



**YFPF MIDDLE EAST DISCUSSION GROUP  
PRESENTS**

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**THE NEXT GENERATION OF  
MIDDLE EAST LEADERSHIP:  
OUTLOOK, CHALLENGES,  
OPPORTUNITIES**

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*The views expressed herein are the views and opinions of the coordinators and contributors, and do not reflect or represent the views of any of the organizations with which they are affiliated.*

## INTRODUCTION

The next generation of leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) will face new challenges and lead in new ways. In the wake of the 2011 uprisings, Arab publics demanded more accountability but governments have been slow to adapt. Violent extremism from groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL) did not capture majority support in any MENA country but remains a serious challenge to those who live in the region. Conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen caused millions of casualties and created national challenges that will last at least a generation. It will fall to the next generation of leaders in government, civil society, business, and technology to chart a course forward for the region's countries.

Next generation challenges require a next generation perspective. YPFP's Middle East Discussion Group (MEDG) is a carefully chosen cluster of highly qualified NextGen MENA professionals. As entry and mid-level analysts, our members have a deep and granular knowledge of their areas of specialization. This knowledge comes not only through the assessment and analysis of raw data, but through unprecedented global connectivity. Social media provides instant access to our NextGen peers in the region, allowing us to see politics through their eyes. Whether over Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, or other platforms, our analysts are uniquely equipped to interact with our peers in the region. These platforms also provide connectivity across social and geographic boundaries. It is important to keep in mind that the next generation of MENA leaders are already connected to peers across the MENA region and in the West. These connections influence how this new generation understands its regional posture in a global context.

Our NextGen MENA analysts also take advantage of unprecedented opportunities to study the region's languages. Nearly all MEDG members have formal language training in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Hebrew, and all have spent extended time in the MENA region. Our analyses thus draw upon a wider range of primary sources and run a lower risk of losing important details in translation. It also enables us to maintain day-to-day relationships with our NextGen peers in the region in their native languages.

The advantages of this unique perspective are reflected in the following report. Each of the report's seven regional and country sections are written by analysts who work on them professionally and, in most cases, have worked, studied, or lived there as well. Each section introduces the region's next generation of leaders and describes what challenges these leaders will face. The report is intended as an overview of these challenges across the MENA region. It offers an innovative and important perspective to those interested in what the coming years may bring in an increasingly complex region.

It is my pleasure to present this report by the Middle East Discussion Group.

Scott Weiner  
Chair, Middle East Discussion Group  
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Six years after the Arab Spring uprisings, youth in North Africa face an uncertain future. The key issues that led to the uprisings—unemployment, economic inequality, and closed political systems—remain un-addressed. Youth also face growing cross-border threats such as migration, smuggling, and terrorism, which threaten to weaken both state and private institutions further.

### *Service Provision Failures in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia*

A common grievance for youth in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia is the failure of formal political systems to deliver on needed socioeconomic improvements. As a result, youth participate less in formal political institutions, which remain dominated by the entrenched elite.

In Algeria, the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN), which led the movement for the country's independence, remains the strongest political force. However, there are signs that the FLN is weakening. The economy has been hit hard by low oil prices, forcing the government to enact austerity measures.<sup>1</sup> While the FLN maintained a plurality of seats in the most recent parliamentary elections, it failed to secure a majority. Voter turnout was only 38 percent, which was a blow to the FLN's campaign to encourage turnout by linking participation to the future stability of the country. Moreover, the FLN appears to lack a plan of succession for ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Meanwhile, Algerian youth, facing an unemployment rate of 30 percent, have limited outlets for formal political expression. Opposition parties are weak and cycle between participation and boycotts in national elections. Youth also lack informal outlets for expression such as civil society.<sup>2</sup> The country's state of emergency (from 1992 to 2011) banned associations and any initiative since then has required administrative authorization.

In Tunisia, youth make up 60 percent of the population and bear the brunt of the country's economic stagnation. Youth unemployment hovers close to 40 percent. Successive post-revolutionary governments, whether dominated by Islamists from Ennahda or old-guard figures in the current ruling Nidaa Tounes party, failed to address the socioeconomic grievances that led to the 2011 revolution. As a result, many young Tunisians lost faith in formal participatory politics. They engage instead through informal avenues by joining civil society organizations or participating in protests.<sup>3</sup> Recent protests in marginalized regions reflect the government's failure to address persistent inequalities.<sup>4</sup> The decision to abstain from formal politics poses a threat to the country's ongoing political transition. As in Algeria, the Tunisian ruling party is based around a cult of personality of the presidency; the future of Nidaa Tounes after President Beji Caid Essebsi is markedly uncertain.

Moroccan youth remain deeply divided politically and economically, mirroring the sharp inequality that persists in the country. While the political system is relatively open, it is divided between liberals and

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<sup>1</sup> Amine Kadi, "Baisse des revenus pétroliers : l'Algérie tarde à resserrer ses dépenses," *La Croix*, December 20, 2015. (French).

<sup>2</sup> Laurent De Saint Perier, "Algérie : pourquoi la société civile est-elle si discrète?" *Jeune Afrique*, May 16, 2017. (French).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Yerkes, "Young People are Staying Away From Tunisian Politics - Here's Why," *Brookings* (Markaz Blog), March 20, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Bouazza ben Bouazza, "Tunisian Vendor's Immolation Echoes Growing Desperation," *Washington Post*, May 16, 2017.

Islamists. King Mohammed VI expressed support for liberals; the youngest minister of the newly appointed government is part of a new generation of Moroccan liberals. The Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) meanwhile pursues a “step-by-step” strategy of appointing its young supporters as ministers. However, Morocco faces a dramatically low civic engagement rate among its youth.<sup>5</sup> Economic despair among the younger population remains the norm, and 50 percent of the country’s economy is informal. Still, the future for Moroccan youth appears brighter than their counterparts in Algeria or Tunisia, where the future of the political systems is more uncertain.

### *Political Divisiveness in Libya*

Libya’s 2011 revolution launched the country into a brutal conflict. Muammar Qaddafi’s legacy left Libya divided; as a result of deep divisions and grievances in the wake of the 2011 revolution, the population segmented along tribal and local lines. Meanwhile, the international community, which launched an intervention in 2011 ostensibly to protect civilians, failed to determine a credible strategy to stabilize Libya in the post-Qaddafi era.

Today, Libya is increasingly divided along tribal lines and local loyalties. Militia rule is the de facto law of the land. Militias and even radical transnational groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and ISIL offer opportunities for youth that the government cannot provide, such as jobs (youth unemployment is almost 50 percent), salaries, and crucially, a sense of purpose. One possible bright spot is that while the country may face major national-level cleavages, Libyans retain high confidence in their local councils.<sup>6</sup> Youth should be encouraged to engage with and participate in these councils. However, in the absence of stability and or a credible national reconciliation effort to address widespread post-revolution grievances, polarization is likely to perpetuate among all of Libyan society, not just among youth.

Despite the differing political systems of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya, youth in these North African countries face many of the same challenges. The chief obstacle—a lack of economic opportunity—mirrors the major grievance that ignited protests in 2011. In order to arrest migration outflows, smuggling, and growing criminal activity - developments that destabilize the whole of Africa and Europe - the region requires an empowered and engaged generation of youth. However, the political systems appear ill-equipped or unable to deliver socioeconomic improvements that will gain the confidence and inspire the participation of youth.

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<sup>5</sup> Mikael Eriksson, “Who put the ‘Post’ in the Post-Arab Spring? - Towards a Fresh Narrative for North Africa,” *The Nordic Africa Institute Policy*, Note 2 (March 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Libya Poll: High Confidence in Legitimacy of Local Councils, Despite Poor Outreach by Local Governments,” *International Republican Institute*, November 9, 2016.

The 2011 revolution in Egypt that toppled President Hosni Mubarak was a moment of triumph for many Egyptians, in particular, Egyptian youth. The mobilization and activism of young Egyptians in the streets and on social media proved critical to Mubarak's ouster. While the youth movement played a large role in the revolution, it never meaningfully entered the mainstream of opposition politics. Rather, the movement that saw its heyday during those eighteen days quickly proved to be disjointed and lacked any clear leadership or defined agenda.

Egypt's youth movement focused on popular mobilization rather than structured leadership. This was advantageous; it allowed the movement to engage with different constituencies participating in the widespread protests. However, it proved only useful in the short term. The youth had little political experience and the larger liberal movement failed to coalesce around a shared platform or unity figure. As a result, liberals performed poorly in the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections and the 2012 presidential election, which resulted in the election of the Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohamed Morsi. It also became clear that while the revolution removed Mubarak, it did not rid the country of the entrenched power of the military. The credibility of the revolutionary movement was further damaged in 2013. Many Egyptians, including the revolutionary Tamarod movement, supported the military in its ouster of former President Morsi, and the military capitalized on that support in its subsequent crackdown on Egyptian society.

### *Government Crackdowns*

Since 2013, over 40,000 Egyptians, including thousands of youth activists, have been jailed. Rights groups claim that there are over 60,000 political prisoners in jail. The regime cracked down on demonstrations, protests, and other expressions of free speech; it views social media activism as a threat to stability, and *de facto* banned political activism on university campuses. Imprisoned youths face deplorable conditions, and are increasingly susceptible to radicalization and recruitment into terrorist organizations. Several insurgent groups emerged, such as the Revolutionary Punishment and a local Islamic State affiliate, Wilayat Sinai, as well as reported radicalized factions within the Muslim Brotherhood. The rise of these groups, in addition to the lack of other opportunities, demonstrates the limited options facing aggrieved youth.

The future looks bleak for Egypt's youth. Frustration with the current state of affairs—worsened by a widespread sense of aimlessness—significantly increased under the Sisi regime, which has worked to stamp out any expressions of dissent since coming to power in 2014. Egypt's grim economic reality only worsens the situation for youth. Official unemployment is around 12 percent, while youth unemployment is above 40 percent. Inflation skyrocketed following the floating of the Egyptian pound in November 2016 and will not likely fall significantly anytime soon. Unsurprisingly, many Egyptian youth choose to migrate in hopes of finding a better future. About 66 percent of Egyptian migrants, the vast majority of whom are male, fall between the ages of 25 and 44.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "CAPMAS Launches the EGYPT-HIMS Findings With the Support of IOM, Other Donors," *International Organization for Migration*, January 18, 2016.

### *Future Challenges For Egypt's Young Activists*

Over the medium to long term, youth seeking to gain influence or authority have little choice but to do so through the state system. One avenue for change could be through the Egyptian military: the military is the glue that has kept the country together since the times of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers, and it remains the most powerful institution within Egypt. Because the military remains so embedded in Egypt's structure of authority and society, short-term change through political means alone is unlikely. However, in the longer term, the military could be slowly influenced by the next generation of soldiers who will enter compulsory service, some of whom may have actively participated in demonstrations in Tahrir Square and other sites across the country that ousted Mubarak. Still, some of those young men who protested in 2011 refused to serve in the military and instead actively sought to receive the status of conscientious objectors. Many of them dismiss the possibility of changing this powerful institution that solidified its hold over the state in recent decades. And it remains critical to recognize the significance of the 2011 revolution, which demonstrated the ability of young people to communicate and organize on a mass scale.

The lessons of the ultimate failures of the revolutionary and liberal movements offer guidance for youth to organize and coordinate efforts to address problems within the state and its major institutions from inside. While it is inevitable that there will be many hurdles, it is possible that educated youth who enter the officer corps may be able to slowly steer the military away from repression and in a direction that is more cohesive to democratic rule.

The Israeli Palestinian conflict has created a steadily deteriorating status quo for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Israelis continue to face threats from car rammings, stabbings, rocket attacks on civilian targets, as well as recurring military conflict against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Furthermore, the passage of a spate of UN resolutions on the status of Jerusalem contributed to Israel's feeling of international isolation and delegitimization. At the same time, Palestinians face continuing Israeli military control that restricts their freedom of movement, contributes to the segmentation of West Bank communities, stifles economic growth, and inhibits national autonomy. An extensive network of settlements and outposts also impose hardship on neighboring Palestinian communities. While the Palestinian Authority held its first elections in fifteen years in May 2017, representative governance remains elusive. In Gaza, Israeli and Egyptian restrictions on the import of basic goods has created severe humanitarian challenges. As of 2016, tens of thousands of Gazans remained displaced following the 2014 Gaza war, 96 percent of the water was unsafe for drinking, and youth unemployment reached 60 percent.<sup>8</sup>

This status quo is unsustainable. "The two-state solution is dead" is accepted wisdom in foreign policy circles, but it fails to account for the unsustainable lack of Israeli security and Palestinian rights. The next generation of leaders on the Israeli and Palestinian sides will be motivated by a desire to end what is quickly turning into a mutually harmful stalemate. Israelis and Palestinians do not suffer from a so-called "failure of leadership," but rather the lack of a politically viable alternative to the status quo.

#### *Debates over Israel's Future in the West Bank*

Israel's politics has shifted steadily to the right since the end of the second intifada. This shift represents fear but not cynicism. In 2011, a series of mass protests throughout the country showed the Israeli appetite for political change.<sup>9</sup> It also forged a generation of young (though not necessarily powerful) activists, including leftist parliamentarians like Stav Shaffir. At the same time, young right-wing politicians like Naftali Bennett captured Israeli political momentum and will remain important long-term players. Prime Minister Netanyahu's retirement from politics will be a critical moment in Israeli history. It will entail a struggle for power between the far right whose solution to the conflict is to annex the West Bank and give second-class citizenship to Palestinians, and a pragmatic alternative constituency that works actively toward a two-state solution. The former is likely to lead to the further international isolation of Israel, exacerbated tensions with the United States, and restrictions on the fundamentally democratic character of Israel as enshrined in its Declaration of Independence and Basic Laws. The latter allows no guarantee of success, but would represent the best strategy for granting Israelis the basic security they deserve while setting the groundwork for stronger regional integration and economic development.

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<sup>8</sup> "Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee," *Office of the United National Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process*, 18-19 September 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Isabel Kershner, "Summer of Protest in Israel Peaks with 400,000 in City Streets," *New York Times*, September 3, 2011.

## *A Generational Struggle for Palestinian Leadership*

Palestinian politics shifted from institutional actors to the grassroots level following the end of the second intifada. President Mahmoud Abbas maintains little popularity among Palestinians. Two-thirds say they support his resignation.<sup>10</sup> Increasingly, grassroots initiatives like the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement gain traction in Palestinian territories and in the Palestinian diaspora. The leaders of this movement will comprise one element of future Palestinian leadership, the other element, however, may consist of a more militant faction frustrated by decades of political stagnation. Which faction will ultimately triumph is a function of whether the status quo stabilizes or continues to worsen, especially following the next Gaza war. A stable status quo would produce more support for BDS, while consistent deterioration risks exacerbating popular desperation for rapid change and acceptance of a strategy of violence.

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<sup>10</sup> Khaled Elgindy, “Abbas and Trump: The Perils of ‘Fake it ‘til you make It,’” *Brookings Institution*, May 5, 2017.

As the six-year civil war in Syria worsens, Lebanon enters a new post-conflict era in which the next generation leaders may gain seats. After multiple failed attempts, Lebanon's cabinet agreed on a new electoral system in June 2017. The proposed law would replace Lebanon's outdated 1960 "winner takes all" or majoritarian voting system with a hybrid proportional voting system that requires voters to not only choose a preferred list but also indicate a candidate preference on the list. The law has the potential to incrementally end an era of sectarian-based voting, increase competition, and open avenues for a new and more engaged political class to emerge. In Syria, on the other hand, there is no clear path forward. In 2011, Bashar al Assad's regime cracked down on a peaceful movement turning it into a deadly sectarian conflict that has resulted in over 500,000 deaths, the emergence of ISIL, and a rush by outside actors to expand their spheres of influence in the country. Today, Gulf-sponsored militant organizations, Russian airplanes, and Iranian-led militias terrorize the population. With the United States-led advance on Raqqa, Russian and Iranian backed regime advances on opposition territory, and the stymied progress towards a political solution, questions remain over the future of opposition forces, the future of the Assad regime, and what comes after the defeat of ISIL in eastern Syria.

### *Enabling Youth Protest Through Social Media*

Since the 2011 revolutions that erupted in the MENA region, youth in Syria and Lebanon have found ways to challenge government actions, demand accountability, and question the legitimacy of terrorist groups claiming to champion Islam through social media. The exponential growth of social media platforms combined with the growth of smartphones provides spaces for youth to express themselves, organize, and spread information unlike any time before.<sup>11</sup> After youth in Deraa spray-painted "the people want the downfall of the regime" on school walls and were detained and tortured by the regime, peaceful demonstrations against the Assad regime in support of the "Children of Deraa" spread throughout social media leading to mass protests across Syria.<sup>12</sup> In Lebanon, youth took advantage of social media to demand government accountability. In August 2015, youth activists, disgusted by trash piling on streets and tired of self-aggrandizing politicians, organized protests in Solidere Square. Taking advantage of new spaces offered through social media they formed a #YouStink Campaign demanding a government response to the garbage crisis, which was delayed by months due to sectarian infighting. The campaign captured built up frustration with government, emanating from a presidential vacuum and parliament's decision to self-extend itself twice between 2013 and 2017 without holding elections. While protests eventually abated, the #YouStink movement energized youth leaders to challenge Lebanon's longstanding patronage-based "zaim" system, which dates back to Lebanon's 1975 civil war.

Following the protests, a plethora of civil society movements emerged. These included *Madinati*, a group of next generation leaders from various sectarian backgrounds seeking to challenge traditional political parties in May 2016 municipal elections.<sup>13</sup> In Beirut, *Madinati* formed an election list, campaigned on the notion of putting Lebanese and their well-being first, and spread their comprehensive strategy for improving Beirut over social media. *Madinati* succeeded to win 40 percent of the vote against a list supported by

<sup>11</sup> Ami Sedghi, "Facebook: 10 Years of social networking in numbers," *The Guardian*, February 4, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Lava Selo, Rima Marrouch and Sean Carberry, "Revisiting The Spark That Kindled The Syrian Uprising," *National Public Radio*, March 16, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> "Beirut Madinati," *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, July 22, 2016.

mainstream parties. Its success shocked many, and continued when another independent list beat traditional parties in the 2017 Beirut Syndicate elections. With a hybrid proportional electoral law, which lowers the number of votes needed to win a seat, and 500,000 newly eligible voters—mainly youth—these new movements pose a real challenge to mainstream parties and will likely win seats in 2018 parliamentary elections. Already, these movements are forcing traditional parties and politicians to become more active, responsive and accountable to citizens with the risk of losing voters. As civil war memories fade, and *zaims* age, youth are seizing opportunities to govern in ways that cross sectarian boundaries and focus on improving the everyday lives of citizens.

### *Leading in the Shadow of Violence in Syria*

Unlike Lebanon, Syria is years from overcoming conflict. Syrian youth, suffering from the results of civil war—death, chaos, and the lack of education and services—will be the generation that needs to overcome the trauma of civil war to create intercommunal reconciliation and peace. As profound as the conflict's impact on this generation—especially for refugees who often lack educational opportunities—many have found their voices amidst the conflict, showing a determination to fight for their country. Under Bashar and Hafez al Assad, freedom of speech, along with civil and political activism were non-existent; those challenging the regime faced repercussions from the brutal security services.

Youth lucky to escape the regime and grip of extremist groups took to documenting human rights abuses, exposing atrocities, and even more recently, fighting against ISIL through social media platforms. Groups like “Raqqah is Being Slaughtered Silently” (RBSS) wage a social media campaign against ISIL. They use footage and information gathered from inside Raqqah to expose ISIL's atrocities, hypocrisies, and to challenge their legitimacy.<sup>14</sup> Their success at gaining international recognition for their dangerous work placed them on ISIL's hit list; yet despite threats and losing members at the hands of ISIL, they remain determined to fight until Raqqah is freed from terrorists. Others groups have devoted time to developing transitional justice systems for a post-conflict Syria. However, those not lucky enough to escape have faced tougher decisions. Some dropped their weapons and joined groups like the White Helmets, a volunteer group responding to regime attacks by helping rescue civilians and bring them to medical facilities.

Moving forward, youth in Lebanon have a unique opportunity to capture seats in upcoming elections with a new electoral law. Once captured, these movements will likely experience difficulty forming coalitions and passing bills. The next challenge for them will be understanding how to bring about change in government. They should not let challenges hurt their efforts. Change takes time but with perseverance and the ability to overcome failure, the next generation can lead Lebanon into a new direction. In Syria, it will be those willing to stand up to regime brutality and against radical ideologies, along with those that show an effort to promote intercommunal reconciliation, that will lead Syria into a new era. Groups like the White Helmets and RBSS are examples of such entities. With positive reputations among citizens for their dedication to helping civilians, they are positioned to lead local and regional councils that emerge post-conflict, and offer solutions to pressing issues such as developing justice systems.

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<sup>14</sup> David Remnick, “Telling the Truth About ISIS and Raqqah,” *The New Yorker*, November 22, 2015.

The occupation of the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant nears its end with the Iraqi Army, supported by myriad forces, battling to displace the last of the ISIL fighters from the Old City in Mosul. The narrow alleyways and building density intensifies the fighting, while the large civilian population still in the city prohibits the effective use of airstrikes and artillery. Despite these hurdles, the Iraqi Army is likely to retake Mosul in the near future from the remaining ISIL fighters, estimated to be between a few hundred and 1,000.<sup>15</sup> The next generation of Iraqi leaders, however, will face challenges that go beyond the liberation of Mosul.

ISIL surged into Anbar Province in 2014, using social media to meet its recruitment needs. Weapons consolidated from the spoils of the ongoing civil war in neighboring Syria aided the group in its capture of Ramadi and Fallujah in January of that year. By June 2014, ISIL forces entered Mosul with little to no resistance. Much of the Iraqi security forces abandoned their posts and fled for reasons including incompetence, poor leadership, lack of equipment, and fear.<sup>16</sup>

ISIL's rapid rise to power and territorial gain was aided by the belief of Sunni residents in Anbar Province that the government in Baghdad was consolidating power for the Shia of Iraq. Exacerbated by the government's blatant promotion of Shia loyalists within the Iraqi civil service, police forces, and military leadership, sectarian strife widened. Fearing disloyalty, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki replaced Kurdish and Sunni leaders with loyal Shia to lead the army divisions in Mosul.<sup>17</sup> This accelerated the breakdown of the Iraqi Army's capabilities after years of careful tutelage under American advisors and trainers. In the end, ISIL took Mosul, and slaughtered thousands of soldiers, policemen, and civilians judged as "un-Islamic."

#### *Future Security Challenges in Mosul*

The next generation of Iraqi leaders will need to make crucial decisions for the future of Mosul and Anbar Province in order to stave off further political strife. Security must be the Iraqi Army's first priority. There will need to be security forces to maintain order while defending the civilian populace against ISIL. Remnants of the group are unlikely to be completely neutralized and will remain active in the city. The government must pay careful attention to the security force demographics in order to avoid the cyclical sectarian strife that has plagued Iraq throughout its recent history. The Population Mobilization Forces (PMF)—a conglomerate of Shia militias—will be viewed by the Sunni majority population as an occupying force.<sup>18</sup> While some argue that the Shia forces do not have discriminatory practices in Mosul, others have accused the PMFs of displacing Sunnis in order to make Shia "safe havens," which further exacerbates tensions.<sup>19</sup> The Kurdish Peshmerga would offer a more balanced option, yet the Iraqi government would never allow this for fear that the Kurds would attempt to consolidate territory to build a future

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<sup>15</sup> Jack Moore, "The Final Push for Mosul: 'Matter of Time' Until ISIS Falls in Iraq's Second City," *Newsweek*, May 30, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Chulov, "Isis insurgents seize control of Iraqi city of Mosul," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ned Parker, Isabel Coles, and Raheem Salman, "Special Report: How Mosul fell - An Iraqi general disputes Baghdad's story," *Reuters*, October 14, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Priyanka Boghani, "Iraq's Shia Militias: The Double-Edged Sword Against ISIS," *PBS Frontline*, March 21, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Liz Sly, "ISIS: A Catastrophe for Sunnis," *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2016.

independent Kurdistan. In the interim, the Iraqi Army could support local forces as the latter rebuild their resources in order to maintain security while avoiding the semblance of a foreign military occupation.

### *Supporting Local Governance*

The next generation of Iraqi leaders will also need to support and strengthen local governance. National government officials must work to determine which local leaders, tribal or political, are best suited to rebuild their local governments. While vetting will be important, care must be taken to ensure that it does not have the appearance of national government interference. Mosul's leaders must be allowed to run Mosul, as the Baghdad government is still viewed as an adversary, despite al-Maliki's departure.

### *Rebuilding Infrastructure*

The Iraqi Army must support the Mosul government's effort to rebuild and reinforce the city's critical infrastructures. This is required in order to facilitate basic services and attempt to recreate a semblance of normality after a hellish occupation. Without this service provision, the next generation of Iraqis may eventually look to satisfy their basic needs from other sources, such as extremist organizations. Prioritizing Mosul's restructuring offers a check against factions that will oppose the Baghdad government's involvement. If priorities are not determined with the goal of improving stability and social welfare, another insurgency, fueled by the political desire of autonomy from Baghdad, could materialize.

Mosul's residents faced countless horrors during ISIL's occupation of Mosul. The youth in particular were confronted with additional hurdles. Children were put through the "education" program set up by ISIL which sought to indoctrinate and skew their worldview from an early age. Fighting-age males were often coerced into joining the ranks of ISIL fighters. Young women faced forced marriages and sexual slavery. Successfully addressing these atrocities and situations will require leadership from young people in order to best facilitate the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Mosul into the future. Projects such as re-institutionalizing education, paired with access to public goods, could provide a strong defense against further extremist influences. Mosul cannot be put back together without the power and influence of the city's youth, and therefore their consistent and dedicated participation in rebuilding remains critical.

The next generation of leaders have already started replacing their older counterparts in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. In Saudi Arabia, thirty-one-year-old Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman has become one of the most important figures in the country. In Qatar, thirty-six-year-old Tamim Ben Hamad Al Thani recently became the country's Emir, presenting a newer, younger face as the country's leader. This next generation of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders will face three broad challenges: 1) populations that increasingly demand greater freedom and political representation; 2) economic diversification away from hydrocarbons and the development of the private sector; and 3) the threat of extremism and regional instability. How these leaders address these challenges will shape the future of the GCC region, and have significant impacts for the global economy and its stability.

#### *The Desire for Greater Freedoms and Political Representation*

In many Arabian Peninsula countries it is nearly impossible for regular citizens to participate in the political arena outside of largely symbolic *majales* (councils). Citizens have little say in the direction of their countries and do not have the ability to influence political and economic decision-making in any significant capacity. This norm will change as the region's populations gain greater access to information and stronger connectivity through social media and the Internet. The Arabian Peninsula's young populations are calling for improved governance, more representation, and greater freedoms—especially as governments, including Saudi Arabia, decrease subsidies on fuel and lower government salaries during a time of lower oil prices and state revenues. In response to these demands, the region's governments have largely resorted to strengthening national identity and emphasizing individual responsibility for national development. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for example, the *Watani* program is designed to strengthen national identity by creating a more forward-looking sentiment in the national culture and promoting engagement with the outside world.

#### *Economic Diversification*

The greatest challenge facing GCC countries is how to diversify their economies away from oil and increase private sector contribution to the national economy. Some, including the UAE, Bahrain, and to a lesser extent, Oman, found success in creating flourishing private sectors with strong financial and tourism sectors. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, however, rely increasingly on oil and gas sales.

Mohammad Bin Salman launched the effort to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy and strengthen the private sector with "Vision 2030," a set of national development goals that contain a large emphasis on privatizing state-owned enterprises, increasing domestic manufacturing, and bolstering the private sector, in addition to creating the infrastructure necessary for the country to become a "regional hub" for international trade and commerce. Other countries in the region, including Bahrain and Qatar, also published "Vision 2030" development plans. Regional economic integration, however, will require better cooperation. The region's countries will need to reconcile differences in order to fully take advantage of opportunities for regional economic growth while avoiding scenarios such as the recent isolation of Qatar.

### *Combating Extremism and Regional Instability*

The fight against terrorism rages on in the Arabian Peninsula. GCC countries, especially the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, are currently engaged in fighting the Houthi rebels and al Qaeda in Yemen, while supporting the United States and other countries in the fight against ISIL throughout the MENA region. Young GCC leaders understand the importance of rooting out terrorism and its ideological draw to some sections of the region's populations. In the UAE, for example, the sons of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan joined the military and are active participants in the war in Yemen.

The Gulf States will continue to evolve at a fast pace, and newer, more youthful leadership will help to push each country in the right direction. Even in countries like Bahrain and Oman, where the countries' leaders are of old age—sixty-seven and seventy-six years old, respectively—leaders will be unable to resist the demands of younger citizens: almost half of the region's population is under twenty-five years old. In addition to national development plans and promoting a strong national identity amongst their populations, GCC governments must also continue to push for greater involvement of young leaders from different parts of their populations to participate in politics and decision-making.

The results of the Iranian presidential election in May 2017 represent a great opportunity for Iranian youth: President Hassan Rouhani won re-election with a stunning 57 percent of the total vote and by carrying over 70 percent of voters aged 18-45.<sup>20</sup> His dedication to improving civil society, including negotiating economic sanction relief in the landmark nuclear deal, along with pledges for reform, made him more popular among the young population, where two-thirds of Iranians are aged 35 or under. Yet Rouhani's win was as much a signal from Iranian voters on the necessity to reform as it was a referendum against his primary opponent, Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-liner candidate running a populist campaign. Iranian youth will be shaped by the next four years of Rouhani's leadership, which will in turn dictate where the Islamic Republic's next generation of leaders move on international relations and democracy. An empowered youth population could bring more reform, an opening to the West, and an expansion of democracy. However, much of this hinges on the fate of the economy and US sanctions relief under President Donald Trump.

#### *The Nuclear Deal Under President Rouhani*

After Rouhani won the 2013 Iranian presidential election, experts touted the possibility of change, including a potential thaw in US-Iranian relations. President Trump's victory in the 2016 US election threatens to reinforce the freeze, despite Rouhani's landslide 2017 win. In a speech broadcast on state television after the election, Rouhani said,

“[T]oday, the world is well aware that the Iranian nation has chosen the path of interaction with the world, a path which is distant from extremism and violence. Our nation seeks to live in peace and friendship with the world but, in the meantime, does not want to accept any humiliation or threat. This is the most important message that our nation expects to be heard clearly by all governments, neighbors, and especially world powers.”<sup>21</sup>

Rouhani's rhetoric clearly indicates his intention to open up Iran, albeit slowly at first. In doing so, he is reaching directly to the great powers of the world, reminding their leaders that Iran will still be a forceful player on the global stage, despite a greater willingness to work together.

#### *The Nuclear Deal Under President Trump*

President Trump's rhetoric on Iran and the nuclear deal is inconsistent. During his first official international trip to the Middle East, he announced broad support for Saudi Arabia, a policy that appears to go “all in” on the US-Saudi alliance at Iran's expense. The Trump administration's signals indicate a clear commitment to national security via proxy in the Middle East: hold up the least objectionable party to strengthen defenses against the most objectionable enemy. Moreover, the administration's loyalty to Saudi Arabia indicates a preference in the Islamic sectarian divide, shunting aside Shia-majority countries, including Iran and Syria. As such, US support for Saudi Arabia adds space to the divide, making it starker.

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<sup>20</sup> Poll conducted by International Perspectives for Public Opinion, May 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Hassan Rouhani. “Rouhani Victory Speech,” US Institute for Peace, May 22, 2017.

President Trump recently backtracked on a campaign promise to end the Iranian nuclear deal, however. As of this writing, his administration said it will uphold the deal, including sanctions relief, but with a full internal review of the agreement.<sup>22</sup> The administration's waffling tends to undermine international faith in Trump's rhetoric and promises. Although the United States currently stands with the plan, and the sanctions relief, it is no longer guaranteed.

The commitment to the nuclear deal may be the keystone to continued youth empowerment. Prior to the nuclear deal in 2015, the World Bank released a report which suggested that Iran would receive a \$56 billion windfall, which could be used to revive oil production and domestic industries, and alleviate widespread unemployment.<sup>23</sup> Greater economic opportunities only improve young people's prospects, ensuring that many members of the next generation will remain in the country. Retention is critical for future innovation and investment, and gives space for political growth. However, a change in the Trump administration's commitment to the nuclear deal could derail this process: a reversal in sanctions relief will likely cause many youth to leave Iran in search of a better economic opportunities. It will also fan anti-Western and anti-US sentiment, and break any opportunity to thaw relations. The young Iranian population will bear the brunt of any economic change. The next generation of leaders will be made from where the Iranian economy and civil society moves in the coming four years. A more open society will only serve to benefit US interests in its national security and in the power balance in the Middle East.

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Wadman, "Trump administration grudgingly faces reality on the Iran nuclear deal," *The Washington Post*, April 19, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Mufson, "What ending sanctions on Iran will mean for the country's economy," *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2015.



# YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN FOREIGN POLICY