The Middle Eastern system of States: a systemic view of contemporary trends and issues

Istanbul, 3 October 2019

Dr. Alessandro Quarenghi, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

Outline

1. The Middle East

2. The Middle East in the 21st Century

3. The Middle East Today

1. The Middle East

1. A SYSTEM OF STATES
2. A MULTIPOLAR BALANCE OF POWER ORDER
   - Spheres of influence and temporary alliances
   - Conflict
3. HETEROGENEOUS
4. IMPOSSIBLE HEGEMONY
   - Low salience of sovereignty
5. OPEN TOWARDS THE INSIDE
   - External influence
   - Unusual external balancing
6. RESILIENT AUTHORITARIANISM
   - Irrational behaviour: ideology and policy-making

A

BADLY-WORKING

BALANCE

OF

POWER

2. The Middle East in the 21st Century

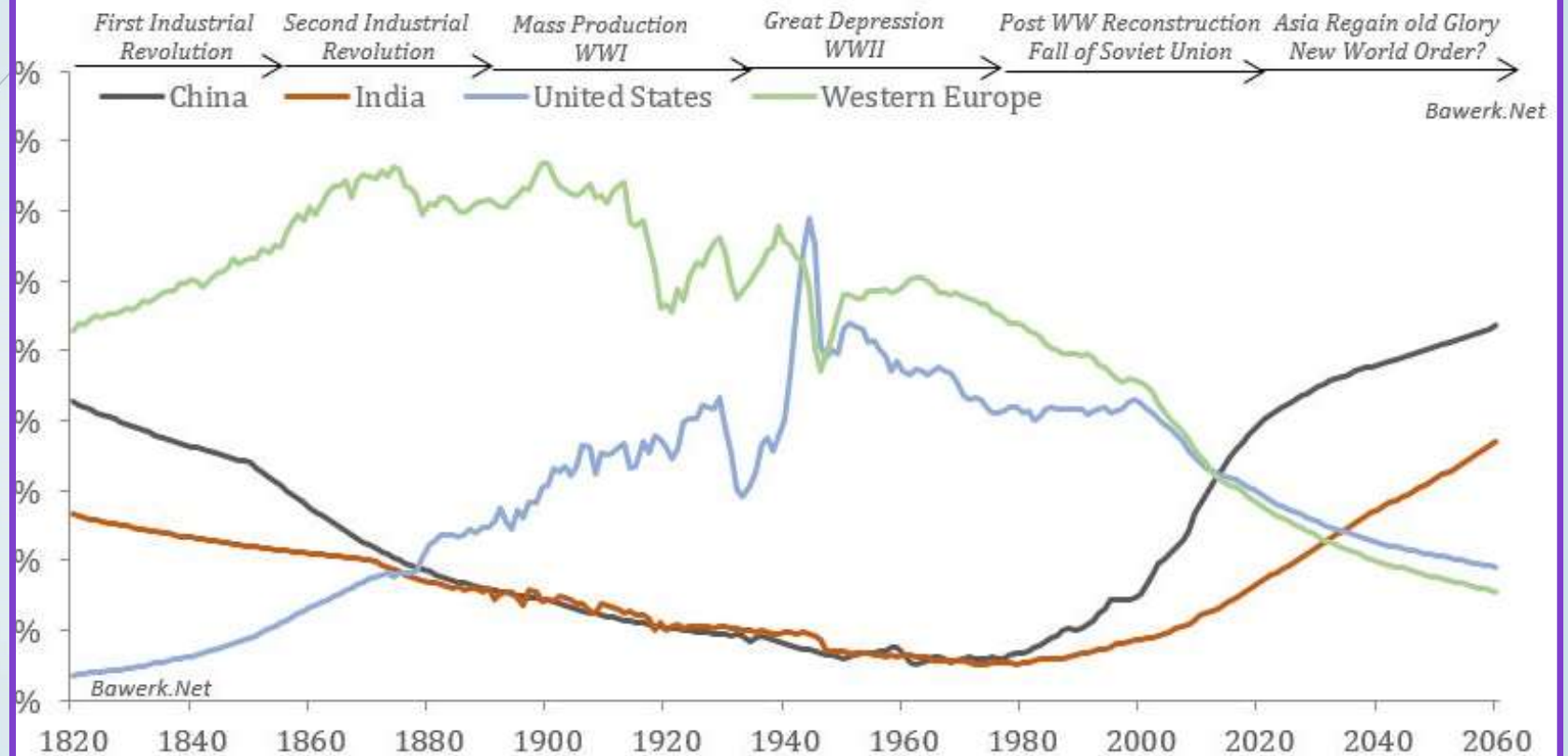The GLOBAL TRANSITION OF POWER

CIVIL REVOLTS

US REVISIONISM

Change in primary energy demand, 2016-40 (Mtoe)
World Energy Outlook 2017
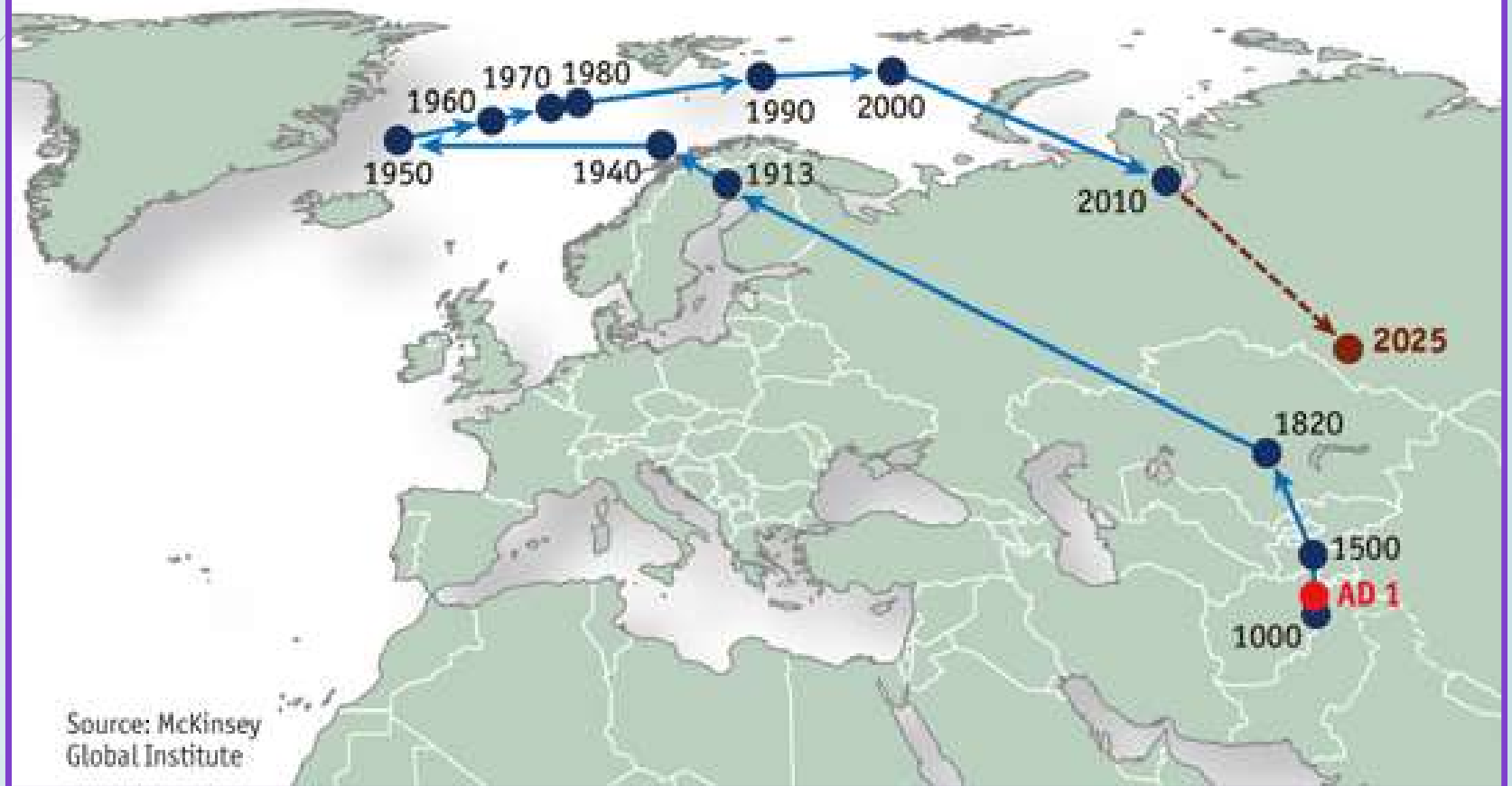
a. The global shift of power

Share of World GDP

First Industrial Revolution → Second Industrial Revolution → Mass Production WWI → Great Depression WWII → Post WW Reconstruction Fall of Soviet Union → Asia Regain old Glory New World Order? →

China — India — United States — Western Europe

Bawerk.Net

Source: Angus Maddison Project, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Bawerk.Net

Evolution of the earth's economic centre of gravity
AD 1 to 2025

Source: McKinsey Global Institute

The main strategic axis : from atlantic to the indian ocean

Source: France's White paper on Defence and National Security, 2008
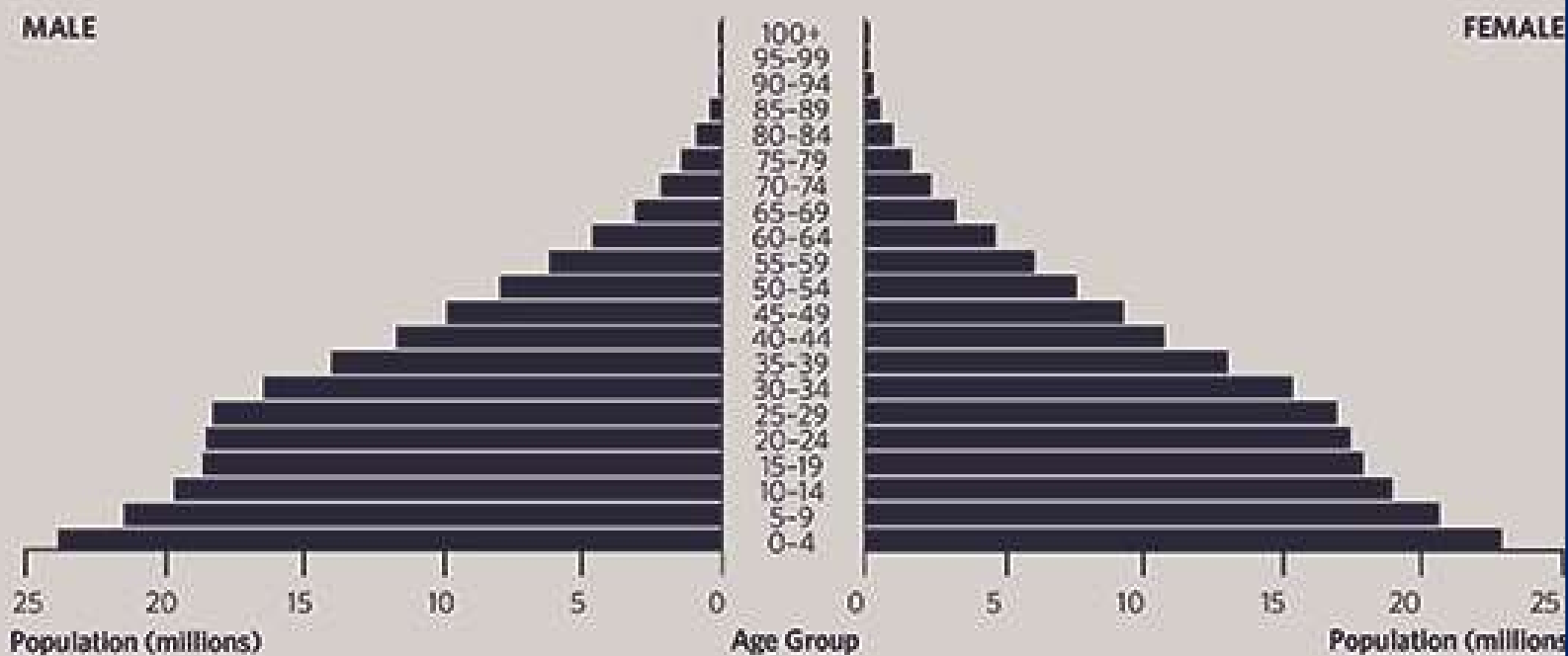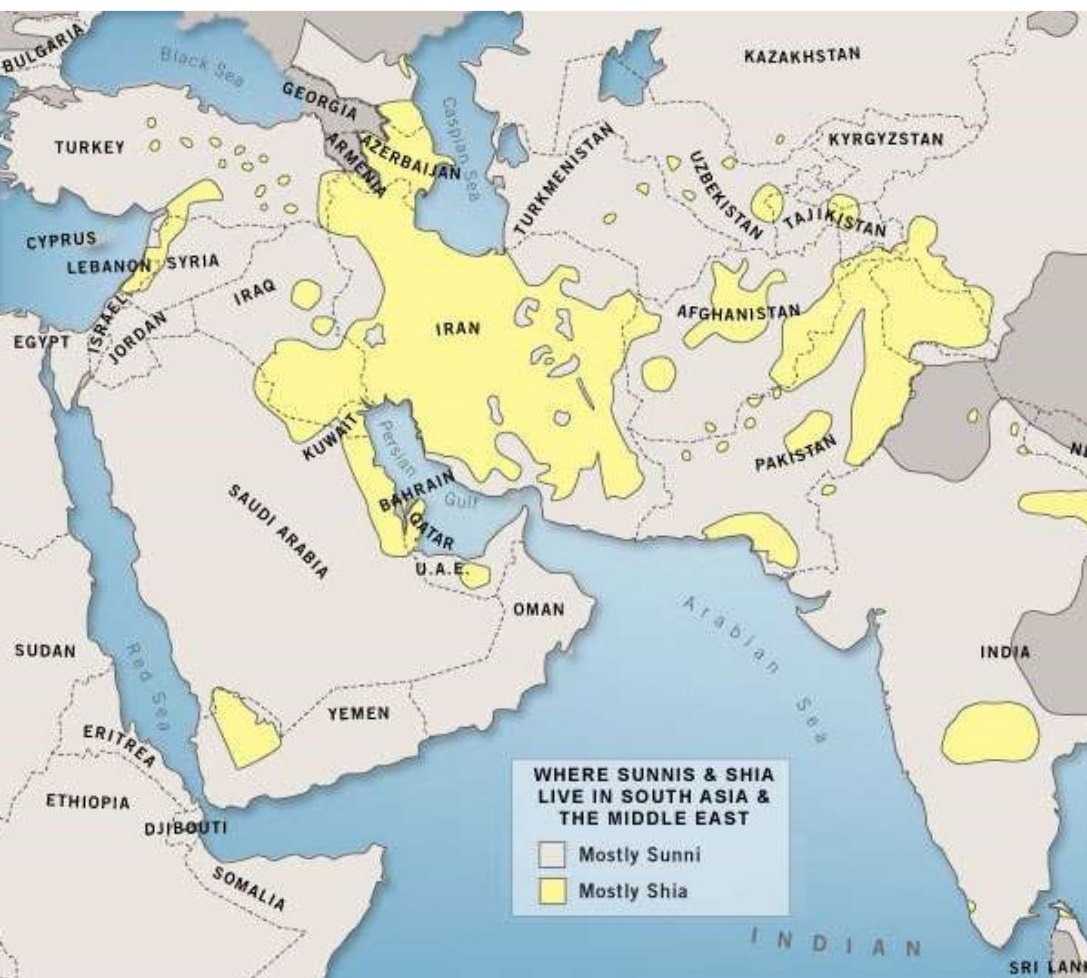
b. Civil revolts

- A wider phenomenon
- Short-term international, regional, and local phenomena

- Long-term issues

1. The 'Youth bulge': higher potential for political movements

2. The relationship between religion (Islam) and politics
   - The 1928 founding of the Muslim Brotherhood
   - Geopolitically, the Iranian Revolution: sectarianism
   - The intra-Islam and intra-Sunni divide
     - Sunnism: a plurality of proposals: Islamism, Jihadism, Salafism, Wahhabism

3. ICTs: social and political legitimacy and re-articulation of politics

4. Weakness of state ideologies

FIGURE 1. Youth Bulge Among Arab League Member States, 2016

distribution of Shia & Sunni Muslims in the Middle E[ast]

Shia majority   Sunni majority

Source: Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

c. US Revisionism

- The four main goals of US Middle Eastern Policy
  - ❖ National security (violent Jihadism as the main threat)
  - ❖ Israel
  - ❖ Oil

  - ❖ Democratization (Human Rights, Rule of Law, etc.)

- Two major issues
  - ❖ Harmonization between the 4 main goals
  - • September 11, 2001
  - • The 'War on Terror'
  - • The 2003 Iraq War

  - ❖ Reduction of resources

Two strategies: B. Obama and D. Trump

Barack H. Obama (2009-2016)

- Create a self-sufficient system, so fewer US resources can be invested
- Harmonization between the US' four main goals
- A more stable balance of power through multiple balances of power
- Strategic 'atomization'

Donald J. Trump (2017- ongoing)

- Invest fewer resources so the system becomes self-sufficient
- Simplification: no democratization
- A new 'two pillars' policy: 2 friends versus 1 enemy
  (Israel and Saudi Arabia vs Iran)
- US as a balancer of last resort

Trump's strategy assessment

Intrinsic weaknesses ⟶ self-defeating dynamics

a. Israel and Saudi Arabia's ability to perform the assigned role
  • *Internally*
  • *Externally*

b. US committment to supporting Israel and Saudi Arabia
  • *Trump and Congress*
  • *Fundamental contradiction: Reduction of resources vs Balancer and support*

c. Chainganging
  • *Allies are tempted to overpush*

d. Iran's willingness to accept the assigned role

e. Sacrifice of other actors
  • *Increase Turkey's strategic and economic re-orienting towards the East*

f. Sustainability of No democratization

Policy implementation

a. Plural policy-making
b. Erratic
c. Style: personal relationships and envoys over bureaucracy
d. Focus on US constituencies

c. Chainganging

Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

Segui

Saudi Arabia oil supply was attacked. There is reason to believe that we know the culprit, are locked and loaded depending on verification, but are waiting to hear from the Kingdom as to who they believe was the cause of this attack, and under what terms we would proceed!

15:50 - 15 set 2019

23.932 Retweet 88.008 Mi piace
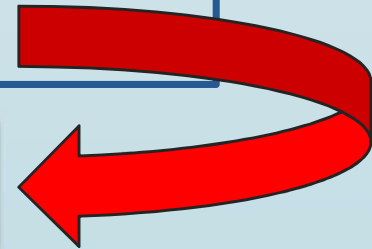
💬 33712   🔁 23932   ♡ 88008

c. The Middle East Today

- Weaker State legitimacy
- Areas of insecurity
- Middle Eastern States as exporters of insecurity
  - Violence
  - People
- Sectarianism (proxies)
- Internationalization of conflicts
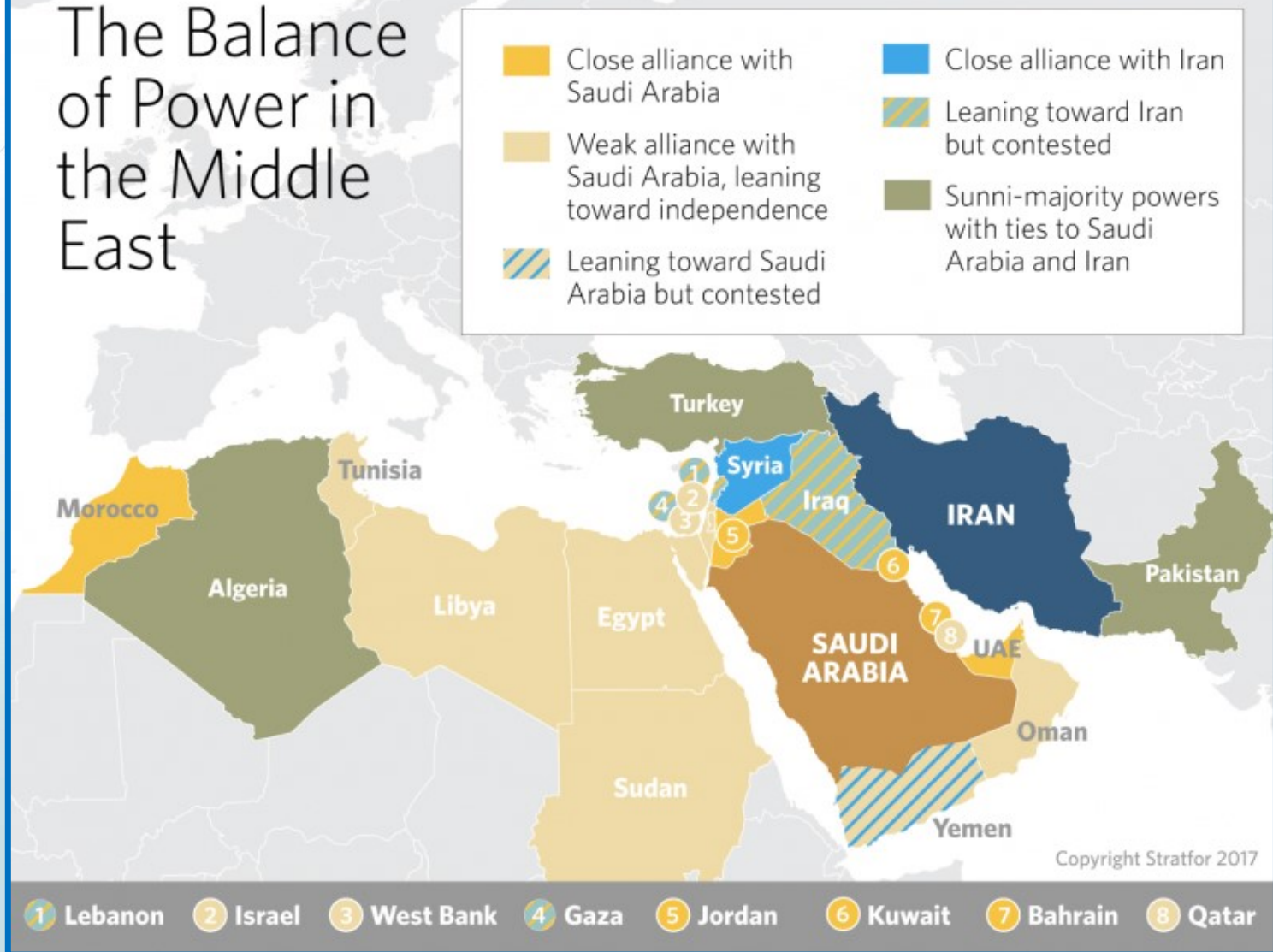- End of the US era? Bigger role for a higher number of international powers

1. A SYSTEM OF STATES
2. A MULTIPOLAR BALANCE OF POWER ORDER
3. MORE HETEROGENEOUS
4. IMPOSSIBLE HEGEMONY
5. MORE OPEN TOWARDS THE INSIDE
6. RESILIENT AUTHORITARIANISM
   - Weaker States: the insecurity-State legitimacy relationship

DEGRADATION OF WORKING MECHANISMS
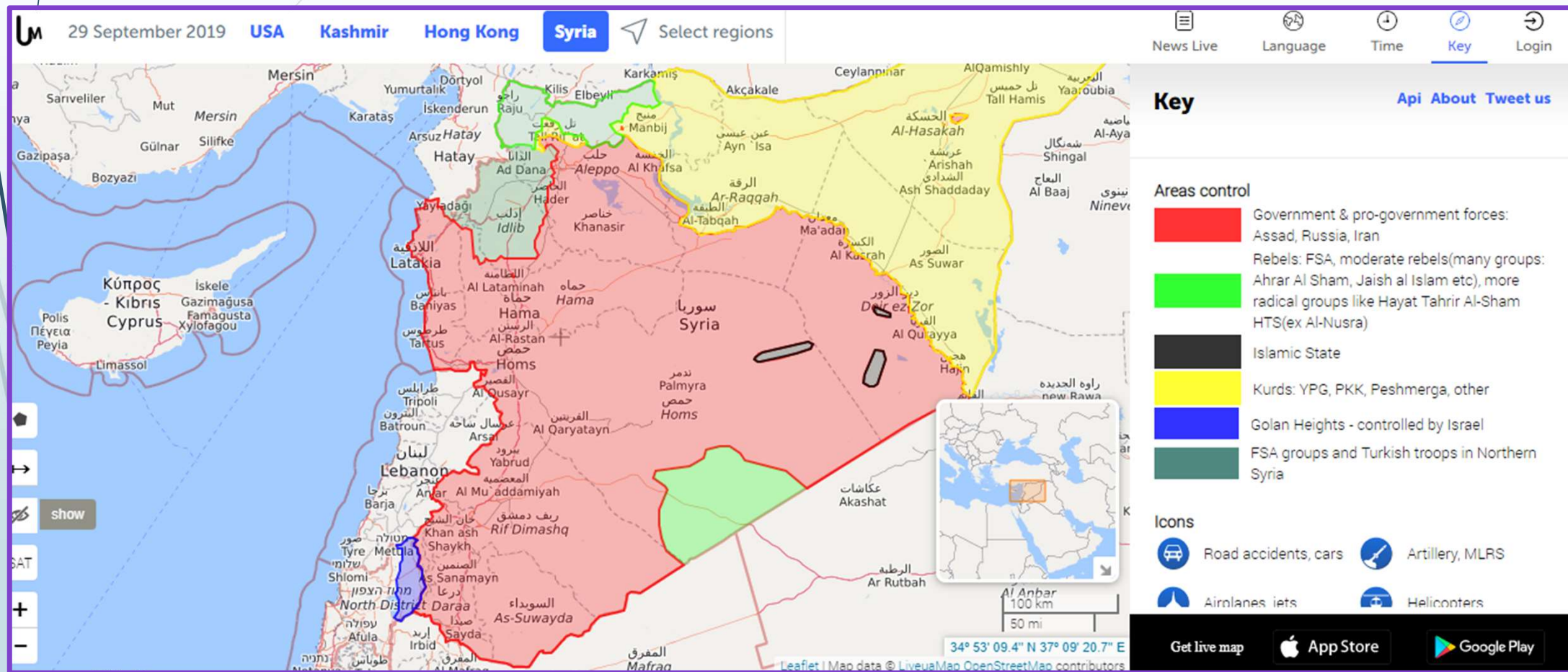*Higher risk of direct war between regional powers*
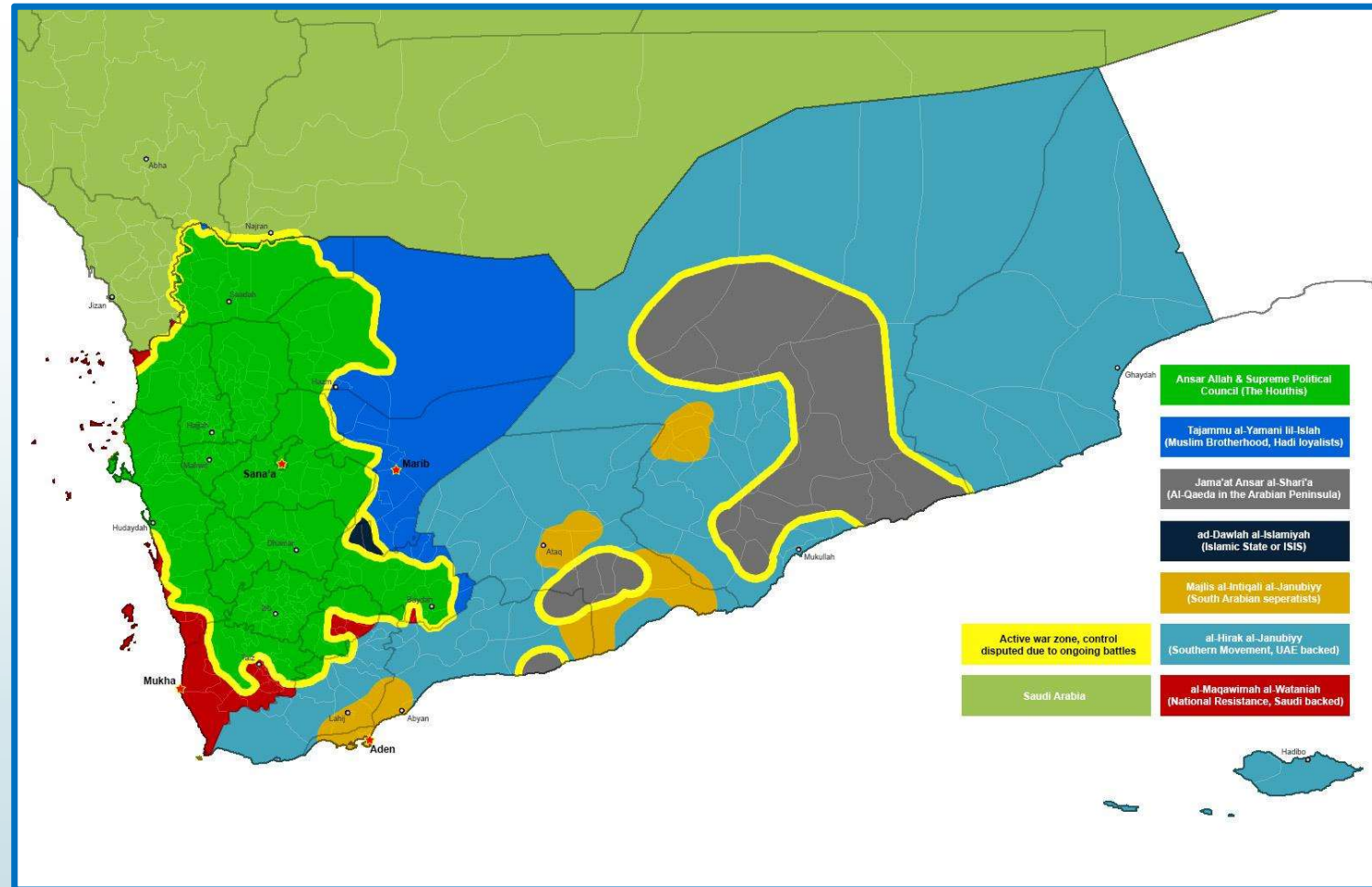
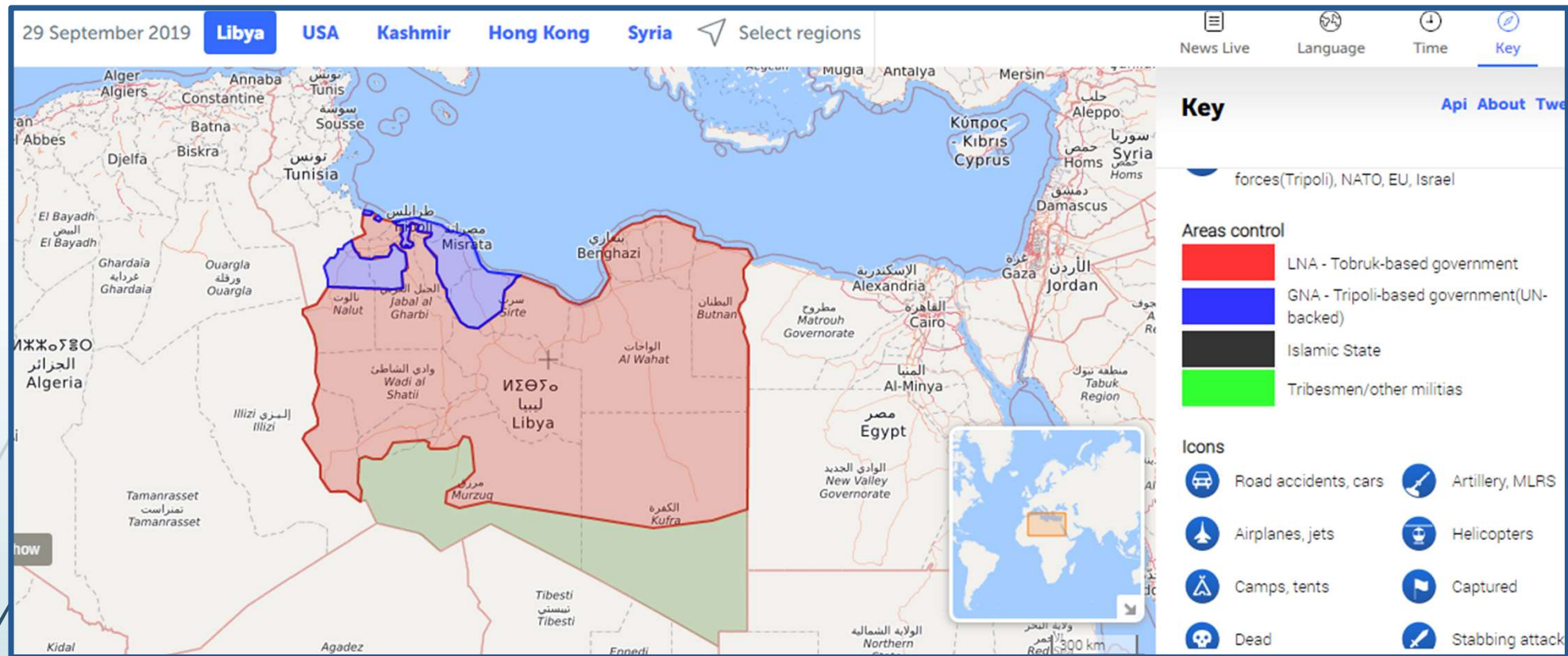The Balance of Power in the Middle East

Syria

Source: https://syria.liveuamap.com/

Source: https://yemen.liveuamap.com/

Yemen

Source: Reddit, 2019

Source: https://libya.liveuamap.com/

Libya