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THE ARAB SPRING AFTERMATH: REGIONAL AND EXTRA-REGIONAL INTERVENTION IN THE GULF AND THE LEVANT

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ABSTRACT

When the first popular movements broke out in some Arab countries, most academics were convinced that, as the People's Spring in the XIX century, this new Arab Spring would result in the fall of authoritarian governments and in the institution of democracies across the region. However, as history demonstrates, the Middle East has been a central region where local and external interests take place, with extra-regional and regional interventions in most of its conflicts. Thus, when the series of popular movements spread throughout the Arab world, a large range of actors pursued their self-interests to take advantage in each of these events. Among these actors are Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies, Iran, Turkey, besides the United States and Russia, what evidences the complexity of such regional struggle. After all, interventions in conflicts ultimately provoke economic, political and social damages for the states, their population and, in a broader way, for regional stability, as the Syrian and Yemeni Wars illustrate.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring was a political movement that took place throughout a region that extends from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula. This movement was emblematic due to its final consequences to the configuration of Middle Eastern states and their governments. As the "People's Spring" in the 19th century, the citizens of these countries urged for reforms that would lead to democracy in most of those states that lived long-dated repressive regimes. The movement was characterized by popular uprisings in the streets asking for transparency, against the long-dated corruption, besides for political and individual liberty.

However, the consolidation of a new political structure was a central problem to the establishment of new democratic regimes, being a challenge to implement real changes and unite the diverse interests, often diffused, amongst the population and internal groups inside of each country. This situation has its roots during the independence and the state-building process after that: some of these states rested on fragile political structures, where a wide range of internal groups had great autonomy and often a great personalist leader would integrate these groups under his government. Examples of these states were the socialist/nationalist governments of Egypt under Nasser, Libya under Kaddafi and Syria under Assad. In the other end of this spectrum, there are the Gulf monarchies that, although resting in more decentralized structure, they were capable of consolidating their political structures with relative success. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates currently represent one of the most important and consolidated actors in Middle Eastern dynamics.

When considering the conjuncture already exposed, it is possible to understand some of the internal causes that led to political and social instability during the Arab Spring process. Although the initial purposes were legitimate and looked for the advancement of democracy in the region, regional interest of the great powers in the Levant and the Gulf overlaid the processes, exacerbating the regional struggles at stake. In some of these cases, regional and extra-regional interests led the popular movements to real civil wars, where each side is supported by one of the powers concerned about the consequences of the conflict. These powers include Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States, Russia, Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. So, external intervention, through military and financial means, exacerbated some conflicts as in Syria and Yemen which have been lasting for six years approximately. At the end, the political movements were maneuvered by the regional and extra-regional powers through interventions that resulted in conflict, state fragmentation and regional instability.

Thus, after considering the complexity when analyzing the concept and the consequences of those interventions, the ultimate goal of this study guide is to examine how regional and external interference are central to understand the contemporary dynamics in the Middle East. As seen in Syria and Yemen, the overlay of interests propels all actors to pursue and increase their involvement, causing political, humanitarian and devastating consequences eventually.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Arab Spring was a unique event which gathered the majority of the Arab world around a single movement and which spread throughout every country of the Middle East. Such event attracted international attention and led to the sponsorship of interventions carried out by regional and extra-regional players. The movement had particular characteristics in every state. Due to the scale of organized internal opposition and to the singularity of the formation of the states in the Great Middle East, each uprising has often been explained by local conditions. Nevertheless, internal coalitions are sometimes formed based on allegiance to certain regional and extra-regional powers, which can benefit from the destabilization of a competing power. In surveys conducted over the last five years, nearly 70% of Arabs agreed foreign interference are obstacles to internal reforms in their countries (Guzansky 2015).

Geographically, the Great Middle East has distinct contrasts between countries in the Maghreb, Levant and the Arab Gulf[3], where most of those in the Fertile Crescent[4] could build more fairly diversified economies based on agriculture and on some level of industrialization – which was heavily financed by oil incomes or foreign help. Meanwhile, the countries in the Arab Gulf were characterized by oil-based economies, great masses of desert and scarce populations, sometimes subdivided into nomadic tribes in the great Arabian Desert. Even though the post-1990 and the post-Arab conjuncture has drastically changed this comparison, the influence of the tribesmen and

3 For the consideration of this study guide, the countries of the Maghreb are Northwest of Egypt, in Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya; countries in the Levant are in the Eastern Mediterranean: Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. Those countries in the Arab Gulf have oil-based economies and are designed as: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), sometimes including Yemen. Even if Iraq can be allocated in both regions of the Levant and the Arab Gulf, this guide will mostly allocate it in the group of states of the Levant.

4 The Fertile Crescent is a region the region considered the "Cradle of Civilization", comprehending the Nile and Euphrates and Tigris rivers, a region that is comparatively more fertile then others in the Middle East. The countries in the Fertile Crescent are Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Iraq and parts of Turkey and Iran.

their militias, which are frequently conservative and have an intense relation with Islam, had considerable impact in the internal politics, culture and security, holding the capacity to unbalance the power in some regimes (Khoury 1990). However, we must pay attention to internal and external factors in the regimes, since "what defines the Great Middle East is not the religion, as the geopolitical region is defined from the outside to the inside (as an area of geographic connection)" (Visentini 2014, 3).

The states of the Levant, in their majority, were formed based on the ideals of an Arab Nationalism, centered in the Baath or Nasser parties. Those systems, through the one-party system, boosted the nationalism and the industrialization in their countries and bargained between the USSR and the Western powers to support their ascensions in the Middle Eastern power system. At the same time, the Iraqi, Egyptian and Syrian national identities were formed based on the national myth of embodiment to foreign powers, differently to the Gulf States, where their independence from the colonial empires were peaceful and time-consuming (Patrick 2009).

Meanwhile, the tribal nature of some countries in the Gulf and the Levant are critically classified as "not nation-states, but rather tribal states" (Guzansky 2015, 110), as the "Gulf nations have a weaken national coherence, the Arab Gulf leaders have tended to use tribal and religious identities to reinforce their domestic legitimacy" (Patrick 2009, 4). Accordingly, "the tribal nature of the states is apparent in the social contract between the regime and the citizens" (Guzansky 2015, 110)[5]. However, presente-day nationalism within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is centered in the desire of the local leaderships to emphasize the national interest above internal identities, even if the countries have a market-friendly culture, this national social accord is intended to put some limit to the inflow of foreign nationals and foreign interests (Patrick 2009). This disjunction is largely a product of patterns of state building, in which regimes gain security directly from external powers or acquire needed resources from reinter sources like oil receipts or foreign aid (Hazbun 2015).

The Middle East is the only region that has not had a single local power capable of creating a regional market and integrating the region around its hegemony (Visentini 2014). This is somehow expected, as certain external economic and military dependency created barriers to the ascension of a regional power and, most importantly, the inefficiency of the Middle East to produce a complete industrial revolution (Visentini 2014). Nevertheless, a perennial conflict for regional hegemony still shapes the Middle East. The

5 For example: the Gulf petromonarchies charge zero or low taxes on their population, and the high expenditures in social welfare are supported by the return of the rich-oil trades, in exchange. Thus, the "social-contract" establishes that the population shall not raise against the monarch (Guzansky 2015).

fall of former regional powers such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt clears the path for the disputes over hegemony between Iran and Saudi Arabia to escalate (Lynch 2016).

2.1 From the Colonial Empires to the Creation of States

According to Visentini (2014), three major processes shaped the Middle Eastern inter-state system as we know it: (i) its social and historical evolution, in the long term; (ii) the process of development in the colonial and postcolonial period; and (iii) the disintegration of the Soviet Union (USSR), and the rise of the United States as the sole extra-regional hegemon after the Cold War.

These processes are intrinsic features of the countries in the Middle East, which have been for a long time victims of the constant dispute for regional dominance, in one of the most strategic regions in the world – which has also been the theater for proxy wars perpetrated by the major international powers since the XIX century. Likewise, the Arab region, as the larger oil deposits in the world, fuelled economic interests from the major powers, creating a strong mutual dependency on those markets, leading to interventions that put conservative governments in place to secure the strategic interests of the Western powers[6] (Visentini 2014).

Prior to World War I, the major power in the Middle East was the Ottoman Empire (1300-1922), a multiethnic, multi-religious state, under laws derived from Islam and by the sultan's dictates. With the end of this war, the international system witnessed the fall of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which had been controlling the Middle East since the XV century. International interventions played a critical role in the destabilization of the region and in the fall of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, as military interventions were conducted from Cairo to Ankara. In accordance, the British promises for Arab Nationalists regarding an independent Arab state and their subsequent support for the Allies was essential to the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the European victory in the Middle East.

After the war, both a British and a French Mandate were established in the region, with the support of the newly created League of Nations. Such mandates were a result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), negotiated secretly between France and the United Kingdom to make a territory partition of the Ottoman Empire, even before the end of the war. At the same time, the Balfour declaration of 1917 – which promised the creation of a national

6 Opposition movements in the region frequently contend that the present global order subordinates the rights of the colonized and postcolonial states to the requirements of the self-defined national interests and security concerns of the West (Hazbun 2015).

home, not a State, for the Jewish people in the Palestine – created a stand--off between the Western powers and the Arab nations, which were strongly against the creation of a Jewish State and the international interventions in Palestine (Visentini 2014).

After the Second World War and the Holocaust, the U.N pushed for a Partition Plan for the Palestine and the Jewish Settlement, however, this decision started the withdraw of the British forces from the Palestine, creating a vacuum of power in the region, which led to a series of wars that ended up consolidating Israel. Ultimately, the Sikes-Picot agreement and the Balfour declaration undermined the independence of several Arab nations and dismantled the aspiration of a Great Arab Nation, and ultimately led to a series of regional wars that engulfed the region in serious security tension, opening space for international interventions and regional conflicts in the XX century (Visentini 2014).

The British Empire was the most prominent one in the region after the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and had eventually assumed responsibility for the defense of Oman in 1829; the Trucial States (the present-day United Arab Emirates) in 1835; Bahrain in 1861; Kuwait in 1899; and Qatar in 1916. Once Britain took the role as protector, it could guarantee its oil companies interests while playing a major role to the balance of the region. This collaborative relationship was the reason for the success and longevity of the *Pax Britannica*[7] in the Arab Gulf (Onley 2009). Britain's move of removing its troops from the Gulf signalized a dramatic change for the region, as

> [o]n November 30, 1971, one day before the troops were actually withdrawn, Iran seized three strategic islands near the Strait of Hormuz [...] under the sovereignty of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah (both of whom later became part of the UAE) (Guzansky 2015, 9).

The seizure of these islands demonstrated the vulnerability to the threats of the Arab Gulf nations by their neighbors at the time, and illustrated the necessity and importance of outside security support in the Middle East to counterbalance regional and extra-regional powers. In this political context, the states turned to secular nationalist movements, like the Nasserism and the pan-Arabism, to draw force to achieve independence from the colonial empires (Visentini 2014).

These nationalist movements heavily influenced the nation-states of the Levant and Maghreb; however, some countries were not able to provide a solid institutional base, which pushed those states to a high dependency

7 The *Pax Britannica* is a concept for the time (1815-1914) when the British Empire became the global hegemonic power and adopted the role of a global police force (Porter 1998).

on the former colonial powers[8]. Nonetheless, due to their lack of economic and military capacities, their disengagement in the region left it open to the influence of the United States or the Soviet Union as strategic allies (the two super-powers of the Cold War), which consequently led to a deepening of political tensions and wars, both internal and regional (Araújo 2013, Abu--Rabi 2011, Maraschin 2015).

2.2 The Middle East during the Cold War

The Arab Cold War, during the fifties and the sixties, revolved around the regional axes of monarchies against socialist republics, with Islamist forces forming either a suppressed opposition or a rising underground movement (Khoury 2013). The strategic advantage that the URSS had to provide security and economic aid, being geographically close to the Middle East, could counterbalance a region dominated by the influence of American military deal and economic leadership in the region. Yet, the rivalry was most intense amongst the conservative monarchies, supported by Washington, and socialist/nationalist republics, supported by Moscow, albeit with a military dictatorship underneath the façade in the case of socialists and a tribal/military mix buttressing the regime in the case of the monarchies (Khoury 2013).

Regional alliances largely mirrored the international Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, a dispute that included proxy wars, as the Yemeni War of 1972 (Khoury 2013). To the credit of the Soviets, prior to 1973, bypassing the Baghdad Pact[9], Moscow made itself indispensable in fueling wars: operating on behalf of Arab States in Arab-Israeli conflicts; and bringing the communist regime of South Yemen and the nationalists of Syria, Iraq and Egypt to a broader alliance (Ashley 2012). In comparison, to secure its strategic interests in maintaining a pacific and stable Middle East, and to secure maritime connectivity and the vital oil commerce in the region, the United States allied with the major oil producers in the Persian Gulf, the Imperial State of Iran and the State of Israel. These alliances were very effective to counterbalance USSR and the nationalists.

A series of wars involving the controversial state of Israel weakened the nationalist partners of USSR and, in the final stages of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, ended up bringing together some of the adversary countries, under

8 Mainly the small countries of the Gulf (Qatar; UAE; Kuwait; Oman; Bahrain) were until the 1980's heavily dependent of the British security, and some, specially Bahrain, still holds close ties in the area of defense with the United Kingdom (Guzansky 2015).

9 The Baghdad Pact or The Middle East Treaty Organization was an organization formed in 1955 by the Empires of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Due to internal affairs from the Israeli-lobby, the United States could only join in 1958, but it gradually lost importance as conflict of interest between the members arose. The Iranian Revolution marked the end of the Baghdad Pact (Martin 2008).

the aegis of Washington leadership in the Arab League Summit in Khartoum:

> The Arab League Summit in Khartoum rejected a peace agreement with Israel, according to the ambiguous formula "yes to the West, not to Israel". It was the triumph of pro-Western thesis of Saudi Arabia against the confrontational position of Syria and Algeria (Visentini 2014, 33).

Besides that, the oil crisis of the 1970s displayed frictions between the alliance of the United States and the petromonarchies, as the artificial rise of prices of oil was a brutal attack to Western industries in response to the Israeli wars and to the American support for them. However, the United States was able to use the peace accords to stabilize the region and to approach the losing countries over the aegis of Moscow[10].

Additionally, this maneuver by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries aimed at strengthening the organization itself internationally – by the means of the end of the Bretton-Woods currency accord[11] – and creating an interdependency network in the Middle East over the petrodollars. The interdependency network of the petrodollars[12] allowed the countries in the Gulf, but mainly Saudi Arabia, to build enduring alliances with Western and Regional countries, like Germany and Egypt. In conclusion, the OPEC nations demonstrated that their oil resources could be used as an economic and political weapon against other nations, at least in the short term.

Due to the intensity of the interventionism and authoritarianism following the 1970's crisis of the Middle East, the Islam started to be more identified as a political form of resistance to these regimes. So the rise of the Political Islam gained a prominent role against the National-Socialists and the Autocratic Secular States, leading to the Iranian and Afghanistan Revolution of 1979. This conjuncture changed drastically the balance of power in the region as Iran started to fund and promotes the expansion of the Islamic revolution in other countries of the Middle East, prompting the concern of

10 For instance, Egypt's Nasser backs off in return for Saudi financial support to save his regime, ceding in Yemen and focusing on Egyptian interests (Visentini 2014).

11 The Bretton-Woods currency accord was the fixation of the dollar in gold. When the OPEC embargo made the oil prices skyrocket, the United States were not able to cover the costs of using its gold reserve to hold the price of international 1-gold-once in 35 dollars, and so ended unfixing the dollar to the gold, ultimately ending the Bretton-Woods accord.

12 Petrodollars are the expenditures or investments of a country's revenue from petroleum exports. The petrodollars have an important impact internationally, as the oil-rich countries of the Gulf have heavily invested in the debts of Western powers or acquired large business capital on those countries. At the same time, the petrodollars have a major role regionally, as they are used to finance certain groups and states, representing a type of interventionism through economic support.

insurgencies in the Monarchies of the Gulf, and ultimately, regional disputes over the leadership of the Islamic world. In the same sense, the Political Islam gained territory in the Gulf monarchies as a tool of counter-revolution and to appease conflicting internal relations (Costa 2010, Maraschin 2015).

2.3 The Middle East under American Prominence

After the end of the Cold War, the Middle East saw an abrupt change on the region's balance of power. The collapse of the Soviet Union by the end of the 1980s represented the removal of the only capable competitor of the United States in the Middle East and the establishment of a new structural order in the region – which was now led by Washington. "The absence of any meaningful alternative to the United States forced regional players to choose between inclusion in the American-dominated international system or isolation as rogue states" (Lynch 2016, 21).

American dominance in the region could be divided in two main phases with different diplomacies towards its partners in the Middle East. The first phase marks the period of the 1990s, in which the United States worked with autocratic allies to sustain the status quo in the region; the second phase was by the decade of 2000, following September 11 and the Bush Administration. During his government, the United States adopted an aggressive revisionist strategy in the region, employing the discourse of "war on terror" to change autocratic regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, which was previously seen as acceptable for the maintenance of regional stability, at the same time that intensified the support for the autocratic governments of the Gulf (Lynch 2016).

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990, prompt the formation of a coalition in support for the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1990, named as Operation Desert Storm. This Operation marked the politics of the 1990's decade, when "united traditional American allies, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and adversaries such as Syria and [quietly] Israel" (Lynch 2016, 31), representing the ultimate victory of the American-dominated system in the region. Furthermore, the unfinished settlements of the Yom Kippur War tensioned once again the interstate system in the Middle East. Synchronously an America-led diplomacy for the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian peace talks kept Washington at the center of the ongoing diplomacy. On the other hand, sanctions against Iran and Iraq destabilized these countries' governments, generating a major popular discontentment across broad sectors of the Arab world. Mounting public hostility towards the US and an endless series of political crisis at the United Nations helped the Arab dictators to justify their repressive means, when Washington, most of the times, proved willing to look away (Lynch 2016).

Furthermore, following September 11, the invasion of Iraq, the global war on terror and the democratic changes promoted by the "Freedom Agenda", the United States altered the balance of power in the region, a reconfiguration of the status quo that could only be sustained by unprecedented military, diplomatic, political and financial costs of the United States (Lynch 2016). As a consequence of the events following the American invasion of Iraq, which represents the end of the dual containment policy and the removing of its primary military rival in the region[13], Iran's influence in the Middle East increased significantly. From then on, Iran changed its approach in order to be able to influence the new commanding positions in the politics of the New Iraq, which include the prime minister and the Shiite militias[14] (Guzansky 2015). The American War on Terror expanded Washington intrusion into Arab politics, and the Gulf States became accustomed to this high intensity of American intervention – and since they do not feel personally threatened, they end up embracing a more eagerly alliance with the United States, looking forward to counterbalance Iran and to create networks of counterterrorism[15] (Lynch 2016). By 2010, only Iran and Syria remained outside this American-led order[16]. Comparatively, this phase has been an unstable time for the Middle East, once Israeli and Palestinian wars outbroke again, in the raise of anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment, rapidly evolving sectarian tensions, and jihadist violence paved the way to the emergence of rebel and terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), after the Arab Spring.

After the end of the Bush administration, Obama started to build a more multilateral diplomacy[17], relying in the desire to move away from militant unilateralism that branded the post-Cold War era in the Middle East. Therefore, Washington aimed to return to a more traditional multilateralism

13 "The policy of dual containment was finally buried with the US invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003 and the following ouster of the Saddam Hussein regime" (Guzansky 2015, 12).

14 Iran has been a crucial ally to the new Shiite government of Iraqi, after the deposition of the Sunni government of Saddam Hussein, presenting itself as a new partner for stabilization in the country after the disregard of the United States in the matter, and specially following the retreat of the American army in 2011.

15 There is a clear prioritization of security measures, such as the containment of Iran and counterterrorism initiatives, over democratization and human rights in the Arab petromonarchies.

16 By 2010, only Iran and Syria remained outside this American-led order, and both were actively seeking a way in. Syria, which had joined the US-led coalition against Iraq and peace talks with Israel in the 1990's, was actively exploring diplomatic cooperation with Washington, while Iran saw the nuclear negotiations as a vehicle for changing its relationship with the United States (Lynch 2016).

17 Obama hoped to decrease American military and political footprint in the region, in order to pivot away from the Middle East towards more vital strategic challenges in Asia (Guzansky 2015).

in international affairs, sharing military burdens, disengaging in conflicts and trying to deal with Iran and Syria through a more conciliatory regional policy, aiming at reconstructing its image in the Middle East (Gerges 2013). The tensions led by the disengagement of the United States in the region, alongside a global economic crisis and the rise of regional and internal disputes that noticeable built the pre-factors of the Arab Spring; all of these factors continue to jeopardize a regional military stability. The Gulf and Levant states, facing their sub-regional struggles[18], are now "willing to take military action not just as part of a Western-led coalition, but as part of regional coalitions, organized in pursuit of their own security interests" (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2017, 351).

3 STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

The politics of contemporary Middle East is a major challenge to all leaders of states in the world and mostly in the region itself. When, in 2011, the Arab Spring outbroke, most of world leaders could not have imagined which would be the consequences for an already unstable region due to the Afghan and Iraqi Wars. Therefore, new dynamics arouse and extra-regional powers, aware of their strategic interests, started to intervene in the regional conflicts, sometimes directly with military capacity, other times with financial and diplomatic support. However, it was the regional powers that remained as the main actors in most of the conflicts: pursuing their own foreign policy objectives, they have not been demonstrating any caution to intervene whenever and wherever their main interests are at stake. In fact, some states and their societies have been transformed into arenas to regional and extra-regional disputes without any consideration about national sovereignty or about civilian lives. These actions have generated a large spectrum of civil wars that last for years without any prospect of an end, such as in Syria and Yemen. Bearing that in mind, the present section of this guide intends to analyze these interventions across the Levant and the Gulf, assessing how far they may go.

3.1 The Arab Spring in the Gulf and the Levant

In December 2010, a Tunisian man set himself on fire as a protest after having his goods confiscated by government officials. This event was a result of consternation against the Tunisian government's oppression. Since

18 The Levant states struggle to counterbalance Israeli and Turkish influence, while Syria and Iraq face insurgent movements and the Islamic State. Therefore, there is the possibility to spillover to other neighboring states, most of all regarding the refugee crisis. Meanwhile, the Gulf States are concerned with revolutionary movements; the destabilization of Yemen and the vital routes of the Aden's Gulf, unity within the GCC; and the Iranian influence in the sub-region (Guzansky 2015).

then, popular uprisings have spread out throughout the Middle East, changing dramatically the regional dynamics: these events became known as the Arab Spring. During the last decades, dictatorial regimes were dominant in the region, from Tunisia to Iraq. In these states, harsh measures were used whenever they were necessary to suppress sociopolitical groups and to exclude them from domestic politics, whereas, in the international level, they sought external ties with great powers to maintain their own security (Hazbun 2015). The unequal distribution of wealth, the corruption and the already mentioned oppression were the main causes that moved the claims for democracy in the Middle East.

The popular uprisings spread out in the region and affected most of the authoritarian regimes: Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. The regime forces responded with even more state-led repression, turning the situation "[…] into armed conflict between regimes and rebels backed by powerful external patrons" (Hazbun 2015, 64). As the popular movements intensified, the main regional powers, backed by their extra-regional allies, started to intervene: sometimes against the regime, other times against the rebel forces. This pragmatic attitude can be mostly understood in light of the geopolitical dispute in the Gulf and the Levant between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In this so-called "New Middle East Cold War", two major groups struggle for the regional power status in the Gulf: Iran – allied to Shia governments in Iraq, to Syria, to Hezbollah in Lebanon and to Hamas in Palestine – against Saudi Arabia and Sunni conservative monarchies of the Gulf (Gause III 2014). The Iranian "Axis of Resistance" represents a direct confrontation to the Sunni Western-backed states and their regional interests. On the other hand, the Sunni monarchies instrumentalized the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to pursue their interests and prevent the expansion of Iranian influence in the region (Guzansky 2015). To complete this regional chessboard, Turkey presents as a regional competitor, using its growing influence among the neighboring states to point out its national interests related to Syria, most of all about the Kurdish question.

This entire geopolitical configuration propelled the regional actors to adopt a more assertive and interventional foreign policy in the region. To achieve their goals, each of these regional actors took advantage of their security relations with extra-regional powers (Western states and Russia) in the main conflicts. This mechanism resulted in progressive military interventions by these states and ultimately the worsening of the civil wars in Syria and Yemen. The following sections are going to debate such situation and the main interests behind it.

3.2 The Middle Eastern Chessboard: regional and extra-regional players at the game

All over Middle Eastern history, the region has been an arena for regional and extra-regional interests. The "New Middle East Cold War" at stake between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a reality. With the Saudis, the others Gulf conservative monarchies have been more active in the regional dynamics, both backed by the United States and European powers; on the other hand, Iran has relations with Iraq, Syria, and the non-state groups Hezbollah and Hamas, mostly Shiite dominant actors, backed by Russia in the Syrian War. In this regional chessboard, both sides pursue their interests and use their military, diplomatic and financial powers to achieve them. Therefore, with the outbreak of the Arab Spring and its destabilizing consequences, the principal actors have exacerbated their involvement, worsening the regional disputes that involved military interventions and the escalation of regional conflicts.

3.2.1 The Conservative Monarchies (mostly Saudi Arabia and Qatar)

The conservative monarchies consist as the group of States located in the Persian Gulf, namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain. These monarchies are mostly dependent on oil-based revenue and, in security terms, on the American military apparatus. Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the conservative monarchies in the Gulf have been progressively more assertive and interventionist in the region. After the weakening of the ancient major states in the region, mostly governed by the Ba'ath party like Iraq, Syria and Egypt, the Gulf monarchies managed to exert their great financial recourses to take the leading role in the region as the most stable states in the Middle East (Ayoob 2012). That situation was called by academics (mostly by Florence Gaub) as "the Gulf Moment", representing the new configuration of the region's balance of power.

The relation between the conservative monarchies and the Western states is actually central to understand their regional relations in the Middle East. Most of these monarchies are deeply dependent on the American defense structure for their complete security maintenance. While Saudi Arabia has a little more autonomy in capability terms when compared to the other monarchies, mostly Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are completely dependent on the United States for their sovereignty, including allowing American military bases in their territories (Guzansky 2015). The geostrategic location of these monarchies is central to understand their importance to American interests. They are located around the most important petroleum and gas reserves in the world, and in a region with strong commercial navigation through the Persian Gulf and the Hormuz Strait (Guzansky 2015).

Added to the perceived threats presented by Iran, the region is vital to American prominence and the conservative monarchies know how to use that in their favor.

Saudi Arabia has been one of the most important actors in the Gulf and the Levant after the Arab Spring, adopting a more assertive and interventionist foreign policy regarding regional conflicts. The dispute with Iran for the role of Muslim leader in the region compelled Riyadh to be more active in their foreign policy, giving up its previous passive behavior, mostly after the fall of its regional ally, the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (Guzansky 2015). Since the Arab Spring outbreak, in 2011, Saudi Arabia has been positioning itself more pragmatically according to its interests, sometimes through diplomatic support for governments (Egypt under Sisi) and military intervention (Bahrain), other times through financial and military support for opposing groups (Libya, Syria and Yemen) (Hazbun 2015, Guzansky 2015). The military intervention in favor of the establishment (house of al-Khalifa) in 2012, in Bahrain, was influenced by the fact that the majority of Bahraini population and opposing groups is mostly linked to Shia and more favorable to Iran. Therefore, a Shia revolutionary government in Bahrain could provide a potential ally to Iran and inflate the Shia minority concentrated in the Saudi Eastern Province, representing an internal threat to the monarchical house of al-Saud (Guzansky 2015). Both in Yemen and Syria, Riyadh have been using its financial and military resources to support Islamist Sunni groups (sometimes terrorist groups) in the conflict, resulting in the extension of the conflict and the escalation of it to the point that puts in risk the Syrian and Yemeni state institutions and territorial integrity.

Another important actor is Qatar. As Saudi Arabia, Qatar is one of the most important supporter of rebel groups due to its wealth from petroleum and the financial resources presents in Doha. In the outbreak of the Arab Spring, Qatar actively funded the rebel groups against Muammar Qadhafi and also took part in the coalition of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (OTAN) intervention in Libya (Khoury 2013). However, Saudi Arabia and Qatar do not finance the same rebel groups: the former finances the Wahabi/Salafi groups[19], while the latter finances Islamist groups from the Muslim Brotherhood[20] (Khoury 2013). In the Gulf region, Qatar has a more

19 The Wahhabism/Salafism is a branch of the Sunni Islam founded by Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) which advocates the traditional and fundamentalist Islam in the society and sees the State as a religion institution. This fundamentalist branch of Islam is mostly supported and financed by Saudi Arabia and has links with terrorist actors (The Telegraph 2017).

20 The Muslim Brotherhood is a Sunni transnational organization founded in Egypt in 1928 as an organization whose objective is to serve as a guideline for modern Islamic societies, adopting the Islamic traditions and values in the State and society structure. Since its foundation as an organization, the Muslim Brotherhood passed for moments of suppression and

independent foreign policy due to its leading role in the GCC. However, they also address Iran through a more welcoming approach. Among the GCC members, Qatar is the one which pursues more regional security independence in relation to the United States, but at the same time, Doha has knowledge of its American security dependence and its position between great powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran (Guzansky 2015). However, the relations with Western states were impacted after it went to public that Qatar supported radical groups in Syria with financial resources, some of them linked to al--Qaeda (Phillips 2017).

Regarding the Arab Spring, the Gulf monarchies have been the most active players in the military interventions among the conflicts that have started since 2011. Although Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the most assertive within the group, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait have also intervened in cases like the military repression in Bahrain under GCC's operations. Despite the fact that the Arab Spring has evidenced the financial power of these monarchies, it has also highlighted their dependence upon American military leadership, since the Gulf monarchies have small forces compared to the other axis of forces operating in the Syrian War – namely, the allied forces of Syria, Russia and Iran. This situation has led to expensive proxy wars that have been weakening these surrounding states and the monarchical ruler families themselves (Guzansky 2015).

3.2.2 Iran

Iran is a regional power and a central piece in the regional geopolitical chessboard of the Middle East. As already exposed, the struggle for regional primacy and Muslim leadership in the Gulf between Iran and Saudi Arabia influences most of the conflicts in such region and the Levant. Therefore, in order to properly understand the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, it is important to bear in mind the interests of these competing powers. Iran's central purpose is to increase Middle Eastern security autonomy, under its regional leadership, challenging Western military presence and influence, which are supported by the Gulf monarchies and Israel (Mohseni and Kalout 2017). This situation helps to partly understand the nuclear program aimed by the Iranian government as a strategy to get more regional autonomy and power projection, what is in line with its intent to strengthen and maintain the "Axis of Resistance".

The Axis of Resistance is a new power configuration between the states (Iran, Iraq and Syria) and related non-state actors (Hezbollah and Hamas). According to Mohseni and Kalout (2017), it represents the future

political participation against the nationalist regimes in the region and was one of the most important actor during the Arab Spring movements in Egypt (Encyclopedia Britannica 2017).

pattern for the Middle East. The Axis is one of the political and social force supported by the population in some areas: because of the fragility of some regional states (Iraq, Syria and Yemen), the Iran-backed militias represent the main sources of local civilian security. These militias, like the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the National Defense Forces in Syria, for instance, are viewed as the main forces against the increase of radicalism and fundamentalism supported by Saudi Arabia through rebel and terrorist groups. In contrast with the fundamentalism represented by ISIS, the Iranian forces have pursued the integration of all the religion minorities – such as the Christians, the Kurds and the Yazidis – to gain popular support and combat forces to face the rising sectarianism (Mohseni and Kalout 2017).

As the principal leader of Shia Muslims, Iran has adopted a supportive strategy towards its Gulf neighboring states that have, within their society, a Shiite populational majority. Concerning these states – as Bahrain and Yemen –, Iran has provided political, financial and military resources sometimes to the rebels, other times to the regime, what evidences the pragmatic support for the side most favorable to Iran. In Bahrain, the revolutionary movement has received a response by the GCC states, which have launched a military invasion in country due to concerns regarding the possibility of a new Shiite government allied to Iran in the Gulf (Ayoob 2012). In Yemen and mostly in Syria, the military support is fundamental. In Syria, the Shiite militias sent to the country – forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), from Iraq and Afghanistan – were crucial for the maintenance of the Assad regime. Currently, they have taken on the leading role amongst the forces in favor of the regime, added to the aerial support of Russia (Souleimanov 2016).

3.2.3 Turkey

In the last years, Turkey has progressively changed its foreign policy towards the Middle East. Due to the fact that former regional leaders have fallen one by one in political instability, Turkey has seized the opportunity of a relative power vacuum to insert itself in the regional dynamics. The turning point towards the Levant was when the wave of popular uprisings broke out in the Middle East after 2011. At first, Ankara aimed at establishing itself as a regional leader and as an example of government to the revolutionary states whereas in recent years, Turkey has adopted a more pragmatic foreign policy toward its main threats — namely, the Kurds and ISIS. However, the adoption of a more assertive foreign policy towards the Middle East has domestic and international components that influence further actions (Nasser and Roberto 2016).

Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has won the elections in 2002, Turkey has been looking forward to constitute itself as a po-

litical example in the region, due to its intend to conciliate Islamic tradition with democratic values within a secular bureaucracy (Nasser and Roberto 2016). This prestigious image has been built in order to present Turkey as a modern state in equity with Western nations, which have supported Ankara's government in the years before the Arab Spring. Accordingly, these first years have been marked by a Western tendency. The willingness to integrate the European Union and closer diplomatic relations with the United States are examples of such Turkish move. However, when the Arab Spring broke out, Turkey has seized the opportunity to project its political image to the revolutionary states – that is, where popular uprisings started against dictatorial regimes (Gerges 2013). Therefore, Ankara has started to support the political parties of the Muslim Brotherhood, and other similar groups, whenever possible due to its political affinity – the most significant case was the support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This policy shift to the Middle East seems to represent the intent of Turkey to become a regional leader and an example to all the recent governments (Khoury 2013, Phillips 2017).

Regarding the Syrian War, Ankara has shifted its policy towards a more assertive and interventionist one after 2011. At first, Turkey has provided rebel groups against Assad with financial resources, creating a corridor to fighters coming from other nations, allowing them to cross its borders and to join the rebel and radical forces in Syria. Later on, Turkey would became even more interventionist when the United States signaled that the Syrian Kurds would be the main ground-forces against ISIS' possessions (Nasser and Roberto 2016).

Such a movement is connected to the fact that the Kurdish people in Turkey has a long-time history as a separatist movement in the region nearby the Turkish border with Syria. Therefore, the government in Ankara sees the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey as a terrorist movement that directly threatens the domestic stability. When the Kurds in Syria conquered a large territorial portion against ISIS along the borders with Turkey, Ankara perceived the possibility of connections with the separatist Kurds (the PKK) in its territory. In August 2016, hence, Turkey intervened militarily for the first time in Syria through the launching of Operation Euphrates Shield against ISIS-dominated areas, which intended to prevent and to combat the unification of Kurd-held territories in the Northern Syria. This Operation was launched when the Kurdish forces crossed the Euphrates River, a red line for Ankara, and conquered the Syrian city of Manbij, aiming to consolidate their control through the unification of the territories from East and West of the Euphrates. Since then, Ankara has adopted a preventive foreign policy against the Kurds and ISIS – to avoid any domestic instability –, while also financing rebel groups against Assad (Phillips 2017).

3.2.4 The United States

Since the Bush administration and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States has received a lot of international criticism, mostly from American citizens themselves. The international economy crisis, the increased public debt and the already mentioned domestic criticism are all factors that influenced the Obama administration to try to focus more on domestic issues and to search for a military disengagement from the Middle East and from the costly wars inherited from the previous administration. However, the outbreak of the Arab Spring made it difficult for the United States to completely disengage from the region, which resulted in a new approach, thought the indirect and supportive involvement, but the same interests (Gerges 2013, Krieg 2016).

The so-called Obama Doctrine was more pragmatic than the rhetorical and unilateral Bush Doctrine, interfering directly just when American national interests are perceived being at stake (Gerges 2013). Accordingly, the United States would focus on its "Pivot to Asia"[21], looking forward to counterbalancing the Chinese rise and to assuring its economic and military interests rather than getting involved in other high costly conflicts in the Middle East – in financial, military and human terms (Gerges 2013, Krieg 2016). On the other hand, security-dependent allies of the region – namely, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Qatar – have sided against such foreign policy reorientation. Therefore, this disengagement and the perception of vulnerability have led to more assertive foreign policies from these states, specially by Turkey who is encouraged by Washington to deal with the regional problems as a regional leader.

Because of the remaining strategic links with the Middle East, the Obama administration decided to lessen externalities and to privilege the so-called "surrogate strategy". According to Krieg (2016), differently from the Bush administration, Obama sought to reduce the conflict externalities created by the wars in the Middle East – which damaged the international and domestic perception of the United States – adopting a strategy of burden-sharing with regional allies and non-state groups – which is itself the "surrogate strategy" –, rather than the previous unilateral initiative.

Therefore, the United States would get indirectly involved in the conflicts, being contrary to boots on the ground operations, prioritizing su-

21 The "Pivot to Asia" Policy was proposed by the Obama administration as a reorientation of the American foreign policy towards the region of Asia Pacific. This policy took in account the Asia's rising importance in the global economy, the rise of China. To counterbalance China, the United States would disengage from the costly military interventions in the Middle East to focus in the American military, political and economic presence in Asia. However, after the end of the Obama administration, some academics criticize this policy and see it as a failure for American interests (Ford 2017).

pport for local surrogate groups to purchase its interests. Thus, when the Arab Spring broke out, the United States supported states and non-state actors with financial and military resources, training these actors to combat in the conflict alongside American aerial support started since 2014. In the Syrian War, for example, the United States has supported the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Iraqi Kurds against Bashar al-Assad forces and ISIS respectively. In Yemen, on the other hand, the support is through Saudi Arabia and bombardments with unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs), the drones. Although the utilization of surrogate groups avoids public criticism that a direct military intervention would provoke, by supporting these surrogates, the chances of an escalation in the conflict are intense, not to mention the possibility of the conflict (and of these groups) becoming unmanageable by the United States.

Since the new president-elect, Donald Trump, has taken office, the American administration has expressed less reticence for direct military intervention when compared to Obama's years, which was confirmed by U.S.'s airstrikes on Syrian National Army's positions in April 2017. However, it is unlikely that the current administration will give up Obama's policy of indirect intervention in the Middle East as the continued support of Kurdish and Iraqi troops in Mosul and Raqqa demonstrate.

3.2.5 Russia

Russia is once again a present great power in the Middle East. Since the end of the Soviet Union and the following national economic crisis, Russia had been more absent in Middle Eastern affairs than during the Soviet period. It is important to highlight that during most Russian history – since the imperial centuries and all over the Soviet period – Russian foreign policy focused, at some extent, in Middle Eastern power dynamics. The proximity and the linkages with Russian Muslims have always pointed out the importance that the Middle East represents to its domestic and international environment. Since the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, Russia has been adopting a more assertive foreign policy for the purpose of becoming once again a leading great power as the Soviet Union once was. The collapse of the USSR represented a strong humiliation for the Russian people, so the election of Putin and his stronger government has given a solid incentive to regain the diplomatic, economic and military power as during the Soviet period.

Moscow aimed at reinserting itself in Middle Eastern dynamics after the Arab Spring and the escalation of the Syrian War – added to the rise of the Islamic State. It is important to note that Syria has a strategic importance for Russian interests not only in the Middle East, but also in the Mediterranean Sea. Due to its geographical location, central in the Levant basin and in

the Middle East itself, the maintenance of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria guarantees a long date ally and a support base for Russian forces (Ayoob 2012). Since 1971, Moscow has had a facility in the port of Tartus, the only Material Technical Support Point outside the former Soviet Union. Added to the airbase in Latakia, Russia can project its military power throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Middle East as an attempt to counterbalance American presence in the region (Williams and Souza 2016). Another critical point is the threat that terrorist groups, after fighting in Syria, would return to Muslim areas in Russia with the potential to continue terrorist maneuvers at home, what could lead to domestic instability (Kalb 2015). Therefore, the reinsertion of Russia in the Middle East is a result of these clearly pragmatic considerations.

Russian intervention in the Syrian War can be understood in face of these national interests. In September 2015, Russia launched a military intervention in Syria to bolster Assad regime's forces against the rebel and radical groups that were in a progressive advance in comparison with regime-held areas. That intervention was formerly justified by Russia as an operation against the Islamic State and the terrorists groups present in Syrian territory. The so-called "Operation Retribution" involved the deployment of military aircrafts, tanks and special combatant troops to support the regime during the conflict. However, the main targets of the Russian air strikes were the moderate rebel forces around the most important cities in the country like Homs, Aleppo and Idlib (Williams and Souza 2016). With Russian aerial support, Assad forces have been gaining territories against his opponents in key areas of the country, what created a favorable situation that ensured Assad's position in any negotiation about the fate of Syria. In March 2016, for the surprise of most Western leaders, Putin declared the withdrawal of Russian forces in Syria, stating that his objectives had already been accomplished in that country. In fact, the former goal of fighting ISIS had clearly not been accomplished, once the main targets were in the rebel areas. However, most part of the Russian forces remained in Syria and even supported regime forces to take Aleppo. Therefore, the Russian intervention had turned the table in favor of the regime forces, assured the maintenance of Bashar al-Assad in any peace negotiations and confirmed Russia as an indispensable power to account regarding the Syrian War, mostly after the diplomatic isolationism since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Souleimanov 2016).

The military intervention in Aleppo and, unfortunately, the resulting civil casualties, were strongly criticized by the international community. It raised the debate about the truly efficiency of the interventions and the danger of extra-regional and regional powers in financing and supporting the opposing groups in the war. Thousands of civilians have fled combatant areas

and Aleppo is currently considered a horrifying illustration of the consequences in civilian lives caused by the escalation of conflicts based on foreign interests.

3.3 The Cases of Syria and Yemen

In both Syria and Yemen, regional and extra-regional interests are at stake and the main actors involved perceive both wars as decisive opportunities to define the power balance of the Middle East, mostly in the Gulf and the Levant regions. Due to this strong competition, this section will present the most important interventions in Syria and Yemen since the outbreak of the hostilities, and how these two major and long-lived conflicts are at the center of regional power dynamics.

3.3.1 The Syrian War

When the popular uprisings started in 2011, the majority of analysts believed that the Middle East would enter in a new era with the fall of authoritarian regimes and the establishment of democracies. Although some authoritarian regimes have been substituted by democracies or have experienced political reforms, when the popular uprisings reached Syria, the government repression led to a bloody conflict and a civil war. The causes were already partially exposed in each subsection above, which demonstrate the overlapping interests behind this long-extended conflict. Without signs of end, the Syrian War is central to identify the regional disputes at stake in the Gulf and the Levant, whose actors struggle for self-interested outcomes.

The first phase of the Syrian War was characterized by the first popular unrests across the country in 2011, which were met with brutal repression by government's forces. This response intensified the opposition against the regime of Bashar al-Assad on a level that most part of the national territory was then controlled by rebel groups. These groups, under direct support and coordination, first by Qatar and after by the other Gulf monarchies, these states intended to organize the opposing groups in a united front in 2012 called the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Soon after, the United States, Britain, France, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies declared that they considered the National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. It is important to state that, since the first uprisings, as attested by Moniz Bandeira (2014), the Western nations, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies have been the main supporters of these groups on military, financial and training aspects – as it has been done in Libya and Egypt. The "Assad must go" was the only option for these states, so the unrestricted support to the rebels was necessary to achieve this objective: an end to the Assad regime, to substitute it for a friendly government

and to undermine the Iranian influence in the Gulf and the Levant.

The second phase of the war was marked by the rise of Islamist groups and of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2013 and 2014. This phase was very important because it changed the characteristics of the conflict and posed the question of who would be the main enemy to be fought with: the Assad regime or ISIS. After the fall of Mosul in Iraq, in mid-2014, ISIS extended its control throughout most of Eastern Syria and also in Iraq. Right after, ISIS declared itself as a "caliphate", implementing the Sharia law and perpetrating radical hostilities against the small religious groups. Some academics would affirm that the military and financial support by the Gulf monarchies and at some extent by the Western nations (United States and European allies, France and Britain) indirectly reached terrorist forces, what generated some criticism by the international community (Bandeira 2014).

This new situation led to the formation of a Western-led military coalition composed by the United States, European countries, Gulf monarchies and Turkey that would intervene in Syria and Iraq with air strikes against Islamic State's positions. Since September 2014, this coalition has supported the ground forces of the Free Syrian Army and Kurdish forces against ISIS positions near the Turkish border. However, the alliance with Kurdish Peshmerga caused friction between United States and Turkey due to Ankara's domestic concerns already exposed (see 3.2.3. Turkey). Nonetheless, since then, the Kurds have progressively represented the main ground forces to the American strategy, what created a complicated situation amongst regional actors (Kahl 2017).

The third phase of the war represented an expansion of the military intervention, which started when Russia decided to intervene militarily in September 2015. This event changed once again the nature of the conflict – provoking further escalation –, because it introduced a direct extra-regional force using missiles, ground forces and anti-aerial infrastructure. Most importantly, the Russian intervention has changed the force correlation in favor of Assad, who had lost several positions to the rebels until then. Major cities like Homs and Aleppo were re-conquered by the regime forces, which strengthened Assad's position in the war and assured his presence in future negotiations (Doucet 2016). Added to this, in relation to ground forces, Iranian militia forces became essential for the successive regime victories, combating in the main front lines against the rebel forces and demonstrating the huge involvement of Iran in the results of the war (Neylor 2016).

However, the situation changed once more when, in April 2017, after allegations that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons against civilians, President Donald Trump authorized the missile bombardment of Syrian Army bases unilaterally. That event was so important because it was

the first time the United States utilized directly and alone its military capabilities in Syria against the Assad regime, what differed a lot from the strategy adopted until then by the Obama administration (Kube et al. 2017).

In conclusion, these three phases represented the escalation of the conflict and a concrete illustration of how far military interventions by other actors (regional and extra-regional) can change decisively the characteristics of a conflict. Initially as a civil war between the Assad regime and the rebel groups, a series of interventions by a broad range of actors transformed the conflict into a regional war if we consider that all the main regional and extra-regional actors are involved at some extent. Furthermore, the power balance struggle that the Syrian situation represents today has posed destabilizing casualties for the entire Middle East, what unfortunately increased the political instability and endorsed the fragility of the region.

3.3.2 The Yemeni War

The current crisis in Yemen dialogues with internal problems that are traced back far beyond the Arab Spring. Yemen has always been the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula, even before the conflict, having also a fragile sense of unity and cohesion (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2017). Prior to the current conflict, Yemen has been engaged in several wars, some involving neighboring countries or even terrorist organizations, but the Yemeni wars were predominantly internal wars, or, prior to the Unification of Yemen in 1990, wars between the North and South Yemen. Nonetheless, foreign interference in supporting insurgents in Yemen has also been a crucial factor to the emergence and to the strengthening of terrorist groups in the country, as they benefit from the instability of the government and the weakening of the army, and correspondingly receiving money from the government or Arab-Western allies of the government to fight against insurgents, in this case, the Houthis (Guzansky 2015).

In a broader initiative to strengthen the Yemeni state against Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), which has been operating in Yemen since 2009, the United States and the United Kingdom[22], alongside the Gulf States, initiated an economic help for the Yemeni government in the fight against the AQAP[23]. This cooperation soon became a broader military alliance, lending the bases for further alliances and interventions in the upcoming internal conflicts in Yemen (Lynch 2016).

The current Yemeni War has its roots in six confrontations between

22 The United States and the United Kingdom see Yemen as an important arena to combat al-Qaeda's intention to laid siege in strategically important areas in the Middle East (Lynch 2017).

23 The Islamic State in Yemen started operations in 2014. It is not an affiliation or an ally to the Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula, but a contestant.

the Houthi forces and the government, dating back to 2004. When the Yemeni revolution took place, in 2011, on the impetus of the Arab Spring, the major protests and the Houthi mobilization ultimately led to the resignation of president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Since the maintenance of the Yemeni state was seen as essential for preserving regional stability, "[t]he Gulf Cooperation Council formally took the lead in managing this transition, though in practice Saudi Arabia closely held the reins" (Lynch 2016, 73). In agreed terms, the vice-president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, would take on the position of president of the country in the transitional period, until general elections were held in 2014. The proposition by the GCC, launched in March 2013, to create a tool to deal with divisive issues in Yemen through a "National Dialogue" did not resolve internal differences and only put in discussion the old questions of regional differences, corruption, patronage, inequality and federalism. The elections held in the upcoming events served only as a marker of legitimacy, as it had only one candidate, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and there was no real change in the institutions or the intention to question national power (Lynch 2016).

Tensions rose and, in July 2014, the Houthis started an open rebellion. In September, they took Sana'a, the Yemeni capital, and later on they pushed to Aden and Taiz[24]. In March 2015, President Mansur Hadi asked the Saudi-led coalition to intervene, when it started attacking Houthi positions. An UN sponsored cease-fire came to force on April 2016 and peace negotiations started to take place, only to be broken soon after (Lynch 2016). These activities of foreign intervention have taken place against the backdrop of a worsening regional security situation, perceived Western inaction in relation to Syria and concerns over the Iranian Nuclear Deal (Lynch 2016).

As the uprisings erupted, it offered an unprecedented opportunity for Saudi Arabia to project its hard power over Yemen; and Qatar to provide a more moderate project of soft power in the early days of the uprising through financial help and an expansive network of activists (Guzansky 2015). Moreover, alleged Iranian and Eritrean[25] support in logistics and supply for the Houthis kindled the tensions of the Saudi-Iran proxy war, as Western and Arab countries somewhat affiliated with Washington and Riyadh made pressure over Tehran and Astara[26].

24 Aden and Taiz are the second and third larger cities of Yemen. Aden is one of the most important and busiest ports of the Middle East, and is now the temporary capital of the internationally recognized government of Yemen.

25 In 2016, the State of Eritrea starts cooperating with the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, providing logistical support to military actions to the coalition.

26 It is important to notice that the governments of Iran and Eritrea have made statements claiming they do not support the Houthis, however, taking a neutral position in the matter. Notwithstanding, both countries have been suspected of being interventionist in Yemen in regard to promote their interests in the region (Solomon 2016).

Airstrike superiority and sea blockade provides the coalition with a sustained superiority in terms of military strategic, but the war has been stretching from 2014 on, as former president Saleh adheres to Houthi rebels and leads a great part of the army and loyalist forces to the insurgent side in a counterbalance movement. At the same time, Yemen witnesses a severe humanitarian crisis, as there are more than 7,000 civilian casualties and 16 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, since naval blockades suppress provisions in a country that is 90 percent dependent on food imports (BBC 2017). The conflict only tends to stagger as the countries of the GCC (the main force of the Saudi-led coalition) face diplomatic challenges with the allegations of Qatar supporting Iran and terrorist groups in the Gulf Peninsula. Furthermore, a series of protests in May 2017 calling for the Southern Secession in Yemen only increases the internal instability of a country currently in a Civil War, with a large history of internal clashes involving secession. Nonetheless,

> [t]he separation of southern Yemen would weaken the authority of the legitimate government in Yemen. It would also lead to the failure of the Saudi-led Arab coalition's operations and ultimately the victory of Iran's allies, represented by Houthis and Saleh (Al Jazeera 2017c, online).

4 PREVIOUS INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Issues related to intervention are old and, at the same time, contemporary to the international community. During the international system structuration, since the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, states have always sought ways to limit and regulate external intervention in internal affairs, besides strengthening their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Sovereignty, therefore, has progressively become one of the main concepts in International Relations (IR) theory and one of the most discussed topics along the centuries. It was only in the XX century, however, that the problematic about foreign intervention and its prohibition acquired real legal dynamism and became progressively institutionalized. Soon after the First World War, the creation of the League of Nations and the fourteen points of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, the right to self-determination and non-intervention by outside actors were established. The prohibition of external intervention would acquire more concrete dimensions after the Second World War and after the United Nations creation in 1945. With the UN Charter, the non-intervention principle became one of the new world order founding stones, with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as the only responsible

organ for approving or not external interventions. However, as the Cold War demonstrated, the superpowers continued to promote military interventions directly or indirectly in other countries – especially those from the global periphery – in order to fulfil their interests within their ideological dispute. After the end of the Cold War and the advent of U.S. unipolarity, the Middle East was the most targeted region by military (even unilateral) interventions, which affected the entire region and raised questions about the principle of non-intervention in sovereign states.

Bearing that in mind, this section aims to analyze the main legal actions that are somehow important for the discussion on external intervention, from the UN Charter to the UN Resolution about military intervention in Libya. Lastly, the main UN resolutions about the two cases here analyzed – the Syrian and Yemeni wars – are presented.

4.1 The United Nations Charter

The most important framework that regulates external intervention, territorial integrity and sovereignty nowadays is undoubtedly the United Nations Charter of 1945. This document has been the main basis to structure the contemporary world order under the leadership of the United States, having the UN a prestigious role in it. Despite pre-1945 attempts to regulate and prevent interventions against state's sovereignty, especially in domestic affairs, it was only after the creation of the United Nations that military interventions between major powers were prevented, thus avoiding systemic wars such as World War II. The greatest achievement of the UN Charter was the institutionalization of the UNSC as the main and sole legitimate body responsible for decisions concerning international security, which includes military interventions under its approval. Since then, the use of force to resolve political disputes without the Security Council's approval has been prohibited, encouraging, otherwise, the settlement of these disputes through peaceful means (United Nations 1945). The issues about territorial integration and domestic sovereignty are so important that these aspects are explicit at the Chapter 1 of this Charter, as Articles 1 and 2 state:

> 1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.
> 2. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the

> threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations (UN Charter, art. 1 and 2).

However, external interventions have continued to occur in the international system even after the creation of the UN. Despite avoiding another World War, external interventions occurred mainly in peripheral countries, within the context of the political, economic and ideological dispute between the Cold War superpowers. Although often indirectly, movements and processes of independence in the then-Third World served as a pretext for interventionist attitudes on the part of the central powers. Furthermore, what could be pointed out as the turning point of the contemporary international system is the unilateral military invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the United States through a decision of the country's Congress and without the authorization of the UNSC. This initiative demonstrated the fragility of the concepts of sovereignty, territorial integrity and external intervention, even though the UN continues to try to assert itself as the legitimate regulator of these issues. Closer in time was the case of the NATO-led military intervention in Libya, allegedly aimed to protect Libyan civilians but, as it was demonstrated, in reality directed to the deposition of then-President Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

4.2 UN Resolution 1973 (2011)

This UN resolution has represented a landmark in Middle Eastern dynamics in the context of the Arab Spring outbreak. When these dynamics reached Libya in 2011, the then-president Col. Muammar Gaddafi faced a myriad of opposition groups throughout the Libyan territory, to whom he responded with military repression though the usage of government forces. Due to escalation of violence, Great Britain and France, with the support of the United States, introduced a resolution in the UNSC proposing a military intervention in Libya to implement a ceasefire and to protect the civilians and opposing groups against the aggressions perpetrated by the Libyan government. The Resolution 1973 was approved in 17 March 2011 with 10 votes in favor – among them were the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Nigeria and South Africa – and 5 abstentions by Russia, China, Brazil, India and Germany. This resolution pointed out that the conflict in Libya was an alleged "threat to international peace and security", what would justify the military intervention and the use of force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. This chapter states that the UNSC has the legitimate authority to use all means to restore and maintain international peace and security, including the use of force by member states (United Nations 2011a).

Although the main objective, according to the resolution, was to protect civilian lives and to implement a ceasefire, it authorized the use of all means necessary to achieve these objectives, including under regional organizations' leadership, what paved the way to NATO's involvement:

> 4. *Authorizes* Member States that have notified the Secretary-General, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, and acting in cooperation with the Secretary-General, to take all necessary measures [...] to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi [...] (United Nations 2011b, 3).

Another important aspect was the central role expressly gave to the League of Arab States during the enforcement of this resolution, what demonstrated the interest of the Arab states (most important, the conservative monarchies and Western-backed states like Jordan) in the Libyan outcomes. Therefore, alongside NATO, Arab states were essential to impose the no-fly zone in Libyan territory and, ultimately, to remove Gaddafi from power, always attaching themselves to the "all necessary measures":

> 8. *Authorizes* Member States that have notified the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, to take all necessary measures to enforce compliance with the ban on flights [...] and *requests* the States concerned in cooperation with the League of Arab States to coordinate closely with the Secretary General on the measures they are taking to implement this ban [...] (United Nations 2011b, 3).

The military intervention was carried out in the same month, March 2011, and turned out to be a direct intervention like already seen in other cases. Special Forces, especially from France and the United Kingdom, were deployed to the country and no real ceasefire was implemented during the intervention, what demonstrated its dubious objectives. There are some critics about the instrumentalization of ground forces in the country, since the Resolution 1973 just stipulated the implementation of a no-fly zone, but at same time did not prohibited the deployment of such kind of forces on the ground (BBC 2011). The aerial intervention (the establishment of the no-fly zone) thus served to support the rebel groups against the Gaddafi government forces and to ultimately remove him from power. Severe consequences were caused to the state integrity and the Libyan civil war just got worst,

resulting in a fragmented country with no central government even after six years from the military intervention (Bandeira 2014).

4.3 UN Resolutions on Syria

The Syrian War is a recurrent case under discussion by the UNSC not only due to its obvious importance in the international relations dynamics, but also due to its consequences for international peace and security. As already demonstrated in the previous section, the conflict in Syria has several complex connections between its antagonistic actors, whose interests are also introduced at some extent to the UN Security Council debates. Thus, since the most important powers involved in the conflict have the veto power in the UNSC, it is extremely hard to approve resolutions that give advantage to one side only, a situation that makes it difficult for the conflict resolution (McKirdy 2017).

4.3.1 Resolution 2254 (2015)

The Resolution 2254 (2015) was one of the first and most important decisions approved by the UNSC about the Syrian War and its consequences, deserving, therefore, a broader consideration. Adopted unanimously by the Council on December 18, 2015, this resolution was the result of continuous efforts to achieve a political resolution for Syria, mostly through the Vienna and Geneva negotiations[27]. Therefore, the most important characteristic of this resolution is that it reinforces the need of a Syrian-led political transition to resolve the conflict. This entails that Syria's political future must be decided by all Syrian people, from all ethnic and religious groups, and mostly through Syrian institutions.

> *Reiterating* that the only sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, [...] including through the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body with full executive powers, which shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent while ensuring continuity of governmental institutions (United Nations 2015c, 1).

27 Since 2012, the international community, under the UN leadership, has intended to resolve the Syrian War through peaceful means. There were two important events that aimed to achieve a political solution for the conflict: the Vienna (2015) and Geneva peace talks (2012, 2014 and 2016). The most important document which resulted from them was the Geneva Communiqué, which reinforces the need for a Syrian-led political transition that takes into account both the interests of the Assad regime and the opposition groups (UN Action Group for Syria 2012).

> 1. *Reconfirms* its endorsement of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, endorses the "Vienna Statements" in pursuit of the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué, as the basis for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition in order to end the conflict in Syria, and stresses that the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria (United Nations 2015c, 2).

The resolution still recommends a nationwide ceasefire followed by general elections and the formulation of a new constitution within 18 months, under supervision of the United Nations. The idea behind this resolution is truly relevant since the Syrian war has experienced a wide range of interventions (military, financial and political) by external states that limited its national sovereignty. According to Resolution 2254 (2015), in order to resolve the conflict there must be a Syrian leadership constituted on the basis of the national population's will, therefore rejecting external impositions by foreign actors – as it happened in Libya (United Nations 2015c). This position was supported by the states that recognize the importance of national institutions in the process of building conditions for peace during transition. However, divergences raised around the role to be taken by Bashar al-Assad during such transition, what divided the states inside the UNSC and posed challenges for further decisions. United States, United Kingdom, France and Lithuania were against the participation of Assad in the process, whereas Russia and Venezuela considered him an essential actor in the equation for the peace (United Nations 2015c).

4.3.2 Resolution 2336 (2016)

Resolution 2336 (2016), alike Resolution 2254 (2015), represented a new impulse to settle the Syrian war. Introduced by Russia, Iran and Turkey on December 20, 2016, the resolution reiterated the previous UNSC work regarding the political resolution of the conflict, besides reaffirming the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. In addition, the resolution reinforced the need for a national ceasefire between the forces involved (except terrorist groups) and for progress in peace negotiations between the regime and opposition representatives, being held through the Astana Talks[28] in mid-January 2017, in Kazakhstan. The unanimous adoption of Resolution 2336 (2016) represented a "step ahead" in the Geneva negotiations and the reaffirmation of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué about the

28 The Astana Talks was a meeting proposed by Russia, Iran and Turkey backed by Kazakhstan that aimed to produce an alternative solution for the Syrian War, through the implementation of a cease-fire in the country. Although these meetings are not part of the UN's Geneva talks, the effort is strongly supported by the UN and it is seen as complementary to Geneva's decisions (Putz 2017).

political resolution of the Syrian war (United Nations 2016a, United Nations 2016b).

4.4 UN Resolutions on Yemen

As in Syria, the Yemeni war is complex due to the presence and action of several state, non-state and terrorist groups in the country. The main forces involved – the Yemeni government, the Houthis, the Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, most recently, ISIS linked groups – create a range of opportunities for external influence to go into the conflict, mostly by the side of Arab states. Thus, the main UN resolutions regarding the conflict have, frequently, as main objectives arms embargoes, besides efforts to implement a political transition under GCC's observation and regional cooperation.

4.4.1 Resolution 2201 (2015)

This resolution was adopted throughout the escalation of violence in the conflict between Houthis forces and the Yemeni government. During the dispute for political and territorial control between the main forces involved in the Yemeni War, the Houthis forces stormed the capital, Sana'a, in September 2014, dissolved the Parliament and took over Yemen's institutions, including the President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (United Nations 2015a). The resolution was adopted on February 15, 2015, and represented the consciousness about the escalation of violence in the conflict, acknowledging that it would be hard to achieve a political and democratic transition in the country. Therefore, there are two points that deserve to be analyzed: the significant role given to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) concerning the administration of the consequences in the Yemeni War; and the concern about external interventions in the conflict (United Nations 2015a).

The great political importance given to the Gulf Cooperation Council is stated in the first lines of the resolution: the Security Council supports "[...] the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council and commend[s] its engagement in assisting the political transition in Yemen" (United Nations 2015a, 1). This demonstrates that the GCC is directly related to the political decisions taken in the Yemeni transition process, what is already expected given that the GCC members – Saudi Arabia and the other conservative monarchies – have a wide range of economic and geopolitical interests in the Yemeni War. It is important to highlight that the most politically important decisions would be adopted under the GCC leadership:

> *Emphasizing* the need for the return to the implementation of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism

> and the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue conference, including drafting a new constitution, electoral reform, the holding of a referendum on the draft constitution and timely general elections [...] (United Nations 2015a, 1).

Regarding the external intervention, the resolution expressly took into account the questions about external interventions in the conflict. The member-states demonstrated their concern about the influence of external actors in the conflict worsening and the complex dynamics that resulted from these interventions. Therefore, as already exposed, the conflict represents a dispute of regional interests that makes it difficult to achieve a peaceful resolution: "9. Calls on all member States to refrain from external interference which seeks to foment conflict and instability and instead to support the political transition" (United Nations 2015a, 3).

4.4.2 Resolution 2216 (2015)

As the situation in Yemen got worse, mostly due to unilateral actions took by the Houthi forces, humanitarian damages were caused and destabilizing consequences for the region posed a challenge to the international community. Therefore, in April 14, 2016, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2216 (2016), with the abstention of Russia, which pointed out that the imposition of sanctions at Yemen would only worsen the conflict (United Nations 2015b). However, in regard to this resolution, it is important to highlight once again the presence and importance of the Arab States in the conflict, what, at some extent, paved the way for the Saudi Arabia-led military intervention in Yemen since 2015. As stated in the beginning of this resolution, the right to intervene in the conflict "by all necessary means and measures" was given to the GCC and its member-states:

> *Noting* the letter [...] from the Permanent Representative of Yemen, to the United Nations, transmitting a letter from the President of Yemen, in which he informed the President of the Security Council that "he has requested from the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and the League of Arab States to immediately provide support, by all necessary means and measures, including military intervention, to protect Yemen and its people from the continuing aggression by the Houthis" [...] (United Nations 2015b, 1).

Another point that deserves appreciation is the one that recognizes the regional impact caused by the Yemeni War, including in neighboring states. In addition to this, humanitarian casualties, besides political and institu-

tional instability, increased the negative externalities throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, the resolution still recognizes the Yemen War as a threat to international peace and security, very similarly to the Libyan case, what could open a way for a UN Charter's Chapter VII instrumentalization of external interventions under the UNSC's approbation:

> *Recognizing* that the continuing deterioration of the security situation and escalation of violence in Yemen poses an increasing and serious threat to neighboring States and reaffirming its determination that the situation in Yemen constitutes a threat to international peace and security (United Nations 2015b, 3).

5 BLOC POSITIONS

Afghanistan has been experiencing chaotic moments since the occurrence of a series of coups from 1970 onwards, following a civil war and the Soviet Union invasion. Since then, the country has been a field for conflicts between regional and extra-regional powers (Visentini 2014). Since 2001, the War on Terror has preserved the US-NATO allies' presence in the region, while Afghanistan tries to apply a pragmatic politic towards the Middle East. Kabul plays a neutral policy regarding the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts; on the other hand, the Afghan population, with the intermediary of Iran, contributes with approximately 20,000 Shiite voluntaries to reinforce Hezbollah, which supports the Assad's government (Heistein and West 2015). Ultimately, the afghan government will use the Syrian crisis as a card to bargain between the United States and Russia (Khalil 2017).

Amnesty International's founding principles include non-intervention on political questions, a robust commitment to gathering facts about the various cases and promoting human rights. Amnesty International generally neither condemns nor condones the resort to the use of force in international relations, nor does it make any comments or pass judgment on the arguments justifying the use of force. In the Syrian crisis, the NGO calls for an arms embargo on rebels and government alike (Amnesty International 2013). The Yemeni crisis poses a bigger threat, as aid and assistance relief is being denied entrance in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition, resulting in an outbreak of diseases, like Cholera for instance (Amnesty International 2016). Its main objective is to oversee crimes of war and crimes against humanity to denounce them and to prevent them from happening.

Azerbaijan is extremely careful regarding external interventions, thus prioritizing the support for political and diplomatic solutions instead of military ones. Baku has intended to be a diplomatic intermediate in the

regional conflicts, standing equidistant on both sides as in Syria (Balsi 2013, Karimova 2016). As Azerbaijan and Armenia are still involved in a conflict around the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the Azerbaijani government utilizes UN resolutions regarding external interventions to criticize the territorial integrity violations by Armenia in Azerbaijani territory (Hasanov 2011).

Bahrain, a protectorate of the United Kingdom until August 1971, participates in the Saudi-led coalition of Yemen. Formerly, the country has participated in military actions against the Taliban, in 2001, when the U.S. President George W. Bush promoted Bahrain as a "major non-NATO ally". Regarding Syria, Bahrain is largely in line with the Saudi policy of supporting Assad's opposition. Recently, however, Manama has reduced its support for the Syrian opposition forces, now dedicating itself to promoting regional stability (CSIS 2016).

The **People's Republic of China** has a sacred principle of state sovereignty against arbitrary or excessive military interference, practicing a long--dated policy of non-interference in the Middle East. Beijing's position contrary to coercive pressures – such as sanctions or the use of force – against sovereign governments boosted its presence in the Middle East. Also, the country believes that the U.S. and Western-led interventions are often motivated by a desire for regime change, ultimately compromising the region's balance of power (Swaine 2015). Regarding Syria, alongside Russia, China has vetoed UNSC's resolutions about military or economic sanctions against the Assad regime, beyond traditionally holding close ties with Russian and Syrian military (Reuters 2016a). In Yemen, in accordance with the UNSC Resolution 2216, Beijing believes in a peace agreement at the same time that it supports Hadi's government (Reuters 2016b).

The OPCW is here represented by its **Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.** The OPCW is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and should look forward to working closely to the representative of the United Nations. Furthermore, there is an opportunity presented by the Syrian chemical disarmament, to advance a practical disarmament agenda in the Middle East, and push for a WMD-free zone in Yemen and even the Middle East (Asirwatham 2013).

Djibouti is located in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and because of the strategic importance of its maritime routes concerning the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, seven armies or navies hold bases in the country, of which are: China, Italy, France, Germany, Japan, Spain, and soon Saudi Arabia, which has finalized an agreement with Djibouti to start building a base in 2017 (Anyadike 2017, Aglionby 2017). Financial and political resources derived from the foreign power bases are highly important to Djibouti, as the country

provides a logistical support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Apart from that, Djibouti seeks a fast solution in Yemen's crisis, due to economic and security reasons. The small country has also accepted 35.000 Yemeni refuges, a considerable number to a country with nearly a million people (United Nations 2015).

After the 2011 movements of the Arab Spring, **Egypt** experienced a troublesome political transition, fruit of successive regional and extra-regional interventions which led to a coup done by the militaries, eventually overthrowing the Muslim Brotherhood. There has been a shift in Cairo's foreign policy, as Turkey and Qatar condemned it as a *coup d'état*, while Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait helped to consolidate the new government (Lynch 2016). This led Cairo to be more cautious to the Russian intervention in Syria, and to seek renewed diplomatic relations with Syria. Due to the extensive political and financial help of Riyadh, Egypt has agreed to participate in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen (Wintour 2017).

Eritrea aims to be a more relevant regional player by exploring the fact that it is situated in an important strategic position in the Red Sea: one of the two states controlling the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, with Yemen being the other (IISS 2017). In 1995, Eritrea and Yemen went to war involving the Hanish Islands in the Red Sea. Since then, Eritrea has been allegedly interfering in Yemen's internal affairs and supporting the Houthi rebels by training them and functioning as a logistical hub, providing weapons and supply with the alleged help of Iran. In 2015, Eritrea took the strategic opportunity to logistically support the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm against the Houthis, in return for financial assistance, mainly from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Eritrea's relations with foreign countries are complicated, apart from being one of the most militarized nations in Africa, the 2009 UNSC sanctions following the confirmation of Eritrea's support for Al-Qaeda affiliates in Somalia, has isolated the country in the region (Ngaish 2015). Its closest partners are Egypt, for it has great interests in the security of the Gulf of Aden, and Qatar, for the Qatari long-time regional finance-aid foreign policy (IISS 2017, Al Jazeera 2016), however, because of the support the Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Qatar crisis, the close relation with Qatar may have seen its last days (Akwei 2017).

Ethiopia is known for having the third biggest army in Africa and for its critical role on interventions in neighboring countries. Moreover, Addis Ababa is highly depended on foreign financial support, and because of its problematic internal and external political conjunctures, it has been avoiding issuing any substantial statement on the Syrian and Yemeni crises (Amahazion 2016). Ethiopia is currently trying to work with Yemeni government to support its endeavor in ending the crisis (ENA 2017), as Addis Ababa is

concerned over regional instability and over the one million Ethiopians currently living in Yemen (Anderson 2015).

Terrorism has been a critical security issue to **France** due to the horrifying terrorist attacks in the past years. Therefore, France is part of the U.S.-led coalition aimed at destroying ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq, through "*Opération Chammal*", ongoing since September 2014. Supporting Saudi Arabia with an 18-billion-dollar arms deal in 2015, France entered the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen to provide logistical and intelligence support. Macron reshaped France's view about deposing Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, standing today in the perspective that the resolution of the crisis passes, ultimately, through a political and diplomatic roadmap (Ahmad 2017). The objectives of France are connected to Germany and U.K, its main allies, in the attempt to secure that this transition passes through the Geneva Talks and not from the Russian, Iranian and Turkish controlled Astana Process.

Georgia was a direct target of external military intervention during the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, which created a series of national problems around the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Since then, the Georgian government stands in favor of international law concerning territorial integrity, thus against military intervention (Republic of Georgia 2017).

In the same direction stands **Germany**, which sees no withstanding for the Assad regime in Syria, ultimately pushing for a fast and peaceful transition of power, as Syria cannot persevere without true democracy (Bundesregierung 2017a). Germany has not gotten involved in the Libyan conflict, restraining itself from military interventions in the Middle East. However, due to the Paris Attacks, the alleged use of chemical weapons and the migrant crisis, German has entered the American-led coalition, under the Operation Counter Daesh. As Merkel stressed out, it is not possible to resolve the matter in Syria and Yemen without the will of certain countries, objectively hoping for a solution that coordinates with everyone's interests (Bundesregierung 2017b).

The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** has experienced an increase of power of its members due to the commodities boom of the 2000's and to active diplomacy activities. The members of the GCC have different interests, which may be seen as a challenge for the adoption of common active policies (Guzansky 2014). However, four points define the GCC: (1) the close alliance with the U.S, specially under the CENTCOM-led headquarters; (2) the military cooperation under the Peninsula Shield Force; (3) the prevailing policy of non-interference and support for Arab Leaders in its history, as a principle of religion and politics; and, ultimately, (4) its diluted tensions with Iran, comparable with some of the states in the GCC, establishing within the GCC a stance for dialogue between Iran and the GCC states (Young 2013).

Furthermore, the Qatari crisis has been a turmoil for the GCC, dividing the countries in the Council. Additionally, a new accord regarding six mutual principles can open the door, within the GCC, for the normalization of relations in the bloc (Khouri 2017).

India is another state with a pragmatic view about intervention, having made political, economic and military interventions in South Asia, especially regarding Pakistan. However, for the past 20 years, New Delhi has been inspired by the international movement for non-intervention, and will not intervene internationally, unless requested by the sovereign state affected or in the case of humanitarian crises. With regard to Syria, the Ministry of External Affairs has confirmed that there is no possibility of sending troops to the U.S.-coalition or joining a cease-fire outside UN frameworks (Government of India 2016a).

Iran has vital interests in the defense of Assad's regime in Syria, as it has historically been the only consistently ally of revolutionary Iran. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard, alongside Hezbollah, has been playing a major role in the training, support and fighting in Syria (Sherlock 2014). Nevertheless, due to recent events of escalation of the conflict, mainly by the bombing of the Shayrat air base in Syria, Tehran started considering deploying ground troops to counter U.S. intervention in Syria (Middle East Eye 2017a). Iran's close ties with Russia has led to cooperation not only in the military level – such as providing air and sea bases for the Russian to launch operations in Syria –, but also in the diplomatic one: Russia, Iran and Turkey make trilateral agreements on Syria, one of which is a ceasefire (New York Times 2016). Iran has for long been a supporter of Shiite minorities in the Middle East, despite stating that it does not have any relation with the Houthi forces in Yemen. The country also condemns the Saudi-U.S. coalition for the irresponsible use of force in the Yemeni crisis (Presidency of Iran 2016), and the use of deceptive discourse to undermine its interest in the region (Huffington Post 2015). The worsening of relations within the GCC opens space for a more positive diplomacy of Tehran with both Qatar and Oman, boosting its chances of achieving a diplomatic solution in Syria and Yemen (Al Jazeera 2017).

Iraq is in a complex position regarding external interventions, mostly concerning the cases of Libya and Syria. Baghdad demonstrates a pragmatic discourse on the topic, being favorable or not to that type of action depending on the direct impacts in its country. For example, the Iraqi government has supported the intervention in Libya based on the Western discourse of civilian protection (Arango 2011, Reuters 2011). Concerning the Syrian War, Baghdad has adopted a position in support of the Syrian government, rejecting external interventions in the neighboring country. However, the

Iraqi government, being conscious of the negative externalities, has criticized and advised the Syrian government to take into account the humanitarian damages caused by the conflict (Schmidt and Ghazi 2011).

Israel has two main concerns in the Syrian conflict: (i) the security of the disputed border of the Golan Heights; (ii) the containment of jihadist extremists; and also Iran and Hezbollah, their long-dated enemies. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fully supported the U.S. government, and has called for a united action against ISIL, praising Trump's decision of the military strike on a Syrian airbase, on April 7, 2017 (Parry 2017). Officially, the position of Israel is not against Assad, but against Hezbollah and Iran in Syria, remaining uninvolving in the fighting and in denial of supporting the opposition groups in Syria (The Economist 2015, The Jerusalem Post 2017). However, Israel is taking huge steps towards publicly abandoning its policy of non-intervention and cooperating with the Syrian opposition, the U.S. coalition and the moderated Sunni Arab states, as a way to build diplomatic relations with the Gulf Monarchies and to cast out Iran from Syria and Yemen (Frisch 2017).

Italy, as a member of NATO, has joined military coalitions launched in Iraq and in Libya mostly. However, the Italian government adopts a more cautious and reticent position related to military interventions: in its view, without the acceptance or invitation by the government, they would destabilize the state, escalate the conflict and strengthen terrorist forces (Scherer 2016). Rome recognizes the regional externalities caused by the interventions, keeping in mind that Italy is one of the main entrances of refugees in Europe, and also highlights the danger of power vacuum created after external interventions, being skeptical about the efficiency of military intervention as a conflict solution (Stornelli 2015).

Japan has been a longtime friend to state and not-state actors in the Middle East, with which it has built important relationships based on economic ties (MOFA 2015). Its unique relations with Arab actors, and its long-dated humanitarian and financial support in the war on terrorism, can make the government of Japan a conciliator in the conflicts of the Arab Spring aftermath (Kumar Sen 2016). Despite having two civilians killed by ISIS in 2015, and the longtime alliance with the U.S, the Japanese government is committed not to offer logistical support for U.S. allies' coalitions in Syria and Yemen (Pollmann 2015). Although the Japanese forces have been deployed to the Middle East on numerous occasions in peacekeeping operations, the Japanese post-war constitution prohibits it from taking offensive maneuvers against any state.

Being dependent on Western and Arab aid, **Jordan** has cooperated with the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East in several regional and interna-

tional issues (Sharp 2017), more recently being a key partner in the U.S.-led coalition battling the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and with the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Moreover, the Jordanian government makes it clear that it will not launch ground operations, unless there is a present terrorist threat to their national security (Younes 2017). Hosting approximately 650,000 Syrian refugees, which roughly stands for about 10% of its population (Amnesty International 2016), the government is more sensitive to the Syrian crisis, and thus advocates for a fast and peaceful resolution.

The **Kuwait** war of 1990 shaped the Middle East forever, as the regional clashes for the determination of a regional power ended up ultimately destroying Iraq and uniting the entire region under an American-dominated system (Lynch 2016). After the Iraqi aggressions, Kuwait's dependency on U.S.'s defense grew exponentially – therefore, under the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), Kuwait hosts several bases for U.S. troops, being a major non-NATO ally. Kuwait's leadership, alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE, supported the Egyptian military's removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power, in July 2013. Kuwait participates in the coalitions, together with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, in Libya, Syria and Yemen. The country has also supported U.S. and Saudi Arabia's efforts to contain Iran, at the same time trying to diplomatically engage Iran at elevated levels (Katzman 2017).

The history of **Lebanon** is intrinsically related to foreign intervention, from the Sykes-Picot agreement that led to the state's creation to modern-day interventions perpetrated by Israel. It is also related to the patronage of non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, which ended up playing major roles in Lebanese domestic political system. Since 1978, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) acts in the country, aiming at resolving the clashes with Israel and at stabilizing its internal affairs. Regarding the Syrian crisis, more than a million Syrian refugees have fled to Lebanon, already accounting for one quarter of the population and shaking the already tense internal relations between social groups (Amnesty International 2016). Moreover, the government, besides imposing more control to its borders, has played very neutral in the conflict, being a well-known defender of non-intervention and peace talks (Auon 2016). Aversively, Hezbollah has been a major actor in the defense of Assad's regime and Iranian interests in Syria, and as an important political and military force in Lebanon, its involvement in the Syrian conflict has sharpened sectarian tensions in Lebanon, specially by Sunni militants (BBC 2016).

Libya has been a major example of the causes and effects of interventions perpetrated by regional and extra-regional forces in the Middle East. The 2011 uprising, which deposed Gaddafi, changed the political perception of the country. The Internationally Recognized government of GNA (Gover-

nment of National Accord) still struggles to consolidate the country's unity, opposing factions and sectarian groups – such as ISIL in Libya – which still impose a serious threat to the state's stability (Al Jazeera 2015). The internationally recognized government's official position is not to support a military intervention in Syria. On the other hand, it supports the U.N. resolutions for Yemen (Abdessadok 2017).

Morocco adopts a diplomatic approach based on the respect of internal affairs of other states, advocating as in the Libyan case that military actions cannot be the main ways for conflict solution, preferring political ones (Karam 2011). However, because of the tight relations between Morocco and the GCC, the Moroccan government approved the cooperation and participation of its armed forces in the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen (Reuters 2015). In recent years, Morocco has strengthened its role as a diplomatic leader in the Arab world, most of all with the Gulf monarchies due to the strategic importance that GCC stability represents for Moroccan interests (Bennis 2015).

Since its foundation, **Oman** has maintained an enduring and unique foreign policy comparably to its neighbors in the Persian Gulf, having an active policy of non-intervention (Kechichian 2002). Oman has consistently supported peacemaking efforts by publicly endorsing peace agreements and meetings involving the Israeli and Palestinian crisis, and even hosting talks on the Iranian nuclear deal – which goes against the policies of Oman's Gulf state allies (Aboud 2015). As one of the few states which holds, at the same time, close ties with the GCC, the U.S. and Iran, Oman may play the major role of congregating the different interests of those involved in the Syrian and Yemeni crises, and of pushing to successful negotiations of peace and de-escalation, as it has already done in both the seven-point peace deal of 22 April 2016 and the November Ceasefire (The Guardian 2016).

Pakistan has stressed out its dissatisfaction with foreign interferences in both Syria and Yemen, assuming a strict neutral position (Syed 2015, Panda 2015) and hoping that a peaceful agreement can be reached through U.N.'s frameworks. However, Pakistan has taken a big step in the fight against terrorism in the Middle East, having the position of Commander in Chief of the Islamic Military Alliance to fight Terrorism (IMAFT) (Syed 2015).

Palestine must deal with constant harassment of Israel and the problems facing the growth of illegal settlements in the West Bank, having, therefore, a more neutral foreign policy towards the current crisis in Yemen and Syria. In the Arab League Summit of 2016, Palestine stated that foreign intervention in Arab affairs is one of the major reasons for the current crisis, and only an integrated region can repeal foreign intervention (Al Jazeera 2016). Furthermore, the state of Palestine tries to find new creative ways to put

forth its agenda, and to take advantage of the recent momentum to push for the implementation of a two-state solution in the Israel-Palestine crisis (Erel 2017). Additionally, as Palestine ongoing conflict, groups of resistance are well known to gain power and influence internally and eventually influence foreign relations. This is the case of Hamas, a Palestinian militia force who has great political force over the government, but act independently – as an example, Hamas has supported the Free Syrian Army, which is not the official position of the State of Palestine. However, in the mid of the Islamic polarization, the Syrian State weakens and the Palestinian Movement loses one of its main supporters (Cafiero 2014).

Qatar has played neutral and pragmatic policies in order to sustain itself in Middle Eastern affairs. However, Qatar's political stability throughout the Arab Spring, its economic wealth, Al-Jazeera's role as a free and democratic media, and international reputation gave it the confidence to take an interventionist role during the Arab Spring, connecting itself with the Muslim Brotherhood and ascendant Islamist political forces to be a leadership in transitioning countries, such as Libya, Egypt and Syria (Ulrichsen 2014). This situation has gone against Saudi Arabia's interests, leading to a rivalry within the GCC and in the political transitions of Egypt, Syria and Yemen. Qatari efforts to moderate the conflict in Yemen has attracted Iran to the negotiations, which, alongside Al-Jazeera media, have been used as a way to counterbalance Saudi Arabia and not to cede Yemen to the Saudis. This had escalated the tension of Riyadh-Doha relations, leading up to the embargo of Qatar and the country's expulsion from the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen (Regencia 2017). Qatar has, for years, been looking forward to establishing itself as an alternative mediator in the ongoing Yemeni conflict (Guzansky 2014), as it has stable relations with Iran, Turkey and some of the GCC countries.

The **Russian Federation** has been more actively engaged in the Middle East since the 2013, in a strategic attempt to present itself as a valuable partner in the absence of the United States (Goldenberg and Smith 2017). Most prominently, Moscow has a long-dated strategic partnership with Syria, dating back to 1971, when it opened its naval base in Tartus, Syria. The country has shown support for this regime in the Arab-Israeli wars and again in 2013, in the chemical weapons agreement between the Syrian, U.S and Russian governments (Urquhart 2013), and 2015, when Damascus called for Russia to intervene on its behalf. The Russian objective to fight global terrorism led to a rapprochement with Egypt in the government of Sisi and with the new government of Libya (CSIS 2016). Russia's strategy for the Middle East encompasses the condemnation of military interventions without state--approval, as it leads to the escalation of the conflicts. Moscow also calls for

the immediate cessation of military activities in both Syria and Yemen from US and Saudi allies, as they pose a very serious threat to regional security. Its ultimate goal can be seen through the rapprochement with the Turkish government, which led to the Astana Talks, working for a peaceful and diplomatic solution amongst all parties involved in Syria (Middle East Eye 2017b).

Saudi Arabia has an extensive role in Middle Eastern affairs in the Arab Spring aftermath due to its objective to suppress democratic revolutions, to preserve the status quo of the region and to censor any revolution in Riyadh or in the GCC countries, as it could have been seen in the support of Bahrain's counter revolution of 2011 (Lynch 2016). Riyadh interventions have also been deeply connected to its proxy war with Iran; countermeasures to secure its position as a regional power, battling against Iranian-supported militias. Saudi Arabia has also substantially supported Sunni militias in Syria and Iraq, sometimes with heavy military equipment for Assad's opposition (Bender 2015). Apart from Syria, Riyadh has had several clashes in the South Frontier involving the Houthis, leading to the formation of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen to safeguard its frontiers and to restore the integrity of Yemen under a pro-Saudi government with Hadi (Lynch 2016). However, the rivalry with Qatar for the leadership of the Sunni world led to accusations of Doha's support for terrorism and sanctions from Saudi and its allies against Qatar (Wintour 2017). The biggest challenges for Saudi Arabia would be the competing factions within the GCC and ways to secure a fast victory in Yemen or a peace agreement under the leadership of Riyadh.

Somalia is currently facing an ongoing civil war, which led countries like the United States of America, Qatar, Turkey and some of its neighboring African states, to step up to the regional crisis in the Horn of Africa, as the country has become an attractive location for foreign entities that have geopolitical interests in the region (Al Jazeera 2017). Furthermore, Somalia has to fight Al-Qaeda and ISIL, which acquired relevant positions in 2009 and 2015, respectively. The war on terrorism and the fragile Somali state have lured regional and extra-regional powers to interfere (Tran. 2012). As another strategic country located in the important maritime routes of the Gulf of Aden, Somalia has joined the Saudi-Led coalition in Yemen as a logistical power, in exchange for support in its current internal conflict.

Sudan has adopted a pragmatic posture regarding external interventions, treating case by case under the light of its national interests. For instance, Sudan sent military support through its frontiers for the Libyan rebels in 2011 as a revenge for the Libyan support to Sudanese rebels in 2008 (Copnall 2011). The Sudanese government also allowed NATO-led coalition's airplanes to cross its airspace in direction of Libya (Charbonneau 2011). In the Syrian War, Sudan has been of the arms suppliers for the rebel

forces in the war, alongside with the other Gulf states and Jordan (Laub and Masters 2013).

The **Syrian Arab Republic** has an important position in the present discussion about external intervention, mostly because it is one of the main illustrations of it in contemporary international relations. According the Syrian government, foreign intervention by other states and groups must be criticized for being a violation of sovereignty and territorial. Besides the direct foreign intervention, the Syrian government also criticizes indirect interventions through the support of terrorist and internal groups (United Nations 2015c). For Damascus, it is also important to achieve a political resolution with the permanence of national institutions, through a Syrian--led, Syrian-owned political transition. In opposition of a foreign political intervention, it is reinforced the central role of Bashar al-Assad during this process, if it takes place, as an illustration of national sovereignty.

Tunisia was the first country to experience the Arab Spring under the "Jasmine Revolution", in December 2010. Differently from the other Arab Spring revolutions, political experts report Tunisia as the sole successful revolution due to the accomplished results. This is linked to the unique process of revolution where the army did not participate, the government quickly fell, regional and where extra-regional interference played little part in the process as the revolution was spill over to more chaotic areas in the Great Middle East, like the Libyan and Syrian wars (Anderson 2011). Tunis cut ties with Syria in 2012 and has for long been a critic of Assad's regime, stating their support for the West-Arab interventions in Syria, where the downfall of ISIS should be connected to Assad's as well (Al Monitor 2014). In addition, the Foreign Minister of Tunisia urges an "Arab Solution" to the Yemeni crisis (Ciochon 2015).

Turkey played an important role in the late 2000's competition for influence in the Middle East, as the government of Tayyip Recep Erdogan portrayed itself as a democratic model for moderated Islamic movements, a "third-way solution", ultimately going against several Sunni Arab countries which opposed the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Saudi Arabia (Lynch 2017). In the Syrian crisis, Ankara is part of the US-led coalition against Assad and has supported separatist groups, such as the Free Syrian Army and allegedly the Al-Nusra Front. The strength of the Kurds in its frontier, and the West support for them, created an approximation with Russia. As seen in the Astana Talks, Turkey may be softening its way towards a peace negotiation in which Assad would still remain in power – if that means cooperating to limit Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria, a mutual interest both to Syria and Turkey (Al Monitor 2017). Additionally, Qatar is an indispensable pillar of its strategic posture in the Middle East, as it hosts a major base of Turkey,

which aims at maintaining Ankara's presence and projecting power against its two major rivals for regional dominance: Saudi-Arabia and Iran (Al Jazeera 2017b).

As the main source of international regimes and the most important organism for conflict resolution, the United Nations, here represented by the **United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria**, is very concerned about the questions related to external interventions. As stated in the UN Charter, the use of force against another state is prohibited unless the UN Security Council decides so, encouraging controversy resolutions through peaceful means. Therefore, the former U.N. General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon, has criticized the escalation of violence in Syria and Yemen, where regional and extra-regional states have influence. For the U.N., the most critical point is the violation of humanitarian laws and the resulting flow of refugees from the already destabilized region (United Nations 2016b). To cease the humanitarian damages, the U.N. created some initiatives to reach resolutions through peaceful means, such as the Geneva and Vienna Peace Talks for Syria.

After a decade of unprecedented wealth generation from the 2000s commodities boom, the **United Arab Emirates** has become more active in the region, intervening both financially and militarily in the Arab politics, including unilateral use of its own military – arguably the best trained and most capable among the GCC states (IISS 2017). The UAE have asserted that Assad needs to be ousted in order to settle the Syrian civil war and to strategically weaken Iran in the Middle East. However, participating in the International Syrian Support Group (an attempt to negotiate the political transition in Syria), it understands that a resolution will ultimately requires an agreement between Russia and the United States – the latter being UAE's main ally (Black 2014). The UAE have, alongside Saudi Arabia, sponsored counter-revolutions in the Arab Spring aftermath and corroborated the 2014 and 2017 maneuvers against Qatar, for its alleged support to the Muslim Brotherhood. The United Arab Emirates have a more practical presence in the Yemeni crisis, where it actively participates in the coalition against the Houthis, while some accuses the UAE of attempting to control Southern Yemen secessionist movement for its own economic and political interests, what goes in the opposite way of Saudi Arabia's interest (Katzman 2017b).

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** has a long history of partnership with the Middle East, where it held treaties of protectorate with most of the Persian Gulf States until the sixties and seventies. In accordance with the Strategic Defence and Security Review plan of 2015, the U.K. forces would cooperate more with its allies in the Middle East and have a new naval base in Bahrain (IISS 2017). The United Kingdom has

continuously supported the Arab Gulf states, while engaging proactively in the interventions of Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The governments of the U.K., Germany and France released a joint statement in 2011 stating that it was unthinkable to find a solution where Bashar Al Assad remained in power (Huffington Post 2011). The U.K also participates in the task force against the Al-Nusra front and ISIL, even cooperating with intelligence and equipment with the Free Syrian Army (The Guardian 2014). Even though Saudi Arabia is the biggest arm buyer of the U.K., London's partnership and long dated friendship with the other Gulf States, especially Qatar and Bahrain, makes it an interesting player for helping appease international crisis within the GCC (Peck 2017).

The high interest of the **United States of America** in the area is due to its central and strategic position in the globe, where its Gulf allies provide important military bases and safe ports (Guzansky 2014). Regarding Syria, the U.S has led the international effort to impose sanctions and to support "moderated groups" that opposed Assad's regime, while ultimately organizing a U.S.-led coalition in Syria (Lynch 2016). Washington will continue to defend and lead the intervention in Syria, as its "vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons" (Congressional Research Service Reports 2017, 6). In order to accomplish those objectives, and to ultimately destroy the Islamic State, the U.S has worked to cooperate and to arm the Kurdish YPG[29] fighters, also, helping to create the Syrian Democratic Forces in 2015, after the escalation of Russia's involvement in the conflict (Congressional Research Service Reports 2017). President Trump inaugurated a new era in U.S.-Saudi Arabia relations by signing a joint strategic vision that includes $110 billion in American arms sales and other new investments. This ultimately boost the cooperation for Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and the restraint of Iran. Washington warned Iran to seize all support for the Houthis, at the same time that led to an increase of the U.S presence in the Gulf of Aden (BBC 2015). Its objective in the Yemen are also tied to the security of the Bab-el-Mandab strait, a critical chokepoint in the region, as "any hostile air or sea presence in Yemen could threaten the entire traffic through the Suez Canal" (Cordesman 2015).

Yemen is central to discuss present-day interventions in the Middle East, as the internal political struggle against the Houthi-Saleh forces and the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, has led the official government of Hadi to ask the GCC and the U.N. to intervene in order to restore national cohesion (Shaheen 2015). Despite multiple attempts by the U.N. Special Envoy

29 The Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG, is the main Kurdish militia in Syria, and one of the main forces in the soil to fight ISIS. It is well known for its campaign to recapture the city of Raqqa from ISIS (Congressional Research Service Reports 2017).

for Yemen, there is not a peace agreement yet, as the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi-Saleh forces continue to disagree on fundamentals for a political settlement (Sharp 2017). President Hadi rejected previous peace-agreement plans, which demanded its abdication, or didn't compelled the Houthi-Saleh forces to relinquish their heavy weaponry (including ballistic missiles and launchers). This stands in accordance to the most critical subjects for Yemen's internationally recognized government, managing to uphold its national integrity and stopping successive rebellions, after all being able to provide for its own security. Yemen also stresses its compromise to fight and stop terrorism in the country and in the entire Middle East (Hadi 2016). Apart from that, Yemen distanced itself from the Syrian crisis, but official statements urged the Syrian people to engage in a de-escalation of the conflict and stressed the importance of holding an open dialogue (Xinhua 2011).

6 QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. After the end of the Cold War, the Middle East experienced a wide range of transformations which include direct military interventions, as it occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan. How these experiences shaped the regional perspectives of the states in the Levant and Gulf?
2. Since national sovereignty and territorial integrity are central concepts for the international community, how can the contemporary dynamics in the Levant and Gulf be perceived?
3. Some regional states do not have full security autonomy when compared to extra-regional ones, being dependent on the defense systems of these states. How could this situation interfere in Middle Eastern interstate relations?
4. Has the current instability presented in the Levant and the Gulf been, at some extent, caused by sectarian disputes and, even more, by geopolitical disputes?
5. How the U.N. and other multilateral organizations could prevent foreign interventions and construct a stable security architecture for the region, since instability has favored parastatal groups, such as the terrorist ones?

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WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the XX century, the world has witnessed an escalation of conflicts worldwide, and the Middle East, particularly, has been theater for several of those. As both a consequence and a cause, regional and extra-regional states have gradually increased their military capabilities, which encompasses the process of developing or otherwise acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD) – namely, chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. After the Iran--Iraq War, several states have allegedly built up new – or enhanced existing – national programs for the weaponization of chemical agents, biological toxins or radioactive material. This very process has led to spillover effects, with the threat represented by WMDs now functioning as a background which percolate through most of present-day Middle Eastern warfare and disputes: the Syrian Civil War, the Iran-Iraq rivalry and so forth. Aiming at evidencing such debate at its most elucidative form, the present study guide is subdivided as follows: (i) a historical background on the topic; (ii) the statement of the issue; (iii) the "previous international actions" section, which discusses legal approaches for non-proliferation initiatives; and (iv) a presentation on the bloc positions of the members of Manama Dialogue.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Although most of the Middle East is characterized by weak postcolonial modern states, this weakness does not prevent the region from being highly militarized and security-focused (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Providing a background for such assessment, Visentini (2002) argues the region has always been a feature of great greed from extra-regional superpowers, by virtue of its oil-rich attributes and its strategic geographical position. This aggressive external intrusion, therefore, has transformed the Middle East into an arena in which several of the most intense and persistent armed conflicts have taken place throughout the XX century (Visentini and Roberto 2015). The consequence of such belligerent environment, however, is not the maintenance of perennial conflicts exclusively. Instead, it is possible to verify another direct result of such scenario: the militarization of regional actors, which allegedly seek for their own belligerent apparatus for national defense purposes. This virtually constant process of militarization opens space for the proliferation of this study guide's central elements: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).

The present article, therefore, aims at evidencing the challenges posed by WMDs in the context of the states of the Middle East – including Libya[4]. For analytical purposes, we acknowledge WMDs as comprehending biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, as well as their respective delivery systems. In this sense, first, we shall present a historical perspective on the usage of chemical agents, biological toxins and nuclear weapons in modern warfare, with a special regard to the developments which took place in Middle Eastern theatres. Second, an overview on WMDs' conceptualization and on programs for the development of WMD is made. We then proceed to a discussion regarding recent problematics in the matter of WMDs, bearing in mind a substantial axis: the usage of chemical weapons (CW) in the Syrian Civil War. The study guide finishes by presenting the following discussions: legal approaches for non-proliferation initiatives; the feasibility of establishing a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East; and the position of Manama Dialogue's members on the issue.

4 The "Greater Middle East" aims at gathering affiliated countries by culture and language, not necessarily by religion itself. In geographical stances, this political definition encompasses the Northern Africa region (the Maghreb), the common and broadly acknowledged core for the Middle East (from Egypt to Iran), as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan (Visentini 2014). For the purpose of the present study guide, however, we shall address the aforementioned core of the Middle East and one particular state of the Maghreb region: Libya. Methodologically, hence, the analysis will focus its efforts on the following set of countries: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Yemen and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Being the subject here addressed extremely technical and complex, the goal of this historical background is to make a brief review on the evolution of WMD and its usage and impacts in different warfare situations. In this sense, we first verify the weaponization of chemical agents and biological toxins – giving a special attention to its development from the XX century onwards – and then we examine their usage in three different Middle Eastern wars. At last, we proceed to a separated analysis regarding the development of nuclear weapons in the context of the Cold War arms race.

2.1 Historical Approaches on the Usage of Chemical Agents in Warfare

The idea of using toxic chemical as tools of war is not an exclusivity of recent military strategies. Such kind of weapon has been employed for thousands of years, most notably in Ancient Greece – with the usage of sulfur flume –, in Chinese campaigns against Gengis Khan – with the usage of smokes – and also in South America, where indigenous people would use plant extracts as poison on their darts. Despite some eventual subsequent conflicts in which this kind of agents was applied, it was only during World War I that the world came to witness, comparatively, a massive use of chemical weapons (OPCW 2014).

On April 22, 1915, the German military launched the first large-scale attack with chlorine gas at Ypres, Belgium, killing around 1,100 people and leaving 7,000 injured. From that moment on, the great powers taking part in the war – remarkably Great Britain and the United States – acknowledged the urge not only to engage in the establishment of chemical weapons research programs, but also to equally deliver this kind of agents, since it was expected that they could solve the "acute lack of conventional ammunition and to react to the reality of static warfare"[5] (Pitschmann 2014, 1763). Even though Germany repeatedly seized the initiative in the gas war, the Allies did not take long in the catching up process. By the end of World War I, the use of chemical weapons – including chlorine, phosgene and mustard gas – resulted in 1.3 million casualties (Spiers 2010).

Once seen the catastrophic consequences of chemical warfare – which also took place in many of the imperialist conquest wars[6] –, the League of

5 The term "static warfare" is employed by the author in order to refer to the trench warfare, a type of land warfare predominant in the western fronts in World War I, remarkable for its little advances in mobility.

6 The Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936) is probably the most representative example of such. During this colonial war, the so Italian prime-minister, Benito Mussolini, authorized the utilization of mustard-gas bombs in Ethiopia, aiming at the destruction of Emperor Haile

Nations decided to take a step forward on the restriction of such weapons. In June 1925, the organism adopted the Geneva Protocol, through which the usage of chemical and bacteriological agents in war was banned. The Protocol, nevertheless, did not prohibit their development, production and stockpiling. Moreover, the signature of many countries was followed by a series of reservations that allowed them to employ the agents under determinate circumstances. Consequently, in the interwar period, there was a number of developed countries willing to spend their resources in the research and production of chemical weapons, situation which was increased by the discovery of powerful nerve gases (OPCW 2014).

With the beginning of World War II, chemical warfare became once again a reality, but not as massive as expected: although Germany used poison gases in a large scale against civilians in Nazi concentration camps and Japan employed chemical weapons in China, the usage of chemical agents in European battlefields was as long as possible avoided. During the Cold War – period in which both the antagonist superpowers maintained huge stocks of weaponized agents –, the United States (U.S.) employed napalm in the Vietnam War (Everts 2015).

2.2 The Weaponization of Biological Toxins throughout the XX Century

The employment of biological toxins as weapons dates back to the dawn of civilization, with the perception that infectious diseases could have potential impact on armies. Historical recordings show that in the past 2,000 years there have been numerous cases in which the use of biological agents was made in form of diseases, filth, and animal and human cadavers[7] (Riedel 2004). It was only in the XIX century, however, that the world came to witness a considerable sophistication of biological warfare. The foundation of microbiology brought new prospects to the matter, allowing the choice, design and, consequently, the stockpiling of certain agents on a rational basis. Despite two international declarations that were made as soon as this danger became acknowledged[8], substantial evidence point out to the possibility of a German development of weaponized biological toxins, more specifically

Selassie's army. Although Italy was a part of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, the League of Nations did not spend efforts to stop the country from using chemical weapons (Everts 2015).

7 During the siege of Caffa by the Genoese (1346), the Tartar forces suffered with an epidemic plague, which resulted in many casualties. In an attempt to reverse their misfortune, however, the Tartars hurled the cadavers of their dead men into the city, initiating an epidemic plague that was crucial for the retreat of Genoese forces (Riedel 2004).

8 The 1874 Project of an International Declaration concerning the Law and Customs of War (Brussels Declaration), that structured the codification of the law of war, and the subsequent 1899 Hague Conventions, whose Declaration II emphasized the use of asphyxiating or deleterious gases (Frischknecht 2003).

anthrax and glanders (Frischknecht 2003). However, it is still controversial whether Germany managed to first deliver such biological agents.

As it happened in the matter of chemical weapons, the adoption of the 1925 Geneva Protocol was not effective at all in its task of limiting the usage of biological agents: during both the interwar period and World War II, a number of states engaged in biological weapons research programs. From 1932 to the end of the war, Japan carried out a large-scale program to develop weaponized biological agents, many of which were employed in the conquest of China. In Germany, on the other hand, an offensive biological weapons program was never materialized (Riedel 2004). At last, the U.S.'s initiative to develop biological weapons was initially private, even though the government was pressed to undertake a program of its own.

Despite the end of World War II, many countries expanded their development of weaponized biological agents. Besides the U.S.'s program, which increased its capacities during the Korean War (1950–1953), a few states, including Canada, Britain, France and the Soviet Union, proceeded on their biological weapons research. In the post-World War II period, there was a series of accusations involving these countries on situations in which biological agents were employed (Riedel 2004).

Over time, and in part due to the adoption of the Biological Weapons Convention (1972), there was a partial turnaround in what seemed to be a growing tendency in the development and usage of biological weapons: in a period of approximately 13 years, both the U.S. and Britain decided to carry on the shutdown of their respective biological programs. In this very same period, nonetheless, the Soviet Union – whose biological weapons program was kept in secret for a long time – established its major biowarfare project, Biopreparat[9], in which tons of anthrax, bacilli and smallpox virus were produced and stockpiled (Frischknecht 2003). Recent events, such as the 2001 Anthrax Attacks[10], have shown that the interest in developing and employing biological agents as weapons is neither reduced nor restricted to governmental actors (Cordesman 2005).

2.3 Early Military Operations Involving Chemical Agents and Biological Toxins in the Middle East

Considering chemical and biological weapons have been first used

9 Biopreparat was Soviet Union's biological warfare agency, which, by the 1980s, was working with its full capacity, having employed around 50,000 people in many production centers (Alibek 1999).

10 The 2001 Anthrax Attacks started one week after the September 11 terrorist attacks and continued for many weeks. Letters laced with anthrax were sent to some of the most important news media offices – including ABC, NBC and CBS – and two Democratic U.S. Senators. The outcome of such biological attacks was the killing of five Americans and the contamination of another seventeen (FBI 2017).

in a large scale during World War I, it did not take long for such belligerent apparatus to reach Middle Eastern theatres. The first situation in which WMDs were used in this region was the North Yemen Civil War (1962-1970). This conflict opened the path to an increasingly proliferation of chemical (and biological) weaponry in the area, resulting in the following outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980. At last, in 1990, the Persian Gulf War manifested, once again, WMD's intensification in the Middle East.

2.3.1 North Yemen Civil War

Beginning in 1962, with a *coup d'état* that overthrew the country's monarchy, the North Yemen Civil War opposed royalist forces – loyal to Imam Muhammad al-Badr – to republican dissidents, who declared the Yemen Arab Republic under Abdullah as-Sallal's presidency. As the conflict started, Egypt officially recognized the Yemeni republic, providing its military support against the royalist troops, who were backed by Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Britain.

The usage of chemical weapons in the modern Middle East began in this very same war, more specifically, with an Egyptian initiative: the first attack is reported to have occurred in July 1963, when the pro-republican country allegedly employed chemical warfare in the village of Al Kawma, killing seven civilians (Smart 1997). Despite the almost ineffective initial employment of chemical agents, as the conflict went through the years and as Egyptian presence in Yemen expanded, the use of such weaponry became deadlier. The progression from tear gases to mustard gas increased the number of casualties and, finally, the following use of nerve gases allowed the killing of a considerable number of people quickly. At that time, no country had ever employed nerve agents in combat situations before.

Egypt – who was a signatory of the 1925 Geneva Protocol – is believed to have dropped chemical-filled bombs on pro-royalists' villages until 1967, even though the country strongly denied any accusation regarding the matter. The International Committee of the Red Cross examined Yemeni victims and soil samples, confirming the use of chemical agents (mustard and nerve gases included). Despite Saudi Arabia's complaints to the Secretary-General about Egypt's improper usage of chemical weapons, the United Nations (UN) preferred not to get involved in the subject. Such impunity, however, had a major impact on further uses of chemical weapons, especially in Iraqi's irresponsible employment during the Iran-Iraq War (Carus 1988).

With the establishment of a ceasefire between the royalist and the republican factions and the recognition of the Republic by Saudi Arabia, the North Yemen Civil War officially came to an end in 1970. Although there is no concrete evidence pointing out the employment of biological weapons

during such war, the conflict still represents an important benchmark for understanding later activity in the Middle East regarding chemical weapons (Terrill 1991).

2.3.2 The Iran-Iraq War and the Al-Anfal Campaign

Being one of the most remarkable recent conflicts of the Middle East, the Iran-Iraq War began on September 22, 1980, with the invasion of Iran by Iraq. Given Iran's internal disarray due to the Iranian Revolution, Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, was expecting to change some aspects of the relationship between the two countries, more specifically, a border deal previously negotiated. The war opposed Iran's superior manpower to Iraq's advance in technology (SIPRI 1998). Violating its compromises under the 1925 Geneva Protocol, Iraq first used chemical warfare against Iranian troops in 1982, with the employment of tear gas mostly. From that moment on, the country began to employ its chemical weapons with certain regularity, which resulted in Iraq becoming more adept to these capabilities and learning how to better manage them under combat situations, considering weather and soil conditions (Ali 2001).

During this period, Iran started its attempts to warn the international community on Baghdad's indiscriminate usage of chemical agents and on the consequent violation of international law. Although initially the western powers have neglected Iran's accusations, avoiding criticizing or punishing Iraq, in 1984 the UN dispatched its first team of specialists to verify the veracity of Iranian claims. The research mission concluded that chemical weapons in the form of aerial bombs have been used in Iran, being the main agents mustard gas and Tabun, a nerve agent (Smart 1997).

As the fighting continued, however, chemical weapons kept being the main feature of the Iraqi strategy. From 1984 to 1986, the country's program went through expansion, broadening its production – which included new nerve gases, such as sarin and VX. By the end of this period, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 582, condemning the escalation of the conflict and stressing both Iran and Iraq were parties to the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Aversely, the last two years of conflict were more intense regarding CW: besides an acceleration in Iraq's utilization, Iran allegedly managed to develop its own chemical technology[11], engaging on its first offensive attempts. Reports from a third UN mission (1987) showed employment of chemical weapons against civilians, now with Kurdish rebellious factions becoming a target (Smart 1997).

In the final stages of war, however, the world witnessed what came

11 By December 1986, the Iran's Prime Minister, Hussein Musavi, communicated the development of Iran's own chemical warfare technology.

to be probably the deadliest chemical attack of the Iran-Iraq War. Responding to the presence of Iranian forces threatening to seize control of an important hydroelectric plant in the Kurdistan area, in March 1988, Iraq bombarded the town of Halabja during a period of three days, in the so-called Al-Anfal Campaign, using a series of chemical agents. The result were several casualties, with the death rate ranging from 5,000 to 8,000 people, many of which were Kurdish civilians. Popularly considered as a Kurdish genocide, the Al-Anfal Campaign was responsible for a strong international condemnation of Iraq and for a bigger concern regarding the dangers of using chemical warfare[12] (Ali 2001).

After huge costs, in economic and human lives terms, to both sides, the conflict that came to be one of the longest and bloodiest of the XX century ended in August 1988, with a cease-fire plan proposed by the UN. Besides of generating more skepticism regarding the effectiveness of international agreements on the matter, Iraqi, and allegedly Iranian, employment of chemical weapons dragged its regional neighbors' attention to the strategical use and the impacts of WMDs (Ali 2001).

2.3.3 The Persian Gulf War

The Persian Gulf War (or First Gulf War) began on August 2nd, 1990, with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops commanded by Saddam Hussein, who was allegedly supporting Kuwaiti revolutionary forces. Six days later, Saddam Hussein announced the annexation of Kuwait to the Iraqi territory, arousing western powers' – especially U.S.'s – attention. The following dispatch of U.S. forces to Saudi Arabia as part of the so-called Operation Desert Shield marked the buildup phase of the war (Smart 1997).

The acknowledgement of Iraq's capabilities and its willingness to employ them in combat situations led the U.S. to prepare its troops for the military stage of the war. Besides the possession of chemical weaponry, it was believed that Iraq had developed a biological agent facility, which enabled the production of botulism's and anthrax's agents (Smart 1997). To be able to fight against such threats, U.S. military units received the latest chemical and biological defensive equipment, such as antidotes kits, and were vaccinated against specific toxins.

Although the scenario was set to turn it into one of the major chemical wars of the XX century, by the end of February 1991, when the Allied forces – formed by the powers fighting against Iraq's offensive – finished destroying all Iraqi divisions in Kuwait, surprisingly there was no evidence concerning chemical or biological attacks from Baghdad. Some specific fac-

12 Even though some may argue Iraq has also used biological weapons, this claim lacks proper confirmation, pointing out to evidence of doubtful accuracy (Carus 1988).

tors appeared to affect this decision: first, the significant speed through which allied troops were advancing increased the difficulty of selecting battlefields targets for a delivery of chemical or biological agents. Second, after six months of war, the prevailing winds turned southeast, toward Iraqi lines, meaning a chemical attack would not reach the enemy, rather Iraqi troops themselves (Tucker 1997).

Despite strong denial from American authorities, a few years after the conflict, allegations regarding the exposure to chemical and biological agents began to arise. The later effects derived from this exposure came to be known as the "Gulf War Syndrome". By 1996, around 60,000 veterans of the Persian Gulf War claimed different health problems related to their war activities. Among the factors that may have caused the syndrome, there are psychological stress, the exposure to depleted uranium, nerve agents and infectious diseases, the smoke from burning oil wells, as well as a series of other possible reasons (Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses 2008).

The outcomes of the Persian Gulf War manifested Iraq's inclination to continue developing Weapons of Mass Destruction. Even though more than two decades have passed since the war and many policies concerning the use of chemical and biological weapons have been established since then, the deeper understanding of this episode and its effects is still partial, remaining as a mystery to the players involved (Ali 2001).

2.4 A Historical Review on Nuclear Weapons

In July 1945, the U.S. conducted the first nuclear attack in history over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, the same country bombed Nagasaki, which resulted in more 74,000 deaths and 75,000 injured (Asia Society 2017). Despite the massive effects of such incident, over the following years, the U.S., the USSR and the United Kingdom conducted several nuclear tests. France (1960) and China (1964), thereafter, integrated the hall of nuclear device's country, in such a way that the nuclear power stability becomes composed by new actors (Nobel Prize 2003).

An important concept for understanding the following events is *deterrence*. Dissuasion by deterrence operates by frightening a state out of attacking, not because of the difficulty of launching an attack, but because the expected reaction of the attacked will result in one's own severe punishment (Waltz 1981). In 1963, the Cold War period called *détente* started: the USSR had developed nuclear capability and "the perceived necessity of maintaining a nuclear second-strike capability resulted in the spiraling of attempted strategic advantage into the strategic stalemate of *mutual assured destruction*" (Malet and Herman 2010, 114). In other words, it was generally perceived

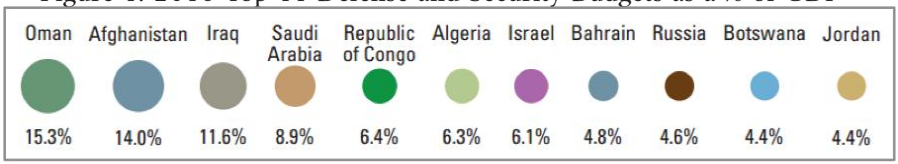
that U.S. and USSR's power to annihilate each other had arrived at a level that a nuclear war without each side destructing the other would be inevitable - and it was precisely this aspect that maintained the stability of the system.

The first attempts to reduce nuclear weapons proliferation started on the 1970's, including the most known agreement for such purpose: The Non-proliferation Treaty of Nuclear Weapons, the NPT (Scheinman 1999). The post-Cold War era was marked by reductions of nuclear arsenal and research programs, despite "some 12,000 nuclear weapons remain in active service" (Blix 2006, 37). Regarding the Middle East, proliferation is not a new phenomenon, as explained in Iran's case. Egypt and Israel began to pursue nuclear weapons during the early 1960s (Dokos 2008). Currently, Israel is the country with the highest nuclear power in the region (Arms Control Association 2017d).

3 STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Addressing the usage of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East unavoidably means providing an assessment on the region's security architecture. The four major regional conflicts – Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen –, as well as the increasing collective-defense initiatives among the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) since 2013, have impelled Middle Eastern states to exert further militarization, ergo intensifying regional rivalries. As stated by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (2017, 353) in its Military Balance for 2017, "competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, jihadi activity across the region, a sense of retrenchment by the United States and concern about further instability created anxiety". As a practical result, this anxiety has been translated into investments in the fields of state-security and defense-policy[13]. In general stances, it is worth illustrating this overview by presenting the international ranking of defense and security budgets as a percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2016.

Figure 1: 2016 Top 11 Defense and Security Budgets as a % of GDP[14]



Source: IISS 2017.

13 Israel and Jordan, for instance, have presented a growth of 3,0% and 11,1%, respectively, from 2015 to 2016 (IISS 2017).

14 Analysis only includes countries for which sufficient comparable data is available. Notable exceptions include Cuba, Eritrea Kuwait, Libya, the UAE, North Korea and Syria" (IISS 2017, 19).

Out of the first eleven states in the world scale of military expenditure as % of GDP, six are located in the Middle East. A reason for such scenario is that, albeit constrained defense budgets in several nations of the region, "some states [still manage to] give [high priority] to defense programs if they are engaged in, or feel threatened by, military challenges" (IISS 2017, 359). It all adds up to what has been previously stated: Middle Eastern states, which have historically faced intense foreign intrusion, now, despite limited statehood and relatively deficient internal structure, employ high militarization (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Within this context, WMDs – nuclear, biological and chemical weapons (NBC weapons) – have conquered space and deployed their proliferation amidst Middle Eastern sense of insecurity, eventually leading up to the establishment of national programs for their development in several states of the region. Looking forward to stating the present issue at its most complete form, the present section is going to provide an extensive review on strategic usage and technical functions of NBC weapons, a comprehensive analysis on national programs for the development of WMDs that are taking, or which have taken, place in the Middle East, and, at last, a case study of the use of chemical weapons during the current Syrian crisis.

3.1 What are Weapons of Mass Destruction?

Weapons of Mass Destruction are everything but a theoretical consensus amongst authors dedicated to researching on Security Studies. There is a widespread idea that the term 'WMD' is a more startling and vague synonym for nuclear weapons. Such assessment is not only inaccurate, but also inherently misleading, considering the extensive range of existing aggressive systems which are equally or even more destructive (Spaight 1954). Nonetheless, the fact that such concept's modern usage emerged side by side with the advent of nuclear warfare is not prone to denials. As it happens, right after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 by the U.S., the president of this very country, alongside the Canadian and British prime ministers, issued a joint declaration drawing attention to the international control of atomic weaponry, but not exclusively. In this statement, the Western leaders resolutely denied the possibility of ignoring the threat posed by both atomic weapons and *new methods of warfare*, eventually leading up to the excerpt in which they called "[…] for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other *major weapons adaptable to mass destruction*" (United States of America 1945, 41). Hence, this was the initial milestone for the propagation of the term "Weapons of Mass Destruction" (Carus 2012).

Three years later, on 12 August 1948, the UN took its first step

towards an authoritative definition in this regard, drafting a resolution[15] stating that "weapons of mass destruction should be defined to include atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical and biological weapons […]" (United Nations 1948, online). For the purpose of the present study guide, we shall address WMDs as nuclear, biological and chemical weapons (NBC)[16] exclusively.

Beyond establishing that WMDs refer to NBC weapons, it is also worth detailing why the term *mass destruction* is ascribed to this specific set of weaponries (NBC). Most of the existing bibliography on WDM associate *mass destruction* with *mass casualties*. In other words, it means that Weapons of Mass Destruction are labeled as such due to their capacity to "[…] cause death or serious bodily injury to a significant number of people […]" (National Security Council 2008, online). A quantitative definition, nevertheless, is not the most appropriate one. The use of conventional weapons – small arms and light weapons, sea and land mines, incendiary and explosive weapons, among others – is also capable of leading to mass casualties, given the 13-week genocide in Rwanda, which witnessed a number of deaths approximately 3,5 times more intense than the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In fact, "[the Rwandan slaughter] resulted in far more deaths than *all* uses of WMD in the 20th century" (Carus 2012, 40).

There is, however, a clear distinction between Weapons of Mass Destruction and Conventional Weapons that can solve the problem of using mass casualties as a conceptual measure. Such distinction, which will be used as the milestone for the development of this study guide, is based upon two main pillars. The first one is regarding the nature of WMDs themselves. On the one hand, there are conventional weapons, which are indeed capable of generating mass casualties. On the other hand, we have WMDs, which can also cause mass casualties, but, at this time, doing so *by producing a toxic effect*, mainly due to the action of poisonous gas, viruses and bacteria, and radiological material (Spaight 1954). The second, and perhaps the most decisive one, is the *single incident* criterion, which addresses the capability of WMDs to produce mass casualties or serious bodily injury all at once or within a precisely short time-frame, with its effects being also likely to be sustained in a long-lasting dimension (Carus 2012). Therefore, considering all the

15 First, in 1948, the Soviet Union (URSS) managed to use its veto power within the frameworks of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), determining the failure of the resolution. Later, in 1977, they ended up approving the text of the resolution, which eventually led to the formal acceptance of such definition by the UN (Carus 2012).

16 Some authors also address radiological weapons – or radiological dispersion devices (RDDs) –, which are "any device, including any weapon or equipment, other than a nuclear explosive device, specifically designed to employ radioactive material by disseminating it to cause destruction, damage, or injury by means of the radiation produced by the decay of such material" (Ford 1998, 2).

previously stated information, this study guide will acknowledge Weapons of Mass Destruction as being chemical, biological and nuclear devices capable of generating mass casualties or serious physical damage at a once time use and with the possibility of giving rise to enduring suffering.

3.2 Why do states seek Weapons of Mass Destruction?

Analyzing Middle Eastern complex relations is imperative to understand the development and employment of WMDs. There are two key--concepts of international security which rule the regional interstate system and, as a consequence, end up being intrinsically tied to WMDs' dynamics: (i) the *balance of power*; and (ii) the security dilemma. The balance of power designates a system in which states seek security through internal buildup of power or by alliances with other states in order to prevent one state from excessively accumulating power. The *security dilemma*, in turn, points out that "as one state takes measures to increase its security (e.g. increasing its military strength, making alliances), another state might take similar, reactive measures to make up for the shift in the balance of power" (Prasad 2015, online). The security dilemma operates within a spiral of threat perception, as Lee (2001, 116) explains

> [...] because an effective offensive capability can be weakened by an adversary's deployment of defensive capabilities – and because such defensive capabilities can be weakened by the first state's improvement of its offensive capabilities – it is axiomatic that both states would be encouraged to engage in an arms race, either for self-help/self-protection (in a state of anarchy) or for the potential use of military means for political ends. [...] this situation can easily evolve into a vicious cycle of competition and confrontation.

Moreau (2015) argues Middle Eastern countries are expanding their defense budgets at a rapid rate, raising concern over the potential speed-up of the already existing regional arms race and stimulating further NBC proliferation. In a regional balance of power perspective, Blix (2006) stresses that what motivates states to seek and retain WMDs is mostly the perception of security interests and threats. Some states see NBC weapons as a way of balancing an overwhelming conventional superiority of an adversary, or as a hedge against some perceived emerging threat. Accordingly, a "WMD program in one state, if perceived as a threat to other states, has a tendency to prompt other WMD programs" (Blix 2006, 35) – summarizing the security dilemma.

A state could also seek such weapons in the belief that this would enhance its prestige or standing domestically or abroad. In the case of biological weapons, for instance, several developed countries are well known for ongoing biological research programs. Despite their claim that it is only for biodefense purposes, it might imply in other regimes acknowledging it as an offensive initiative, and therefore as a threat; a threat that requires an increase in their own bioweapons programs in order to develop defense structures against the capabilities of the establishment's powers. "In many cases, [NBC] arsenals are the quickest way that states [...] can legitimize their authority among constituents" (Malet and Herman 2010). However, due to the difficulty of developing nuclear weapons, and the easy acquisition of pathogens and toxic chemicals, both biological and chemical weapons provide an ideal alternative (Global Security 2017).

3.3 Chemical Weapons

A toxic chemical, according to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) of 1997, is "any chemical which, through its chemical action on life processes, can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm to humans or animals [...]" (OPCW 1997, 4). Toxic chemicals, however, are not used for hazardous purposes exclusively. In fact, their use is widely spread in industry, functioning also as fumigants, herbicides, insecticides and other compounds for agriculture, medicine or pharmacy. The CWC therefore plays a key role in preventing the development and production of such toxic chemicals from exceeding the quantitative guidelines posed by the Convention itself. When it does exceed the allowed production amount, it is said that the process of *weaponization* happens, eventually turning these toxic chemicals into chemical weapons. In addition, devices designed to deliver such kind of weaponry – also known as delivery systems – are also considered weapons themselves under the Convention's frameworks, regardless of being filled or unfilled (OPCW 2017a).

There are groups which categorize toxic chemicals that have been developed with the purpose of being deployed as chemical weapons. The most acknowledged categorization is as follows: choking, blister, blood and nerve agents. First, choking agents, or pulmonary agents, are intended to damage and block the victim's ability to breathe by generating an accumulation of fluids in the lungs. As chemical warfare agents, the most frequently utilized choking agents are chlorine and phosgene gases, capable of causing death within a 24 hours' time-range (Ravi 2014). Second, the blister agents, or vesicant agents, are oily substances that, once inhaled or in contact with skin, cause life-threatening skin blisters that resemble burns, potential blindness and respiratory distress. The ones most commonly known are lewisite

and sulfur mustard – the latter being "the vesicant with the highest military significance since its use in World War I" (Ganesan, Raza and Vijayaraghavan 2010, 15), receiving also the title of "king" of chemical weapons. One of the most recent uses of sulfur mustard has been in Iraq by the terrorist group Daesh – the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – against Kurdish forces (Deutsch 2016). Third, the blood agents affect bodily functions through their absorption into the blood by inhalation or ingestion, being their main effects severe convulsions and respiratory failure followed by death by inhibiting the ability of blood cells to transfer oxygen. According to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), hydrogen cyanide is the most widely spread blood agent. In spite of having large-scale industrial uses, it is capable of killing a human in about one minute when utilized in high concentrations. Fourth, there are the nerve agents, which,

> [...] have had an entirely dominant role since the Second World War. Nerve agents acquired their name because they affect the transmission of nerve impulses in the nervous system. [...] They are stable and easily dispersed, highly toxic and have rapid effects both when absorbed through the skin and via respiration. Nerve agents can be manufactured by means of fairly simple chemical techniques. The raw materials are inexpensive and generally readily available (OPCW 2017c, online).

The toxic effect of a nerve agent depends on its concentration in the air inhaled and on the time of exposure. Accordingly, the symptoms may vary from hallucinations and nausea to convulsions, loss of consciousness, muscular paralysis and eventually death by suffocation (OPCW 2017c). In comparison with other chemical warfare agents, nerve agents are even more toxic. Albeit there is no record for their use during World War II, Iraq used them against Iranian troops in the context of the Iran-Iraq war. In general, nerve agents can be sub-classified into two separate groups: the G-agents and the V-agents. The former constitutes the first set of nerve agents ever developed in history (in the 1930s) and comprehend mostly Tabun, Sarin and Soman. The latter, V-agents, have been developed throughout the 1960s in order to enhance G-agents' military use, providing new, more potent and persistent, more stable attributes to the material (Ganesan, Raza, and Vijayaraghavan 2010). A prominent example of a V-agent is the one simply called VX. In spite of that, the most contemporary nerve agent is still the Sarin vapor, which can be lethal at very low concentrations and highly toxic whether by contact with the skin or inhaled. Not differently from other nerve agents, Sarin unleashes asphyxia – and death – by attacking one's nervous system and, there-

fore, restraining one's ability to control the muscles involved in the breathing function (Benschop and De Jong 1988). Sarin is contemporary mainly due to its usage during the Syrian Civil War, alongside chlorine (choking agent).

Table 1: Chemical Warfare Agents

AGENT	CATEGORY	EFFECTS ON HUMANS
Chlorine	Choking	Nausea; blurred vision; coughing; burning sensation in the nose, throat, and eyes; fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema) possibly escalating to death.
Phosgene	Choking	Fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema) possibly escalating to death; heart failure; difficulty breathing.
Sulfur mustard	Blister	Second and third degree burns on the skin; chronic respiratory disease, repeated respiratory infections, or death; suppress the immune system.
Sarin	Nerve	Confusion; loss of consciousness; convulsions; paralysis; respiratory failure possibly leading to death;

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016.

As stated above, not all toxic chemicals need to be inhaled. Nerve agents, for instance, can be absorbed into the body even when only in contact with the human skin. Moreover, these toxic chemicals are extremely potent so that low amounts of nerve agents are capable of killing thousands of people. As such, not only falling into the category of WMDs, they are also sometimes "referred to as the 'poor man's nuclear weapon', because, theoretically speaking, it can be easily diverted from the production of pesticides" (Ryukichi 2002, 94). In other words, toxic chemicals have the potential to become chemical weapons through inexpensive means. Accordingly,

> Most countries have the capability to develop chemical weapons. Those with a well-developed military infrastructure could readily adapt existing munitions for chemical warfare. […] Virtually any country or subnational group with significant resources has sufficient capability to attain the minimum capability that would be needed to meet terrorist aims. Any nation with substantial foreign military sales or indigenous capability in conventional weapons will have (or have ready access to) both the design know-how and components required to implement at least a moderate capability (Federation of American Scientists 2013, online).

On the other hand, when effectiveness and well-defined targets are intended, high quality manufacturing, storing and delivery methods are nee-

ded, requiring hence fragile treatment and energetic observance of temperature, density and stability features. According to the Federation of American Scientists (2013, online), "perhaps the most important factor in the effectiveness of chemical weapons is the efficiency of dissemination". In order to deliver already weaponized toxic chemical agents, ammunitions such as bombs, projectiles, warheads and spray tanks are usually deployed. In the field of chemical weapons, dispersion and dissemination are necessary not only to guarantee effectiveness, but also to reduce risks of injuring friendly forces. In general, history attests the most widely spread dissemination method used to deploy such kind of weaponry has been the usage of explosives, in spite of their certain lack of efficacy and accuracy. More recently, new delivery systems have been developed, now considering weather observation and forecasting (Federation of American Scientists 2013).

3.4 Biological Weapons

In the early XX century, following both the breakthrough discoveries in biological sciences and the generalized conflicts, the world came to witness major investment in research and development of biological weapons (BW). Their potentially destructive nature allows bioweapons to fall into the category of weapons of mass destruction, capable of killing and devastating humans, animals and plants. They operate by disseminating disease-causing organisms (*i.e.* bacteria, viruses, fungi) and toxins such as poisonous substances originated from animals and plants (United Nations 2009). In general stances, when a bioattack targets a state army or military forces, it is said to be an act of biowarfare – under international law, also a war crime. In turn, when civilians themselves are intended to be the target, some say it is considered bioterrorism (Hilleman 2002). Although Hilleman opens space for interpretations that bioterrorism can be display by states – when, for instance, a state owns a clandestine biological weapons program –, Ackerman and Moran (2006, 22) emphasize that bioterrorism is "the use by *non-state* actors of microorganisms [...] or the products of living organisms [...] to inflict harm on a wider population". In regard of their delivery systems,

> Biological weapon delivery systems can take a variety of forms. Past programs have constructed missiles, bombs, hand grenades and rockets to deliver biological weapons. A few programs also designed spray-tanks to be fitted to aircraft, cars, trucks, and boats. There have also been documented efforts to develop delivery devices for assassinations or sabotage operations, including a variety of sprays, brushes, and injection systems as well as means for contaminating food and clothing (United Nations 2009, online).

Biological weapons own a set of features that discern them from nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons, namely: (i) rather quiet attack and difficult, slow identification of its effects (delayed effects); (ii) potential to acquire large-scale effects through inexpensive, self-replicate means; and (iii) capacity to destroy food (but not only) crops of the enemies' population. Once a bioattack is done, its effects may take a long while to be perceived, especially because humans may only start to develop the symptoms of the disease several days before the infection (Henderson 1999). Albeit a biological attack may demand proper and technological delivery devices in order to achieve a higher level of effectiveness and contamination, it is not essentially a rule. Alike chemical weapons, the expression "the poor man's atomic bomb" is also sometimes applied to describe biological weapons (Carus 1991). The difference here, however, is that bioweaponry is inexpensive both in dissemination and in production: the possibility of human-to-human fast spread is highly facilitated, turning it into an epidemic (Henderson 1999). As highlighted by Koblentz (2004, 88), "the cost of causing one civilian casualty per square kilometer was about $2,000 with conventional weapons, $800 with nuclear weapons, $600 with chemical weapons and only $1 with biological weapons". It is also worth mentioning that bioweaponry can also be deployed as an anti-crop or anti-agriculture agent, by weaponizing diseases capable of destroying plants in general or specific products such as wheat and rice. The aim of such attack is to sabotage the enemy's agriculture, causing lack of food and sometimes starvation (Whitby 2002).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) manages a list of Biological Select Agents or Toxins (BSATs), which coordinates and categorizes bio-agents qualified as potential hazards for public health. The list is subdivided into categories A, B and C. Category A comprehends high-priority agents, the ones with the easiest person-to-person transmission and the highest mortality potential, and the ones most likely to disrupt social order. Among Category A agents, it is worth mentioning Variola major, *Bacillus anthracis, Yersinia pestis, Clostridium botulinum* and Marburg virus – respectively, smallpox, anthrax, plague, botulism and hemorrhagic fever. Category B agents constitute the second highest in the ranking of hazards, with moderate dissemination ease, moderate morbidity and low mortality. They comprehend *Coxiella burnetti* and *Ricinus communis* – respectively, Q-fever and ricin –, among others. Category C agents, in turn, include mostly *emerging* pathogens; that is, agents that, in the future, could be weaponized for mass dissemination via an engineering process. Among C Category agents, the ones most commonly pointed out are yellow fever, tuberculosis, H1N1 and HIV (Khan, Levitt, and Sage 2000). For details on some of the agents mentioned above, such as their respective diseases and symptoms, see table 2.

Table 2: Biological Warfare Agents and Their Specific Aspects

PATHOGEN	CATEGORY	DISEASE	SYMPTOMS	INFECTION
Bacillus anthracis	A	Anthrax	Necrotic ulcer in the skin; pneumonia and respiratory collapse.	Skin, inhalation, intestinal, and injection
Variola major	A	Smallpox	Severe fever; intense sores and pimples over the body; internal hemorrhage.	Person-to-person and through contaminated material.
Ricinus communis	B	Ricin	Pulmonary edema; liver, spleen and kidney death.	Through the air, food, water or physical contact. Not person-to-person contagious.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017.

A critical trait on the defense against an act of biowarfare is definitely its intrinsic vulnerability. In other words, reacting to a biological weapon's attack includes establishing measures to prevent, weaken and treat its effects on the population; nevertheless, "the element of surprise is crucial for an effective biological weapon attack and [it also] is relatively easy to achieve" (Koblentz 2004, 90). Albeit the occurrence of high-quality scientific research – to develop vaccines, antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals –, as well as the existence of early warning systems, both mechanisms require huge funding investment and, still, they sometimes are not enough to countermeasure a bio-attack. Furthermore, these features also contribute to the anonymous use of biological weapons. Usually, bio-attacks do not provide a 'signature' to identify the attacker (Koblentz 2004).

3.5 Nuclear Weapons

The international community is well aware that nuclear threats have not stayed in the past with the Cold War. As of mid-2014, approximately nine states preserved nuclear weapon stockpiles and five other countries – all of them non-nuclear North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies[17] – hosted around 180 nuclear bombs derived from the U.S. From the estimated number of nuclear weapons worldwide, roughly sixty percent (60%) is in military arsenals and eleven percent (11%) is ready for use on short notice. Altogether, Russia and the United States still possess ninety-three percent (93%) of the global inventory, but the seven other nuclear states are also worth making explicit – see table 3 (Kristensen and Norris 2014b).

17 Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey (Kristensen and Norris 2014b).

Table 3: Estimated Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories, 2014

Russia	8,000*
United States	7,300**
France	300
China, People's Republic of	250
Britain	225
Israel	80
Pakistan	100-120
India	90-110
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	<10
TOTAL	Approximately 16,300

*Approximately 4,300 of the Russian warheads are operational or in military custody. The remaining 3,700 warheads are thought to be excess warheads awaiting dismantlement.

**Approximately 4,760 of the U.S. warheads are in the military stockpile (about 1,980 deployed); 2,540 retired warheads are awaiting dismantlement.

Source: Kristensen and Norris 2014b.

Alike pathogens and chemical toxins, atomic energy is not used for harmful purposes only. It is, in fact, the source of power for both nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons; the process of *weaponization* is also necessary here. This sort of ambiguity portrays the so-called Energy versus Weapon Dilemma, which has stigmatized, for instance, Iran's nuclear program since its first efforts, therefore raising doubts as to whether the "country is actually using nuclear energy for non-military ends, or whether nuclear weapons are being secretly developed" (Guimarães et al. 2012, 8). Either way, atomic energy is derived from the fission or fusion, splitting or joining, of atoms, with the former being the only process utilized in battle as a nuclear weapon. Although both nuclear and (some) conventional weapons rely their destructive power on a blast or explosion, the fission/fusion of atoms result in a tremendous amount of energy, reaching much higher temperatures than the usual and, therefore, causing far more devastating effects to both living beings and infrastructure. Beyond that, nuclear explosions also carry a radioactive fallout, whose effects potentially endure for several years (Siracusa 2008).

During the Cold War, power distribution in the international system (IS) was established by two factors: (i) the possession of nuclear weaponry; and (ii) the so-called second-strike capability[18] with intercontinental ballistic missiles – ICBMs (Ávila, Martins, and Cepik 2009). Nuclear primacy, therefore, would be enjoyed by a state which cannot be threatened by another state's second-strike capability. On the other hand, nuclear primacy alone does not assure a unipolar[19] IS.

18 The second-strike capability refers to the capability of one state to strike back a nuclear attack from a second state by carrying out another nuclear attack against this same state (Ávila, Martins, and Cepik 2009).

19 In International Relations' (IR) theory, structural realism, or neorealism, determines that polarity is the structure of the I.S. which results from distribution of power amongst its various units/agents (Waltz 2000).

3.6 National Programs for the Development of WMDs in the Middle East

The present section is now going to focus on six case-studies of the following set of states: Syria, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. These countries have been selected due to their capabilities and historical involvement with WMDs. For methodological purposes, this section is subdivided into two parts: the first one analyses the countries possessing chemical and biological weapons; the second, the possessors of nuclear weapons. It is necessary to highlight that extremely precise data on national WMDs capabilities is not often available. Several programs involving this set of weaponries are – or have been – kept under secrecy, either with the claim that such initiatives are intrinsically tied to national security purposes – therefore not open to the public domain –, or due to fact that, if the state admitted possessing a WMD program, it could be acknowledging its unfulfillment of its treaty obligations.

3.6.1 States Suspected of Possessing Chemical and Biological Weapons

In the middle of a civil war, Syria remains a signatory of the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention, in spite of not having ratified it. Assad's biological program is centered in the Scientific Studies and Research Center (SRRC), where these weapons are stockpiled, despite its structures being known to be obsolete. Smallpox is arguably the most advanced program Syria allegedly possesses, with the country being long suspected of retaining strains (Aalst et al. 2013). Still, the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) concluded, in 2008, that the Syrian BW program is possibly only on a research level, with possible low production of anthrax, botulinum toxin and ricin agents. Syria is also known for possessing chemical weapons. Reports of 2013 have shown chemical weapons attacks supposedly perpetrated by the Syrian Armed Forces. The Syrian government would have used mostly the nerve agent sarin. The country deposited an instrument of accession to the CWC in 2013, which led to the OPCW's "Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons". By the end of August 2014, 94% of Syria's declared stockpile was intended to be destroyed (Crane 2017).

As for Israel, some ambiguity exists regarding its research and development of CW, since no official data is available on the country's stockpile (Zanders 2012). The concern increases because Israel refuses to open its facilities to international inspectors. One reason may be the geographical proximity between chemical, biological and nuclear facilities: inspectors would see more of Israel's security systems than just CW capacities. According to CNS (2008), Israel is likely to possess a CW program, despite its possible agents remaining unknown. On BW capabilities, the report points out to a research

program, with possible production of agents.

Egypt is not a member of either the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention, allegedly maintaining some chemical and biological capabilities. The Egyptian government justifies it by using a pan-Arab approach: these weapons are necessary due to the threat that the Israeli nuclear capabilities represent to the Arab world. Shoham (2016) argues Egypt's alleged close ties with both CW and BW are due to its low capabilities in the development of NW. Furthermore, it is evident the Israeli-Arab balance of power has a direct influence here, once Egyptian strategists understand the relevance of both BW and CW as vital components of Arab countermeasure efforts (Shoham, 2016). Recently, Cairo has realized a national inspection on a chemical facility, reporting its results to the Conference of Disarmament – despite still not allowing any international inspection. The current and official position of the Egyptian government is that the country does not possess chemical weapons, but instead only the necessary facilities to produce them. It also claims to have produced a large amount of CW in the past but, now, its CW production would be limited to what is strictly necessary to ensure defense and deterrence capabilities. In sum, even indirectly and among several distractions, the Egyptian government seems to point to a production of CW. Egypt would then be classified as a chemical weapons possessor state (CNS 2008).

As it was previously presented in the Historical Background section, Iraq has a past linked to BW and CW. Nowadays, nevertheless, the country is party both to the CWC and the BWC, also being known to have shut down its former programs. Formerly, and according to data from the UNSCOM, Iraq worked primarily with the anthrax and botulinum toxin (Zanders 2012). Accordingly, Iraq is now known for having produced "[...] 19,000 liters of botulinum toxin, 8,500 of anthrax solution [...]. In 1991, Saddam Hussein deployed [...] 25 Al-Hussein missiles containing anthrax, botulinum toxin [...] in preparation for Operation Desert Storm (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2015, online). The later Western invasion of Iraq, in 2003, is known for having as one its motives such Iraqi bio-offensive program. Such intervention also came to the conclusion that, at that point, Iraq was not reconstruction its former BW program. Summarizing it, a CNS report of 2008 indicates Iraq had formers CW and BW which used to include mustard, sarin, tabun, VX and anthrax, botulinum toxin and ricin (CNS 2008).

3.6.2 States Possessing Nuclear Weapons

On a regional level, Iran is often the center of the concerns regarding nuclear weapons. Despite international efforts to contain alleged Iranian nuclear ambitions, this landscape is said to have the potential to catalyze

regional tensions. As a result, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have already made move towards investment in nuclear infrastructure (Sukin 2015). Furthermore, according to Kristensen and Norris (2014a), although neither confirmation nor denials by Israeli authorities, Israel is a nuclear-armed state, with an arsenal of around 80 nuclear warheads.

Visentini (2012) argues that, as a result of the modernization process, Iran became one of the most advanced countries in the Middle East. Apart from possessing the biggest population and the second largest oil reserves on a regional level, Iran's past helps to explain current dynamics. During the Iran-Iraq war, the country went through a stage of isolation and self-sufficiency, due to the lack of international support. While the cost of being self-sufficient has been huge, it has also injected the sense of national pride. In 2006, the then president Ahmadinejad announced Iran had successfully enriched uranium and joined the role of countries which had nuclear power. The next period was marked by sanctions against Iran, even when the country argued that the process was for peaceful purposes only. In 2015, the state eventually signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, by which it agreed to provide IAEA greater access and information on its nuclear program and to allow the agency to investigate sites which could maintain uranium enrichment facilities. Furthermore, the agency would have access to the supply chain and to continuous surveillance over Iranian nuclear program (Katzman and Kerr 2017).

Iraq is another Middle Eastern country which made efforts to create a nuclear capability. During Saddam Hussein's government, the tactical and strategic view on NBC weapons was mainly because these weapons were inextricably linked with his ambitions to consolidate his power domestically and to achieve regional dominance – in other words, Iraq intended to use these weapons as a mean of deterrence. The post-Saddam Iraqi government had worked to destroy this establishments and to adhered to the nonproliferation regime (CIA 2007).

Within this context, is important to explain the action of an American ally: Israel. The country's government has always opted to maintain a foreign policy of nuclear ambiguity, which is neither the acknowledgment nor the denial of the possession of nuclear weapons. According to Scheinman (1999), Israel was concerned about the complications it could result for their relations, since the Israeli perceive an open nuclear status would indeed create significant pressure on neighboring states to follow them down the nuclear path. Therefore, Israel has never officially admitted possessing nuclear weapons, although it is widely recognized to own a significant arsenal (Kile and Kristensen 2016). This ambiguous policy is viable since Israel is not party

to any international agreement forbidding NW – thereby, the country is not inspected by any foreign inspection neither is subject to sanctions by other countries. Israel's

> [...] nuclear superiority would give it a credible capacity to deter initiation of a nuclear attack on its cities, besides, the country would have both the technical ability to strike back and little, if anything, to lose had it absorbed a nuclear first strike. [...] Israel's most important disadvantage is its small population and territory, but the Arab states are vulnerable too (Dokos 2008, 41).

At last, we must point out that the U.S. also performs command over the Middle East through NATO – and most notably Turkey. As part of its NATO commitment, Turkey has hosted American nuclear weapons for nearly six decades. Accordingly, "the U.S. stockpiles about 70 B-61 nuclear bombs for Turkish F-16 Dual Capable Aircraft (DCA) that are at the disposal of the Turkish Air Force, which do not have to be renewed until the mid-2030s" (Global Security 2017 online). Besides, the country is believed to be acquiring capabilities to deny adversaries the benefits of NBC weapons possession, which will enable Ankara to strengthen deterrence and provide an effective defense should deterrence fail. Historically, "Turkey's southeastern neighbors, particularly Iran, view Turkey as a powerful neighbor with a large military machine, strong security and military ties with the West [...]" (Al 2001, 108). In this context, the Turkish defense strategy is based on deterrence, including its NATO membership, their cooperation with Israel and their air force strike capability.

3.7 Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Civil War: A Case Study

Four major conflicts are currently taking place in the Middle East: in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Amongst these warfare situations, the jihadist group known as Daesh – or ISIS – seems to have spread in all four – whether under the group itself or under its branches. However, more recently, military campaigns against ISIS has proven themselves efficient; indeed, the group has been losing critical, strategic territory and personnel for enemy coalitions. In contrast, the already six year-lasting – and counting – Syrian civil war has not yet presented a minimally optimistic prospect. In fact, the situation's severity is proving itself so harsh that neither the UN nor international and regional military-diplomatic arrangements are being capable of handling it properly (IISS 2017). Amidst several and distinct atrocities perpetrated by the Syrian army, by rebel forces and by foreign militaries, the use of chemical weapons has been a specially pressing issue. Although a great deal of

small, isolated strikes have occurred since 2012, three major ones have been particularly disturbing and deadly: (i) the Khan al-Asal attack, on 19 March 2013; (ii) the two Ghouta Area attacks, on 21 August 2013; and (iii) the recent Khan Shaykhun attack, on 4 April 2017.

At certain extent, it is possible to state that the ongoing Syrian crisis has its roots in the movements which spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and ended up being referred to as the Arab Spring[20] in the late 2010. In 2011, Syria, which was under Bashar al-Assad regime, became the sixth country to experience civil uprising against liberty curtailment, representing the dawn of the Arab Spring in the country. The protests, catalyzed by Western establishments, started to look forward to a regime change. The government, in turn, tried to manage counterinsurgency measures at first, failing miserably. The escalation of both civilian resistance and government-led repression led up to the outbreak of the now generalized Syrian Civil War (Visentini and Roberto 2015).

Despite the chaotic scenario, Assad still manages to remain in power. However, since the conflict's eruption, his forces have lost significant territories to various groups, including to opposition forces – which are mainly formed by dissidents from the Syrian armed forces themselves and by rebellious portions of the population. On the one hand, the Syrian government and the Syrian Armed Forces (SAF) are backed by Iran, Russia, the non-state actor Hezbollah and other minor allied groups. On the other hand, mainly four other armed groups and/or coalitions also take part in the Syrian aggressive arena, namely: (i) the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which is formed by defected officers from the SAF; (ii) the jihadist group known as ISIL; (iii) the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a multi-ethnic group formed mainly by the Kurds and Syrian Arabs; and (iv) the coalition denominated Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), a Western and U.S.-led initiative, aimed at degrading and destroying ISIL. Turkey is also a key agent. First, the Turkish do not get along well with the Assad regime. Second, they aim at forcefully avoiding a solidification of Kurdish goals. Cook (2016, online) summarizes Turkish ambitions: "Assad must go, preventing Syrian Kurds from establishing a state that has implications for Turkey's own territorial unity and security. And then third, confronting the Islamic State, but that has been a lower priority […]".

Regarding CW, in 2005, the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the UN strongly emphasized that the country did not possess

20 The Arab Spring was a revolutionary wave which comprehended both violent and non-violent demonstrations and riots in countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa. Although at first a regional and internal movement against the establishment, authoritarianism, and non-democratic values, it later on prompted great interest from Western governments in regime-change processes (Roche 2012).

either CWs or any related material – but the nation's president would soon indicate otherwise. In 2009, in an interview, Assad, when asked about his interest in producing CW, replied to the German journal *Der Spiegel*: "Chemical weapons, that's another thing. But you don't seriously expect me to present our weapons program to you here? We are in a state of war" (Al Assad 2009, online). Not surprisingly, almost three years later, both the Assad regime and opposition forces started to accuse each other of using CW. Although in several occasions these accusations did not get confirmed by independent sources – concerning chemical and biological weapons, their military usage can be easily raised by the alleged 'victim' with the sole purpose of discrediting the opponent –, in various others they did.

On 19 March 2013, Syrian authorities argued that, in southeast Aleppo, in the city of Khan Al Asal, terrorist organizations had fired a rocket filled with weaponized chemical toxins, injuring around 110 people and killing 25 others. This event led to the establishment of a UN Secretary-General's Mechanism (SGM), which aimed at investigating the use of CW and/or BW in the attack. It happens that, few days after the incident, the UN started to receive several other accusations from states such as France, the United Kingdom, Qatar and the United States of an alleged use of CW by Assad in various other occasions, after and prior to March 19. Samples identified the use of the nerve agent sarin, but these investigations lacked reliability, since they were "carried out by individual governments outside the multilateral arms control and disarmament treaty regime framework" (Pita and Domingo 2014, 393). However, at that time, Syria had neither signed nor ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) – therefore, it was not subject to a legally mandatory inspection by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Overall, it all meant that an independent, trustworthy investigation in Syria would only occur through a SGM allowed by Assad himself. Nevertheless, unlike OPCW's investigations, SGM's task was "to investigate whether CW had been used, not who had used them" (Pita and Domingo 2014, 393). Concluding accordingly, the perpetrators – be them the terrorist groups, the Assad regime or even foreign establishments – would not be held accountable.

Four months after the Khan Al Asal incident, on 21 August 2013, several casualties were identified in the opposition-controlled area of Ghouta, nearby Damascus. Allegations of CW use were raised following the analysis of the situation: an elevated level of patients in a short time-range and specific clinical signs – namely, miosis, secretions, convulsions and the inability to breathe properly. Indeed, "[...] three hospitals in Damascus [...] reported that they received about 3,600 patients (of whom, 355 died) with neurotoxic symptoms in less than 3h" (Pita and Domingo 2014, 394). Meanwhile, the

UN Mission to Damascus had just arrived in the country. However, facing this new attack, the mission's initial duty was modified; now, the Ghouta area attacks would be investigated. By the end of the report, the UN concluded that: (i) CW were indeed used on 21 August 2013 against civilians; (ii) sarin was the main toxic chemical deployed in the attack. Hence, once again, no group – neither Syrian authorities, nor armed rebel organizations – was accused and/or convicted (Pita and Domingo 2014).

As for all sources and political opinions, the Ghouta incident did not open space for denials: a massive human rights violation had indeed occurred. Facing such situation, an international military intervention in Syria was expected – 'red lines' had been crossed and, as such, there was pressure mounted for an international response. An alternative approach, however, ended up being established. On 14 September 2013, the U.S. and Russia arranged negotiations that eventually led up to a framework which aimed at the Syrian adherence to the CWC and at a further elimination of the entire Syrian CW's arsenal (Geis and Schlag 2017). As it happens, the Assad regime abided by the arrangement and, on 14 October 2013, Syria became a party to the CWC – subject, therefore, to surveillance under the OPCW's mandate. As highlighted by Geis and Schlag (2017, 1), although catching the international community by surprise, Assad's movement perhaps has been motivated by very evident strategic *rationales*: "avoiding military strikes [and] an attempt to regain diplomatic initiative and credibility as an actor […]".

Beyond the commitment to a treaty banning the development, production, stockpiling, and use of any toxic chemical in war, Damascus have also engaged in a process of giving in its CW capabilities monitored by the OPCW, which was due to be complete in January 2016. At first, Syria declared 1,230 unfilled chemical ammunitions and 1,290 metric tons of sulfur mustard and other weaponized chemical toxins – such as chlorine, sarin, among others. Nevertheless, not long after, Assad started to discreetly, carefully shift its actions towards the Syrian former behavior. In other words, the regime adopted a position slightly resistant to the *complete* destruction of *all* forms of CW. Accordingly, Damascus filled requests to be allowed not to destruct all of its poison gas sites, but, instead, to convert them into peaceful purposes, at the same time as refusing to abide by the destruction of a dozen underground structures which were allegedly used to shelter CW production facilities (Smithson 2016).

Indeed, from October 2013 to May 2017, both the OPCW's Fact Finding Mission to Syria and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) have confirmed the usage of chemical weapons – sarin, mustard gas and mostly chlorine – in the country for approximately 20 times. Although a few foreign establishments and specialists assert Assad is to blame for al-

most the whole of the chemical incidents (Smithson 2016), there is evidence that ISIS is also responsible for carrying out attacks against the Syrian army, the rebel forces and the Kurds themselves (United Nations 2016a). On 4 April 2017, there was a major sarin-like chemical attack in the rebel-controlled province of Idlib, in the city of Khan Sheikhoun, which led to U.S. strikes as retaliation against the Assad regime.

The Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack has been the deadliest since the Ghouta incident, killing around 92 people and injuring more than 400 (Ward et al. 2017). The town – which was under the control of the jihadist group al-Nusra Front – was hit by an airstrike of disputed origin, followed by civilians with symptoms of poisoning by nerve agents – sarin, according to the OPCW (2017b). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has unanimously urged for further investigation of the attack, which is already ongoing by the OPCW (Al Jazeera 2017c). In July 2017, there was still no independent, official provenance of the strike's perpetrator, but governments worldwide have attributed responsibility to one actor or another, according to what follows: (i) Assad has stated the attack was a complete fabrication utilized to justify U.S. military actions in Syria, therefore denying responsibility (Reuters 2017a); (ii) Russia, Damascus' strongest ally, has denied involvement, but it has also affirmed that a Syrian airstrike has indeed occurred, but it did not contain chemical material – instead, it was intended to destroy rebels' ammunition facilities, which, by its turn, sheltered CW stockpiles, fact that was allegedly unknow by the Syrian regime (BBC 2017); (iii) on the other hand, the U.S., backed by the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (KUNA 2017), have expressed strong confidence that the attack has been carried out by the Assad regime itself (Barnard and Gordon 2017). Abiding by what former president Barack Obama had stated previously – that the use of CW would represent a 'red line' for American military response in Syria –, the new administration, on the night of 6 April 2017, launched 59 cruise missiles at the Syrian airfield of Shayrat. A U.S. National Security Adviser has assessed the strike has destroyed an important facility for Syrian CW use, but it has certainly not avoided the regime's capability of using this kind of WMD (Koblentz 2017).

4 PREVIOUS INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Apart from UN resolutions and initiatives, there is no authoritative treaty that prohibits and regulates WMDs themselves as a whole. Instead, specific arms control treaties for each kind of WMD – nuclear, biological and chemical weapons – operate within the area of international law. Arms control treaties, however, do not manage to address *all* threats posed by WMDs,

such as their disproportionate damage to both civilians and combatants, as well as to the environment itself. Broader and traditional legal frameworks are applied to address WMDs' destructive potential (Strydom 2015). Fidler (2004, 41) utilizes the International Court of Justice's *Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* to state that "three bodies of international law regulate WMD: arms control treaties, international law on the use of force, and international humanitarian law", as Table 4 exemplifies.

Table 4: International Law and WMDs

AREA OF INTERNATIONAL LAW	WMD DEVELOPMENT	USE OF WMD
International law on the use of force	Addresses the threat or use of force, not the development of weapons.	Establishes legal justifications for the resort to force, not rules on what weapons states may use.
International humanitarian law	Does not directly regulate the development of weapons.	Disciplines generally the kinds of weapons that can be used in armed conflict.
Arms control treaties	Specifically regulate the development of WMD.	Prohibit the use of chemical and biological weapons.

Source: Fidler 2004, 41.

Regarding international law on the use of force, the most traditional authoritative regulation is expressed in the UN Charter of 1945, which addresses the issue by stating that: "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations" (United Nations 1945, art. 2, para. 4). The Charter establishes only two exceptions to that definition, allowing the use of force: (i) under direct authorization by the United Nations Security Council; or (ii) whenever an armed attack takes place against a state, which then becomes entitled to perform an act of proportionate self-defense against the opponent (Fidler 2004).

As for international humanitarian law (IHL), it comprehends the norms regulating conduct in warfare. In accordance with the International Committee of the Red Cross (2010, online), IHL legislates in order to "[…] protect persons who are not or are no longer taking part in hostilities, the sick and wounded, prisoners and civilians, and to define the rights and obligations of the parties […] in the conduct of hostilities". Right after World War II's atrocities, the Geneva Conventions were adopted in 1949. Amongst various binding IHL principles, a few of them demand presentation: (i) civilian population and property must be preserved at all times and at all costs when an attack is launched; (ii) it is forbidden to kill and perpetrate any kind of

injure to any person incapable of carrying out an act of war; (iii) personnel, facilities and equipment involved in medical assistance for conflict-affected areas should be regarded as safe havens, therefore not subject to any kind of violence (ICRC 2010). IHL does not regulate NBC weaponry; instead, they borrow and abide by the provisions established in the three main treaties concerning each kind of WMD.

4.1 The Arms Control Treaties

International law on WMD provides its most specific regulation through arms control treaties; therefore, this body of international law is regulated by the *arms control approach*, which is based upon "formal agreements among states to regulate the use and development of WMDs [...]" (Fidler 2004). The most comprehensive, multilateral treaties concerning nuclear, chemical and biological weapons are, respectively, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Their features are specified below.

The **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons** (NPT) dates back to 1970. Forty-seven years after its adoption, the treaty is now recognized as a multilateral agreement on disarmament, with a total of 190 [21]states adhering to it (UNODA 2017a). The NPT consists of three main operational principles: *non-proliferation*, disarmament and promotion of the peaceful use of nuclear technology, all three supervised under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The principle of non-proliferation – which is guided by the provisions that non-nuclear states would neither develop NW by themselves, nor receive nuclear weapons technology from nuclear states –, may be regarded as having achieved its purposes: apart from the states which had already developed a nuclear arms program until 1970, only Pakistan and North Korea have gone nuclear ever since (Graham Jr. 2004)[22].

As for the pillar of *disarmament*, however, the situation is more complicated. Since the NPT's first drafts, there has never been any rule forcing already nuclear states to get rid of their arsenals; namely, the countries recognized as such were the People's Republic of China, France, U.S., the U.K. and Russia. Despite having been revised for a few times, the treaty has not managed to put into practice a universal disarmament, since it does not provide binding procedures for the reluctant aforementioned states to give up – or to significantly reduce – their stockpiles. This whole situation has raised criticism over the exceptionalism of the treaty, with claims that it institutionalizes

21 The NPT has achieved a total of 191 adherent states, but North Korea withdrew in 2003.
22 "[...] in the early 1960s, there were predictions that there could be as many as 25-30 nuclear-weapon states within a couple of decades" (Graham Jr. 2004, online).

the power gap between nuclear and non-nuclear states, standing for discriminatory, disproportionate dissuasion in favor of the *status quo* super powers and against non-nuclear nations – mostly developing nations (Graham Jr. 2004). Currently, India – the most outspoken critic of the treaty –, Israel, Pakistan, North Korea and South Sudan are the non-signatories.

With regard to chemical weapons' regulation, the landmark is the **Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction** (or simply 'CWC') of 1997. Its adherence is now widely spread, englobing around 192 states – the only four UN members which are not party are Egypt, Israel, South Sudan and North Korea. As its name evidences,

> Under the CWC, the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, or use of chemical weapons is prohibited and States Parties are under an obligation to destroy such weapons as well as all production facilities under their jurisdiction or control. A unique feature of the treaty is the comprehensive verifying and compliance mechanism, provided for in the form of an Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons […] (Strydom 2015, online).

The CWC's international institution, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), is unprecedented in its scope of providing effective mechanisms towards the complete destruction of all forms of CW worldwide. The OPCW is empowered by the CWC, which grants the organization verification provisions[23] by not allowing States Parties to refuse verification activities, as highlighted by Fidler (2004, online): "the CWC allows any State Party to request on-site challenge inspections by the OPCW in the territory of another State Party to clarify and resolve questions concerning possible non-compliance". Furthermore, unlike the NPT, all states are equal under the CWC and therefore under the OPCW; that is, no party is entitled to the right of maintaining its chemical weapons (Strydom 2015).

Regulation on biological weapons is ruled by the **Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction** (BWC). In the Middle East, Syria, Egypt and Israel[24] have not yet abided by the treaty. The BWC prohibits any form of acquisition and transfer of BW; it is also mandatory to destroy or transform into peaceful purposes existing ar-

23 "The CWC requires States Parties to make declarations concerning possession of chemical weapons, chemical weapons production facilities, and certain civilian chemical production facilities, and the CWC empowers the OPCW to engage in verification of these declarations" (Fidler 2004, online).

24 Both Syria and Egypt have signed but not ratified the treaty. Israel has done none.

senals of such weapons. Despite not having the discriminatory features of the NPT, the BWC's major flaw "remains the absence of an effective mechanism to ensure compliance" (Blothe 2016, online), such as the OPCW.

4.2 The United Nations

The UN system is provided with mechanisms which are used to prevent – or respond to – the use of WMDs worldwide. Most of these mechanisms operate under the frameworks established by the arms control regime presented above, and therefore the UN plays a significant role in supporting such treaties and providing assistance to their verification of compliance mechanisms. However, the UN has its own processes and initiatives, which are used either as a complement to the arms control treaties, or as a form of regulating the behavior of its members which are not parties to the NPT, the CWC or the BWC. Therefore, the present subsection aims at briefly evidencing the mechanisms which operate under the UN.

4.2.1 The Security Council

The UN Charter of 1945 establishes that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the organization's highest organ for the maintenance of international peace and security, and therefore all Member States are bindingly obligated to comply with its resolutions or any further decision. Although UNSC's primary goal is to achieve a peaceful resolution for any kind of controversy, not seldom it ends up resorting to sanctions (Article 41 of the UN Charter) or allowing the use of force to be applied (Article 42 of the UN Charter) against a threatening actor – the UNSC is the only body entitled to authorizing the use of force and calling for collective action (Okhovat 2011).

As mentioned before, both the NPT and the CWC have organizations dedicated to ensuring compliance (the IAEA and the OPCW, respectively). It means that, whenever a threat related to CW or NW exists, it will first be addressed within OPCW's or IAEA'S frameworks. The UNSC only take on the matter as a last resort, "only where these organs are unable to solve the problem [...]" (Blothe 2016, online)[25]. However, there is a key point whose understanding is imperative: the IAEA and the OPCW mandates only cover the states signatory to the NPT and to the CWC. As for all others, a WMD threat is dealt directly by the UNSC (Blothe 2016). Since the arms control treaties are specific to state actors, the UNSC also ends up embracing WMD threats of non-state actors.

The Security Council's landmark resolution concerning WMDs is **Resolution 1540 (2004)**, of 28 April 2004. As of June 2017, it had been re-

25 As for BW, which do not possess a verification mechanism previously prescript by the BWC, the issue goes directly to the Security Council (Blothe 2016).

vised for at least five times[26]. It has been unanimously adopted by the UNSC, with a text that affirms "proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons as well as the means of their delivery, constitutes a threat to international peace and security" (United Nations 2004, 1). Amongst several clauses, the resolution establishes three main guidelines: (i) it bindingly obligates all UN Member States to adopt national legislation towards non-proliferation of WMDs and to adopt domestic measures towards the prevention of illicit trafficking of related material; (ii) it imposes binding prohibitions on each and every state to refrain from supporting any non-state actor from developing or otherwise acquiring WMDs; and (iii) a committee – the 1540 Committee – to verify the implementation of the resolution's principles, requiring all states to hand over a report expressing their existing efforts or intentions towards the matter (United Nations 2015). Criticism – especially from developing countries – has been raised over the alleged bias of the resolution in favor of the American "War on Terror", with the argument that it institutionalizes UN interference in state's national sovereignty.

4.2.2 The Secretary-General's Mechanism (SGM)

The **Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons**, or simply SGM, is an institutional approach to investigate the possible use of both CW and BW. Any UN Member State may bring to the attention of the organization's Secretary-General (SG) an alleged use of CW and BW, requesting an investigation. The request will pass through the SG's discretion, which may define whether a Fact-Finding (FF) team must be dispatched to the location of the alleged attack. Once decided so, the team in charge collects evidence and samples, and conducts interviews with victims and eyewitnesses. The FF report is submitted to the SG, who informs all Member States of its conclusions. Although an SGM is effective in assessing whether CW and BW – and their specific kinds – have been used or not, it does not provide results on who has carried out the attack. Such mechanism was activated in 1992, in both Mozambique and Azerbaijan, and, more recently, in Syria – with the latter counting on experts of the OPCW and the World Health Organization (UNODA 2017b).

4.2.3 The Establishment of a WMD-Free-Zone (WMD-FZ) in the Middle East

The idea of establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East has its roots in 1974, when both Iran and Egypt suggested the UN General Assembly (UNGA) the creation of nuclear weapons-free-

26 UN Security Council resolutions 1673 (2006), 1810 (2008), 1977 (2011), 2055 (2012) and 2325 (2016).

-zone (NWFZ). Although it has not yet been born in reality, the proposal has been unanimously sponsored by the UNGA. More recently, "in 1990, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak extended the original proposal as to make the region free of all weapons of mass destruction" (Foradori and Malin 2013, 40). A NWFZ is a freely arrived arrangement amongst states of a specific region which spontaneously settle a treaty or a convention recognizing the total absence of nuclear weapons within the zone and assuring verification mechanisms. Beyond certain areas' treaties of denuclearization – Antarctic, Outer Space, Seabed and the Moon –, there currently are five different treaties which are the basis for the six existing NWFZs: (i) Treaty of Tlatelolco (Latin America and the Caribbean); (ii) Treaty of Rarotonga (South Pacific); (iii) Treaty of Bangkok (Southeast Asia); Treaty of Pelindaba (Africa); (iv) Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia.

Analyzing these five experiences of a NWFZ, two main criteria seem to make it feasible for such an initiative to thrive: "a common historical understanding among regional states and a manageable relationship with the five recognized nuclear-weapons states (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States)" (Bahgat 2012, online). Middle Eastern regional dynamics fulfill none. Although mounting international pressure for non-proliferation initiatives, regional rivalries – especially Iran-Israel – have blocked the progress towards a NWFZ in the Middle East for several decades. Furthermore, if the scenario was already harsh for denuclearization of the region, the establishment of a weapons of mass destruction-free-zone (WMDFZ) seem even further after the security upheavals and uncertainties of the post-2011 period (Bahgat 2012). Two different approaches seem to standout: (i) the "peace first, zone second" approach, which is supported by Israel; and (ii) the "zone first, peace second", which is followed by the Arab states and Iran. By 2013, according to Foradori and Malin (2013), there were three main pressing issues: (i) the negotiations and outcomes concerning the Iran Deal; (ii) the erosion of Israeli nuclear monopoly; and (iii) the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

5 BLOC POSITIONS

Afghanistan signed the CWC, the BWC and has also ratified the NPT. Regarding the Syrian war, there are reports of Sunni Afghan fighting against Assad while the government and Shia Afghan joined efforts to support him (Khalil 2017). Historically, "Afghan Taliban has reported to receive chemical weapons during 1990's from Pakistan" (IDSA 2017, online). The country is known for facing terrorist attacks, with the involvement of chemical weapons (Johnston 2015). For these reasons, Kabul strongly supports the

necessity of the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East as the regional conflicts have the capability to spill over into its neighboring (Saikal 2015).

Amnesty International is a non-governmental organization operating worldwide in order to protect human rights. It strongly opposes the use, possession and production of NW, given their indiscriminate nature, also "stress[ing] that the use of chemical and biological weapons in armed conflicts is prohibited by international law" (Amnesty International 2005, online). In situations of armed conflict, Amnesty International focuses on ensuring that warring parties respect international humanitarian law and human rights. In the context of the armed conflict in Syria, the NGO does not have conclusive information on who perpetrated the chemical attacks, but it is strongly concerned about the situation of civilians in Syria, calling upon the international community to undertake measures to protect them and prevent further war crimes (Amnesty International 2013).

Since becoming independent in 1991, **Azerbaijan** has been engaged in several WMDs non-proliferation initiatives, such as the foundation of the OPCW. As a party to the NPT, the CWC and the BWC, there is no evidence suggesting Baku's involvement with WMDs' production (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2015). The country is a NATO ally under the organization's Partnership for Peace program, besides cooperating with the U.S. in fields such as counterterrorism and non-proliferation (U.S. Department of State 2016). In spite of condemning any alleged use of CW in Syria, and urging Damascus to comply with its international obligations (Republic of Azerbaijan 2013), Azerbaijan adheres to a balanced position which prevents it from taking a hard line against Assad and from getting involved in any military coalitions in Syria (Trend News Agency 2015).

Bahrain is signatory of the CWC and of the BWC, while still making accession to the NPT. Manama has stated that security and stability foundations require the elimination of all nuclear weapons and other kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, Bahrain strongly encourages the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East, which should include the Gulf states. Previously, Bahrain's policies on Syria were largely in line with the Saudis: supporting Assad's opposition. Recently, however, Manama has reduced its support (CSIS 2016).

The **People's Republic of China** ratified the CWC in 1997 - in this occasion, the communist government announced the existence of three former production facilities. China joined the BWC in 1984; nonetheless, over the following years, the U.S. government has alleged that China maintained a small offensive program and supported programs in countries such as Iran. Despite formally acceding the NPT, China has always been cautious in openly discussing its nuclear weapons. The state has continued to modernize its

nuclear forces while only providing limited transparency as to their size and modernization (Cordesman 2016). Regarding the Syrian issue, Beijing has adopted a non-interventionist posture, being against foreign military forces acting in the region, at the same time as supporting the Assad regime (Swaine 2012).

The **Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**, representing the organization, has as its mission, throughout Manama Dialogue, the promotion of the CWC's provisions in order to achieve its vision of a world free of chemical weapons and of the threat of their use. The organization is a main supporter of the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. Regarding the attacks in Syria, the OPCW, which has worked in the destruction of the Syrian CW arsenal in the past, has sent missions to establish facts surrounding allegations of the use of CW in the state. Even though the mission has already concluded that the chemicals were used indeed, there still lacks proper evidence pointing out to those responsible for carrying out the attacks (OPCW 2017a).

In spite of not being a signatory country of the BWC, **Djibouti** has signed both the CWC and the NPT, being also a state party to the Pelindaba Treaty – which establishes a NWFZ in the African territory (IAEA 1997). Showing its consciousness regarding the threat that the proliferation of WMDs poses to international peace and security, the country "supports unreservedly the various international efforts being made to ensure the non--proliferation and elimination of such weapons" (United Nations 2005, 2). In this sense, and recognizing the Middle East as one of the tensest regions in the globe, Djibouti strongly encourages the creation of a WMDFZ in the region (United Nations 2005). Furthermore, in which concerns the situation in Syria, Djibouti's Defense Minister Ali Hasan Bahdon, aligning with the Saudi forces, sharply condemned the employment of chemical weapons in the country, believing that the Iranian intervention is one of the core reasons for the crisis in Syria (Middle East Observer 2017).

Egypt is one of the most influential players in the Arab region, which is a reason of concern since the state is not a party of either the CWC or the BWC. The country has been a signatory of the NPT for many decades. Egypt, alongside Iran, was the first Middle Eastern country to propose a Nuclear--Weapon-Free-Zone, considering it the fourth pillar of the NPT. However, Egypt does not support any non-proliferation initiative that does not obligate states such as Israel to join the NPT (Foradori and Malin 2013). Concerning the Syrian War, Cairo was once opponent of Syria's president, but recently it has publicly supported the regime of Bashar al-Assad (MEMRI 2016).

Eritrea has never either developed nor possessed any WMD, with the state being deeply committed to their elimination. Party of the Afri-

can Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone, Eritrea is an active member of IAEA and OPCW. Additionally, there is no allegation or report about Eritrea support to non-State actors that attempt to develop such weapons (United Nations 2006). Eritrea argues that is necessary a new legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons which provide a moral pressure for nuclear possessor states to eliminate their arsenals. Considering it all, the country also fully encourages the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East (ICAN 2014). Eritrea has not taken an official stand on the civil war in Syria.

Member of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone, **Ethiopia** strongly supports such an initiative to be established in the Middle East as well. Addis Ababa also emphasizes the need to make the region free not only of nuclear weapons, but also of chemical and biological ones (United Nations 2012). Currently occupying a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, the country maintains a voting record of abstentions when it comes to determining those responsible for the use of CW in Syria. Indeed, Ethiopia stresses its "policy against the use of chemical weapons [is] uncompromising, adding that their use for any reason, or under any circumstance, violate[s] international law" (United Nations 2017c, online). However, the country is extremely cautious, asserting that any measures to be taken in response to CW attacks in Syria must be backed by conclusive, substantial findings. As of now, Ethiopia reckons there is no sufficient evidence to hold the regime accountable (United Nations 2017c).

France supports a political transition in Syria since, according to Paris, maintaining the Assad regime encourages continued conflict and radicalization of the opposition, sustains refugee flows and destabilizes the region. The French Republic has also been carrying out the Operation Chammal (in the framework of the Global Coalition against Daesh) in Syria since September 2015 (France Diplomatie 2016). As a non-possessor state, France has ratified the CWC and the BWC. Paris strongly supports the creation of a WMDFZ in the region (United Nations 2010). France's closest ally in the EU, **Germany**, on the other hand, has all the necessary to develop nuclear weapons, but has agreed not to produce it, since it is a signatory of the NPT (as well as of the CWC and the BWC). Germany has been strongly committed to a WMDFZ in the Middle East. In response to the Syrian crisis, Germany follows U.S.'s will to overthrow Assad through sanctions against the Syrian government and through military, medical and logistical support to the opposition (El-Hamid 2017).

A former Soviet Republic, **Georgia** is a signatory of the CWC, the BWC and the NPT. The country also has a special law regarding export control of armaments, military equipment and dual-use products – which could be used for the creation of CW and BW (OPCW 2017b). There is no evi-

dence of the state possessing or producing any chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. Despite the Syrian government use of CW, Georgia has indirectly helped the regime of Bashar al-Assad, specially through private entities which have reportedly sent or attempted to send diesel fuel (HRF 2013).

India seems fully committed to the non-proliferation of NBC weapons, having ratified both the CWC and the BWC. India destroyed its entire CW stockpile under OPCW's verification in 2009 (OPCW 2017d). In 1992, New Delhi signed the India-Pakistan Agreement on Chemical Weapons, prohibiting the use of CW against each other (Gopalan 2007). However, as evidenced by its nuclear program, India has never joined the NPT, recognized for being a de *facto* nuclear weapon state (Cserveny et al. 2004). Opposition to foreign intervention and support to state sovereignty, regardless of regime kind, are principles that by default make India's position favorable to the maintenance of the Assad regime in Syria (Devare 2015).

After years of tension between the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and Western countries, due to the Iranian nuclear program, the country is now a signatory of the NPT, as well as of the CWC/BWC. Regarding a WMDFZ, Iran has strongly supported the creation of such structure and is fully committed to it (Hadian and Hormozi 2013), but has emphasized the necessity of non-selective implementation of the NTP (United Nations 2012). Iran has been one of the key supporters of the regime of Bashar al-Assad since 2011, providing military advisers and subsidized weapons, as well as lines of credit and oil transfers to the country (Ansari and Tabrizi 2017).

Despite its past, **Iraq** ratified the BWC in 1991 and the CWC in 2009. Although Iraq ratified the NPT in 1969, in 1991, when the IAEA began a series of inspections in the country, it was discovered a secret nuclear program (PIR Center 2013). Nowadays, Iraqi Nuclear Program is wrecked and the government is strongly in favor of the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. After 25 years of broken relations, in 2006, Iraq and Syria decided to resume diplomatic relations. Iraq has a lot in common with the Syrian situation: ISIS forces are operating in the country, for instance. Its close ties with Iran were one of the causes of Iraqi government support to Assad (ECFR 2013a).

In 1974, the United Nations General Assembly adopted an initiative of resolution to create a NWFZ in the Middle East, in which **Israel** abstained. Meanwhile, Tel-Aviv, which remains outside the NPT, has a nuclear arsenal estimated at 80 nuclear warheads (SIPRI 2012). Israel considers BW and CW as necessary to deter other countries which pose them a threat. The country has never signed or ratified the BWC and has signed but not ratified the CWC. Indeed, the state is currently one of the major obstacles to construction of a WMDFZ in the Middle East, for being possessor of a nu-

clear arsenal and being the state with which most of the states of the region have no diplomatic relations (Foradori and Malin 2013). Regarding Syria, hostility between both countries dates back to the Israel's creation in the late 1940s, driven by Syria's support to Palestinian resistance. The Israeli-Syrian situation, currently, is tense specially because Hezbollah group is also involved in the conflict. The presence of this group is considered a bigger threat than Assad's regime - Israel considers Hezbollah, and its key backer Iran, as its biggest threat (Jewish Virtual Library 2017).

Although being now a state party to three most important mechanisms for the non-proliferation of WMDs, the BWC, the CWC and the NPT, **Italy** is known for having pursued – and in some cases achieved – the production of such weaponry. While its biological program was of a small scale and was maintained mainly for defensive purposes, the significant utilization of its chemical weapons during the imperialist Italian-Ethiopian War dragged the world's attention (Global Security 2011). Moreover, regarding its nuclear weapons policy, Italy takes part in NATO Nuclear Sharing Program, which means that, despite not having its own nuclear program, the country hosts U.S.' nuclear weapons and, therefore, in times of war, can be considered as equivalent to a nuclear power (Nassauer 2001). Still, as stated in IAEA 57th General Conference, Italy believes that "the use of chemical weapons in Syria is a painful reminder that the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction is real" and, in this sense, hopes that a WMDFZ can be established in Middle East (IAEA 2013, 1). Finally, condemning the chemical attacks allegedly held by Bashar Al-Assad's government, Italy showed its support to the U.S. strikes in Syria, understanding the reasons for such response (Reuters 2017).

Japan is a party to the NPT, the CWC and the BWC, thus indicating the country's unwillingness to develop or otherwise acquire WMDs (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2017). Tokyo's involvement in the Middle East clearly revolves around the protection of its energy interests in the region, given that it imports a significant amount of natural gas and oil from the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran. Although a relevant U.S. ally, Japan's Middle East policy is driven by stability, which prompts Tokyo to maintaining cordial relations with both Israel and Iran (Wagner and Cafieiro 2013). On the Iranian nuclear issue, Japan aims at achieving a diplomatic solution, cooperating in the field of nuclear safety and preserving its economic ties with Tehran (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2016). Japan also expresses its deep concern over the alleged use of CW in Syria, stating that proper investigation must be carried out in order to identify the perpetrators. Regarding the U.S. missile strikes on Syria, on April 2017, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has emphasized that "Japan supports the U.S. government's determination to prevent the spread and use of chemical weapons" (Aisch, Yonette and Singhvi 2017,

online).

Of all Syria's neighbors, **Jordan** is the one which has trod most cautiously since the outbreak of the conflict. Their actions were in favor of guaranteeing their security domestically rather than supporting Assad. Jordan is concerned by the risk of state collapse in Syria, which could increase non--state actors' power and act as a breeding ground for jihadi militants, with the threat of CW proliferation (ECFR 2013b). The Kingdom considers that a WMDFZ in the Middle East depends on the confidence that would only be achieved whether all the states were part of the NPT, CWC and BWC, specially Israel (Milada 2013). Not known for possessing NBC weapons programs, the country has ratified the NPT, CWC and BWC (United States of America 2017a).

Kuwait has been diminishing its support for Syrian opposition, focusing instead on playing a humanitarian and diplomatic role. According to the CSIS (2016), in the past, Kuwait has served as a central hub for private fundraising to the Syrian opposition due to its lax financial regulations. However, it contributed to enhance sectarian tensions which finally culminated in the Kuwaiti government passing a law, in 2013, that criminalized terrorist financing and froze terrorist assets. Kuwait, as signatory of the NPT, considers Israeli refusal to participate of international regulations on nuclear weapons as a serious obstacle to the creation of a WMDFZ (KUNA 2016). Kuwait signed the BWC in 1972 and has assented to prohibit the development, production, and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. The state also signed CWC in 1993 and has kept destroying those weapons since 2007 (ICAN 2015).

Lebanon has supported the establishment of a WMDFZ. Lebanon believes that the nuclear warheads developed by Israel are a permanent danger to peace in the Middle East. Israeli facilities are not under IAEA monitoring and, considering Israel geographical proximity to Lebanon, any nuclear accident will have very dangerous consequences. Lebanon has assisted IAEA and NPT since 1974. The Syrian crisis started in a moment of vacuum of power in Lebanon, which for many years had been under Syrian influence, consequently, the war in neighborhood has spilled over the country. Lebanon officially refrained from measures that affiliated it with the regime or the opposition – such as Arab League sanctions (Meier 2013). However, Hezbollah, a political party in Lebanon, has declared its support to Assad (ECFR 2013c).

Libya has joined the NPT and secretly violated it. In 2004, during Qaddafi's regime, Libya gave up its NW program, which fragilized the country for extra-regional interventions (Gärtner 2011). Tripoli also joined the CWC and the BWC. While joining the CWC, Libya declared its chemical

weapons stockpile in 1997 (Robinson 2005). In 2014, the state "announced that it had completed the destruction of its usable chemical weapons [...]" (Shanedling 2015, 342). Regarding BW, however, allegations persist that Libya is actively conducting research in pathogens and toxins for military uses. Since it is part of the African Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, Libya is in favor of a WMDFZ in Middle East. Concerning the Syrian crisis, however, the government emphasized the need to avoid a military intervention in the country. Libyan officials claim support to the Syrian National Council, a coalition against Assad, and, at the same time, Libya is used as a major gateway for weapons (Washington Post 2011).

Morocco is party to all legal instruments related to WMD, being seriously committed to the creation of a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone in the Middle East (United Nations 2015). The state highlights the importance of complete disarmament in the region as well as the signature of all countries to the NPT, including Israel (United Nations 2012). Rabat has condemned Bashar al-Assad's regime, being part of the "Friends of Syria", group composed in order to overthrow the current regime of Syria (Al Akhbar 2012).

Oman recognizes the danger posed by NBC weapons, therefore supporting the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. The country has ratified the CWC, even though it has only acceded[27] both the BWC and the NPT. Despite a recent improvement in its relations with Iran, Oman stands as a neutral regional power, fact that explains its success in mediating conversations not only between its fellow member states of the GCC and Iran, but also between the West and Iran. Regarding the situation in Syria, unlike other GCC states, Oman preserved its diplomatic relations with the country, emphasizing its position as a mediator in the region (Aboud 2015).

By the mid-1970s, as a consequence of its defeat in the Indo-Pakistani War (1971), **Pakistan** started to engage in a nuclear weapons program. From that moment on, Islamabad managed to develop its own uranium enrichment facilities and to create a sort of black market that, from the 1980s to 2002, supplied Iran, Libya and North Korea with nuclear technology. In spite of having publicly created new export control laws in 2004, Pakistan keeps improving its capabilities. The country is expected to house a nuclear arsenal of approximately 140 warheads, having, by 2015, developed short-range tactical nuclear weapons (Arms Control Association 2017a). Despite this strong policy concerning nuclear weapons – which involves the not signing of the NPT –, the country has ratified both the CWC and the BWC, stating

27 Although having the same legal effects as the ratification, the accession of a treaty happens when a state accepts to become a party to a treaty that has already been negotiated by other states.

that it "remains opposed to the use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances" (OPCW 2013, 2). At last, regarding the Syrian Civil War, Islamabad strongly condemned the use of CW, regardless from which side the initiative came from, also claiming that Syria's territorial integrity should be respected (Radio Pakistan 2017).

Despite of not having signed the CWC and the BWC, **Palestine** is now the most recent state to join the NPT. Being the most affected state by the Israeli policies, the threat posed by its neighbor's capabilities is a permanent element of concern. Following the Arab League, Palestine understands how dangerous it could be the development and the usage of NBC weapons. The country claims it is imperative to "reaffirm the 1995 Resolution on the establishment in the Middle East of a Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and all other WMDs" (State of Palestine 2015, 1). Although Palestine and Syria – that once welcomed a number of Palestinian refugees – have historically maintained good relations, the outbreak of the civil war in the latter has put the former in a dilemma – whether to support the pro-Assad Palestinians or the rebel ones (Al-Shabaka 2017).

Besides having acceded the NPT, **Qatar** has also ratified both the CWC and the BWC, showing itself as a committed state with the fight against all types of WMDs. Accordingly, "peace and stability cannot be reached in light of a race for obtaining arms", in the same way that a strategic balance cannot be reached through the possession of WMDs" (State of Qatar 2016, online). In the Annual NATO Conference on WMDs Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation, held in June 2017, the country's representative advocated the importance of establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East, stressing the feasibility of creating such zone (State of Qatar 2017). The Gulf country – a leading backer of Syrian rebels fighting Assad's government – recognized an independent investigation on the CW attack of April 2017 was needed (Al Jazeera 2017b).

As one of the most influential extra-regional players in the Middle East, the **Russian Federation** stands as a fundamental actor in finding a way out of the region's instability. Despite being a nuclear state party to the NPT, the country carries out a gradual arsenal reduction (Kristensen and Norris 2017). Its chemical stockpile, which during the Cold War represented the world's largest-amount in metric-tons, has also been suffering a considerable reduction due to the CWC's obligations, in such a way that, as reported by a Moscow official, the country expects to destroy the entirety of its chemical capabilities by December 2020 (NTI 2017). Although Russia maintains that it is acting accordingly to its commitments under the BWC, its BW remain as a great concern to the West, since the country is known to have inherited a major Soviet offensive biological program, which included research into

anthrax and smallpox (Arms Control Association 2017b). Moscow strongly regrets the lack of progress to establish a WMDFZ in the Middle East up to now, stressing the importance of organizing negotiations on the matter (Russian Federation 2017b). At last, being a supporter of Al-Assad's regime in Syria, Russia condemned President Trump's decision to attack Syrian military facilities based on unfounded accusations, having also stressed the urge to fight the threat of chemical terrorism in the Middle East (Russian Federation 2017a).

Saudi Arabia is a great supporter of the potential establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. The main reason for such is its constant concern over the possibility of Iran managing to develop its own NW (Foradori and Malin 2013). It is exactly in this context that occasional evidences pointing out to a Saudi attempt to engage in a nuclear program emerge. Even though the country has been known for a long time to lack the national infrastructure and expertise necessary to do so, such situation may have changed in the more recent years. Therefore, not possessing NBC weapons, Saudi Arabia has ratified the NPT, the BWC and the CWC, having also created a domestic law that bans the production, the possession and the storage of CW (NTI 2016a). Moreover, strongly disapproving Assad's administration and supporting rebel forces, Riyadh made a joint declaration with Washington supporting "President Trump's decision to launch missiles at Shayrat Airbase from which the Syrian regime launched its chemical attacks on Khan Shaykhun" and claiming the necessity of the "Syrian regime adhere to the 2013 agreement to eliminate its entire stockpile of [CW]" (The White House 2017, online).

Standing as one of the most important regional organizations, the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** - here represented by its Secretary-General - gathers six countries located in the Persian Gulf, more specifically, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The regional bloc, having within its objectives the cooperation and the integration, strongly supports the idea of creating a WMDFZ in the Middle East, understanding it as a way to remedy its concerns over Iranian nuclear projects (Kubbig and Weidlich 2015). In 2005, given the frustration of establishing a regional WMDFZ, but still trying to get Iran committed through a legal framework, the then Secretary-General of the GCC proposed a sub-regional accord for the setting up of a WMDFZ in the Gulf, compromising its six members, Iran, Iraq and Yemen. This reduced proposal, which did not take off, aimed at preparing a groundwork for a later comprehensive accord encompassing the Middle East as a whole (Rizk 2013). Furthermore, the relationship between the Gulf states and the U.S. remains as an essential element in the former's security strategies, relying on Western security commit-

ments (Kubbig and Weidlich 2015). It is in this very same sense that, with an exception from Oman, the GCC states' leaders hope that the Syrian conflict can be solved with support from the U.S. (Huffington Post 2017).

Recognized as a Non-Nuclear Weapon State (NNWS), **Somalia** has ratified the NPT, acceded the CWC and signed the BWC, as well as the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone – the Pelindaba Treaty (Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy 2011). In this sense, as declared by its ambassador, the country states its endorsement "to declaring the Middle East a Zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction" (United Nations 2014, 1). Furthermore, regarding being a country that has already suffered with its own civil war, Somalia shows itself extremely concerned with the humanitarian situation in Syria, acknowledging the importance of solving such crisis (Federal Republic of Somalia 2017).

Although a long-dated Iranian partner in the Arab world, **Sudan** has shifted its alignment towards Saudi Arabia. Pragmatically, the fear of isolation and the greed for investment has made the country decide to change sides. Khartoum's has ultimately expressed its commitment "to Riyadh and its Gulf allies in March when it joined the coalition in Yemen against Shia Houthi rebels" (The Guardian 2016, online). Sudan is a party to the NPT, the CWC and the BWC.

Since 2011, **Syria** has been immersed on a series of conflicts. Being a state member to the NPT and having signed – though not ratified – the BWC, the main concern of the international community was in regard of Syrian chemical weapons, which included nerve agents, such as sarin and VX, as well as blister agents, such as mustard gas. In August 2013, the Ghouta area of Damascus faced a large-scale chemical attack and, regardless of who delivered it, the repercussion of such event was enough to press Syria to join the CWC and to agree with the disarmament of its chemical weapons, allowing the OPCW to destroy its stockpiles (United Nations 2016b). This subject, however, was brought back to light in April 2017, when a sarin gas attack was delivered once again. The Syrian regime - which has Russia and Iran as its main supporters - stresses that the employment of CW amid the Syrian conflict was "fabricated" or, still, carried out by terrorist groups (Al Jazeera 2017a). Even though the Syrian representative at the UN General Assembly has only stressed the necessity of creating a NWFZ, Assad's recent compliance with the CWC may open the path for Syria to consider the establishment of a WMDFZ (United Nations 2012).

Located in the Maghreb region, **Tunisia** has ratified not only the CWC, the BWC and the NPT, but it is also a party to the African Nuclear Weapon Free-Zone Treaty (IAEA 1997). In this sense, and not possessing nuclear, biological or chemical capabilities, the country has underlined the

necessity of establishing a zone free of WMD, especially in the Middle East (United Nations 2001).

Having ratified the CWC, the BWC and the NPT, **Turkey** is known for its historical on strong non-proliferation policies, which are a result of its strategic location in the Middle East and its status during the Cold War as a member of NATO – implying the compliance with western approaches to deterrence (Ülgen 2012). Given its location amidst high proliferation levels and, consequently, the threats posed by its neighbors' capabilities (mainly the Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian ones), Ankara plays a substantial role in this security issue: rather than pursuing a nuclear, biological and chemical weapons program, the country is known for expending efforts in order to reverse the growing tendency in the development of WMD (Global Security 2017). This, additionally to the vindication of a NWFZ – in which Turkey does not show itself as a leading part due to its warm relations with Israel (Bahgat 2017) –, points out to a favorable position in the potential establishment of a WMDFZ in the region. Being an immediate neighbor of Syria, Turkish worries regarding this country's belligerent apparatus are a constant element of its foreign policy. In this sense, Turkey has a major involvement in the conflict, providing military assistance to the rebel forces and condemning Assad's government.

Not being known to possess any programs for the development of NBC weapons, the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** is a signatory and ratifying member of both the CWC and the BWC, having also acceded the NPT. The country, whose biggest city, Dubai, was once a hub for a network that provided nuclear technology for states such as Iran and Libya, has been showing itself as significantly engaged in non-proliferation measures. In order to advance in such policies, the UAE counts on the United States and France as its main partners (Early 2009). Yet possessing a missile defense system, purchased from its Western allies, Abu Dhabi emphasizes "the importance of taking future steps towards declaring the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction" (United Nations 2016b, online).

Being a nuclear weapon state party to the NPT and to all of the major non-proliferation treaties regarding WMDs - including the CWC and the BWC -, the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** currently possesses the smallest deployed arsenal among all other P5 nuclear states (Kristensen and Norris 2017). One of the main characteristics of its program is the willingness to reduce its capabilities (UK Government 2015, 35). In the 1950s, the state renounced its chemical weapons - phosgene, mustard gas and lewisite - and its biological weapons offensive program, even though its defensive biological program was known to remain strong

(Leitenberg 2001). As stated in 2012, "the British Government supports the objective of a WMDFZ in the Middle East", recognizing, however, that "more preparation and direct engagement between states of the region will be necessary to secure arrangements [...]" (UK Government 2012, online). Regarding the Syrian situation, London condemns the brutal violence employed by Assad's regime and supports diplomatic efforts in order to establish a political transition in the country (UK Government 2016).

The United Nations, having as its representative the **United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria**, has been, for a long time, the main supporter and mediator of the attempts to establish a WMDFZ in the Middle East. The most recent initiative, dating back to 2012, was the setting up, alongside the U.S., Russia and the U.K., of a conference that would discuss the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. The deadline to the realization of such meeting, however, was missed and no further steps were taken regarding the WMD's issue in the region (Foradori and Malin 2013). As for the Syrian Civil War, the Special Envoy for Syria described the chemical attack of April 2017 as "horrific" and stressed the necessity of an identification of the responsible through a Security Council meeting (Reuters 2017b).

Historically known for having first developed and for being the only one to have ever employed nuclear weapons, the **United States of America**, although being an extra-regional power, is a fundamental actor in discussing WMDs in the Middle East. In spite of being a state party to the NPT, the BWC and the CWC, the country still possesses large stockpiles of nuclear and chemical weapons, having destroyed by the 1970s, however, its biological ones. As for its chemical weapons, the United States has the second-largest stockpile of chemical agents, having assumed, nonetheless, the compromise to destroy all of them in the shortest run (Arms Control Association 2017c). Even though the country has "supported NWFZs on the grounds that, when properly crafted and fully implemented, they can contribute to international peace, security and stability" (United States of America 2017b, online), it is important for Washington to make sure that its partnership with Israel does not obscure negotiations on the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. Finally, the U.S. is strongly opposed to the alleged violence that Assad's government has been using against civilians, especially with regard to the latest chemical attack – a 'red line' which was responded with missile strikes (The White House 2017).

Being considerably influenced by the GCC stance, **Yemen** has never pursued nor has within its interest to develop a NBC weapons program. The country is a party to the CWC, the BWC and the NPT, having also approved an internal law "On the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons" (NTI 2016b). The Yemeni support

of a WMDFZ in the Middle East, which has always existed, is now enhanced due to its internal disarray: the outbreak of the civil war and the consequent fragmentation of the country's territory have fostered the worries regarding the proliferation of WMDs and terrorism, seen that such weaponry is the aim of some groups. The government of Yemen is especially concerned with Iran, which is known to provide military aid to the Houthi's forces (Foradori and Malin 2013). Given that, in August 2016, Yemen saw its own population suffering a chemical attack, the employment of chemical weapons in Syria - which the country's government believes as to have been delivered by Assad - was condemnable (Al Batati 2017).

6 QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Are Middle Eastern states truly to condemn for the development of WMDs or is this process merely a reaction to long-dated foreign belligerency in the region?
2. Which are - and how to overcome - the obstacles hampering the establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East?
3. Which is the most appropriate approach to the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East: "peace first, zone second" or "zone first, peace second"?
4. Should the international community strike back at the employment of chemical weapons, such as the United States' response to the Khan Sheikhoun attack in Syria?
5. Does the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) operates in favor of the status quo superpowers, discriminating regional developing actors?

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