ally in the Middle East — and was the most interventionist power by the end of the decade following the Arab Spring. Other regional powers have extensive military partnerships with the United States. The UAE has participated in NATO–led coalitions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya, earning itself the affectionate nickname "Little Sparta" among U.S. military officials.[15] U.S. intelligence services have provided targeting data to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and Turkish forces in northern Iraq.[16] Washington is not sitting on the sidelines: It is an active player in these interventions.

All of the major interventionist powers in the Middle East, except for Iran, have received extensive U.S. support for decades.

The largest gap between Iran and its rivals was in 2014. Iranian forces were engaged in combat in Iraq and Syria; the Islamic Republic was also supporting proxies in a limited war in eastern Lebanon and full-scale wars in Yemen and the Palestinian territories. That year marked the peak of Iranian interventionism during the decade in question. Although Iran's interventions in Syria and Yemen continued to grow in sophistication and

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[14] See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfers Database. https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers. March 15, 2021.
For an explanation of trend-indicator value, see Holtom, Paul, Mark Bromley, and Verena Simmel. "Measuring International Arms Transfers." SIPRI, December 2012. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/FS/SIPRIFS1212.pdf.
[15] Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. "In the UAE, the United States Has a Quiet, Potent Ally Nicknamed 'Little Sparta.'" *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-the-uae-the-united-states-has-a-quiet-potent-ally-nickna med-little-sparta/2014/11/08/3fc6a50c-643a-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67_story.html.
[16] Hosenball, Mark, Phil Stewart, and Warren Strobel. "Exclusive: U.S. Expands Intelligence Sharing with Saudis in Yemen Operation." Reuters, April 10, 2015. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-yemen-exclusive-exclusive-u-s-expands-intelligence-sharing-with-saudi s-in-yemen-operation-idUSKBN0N129W20150410;
Pamuk, Humeyra, and Phil Stewart. "Exclusive: U.S. Halts Secretive Drone Program with Turkey over Syria Incursion." Reuters, February 5, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-drone-exclusive-idUSKBN1ZZ1AB.

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visibility, Iran neither expanded nor shrank the geographic reach of its operations.[17] Any further movement in Iran's interventionism score reflected the fluctuating intensity of the conflicts it was involved in.

July 15, 2018 — Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in Istanbul, delivers a speech celebrating the second anniversary of the defeat of a military coup against his rule. (quetions123 / Shutterstock.com).

By 2017, the UAE and Turkey had surpassed Iran in their interventionism scores. In 2010, the UAE's foreign engagements were limited to supporting the NATO−led intervention in Afghanistan and an attempt to set up an anti-piracy police force in Somalia. But by the end of the decade, Emirati forces were also involved in Libya and Yemen, while Emirati-trained forces were fighting in Syria and the Sahel.[18] Turkey actually experienced a sharp decline in interventionism at the beginning of the decade, due to the end of

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[17] Feierstein, Gerald M. "Iran's Role in Yemen and Prospects for Peace." Middle East Institute, December 6, 2018. https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-role-yemen-and-prospects-peace;
Ahmadian, Hassan, and Payam Mohseni. "Iran's Syria Strategy: The Evolution of Deterrence." In *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020: Deterrence in the 21st Century — Insights from Theory and Practice*. Frans Osinga and Tim Sweijs, eds. The Hague. NL ARMS, T.M.C. Asser Press, 2021. 231−60. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-419-8_13.
[18] Ardemagni, Eleonora. "The UAE's Military Training−Focused Foreign Policy." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 22, 2020. https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/83033.

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NATO–led operations in Libya and the beginning of the Turkish–Kurdish and Serbian–Kosovar peace processes. However, the breakdown of the Turkish–Kurdish peace process — coinciding with the rise of the Islamic State, or ISIS — led to deepening Turkish interventions in Iraq and Syria. Turkey continued to expand its interventions in subsequent years, putting ground forces in Libya and Somalia as well as proxy militias in Nagorno–Karabakh.

The lowest intervention scores in 2017 — 13 for Saudi Arabia and 12 for Qatar and Israel — were about the same as the highest 2010 score, that of Iran.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia have a comparatively low number of interventions but have invested in nonmilitary influence while partnering with more militarily active states. Both kingdoms invested heavily in the export of ideology before and during the post–Arab Spring conflicts, including through media outlets, development aid, and religious institutions. As to their partnerships with more militarily active states, Turkey has been Qatar's partner and the UAE has been in Saudi Arabia's.[19] In some cases, Saudi or Qatari soft power has helped lay the political groundwork for Emirati or Turkish military involvement. For example, Qatar has been providing extensive aid to Somalia, while Turkish troops train the Somali military.[20] In other cases, the pairs have carried out military interventions in tandem. Saudi Arabia and the UAE initially intervened together in Yemen, for instance, although their proxies have also clashed with each other quite violently.[21] To an extent, the Qatari–Turkish and Saudi–Emirati partnership can be thought of as divisions of labor, with a wealthy state's soft power functioning as a force multiplier for a more militarily active state's hard power interventions.

The total number of military interventions has increased over time, especially after the middle of the decade. The two largest increases in interventionism occurred from 2010 to 2011 and from 2014 to 2015. The first coincided with the Arab Spring, as several new

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[19] Yüksel, Engin, and Haşim Tekineş. "Turkey's Love-in with Qatar." Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, January 2021. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2021/drivers-of-turkish-qatari-relations/.
[20] Yüksel and Tekineş.
[21] Juneau, Thomas. "The UAE in Yemen: From Surge to Recalibration." *Lawfare*, October 11, 2020. https://www.lawfareblog.com/uae-yemen-surge-recalibration.

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revolutions erupted across the region, with many of them followed by postrevolutionary conflicts. Cumulative interventionism declined in the following year and then rose gradually until 2014–15, when it suddenly jumped by 16 points due to the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, the breakdown of the Turkish–Kurdish peace process, and Israeli airstrikes against ISIS–aligned militants active in the Sinai.

The initial increase and the post–2018 levelling out of interventionism correspond with an increase and levelling out of the number and intensity of conflicts across the region. In 2010, the HIIK Conflict Barometer counted two full-scale wars and six limited wars in the Middle East and Maghreb region. In 2011, the number of full-scale wars suddenly jumped to eight. By 2018, the peak of the instability, that number had risen to nine full-scale wars in the region. In 2020, the number of full-scale wars fell slightly, to seven, which was still dramatically higher than it had been at the beginning of the decade.

A similar pattern holds for the rise and fall of combat deaths in the region:

Internventions and combat deaths in the Middle East, 2010–19

Legend: ■ Middle East   ■ Middle East (HIIK Definition)   ■ Syria   ▬ ▬ Number of Interventions
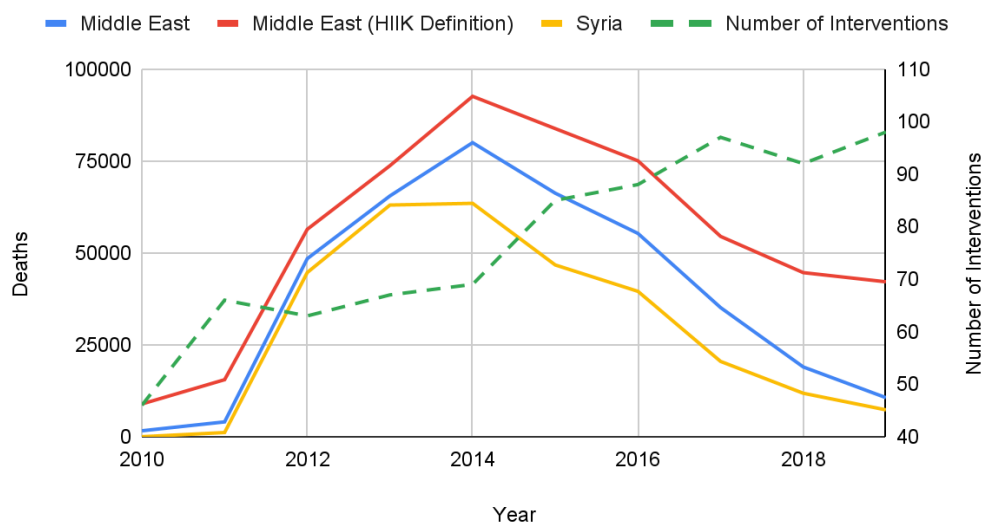
Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Project.[22] The UCDP defines the boundaries of the Middle East slightly differently than the HIIK does; the red line indicates conflict deaths counted by the UCDP within the boundaries of the Middle East as defined by the HIIK.

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[22] Pettersson, Therese. Uppsala Data Conflict Project, Battle-related Deaths Dataset Codebook vol. 21., no. 1, 2021. https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/;
Therese Pettersson *et al.* "Organized violence 1989–2020, with a special emphasis on Syria." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, no. 4. 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00223433211026126

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The dramatic increase in interventionism in the middle of the decade describes several simultaneous escalations by different powers in the post–Arab Spring conflicts. Every state's interventionism increased from 2013 to 2015, and three conflicts in particular became venues for escalating interventions: the ISIS insurgency, the Turkish–Kurdish conflict, and the Yemeni civil war. ISIS appeared as a territorial entity in the summer of 2014, taking Mosul and nearly overrunning several other Iraqi cities; Iran quickly launched a direct military intervention on behalf of the Iraqi state. The next year, Israel similarly launched an air campaign to help Egypt fight off ISIS in the Sinai.[23] The rise of ISIS also caused a resumption of the Turkish–Kurdish conflict, reflecting the Turkish state's anxiety about the role of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, in the fight against ISIS in Syria and violence inside Turkey that the Syrian conflict caused.[24] Finally, several states intervened in the Yemeni civil war, which escalated significantly after 2014, as will be considered in the next section.

The decline in interventionism from its peak in 2017 was slight. In many ways, that year was an outlier. Saudi Arabia led an international pressure campaign to force Qatar to capitulate on a variety of foreign and domestic issues — also forcing a Qatari withdrawal from Yemen — and kidnapped Saad al–Hariri, the Lebanese prime minister. (As it did not involve armed force, the Saudi–Qatari crisis is not recorded as a military intervention in the data.) Iraqi Kurdistan also attempted to secede from Iraq, causing Turkey to withdraw its support for Iraqi Kurdish forces.[25] Finally, the Trump administration closed the main program for international support of Syrian rebels at the end of the year.[26] While Qatar and Turkey vowed to maintain support for the opposition in Syria, and the UAE had already begun supporting the Kurdish-backed Syrian Democratic Forces through a separate track, Saudi Arabia took the opportunity to

[23] Kirkpatrick, David D. "Secret Alliance: Israel Carries Out Airstrikes in Egypt, With Cairo's O.K." *The New York Times*, February 3, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/03/world/middleeast/israel-airstrikes-sinai-egypt.html.
[24] Hoffman, Max. "The State of the Turkish–Kurdish Conflict." Center for American Progress, August 12, 2019. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/08/12/473508/state-turkish-kurdish-conflict/.
[25] Butler, Daren. "Turkey Stops Training Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga after Independence Vote." Reuters, September 28, 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-kurds-referendum-turke-idUSKCN1C314N.
[26] Al–Sham, Sada. "U.S.–Backed MOM Operations Room Ends Support for FSA Groups." *The Syrian Observer*, December 19, 2017. https://syrianobserver.com/features/21582/u_s_backed_mom_operations_room_ends_support_fsa_groups.html.

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refocus on confronting Iran in other areas.[27] However, despite certain powers' adjustment away from specific theaters, the underlying dynamic of proxy conflict among regional powers did not change, and most of those powers' major interventions continued.

Interventionism levelled off after 2018, with the cumulative score fluctuating between 92 and 98 over the next few years. With the exception of the second Nagorno–Karabakh war, the region did not see any new conflicts in 2019 and 2020, although violence in Iraq and Libya escalated. Perhaps the process of state collapse had run its course; by 2018, every country in the Middle East and North Africa except for the Persian Gulf monarchies was suffering from a war, limited war, or violent crisis. One plausible interpretation of the data is that states were reluctant to abandon their strategic investments but also saw few new opportunities to expand their activities. Indeed, previous examples show how difficult it is for a state to draw down from a proxy intervention.[28] On the other hand, a sense of diminishing returns seems to have come over the region. As a Syrian defector close to Saudi intelligence told *Al Jazeera* in June 2021, "The prevailing attitude can be defined as, 'times have changed, the Arab Spring is history and the region is transitioning towards a new future, with new geopolitical characteristics.'"[29] Middle Eastern states have maintained their involvement in foreign conflicts as these conflicts de-escalate, but there seems to be little appetite or opportunity to begin new interventions.

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[27] Maclean, William, and Tom Finn. "Qatar Will Help Syrian Rebels Even If Trump Ends U.S. Role." Reuters, November 26, 2016.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-qatar/qatar-will-help-syrian-rebels-even-if-trump-ends-u-s-role-idUSKBN13L0X7;
Yüksel, Engin. "Strategies of Turkish Proxy Warfare in Northern Syria." Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, November 2019.
https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/strategies-of-turkish-proxy-warfare-in-northern-syria/;
Lund, Aron. "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up on the Syrian Opposition." The Century Foundation, October 17, 2017.
https://tcf.org/content/report/assads-enemies-gave-syrian-opposition/;
"UAE Special Forces to Deploy in Syria, as Russia Warns of World War." *Times of Israel*, February 16, 2016.
http://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-special-forces-to-deploy-in-syria-as-russia-warns-of-world-war/.
[28] Byman, Daniel. "Why Engage in Proxy War? A State's Perspective." *Lawfare*, May 21, 2018.
https://www.lawfareblog.com/why-engage-proxy-war-states-perspective.
[29] Ayton, Matthew. "'Times Have Changed': Saudi Arabia–Syria in Rapprochement Talks." *Al Jazeera*, June 8, 2021.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/8/times-have-changed-saudi-syria-in-rapprochement-talks.

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Did nuclear talks with Iran cause more regional instability?

Contrary to a narrative promoted by opponents of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the accord governing Iran's nuclear programs, the data do not support the argument that the Iran nuclear agreement — and the subsequent lifting of many international economic sanctions — drove regional interventionism by enabling Iranian expansionism. The fundamental nature and geographic extent of Iran's interventions did not change during this period. Nor do the data provide any evidence that the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign changed Iran's behavior, as was its intent.

A member of Lebanon's Hezbollah holds a Lebanese flag as he stands in front of a picture depicting senior Iranian military commander General Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis who were killed in a U.S. attack, during a ceremony marking the first anniversary of their killing, in the southern village of Khiam, Lebanon January 3, 2021. REUTERS/Aziz Taher.

However, the cumulative interventionism of all other regional powers did increase during the period that the JCPOA was in effect, and it decreased slightly during the maximum pressure campaign. Moreover, the largest single-year increase in regional

interventionism — the entrance of several Arab armies into Yemen — took place while the JCPOA was negotiated and was related to fears of Iran. U.S.–Iranian diplomacy therefore could have contributed to an increase in regional interventionism by U.S. partners — not because Iran was necessarily on the march, but because Iran's rivals feared that warmer U.S.–Iran relations as well as a less constrained Iranian economy could embolden Tehran in the future.

> *The rhetoric of regional states would certainly appear intended to present nuclear diplomacy as enabling Iranian expansion.*

According to this interpretation, a potential U.S.–Iranian rapprochement created the perception that the United States was abandoning regional powers to Iran, so incentivizing those powers to act more aggressively in pursuit of their perceived interests. The war in Yemen is the best example of this, wherein Saudi Arabia and allies acted aggressively to quash what they saw as an advancing Iranian proxy. Still, this explanation would nonetheless contradict the claim put forward by Trump administration officials that funds unlocked by the nuclear accord enabled Iran to become more aggressive,[30] as it was other states rather than Iran that ramped up their interventions.

The rhetoric of regional states would certainly appear intended to present nuclear diplomacy as enabling Iranian expansion. While talks continued in Lausanne, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister at the time, warned that the "Iran–Lausanne–Yemen axis is extremely dangerous to humanity."[31] After the JCPOA was signed, Yousef Al

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[30] Kelly, Marie Louise. "Transcript: NPR's Full Interview With Secretary Of State Mike Pompeo." National Public Radio, January 24, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/01/24/798579754/transcript-nprs-full-interview-with-secretary-of-state-mike-pompeo; Jeffrey and Ross. "The Iran Nuclear Deal Isn't the Problem. Iran Is."

[31] Parsi, Trita. *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy*. New Haven. Yale University Press, 2017. 650. https://books.apple.com/us/book/losing-an-enemy/id1527207838; Ravid, Barack. "Netanyahu: Iran–Lausanne–Yemen Axis Endangers Humanity and Must Be Stopped." *Haaretz*, March 29, 2015. https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-netanyahu-iran-deal-worse-than-israel-thought-1.5343986.

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Otaiba, the UAE's ambassador to Washington, wrote that "Iran sees [the deal] as an opportunity to increase hostilities in the region."[32] These fears were exacerbated by the boastful pronouncements of various Iranian politicians.[33] While the Houthi rebellion was tearing through Yemen in late 2014, one Iranian member of parliament said that Sana'a would soon join the "three Arab capitals" — Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus — that "have today ended up in the hands of Iran and belong to the Islamic Iranian revolution."[34] His comments, paraphrased as "Iran now dominates four Arab capitals," soon became a catchphrase of regional leaders pushing for a more aggressive stance toward Iran.[35]

Regional states' fears may have been more about the United States' posture toward the region rather than Iran's. U.S. partners had relied on Washington to adjudicate their disputes and defeat their enemies, but in the chaos that followed the Arab Spring these states became increasingly convinced that they could rely only on themselves. (While some have argued that the post–Arab Spring disorder was the result of a U.S. abdication of leadership, Waleed Hazbun, a political scientist at the University of Alabama, has made a compelling case that previous U.S. attempts to reshape the Middle Eastern order were actually the cause of the breakdown.[36]) The JCPOA — which was linked to President Barack Obama's broader "pivot" from the Middle East to Asia — seemed to further confirm that view.[37] Obama publicly complained about "free riders" on U.S. power, advising them to learn to "share the neighborhood" with their rivals.[38] Saudi intelligence chief Turki al–Faisal responded that Obama's real goal was a "pivot to Iran,"

[32] Al Otaiba, Yousef. "One Year After the Iran Nuclear Deal." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2016. https://www.wsj.com/articles/one-year-after-the-iran-nuclear-deal-1459721502.
[33] Alabbasi, Mamoon. "Iran Continues to Boast of Its Regional Reach." *Middle East Eye*, March 13, 2015. http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-continues-boast-its-regional-reach.
[34] "Sanaa Is the Fourth Arab Capital to Join the Iranian Revolution." *Middle East Monitor*, September 27, 2014. https://web.archive.org/web/20141111135425/https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/14389-sana a-is-the-fourth-arab-capital-to-join-the-iranian-revolution.
[35] "The Complete Transcript of Netanyahu's Address to Congress." *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/03/03/full-text-netanyahus-address-to-congress/; Majidyar, Ahmad. "Sudan's President Blasts Iran's 'Expansionist' Policies in Mideast and North Africa." Middle East Institute, February 10, 2017. https://www.mei.edu/publications/sudans-president-blasts-irans-expansionist-policies-mideast-and-north-africa.
[36] Hazbun, Waleed. "In America's Wake: Turbulence and Insecurity in the Middle East." *Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East*. 14–17. http://pomeps.org/pomeps-studies-34-shifting-global-politics-and-the-middle-east.
[37] Parsi. *Losing an Enemy*. 150–154.
[38] Landler, Mark. "Obama Criticizes the 'Free Riders' Among America's Allies." *The New York Times*, March 10, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/world/middleeast/obama-criticizes-the-free-riders-among-americas-allies.ht ml.

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complaining, "We were America's best friends in the Arab world for 50 years."[39] Regional states may have seen the JCPOA as another piece of evidence that the United States was no longer willing to fight their battles, pushing them to carry out independent interventions across the region.

> *Washington's attempts to reassure regional states that the United States was still committed to helping fight their battles may have helped enable the regional increase in interventionism.*

Washington's attempts to reassure regional states that the United States was still committed to helping fight their battles may have thus helped enable the regional increase in interventionism. The Saudi-led intervention in Yemen was directly linked to U.S. attempts to reassure Iran's rivals while the nuclear talks continued. According to Robert Malley, a former Obama administration official currently serving as the Biden administration's special envoy for Iran, the United States began supporting the kingdom's operations to reassure "the Saudis that Washington would stand behind a decades-old security assurance to defend their country against certain external threats, as well as spreading some of that feeling of steadfast support to other regional partners."[40] (Rather than pushing out Iranian influence, the Saudi-led war effort ironically created opportunities for Iran to deepen its relationship with and provide more sophisticated weaponry to the Houthi movement.[41]) After the JCPOA was concluded, the Obama administration took pains to reassure the Gulf states and Israel that their security arrangement with the United States would not fundamentally change. After signing the accord, the United States approved a $38 billion military-aid package for Israel and a new, $1.29 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia. In total, the Obama

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[39] Parsi. *Losing an Enemy*. 738.
[40] Malley and Pomper. "Accomplice to Carnage."
[41] Al–Muslimi, Farea. "Iran's Role in Yemen Exaggerated, but Destructive." The Century Foundation, May 19, 2017. https://tcf.org/content/report/irans-role-yemen-exaggerated-destructive/.

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administration offered Saudi Arabia $115 billion in weapons sales, more than any U.S. administration in history.[42]

Of course, if regional states' interventions were primarily driven by fear of Iranian expansion, then these U.S. reassurances — as well as the Trump administration's decision to escalate against Tehran — should have reduced these states' appetites to intervene. Instead, interventions continued to increase after 2015, and did not decrease much after 2017. A better explanation may be found in the conflict-afflicted countries themselves, rather than in either Washington, Tehran, or Lausanne.

Most of the new interventions by regional states from 2015 onward took place in conflicts that had more to do with internal regime security than Iranian expansion. In fact, many of the conflicts that escalated in the middle of the decade involved U.S. partners fighting among themselves. As Gregory Gause of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M has pointed out, the contemporary Middle East has actually experienced under-balancing against Iran; while regional powers might be expected to unite to roll back Iranian gains, they have been preoccupied with fighting among themselves, as states such as Egypt and Qatar see each other as presenting ideological threats to their internal security.[43] The conflict in Libya was between Iran's rivals, without any Iranian involvement, and the escalation of the Turkish–Kurdish conflict from 2015 onward involved Turkey fighting a coalition of Kurdish leftists that included U.S.–backed Syrian rebels. (In fact, that conflict involved Turkey at times engaging both Iranian-backed and U.S. forces.[44]) Additionally, the rise of ISIS threatened Iran and its squabbling rivals at the same time.[45] The Iranian ground campaign in Iraq,

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[42] "FACT SHEET: Memorandum of Understanding Reached with Israel." The White House, September 14, 2016. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/14/fact-sheet-memorandum-understanding-reached-israel;
Hartung, William. "U.S. Arms Transfers to Saudi Arabia and the War in Yemen." Security Assistance Monitor, September 7, 2016. https://web.archive.org/web/20160908234514/https://securityassistance.org/fact_sheet/us-arms-transfers-saudi-arabia-and-war-yemen.

[43] Gause, F. Gregory III. "Ideologies, Alignments, and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 50, no. 3, July 2017. 672–75. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517000373.

[44] Tharoor, Ishaan. "Turkey and Iran Face off in a New Battle in Syria." *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/21/turkey-and-iran-face-off-in-a-new-battle-in-syria/.

[45] Gause. "Ideologies, Alignments, and Underbalancing." 673.

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the Israeli airstrike campaign in the Sinai, and the Emirati proxy campaigns in Somalia and the Sahel were all in response to that same threat. Those interventions became venues for competition among states once the threat of ISIS subsided and power vacuums closed up.

Security dilemmas

The Arab Spring and its aftermath created an environment that was predisposed to escalating security dilemmas. As Robert Jervis of Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs has argued, a "doubly dangerous" world is one in which "the offensive has the advantage" and "an offensive posture [is] not distinguishable from a defensive one," leaving states with "no way to get security without menacing others."[46] Both conditions held in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The weak state structures of the Middle East have given the advantage to the offensive. Geography and weak conventional armies severely limit the potential for military conquest in the region.[47] However, the collapse of states such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen has given other regional actors a platform for projecting their own power. Failed states have become "fractal" security environments, wherein armed groups compete and cooperate with the central government and with each other.[48] Within the churn of nonstate actors, states can cheaply establish footholds outside their borders by partnering with nonstate forces. These forces can be mobilized for offensive military operations without the political or material constraints that a state would incur by deploying its own military forces; one military expert described the effect on policymakers as a "form of military 'sugar rush' that can be addictive."[49] The breakdown of several regional states at once has multiplied this effect, allowing powers not only to

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[46] Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics*, vol. 30, no. 2, January 1978. 211. https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958.

[47] Gholz, Eugene. "Nothing Much to Do: Why America Can Bring All Troops Home From the Middle East." Quincy Paper No. 7. The Quincy Institute, June 24, 2021. https://quincyinst.org/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/.

[48] Ahram. "Hybrid Security, Frozen Conflicts, and Peace in MENA."

[49] Rondeaux, Candace, and David Sterman. "Twenty–First Century Proxy Warfare: Confronting Strategic Innovation in a Multipolar World." New America. February 20, 2019. http://newamerica.org/international-security/reports/twenty-first-century-proxy-warfare-confronting-strategic-innovation-multipolar-world/.

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recruit proxies from multiple battlefields, but also to move them across borders, as will shortly be considered.

Proxy warfare also makes offensive and defensive postures difficult to distinguish from one another. After all, hired guns can be used either to defend a state or to overthrow it, to deal with security problems or to create new ones for other powers. And failing to intervene in a nearby conflict can be the more dangerous option for a regime. Even before the Arab Spring, regional states had been sensitive to the threat that transnational political movements could pose to their internal security.[50] The post–Arab Spring conflicts heightened those fears, empowering nonstate actors such as ISIS, the PKK, and the Houthi movement — all of which sought to fight state authority in neighboring countries. Finally, proxies can be integrated into their patron state's official ideology and even bureaucratic structures, imposing costs on a state for abandoning its interventions.[51] What one state sees as defending its own interests, other states may see as dangerous expansionism.

Thus, the contemporary Middle East has become an environment that incentivizes powers to move aggressively into power vacuums and to match their rivals' interventions with counter-interventions as frequently as possible.

The Syrian civil war is an instructive example. Iran and its regional rivals believed that they were acting in defense of their own interests against menacing forces. Iranian forces initially intervened on behalf of the Syrian regime for what Tehran saw as defensive purposes: helping a longstanding ally, maintaining Iran's strategic depth and deterrent capabilities, and protecting Shi'a communities and shrines from sectarian violence.[52] In his posthumously published memoirs, General Hossein Hamedani of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps recalled his shock at seeing that three-quarters of Syria "was under the control of the terrorist groups." When Hamedani proposed a project to reform the Syrian state, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah responded by

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[50] Ryan. "Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East." 8–9.
[51] Byman. "Why Engage in Proxy War?."
[52] Ahmadian and Mohseni. "Iran's Syria Strategy."

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painting an even more urgent picture of the situation: "Bashar Assad and the Ba'ath Party are drowning to their necks in a quagmire. Nothing is left until they completely drown… First we have to get Bashar and the Syrian government outside the quagmire; then, we'll clean them, give them clothes, feed them, ask them to study and do their prayers."[53] However, other states saw Iranian aggression, as Iran brought in foreign forces to impose an illegitimate and dangerous regime on an unwilling population.[54]

Brussels, Belgium, March 14, 2019 — Lebanon's then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri arrives to attend an international conference on the future of Syria and the region. Hariri was kidnapped by the Saudi government in 2017 in an apparent bid to curb Iranian influence in Lebanon. (Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock.com).

Additionally, much of the world believed that the regime would fall quickly, making it imperative to shape the coming events and avoid the dangers of an uncontrolled collapse.[55] Syria's neighbors thus pumped weapons to the anti–Assad opposition. The

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[53] Hashem, Ali. "In Syria, Iran Sees Necessary War." *Al–Monitor*, March 16, 2017. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/03/iran-syria-intervention-hamedani-quds-force-memoir.html.
[54] Mann, Sean. "How the Arab League Turned against Syria." openDemocracy, February 9, 2012. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/how-arab-league-turned-against-syria/.
[55] Warrick, Joby. *Red Line: The Unravelling of Syria and the Race to Destroy the Most Dangerous Arsenal in the World*. New York. Doubleday, 2021. https://books.apple.com/cz/book/red-line/id1513687172. 100–114;
Lund. "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up on the Syrian Opposition."

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Syrian government's allies doubled down rather than backed down in the face of a rebel resurgence, with tens of thousands of Iranian-backed fighters and the Russian military entering the fray. The Syrian civil war is unmatched in the Middle East in how rapidly it escalated and how many lives it claimed, but it is a demonstration of a dynamic that would follow in other conflicts.

The recent civil war in Libya shows how the security dilemma could unfold over a number of years, with a less intense (although still quite tragic) level of violence. The revolution of 2011 was a popular uprising driven by local grievances with the Gaddafi regime. Several regional and outside powers participated in a NATO-led intervention, resulting in the fall of the regime and creating a power vacuum. Qatar attempted to back its favored factions — many of them Islamists — in the postrevolutionary chaos. In 2013, an anti–Islamist coup in Egypt emboldened an anti–Islamist faction in Libya led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who soon began receiving support from the new Egyptian regime and its backers in the United Arab Emirates.[56] Haftar's attempts to seize territory sparked a civil war in 2014, which accounted for part of the 2013–14 increase in interventionism. In 2019, Saudi Arabia offered to back Haftar's offensive financially, while Turkey entered the war directly on the side of the Tripoli government.[57]

The course of the Libyan war demonstrates two important insights for understanding the overall data. The first is that events on the ground can draw in (rather than being driven by) foreign powers. The second is that the involvement of one foreign power in a conflict can attract the involvement of others as balancing behavior.

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[56] Wehrey, Frederic. "'This War is Out of Our Hands': The Internationalization of Libya's Post–2011 Conflicts From Proxies to Boots on the Ground." New America, September 14, 2020. http://newamerica.org/international-security/reports/this-war-is-out-of-our-hands/.

[57] Malsin, Jared, and Summer Said. "Saudi Arabia Promised Support to Libyan Warlord in Push to Seize Tripoli." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2019. https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-promised-support-to-libyan-warlord-in-push-to-seize-tripoli-11555077600; See also Vitkine, Benoît, Marie Jégo, and Frédéric Bobin. "En Libye, Le Grand Marchandage Entre Moscou et Ankara." *Le Monde*, January 24, 2020. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/01/24/en-libye-le-grand-marchandage-entre-moscou-et-ankara_6027114_3210.html.

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Different countries, similar methods

The post–Arab Spring interventions have been characterized by a combination of proxy warfare, airstrikes, and direct military intervention. The three most interventionist powers (Iran, Turkey, and the UAE) have converged on a remarkably similar set of techniques for major interventions. All of them have combined their regular military forces with a transnational proxy network that can be shuttled from battlefield to battlefield. Like local proxies, the transnational fighters allow each state to keep its military interventions at arm's length. At the same time, these fighters are beholden to their state patrons rather than to any local constituencies.[58] Iran, Turkey and the UAE all use different combinations of financial incentives and ideology to control their proxies. However, all of these states use their integrated proxy networks in similar ways to achieve similar ends.

The three most interventionist powers — Iran, Turkey, and the UAE — have converged on a remarkably similar set of techniques for major interventions.

It is worth mentioning that many of these tactics may have been introduced to the region, or at least influenced, by U.S. interventions, particularly the Iraq War. As Waleed Hazbun argues, the aftermath of that war "enabled the rapid militarization of several uprisings and the outbreak of multiple civil wars" during the Arab Spring. Norms of state sovereignty broke down, militant networks metastasized after the 2003 destruction of the Iraqi state, and U.S. rivals sought new methods to protect themselves.[59] Middle Eastern powers had an opportunity to watch and learn from U.S. attempts to carry out counterterrorism campaigns by building up local forces.[60] The UAE even borrowed

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[58] Benowitz, Brittany, and Alicia Ceccanese. "Why No One Ever Really Wins a Proxy War." Just Security, May 11, 2020. https://www.justsecurity.org/70093/why-no-one-ever-really-wins-a-proxy-war/.
[59] Hazbun. "In America's Wake." 15.
[60] Benowitz and Ceccanese. "Why No One Ever Really Wins a Proxy War."

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expertise directly from the source, hiring American security contractors (including a key player in the Iraq War) to build up its proxy network, as will be considered below. Technologies also proliferated. Turkey, after seeing the counterinsurgency benefits of intelligence gathered by U.S. and Israeli drones, invested heavily to develop an

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, flanked by White House senior advisor Jared Kushner (L), speaks with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Armed Forces Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan during the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia May 21, 2017. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst.

independent drone industry.[61] Iran and the UAE soon followed by building drone fleets.[62] In more respects than one, U.S. hegemony has left a deep imprint on the Middle East.

Although it was not the only state to use proxies, Iran entered the Arab Spring with a uniquely well-developed proxy strategy centered around nonstate actors. While it is debated whether the 1979 revolution fundamentally changed Iran's national security outlook, the Islamic Republic leaned much more heavily than the previous government

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[61] Farooq, Umar. "The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power." *The Intercept*, May 14, 2019. https://theintercept.com/2019/05/14/turkey-second-drone-age/.

[62] Salyk–Virk, Melissa. "Airstrikes, Proxy Warfare, and Civilian Casualties in Libya." New America, June 2, 2020. http://newamerica.org/international-security/reports/airstrikes-proxy-warfare-and-civilian-casualties-libya/; Arraf, Jane, and Eric Schmitt. "Iran's Proxies in Iraq Threaten U.S. With More Sophisticated Weapons." *The New York Times*, June 4, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/04/world/middleeast/iran-drones-iraq.html.

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on nonstate allies across the region to make up for its international isolation and a lack of conventional military strength. From war-torn Lebanon in the early years of the revolution to Iraq during the U.S. occupation, the Iranian strategy has been to mobilize and arm pro–Iran constituencies, then leverage them to make Tehran an indispensable player in local politics.[63] Of course, other Middle Eastern powers had also built proxy relationships of their own, notably Saudi support for the Afghan *mujahedeen*, Israel's extensive use of Lebanese militias, and Turkey's alleged support for the Gray Wolf militants in the Caucasus.[64] However, none of these states had a well-developed method for entering new battlefields along the lines of the Iranian model.

Tehran transformed its proxy forces into a truly transnational network on the Syrian battlefield. From early in the civil war, Hezbollah and the Iraqi militias, as Iran's allies, joined Syrian loyalist forces on the battlefield. Iran also recruited new Afghan and Pakistani Shi'a fighters to shore up the regime.[65] Many of these fighters, some of them children, came from the vulnerable and impoverished Hazara refugee community in Iran.[66] This foreign legion in Syria was held together by financial incentives and religious appeals; Iran invoked the protection of Shi'a shrines and communities as the reason for its Syrian intervention. By May 2014, an Iranian official claimed to have 130,000 "soldiers" in Syria at Iran's disposal.[67] The Revolutionary Guards allegedly used a civilian airline to move these proxy fighters and their materiel between countries, in a move

[63] "Iran's Playbook: Deconstructing Tehran's Regional Strategy." The Soufan Center, May 2019. https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Iran%E2%80%99s-Playbook-Deconstructing-Tehran%E2%80%99s-Regional-Strategy-by-The-Soufan-Center.pdf;
Tabatabai, Ariane. *No Conquest, No Defeat: Iran's National Security Strategy*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2020. https://books.apple.com/us/book/no-conquest-no-defeat/id1544281654. 409.
[64] Bergman, Ronen. *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations*. New York. Random House, 2018. 242–245;
de Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. New York. New York University Press, 2003. 252.
[65] Ahmadian and Mohseni, "Iran's Syria Strategy";
Alfoneh, Ali, and Michael Eisenstadt. "Iranian Casualties in Syria and the Strategic Logic of Intervention." The Washington Institute. March 11, 2016. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iranian-casualties-syria-and-strategic-logic-intervention.
[66] "Iran: Afghan Children Recruited to Fight in Syria." Human Rights Watch, October 1, 2017. https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/01/iran-afghan-children-recruited-fight-syria.
[67] Fassihi, Farnaz. "Iran Pays Afghans to Fight for Assad." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2014. https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304908304579564161508613846.html.

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reminiscent of the CIA's use of Air America as a cover during the Indochina wars.[68] Iran thus demonstrated the ability not only to build a regional network of proxies, but also to integrate those proxies horizontally, creating a force that could flow among battlefields as needed.

If Syria was Iran's proving ground for foreign fighters, the war in Yemen allowed the UAE and Saudi Arabia to deploy and refine their own transnational proxy networks. The UAE already had a longstanding relationship with mercenaries, having hired American security contractor Erik Prince to build a UAE–backed counter-piracy force in Somalia and recruit an elite royal guard comprised of Latin American fighters.[69] Prince ceased to be personally involved some time before 2015, but the UAE continued his program, bringing Latin American fighters into the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.[70] Saudi Arabia and the UAE also recruited thousands of Sudanese fighters — many of them child soldiers[71] — by paying the salaries of Sudan's fearsome Rapid Support Force in exchange for its assistance in Yemen.[72] The UAE has since exported this model to Libya. Since 2019, Sudanese fighters with "direct relations" to the UAE have been deployed to Libya alongside the UAE–backed Libyan National Army, according to a United Nations

[68] Nadimi, Farzin. "Iran Is Still Using Pseudo–Civilian Airlines to Resupply Assad." Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 13, 2017. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-still-using-pseudo-civilian-airlines-resupply-assad; Leary, William. "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955–1974." *Studies in Intelligence*. vol. 43, no. 3, Winter 1999–2000). https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/archives/vol-43-no-3/cia-air-operations-in-laos-1955-1974/.
[69] Cole, Matthew. "The Complete Mercenary: How Erik Prince Used the Rise of Trump to Make an Improbable Comeback." *The Intercept*, May 3, 2019. https://theintercept.com/2019/05/03/erik-prince-trump-uae-project-veritas/; Mazzetti, Mark, and Emily B. Hager. "Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder." *The New York Times*, May 15, 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html.
[70] Hager, Emily B., and Mark Mazzetti. "Emirates Secretly Sends Colombian Mercenaries to Yemen Fight." *The New York Times*, November 25, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/26/world/middleeast/emirates-secretly-sends-colombian-mercenaries-to-fight-in-yemen.html.
[71] Kirkpatrick, David D. "On the Front Line of the Saudi War in Yemen: Child Soldiers From Darfur." *The New York Times*, December 28, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/28/world/africa/saudi-sudan-yemen-child-fighters.html.
[72] Talebi, Tessa. "The Great Game of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Sudan." Project on Middle East Political Science, June 16, 2020. https://pomeps.org/the-great-game-of-the-uae-and-saudi-arabia-in-sudan.

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panel.[73] Some of the fighters were reportedly tricked into deploying to Libya.[74] The same U.N. panel implicated Prince in a scheme to smuggle arms to the LNA, and U.S. military intelligence reported in late 2020 that the UAE may also have been paying the salaries of Russian mercenaries in Libya.[75] The UAE now leads a fearsome international proxy network that stretches far beyond the Middle East, and, like Iran, it has exported this network from one battlefield to another.

> *The UAE now leads a fearsome international proxy network that stretches far beyond the Middle East, and, like Iran, it has exported this network from one battlefield to another.*

Turkey began recruiting foreign fighters relatively recently but has made up for its late start by aggressively deploying them to multiple battlefields. The Turkish military had used a variety of Turkish-backed Syrian rebel groups as irregular forces during the initial Turkish incursions in Syria. In 2017, these forces were reorganized as the Syrian National Army "under almost full Turkish control via the provision of training and equipment, salary payments and the creation of new organisational structures."[76] Turkey, now in possession of an organized foreign legion, quickly began shuttling it from battlefield to battlefield. In late 2019, SNA fighters were recruited to fight in the Libyan conflict with promises of money and the opportunity to fight enemies of the Syrian

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[73] Mackinnon, Amy. "The Conflict in Libya Is Getting Even Messier." *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2021. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/04/libya-conflict-un-report-uae-haftar/;
Burke, Jason, and Zeinah Mohammed Salih. "Mercenaries Flock to Libya Raising Fears of Prolonged War." *The Guardian*, December 24, 2019.
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/24/mercenaries-flock-to-libya-raising-fears-of-prolonged-war.
[74] Zayadin, Hiba. "Recruited as Security Guards in the UAE, Deceived into Working in Conflict–Ridden Libya Instead." Human Rights Watch, November 1, 2020.
https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/01/recruited-security-guards-uae-deceived-working-conflict-ridden-libya-instead.
[75] Detsch, Jack, and Amy Mackinnon. "Pentagon Says UAE Possibly Funding Russia's Shadowy Mercenaries in Libya." *Foreign Policy*, November 30, 2020. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/30/pentagon-trump-russia-libya-uae/;
Cole, Matthew. "Project Opus: Erik Prince and the Failed Plot to Arm a CIA Asset–Turned–Warlord in Libya." *The Intercept*, February 26, 2021. https://theintercept.com/2021/02/26/erik-prince-jordan-libya-weapons-opus/.
[76] Yüksel, Engin. "Strategies of Turkish Proxy Warfare in Northern Syria." Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, November 2019.
https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/strategies-of-turkish-proxy-warfare-in-northern-syria/.

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revolution.[77] They were flown to Libya on Turkish military planes, sequestered on military bases, and supervised by trainers from the Turkish security contractor SADAT.[78] Just like the Iranian and Emirati pools of foreign fighters, Turkey's foreign legion also included

child soldiers.[79] A year later, SNA fighters were again deployed, this time to fight in the Nagorno–Karabakh war on the Azerbaijani side. In fact, recruitment for the fighters began almost a month before the war began, suggesting high-level coordination between the SNA and the governments of Turkey and Azerbaijan.[80] Turkey has gone beyond even Iran and the UAE, transforming an entirely local force into a foreign legion that can be deployed over long distances.

[77] Ivanescu, Isabel, and Eva Kahan. "Syria's Wretched Foreign Legion." *Newlines Magazine*, June 1, 2021. https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/syrias-wretched-foreign-legion/.
[78] "Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress: East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation." U.S. Department of Defense, September 2, 2020. 35. https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/02/2002489948/-1/-1/1/LEAD%20IG%20EAST%20AFRICA%20AND%20NORTH%20AND%20WEST%20AFRICA%20COUNTERTERRORISM%20OPERATIONS.PDF.
[79] Zaman, Amberin. "Report: Child Soldiers Deployed to Libya by Turkish–Backed Syrian National Army." *Al–Monitor*, May 8, 2020. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/05/child-soldiers-libya-syria-national-army-turkey.html.
[80] Zaza, Ahmad. "Turkey Deploys Syrian Mercenaries to Karabakh War." *Asia Times*, October 7, 2020. https://asiatimes.com/2020/10/turkey-deploys-syrian-mercenaries-to-karabakh-war/.

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Conclusion

Our quantitative and qualitative studies of Middle Eastern interventions reveal that, rather than a single actor constituting the source of instability in the region, numerous powers have been engaged in comparable levels and types of intervention over the past few years. In other words, the data strongly suggest that no single power is to blame for instability; instead, power vacuums may have arisen for other reasons and then become venues for international competition. (This is not to say that interventions do not aggravate instability; several conflicts may indeed have been prolonged by the presence of foreign powers.) Further, the most interventionist powers seem to have settled on a similar set of techniques for integrating instruments of power with each other and across battlefields.

The greatest increases in Iranian interventionism occurred before the 2015 nuclear accord was signed, while other powers continued to expand their military operations for years afterward.

Contrary to expectations, two U.S. partners, Turkey and the UAE, were on a par with Iran in terms of interventionism. All of them became more interventionist as post–Arab Spring conflicts dragged on. While Iran's interventionism stabilized after 2014, Turkey's and the UAE's continued to increase. Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Qatar fell into a lesser interval, but all three significantly increased their interventions over the past decade as well. (Perhaps most surprising, Saudi Arabia was far less militarily interventionist than its smaller ally, the UAE.) All of these powers, except for Iran, continued to receive generous U.S. support in spite of — and sometimes because of — their increasing interventionism across the region.

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Hawkish analysts have tried to blame the region's increasing chaos on the Iran nuclear deal and a short-lived U.S.–Iran thaw, which supposedly empowered Iran and provoked a fearful reaction from rival powers. The data do not support that assertion. The greatest increases in Iranian interventionism occurred before the 2015 nuclear accord was signed, while other powers continued to expand their military operations for years afterward. One of the conflicts that escalated during the period of U.S.–Iranian diplomacy — the war in Yemen — was related to the Saudi–Iranian rivalry. Others were unrelated to Iran and involved U.S. clients fighting one another or nonstate movements.

In fact, many of the region's conflicts were unrelated to one another, as states that found themselves cooperating on one battlefield clashed on a different one. The only common thread across the region's conflicts seems to have been the Arab Spring, which produced a massive structural shock, aggravating preexisting tensions and creating power vacuums where there were once strong states. The implosion of several regional states then created situations in which multiple powers felt compelled to act in defense of their interests, often through local proxies. One man's freedom fighter was another man's terrorist; states competed to match other states' escalations in what appears to be a classic security dilemma.

The most interventionist states seem to have figured out a similar set of methods for manipulating this chaos. They have integrated their hard power apparatuses vertically — by building proxy armies that operate alongside regular troops and drone fleets — and horizontally, by moving those combined armies across borders. Whether the motivation is God, gold, or glory, the result is the same, with states learning to offload the costs of their foreign policy onto poorly paid mercenaries and local populations.

Indeed, it is worth mentioning the human costs of such tactics. The Syrian war has killed hundreds of thousands of people; some casualty estimates surpass 600,000 deaths.[81] In Yemen, the civil war has caused a quarter of a million deaths, many of them

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[81] Syrian Observatory For Human Rights. "Total death toll | Over 606,000 people killed across Syria since the beginning of the 'Syrian Revolution', including 495,000 documented by SOHR," June 1, 2021. https://www.syriahr.com/en/217360/.

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due to starvation and disease.[82] Even smaller conflicts are filled with tragic stories, from Libyan fighters burying their enemies alive to Iraqi militias gunning down youth protesters.[83] The breakup of countries turns the well-being of innocents into yet another bargaining chip to be traded away for economic or political concessions. No Middle Eastern country has a monopoly on these brutal tactics, although a few have distinguished themselves as especially prolific participants. In this world of violence, there are few heroes or villains, and many a "brutal, self-interested, middle power among others," as the columnist Peter Beinart has put it.[84]

Since stability in the Middle East is conducive to U.S. interests there, the United States government should adopt the following three measures to help stabilize the region:

- First, the United States should seek to "do no harm" and avoid policies that fuel state collapse, since the collapse of state authority is a major driver of interventions and instability.[85] In large part, this means simply resisting the temptation to start new wars. The decades of civil war in Iraq were precipitated by the U.S. invasion in 2003. The civil war in Libya, which began with an internal uprising, became a decade-long international proxy conflict after a NATO–led military intervention swiftly drove out the old regime in 2011. In other cases, doing no harm means steering clear of policies that prolong ongoing civil wars. The United States encouraged foreign interventions in the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, providing many of the armaments for both. The current U.S. sanctions policy toward Syria is explicitly meant to discourage postwar reconstruction until the regime

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[82] "UN Humanitarian Office Puts Yemen War Dead at 233,000, Mostly from 'Indirect Causes.'" *UN News*. December 1, 2020. https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078972.
[83] Walsh, Declan. "U.N. Expresses Horror at Mass Graves in Libya." *The New York Times*, June 13, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/13/world/middleeast/libya-mass-graves.html;
Loveluck, Louisa, and Mustafa Salim. "In Iraq, Powerful Militias Assassinate Protesters with Impunity." *The Washington Post*. May 12, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iraq-militia-assassinations-fear/2021/05/12/501474c0-b1cc-11eb-bc96-fdf55de43bef_story.html.
[84] Beinart, Peter. "Rejoining the Iran Nuclear Deal Is Not Enough." *Jewish Currents*, March 1, 2021. https://jewishcurrents.org/rejoining-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-not-enough/.
[85] Pillar, Paul, *et al*. "A New U.S. Paradigm for the Middle East.

falls or surrenders much of its power.[86] (The United States is engaged in several "maximum pressure" campaigns of this kind, in the Middle East and elsewhere.[87]) Such policies intensify the process of state collapse, and in so doing, induce interventions.

- Second, the United States can make a significant contribution to stability by supporting regional diplomacy with an eye toward the creation of a new, inclusive security architecture. As the data suggest, instability may drive interventions more often than interventions are the sole cause of instability. Addressing the regionwide state of instability through inclusive diplomacy will likely be more effective than focusing solely on specific intervening states. Not only can multilateral talks help to solve ongoing proxy conflicts; a general reduction in regional tensions can also disincentivize regional powers from intervening in other states' internal conflicts. There have already been several encouraging signs of a trend toward regional diplomacy this year. Iran and Saudi Arabia have sat down for talks, the Saudi-led bloc has lifted its blockade of Qatar, and Turkey has taken steps to de-escalate tensions with Egypt.[88] The Biden administration should signal that it looks favorably on these talks and encourage the parties to institutionalize this regional dialogue.

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[86] Petti, Matthew. "US Has No Plans to Aid Civilians, Reconstruction in Syria." *Responsible Statecraft*, December 10, 2020. https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/12/10/us-has-no-plans-to-aid-civilians-reconstruction-in-syria/. For more on how U.S. sanctions affect the Syrian state's ability to provide basic services, see Heller, Sam. "Syrians Are Going Hungry. Will the West Act?" The Century Foundation, June 7, 2021. https://tcf.org/content/report/syrians-going-hungry-will-west-act/.

[87] Cohen, David S., and Zoe A. Y. Weinberg. "Sanctions Can't Spark Regime Change: The Trouble With Trump's Approach to Venezuela and Iran." *Foreign Affairs*, May 14, 2019. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2019-04-29/sanctions-cant-spark-regime-change.

[88] Krasna, Joshua. "A Wave of 'Smile Offensives' in the Middle East: Why, and How Real?" Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 27, 2021. https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/05/a-wave-of-smile-offensives-in-the-middle-east-why-and-how-real/.

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- Finally, given the destabilizing feuding between U.S. strategic partners, the United States can play a pivotal role by helping to manage rivalries among U.S. partners in the Middle East. The United States has invested heavily in building up regional partners' military capabilities while failing to prevent those partners from fighting one another. President Obama responded to the growing Emirati–Qatari proxy war in Libya with a "mild scolding" of Gulf leaders, while other U.S. officials provided "tacit acceptance" to the Emirati intervention.[89] Even worse, President Donald Trump publicly encouraged the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar. The Trump administration reportedly stepped in to reduce tensions only when Saudi Arabia and the UAE threatened a full-scale military invasion of Qatar.[90] Trump administration officials even assisted in a Saudi and Israeli pressure campaign against Jordan — a loyal U.S. partner and one of the most stable countries in the region — that culminated, in the spring of 2021, in an alleged coup attempt against the Jordanian king.[91] In these fratricidal conflicts, U.S. support should theoretically provide the leverage to bring both sides to the table. Using that leverage, however, requires a clear-eyed view of the causes of regional instability.

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[89] Wehrey. "This War Is Out of Our Hands."

[90] Emmons, Alex. "Saudi Arabia Planned to Invade Qatar Last Summer. Rex Tillerson's Efforts to Stop It May Have Cost Him His Job." *The Intercept*, August 1, 2018. https://theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/; see also McFarlane, Sarah, Summer Said, and Michael Amon. "Oil–Rich Saudi Arabia Barrels Into the Gas Business." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2019. https://www.wsj.com/articles/oil-rich-saudi-arabia-barrels-into-the-gas-business-11558549343.

[91] Chulov, Martin, and Michael Safi. "Did Jordan's Closest Allies Plot to Unseat Its King?" *The Guardian*, May 26, 2021. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/did-jordans-closest-allies-plot-to-unseat-its-king; Ignatius, David. "Inside the Palace Intrigue in Jordan and a Thwarted 'Deal of the Century.'" The *Washington Post*, June 11, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/11/jordan-saudi-trump-netanyahu-deal/.

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Appendix

In most cases, where a power intervened in a territory with multiple conflicts, all of the conflicts that the power or its proxies were involved in were counted as a single conflict. However, there were a few exceptions:

- The Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights is counted separately from Israel's other interventions in Syria, as the territorial dispute is a much older conflict with little overlap with the Syrian civil war.
- The Iranian and Turkish interventions against Kurdish forces in Iraq are similarly counted separately from those countries' support for local proxies, as they entail cross-border raids against forces with little connection to other Iraqi actors.

Further, a few unconventional interventions were also counted as part of each country's score:

- Although the Saudi kidnapping of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al–Hariri took place on Saudi soil, it was an attempt to alter the course of Lebanon's internal conflicts through a violent attack on a state official. Therefore, it is counted as a level 2 (low-intensity) intervention.
- The Emirati financing for the Egyptian protest movement Tamarod, which has been confirmed by U.S. officials and leaked recordings of Egyptian officials, later led to the Egyptian coup d'etat. The post-coup crackdown is listed in the HIIK Conflict Barometer as a level 5 (war) conflict, thus Emirati involvement is considered a level 3 (proxy and remote) intervention.

A few reported interventions were not counted:

- Although Saudi Arabia and the UAE offered aid to the post-coup government of Egypt, there is no evidence that Saudi Arabia coordinated with the plotters beforehand, as the UAE had.

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- Israel and pro–Israel organizations have long accused Turkey of supporting Hamas. The only claims that Turkey willingly allows Hamas to plot attacks from Turkish soil come from Israeli officials or sources of unknown affiliation.[92] Although Hamas figures have visited Turkey, the Turkish leadership insists that its relationship is only diplomatic. The Foundation for the Defense of Democracies has also repeatedly cited a report that "Turkey may have pledged $300 million to Hamas several years ago," including in congressional testimony. However, Turkey denied the report in question, and no further allegations have been made since then; the pledge may have been a confused reference to humanitarian aid.[93]
- Israel occupies the Sheba'a Farms, a small segment of the Golan Heights that Syria once controlled but Lebanon claims as its own. The Lebanese claim is relatively recent, and the United Nations has treated the Sheba'a Farms as Syrian rather than Lebanese territory for the purposes of certifying Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, although "without prejudice to future border agreements between the Member States concerned."[94] Therefore, the dispute over the Sheba'a Farms is treated as part of the Israeli occupation of Syrian territory.
- Saudi Arabia pledged $100 million to the G5 Sahel military alliance in late 2017. However, this money was never delivered.[95]

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[92] Rothwell, James. "Turkey Grants Citizenship to Hamas Operatives Plotting Terror Attacks from Istanbul." *The Telegraph*, August 13, 2020. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/08/13/turkey-grants-citizenship-hamas-operatives-plotting-terror-attacks/; Sanchez, Raf. "Exclusive: Hamas Plots Attacks on Israel from Turkey as Erdogan Turns Blind Eye." *The Telegraph*, December 17, 2019. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/12/17/hamas-plots-attacks-israel-turkey-erdogan-turns-blind-eye/.

[93] Schanzer, Jonathan. "Hamas' Benefactors: A Network of Terror: Testimony before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa and the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs," September 9, 2014. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg89738/html/CHRG-113hhrg89738.htm.; "Terrorism Finance in Turkey: A Growing Concern." Foundation for Defense of Democracies, February 2014. https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/defenddemocracy/uploads/documents/Schanzer_Turkey_Final_Report_3_smaller.pdf.

[94] "The Shebaa Farms." The Reut Institute, August 6, 2006. http://reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=676.

[95] "G5 Sahel: Why Are Millions of Dollars Pledged by Saudi Arabia Being Withheld?" *The Africa Report,* March 30, 2020. https://www.theafricareport.com/25345/g5-sahel-why-are-millions-of-dollars-pledged-by-saudi-arabia-being-withheld/; "France Takes Aim at Saudi over Failed West Africa Commitments." Reuters, November 20, 2019. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-westafrica-security-france-idUSKBN1XU2JK.

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- Weapons resembling Iranian-made weapons have been found in the hands of Shi'a dissidents in Saudi Arabia and Haftar's forces in Libya.[96] However, there is no indication whether Iran knowingly provided these weapons, or whether they were simply resold or passed on by Iranian proxies in Bahrain and Syria acting on their own accord.

- A missile and drone attack destroyed major Saudi oil facilities in September 2019. A U.N. probe determined that the attack came from the north, and four sources of unknown affiliation described an Iranian planning meeting to Reuters.[97] However, it is unclear whether the attack was launched directly from Iranian soil, or by Iran's proxies in Iraq, who have attacked Saudi targets on other occasions.[98] Therefore, this attack is not counted as a separate Iranian intervention.

- A Qatari businessman was caught on tape telling Qatar's ambassador to Somalia that "[o]ur friends were behind" a bomb attack "intended to make Dubai people run away from there," according to a recording provided to *The New York Times* by a foreign intelligence service.[99] As much as the recording suggests that Qatari favors certain sides in the Somali civil war, it is not conclusive evidence of Qatari state involvement in the attack, let alone a proxy relationship with Somali militants.

- Tigrayan militants have accused Emirati forces of conducting airstrikes against them during the 2020–21 northern Ethiopian conflict. While the UAE has deployed drones to neighboring Eritrea, those drones may have been meant for use in

[96] Nichols, Michelle. "Anti–Tank Missile in Libya Looks like Iran–Produced Weapon — U.N." Reuters, December 8, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-arms-libya-un-idUSKBN28I2SX;
"The IED Threat In Bahrain." Conflict Armament Research, December 2019. 20–23. https://www.conflictarm.com/reports/the-ied-threat-in-bahrain/.

[97] Nichols, Michelle. "Exclusive: U.N. Investigators Find Yemen's Houthis Did Not Carry out Saudi Oil Attack." Reuters, January 8, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-un-exclusive/exclusive-u-n-investigators-find-yemens-houthis-did-not-carry-out-saudi-oil-attack-idUSKBN1Z72VX.

[98] "Will Saudi Arabia Become a New Drone Battleground?" *Deutsche Welle*, March 2, 2021. https://www.dw.com/en/iran-sponsored-militia-in-iraq-threatens-saudi-arabia-with-drone-warfare/a-56384109.

[99] Bergman, Ronen, and David D. Kirkpatrick. "With Guns, Cash and Terrorism, Gulf States Vie for Power in Somalia." *The New York Times*, July 22, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/22/world/africa/somalia-qatar-uae.html.

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Yemen's civil war, and there is thus far no evidence that they were used in Tigray.[100]

The rest of the interventions are designated in the tables that follow. All sources are from the HIIK Conflict Barometer unless otherwise noted. Again, the levels are these:

2. Low-intensity intervention

3. Proxy or remote warfare

4. Combat troops on the ground

5. Territorial conquest

Intervening Country	Target Country	Years	Level	Description
Israel	Iran	2007 to date	2	Israel has cultivated relations with armed opposition groups in Iran. Israeli intelligence officers posing as CIA operatives made contact with the Baloch insurgent group Jundollah in 2007 and 2008, according to numerous officials.[101] Two Obama administration officials confirmed that Israel had carried out the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists in 2011 through 2012 through Mujahedin-e Khalq operatives, and a former official confirmed their claims in a separate report. The official added that the U.S. military trained the operatives on U.S. soil.[102]

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[100] Walsh, Declan. "'I Didn't Expect to Make It Back Alive': An Interview With Tigray's Leader." *The New York Times*, July 3, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/03/world/africa/tigray-leader-interview-ethiopia.html; Zwijnenburg, Wim. "Are Emirati Armed Drones Supporting Ethiopia from an Eritrean Air Base?" Bellingcat, November 19, 2020. https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2020/11/19/are-emirati-armed-drones-supporting-ethiopia-from-an-eritrean-air-base/.
[101] Perry, Mark. "False Flag." *Foreign Policy*, January 13, 2012. https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/13/false-flag/.
[102] Hersh, Seymour M. "Our Men in Iran?" *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2012. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/our-men-in-iran.

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Israel	Syria	2013 to date	3	Israel paid Syrian rebels near the Golan Heights from June 2013 to July 2018.[103] Israeli forces have also carried out hundreds of airstrikes against Iranian forces in Syria, including after support for rebels ended.
Israel	Syria (Disputed)	1967 to date	2	Israel continues to occupy and resettle the Golan Heights.
Israel	Egypt	2015 to date	3	Israeli forces have carried out airstrikes against ISIS forces in the Sinai Peninsula with Egypt's permission.[104]
Israel	Palestine	2013, 2015, 2020	2	Israel continued to occupy and resettle the West Bank and maintain a blockade on Gaza.
Israel	Palestine	2011–12, 2014, 2018–19	5	Israel continued to occupy and resettle the West Bank and waged war on Gaza.
Iran	Syria	2011	3	Iran initially attempted to set up a militia network to defend the Syrian regime.[105]
Iran	Syria	2012–20	4	Iran sent forces into combat in support of the Syrian regime. Iranian casualties have been reported as early as 2012 and as late as 2020.[106]

[103] Tsurkov, Elizabeth. "Inside Israel's Secret Program to Back Syrian Rebels." *Foreign Policy*, September 6, 2018. https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/06/in-secret-program-israel-armed-and-funded-rebel-groups-in-southern-syria/; Gross, Judah Ari. "IDF Chief Finally Acknowledges That Israel Supplied Weapons to Syrian Rebels." *Times of Israel*, January 14, 2019. https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-chief-acknowledges-long-claimed-weapons-supply-to-syrian-rebels/.
[104] Kirkpatrick. "Secret Alliance."
[105] Ahmadian and Mohseni. "Iran's Syria Strategy."
[106] Alfoneh and Eisenstadt. "Iranian Casualties in Syria and the Strategic Logic of Intervention"; "Syria: Iran IRGC Member Killed in Aleppo Rocket Strike." *The Defense Post,* February 18, 2020. https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/02/18/syria-iran-irgc-hamidreza-babelkhani-killed-in-aleppo/; "Iran Guard's Commander Dies In Syria In Possible 'Assassination.'" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 7, 2020. https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-guard-s-commander-dies-in-syria-in-possible-assassination-/30474950.html

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Iran	Iraq	2003–10	3	Iran maintained proxy forces in Iraq throughout the U.S. occupation and civil war.[107]
Iran	Iraq	2011	4	Iranian forces launched an incursion against the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan on Iraqi soil.
Iran	Iraq	2011–13, 2020 to date	2	Iran proxy forces remained in Iraq after the U.S. occupation.[108]
Iran	Iraq	2014–19	4	Iran sent forces into Iraq to fight ISIS and bolster its militias. Iranian forces suffered casualties as early as 2014 and as late as 2019.[109] Iranian-backed militias also seized disputed territory held by Iraqi Kurdish forces during the 2017 independence referendum.
Iran	UAE (Disputed)	1971 to date	2	Iranian forces occupy islands claimed by the UAE.[110]
Iran	Lebanon	1979–2013, 2016 to date	2	Iran supported the Lebanese militia Hezbollah.[111]
Iran	Lebanon	2014–15	3	Iran supported the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, which was at war with Islamist forces along the Syria border.
Iran	Bahrain	2013 to date	2	Iran provided bomb-making material to armed Bahraini opposition. While Bahrain has long leveled these

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[107] "A Thousand Hezbollahs: Iraq's Emerging Militia State." Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, May 4, 2021. https://newlinesinstitute.org/governance/a-thousand-hezbollahs-iraqs-emerging-militia-state/.
[108] Newlines Institute. "A Thousand Hezbollahs."
[109] Dehghanpisheh, Babak. "INSIGHT— Iran's Elite Guards Fighting in Iraq to Push Back Islamic State." Reuters, August 3, 2014. https://web.archive.org/web/20141018204329/https://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/03/iraq-security-iran-idUSL6N0Q73ZU20140803;
Toumaj, Amir, and Caleb Weiss. "Iranian Killed at PMF Base in Iraq." *FDD's Long War Journal*, July 25, 2019. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/07/iranian-killed-at-pmf-base-in-iraq.php.
[110] Salama, Samir. "Islands Issue Mars Iran–UAE Ties, Abdullah Tells FNC." *Gulf News*, April 20, 2010. https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/islands-issue-mars-iran-uae-ties-abdullah-tells-fnc-1.615065.
[111] Bergman, *Rise and Kill First*.

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				accusations, independent experts were able to verify that Bahraini authorities intercepted Iranian-made materials from 2013 onward, around the same time as an uptick in more sophisticated attacks.[112]
Iran	Palestine	2013, 2015, 2020	2	Iran openly supported Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas.[113]
Iran	Palestine	2011–12, 2014, 2018–19	3	Iran openly supported Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which were at war with Israel.
Iran	Yemen	2009–12	2	A leaked United Nations report in 2015 stated, "Current military Iranian support to Houthis in Yemen is consistent with patterns of arms transfers going back to more than five years to date," arguing that shipments at sea "can be traced back to at least 2009."[114]
Iran	Yemen	2013 to date	3	Iran has increased its direct support for the Houthi rebellion.[115]
Qatar	Syria	2012 to date	3	Qatar supported Syrian opposition groups and vowed to continue doing so after the U.S.–backed arms pipeline was shut down.[116]
Qatar	Libya	2011	4	Qatar deployed special forces to train Libyan opposition groups and

[112] "The IED Threat In Bahrain." Conflict Armament Research, December 2019. https://www.conflictarm.com/reports/the-ied-threat-in-bahrain/; Knights, Michael, and Matthew Levitt. "The Evolution of Shi`a Insurgency in Bahrain." *CTC Sentinel* vol.11, no. 1, January 24, 2018. https://ctc.usma.edu/evolution-shia-insurgency-bahrain/. Knights and Levitt lean heavily on the Bahraini regime's claims, but their overall timeline of the insurgency is consistent with physical evidence examined by Conflict Armament Research.
[113] Bergman. *Rise and Kill First.*; Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 177.
[114] Landry, Carole. "Iran Arming Yemen's Houthi Rebels since 2009: UN Report." Agence France–Presse, May 1, 2015. http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-arming-yemens-houthi-rebels-2009-un-report.
[115] Johnston, Trevor, *et al*. "The Houthis and Their Relationship with Iran." In *Could the Houthis Be the Next Hizballah? Iranian Proxy Development in Yemen and the Future of the Houthi Movement*. Santa Monica. RAND Corporation, 2020. 51–73. https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2551.
[116] Maclean and Finn. "Qatar Will Help Syrian Rebels Even If Trump Ends U.S. Role."

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				participated in Operation Unified Protector and the storming of Gaddafi's palace.[117]
Qatar	Libya	2012 to date	3	Qatari-backed factions continued to contend for power in postrevolutionary Libya; the Qatari chief of staff even appeared side-by-side with a militia commander during an opposition meeting.[118]
Qatar	Palestine	2013, 2015, 2020	2	Qatar openly supported the Hamas government in Gaza.[119]
Qatar	Palestine	2011–12, 2014, 2018–19	3	Qatar openly supported Hamas, which was at war with Israel.[120]
Qatar	Yemen	2015–17	4	Qatar contributed pilots and ground troops to the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen until 2017.[121]
Saudi Arabia	Iran	1989 to date	2	In 2020, the Danish government indicted Ahwazi separatist exiles for plotting violent attacks on Iranian targets from European soil and said that the exiles had been working for Saudi intelligence services from 2012 to 2018.[122] Multiple defectors

[117] Black, Ian. "Qatar Admits Sending Hundreds of Troops to Support Libya Rebels." *The Guardian*, October 26, 2011. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/26/qatar-troops-libya-rebels-support; Stephens, Michael. "The Arab Cold War Redux." The Century Foundation, February 28, 2017. https://tcf.org/content/report/arab-cold-war-redux/. A video also documents the raising of the Qatari flag. See alshemaal. 2012 ,العزيزية باب على قطر علم يرفعون قطريون جنود. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md8UiB2I1_Q.

[118] Dagher, Sam, Charles Levinson, and Margaret Coker. "Tiny Kingdom's Huge Role in Libya Draws Concern." *The Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2011. https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204002304576627000922764650.html; Wehrey, "This War Is Out of Our Hands."

[119] Fabian, Emanuel. "Hamas Threatens to Renew Fighting If Qatari Funds Don't Enter Gaza next Week." *Times of Israel*, June 4, 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-threatens-to-renew-fighting-if-qatari-funds-dont-enter-gaza-next-week/.

[120] Fabian. "Hamas Threatens to Renew Fighting."

[121] "Qatari Forces in Saudi–Led Coalition Return Home." Reuters, June 7, 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-alliance-idUSKBN18Y2YH.

[122] "Denmark Summons Saudi Envoy over Alleged Iranian–Arab Separatist Plot." *Middle East Eye*, June 11, 2020. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/denmark-calls-saudi-envoy-regarding-alleged-ahwazi-arab-terror-plot

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				from the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an armed Iranian opposition group, have gone on the record claiming that Saudi Arabia materially supports the group. The MEK's former head of security said that this relationship dates back to 1989 and included hundreds of millions of dollars in funding.[123]
Saudi Arabia	Syria	2012–17	3	Saudi Arabia supported Syrian opposition groups as part of the U.S.–led arms pipeline. As early as November 2012, Jordanian cargo planes carried Saudi arms shipments to the rebels, several officials told *The New York Times*. Saudi cargo planes began carrying these arms a few months later.[124]
Saudi Arabia	Bahrain	2011	2	Saudi troops entered Bahrain to put down a local uprising.
Saudi Arabia	Yemen	2010	4	Saudi troops fought Houthi rebels along the Yemeni border, struck alleged Houthi positions inside Yemen, and provided support to the Yemeni government in crushing the rebellion.[125] In at least one case,

[123] Joplin, Ty. "Inside the MEK: The Secluded Group Scheduled to Overthrow the Iranian Regime." *Al Bawaba*, July 21, 2018. https://www.albawaba.com/insights/inside-mek-secluded-group-scheduled-overthrow-iranian-regime-39; Jannessari, Sohail, and Darren Loucaides. "Spain's Vox Party Hates Muslims — Except the Ones Who Fund It." *Foreign Policy*, April 27, 2019. https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/27/spains-vox-party-hates-muslims-except-the-ones-who-fund-it-mek-ncri-maryam-rajavi-pmoi-vidal-quadras-abascal/.
[124] Chivers, C. J., and Eric Schmitt. "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From C.I.A." *The New York Times*, March 25, 2013. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/arms-airlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.html.
[125] Von Mittelstaedt, Juliane. "'Operation Scorched Earth': A US Hand in Yemen's Civil War." *Der Spiegel*, March 12, 2010. https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/operation-scorched-earth-a-us-hand-in-yemen-s-civil-war-a-732734.html; McGregor, Andrew. "Saudi Military Operations along the Yemen Border Repel Houthist Incursion." The Jamestown Foundation, January 28, 2010. https://jamestown.org/program/saudi-military-operations-along-the-yemen-border-repel-houthist-incursion/.

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				Saudi ground forces admitted to carrying out operations on Yemeni soil.[126]
Saudi Arabia	Yemen	2015 to date	4	Saudi air and ground forces began a campaign to dislodge Yemen's Houthi rebels in May 2015. The first Saudi combat troops took part soon after the air campaign began, with a joint Emirati–Saudi special forces contingent landing in Aden in July 2015.[127]
Saudi Arabia	Lebanon	2017	2	Saudi security forces held the prime minister of Lebanon against his will in a bid to force him to resign.[128]
Saudi Arabia	Libya	2019–20	3	Saudi Arabia offered to pay for Khalifa Haftar's offensive against the Tripoli government, Saudi advisers told *The Wall Street Journal*. Egyptian and Libyan sources later confirmed to *Al–Araby Al–Jadeed* that Saudi Arabia was

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[126] "Saudi Arabian Security Forces Free 2 German Girls Kidnapped in Yemen." Voice of America, May 17, 2010. https://www.voanews.com/world-news/middle-east-dont-use/saudi-arabian-security-forces-free-2-german-girls-kidnapped-yemen.

[127] Knights, Michael, and Alex Almeida. "The Saudi–UAE War Effort in Yemen (Part 1): Operation Golden Arrow in Aden." The Washington Institute, August 10, 2015. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/saudi-uae-war-effort-yemen-part-1-operation-golden-arrow-aden.

[128] Barnard, Anne, and Maria Abi–Habib. "Why Saad Hariri Had That Strange Sojourn in Saudi Arabia." *The New York Times*. December 24, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/24/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-saad-hariri-mohammed-bin-salman-lebanon.html.

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				financing the Sudanese fighters in Libya.[129]
Turkey	Afghanistan	2001−21	3	Turkey has deployed noncombat troops to Afghanistan to assist the U.S.−led coalition.[130] While the Turkish force has suffered a few deaths in recent years, they were due to accidents and a bomb attack on the Turkish embassy, not combat.[131]
Turkey	Libya	2011	3	Turkish aircraft participated in Operation Unified Protector, the NATO−led intervention in Libya.
Turkey	Libya	2019	3	Turkey sent proxies, trainers, and drones to Libya to fight on behalf of the Tripoli government.[132]
Turkey	Libya	2020	4	Turkish troops began to suffer combat casualties in Libya.[133]

[129] Malsin, Jared, and Summer Said. "Saudi Arabia Promised Support to Libyan Warlord in Push to Seize Tripoli." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2019.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-promised-support-to-libyan-warlord-in-push-to-seize-tripoli-11555077600;
"Sudan's Army Provides Libya's Haftar with 1,000 Militiamen." *Daily Sabah*, July 30, 2019.
https://www.dailysabah.com/africa/2019/07/30/sudans-army-provides-libyas-haftar-with-1000-militiamen;
"Arabic Press Review: UAE and Sudan to Supply Libya's Haftar with Fighters." *Middle East Eye*, July 8, 2019.
https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/arabic-press-review-uae-and-sudan-supply-libyas-haftar-fighters.
See also Vitkine, Benoît, Marie Jégo, and Frédéric Bobin. "En Libye, Le Grand Marchandage Entre Moscou et Ankara." *Le Monde*, January 24, 2020.
https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/01/24/en-libye-le-grand-marchandage-entre-moscou-et-ankara_60 27114_3210.html.
[130] Aydogan, Merve. "Turkey's Long Involvement in NATO Mission in Afghanistan," Anadolu Agency, June 19, 2021.
https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-s-long-involvement-in-nato-mission-in-afghanistan/2279062.
[131] Khapalwak, Ruhullah. "ISAF: Helicopter Crash in Kabul Kills 12." CNN, March 16, 2012.
https://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/16/world/asia/afghanistan-helicopter-crash/index.html;
"Turkish Soldier Killed in Attack on Embassy Vehicle in Kabul." The Associated Press, February 15, 2015.
https://apnews.com/article/033f93a4a7f0486585b5d0d280751399.
[132] Wehrey. "This War Is Out of Our Hands";
Ivanescu and Kahan. "Syria's Wretched Foreign Legion."
[133] "Libya Conflict: Turkey Confirms First Soldiers Killed." BBC News, February 25, 2020.
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51626743.

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Turkey	Syria	2011–15	3	Turkey supported opposition groups in Syria.[134]
Turkey	Syria	2016 to date	5	Turkey occupied areas of northern Syria, set up a military government, and began resettling refugees. Turkish civilian authorities provide basic services to those areas, and the Turkish flag has been raised over government buildings.[135] Turkey also continued its support for other Syrian opposition groups.
Turkey	Iraq	2010–13, 2015 to date	4	Turkey had carried out air and ground operations against the PKK in Iraq for years prior to the peace process that began in 2013.[136] The Turkish military resumed airstrikes in Iraq — and soon after, ground

[134] Lund. "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up on the Syrian Opposition."

[135] Stein, Aaron, Hossam Abouzahr, and Rao Komar. "Post Conflict Stabilization: Turkey and the End of Operation Euphrates Shield." Atlantic Council, July 13, 2017. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/post-conflict-stabilization-turkey-and-the-end-of-operation-euphrates-shield/; Chulov, Martin, and Kareem Shaheen. "'Nothing Is Ours Anymore': Kurds Forced out of Afrin after Turkish Assault." *The Guardian*, June 7, 2018. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/07/too-many-strange-faces-kurds-fear-forced-demographic-shift-in-afrin; El Deeb, Sarah. "Blurring the Border, Turkey Deepens Roots in Northern Syria." The Associated Press, June 19, 2018. https://apnews.com/article/3adcaa2b9b214465bb9e61d8427ab774; Petti, Matthew. "The Olive Oil in Your Local Store May Be Funding Syrian Warlords." *The Daily Beast*, November 23, 2020. https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-olive-oil-in-your-local-store-may-be-funding-syrian-warlords.

[136] "Turkish Troops' Incursion May Raise Tensions." *The Guardian*, June 16, 2010. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/16/turkey-kurds-iraq-rebels; Arsu, Sebnem. "Turkey Deploys Thousands of Troops Against P.K.K." *The New York Times*, October 20, 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/world/europe/turkey-deploys-thousands-of-troops-against-pkk.html; Yeginsu, Ceylan. "Turkish Troops Enter Iraq in Pursuit of Kurdish Rebels." *The New York Times*, September 8, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/world/europe/turkey-pkk-bombing-police.html; "Turkish Air Strike Kills Two Iraqis: Kurdistan Official." Reuters, November 12, 2012. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-iraq-operation/turkish-air-strike-kills-two-iraqis-kurdistan-official-idUSBRE8A61O420121107.

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				operations — after the process broke down in 2015.[137]
Turkey	Iraq	2015−17	3	Turkey deployed troops to northern Iraq to train local proxies against ISIS.[138] Their mission ended in 2017, after the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum.[139]
Turkey	Cyprus	1974 to date	2	Turkish troops continue to help prop up the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Turkey threatened to annex the territory in 2012, and Turkish naval forces have enforced its maritime claims.
Turkey	Serbia (Disputed)	1999−2013*	2	Turkish troops participated in the NATO−led peacekeeping mission in the disputed territory of Kosovo. (The UAE also participated in this mission until 1999.[140]) *Although NATO troops have stayed in Kosovo, the conflict is no longer relevant, as the Serbian government normalized its relations with the Kosovar government in early 2013.

[137] Almukhtar, Sarah, and Tim Wallace. "Why Turkey Is Fighting the Kurds Who Are Fighting ISIS." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html;
Yeginsu, Ceylan. "Turkish Troops Enter Iraq in Pursuit of Kurdish Rebels." *The New York Times*, September 8, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/world/europe/turkey-pkk-bombing-police.html;
Zaman, Amberin. "Turkey to Establish New Military Base in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Al Monitor*. April 30, 2021. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/turkey-establish-new-military-base-iraqi-kurdistan.
[138] Filkins, Dexter. "What Are Turkish Troops Doing in Northern Iraq?" *The New Yorker*, December 9, 2015. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/what-are-turkish-troops-doing-in-northern-iraq;
Ergan, Uğur. "Turkish Military Starts Training Missions in Iraq, Syria." *Hürriyet*, March 16, 2015. https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-military-starts-training-missions-in-iraq-syria-79721.
[139] Butler. "Turkey Stops Training Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga after Independence Vote."
[140] "UAE Mission in Kosovo Concludes." *Gulf News*, September 29, 2001. https://gulfnews.com/uae/uae-mission-in-kosovo-concludes-1.425864.

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Turkey	Somalia	2017 to date	3	Turkish troops set up a base in Somalia to train Somali government forces against al−Shabaab.[141]
Turkey	Armenia and Azerbaijan	2020	3	Turkey recruited Syrian fighters to fight on the Azerbaijani side in the second Nagorno−Karabakh War.[142]
UAE	Libya	2011	3	Emirati aircraft participated in Operation Unified Protector, the NATO−led intervention in Libya.
UAE	Libya	2014−20	3	The UAE carried out airstrikes on behalf of, recruited mercenaries for, and provided weapons to Khalifa Haftar.[143]
UAE	Syria	2012 to date	3	The UAE provided weapons to the Syrian opposition, first providing weapons to a regional coalition known as Istanbul Room, then helping to shore up Saudi-backed efforts, and finally training the Syrian Democratic Forces.[144]

[141] Yüksel and Tekineş. "Turkey's Love-in with Qatar."

[142] Ivanescu and Kahan. "Syria's Wretched Foreign Legion."

[143] Wehrey. "This War Is Out of Our Hands";
Mackinnon, Amy. "The Conflict in Libya Is Getting Even Messier." *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2021. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/04/libya-conflict-un-report-uae-haftar/;
Burke, Jason, and Zeinah Mohammed Salih. "Mercenaries Flock to Libya Raising Fears of Prolonged War." *The Guardian*, December 24, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/24/mercenaries-flock-to-libya-raising-fears-of-prolonged-war

[144] Abouzeid, Rania. *No Turning Back: Life, Loss, and Hope in Wartime Syria*. New York. W.W. Norton, 2018. 230−238. https://books.apple.com/us/audiobook/no-turning-back-life-loss-and-hope-in-wartime-syria/id1413027809;
Lund. "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up on the Syrian Opposition";
"UAE Special Forces to Deploy in Syria, as Russia Warns of World War." *Times of Israel*, February 16, 2016. http://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-special-forces-to-deploy-in-syria-as-russia-warns-of-world-war/;
Newlines Institute senior analyst Nicholas Heras, who has advised the U.S.−led coalition in Syria, confirmed in a May 11, 2021 text message: "The Jordanians told me that they worked the UAE to train internal security forces in the SDF areas. Kobani was supposedly where the base was. Small footprint mission."

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UAE	Somalia	2011−14	2	The UAE trained the Puntland Maritime Police Force to fight piracy.[145]
UAE	Somalia	2015−18	3	The UAE established a base to train Somali forces against al−Shabaab, although it was forced to leave due to a falling-out with the Somali central government, and later began building an additional base in breakaway Somaliland.[146]
UAE	Somalia	2019−20	2	The UAE cancelled its construction of a military base in Somaliland,[147] although it continued its relationship with the Puntland Maritime Police Force.[148]
UAE	Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, *et al.*	2016 to date	3	The UAE funded the G5 Sahel military alliance against Islamist militants and opened a military training academy in Mauritania for its forces.[149] *Note:* The HIIK Conflict Barometer counts the entire Sahelian conflict as one war.
UAE	Bahrain	2011−14	2	The UAE participated in the Saudi-led intervention against the uprising in Bahrain. Emirati police

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[145] Cole. "The Complete Mercenary";
Mazzetti, Mark, and Emily B. Hager. "Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder." *The New York Times*, May 15, 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html.

[146] Ramani, Samuel. "What UAE's Growing Presence in Somaliland Means for Its Horn of Africa Strategy." *Al Monitor*, March 29, 2021.
https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/what-uaes-growing-presence-somaliland-means-its-horn-africa-strategy.

[147] "Somaliland UAE Military Base to Be Turned into Civilian Airport." Reuters, September 15, 2019.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-emirates-idUSKBN1W00FI.

[148] "UAE Terminates Programme to Train Somalia's Military." *Middle East Eye*, April 16, 2018.
http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-terminates-programme-train-somalias-military.

[149] Ardemagni. "The UAE's Military Training−Focused Foreign Policy";
Ghanmi, Lamine. "Mauritania Offers Training against Terror in Sahel." *Arab Weekly*, September 21, 2018.
https://thearabweekly.com/mauritania-offers-training-against-terror-sahel.

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				stayed after the Saudi withdrawal, with at least one dying in an attack in 2014.[150]
UAE	Afghanistan	2007–21	4	Emirati special forces participated and saw combat in the NATO–led intervention in Afghanistan.[151]
UAE	Yemen	2015 to date	4	The UAE and its proxies have participated in the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen. Emirati troops first arrived in July 2015 as part of a joint Saudi–Emirati special forces contingent in Aden.[152]
UAE	Egypt	2013	3	The UAE funded Tamarod, a protest movement that paved the way for and backed the violent military coup d'etat, in coordination with Egyptian military officers.[153]

[150] Holmes, Amy Austin. "The Military Intervention That the World Forgot." *Al Jazeera America*, March 29, 2014. http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/3/bahrain-uprisinginterventionsaudiarabiaemirates.html.

[151] Gardiner, Alex. "On the Frontline with UAE Forces in Helmand." *The National*, July 22, 2011. https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/on-the-frontline-with-uae-forces-in-helmand-1.423315.

[152] Knights and Almeida. "The Saudi–UAE War Effort."

[153] Kirkpatrick, David D. "Recordings Suggest Emirates and Egyptian Military Pushed Ousting of Morsi." *The New York Times*, March 2, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/02/world/middleeast/recordings-suggest-emirates-and-egyptian-military-pushed-ousting-of-morsi.html; Kirkpatrick, David D. "The White House and the Strongman." *The New York Times*, July 27, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/27/sunday-review/obama-egypt-coup-trump.html.

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The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft is an action-oriented think tank launched in 2019 to promote ideas that move U.S. foreign policy away from endless war and toward vigorous diplomacy in the pursuit of international peace.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

JESSICA ROSENBLUM
Director of Communications
Email: rosenblum@quincyinst.org
Tel: 202 279 0005

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