Georgetown University

Volume 16 2018–2019

Democracy & Society

A Publication of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society

Borders, Migration, and the Nation

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In the Middle East, Separatists Are the New Spoilers

Ariel I. Ahram

There is an end in sight for the wars that wracked the Middle East for much of the decade, even as the fighting drags on. The U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other outside powers have found a general formula for conflict resolution that combines state-building with power-sharing. Central states would be empowered to defeat terrorists and take control over otherwise ungoverned territory while former belligerents would be enticed into the fold of the state. This two-pronged formula, however, is ill-suited for dealing with separatists that seek to carve out states of their own with new international boundaries. Separatist forces played a critical role in sustaining local orders as national politics descended into chaos after 2011. They appealed to the global community to grant them self-determination. Inhabiting far-off border regions where state control was minimal, they were foot soldiers in the coalitions that defeated ISIS and other radical Islamist terrorists. But separatists' demands for recognition of national rights are typically ignored in peace processes that remain focused on elites inhabiting state capitals. Separatists are thus poised to be the region's next spoilers, wrecking efforts that seek peace and stability through the rehabilitation of existing states.

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Where Arab Separatists Come From

The boundaries of Arab states are famously misshapen, too small for the liking of Arab nationalists and pan-Islamist ideologues and too big to accommodate the national aspirations of stateless Kurds, Berbers, and Palestinians. This mismatch between national identity and state borders hindered the effectiveness and responsiveness of political institutions. States became, in the words of the 2009 Arab Human Development report, "a menace to human security, rather than its chief supporter."[1] Yet through much of the twentieth century, the global **[Cont'd, Page 3]**

immigration and the recreation of various kinds of borders affect health outcomes in immigrants, stripping them of some types of agency and supporting parallel systems of care.

Finally, a book review by **Drake Long** reviews Jasmin Mujanovic's book *Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 2018). Long applauds the fresh perspective Mujanovic brings to the subject and finds much to appreciate and highlight, even as he offers context and identifies several important questions raised by the book.

Taken together, the pieces in this issue offer the reader a variety of perspectives on this year's theme. From repression to refugees and from insurgents to institutions, we hope that you find much to consider. Questions of national identity, the strength or porousness of borders, and the impact of human migration are not going anywhere anytime soon. We believe these contributions further those conversations and we hope you enjoy the issue.

As always, you can keep up to date with the latest events and debates related to democracy and governance by following our blog, *Democracy & Society Online*, at www.democracyandsociety.net. You can also learn more about the Democracy & Governance M.A. program at http://government.georgetown.edu/democracy-and-governance.

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Ahram, *Continued from Page 1*

community insisted that international borders remain fixed. Wary of threats to their territorial integrity, incumbent states tended to shun separatist movements, lest secession lead to a slippery slope. Political contestation in the Middle East, therefore, typically did not challenge the existence of states, but rather focused on who would rule them. Consequently, even the most artificial states (and their borders) tended to endure.[2]

The collapse of Arab regional order during the 2011 uprisings provided a chance to reconsider the shape of states. The main opposition protests still sought control over the central government, but separatists took advantage of the breakdown of security services to set up their own enclaves of self-rule. Beside ISIS, the most notorious breaker of borders, movements on the periphery of Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Libya added to the centrifugal pressure. These groups campaigned to revive national liberation movements that had been denied or defeated in the previous century. Separatists competed with other rebel factions to offer alternative modes of governance. They ran oil installations, adjudicated tribal disputes, and allocated access to irrigation. Rebel rule was messy and sometimes ugly, but often "good enough"[3] to protect civilians in the midst of brutal war. The separatists' diplomatic strategy combined pragmatism and moral suasion. On one hand, they joined the global campaign against radical Islamist factions, particularly ISIS. On the other hand, they asked the international community to rectify past mistakes by granting them states of their own.

The Kurds, the largest stateless minority in the region, are an obvious example of separatists who gained ground during the crisis. Repeated efforts to establish a Kurdish nation-state ended in brutal repression. After the 1990-91 Gulf War, Kurdish guerrillas expelled Saddam Hussein's forces from northern Iraq. Under the umbrella of the U.S.'s no-fly zone, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Popular Union of Kurdistan (PUK) ran the self-proclaimed Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as an effective duopoly. The 2005 Iraqi constitution granted the KRG broad autonomy, including legalizing the Kurdish security forces, called Peshmerga. KDP and PUK leaders integrated into the Iraqi state while delicately pushing for Kurdish nationalist interest.[4] Tensions remained between Erbil and Baghdad about oil and the disposition of disputed territories like Kirkuk. KRG leaders grew bolder as popular protests and the ISIS insurgency paralyzed the central government. When IS overran Mosul in 2014, KRG forces moved into Kirkuk, Nineveh, Diyala, and southern Erbil provinces. KRG President Massoud Barzani spoke about correcting Iraq's faulty colonial boundaries. The U.S. increased its military support to the KRG, both to combat ISIS and to offset Iraq's growing reliance on Iranian-trained militias.

Syrian Kurds' separatist campaign emerged from less propitious beginnings. Successive governments in Damascus sought to make Syria a unitary, centralized, and Arab-dominated state. A short-lived Kurdish autonomous zone in the far northeast was aborted in the 1930s.[5] Kurds saw their lands expropriated, their language restricted, and, in some cases, their citizenship revoked. When anti-regime protests began, Syrian Kurdish parties splintered. The Democratic Union Party (PYD), probably the most important single faction in the Kurdish space, declared its loyalty to the Assad regime. At the same time, the PYD launched its own plan for territorial autonomy, claiming the territory along the north and northeastern border that the Syrian army abandoned as part of Rojava (Western Kurdistan). With ideological and operational ties to the Turkish PKK, the PYD touted its quasi-Marxist, secular, and pluralistic creed. PYD cadres administered security, justice, and education in self-proclaimed cantons. The quickly neutralized opposition within their areas of control, including other Kurdish factions. PYD militias were crucial in the campaign against ISIS in Raqqa. Further distancing itself from Assad, the PYD forces became the mainstay of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).[6]

The leaders of the Southern Resistance (SR) in Yemen, a loose coalition of politicians, insurgents, tribal leaders, and Islamists, similarly tried to make themselves indispensable to foreign sponsors. The SR traces its origins to the merger

of North Yemen and the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1990. After unification, there were almost immediate complaints about corruption and political marginalization in the south. In 1994, a brief but bloody civil war led to the purge of much of the old PDRY elite. Promised political reform and devolution went unimplemented. Southerners increasingly talked of northern "colonization" and "occupation." Although overshadowed by the Houthi war in the far north and the anti-terrorist campaign against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), by the mid-2000's the southern insurgency was probably the most violent of Yemen's multiple wars.[7]

The southern separatists seized military bases and other installations in the midst of Yemen's protracted and blood regime transition. When Houthi forces, aligned with ousted President Ali Abudalleh Saleh, marched into Sana'a and drove the internationally-recognized government of Abdrabbah Mansur Hadi into exile in 2014, the SR came into its own. Southern separatist factions took over sea and airports, utilities, hospitals, and oil facilities. Though they pledged allegiance to the Hadi government, they operated almost wholly independently. The UAE supported the formation of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), headed by Aidarous Zubaydi, a former PDRY military officer, and the Security Belt militia, headed by the Salafi preacher Hani Ben Bryk. The STC and other UAE-backed militias fought both against the Houthi invasion from the north and infiltration from AQAP and ISIS. Human rights organization documented major abuses at detention centers run jointly by the UAE and the Security Belt forces.[8] In 2017, Hadi accused the STC of violating Yemen's sovereignty and moved to dismiss them from Aden, the provisional capital. The STC called Hadi's bluff. Zubaydi declared the south's independence amidst massive public demonstrations in Aden. Although Saudi Arabia rejected secession, actually dislodging the separatists proved impossible.

[A]s wars unwind and the international community tries to help states reconsolidate power, the separatists have become more insistent, making their status acute and obstructive.

The separatist movement in Libya emerged in eastern Libya (Cyrenaica), which had been the epicenter of the initial February 2011 revolt against Qaddafi. The initial revolution had no discernible regional agenda. Cyrenaican tribes formed self-defense forces and aligned with the rebel government. But as the revolutionary front shifted to Tripolitania, many easterners feared being overshadowed by the more populous and prosperous western neighbors. The Emirate of Cyrenaica, they pointed out, had voluntarily confederated into the United Kingdom of Libya in 1951 and the original constitution assured Cyrenaica its own army, legislature, and mineral wealth. Now the separatists moved to restore this autonomy by force of deed.[9] Although separatists adopted the moniker of federalism, no division of power with the central government met their demands. Undergirding this political movement was a new quasi-racial political identity stressing the differences between indigenous Cyrenaicans from other Libyans. In Benghazi, separatist militias sparred with Islamist factions supported by elites from Misrata and Tripoli, as well as with radical jihadist tied to al-Qaeda. In the Gulf of Sirte, separatists tried to blackmail the central government through seizure of export oil terminals. The separatists backed with the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) during Libya's second civil war in 2014 and opposed the government in Tripoli. This also led to an alliance of convenience with General Khalifa Haftar, who was waging his own war against Tripoli. Separatists fought alongside Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), helping to expel ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Islamists factions from Cyrenaica. Still, there was a significant gap between Haftar's plan to install a military government for the whole of Libya and the separatist ambition to root-out Tripoli and Misrata's influence in the east.

Spoiler Alerts

Even at the height of civil wars in the Middle East, the international community treated its separatist allies warily. Pronouncement at the UN ritualistically affirmed commitments to unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. As long as the main axis of conflict hinged over who would rule the capital, the question of what to do with the separatists could be deferred. But as wars unwind and the international community tries to help states reconsolidate power, the separatists have become more insistent, making their status acute and obstructive.

With Kurdish Peshmerga serving at the front against ISIS, Barzani became more adamant about holding a referendum on secession. After fighting and dying to combat the jihadist scourge, the international community owed the Kurds a chance at self-determination. Baghdad deemed the referendum illegal. Some Kurds saw the referendum as a ploy to divert attention from the ruling elites corruption and apparent thuggery. Turkey and Iran, two of the KRG's closest regional allies, cautioned against the move. The U.S., too, stuck to its "one Iraq" policy. Nevertheless, the referendum went forward in September 2017. The official results, unsurprisingly, indicated overwhelming support for independence, although enthusiasm was considerably lesser in areas outside of traditional KDP strongholds.[10] Baghdad responded by dispatching troops to Kirkuk and the disputed territories while Iran and Turkey imposed an air and land blockade. The Kurdish leadership fractured, with the PUK preemptively withdrawing their forces. The

KDP, too, stood down after a few days of fighting. On Kurdish television, Barzani blamed the loss on the international community's "betrayal" and the perfidy of his domestic adversaries. Although temporarily chastened, Kurdish nationalist demands remain trenchant and tensions with the central government high.

In Syria, the PYD's Rojava hangs even more precariously. Under the auspices of the Astana Peace Process, Iran, Russia, and Turkey have empowered the Assad regime to reconsolidate territorial control. Idlib stands as the last rebel holdout. Turkey, which has long regarded the PYD as an extension of PKK, has become increasingly aggressive. In winter 2018, the Turkish army and allied Arab and Turkomen militias liquidated the Kurdish enclave in Afrin. The U.S. helped evacuate the PYD remnants to the remaining Rojava canton in the far northeast. However, President Trump's announcement that the US would withdraw from Syria left the remnants of Rojava completely exposed. Turkey vociferously opposed any residual U.S. commitment to the Syrian Kurds. The PYD were forced to turn to Assad and Russia for support.[11] The Kurd's status within Syria's pending constitutional negotiations is uncertain, but the prospects for renewed violence in Rojava is considerable.

Separatists defy efforts to pacify the Middle East by repairing states.

In Libya, nearly continual fighting against Islamists groups in Benghazi, Derna, and the Gulf of Sirte exhausted the separatist militias between 2014 and 2017. Haftar evinces little sympathy for the separatist agenda and has set out to replace his erstwhile allies with the more professional, better equipped, and loyal LNA. Military and financial support from the UAE, Egypt, and Russia allowed Haftar to extend his dominance in the east and to gain support from Salafi militias. U.S. diplomacy and encouragement further provided the green light for Haftar's spring 2019 assault on Tripoli.[12] Contrary to the expectation of a quick victory, however, the LNA and its allies are bogged down in the fight against the Tripoli government and its network of militias. The more resources Haftar expends to get to Tripoli, the more opportunity separatists have to regroup and reassert themselves. Even if Haftar successfully captures and consolidates power in the capital, separatist resistance could soon reemerge in the east.

The UN mediation between the Hadi government and the Houthis drew harsh criticism from Yemen's southern separatism. Although horrifically bloody, the Houthi conflict is in some respects the most tractable of Yemen's troubles. The Houthis largely share the international community's vision of a single, unified Yemeni state. With Hadi in exile, the Houthis tried to keep the central bank and other state institutions operational for the whole of Yemen. The separatists, in contrast, declared themselves as a different nation from northern Yemenis and sought to sever ties to the Yemeni state entirely. The STC denounced the negotiations for ignoring southern issues and reiterated calls for secession.[13] Houthi leaders, in turn, accuse the UAE and STC of trying to scuttle the agreement.[14] The Saudis still reject secession and back a rival southern faction that is more conciliary toward Hadi, opening up a rift with the UAE. Clashes between the STC and the Hadi government forces are escalating, which has allowed Houthis to gain military moment.[15] Yemeni separatists are significant power brokers, even as the international community refuses to discuss their grievances.

Conclusion

Separatists defy efforts to pacify the Middle East by repairing states. Separatists are not interested in entering the fold of existing sovereign states. On the contrary, they intrinsically dispute the legitimacy of these states and believe they earned the right to self-determination within adjusted territorial boundaries. Federalism is a common response to such centrifugal pressure. Constitutional arrangements granting broad political, communal, and social autonomy might assuage moderates within the separatist camp. For example, when the PUK demurred from Barzani's separatist gambit, they were able to fall back on Iraq's pre-existing federalist structure. Yet such schemes are rare in the Middle East.[16] To many, Iraq is not a model but a cautionary tale. Moreover, federalism is still only a variation on the state-building theme. Paradoxically, a strong and reliable state is a prerequisite to enacting federalist devolution.[17] The path to attaining such a state, however, is inherently uncertain, violent, and often quixotic.[18] Already the signs from reconstruction efforts in war-scarred Syria and Iraq are grim. Instead of offering modes of political reconciliation and economic integration, these initiatives have heightened economic and political inequalities and amount to a kind of peace of the victors.[19] Outside interference further distorts the process, making state less accountable and more prone to repression. This sets the stage for another round of fighting and makes the need to deal with separatist demands for new states and new borders all the more salient.

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The Development of Uyghur Ethnic Nationalism and the Transition of Xinjiang Policies

Joe Cho-Han Hsiung

The ongoing conflict in Xinjiang, a western province in China, is one of ethnic nationalism and statehood. The content of Uyghur ethnic nationalism has developed through time and its interaction with Chinese government should be emphasized. The increasing conflict and hatred between Han Chinese and Uyghur people have accumulated under a series of Chinese government's Xinjiang policies, and the solution to these issues should be re-considered and changed.

1. Origins of Uyghur Ethnic Nationalism

In 1955, Xinjiang, the territory in north-western China which used to be the Second East Turkestan Republic, officially became a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and was designated as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). However, distinctive internal factors made ruling XUAR extremely difficult for the PRC and cultivated ethnic nationalism in Xinjiang.

These internal factors comprise of cultural differences such as the Islamic religion and a distinct language which caused Uyghurs to regard themselves as separate from the Han Chinese.[1] These dynamics became more significant due to the greater official tolerance for the revival of Islam and Uyghur culture after the Cultural Revolution.[2] For example, while in the 1970s there were only 392 mosques across the region, by the end of 1981, there were 4,700 mosques.[3] The number of Islamic schools also significantly increased in the 1980s.[4]

Developments of Islamic culture and religion became "an ideology competing Marxism" and thus a crucial factor of Uyghurs' political mobilizations, which threatened the stability of the Chinese regime.[5] Further, Xinjiang did not benefit from the economic reforms targeting the rest of the country, and its economy did not transform into a market-oriented economic structure. Rather, it remained