

Research Briefing Notes

How Does Addressing Problems of State Fragility Help in the Prevention of Organised Violence in the Middle East and North Africa?

Summary and Research Background

This research briefing describes recent research findings about the causal relationships between state fragility in the MENA region and the consequent problems of social deprivation and injustice as well as processes of violence and conflict there. By answering this question, this part of the research has also given answers to the question of what methods of policies of governance and capacity building addresses the kind of problems of state fragility that help conflict prevention best. By state fragility, this briefing refers to problems in the legitimacy and efficiency of the management of the state's social, economic, political and security management. By organised violence we mean:

1. armed conflicts,
2. one-sided violence (authoritarian violence, terrorist violence against civilians, etc.) and
3. non-state violence, i.e. conflicts without state involvement.

Key Findings

The study revealed that almost all incidents of organised violence in MENA region take place in fragile states. In particular, lack of legitimacy of management of political affairs, corruption and the use of the state for the benefit of group interest (fractionalisation of states) increase the likelihood and intensity of organised violence by states and non-state actors in the MENA region.

International humanitarian interventions, such as the global war on terror, regime change in Libya and Iraq have not addressed these problems but rather, they have escalated violence by helping arguments for violent mobilisation and factionalisation of the state. US intervention in the MENA region is associated with state fragility and more than 10 times higher per population fatalities compared to a situation where the US leaves a conflict to develop without intervention. External intervention has created the most dangerous effects on the intensity of organised violence when, instead of just one great power, two competing great powers offer militarily support to antagonistic intrastate groups, as has been the case in Syria. Such competitive intervention expands the capacity to violence, helps the violent mobilisation against an externally supported group, and further factionalises the state. MENA populations are generally unsatisfied with government services, but this does not seem to predict conflict in the region. Many governments in the region appear to be more effective in delivering security by means of suppressing opportunities for protest and violence, rather than by services.

Policy Recommendations

Legitimacy in the management of political affairs is crucial for peace in MENA. Maximum focus in the prevention of organised violence should be given to the development of indigenous (not externally imposed) and inclusive state policies and institutions that are well controlled against corruption and factionalism (use of state for the benefit of a subnational group). States and conflicting parties in the MENA region should not invite external military interventions and support to their subnational groups, even when they aim at promoting democracy and fighting terrorism. A regional consensus and a charter that prohibits external interference in intrastate conflicts, in the same way as opted for by the ASEAN States in 1976, would be useful for peace in MENA region.

Dissemination

The main research output was published in a peer reviewed, high impact (Scopus IF 3.4) scholarly journal, Social Sciences. The special issue is available open access [here](#).

Other published work:

Alkhayer, T. and Kivimäki, T. 'Competitive Peacekeeping Interventions, State Factionalisation and the Escalation of Organised Violence: The Case of Syria'. *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 2 (2024): 217–45.

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