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International Assistance to the Middle East and North Africa: Managing the Risks

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This report examines the ins and outs of providing international assistance to the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) through the prism of risk management. It provides an evaluation of the original typology of the risks associated with the provision of external support and reveals the main endogenous and exogenous risk factors that determined the specifics of international assistance extended to the MENA countries in the 2010s after the Arab Spring. The report uses statistical data to draw a map of the external assistance provided to the countries in the region, and identifies the main differences in the assessments of the associated risks by the most influential regional and extra-regional actors, including the Russian Federation. The report looks into the key risks complicating the provision of international assistance in the region and offers recommendations on how Russia can better protect its interests in the MENA region through international aid instruments using elements of a risk-based approach.

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Introduction

International assistance. The Middle East and North Africa. Risk management. These three elements that make up the title of this report form a whole which, as is well known, is greater than the sum of its parts. The purpose of this introduction is to lay bare this simple and 'holistic' arithmetic and demonstrate the ways in which this piece may be of interest to experts in each of these three subject areas which rarely intersect.

International assistance is one of the most peculiar forms of cross-border interaction. Full of logical paradoxes, it has stumped scientists for over three quarters of a century. Its peculiarity can be explained by a number of factors.

The first factor is the lack of transparency when it comes to the motives for providing aid. On closer inspection, the common dichotomy of "egoism vs. altruism" does not ring true. International donors never act selflessly, nor do they neglect their own interests – even when providing humanitarian aid (although benevolence may play an important role).

The second factor is the sheer variety of aid modalities, channels and instruments. Scholarships to study in donor countries, loans to help purchase the advanced weapons, and emergency food aid have nothing in common, except for the fact that they meet the formal criteria for transferring funds on a concessional or gratuitous basis, *de jure*, to help citizens of another state.

The third factor is that every single country in the world is involved, one way or another, in the provision of international aid. Moreover, most developing countries manage to juggle the roles of providers and recipients of development cooperation, although not all of them would readily position themselves as donors. As a result, there are literally thousands of models for managing concessional aid flows.

The fourth factor is the unpredictability of donor behaviour. Changes in the donor counry's domestic economic or political environment, situation in the recipient country, a cooling of the international climate, and events unfolding in countries thousands of miles from the region where the aid is sent can all disrupt the status quo.

International aid experts know these difficulties all too well. They also know that the Middle East has been one of the regions where external actors sought to further their own national interests through aid provision which influenced the political life of the recipient countries significantly. For decades the region has been receiving a disproportionate amount of aid relative to the number of countries and the total population size for decades. The examples of the United States providing aid to Arab countries, whether it be Egypt or Jordan, 'in exchange' for signing peace treaties with Israel or the post-war reconstruction sagas of Lebanon and Iraq has long become the textbook cases.

However, the last decade, which opened with the Arab Spring, saw many developments that prompted regional and non-regional actors alike to actively use

aid instruments. These developments included the appearance and then rapid loss of hopes for a successful democratic transition, the emergence of numerous bloody and multidimensional conflicts and regional humanitarian crises of an unprecedented scale, the formation and a subsequent collapse of the first Jihadist quasi-state, and so on.

According to the most conservative estimates, international donors sent approximately $250 billion in economic and humanitarian aid to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) between 2011 and 2018 in response to shifts in political and socioeconomic environment. And this is only the money sent through official channels.

In other words, a rich set of empirical data has been accumulated, although it has yet to receive the proper analytical treatment. Analysing this data through the prism of risk management makes the task even more interesting. Research on international aid has increasingly focused on risk management in recent years against the background of diffusion of 'fragile states' and the concept of 'resilience', which is understood as the ability to cope with the emergence of various internal and external shocks. However, the issue is most often examined from a generalist perspective and rarely with the example of the MENA region, although there is every reason to do just that.

The report may also be of interest to experts in Arab studies. Events in the region are developing in such a manner that country and regional specialists are forced to dive deeper into the nuances of external aid provision. It is difficult to single out any one country in the region whose development trajectory can be fully understood without taking this factor into account. Whatever the topic under discussion – democratization, demographic and environmental challenges, or the fight against terrorism – it is extremely difficult in most MENA countries to find a solution that involves internal resources only, and the issue of external support emerges by itself. The reasons to explore these issues will only grow in the coming years. Just look at the shocks experienced in 2019 by countries that seemed to have survived the turbulence of 2011 relatively unscathed (Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan), or the obstacles preventing the settlement of the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen, or the COVID-19 pandemic, whose systemic impact on the Arab world is yet to be comprehended.

However, the views of area experts on international aid – both as a tool for ensuring the national interests of donor countries and as a factor in the domestic policies of the MENA countries – are too amorphous for a substantive conversation aimed at developing practical solutions. Concessional and non-concessional aid flows are often confused, and the basic categories of 'aid conditionality' and 'aid tying status" are ignored, as are the intricacies of aid suspension and, conversely, the impact that sanctions have on aid provision.

A somewhat similar situation can be observed in risk management. The inherent instability of the Middle East and North Africa means that area experts constantly deal with various kinds of risks, although they rarely apply the categories of risk management itself. This affects approaches to subjects that are even more fami-

liar to the Arab studies, such as the fate of nation-states and the construction of a collective security system in the region. It should be no surprise, therefore, that certain risks associated with the use of external aid and the correspondent risk management strategies are all but ignored.

Experts on risk management will not find any new experimental risk assessment techniques in this report. That said, the report will help broaden the understanding of specific applications of risk management theory to the realm of international aid.

First, external aid itself is used as a tool for managing various political, economic, social, environmental and even technological risks.

Second, international aid – especially in turbulent regions such as MENA – is often hampered by all types of adverse developments (both predictable and unpredictable), which thus reduces its effectiveness.

Third, international aid itself produces new risk factors, which calls for optimal strategies for managing these factors must be found.

It is these considerations that have allowed us to build an original typology of risks, which I describe in depth in the opening section of this report. This typology is used to structure the whole piece.

In our opinion, the benefit of such a 'risk-based' approach is its versatility. It can be used to make sense of new trends in international aid. This is particularly important in the context of Russia's current foreign policy – both in the MENA region and in the field of international development assistance, including humanitarian aid. Given Russia's growing presence in the region after the launch of the military operation in Syria in 2015, it is extremely important for Russian policymakers and experts to expand the set of analytical prisms through which the processes taking place in MENA can be interpreted. The traditional approaches have been exhausted here and no longer produce the desired results.

The same can be said for the policy of international development assistance. The formation and strategic revision of this policy must now be followed by its rationalization, professionalization and reorientation with aim of increasing the effectiveness of the aid efforts. The push to use international aid instruments in the MENA region more actively is understandable, and it will no doubt receive support following the recent change in leadership at the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), its imminent restructuring to include a separate Department for International Development Assistance and Humanitarian Programmes, and the creation of the Interdepartmental Commission on International Development Cooperation chaired by the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office. In this new environment, it is all the more important to put risk management issues at the forefront and integrate elements of scenario planning. This is seen as an essential condition for mitigating the risks associated with providing aid to Syria, Libya, Lebanon and other countries which, if they materialize, may cause Russia to lose the positions it has fought so hard for over the past decade.

It is important from the outset to define the geographical scope of the study. In international studies, the Middle East and North Africa (increasingly referred to as West Asia and North Africa in recent years) typically refers to 20 countries: 16 recognized Arab states (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen), the partially recognized State of Palestine and three non-Arab countries (Israel, Iran and Turkey). Russian experts tend to include Sudan as part of the MENA region, although most international organizations and donor states consider it to be part of sub-Saharan Africa.

All these countries have received external support at one time or another, which is reflected, among other things, in the international statistics on official development assistance (ODA) compiled by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC).[1] However, the picture became far more complicated following the end of the Cold War. In 1996, the OECD DAC removed Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates from its list of official development assistance recipients. This was followed by the removal of Israel in 1997, Libya in 2000 (which was put back on the list in 2011 shortly after the revolution broke out), Bahrain in 2005, Saudi Arabia in 2008 and Oman in 2011. However, this does not mean that concessional loans and grants have ceased to flow to these countries. For example, Bahrain and Oman receive rather generous aid packages from other Persian Gulf countries, but these numbers are not reflected in the international statistics. Conversely, Turkey and Iran have remained on the list of ODA recipients, although both states are now net donors. While both lay claim to leadership in the region, the OECD considers Iran a part of the Middle East subregion and Turkey a part of Europe. Moreover, all these countries (with the exception of Iran) receive military aid as well, most notably from the United States, which in the case of Israel amounts to several billion dollars per year. This directly affects the balance of power in the region.

This is not to downgrade the significance of the external aid provided to Israel, the Persian Gulf states, Turkey and Iran. The point is that this study focuses on the risks associated with providing aid to countries with a low degree of resilience. With that in mind, I will mostly concentrate on 12 Arab states – all the countries of North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia), five recognized states in the Middle East (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen) and the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. With the exception of Israel, non-Arab states will be treated in the report as donors, rather than recipients, of international aid.

I have used a similar approach in previous works on international aid to Arab countries published under the auspices of the Center for Security and Develop-

[1] Official development assistance (ODA) flows – flows to countries and territories on the OECD DAC List of ODA Recipients and ODA-eligible international organizations which are provided by official agencies with the promotion of the economic development and social welfare of developing countries as its main objective and are concessional in character.

ment Studies at the Moscow State University School of World Politics[2] and the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. These publications provide a thorough background to the topic that proved invaluable when preparing the present report.

I would like to thank my colleagues from these research centres for their advice, comments and assistance, which inspired me to 'adjust' my way of thinking when taking a risk-based approach to exploring the issue at hand. Equally important was the support I received from the Russian International Affairs Council for my research initiative. The Council has long-standing ties with both the Center for Security and Development Studies and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which are only strengthened by the publication of this report.

[2] For more detail, see: Dilemmas of Strengthening State Resilience in the Middle East and North Africa in the Context of New Threats to Peace, Security, Global and Regional Stability // Center for Security and Development Studies, School of World Politics, Lomonosov Moscow State University.
URL: https://fmp.msu.ru/csds/dilemmas-of-strengthening-state-resilience-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa

1. International Assistance Through the Prism of Risk Management: Adjusting the Viewpoint

1.1. A Risk–Based Approach to International Assistance: Evolution, Basic Principles and Risk Typology

The core element of this study is the concept of "risk." Traditionally understood as a possibility of an undesired event, it is of key importance in a number of fields. And international aid is no exception.[3]

Politicians have understood the risks associated with providing military, economic and technical assistance to other countries ever since the launch of the first such programmes in the late 1940s. However, in the context of the Cold War and the prevalence of the logic of the 'zero-sum game', international aid was subordinated to the strategic objectives of the global confrontation between the two camps (without downgrading the importance of the South–South cooperation developing in parallel). The concept of "risk," by definition, could not be pivotal at the time.

Donors on both sides of the Iron Curtain were mostly concerned with the threat of losing – and preventing their opponents from gaining – influence. The obsession with supporting regimes with the "correct" political leanings, no matter how corrupt they were or how violently they treated their population, pushed any desire to assess and prevent the long-term negative consequences of that support. True, the first half-hearted bans on assistance to states with poor human rights records were introduced long before the Berlin Wall came down (under the Carter administration in the United States), but the rules were spelled out in such a way that the executive branch had little trouble circumventing them if it so wished. While there has never been a shortage of people genuinely concerned about the disadvantaged among those responsible for programming, and especially implementing individual projects, the self-serving (and by no means enlightened) aspirations of senior management often cancelled out their admirable ideas.[4]

The collapse of bipolar system has undoubtedly opened the door to change and the extensive use of risk-based approaches. Such approaches were pioneered in the humanitarian sphere. The publication of Mary Anderson's *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War* in 1999 can be considered a landmark event in this regard.[5] Anderson was able to show quite vividly that even the most politically neutral humanitarian aid programmes can hypothetically bring about unwanted consequences in conflict situations. She also laid the foundations for the so-called 'conflict-sensitive approach', which would be further elaborated in the 21st century.

[3] For more detail, see: Bartenev, V. Aiding Fragile States through the Lens of Risk-Management Labyrinth of Explanatory Hypotheses // International Trends, No. 4 (2018), pp. 20–41. [In Russian]

[4] Harry S. Truman's Point Four Program is a perfect example of this. See: Glazunova, E. The Origins of International Development Assistance: Truman's Point Four Program. Moscow: LENAND, 2014, 248 p. [In Russian]

[5] Anderson, M. B. Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999. 171 pp.

Another factor that led to the widespread adoption of the risk-based approach was the decision to focus on international aid effectiveness. Principles for mitigating the risks of implementing aid programmes (which were better understood by this time) and maximizing their dividends were put forward, first within the OECD DAC, and then within more inclusive formats (with the participation of donors and recipients beyond that 'club'). These include: ownership (of the recipient country over aid programmes), alignment (of projects and programmes with national development priorities), harmonization (of donors' efforts) etc. In turn, the principles of mutual accountability and results-based management guided the participants towards more responsible management of aid resources.

The process of securitization of development assistance instigated by the United States following 9/11 and supported by all the key players in international development assistance also played an important role.[6] It brought issues of state- and peacebuilding to the fore, first reflected in the adoption of the *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States* and the launch of the *International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding*. The most significant result of this work was the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* adopted in 2011 at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan.[7]

By the end of the 2000s, the global financial and economic crisis had decimated budgetary resources and was forcing donor countries to focus on increasing the returns on their investments (value for money) and mitigating the potential risks associated with the provision of aid. Not only did this affect development assistance, but it also impacted security assistance, which had grown exponentially against the backdrop of the 'Global War on Terror', most notably in the Middle East, and in Iraq in particular, where the largest post-conflict reconstruction program of this period was under way.

The result was that the risks associated with providing development assistance had become a key issue by the time the Arab Spring began. And the destabilization of the entire Middle East and North Africa caused by endogenous as well as exogenuous risks and threats surely accelerated conceptual developments in this area.

A practical result of donor's experimenting with a risk-based approach was the publication of the OECD policy report "Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts" in 2012.[8] The report introduced a new conceptual framework for aid risk analysis, outlining three main types of interdependent risks faced by donors:

1) *Contextual risks* – risks of state failure, return to conflict, humanitarian or economic crisis, natural disaster. External actors have limited control over these risks, but they can try to mitigate them with effective assistance (effective in terms of improving the situation in the partner country). Some researchers, for

[6] For more detail, see: Bartenev, V. Securitization of International Development Aid: Political Discourse Analysis [International Organisations Research Journal], 2011, no. 3, pp. 37–50. [In Russian]

[7] For more detail, see: Bartenev, V. A New Deal for International Engagement in Fragile States: Origins, Components, Prospects [Moscow University Journal of World Politics], 2012, no. 4, pp. 113–143. [In Russian]

[8] Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts. The Price of Success? // OECD. 2012. URL: https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/managing%20risks.pdf

example Alina Rocha Menocal of the Overseas Development Institute, prefer to call these political risks.[9]

2) *Programmatic risks* – risk of failure to achieve the stated objectives of providing assistance (due to a lack of understanding of the context, managerial mistakes such as setting overly ambitious goals, using approaches that have not been tested in the field, erroneous assessment of needs, etc.)[10] or causing harm through intervention.

3) *Institutional risks* – risks to the aid provider, including security and fiduciary failure (risks of misappropriation of funds or lack of transparency in their distribution) and reputational loss arising, among other things, from providing aid to actors regarded in the donor country as dubious recipients.

Programmatic risks are located at the intersection of contextual and institutional risks.

This typology, while useful, simplifies matters somewhat. It has been created by developmentalists for developmentalists and, as such, it overlooks the self-serving interests of the donor country (which are never clearly stated) and the circumstances that prevent them from being realized. A realistic risk assessment can only be performed if such circumstances are given comparable importance.[11]

Building upon this typology, I propose a fundamentally different approach to understanding the risks that are important for planning a country's aid policy and a new way to classify these risks that reflects the importance of time in the delivery of assistance. At the most basic level, we divide all risks into three categories:

1) Underlying risks – risk factors that predetermine the need for external assistance and which external assistance is designed to prevent.

2) Impeding risks – risk factors that significantly complicate and hinder aid provision.

3) Accompanying risks – additional negative risk factors that arise as a result of aid provision.

Additionally, one has to think about where exactly these risks arise – in recipient country or in the donor country.

1.2. Underlying Risks

In the case of 'underlying risks', I am talking first and foremost about factors that relate to the recipient. In each case, the set of key risks may vary, but in general I mean threats to the long-term interests of a donor country.

[9] Rocha Menocal A. It's a Risky Business. Aid and New Approaches to Political Risk Management // Overseas Development Institute. July 2013. URL: https://www.refworld.org/docid/523aba674.html

[10] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a common approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011.
URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

[11] Bartenev, V. Aiding Fragile States through the Lens of Risk-Management Labyrinth of Explanatory Hypotheses [International Trends], 2018, no. 4, p. 23. [In Russian]

Economic risks include the threat of losing investments (for example, as a result of the expropriation of foreign assets, a sudden and disadvantageous change in the tax regime, a decrease in import and export as a result of a slowdown in the development of the recipient country or the emergence of physical restrictions on importing or exporting certain goods, sovereign default, etc.). Should these risks materialize, it would mean, among other things, that donors would have no way to recoup most of the money already invested into the recipient countries as loans or the interest on them.

In political terms, I am talking about the possible collapse of regimes that are friendly to a donor state and, as a result, the loss of influence in a given state or the emergence of cross-border security threats (including terrorism, arms trafficking, illegal migration, etc.) that may affect neighbouring countries, as well as donor states. In particularly complex cases, the risks of a humanitarian catastrophe may also come to the fore. Donors can attempt to prevent or mitigate such a development, both for purely altruistic reasons and for more 'selfish' strategic purposes. The relative weight of these motives will have a direct impact on how much, and under what conditions, humanitarian aid will be provided.

The perception of the risks arising in recipient countries may be influenced not only by a given donor country's specific interests, but also by a wide range of unrelated factors. First, the economic and political situation inside a donor country – how much money its authorities are willing to allocate for international assistance at a given time, what are the general ideological leanings of its leaders and their attitude towards international 'charity', the party-political makeup, etc. Second, the general structure of international system at the regional and global levels and the nature of interaction among various centres of power.

The existence of these factors means that donor states treat the exact same risks in different recipient countries differently, and so-called 'aid darlings' and 'aid orphans' may appear despite the similarities in their domestic needs. Moreover, this is why donors may respond differently to the same risks at different points in time. This, in turn, increases the volatility and unpredictability manifold and thus prevents tangible results from being attained.

It is in the nonlinear dependence of these endogenous and exogenous factors (for both donors and recipients) that one should search for the key reason why the various types of risk are interconnected, which was pointed out by the authors of the 2012 OECD report mentioned earlier.[12] Donors' actions can very well minimize certain types of risk while at the same time increasing others, both for themselves and for the recipient country. Such dilemmas are most clearly manifested when interacting with 'fragile', often conflict-affected states where risks of all types – as well as the potential dividends from using aid to further the donor's national interests – are especially high. Many of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa fall into this category.

[12] Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts. The Price of Success? // OECD. 2012. URL: https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/managing%20risks.pdf

1.3. Impeding Risks

The range of impeding risks that may complicate or hinder aid provision extends much further. It includes risks both for donor states and for organizations that are directly involved in carrying out programmes and projects. Some of them are applicable to all kinds of assistance, while others are more typical of humanitarian aid. At the same time, a number of risks might not apply to the recipient country as a whole, but rather to individual regions or areas of public life within it.[13]

Fiduciary risks. Aid is the transfer of certain benefits (financial and non-financial) to citizens of the recipient country. As such, it is exposed to the very real risk of funds being misappropriated. This, in turn, can make achieving the set goals exceedingly difficult. These risks take shape in another country and are in many ways outside the control of donors. The level of residual risk thus remains extremely high.

Fiduciary risks may be connected with the activities of government institutions in the donor country (for example, when selecting a contractor in case of tied aid, which limits the procurement of goods and services to companies in the donor country (or in a selected group of countries), as well as with the activities of contractors (be they non-governmental organizations, private companies, government agencies in the recipient country or multilateral organizations). A wealth of evidence has been accumulated over the past three quarters of a century that attests to the scale of these types of risk and the ingenuity of those who are willing to line their own pockets with funds allocated for the purposes of international aid.

In early 2020, a report by the World Bank added a new wrinkle to the issue of corruption and international aid. According to the report, increased foreign aid allocations in 1999–2010 coincided with the accumulation of wealth by citizens of recipient countries in offshore accounts. An average of 7.5 per cent of the funds were deposited in special jurisdictions, primarily in Switzerland and Luxembourg. The greater the dependence on external aid (calculated as the amount of aid to GNI), the higher the percentage of funds siphoned into foreign accounts. The figure can go as high as 15 per cent in the countries that are most dependent on external aid – and that does not include money spent inside the country on real estate, luxury goods, etc.[14]

Tellingly, fiduciary risks accompany any type of aid.[15] As experts at the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre of the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway subtly point out, corruption in some settings is not even a risk, it is a near certainty.[16] Given that the beneficiaries of the programmes and the taxpayers who effectively pay

[13] Rocha Menocal A. It's a Risky Business. Aid and New Approaches to Political Risk Management // Overseas Development Institute. July 2013. URL: https://www.refworld.org/docid/523aba674.html

[14] Andersen J.J. et al. Elite Capture of Foreign Aid Evidence from Offshore Bank Accounts. Policy Research Working Paper 9150 // World Bank. February 2020. URL: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33355/Elite-Capture-of-Foreign-Aid-Evidence-from-Offshore-Bank-Accounts.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[15] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a common approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

[16] Why is Corruption Risk Management So Hard? Assessing Current Practices in Development Aid? // Chr. Michelsen Institute. U4 Brief. May 2016. URL: https://www.cmi.no/publications/5819-why-is-corruption-risk-management-so-hard

for international aid are located in different jurisdictions, there is a strong push for tightening control over the spending of resources allocated. However, foreign policy and foreign economic interests often prevent an open discussion on reducing the risk of funds being misappropriated with representatives from the partner country from taking place. The need to spend the funds that have been allocated (which often forces donors to turn a blind eye to the fiduciary risks) is another contributing factor.[17]

Security risks. Assistance is often provided to disadvantaged countries – war-torn states and countries with a high level of terrorist activity or high crime rates – that have a comparable number of victims from armed violence (for example, in Latin America). The greatest danger here is to the employees of humanitarian organizations delivering humanitarian aid to problem areas, who may be injured or even killed either accidentally or as the result of a deliberate attack.

The increase in the number of such incidents can serve a reason for pulling employees out of a given country or region and transitioning to a system whereby the delivery of assistance is directed from abroad, meaning that responsibility is transferred to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the recipient country, which inevitably weakens control over the targeted allocation of funds and complicates the process of monitoring and evaluating results. Employees of local NGOs are thus the ones who fall under attack most often. According to Insecurity Insight, locally hired NGO employees accounted for 71 per cent of all reported aid workers deaths during the implementation of the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other international humanitarian groups' programmes in 2010, compared to approximately 19 per cent in 2000.[18] The inability of external actors to ensure the security of aid workers could aggravate an already difficult humanitarian situation and give rise to animosities with partners in the recipient countries – animosities that could rear their heads during the transition to the post-conflict stage.

Another risk is the militarization of aid in war-torn areas. With the increased involvement of the military in the provision of humanitarian aid and development assistance, humanitarian organizations are no longer seen as neutral actors by the populations of the recipient countries.

Risks of denying humanitarian access. Humanitarian access is defined as the ability of humanitarian organizations to enter a conflict zone for the purposes of providing humanitarian assistance and monitoring the observance of human rights. It is only provided with the consent of the government or forces that control the territory in question, and it is not compulsory. According to the definition provided by ReliefWeb, "sustainable humanitarian access […] is ensured when the receipt of humanitarian assistance is not conditional upon the allegiance to or support to parties involved in a conflict."[19] In the event of an armed conflict,

[17] Ibid.

[18] Scott E.K.M. Yes, Aid Workers Are Getting Killed More Often. But Why? // The Washington Post. 06.12.2019. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/06/yes-aid-workers-are-getting-killed-more-often-why/

[19] ReliefWeb. Glossary of Humanitarian Terms. August // World Health Organisation. URL: https://www.who.int/hac/about/reliefweb-aug2008.pdf?ua=1

the government – or rebel groups – may create various obstacles to humanitarian access or partially withdraw humanitarian aid, redirecting it to loyal groups.

Humanitarian access can also be hampered by *force majeure* circumstances such as natural and manmade disasters, epidemics, and so on. Blocking humanitarian access becomes a topic of negotiations between internal and external actors. Such negotiations are of a political nature and indirectly affect sensitive issues related to the distribution of power and become a factor in the conflict.

Risks of internal changes in the donor country. Such risks can appear as the result of several factors. First, in response to changes in a global economic environment, or in a particular region or donor country. Second, in response to political changes – for example, reforms in the national aid management system or the coming to power of political forces or leaders who are critical of the way funds for international aid are allocated or who accord less importance to aid instruments. These factors are often superimposed on each another, which leads to the partial or even total curtailment of programmes that are already under way, or to the refusal to launch new programmes. As humanitarian aid experts point out, 'failure to sustain humanitarian funding throughout the length of a protracted response also poses serious risks to the gains made by initial relief operations'.[20]

But this is also true of financial, and even, security assistance – especially when reforming the military or law enforcement agencies – in post-conflict settings.

Sanctions risks. If sanctions are understood in the broad sense of the word – that is, as the introduction of restrictive measures for violating certain norms and requirements – then the range of sanctions risks in international aid extends much further than it might appear at first glance. Risks of this kind exist both for the recipient country and for external actors, be they other donors or international organizations that provide aid to affected populations.

Recipient countries are exposed to the following types of sanctions risks:

Risks arising as a result of events that could trigger restrictive measures, such as the termination or suspension of assistance.[21] The example of the United States, which I studied in detail earlier, shows that such restrictions can apply to aid sent (through bilateral and multilateral channels), to individual recipients as well as to associated groups that meet certain criteria. Reasons for imposing such sanctions may include, first of all, actions of the recipient country that damage the economic interests of the donor state; second, factors related to the internal political life of the recipient country; and third, certain actions of the recipient country in the international arena ('hybrid' restrictions are also possible in response to several factors being apparent at the same time). The first type may include, for example, the expropriation of property of companies of the donor

[20] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a Common Approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011. URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

[21] It is worth noting that individual researchers – for example, those who put together the reputable Threat and Imposition of Sanctions (TIES) Dataset – see both reduction or termination of aid as sanctions. See: Morgan T. C., Bapat N., Kobayashi Y. "The Threat and Imposition of Sanctions: Updating the TIES Dataset [Conflict Management and Peace Science], 2014, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 541–558.

country; the second type may relate to serious human rights violations or, in the case of the United States, the acknowledgement by the U.S. Government of a military coup in the recipient country; whereas the third type of restrictions is exemplified by the sanctions imposed in response of support for terrorism or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.[22] The picture is complicated by restrictions on the provision of aid caused by actions connected with the delivery of that aid. For example, the United States suspends aid if the recipient country stops servicing debts on existing concessional loans (the first type of restriction); diverting development aid resources for military needs (the second type); or obstructing the delivery of U.S. humanitarian aid (the third type). While the United States is the undisputed leader in terms of doling out restrictions, they may be introduced by any donor country.

Risks associated with the temporary full or partial suspension of assistance – when using instruments of conditional aid – in the event that the recipient does not comply with certain conditions. In many cases, such restrictive measures are not introduced automatically, but rather at the discretion of the executive branch, which may make an exception (or provide a 'waiver', in the U.S. legal terminology, for humanitarian concerns or in the national security interests). At the same time, as I have already noted, donors rarely impose sanctions for failing to meet the set conditions.[23] First, their actions are driven by strategic, economic and other 'selfish' considerations. Second, officials in development agencies and international organizations prefer to avoid imposing such sanctions, as they do not want to admit that the decision to allocate funds to a particular country in the first place was ill-advised. Third, donor countries are constantly faced with the Samaritan's dilemma, which many choose to resolve by continuing to provide aid to developing countries that are in need.[24]

Risks associated with so-called secondary (extraterritorial) sanctions – in cases where a state imposes or threatens to impose sanctions against individuals or legal entities of another state involved in the provision of aid to a third country. The United States is the most sophisticated user of secondary sanctions, and it is thus quite natural that the United States set the precedent for introducing such restrictive measures in the context of the provision of international aid. For example, in 1996, an amendment was made to the Foreign Assistance Act prohibiting the provision of economic and military assistance to countries that sponsor international terrorism,[25] although the president can issue a waiver if it is in the interests of national security to do so, or for humanitarian considerations. There are cases of country-specific restrictions being imposed. In these cases, both the third countries providing aid and the recipient state itself faced the risk of receiv-

[22] For more detail, see: Bartenev, V. Aid Prohibition as a Tool of the U.S. Foreign Policy: *De Jure and De Facto* [MGIMO Review of International Relations, 2018, no. 6, pp. 110–140. [In Russian]

[23] Bartenev, V. Aiding Fragile States through the Lens of Risk-Management Labyrinth of Explanatory Hypotheses [International Trends], 2018, no. 4, p. 23. [In Russian].

[24] Collier P. et al. Redesigning Conditionality [World Development], 1997, vol. 25, no. 9, pp. 1399–1407.

[25] Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended through P.L. 116-6, Enacted February 15, 2019. Sections 620G and 620H // The United States Congress.
URL: https://ru.scribd.com/document/184730785/Foreign-Assistance-Act-of-1961and-Arms-Export-Acts

ing less support than they had expected or were counting on from outside. Given the unique role of the United States in the global financial system, these risks are very real and can change the balance of power in the provision of international aid significantly. The case of Syria, which I will examine in detail in this report, is the most striking confirmation of this.

Risks that international aid will not achieve its goals due to sanctions pressure on the recipient country. The introduction of unilateral and multilateral sanctions (particularly economic sanctions) can cause significant damage to the country in question. This damage may be several times greater than the positive effect of aid provided by third countries that support the state's political regime, as well as that of humanitarian aid sent to help the population in both government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas. In theory, these kinds of risks have been identified in the past, but, again, it was the case of Syria that demonstrated their mechanics and the extremely destructive effect.

1.4. Accompanying Risks

Accompanying risks include many of the risks that aid provision poses for recipients, donors and the international system as a whole.

The main risks of this kind for recipient countries are:

The risk of a deterioration of governance. This risk manifests itself in a number of interrelated ways, which I had analysed in detail in a special literature review.[26]

First, recipient countries can have such a high level of aid dependence (measured as the ratio of aid to GNI) that it becomes detrimental to their development, similar to the 'resource curse'. [27]

Second, external aid tends to have a negative effect on the authorities, which become increasingly focused on fulfilling the various requirements of donors, as the inflow of funds from the outside means they can pay less attention to the wants and needs of their citizens.[28]

Third, there is an insoluble problem of aid fungibility. The influx of resources frees up a part of the recipient state's budgetary funds, which may be spent not on development, but rather on strengthening security forces, carrying out expensive 'showcase' projects or giving tax breaks to the rich.[29] Aid will thus 'prolong the life' of ineffective governments.[30]

[26] For more detail, see: Bartenev, V. Foreign Aid and Quality of Governance: Shattering Illusory Correlations. [Polis. Political Studies], 2018, no. 6, pp. 67–79. [In Russian]

[27] For more detail, see: Knack S. Aid Dependence and the Quality of Governance: A Cross-Country Empirical Analysis // World Bank. URL: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/200401468741328803/pdf/multi-page.pdf. Lloyd T. et al. The Fiscal Effects of Aid in Developing Countries: A Comparative Dynamic Analysis. In: Mavrotas G., McGillivray M. (eds.) Development Aid. Studies in Development Economics and Policy. Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2009.

[28] Jones S., Tarp F. Does Foreign Aid Harm Political Institutions. [Journal of Development Economics], 2016, vol. 118, pp. 266–281; Moss T., Pettersson G. and N. van de Walle. An Aid-Institutions Paradox? A Review Essay on Aid Dependency and State-Building in Sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006, 28 p.

[29] Apodaca C. Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy Tool // Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. 26.04.2017. URL: https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-332

[30] See: Dollar D., Pritchett L. Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1999, 160 p.

Fourth, the high volatility and unpredictability of foreign aid flows reduces the ability of government agencies in developing countries to carry out effective long-term planning and budgeting.[31] Access to external resources creates the illusion among decisionmakers that budget revenues are 'flexible', which increases the likelihood of budgetary discipline violations.[32]

Fifth, the desire of donors to offset the fiduciary risks by providing aid bypassing governments and outsourcing projects to companies and NGOs may "disrupts citizens'ability to observe if their government is upholding its side of the social contract".[33]

Finally, additional risks are created by the lack of coordination among donors. In the 21st century, the development community pays careful attention to harmonization of donor efforts, which is of particular importance when delivering aid to states with weak institutional capacity.

As every donor has its own methods of reporting and mitigating risks, including fiduciary and security risks, the proliferation of projects by several donors that pursue similar goals and objectives (especially small ones) may increase the administrative burden on already weak state and municipal institutions. Their employees are thus forced to switch from performing their direct duties to interacting with 'sponsors'.

Since international aid provision has nothing to do with pure altruism, these risks can only be partially mitigated. Even the OECD DAC member states, which generally follow similar standards of behaviour, are rather reluctant to enter into negotiations with their 'peers' on coordinating their efforts – especially when one of them has special interests in a particular country. The problem is further exacerbated by the expansion of capabilities of non-Western states', as these countries may have different principles when it comes to providing aid and pursue opposing interests that are aimed, as was the case during the Cold War, at expanding their respective spheres of influence and ousting competitors. China, Turkey, the Gulf States and the Russian Federation are among those states whose donor presence has become especially noticeable in recent years, something that the members of the 'club of Western donors' find particularly worrying. This means that even if the members of this club have come to an agreement among themselves, the possibility of third countries coming to support a recipient country means that this particular risk is always there – especially in the most geoeconomically and geopolitically significant regions, including MENA.

The risk of conflict escalation. The literature on international aid consistently points to the fact that, like the 'resource curse', the aid dependence generates

[31] See: Lloyd T. et al. The Fiscal Effects of Aid in Developing Countries: A Comparative Dynamic Analysis. In: Mavrotas G., McGillivray M. (eds.) Development Aid. Studies in Development Economics and Policy. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009.

[32] Brautigam D., Knack S. Foreign Aid, Institutions, and Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa. [Economic Development and Cultural Change], 2004, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 255–285.

[33] Steele A., Shapiro J.N. Subcontracting State-Building. [Small Wars & Insurgencies], 2017, vol. 28, nos. 4–5, p. 888.

conflicts between interest groups in recipient countries, pulling them into a struggle for finite aid resources.[34] The understanding that external aid, including humanitarian aid, is not politically neutral and can lead to an escalation of violence if diverted to the conflict parties, be it government-backed non-state actors or rebel groups, has been commonplace in development studies since the late 1990s. According to the scheme put forward by Mary Anderson in her book *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War*, foreign aid provision carries the following risks:[35] 1) a weakening of the *connectors* that guarantee peace; 2) an increase in the influence of *dividers*, or sources of tension; 3) the provision or freeing up of resources that can be used for military purposes; and 4) the indirect legitimization of militarism.

The same conflict-sensitive approach becomes a tool for mitigating these risks. 'Conflict-sensitivity' is generally understood as the ability of an organization to understand the context of conflict, recognize that their actions affect the context of conflict, and minimize the negative and maximize the positive impact that these actions have.[36] When engaging with fragile states, donors are expected to account for the impact that aid has on conflict at all stages of the project cycle and to plan, monitor and evaluate progress, allocating additional resources if necessary so that their actions are congruent with the conflict dynamics.

What is more, a number of studies prove that state-building and peacebuilding are not always complementary processes.[37] If aid is distributed unevenly, this might aggravate existing contradictions.[38] Conflict can also escalate as a result of a flare up in the rivalry between regional and non-regional actors over influence in the recipient state through the provision of military, financial, humanitarian and other assistance. A kind of vicious circle emerges, and breaking out of it proves extremely difficult.

Risk of debt amassment. Oftentimes – especially in the case of middle-income countries – international donors do not provide aid on a grant basis. Reimbursement is generally expected. While loans must be concessional in order to qualify as official development assistance (ODA), they have to be paid back – and with interest. Countries that constantly find themselves in financial straits have difficulties paying the interest, not to mention the bulk of the loan itself. This forces them to take out new loans to cover the existing debt. Default is often the only

[34] Alesina A., Weder B. Do Corrupt Governments Receive Less Foreign Aid. [American Economic Review], 2002, vol. 92, no. 4, pp. 1126–1137.

[35] Anderson M. B. Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999. 171p.

[36] For more detail, see: Do No Harm Handbook. Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict // CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. November 2004. URL: https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/aors/protection_mainstreaming/CLP_Do_No_Harm_Handbook_2004_EN.pdf

[37] See: Grävingholt J., Gänzle S., Ziaja S. Policy Brief: Concepts of Peacebuilding and State Building – How Compatible Are They? // German Development Institute. 11.03.2009 URL: https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/Peacebuilding_and_Statebuilding__Draft_11-03-09__01.pdf; Menochal A.R. State-Building for Peace: Navigating an Arena of Contradictions // Overseas Development Institute. August 2009.
URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73B187FA778E8FE0492576260010686A-Full_Report.pdf

[38] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a Common Approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011.
URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

way out of this 'debt trap'. Concessional loans are never the main reason for bankruptcy, but they can speed up negative trends in the recipient country and make it truly inevitable. For a long time, experts were preoccupied with servicing loans provided by the Bretton Woods Institutions with extremely strict conditions regarding compliance with fiscal discipline, carrying out liberal reforms, etc. The strengthening of the positions of non-Western donors, primarily China, Turkey, the Persian Gulf monarchies and Iran only multiplies this risk. Formally speaking, China can provide aid without interfering in the internal affairs of the recipient country, but with stricter financial conditions and in a tied form that does not imply creating new jobs for local population. The inability to pay the bills may eventually entail giving up individual oil fields, transport and port infrastructure facilities and even some territories.

Reputational risks for the donor state. The biggest reputational risks for donors are caused by fiduciary risks (large-scale corruption scandals associated with the misuse of funds) and risks that threaten the life and safety of citizens involved in providing aid to the recipient country, as well as in cases where aid is being diverted to one or more of the conflict parties. Reputational risks also arise due to a lack of visible results from implementing individual projects or programmes in a given recipient state. The emergence of these risks may lead to the amount of aid being cut, which could be a consequence of reduced funding for specific departments or structural units responsible for carrying out the project. This, in turn, creates the additional contextual risks described earlier. Aid workers who are mindful of such reputational costs may shy away from risk altogether and never launch any truly transformational projects in order to preserve their own career prospects.

Risk of aggravating inter-state rivalries. As I have already noted, international aid (even humanitarian assistance) is never about simply providing charity to a country or territory in need. The donor always pursues certain strategic, reputational and economic goals. And since these goals inevitably run counter to those of other actors, any move to provide, increase or decrease, suspend, 'tie' or 'condition' aid is often viewed unfavourably even by friendly states, and in the case of strategic competitors and direct opponents, it is treated with outright hostility. This is typical during periods of inter-state rivalry. Over the past decade, international aid has once again come to be seen as an instrument in the struggle for the redistribution of spheres of influence, which has contributed to the deterioration of relations between individual countries (the United States and Russia, the United States and China, Russia and Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, etc.). Consequently, it is more likely that donors will lower aid standards while ignoring other contextual, reputational and programmatic risks in order to hold onto the influence they have in a given country, which in turn will create new contextual risks.

1.5. Risk Management Strategies

Since the concept of risk can be applied to an extremely wide range of areas, a universal classification of the stages of risk management has been developed

under international standard ISO 31000, which separates the risk management process into a number of key stages:

- risk identification, assessment of the likelihood that a risk will occur and the magnitude of its consequences, calculation of the maximum possible loss;
- selection of methods and tools for managing the identified risk;
- the development of a risk strategy in order to reduce the likelihood of risks occurring and minimize the potential negative consequences.;
- implementation of the risk strategy;
- assessment of the results and adjustment of the risk strategy.

The range of possible risk management strategies is rather limited. Key strategies include risk avoidance (no longer engaging in risky activities); risk reduction (performing actions aimed at reducing the likelihood of risks or the extent of risk exposure – including risk diversification); risk sharing or risk insurance (reducing risks by transferring them to third parties); and risk acceptance (based on a cost-benefit analysis). None of these strategies eliminate risk entirely, and the question of taking on the residual risk therefore arises. What is more, each of the strategies creates additional risks.[39]

In the case of international aid, donors will respond differently to the question of whether or not it is worth providing assistance to a given country based on differences in how they perceive the risks. In the event that the decision to provide aid is taken, the key parameters of engagement must then be determined, for example: 1) the amount of aid; 2) the duration of programmes and projects; 3) the aid modality; 4) the financial instruments; 5) aid tying status – restrictions on the range of potential suppliers of goods and services; 6) the counterpart in the recipient country; 7) the conditions for providing and receiving aid; 8) priority sectors. This creates a myriad of possible combinations of contextual, programmatic and reputational risks. Experts at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) point out the differences in the kinds of risk that humanitarian and direct aid providers prioritize and how they balance them.[40] These kinds of differences can serve as new sources of risks, including making it more difficult for donors to coordinate their efforts and complicating the dialogue between the various links in the project management chain.

The absence of win-win options that would reduce all types of risk while at the same time maximizing the political, strategic and financial benefits makes the donor's choice much more difficult, especially in fragile states. Although, hypothetically, risk management strategies should be aimed at minimizing those risks that have the greatest impact and which are most likely to occur, donors often ignore obvious risk factors due to 'egoistic' considerations.

[39] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a Common Approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011.
URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

[40] Ibid.

There are three main risk management strategies when it comes to providing international aid:

Risk avoidance – either shying away from providing aid as such or focusing on minimizing the related reputational and programmatic risks, which is more or less in keeping with the so-called standard approach to dealing with 'difficult partners' that failed to comply with the principles of 'good governance' in the 1990s. This approach was characterized by the following features: i) providing less money; ii) orientation toward project financing; iii) making shorter time commitments; iv) engaging in a narrower set of actions; v) distributing aid through NGOs (and bypassing the state); vi) providing humanitarian aid with only later making a subsequent shift towards development aid.

Risk transfer – providing aid through a multilateral organisation or as part of triangular cooperation, when one donor finances a project in the beneficiary country and delegates the work on the ground to another state (partner) that is better equipped to provide technical assistance.

Risk prevention/diversification – the simultaneous use of as many different aid instruments as possible: loans, grants, direct budget support and technical assistance, project financing, support for programmes of the individual NGOs in the recipient country, etc. The logic here is that each type of aid implies a certain combination of risks, and providing one type should partially offset the risks posed by the others.

As for taking on residual risk, the acceptable level will differ for each donor and will depend on the situation in a recipient country, as well as on the political and economic environment in a donor country and a general international context.

Risk management strategies for humanitarian and development assistance differ significantly. As the ODI rightly points out, "the high levels of risks to civilian populations inherent in crisis contexts are the rationale for humanitarian intervention, and […] risk thresholds are consequently often high."[41]

What is more, individual staff members of humanitarian organizations may be willing to take risks, but the organization as a whole may not. In international development assistance, the risks of engaging in a particular context or programme are typically assessed, whereas the emphasis in the humanitarian sphere is on the risks of not engaging. Moreover, in the case of development assistance, donors tend to pay more attention to fiduciary risks, while humanitarian organizations focus on security risks.[42]

In Western donor countries, accountability to taxpayers and ensuring a return on investments, as well as the increasing focus on results-based management, mean that donors are more and more likely to choose a strategy of 'risk avoid-

[41] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a Common Approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011.
URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

[42] Ibid, pp. 5-6.

ance'. The unwillingness of many employees of these structures to risk their career prospects is another contributing factor.[43]

In 2010, the former head of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Andrew Natsios complained that development assistance agencies are under such heavy and consistent pressure to reduce risk that it has started to have a negative effect on the desired outcomes, particularly "in countries with weak or nonexistent institutions, widespread corruption, poor infrastructure, and weak human capital", etc.,[44] while 'those development programs that are most precisely and easily measured are the least transformational".[45] The realization of this fact has led to a gradual paradigm shift.

The first sign that such a shift had started to take place was the publication of the OECD report that argued for greater flexibility, adaptability, innovation and greater failure tolerance, and for the opportunities (including those that have been squandered), as well as the risks, to be properly analysed.[46] The World Bank's World Development Report 2014, which quite clearly set forth the desire to move from risk aversion to informed risk taking, deserves special mention here.[47] An increasing number of experts argue for this approach today. For example, having analysed programmes carried out by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Susan Dodsworth and Nic Cheeseman of the University of Birmingham came up with three key tips:

1) accept there's no such thing as a "risk free" option;

2) put trade-offs centre-stage – taking risks can bring rewards, but these rewards always come at a cost;

3) adopt a "portfolio" approach to risk. High-risk programmes are seen as far more palatable when evaluated as part of a package of more and less risky "investments", rather than in isolation.[48]

Today, the focus on accepting residual risk extends even to the assessment of fiduciary risks.[49] More and more experts are starting to suggest that, instead of monitoring and verifying every elements of a project to minimize corruption, risk management should seek "to identify the greatest risks – those with potentially the greatest cost in terms of development outcomes" and mitigate those.[50]

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[43] Rocha Menocal A. It's a Risky Business. Aid and New Approaches to Political Risk Management // Overseas Development Institute. July 2013. URL: https://www.refworld.org/docid/523aba674.html

[44] Natsios A. The Clash of the Counter-Bureaucracy and Development // Center for Global Development. July 2010. URL: https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1424271_file_Natsios_Counterbureaucracy.pdf

[45] Ibid.

[46] Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts. The Price of Success? // OECD. 2012. URL: https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/managing%20risks.pdf

[47] World Bank. 2013. World Development Report 2014 : Risk and Opportunity—Managing Risk for Development. Washington, DC. URL: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16092

[48] Dodsworth S. and N. Cheeseman. How to Take the Right Risks in International Development // DevPolicy Blog. 06.04.2018. URL: https://devpolicy.org/take-the-right-risks-in-international-development-20180406/

[49] Why is Corruption Risk Management so Hard? Assessing Current Practices in Development Aid? // Chr. Michelsen Institute. U4 Brief. May 2016. URL: https://www.cmi.no/publications/5819-why-is-corruption-risk-management-so-hard

[50] Ibid.

Researchers at the Chr. Michelsen Institute believe that such an approach could be very useful in a situation where some kind of return is expected on every dollar spent: "If and when corruption problems do emerge, such procedures can help demonstrate to critics that the agency followed a rigorous rationale and review process when approving a risky project".[51]

Another important thing. Researchers at the ODI in the UK have pointed out in their assessments of humanitarian risks that the risk management strategies used by some actors may impact the risk assessment level of other actors involved in aid provision.[52] This fully applies to risks associated with providing other kinds of aid as well.

This is why the final stage of the risk management strategy – correcting mistakes based on the results of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen strategy – is of such great importance.

The classification of international aid risks and related risk-management strategies presented in this section does not claim to be the only correct one. However, it does allow me to structure the extensive evidence – both qualitative and quantitative – regarding the provision of international aid over the 2010s. In the sections that follow, I will test this typology on the example of the MENA region post-2011.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Metcalfe V. et al. Risk in Humanitarian Action: Towards a Common Approach? // Overseas Development Institute. February 2011. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AF72EA972BB5544B492578330009F1CE-Full_Report.pdf

2. Determinants of International Aid to the MENA Countries (2011–2020)

2.1. Endogenous Risks

The Arab Spring of 2011 was a natural result of the realization of political, institutional and socioeconomic development risks that the authors of the Arab Human Development Report (the first edition of which came out in 2002) had been warning us about for years. The perpetuation of the elite consensus, the lack of opportunity, the high unemployment in the cities due to the youth bulge that is characteristic of the region – all these risks created conditions for the emergence of a turbulent storm that the region had not known for a long time. Experts still disagree about which factors had a greater impact, but a detailed discussion of these arguments is beyond the scope of this report. More important are the hopes that the Arab Spring generated among internal and, crucially, external forces and the risks it created or could not prevent – and in fact even increased.

An analysis of the positions of the MENA countries in the Fragile States Index that has been compiled by the Fund for Peace in the United States since 2006 provides a fairly clear idea of the degree to which political risks become a reality. The Index is made up of 12 indicators that are broken down into four clusters of three:

1) Cohesion indicators – Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites and Group Grievance;

2) Economic indicators – Economic Decline, Uneven Economic Development, and Human Flight and Brain Drain;

3) Political indicators – State Legitimacy, Public Services, and Human Rights and Rule of Law;

4) Social and cross-cutting indicators – Demographic Pressures, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, and External Intervention.[53]

The methodology behind the Fragile States Index certainly has its flaws and is often criticized by the expert community.[54] That said, the data is widely used by the staff of international organizations and national development agencies in the OECD DAC member states – and this is precisely why it is of interest to us.

Seven Arab countries have strengthened their positions in this anti-rating since 2010, but only slightly. Meanwhile, five countries and territories (Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, West Bank and Syria) have dropped significantly in the index. Syria and Libya have demonstrated the most unfavourable dynamics, although Yemen, where the situation at the beginning of the Arab Spring was far worse, has "caught up" in recent years.

[53] For more on the methodology behind the Fragile States Index, see: Methodology // Fragile States Index. URL: https://fragilestatesindex.org/methodology/

[54] See, for example: Glawion T. Handle with Care! A Qualitative Comparison of the Fragile States Index's Bottom Three Countries: Central African Republic, Somalia and South Sudan. [Development and Change], 2019, vol. 50, no, 2, pp. 277–300.

Table 1. Dynamics of Changes in the Positions of Official Development Assistance Recipients in the MENA Region in the Fragile States Index (2006–2020)

ODA recipient	2006		2010		2015		2020		Change from 2010
	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	
North Africa									
Algeria	72	77.8	71	81.3	67	79.6	71	74.6	−6.7
Egypt	31	89.5	49	87.6	38	89.9	35	86.0	−1.6
Libya	95	68.5	111	68.7	25	95.3	20	95.2	+26.5
Morocco	76	76.5	90	77.0	89	74.6	80	71.2	−5.8
Sudan	1	112.3	3	111.8	4	111.5	8	104.8	−7.0
Tunisia	100	65.4	118	67.5	86	75.7	95	68.1	+0.6
Middle East									
Iraq	4	109.0	7	107.3	12	104.4	17	95.9	−11.4
Jordan	74	77.0	90	77.0	81	76.9	67	75.4	−1.6
Lebanon	65	80.5	34	90.9	40	88.1	40	84.7	−6.2
West Bank	67	79.4	54	84.6	68	79.4	69	75.1	−9.5
Syria	33	88.6	48	87.9	9	107.8	4	110.7	+22.8
Yemen	16	96.6	15	100.0	7	108.2	1	112.4	+12.4

Source: Fund for Peace // Fragile States Index 2006–2020. URL: https://fragilestatesindex.org

Among the key unrealized political and institutional opportunities are democratic transition, the renewal of elites, improving the effectiveness of governance in general and reducing corruption (in particular, reforms in the security sector and the judiciary system), mitigating the social tensions, and strengthening the monopoly of governments on legitimate use of violence.

As for political risks, those who took to the streets in 2011 were hoping for the renewal of elites and the redistribution of resources that had been in the hands of the same rulers and loyalist groups for far too long (pro-government coalitions were slightly different in each state). At the same time, not all the protestors called for Western-style democratization. The Islamist forces that appealed to some of the opposition groups wanted to build society on much stricter principles than the authoritarian regimes of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak, Muammar Gaddafi, Bashar al-Assad and Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Be that as it may, over the course of a relatively short period of time, the ruling regimes in many of the region's countries faced the threat of being overthrown.

And this is precisely what happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Syria was able to avoid this fate, although the confrontation between the authorities and the opposition in that country quickly acquired a military dimension with a high degree of external interference. As a result of these events, the number of people affected by conflict has grown significantly in the MENA region: 81 million out of 357 million people in 2010, compared to 155 million out of 423 million in 2018.[55] If ongoing conflicts are not resolved and demographic projections do not deviate from current trends, then this figure will rise to 207 million out of 521 million people by 2030 (that is, to 40 per cent of the total population of the Arab countries).[56]

The monarchies in Morocco and Jordan succeeded in implementing reforms (albeit not truly transformational ones) that placated those who had taken to the streets. But this did not eliminate the internal risks completely, and they remain extremely high.

The Arab Spring, however, turned out to be a surprisingly fleeting phenomenon. The overthrow of decades-old regimes in a number of countries cleared the political space for Islamist forces whose representatives were able to win the first post-revolutionary elections in Egypt and Tunisia. This created a new balance of power which, at least in Egypt, turned out to be unacceptable for the main force in the country, namely, the army. The Egyptian Armed Forces launched a coup d'état in the summer of 2013 against President Mohamed Morsi – Chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (recognized as a terrorist organization whose activities are prohibited in the Russian Federation). The coup paved the way for the emergence of yet another authoritarian regime led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi that is in some respects reminiscent of the Hosni Mubarak regime, which was forcefully removed in 2011.

There was no radical circulation of elites in Morocco and Jordan, not to mention countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, which managed to avoid the turbulence that was sweeping the region at the time. The states affected by conflict had suffered different fates. In Libya, the political system was torn down completely. Supporters of the Gaddafi regime were either physically eliminated or were for a long time deprived of the opportunity to have any kind of influence on the state of affairs in the country. Various rebel and radical Islamist groups entered the scene. In Yemen, the 2011 Yemeni Revolution that toppled President Ali Abdullah Saleh paved the way for the Houthi insurgency and a bloody war involving international actors.

It is rather difficult to provide a brief overview of the situation in Syria: on the one hand, the Bashar al-Assad government has not undergone any major changes, and it still relies on almost exactly the same forces in the government-controlled territories that it relied on in 2011, although the general level of support has declined significantly over the years. The authorities did change, however, in the

[55] Abdellatif A., Pagliani P., Hsu E. Arab Human Development Report Research Paper. Leaving No One Behind. Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries // The United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS). 2019. URL: https://arab-hdr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/UNDP_Citizenship_and_SDGs_report_web.pdf

[56] Ibid, p. 3.

Trans-Euphrates – namely, in the province of Idlib and the north-western territories of the Syrian Arab Republic, which are actually controlled by Turkey. But it is impossible to describe these changes as "democratization", even though a number of foreign experts see a prototype of a future "democratic Syria" in the activities of local councils in these regions.

Risk factors related to corruption are also prominent. Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire – an act that woke the Arab world from its lethargic sleep – to protest police brutality. One would be hard pressed to say that the situation has greatly improved since then. According to Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, the MENA region had the highest bribery rate in the world in 2015–2016, with approximately 30 per cent of respondents saying that they had had to bribe an official at least once over the course of the previous year. The 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index confirmed that the problem continues to be systemic in most countries in the region, especially in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and even Egypt.[57]

The latest edition of the Global Corruption Barometer: Middle East and North Africa paints a very bleak picture indeed: more than 65 per cent of respondents believe that corruption in their country is increasing, while just 12 per cent think it is decreasing, with 19 per cent seeing no change. Most respondents (66 per cent) are convinced that their government is doing a bad job at tackling corruption, while a meagre 28 per cent think their government is doing well. Some 44 per cent of respondents believe that members of parliament and government officials are involved in corruption. It is particularly telling that most people believe law enforcement officials to be the most likely to take bribes.[58] The Transparency International's survey was conducted in six countries, with the most worrying results observed in Sudan, Lebanon and Tunisia (the only state to have carried out a democratic transition). The situation is only slightly better in Palestine, Morocco and Jordan. One in five respondents claimed to have paid a bribe in order to receive public services, while in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, more than one third of those questioned said that they had to use personal connections to get the services they needed, and more than half of those had to pay a bribe anyway.[59] But perhaps nothing pointed to the scale of the corruption problem in the region better than the series of anti-corruption rallies that took place across the Middle East in 2019.

The destabilization of the situation in the wake of the Arab Spring created fertile ground for radical Jihadist groups. This risk manifested itself most fully in the territorial expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or IS, recognized as a terrorist organization whose activities are prohibited in the Russian Federation), which by the summer of 2014 had managed to seize a significant part of the territories of Syria and Iraq and claim them as part of the caliphate.

[57] Will Rampant Corruption Spark an Arab Autumn // Transparency International. 24.10.2019. URL: https://www.transparency.org/en/news/will-rampant-corruption-spark-an-arab-autumn#

[58] Global Corruption Barometer. Middle East & North Africa 2019. Citizens' Views and Experiences of Corruption // Transparency International. 2019. URL: https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019_GCB_MENA_Report_EN.pdf

[59] Ibidem

The unprecedented surge of Jihadist activity created a threat not only for neighbouring states, but also for the countries of North Africa (primarily Tunisia and Morocco), which saw many of their citizens in the Mesopotamia region being absorbed into ISIL, or, alternatively, the strengthening of groups within their own territories that were loyal to ISIL (primarily in Libya and Egypt). The heightened tensions led regional and non-regional actors to come together to defeat ISIL, which took four years to accomplish. The region had stepped away from the abyss and the risk of an establishment of a region-wide caliphate disappeared. However, ISIL still has sleeper cells operating in Syria and Iraq, and this is a factor that continues to determine the actions of external forces. Terrorism remains a big problem in the region. According to the Global Terrorism Index, five of the MENA countries were in the top 20 in terms of the number of attacks and casualties in 2018: Iraq (2nd), Syria (4th), Yemen (8th), Egypt (11th) and Libya (20th).[60]

In terms of socioeconomic risks, many of those involved in the 2011 protests expected regime change to increase growth, reduce inequality, create new jobs and strengthen food security. But none of this happened. This much is evident from the Human Development Index compiled by the United Nations Development Program since 1990 (see Table 2).[61]

On the whole, the dynamics in the MENA region following the Arab Spring were quite negative. Only four of the 12 countries in the region improved their positions over the five-year period from 2013 to 2018: Algeria (+1), Morocco (+2), Tunisia (+3) and Sudan (+1). Every other country fell in the index, with the biggest drops being observed in the three conflict-ridden countries: Libya (–9), Syria (–14) and Yemen (–18).

Inequality indicators can serve as a good illustration of the depth of the region's problems. For a long time, inequality was thought not to be an issue in MENA (the so-called "Arab inequality puzzle").[62] That said, inequality has been on the decline since the 1990s, albeit very slowly. The Arab Spring forced us to reassess these dynamics. The trend was turned on its head in the 2010s. As of 2016, 61 per cent of the region's wealth was concentrated in the hands of 10 per cent of the population (which is 7 per cent higher than in sub-Saharan Africa), with the top 1 per cent controlling 25 per cent of all the wealth, and the bottom 50 per cent less than 10 per cent of the wealth.[63] Today, the Middle East can be characterized alongside Brazil and South Africa as zones of "extreme inequality".[64] The high numbers are due to the high concentration of wealth in the oil-producing countries of the Per-

[60] Global Terrorism Index 2019. Measuring Impact of Terrorism // Institute of Economics and Peace. 2019. URL: https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2019-web.pdf

[61] The Human Development Index is a composite index of decent standard of living (GNI per capita at purchasing power parity in U.S. dollars), education index (mean years and expected years of schooling), and life expectancy at birth. It was developed in 1990 by a group of economists led by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and is calculated annually. Countries are typically classified according to their level of development depending on their Human Development Index score: very high, high, medium and low.

[62] Ianchovichina E. et al. Inequality, Uprisings, and Conflict in the Arab World. Middle East and North Africa // Economic Monitor. World Bank. URL: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/22711/9781464807350.pdf

[63] World Inequality Report 2018 // World Inequality Lab.
URL: https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf

[64] Ibid, p. 74.

Table 2. Human Development Index for the MENA ODA Recipient Countries (2000–2018)

Position (2018)	ODA Recipient	Years				Difference 2013–2018
		2000	2010	2015	2018	
High human development						
82	Algeria	0,646	0,730	0,751	0,759	–1
91	Tunisia	0,653	0,717	0,731	0,739	3
93	Lebanon	No data	0,751	0,728	0,730	–6
102	Jordan	0,702	0,728	0,721	0,723	–6
110	Libya	0,728	0,757	0,691	0,708	–9
116	Egypt	0,611	0,666	0,690	0,700	–2
Medium human development						
119	Palestine, State of	No data	0,671	0,685	0,690	–5
120	Iraq	0,608	0,652	0,665	0,689	–1
121	Morocco	0,531	0,618	0,660	0,676	2
Low human development						
154	Syria	0,590	0,644	0,540	0,549	–14
168	Sudan	0,403	0,471	0,501	0,507	1
177	Yemen	0,432	0,499	0,493	0,463	–18

Source: Human Development Report 2019 // United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). URL: http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf (accessed April 15, 2020).

sian Gulf (which accounted for 42 per cent of the region's income and just 15 per cent of its population).[65] However, recent data suggests that the level of inequality within individual Arab countries is just as high. And there are reasons for this.

When the Arab Spring started, MENA was the only region in the world where unemployment averaged over 10 per cent, and youth unemployment was at 20 per cent. This situation was caused by the specifics of the region's demographic development (the youth bulges), as well as by skill mismatches (a problem that got far worse during the 2000s), large public sector, etc.[66] The destabilization caused by the Arab Spring and the outbreak of armed conflicts only made

[65] The numbers are more or less the same if Turkey and the oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf are removed from the equation. See: World Inequality Report 2018 // World Inequality Lab. URL: https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf

[66] Ahmed M. et al. Youth Unemployment in the MENA Region: Determinants and Challenges // International Monetary Fund. 2012. URL: https://www.imf.org/external/np/vc/2012/061312.htm?id=18656

the situation worse. And the youth policies adopted by a number of countries did little to reverse the trend.[67] With the exception of Lebanon, unemployment in the ODA recipient Arab countries remains in the range of 20–30 per cent, and it is significantly higher in Palestine (41.6 per cent) and Libya (50.9 per cent).[68] What is more, people who are formally employed are often forced to live in extremely difficult conditions, which increases conflict potential.

The multidimensional risks associated with threats to water and food security deserve special attention here. Water scarcity in MENA is reaching dangerous levels, and there is a pronounced economic dimension to this. The price of fresh water in the region is approximately 35 per cent of the cost of production. In the case of desalinated water, only 10 per cent of costs are covered by the consumer, and the difference is subsidized by the state – to the tune of 2 per cent of GDP annually, according to experts.[69]

The situation is made all the worse by climate change, rapid demographic growth and uncontrolled urbanization. What is more, agriculture is in decline. This has a negative effect on food security and food price subsidies, which have repeatedly presented large-scale political risks. The MENA countries will remain among the largest grain importers for the foreseeable future. In fact, most depend on imports for over half of their needs.[70] The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that, as of 2019, approximately 55 million people throughout the Middle East and North Africa (around 13.2 per cent of the population) are undernourished. The catastrophically low level of food security in the region is also a consequence of the worsening humanitarian situation.

Perhaps nowhere have the risks brought about by the Arab Spring manifested themselves as strongly as they have in the humanitarian sphere. Compared to 2011, the number of persons of concern (in the vernacular of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, persons of concern include refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees and stateless persons) is now exponentially higher – at 18.6 million people, according to 2019 estimates (not including Palestinian refugees). While the MENA region is home to just 4.5 per cent of the world's population, approximately 21.5 per cent of the world's "persons of concern" live there.

Syria, Sudan and Yemen are among the top ten countries in the world in terms of the number of displaced persons (which includes refugees and internally displaced persons, or IDPs). In turn, Lebanon and Jordan are among the top ten in terms of the number of refugees they have taken in, ranking 8th and 10th, respectively. At the same time, Lebanon has the highest concentration of refugees in

[67] Kabbani M. Youth Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Revisiting and Reframing the Challenge // Brookings Institution. February 2019. URL: https://www.brookings.edu/research/youth-employment-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-revisiting-and-reframing-the-challenge/

[68] International Labour Organisation. ILOSTAT database // World Bank.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?end=2020&start=2005

[69] Karasapan O. Striving for Water and Food Security // The Cairo Review of Global Affairs. 2020.
URL: https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/striving-for-water-and-food-security/

[70] Karasapan O. Middle East Food Security Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic // Brookings Institution. 14.07.2020. URL: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/07/14/middle-east-food-security-amid-the-covid-19-pandemic/

the world (156 per 1000 people), followed by Jordan (72 per 1000 people), if one takes both refugees (according to the UNHCR classification) and Palestinian refugees (according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) classification) into account – at 0.5 million and 2.3 million people, respectively. However, the negative effects of the armed conflicts are not limited to the number of internally displaced persons. According to the World Bank, conflicts have directly affected approximately 90 per cent of the population in Syria, 55 per cent of the population in Yemen in Iraq, and around 10 per cent of the population in Libya.[71] Approximately 57 million people in the region were in need of humanitarian aid as of the end of 2019.

The conflicts in Syria and Yemen have had the biggest effect on the worsening humanitarian situation. Of the 23 million Syrians living in the country as of the beginning of 2011, approximately 12 million were forced to leave their homes. Half of them found refuge elsewhere in the country, while the remaining 6 million went abroad – approximately 5 million settled in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, and more than 1.1 million found a new home in the European Union (Germany took in some 800,000). The United States, Russia and other countries took in thousands of Syrian refugees). The war in Syria may have come to an end, but, for political and security reasons, refugees appear to be in no hurry to return home (see Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of Syrian Refugees by the MENA Country (as of December 2020)

Location name	Source	Data date	Population	Share in the total number of Syrian refugees in the region's countries
Turkey	Government of Turkey	02.12.2020	3,641,503	65.2
Lebanon	UNHCR	30.09.2020	879,529	15.7
Jordan	UNHCR	04.11.2020	661,997	11.8
Iraq	UNHCR	30.11.2020	241,682	4.3
Egypt	UNHCR	30.10.2020	130,187	2.3
Other (North Africa)	UNHCR	31.01.2020	31,657	0.6
Total		02.12.2020	5,586,461	100%

Source: Syria Regional Refugee Response // United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. URL: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria

[71] Global Spread of Conflict by Country and Population // World Bank. URL: https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/spread-conflict-data

A humanitarian disaster of massive proportions took place in Yemen. After the Houthis seized the capital of Sana'a and thus forced the Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi government to flee to Saudi Arabia, the exiled president formed a coalition with other Gulf states which, with logistical support from the West, launched the large-scale bombing of the Houthi-controlled territories. This led to the massive infrastructural damage, lack of food and water and gave rise to a crisis that claimed the lives of 100,000 people according to the most recent estimates, including approximately 20,000 people in 2019 alone.[72] Some 3.65 million people in Yemen have been internally displaced since March 2015 (including 66,500 families in 2019). Over 80 per cent of these remained outside their place of permanent residence for more than one year, and only 1.28 million have been able to return home. A total of 24.1 million people are in need in Yemen – that is, practically the entire country needs assistance.[73]

The humanitarian crisis caused by the territorial expansion of ISIL has also affected Iraq, where the number of IDPs at its peak exceeded 3 million. As of the time of writing, most of the displaced Iraqi people have returned to their homes. However, approximately 300,000 people remain in temporary camps, and another 150,000 in various informal settlements.[74]

The humanitarian situation in the region was exacerbated in 2020 by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. According to official data, approximately 1.5 million people in the MENA countries (including the Gulf states) had gotten infected as of the beginning of October 2020, and more than 28,000 had died. However, these numbers do not give us a complete picture of the situation, especially in conflict-ridden countries. The recipient countries most affected by the pandemic include Iraq (577,000 cases and 12,600 deaths as of mid-December 2020), Morocco (404,000 cases and 6700 deaths), Jordan (265,000 cases and almost 3500 deaths) and Egypt (123,000 cases and almost 7000 deaths).

The impact on the Gulf monarchies has been equally devastating, with Saudi Arabia reporting 360,000 cases and 6100 deaths, Qatar 141,000 cases and 241 deaths, Kuwait 147,000 cases and 913 deaths, and the United Arab Emirates 187,000 cases and 622 deaths. These countries are the main sources of investment, concessional aid and remittances. In this regard, the slowdown in their economic development, caused to a great degree by the fall in energy prices (which are still below the pre-pandemic levels), will be felt one way or another by all the MENA countries. For example, most of the Yemenis who lost their jobs in 2020 actually worked in Saudi Arabia, where 1.6 million of their compatriots are employed, accounting for 61 per cent of remittance inflows through formal financial routes (approximately $3.7 billion).[75]

[72] More than 100,000 people killed in Yemen war, says new report // Middle East Eye. 31.10.2019. URL: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/over-100000-killed-yemen-war-says-new-report

[73] Yemen Operation Update // United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. URL: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/79011

[74] Iraq CCQM Overview // United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. URL: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/iraq_cccm

[75] Craig I. In Yemen, Families Suffer as COVID-19 Dries up Money from Abroad // The New Humanitarian. 16.06.2020. URL: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/06/16/Coronavirus-Yemen-economy-remittances

Preliminary the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimates suggest that the region's GDP will decrease by 5.7 per cent in 2020, and by up to 13 per cent in war-torn countries. This amounts to a total loss of over $150 billion.[76] The most vulnerable groups of the population will be the worst hit, with 14.3 million people expected to be pushed into poverty. The International Monetary Fund predicts the slowest growth for 50 (!) years.[77] Unemployment will grow by 1.2 per cent, with approximately 1.7 million people losing their jobs in 2020 alone.[78] The United Nations estimates that the MENA countries would need an additional $2.38 billion in aid in 2020, which is more than one fifth of the global pandemic recovery assistance of $10.2 billion. The medium- and long-term consequences of the pandemic cannot be measured yet.

What is more, the Middle East remains a region where extremely unlikely but singularly destructive risks can occur. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than the explosion of 2750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020, one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions the world has ever seen, which killed over 170 people, severely injured several thousand more and left around 300,000 residents of the Lebanese capital homeless. It also created conditions for the further spread of coronavirus. The scale of the damage was estimated at $15 billion. With a national debt of more than 170 per cent of GDP, Lebanon quite clearly does not have that kind of money.

For the sake of fairness, I should note that it has not all been about missed opportunities in recent years. Many of the serious risks that experts thought would almost certainly manifest themselves never came to be. These include, in particular, the threat of a regional, inter-state war, the uncontrollable escalation of religious violence and the fragmentation of states. While none of the states in the region has ceased to exist, the issue of restoring unified power in Libya, Syria and Yemen will require tremendous efforts on the part of internal and external actors. With so many risks involved, it is vital to gain an understanding of how the people in the region themselves assess the challenges facing their countries. Of particular interest in this context are the results of a 2019 opinion poll conducted by *Arab News* and the Arab Strategy Forum, where researchers asked 3000 people in 18 Arab countries (excluding Syria) which problems they considered the most pressing.

Corruption, unemployment and the threat of forced migration from the country top the list, which speaks to the complex nature of the challenges facing the countries in the region. This complicates matters for international donors, who viewed what was happening in the region in terms of the development risks that they pose for Arab countries themselves, as well as through the prism of their own "egoistic" interests, which underwent a serious transformation throughout the 2010s.

[76] Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region An Opportunity to Build Back Better. // United Nations. URL: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_arab_states_english_version_july_2020.pdf

[77] Regional Economic Outlook Update: Middle East and Central Asia. // International Monetary Fund. URL: https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/MECA/Issues/2020/07/13/regional-economic-outlook-update-menap-cca

[78] Covid-19 Economic Cost to Arab Region // The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia URL: https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/escwa-covid-19-economic-cost-arab-region-en.pdf

2.2. Exogenous Risks

The destabilization of the MENA region in the early 2010s has forced international donors, who had grown used to working with the same regimes over the course of decades, to re-prioritize their activities. There were two reasons for that. On the one hand, they had to adjust their mindset to both new challenges and the risks that have been known for some time but were never accorded much importance, as priority was given to ensuring security and stability. On the other hand, noticeable changes occurred within donor countries and in international system at both the regional and global levels.

The change in the political landscape of the region occurred at a specific moment in the evolution of the world order, at a time when the foreign policy of the world's leading country was undergoing a substantial transformation. Even before the Arab Spring, the Barack Obama administration had made it abundantly clear that

Table 4. The Most Pressing Challenges in Arab Countries (according to an opinion poll carried out by Arab News and the Arab Strategy Forum in 2019) (% of total respondents)

	Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Sudan, Yemen	Entire Region
Extremism	6	10	7	7
Sectarianism	3	12	20	9
Unemployment	48	44	28	42
Political differences	16	11	23	17
Economic challenges	28	29	27	28
Western interference	12	15	24	16
Corruption	63	38	55	57
Migration out of my home country	14	7	16	43
Refugees coming into my home country	5	12	3	6
Lack of resources	9	7	9	9
Lack of trust in government	38	16	24	31
Religious political parties	5	6	9	15
Diverting from religion	18	19	9	15
Prefer not to say	5	13	6	7

Source: Khamis J. Arabs Fed up with Corruption, Survey Suggests // Arab News. 09.12.2019. URL: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1596116/middle-east

the main focus of U.S. efforts would no longer be on the Middle East, but rather on the Asia-Pacific. The knock-on effect of this was that regional actors – primarily Turkey and the Persian Gulf countries – were motivated to pursue more active policies in the region. This was also helped by a rapid growth of economic opportunities and the increase in donor activities in almost all of these countries throughout the 2000s.[79] For example, the cumulative share of assistance from the three key Arab donors (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, grew from 2.8 per cent of total aid from DAC countries in 2004–2007 to 4.0 per cent in the crisis and post-crisis years of 2008–2010.[80] This trend only continued during the 2010s, and it was particularly noticeable when the Donald Trump administration came to power in the United States. Trump repeatedly promised to reduce the level of the U.S. engagement in Middle Eastern affairs, as proved it by certain actions (particularly in Syria). The relevant agencies , most notably the Department of State and the Department of Defense, did not take kindly to the impulsive steps of the 45th President of the United States and would often do their best to reverse his decisions.

A distinct combination of internal and external factors determined the position of European countries too. On the one hand, EU countries made support for democratic transition a key dimension of their donor activities, starting with the revolutionary wave in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s – early 1990s, and the embodiment of the general principles of their foreign policy, which meant that the EU had to be involved in the formation of a new Middle East. On the other hand, right-wing populism has been rising in many European countries since the 2010s against the backdrop of a worsening economic situation and an increase in migration flows to the continent, including from the Middle East. European governments have been forced to take measures to prevent the increase in influx of the refugees. One of the ways to tackle this issue, in their view, would be to promote development in the countries of origin of migrants and in neighbouring states. European donors continue to use this logic today.

Speaking of the role of geopolitical and geoeconomics factors, special attention should be paid here to the logic of Russia's relations with the outside world during this period, which was also projected onto its regional policy. The Arab Spring unfolded during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, and it helped accelerate the end of the "reset" of U.S.–Russia relations that saw progress in both military and strategic fields (the signing of the START Treaty in the spring of 2010) and in the resolution of the most pressing (for the United States) problems in the region (Moscow's support for international sanctions against Iran, its consent to transfer to and from Afghanistan along the Northern Distribution Network through Russian territory, etc.). It was against this background that the Russian leadership decided not to block the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya authorizing the international community to establish a no-fly zone over the country, take "all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian populated

[79] See: Xiaoli Guo. Turkey's International Humanitarian Assistance During the AKP Era: Key Actors, Concepts and Motivations. [Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies]. 2020, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 121–140.

[80] Rouis M., Shomakmadova O. Arab Aid on the Rise 2001-2016 // World Bank. February 2018.
URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/665001519755362396/pdf/123735-BRI-PUBLIC-QN-163.pdf

areas while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form" and freeze the assets of the Libyan leadership. However, the United States and its closest NATO allies went far beyond the mandate, paving the way for the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi and the brutal reprisals against him that followed. This set in motion a chain of events that marked the beginning of a new "cooling" in the U.S.–Russia relations, which started to deteriorate noticeably following the events on Bolotnaya Square and the introduction of the Magnitsky Act. The relationship finally reached a nadir as a consequence of the Ukrainian crisis.

All these events were reflected in Russia's uncompromising position on Syria (its attempts to prevent a replay of the "Libyan scenario" by blocking the relevant resolutions in the UN Security Council) and especially in its campaign to counter ISIL (first by creating a joint information centre with Syria, Iran and Iraq to coordinate the fight against this organization and then by carrying out a full-fledged military operation at the request of the Syrian government in September 2015). The latter would become, among other things, a way to demonstrate that Russia, despite Western attempts to isolate it, plays a special role in world affairs. It is in this light that we should view Egypt's burgeoning relationship with Russia under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi – often to spite the Obama administration, which found it difficult to make inroads with the Egyptian leader – and Russia's policy in Libya. In other words, the general logic of the global rivalry pushed Russia to build up its presence in the Middle East, including through the use of aid instruments. Russian politics still hinges on this interdependence of regional and global factors today, and it is only likely to get more prominent in the coming years.

China's potential as a provider of foreign assistance also increased during this period. This reflected the expansion of its economic power and the increased willingness of the country's leadership to use this power to further its political interests – not only along its borders, but also in more remote regions. The launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 (encompassing some of the MENA states), forced the country to become more active both in the Persian Gulf and in Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon.

The combination of the internal and external factors mentioned above determined the amount of aid that countries received and the donor hierarchy, their specific risk strategies and their readiness to coordinate efforts in order to mitigate key risks.

3. Map of Assistance Provided to the MENA Arab Countries as a Reflection of the Differences in Risk Assessments

3.1. Scope and Structure of Assistance[81]

Most Western donors preferred to see the Arab Spring as another example of democratic transition that had to be supported by all means. International (primarily economic) assistance to the government authorities became a key instrument of external support in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, where the regimes changed quickly and peacefully, as well as in the cases of Morocco and Jordan, where the governments managed to remain in power. However, the opposite was true for those countries where armed violence broke out, namely in Libya and Syria: any dialogue with the official authorities in Tripoli and Damascus was broken off, tough sanctions were imposed against the regimes of Muammar Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad and, rather perversely, it was the disparate opposition forces that started receiving external support in the form of financing, weapons and official recognition of the bodies they established (such as the National Transitional Council in Libya or the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces in Syria) as legitimate representatives of the aspirations of the people, etc. Libya became the only country where the West decided to protect rebels who opposed the official (Gaddafi) regime in an armed operation sanctioned by the UN Security Council. However, as I mentioned earlier, the countries involved went beyond their official mandate.

Researchers have more information at their disposal on the amount of aid provided to support the democratic transitions in Egypt and Tunisia and ensure the stability of the monarchies in Morocco and Jordan than on the scale of external support provided to the conflict parties in Libya, Syria and Yemen, which are often difficult to distinguish due to the "fog of war".

In terms of the amount of aid provided in zones of turbulence, donors could hypothetically have followed one of two strategies. The first strategy would be to minimize the level of engagement until the situation has stabilized somewhat, which is more or less in line with the principles of the so-called "standard approach" to interacting with "difficult partners". The second strategy would be to take advantage of the window of opportunity that has presented itself and establish ties with the new authorities by increasing the amount of aid. However, this would require a degree of confidence that this support would be in the best interests of the donor.

At first glance, it would appear that donors have taken the second route. An analysis of the latest statistics on ODA (up to 2018) shows that, since 2011, the MENA countries have received just under a quarter of a trillion (!) dollars from states

[81] This and subsequent sections of the report use the results of exploration of the latest OECD statistics on ODA flows from international donors to MENA countries, which were published in V. Bartenev. The Middle East and North Africa in the Latest Statistics on Official Development Assistance: Data Analytics. Moscow: Moscow University Press, 2020, 54 pp. [In Russian]

that report to the OECD DAC,[82] or 15.8 per cent of the total ODA provided, which is significantly higher than the region's share of the global population (approximately 4.5 per cent as of 2018). If we also take into account the amount of aid from donors who do not report their assistance (primarily Qatar and China), as well as the amount of security assistance, which does not qualify as ODA (we have little information to draw on in this respect – for example, we know that in the case of the United States, such assistance amounts to approximately 55 per cent of the total assistance provided), then we can assert with some confidence that the MENA countries received substantially more than $300 billion on a concessional or gratuitous basis.

Annual aid to the region has grown significantly. In 2017–2018, the region received an average of around $34.3 billion, 135 per cent more than in 2009–2010. Meanwhile, aid to the rest of the world increased by just 26.3 per cent over the same period. The Arab world's share of global ODA flows thus grew from 10.4 per cent in 2009–2010 to 17.7 per cent in 2017–2018 (see Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of ODA to the MENA Arab Countries by Donor Category (2009–2010 and 2017–2018 averages, at current prices)[83]

Donor category	2009–2010			2017–2018		
	ODA volumes (USD million)	Share in ODA from all donors (%)	Share of global ODA from the respective donor category	ODA volumes (USD million)	Share in ODA from all donors (%)	Share of global ODA from the respective donor category
DAC countries	10,231	70.2	10.4	14,735	43.0	12.4
Multilaterals	3706	25.4	25.4	5738	16.7	10.4
Non-DAC countries	639	4.4	59.0	13,791	40.2	72.6
All official donors	14,576	100	10.4	34,265	10	17.7

Source: Author's calculations, based on OECD data.[84]

This aggregate figure can be somewhat misleading, however, as it obscures the differences between donor groups.

The most notable increases in aid have come from the non-OECD countries, primarily Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states. In the

[82] 30 OECD members (all the EU countries except Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Romania and the Baltic states), plus Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the EU institutions), and 30 non-OECD providers of development cooperation, half of which report to the OECD at the aggregate level. These include countries that are active in the MENA region, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Israel, Russia and Turkey.

[83] Here and elsewhere I will use the indicator of "Gross ODA", which is the amount that a donor actually spends in a given year, including repayments of the principal on loans made in prior years as well as offsetting entries for forgiven debt and any recoveries made on grants.

[84] Here and elsewhere, I use the data on official development assistance collected by the OECD available at: OECD Statistics // OECD. URL: https://stats.oecd.org.

case of Turkey, this can be explained by the excessively high volumes of aid to Syrians in territories that are not controlled by the Assad government, which are nevertheless reflected as aid to Syria in the OECD official statistics. Meanwhile, the GCC states have been funnelling huge amounts of aid to Egypt (especially following the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in the summer of 2013), as well as to Yemen, where the largest donors – Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – supported the government in the fight against the Houthis. As a result, the share of MENA in their portfolio, which was high even before the Arab Spring (at 59.0 per cent), grew even more (to 72.6 per cent).

Multilateral institutions, on the other hand, have increased aid to other regions faster. This is due to the fact that EU institutions have scaled back their programmes in a number of countries (for example, Syria), and financial organizations, primarily the World Bank, have curtailed their operations in conflict-ridden countries.

That said, the main reason for the increase in external assistance to the region is the growth in humanitarian aid. As a result, the MENA's share in humanitarian aid flows, which was disproportionately large (relative to the population) even before 2011 (at 20.0 per cent, mostly because of Syria), increased to 50.8 per cent. The region received 43.8 per cent of all humanitarian aid between 2011 and 2018 – approximately $70.8 billion.

Non-humanitarian assistance increased by 59 per cent to $19.61 billion a year, amounting to $152.4 billion for the entire period. This clearly speaks to the fact that international donors sought to meet the region's most urgent needs first and foremost, while a comparable increase in investments in long-term socio-economic and political development were simply not possible. And it was the Scandinavian countries, alongside the Netherlands and Switzerland – countries motivated predominantly by humanitarian and philanthropic concerns – that leant most towards the provision of humanitarian aid rather than any other kind of assistance.

In order to get a better understanding of the path that individual donors have chosen in response to the challenges of the Arab Spring, we need to exclude humanitarian aid from our calculations. Non-humanitarian aid has also increased 1.6 times. At the same time, donors behaved very differently in terms of type of aid they provided.

For example, France provided almost no humanitarian aid whatsoever, while the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom, like Turkey and the GCC states, focused primarily on increasing humanitarian assistance.

Even if we divide these figures by individual donor, we will not get an objective picture. Donors rarely think in terms of a specific region or subregion when making decisions, unless they are implementing subregional programmes that cover several countries. The figures given above are the result of decisions made by donors based on an assessment by each of the countries of the situation on the ground and the risks of engagement. It is thus extremely important to look at the structure of distribution of funds between countries.

Table 6. Distribution of the ODA Flows to MENA Arab Countries in 2011–2018 by Country and Subregional Programmes

ODA recipient	ODA amount (USD million)	Country share of total ODA in MENA, %
North Africa		
Algeria	2079	0.9
Egypt	27,194	12.1
Libya	2219	1.0
Morocco	19,106	8.5
Sudan	9653	4.3
Tunisia	9755	4.3
Subregional programmes	2363	1.1
Total for subregion	72,369	32.3
Middle East		
Iraq	15,329	6.8
Jordan	18,722	8.3
Lebanon	8739	3.9
Palestine	18,314	8.2
Syria	44,413	19.8
Yemen	19,713	8.8
Subregional programmes	26 778	11.9
Total for subregion	152,009	67.7
TOTAL FOR MENA	224,377	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on OECD data.

Since 2011, ODA flows have been distributed between the Middle East and North Africa at a ratio of approximately 2:1. At the same time, a significantly larger share of funds (around 12 per cent) has been directed to subregional programmes in the Middle East, compared to 1.1 per cent in North Africa.

The majority of funds have been pumped into Syria (approximately $44.4 billion) and Egypt ($27.2 billion), which, together make up almost one third of all the aid channeled to Arab countries), with Algeria receiving less than any other country ($2.1 billion).

The distribution of funds between humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance varied both between subregions and among individual countries. Only 9 per cent

of humanitarian aid went to North Africa, with the remaining 91 per cent going to the Middle East – 55.9 per cent of which went to Syria and 10.7 per cent to Yemen. Non-humanitarian assistance was distributed entirely differently, with 42.7 per cent of funds going to North Africa and 57.3 per cent to the Middle East. Naturally, the list of largest recipients was also different: countries that had not suffered from war, namely Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, were the biggest beneficiaries, with the first two receiving only token amounts of humanitarian aid.

On the whole, MENA received assistance in the form of grants – approximately 80 per cent of all aid received in 2011–2018 (including subregional programmes), which is slightly higher than in the rest of the world (76 per cent). This can also be explained by the high share of humanitarian assistance in the total aid flows (see Table 7).

However, this figure differs significantly between subregions and stands at 93.7 per cent for the Middle East and 51 per cent for North Africa. This is due to the high number of loans issued to Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, where the figure was around 60 per cent. At the same time, there are recipients in both subregions who receive aid almost exclusively in the form of grants – namely, Algeria and Libya in North Africa and Syria and Palestine in the Middle East.

It is telling that, even in Palestine and Yemen, part of the funds are provided on a reimbursable basis. The Palestinian National Authority receives loans from the EU institutions, as well as from the three most active providers of loans – France, Germany and Italy. Yemen receives loans almost exclusively from multilateral institutions such as the International Development Association (IDA), the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), the Islamic Development Bank, and even South Korea, which issued one loan in 2017. Egypt receives loans from the EU institutions, France, Germany, South Korea and the GCC states, as well as from regional multilateral institutions, including the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) and the OPEC Fund for International Development.

At first glance, amounts for direct budget support in the MENA region appear rather high, averaging around 14 per cent of all aid sent to the region in 2017–2018, almost three times higher than the figure for the rest of the world (5.2 per cent). Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that two countries account for the majority of this amount: Yemen (39.9 per cent of all ODA) and Jordan

Table 7. Share of Grants in ODA Received by MENA Arab Countries and the Rest of the World over 2011–2018

Countries	ODA amount (USD million)	ODA delivered as grants (USD million)	Share of grants in total ODA volume (%)
MENA	224,337	178,228	79.4
Rest of the World	1,193,064	891,934	74.8

Source: Author's calculations, based on OECD data.

(33.4 per cent). And both countries are fairly unique cases in this respect. Most of the direct budget support for Jordan comes from the United States, which has long regarded the Hashemite Kingdom as one of its key partners in the region, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates provided this kind of support to Yemeni government thus helping it in the fight against the Houthi–Saleh alliance.

The extraordinarily high share of humanitarian aid means that it would also make sense to analyse the sectoral distribution of bilateral aid across the MENA region.

The distinctive features of the aid to Arab countries include:

- significantly larger amounts of funds allocated to the education sector;
- a significantly larger share of aid allocated to "Government & Civil society" sector;
- a radically higher proportion of programme assistance (primarily due to funds provided to Egypt and Iraq).

The difference in the latter two indicators is far bigger in the Middle East, where the economic sectors are underfunded by donors. The situation is the opposite in North Africa, where the "Economic infrastructure and services" sector accounts for just over one third of all received funds (which is almost twice as much as in the world as a whole).

The trends identified above based on data for 2011–2018 are likely to be confirmed once the figures for 2019 and the crisis-stricken 2020 are collected. The coronavirus pandemic is forcing donors to allocate additional funds to the region, both multilaterally and bilaterally, through grants. At the same time, it remains to be seen whether the required amounts will be mobilized in full. As of right now, most countries have received less than half of the amount they requested (see Table 8).

The difficulties in attracting aid experienced by Lebanon following the explosion in Port of Beirut are a clear illustration of the problem with mobilizing funds. The international online conference to solicit aid for Lebanon organized by President of France Emmanuel Macron managed to raise approximately $300 million.[85] Meanwhile, only 20 per cent of the UN's Lebanon Flash Appeal ($355) has been funded.[86]

The fact that donors are painfully slow when it comes to meeting new requirements speaks to the difficulties in mobilizing additional funding at a time when the situation in donor countries that are struggling due to the coronavirus pandemic is worsening. This also suggests future changes in both the overall volume and the structure of aid, as well as in the hierarchy of donors, which transformed quite significantly over the 2010s.

[85] The conference was attended by representatives of 14 European countries, Australia, Canada, Japan and the United States, as well as representative of Arab countries (both donors – Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and recipients of aid – including Egypt, Iraq and Jordan), emerging donors, such as Brazil and China, the Arab League, the EU institutions, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Monetary Fund, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the World Bank.

[86] Lebanon Flash Appeal 2020 // Financial Tracking Service. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1009/summary

Table 8. Emergency Funding Received by MENA Arab Countries to Combat the SARS-CoV-2 (Coronavirus) Pandemic through the UN Appeals (USD million, at current prices as of November 19, 2020)

	Required (USD million)	Funded (USD million)	Coverage (%)
Iraq	264.8	95.1	35.9
Jordan	52.8	18.3	34.5
Lebanon	136.5	84.3	61.7
Libya	46.7	39.1	83.9
Palestine	72.4	56.1	77.5
Sudan	283.5	105.4	37.2
Syria	384.2	186.8	48.6
Syria (regional)	758.3	134.9	17.8
Yemen	385.7	402.0	104.2
TOTAL	2384.9	1122.0	47.1%

Source: Humanitarian aid contributions 2020 // Financial Tracking Service. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: https://fts.unocha.org

3.2. Hierarchy of Donors

MENA is a unique region in terms of the distribution of roles among the main actors (see Table 9).

The OECD DAC members accounted for just 42.2 per cent of total ODA provided to the MENA countries in 2011–2018, compared to 66.6 per cent outside MENA. The share of non-DAC donors amounted 39.4 to 2.5 per cent respectively. There are two factors at play here. Such countries as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the

Table 9. Distribution of the Aid to the MENA Arab Countries and the Rest of the World in 2011–2018 among the main donor groups (in current prices)

Donor group	MENA		Rest of World	
	ODA amount (USD million)	Share in total ODA (%)	ODA amount (USD million)	Share in total ODA (%)
DAC countries	95,062	42.4	794,713	66.6
Non DAC countries	88,092	39.3	30,231	2.5
Multilaterals	41,224	18.4	368,121	30.9
All official donors	224,377	100.0	1,193,064	100.0

Source: Author's compilation, based on OECD data.

United Arab Emirates, and even Israel tend to focus their donor efforts on the Arab world. At the same time, the GCC member states are willing to provide huge amounts of aid, even in the form of balance of payments assistance, ignoring the risks that this entails. Established donors have a much more diversified portfolio of partnerships yet are still less inclined to take unnecessarily large risks, opting instead for a project-based approach.

As for multilateral organizations, their share in ODA flows to MENA (18.4 per cent) is almost half that of the share outside the region (30.8 per cent). This can be explained, among other things, by the fact that the main multilateral development bank – the World Bank, which accounts for most of the funds in other regions – provides grants and concessional loans to just four Arab countries (of the 12 ODA recipient countries), all of them in the Middle East. The visible presence of multilateral institutions of the regional aid map is ensured for the most part by the EU institutions and UN agencies (notably the UNRWA, whose activities have a strictly narrow regional focus).

Another multilateral financial institution worth mentioning is the AFESD, which is made up of the Arab League member states and does little outside of the Arab world.

The number of established donors active in the region is relatively low. Formally, almost all donors provide aid to the MENA countries, which is logical given the scale of the region's humanitarian needs. But the aid provided is highly concentrated. For example, the top five donor countries (Turkey, the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the European Union) accounted for 60 per cent, and the top ten donors – for 84 per cent of all ODA in 2011–2018, with the remaining amount provided by several dozen countries and organizations (see Table 10).

At the same time, it is important to take into account the type of assistance. Turkey, the United States and Germany have made up the top three providers of humanitarian aid to the Arab world in recent years, while Saudi Arabia, the EU institutions and the United Arab Emirates are first, second and third, respectively, in terms of development assistance.

The differences are most noticeable in the case of Turkey: while it is the undisputed leader in terms of humanitarian aid (thanks to the aid it sends to the territories under its control in Syria), accounting for almost half of all such aid to the MENA region, it is only 22nd in terms of development aid, behind such countries as Denmark, and only slightly ahead of Belgium, which is barely present in MENA. Canada and Australia similarly keep their involvement in development assistance to a minimum. But there are countries that do the exact opposite – for example, France and Japan (among the DAC donors), and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (among the non-DAC donor countries).

Only three donors have consistently been among the top ten providers of external assistance in all Arab countries in recent years – Germany, the United States and the EU institutions. Interestingly, this indicator includes other leading donors such as the United Kingdom, France, Japan and the Netherlands, as well as the

Table 10. Distribution of Aid Provided by Key Donor Countries and Multilateral Institutions (2011–2018, in current prices)

No.	Donor	ODA amount (USD million)	Share in total ODA (%)
1	Turkey	30,309	13.6
2	United States	28,842	12.9
3	Saudi Arabia	26,455	11.9
4	UAE	24,170	10.8
5	EU Institutions	23,053	10.3
6	Germany	17,596	7.9
7	France	12,045	5.4
8	Japan	9808	4.4
9	United Kingdom	8088	3.6
10	UNRWA	5634	2.5
	TOTAL	224,377	100

Source: Author's compilation, based on OECD data.

GCC states: the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and the AFESD (see Table 11).

Arab donors naturally pay much more attention to the region than the Netherlands or Japan, and rival the United Kingdom and France in that respect (see Table 11).

Germany is ahead of the United States on all indicators: it is the largest donor in three countries (the United States is the leader in just one country, Jordan; the European Union is number one in two), among the top three donors in nine countries (compared to seven for the United States and six for the European Union), and in the top five in ten countries (compared to seven for the United States and ten for the European Union). This shakes up the common assumption that the United States is the main donor in the region. This is true for security assistance only. As for ODA, the United States has ceded leadership to actors located closer to or within the region itself, although when it comes to providing assistance to political sectors, the United States maintains a dominant position, especially in the Middle East. The United Kingdom and other countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands have been far more prominent when it comes to promoting better governance and supporting civil society in both subregions. Although Germany and the European Union play a key role in this area in North Africa.

What stands out when examining the aid allocation in the region is that there are no multilateral organizations in the list of key donors, which is in sharp contrast to the situation in Central Asia, for example. This leads us to the conclusion that

Table 11. Appearances by Individual Countries and International Institutions in the Top 10, Top 5 and Top 3 and as the Leader in the Ranking of Donors to MENA Arab States

No.	Donor	Appearances in the list of top 10 donors	Appearances in the list of top 5 donors	Appearances in the list of top 3 donors	Number of times ranked top donor
1	Germany	12/12	11/12	9/12	3/12
2	United States	12/12	9/12	8/12	2/12
3	EU institutions	12/12	11/12	7/12	2/12
4	United Arab Emirates	9/12	5/12	2/12	
5	United Kingdom	9/12	6/12	1/12	-
6	France	8/12	5/12	3/12	1/12
7	Japan	8/12	2/12	1/12	-
8	Kuwait	5/12	2/12	1/12	-
9	AFESD	5/12	1/12	-	-
10	Netherlands	5/12	-	-	-
11	Saudi Arabia	4/12	3/12	2/12	2/12
12	Canada	4/12	-	-	-
13	Sweden	4/12	-	-	-
14	Turkey	3/12	1/12	1/12	1/12
15	Italy	3/12	1/12	-	-
16	Norway	3/12	-	-	-
17	UNRWA	3/12	1/12	1/12	1/12
18	Spain	2/12	-	-	-
19	Switzerland	2/12	-	-	-
20	IDA	1/12	1/12	-	-
21	Belgium	1/12	-	-	-
22	South Korea	1/12	-	-	-
23	Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance	1/12	-	-	-
24	Global Fund	1/12	-	-	-
25	Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)	1/12	-	-	-

Source: Author's compilation, based on OECD data.

Table 12. MENA Arab Countries' Standing Among Largest Recipients of Aid from Leading International Donors

ODA recipient	In donor's Top 5 list of largest aid recipients (1 to 5)	In donor's Top 5 list of largest aid recipients (6 to 10)
Middle East		
Iraq	Italy, Japan, UAE	France, Germany, Canada, Italy
Jordan	US, Israel, Kuwait, UAE	Canada, Saudi Arabia
Lebanon	Kuwait	Canada, Norway, Italy, Netherlands
Palestine	Norway	EU, Sweden, Spain, Saudi Arabia, UAE
Syria	EU, UK, Germany, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Israel, Turkey	US, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Russia, UAE
Yemen	Saudi Arabia	UK, Netherlands, UAE
North Africa		
Algeria	–	–
Egypt	–	Germany, France, EU, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia
Libya	–	–
Morocco	Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, EU	France, Germany, Spain
Sudan	–	UAE, Turkey
Tunisia	EU, Saudi Arabia	Italy, Kuwait

Source: Author's compilation, based on OECD data.

competition is developing mainly between Western and non-Western donors in the Arab world and that these two groups effectively act as equals. But this seems like an overly simplified interpretation, as there is rather fierce competition within each group, which makes coordination of efforts that much more difficult.

International donors have established a limited number of multilateral financial mechanisms over the entire period. These include the Middle East and North Africa Transition Fund;[87] the Syria Recovery Trust Fund;[88] and the EU Regional

[87] Established in 2012 as a financial intermediary fund under the trusteeship of the World Bank. For more detail, see: V. I. Bartenev and A. I. Solomatin. The World Bank Financial Intermediary Funds as a Multilateral Mechanism to Channel Assistance to Politically Unstable Regions: The Case of the Middle East and North Africa Transition Fund. [International Organisations Research Journal], 2020, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 72–108.

[88] Established by the Working Group on Economic Recovery and Development of Syria formed in 2012 under the joint chairmanship of Germany and the United Arab Emirates, together with the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, to prepare the transformation of Syria into a liberal market economy following the overthrow of the Assad government, with the German Development Bank KfW as its Trustee. For more detail, see: V. I. Bartenev. Mutually Assured Obstruction? Russia, the West, and the Political Dilemmas of Syrian Reconstruction // [Vestnik RUDN. International Relations], 2018, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 755–774. [In Russian].

Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (the "Madad" Fund).[89] However, regardless of the goals, objectives, membership and governance structure, the additional funds mobilized by each of these groups amounted to approximately $250 million. This is more of a token amount by Middle Eastern standards, and clearly demonstrates the the donors preferences for using bilateral channels.

A retrospective analysis of the impact of the global economic crisis of 2008–2009 on the international aid architecture suggests that the donor hierarchy after 2020 will be determined, among other things, by how the donor countries cope with the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. Right now, it would seem that the trends of the past decade would persist and grow in strength: Spain, Italy, and possibly France will have to reduce aid even further, while Germany, which is coping with the crisis much better, may be able to bolster its positions. There is every reason to believe that the United States and the GCC states will reduce the amount of aid they channel into the region. Ultimately, however, everything will be determined by political rather than economic factors. And, in this regard, we need to better understand the reasoning behind the behaviour of the main donors throughout the 2010s.

3.3. Aid Instruments in the Policies of Regional Actors

The GCC States. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait established themselves as highly influential actors in international development assistance way back in the 1970s following the first 'oil shock', which expanded their financial capabilities significantly, accounting for almost one third of all global aid in the early 1980s. They were extremely active donors in Egypt, where they lent generously to the Hosni Mubarak regime, as well as in Lebanon, where they made a significant contribution to the country's reconstruction following the bloody Civil War of 1975–1990 and the 2006 Lebanon War. However, it was in the 2010s that Arab countries really stepped up their donor activities in response to the Arab Spring that had swept the region.

According to the OECD, the period 2011–2018 saw Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates break into the top five largest donors in the region, with Kuwait inching its way towards the top ten, ahead of several large Western donors. These three countries are among the top ten donors in a number of the MENA countries, providing large amounts of aid in the form of both balance of payments and humanitarian assistance.

Less is known about aid from Qatar, as the country does not report to the OECD. However, an examination of other sources allows us to conclude that Qatar provided significantly more than $10 billion during the period under review, which would put it in the top tier of the MENA donors. Most of these funds went to Egypt, although money was channelled into other countries as well. For example, Qatar has sent at least $1 billion to the Gaza Strip since 2012, including $100 cash per person per month since the autumn of 2018 in exchange for not engag-

[89] Established in 2014. Twenty-three countries participate in the Fund, including 21 EU countries, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

ing in armed violence against Israel as part of a framework deal that both the Israeli government and the Trump administration were instrumental in brokering. However, this aid was delayed in August – the first time this had happened in quite some time. And there is no guarantee that it will be extended, given, among other things, that Doha has allocated $50 million for the restoration of the Port of Beirut.[90]

Not only do the GCC member states compete with Iran – and in some cases Turkey – as donors, but they also compete with each other. The most evident fault line runs between Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on one side and Qatar on the other. Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia were extremely wary of destabilization in the region, which they perceived both as a threat to their investments (as is always the case when there is a regime change) and the risk of Islamists coming to power, which they saw as an existential threat.[91] Qatar, on the other hand, which has long been developing ties with Islamist forces, primarily the Muslim Brotherhood (as well as with Hamas in the Gaza Strip), saw the Arab Spring as a window of opportunity.

Political developments in Egypt, the region's most populous country and the main arena of confrontation, followed a rather intricate trajectory during the first half of the 2010s. While Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait expressed their formal support for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt – without providing any significant amounts of aid – during the first transitional period, Qatar took a proactive stance and effectively became Egypt's sole donor after the Islamists came to power there in 2012. This move worried Qatar's partners in the GCC. We still do not know for sure whether the Egyptian military enlisted the support of the authorities in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait before ousting Mohamed Morsi,[92] but the King of Saudi Arabia definitely expressed his unconditional support for their actions right away, sending a congratulatory telegram to the leader of the 'counter-revolution' Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Within just a few days, all the key GCC donors (with the exception of Qatar) had promised to provide Egypt with much larger amounts of aid than had been given following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak.

Another arena where the interests of Qatar and the other Gulf countries have clashed is Libya, where, after a brief period of providing humanitarian assistance in the east of the country in 2011, states started to support different parties to the conflict. Doha and Ankara supported the Government of National Accord, as evidenced most recently by the signing in August 2020 of trilateral agreements that include, among other things, sending a delegation of Qatari military advisors to Libya and training soldiers in Qatari military academies. Meanwhile, the United

[90] Shehada M. How Qatar Could Trigger the Next Hamas–Israel Conflict // Haaretz. 11.08.2020. URL: https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-with-qatar-cutting-aid-to-gaza-the-next-hamas-israel-conflictis-about-to-begin-1.9063736

[91] Sailer M. Changed Priorities in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia and the Emirates Rethink Their Relationship with Egypt // Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs. 08.01.2016. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2016C08_sil.pdf

[92] A. V. Korotaev and L. M. Isaev. Anatomy of the Egyptian Counter-Revolution. [World Economy and International Relations], 2014, no. 8, p. 96. [In Russian]

Arab Emirates is a key sponsor of the Libyan National Army led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and its support includes paying for mercenaries from Libya's neighbours, most notably Sudan.

In any case, contrary to the widespread belief that Arab donors are motivated primarily by cultural and religious solidarity in their policies, they are just as skilled at using aid as a tool to further their political and economic interests as their Western counterparts. Moreover, like established donors, Arab countries have adjusted the structure of aid according to what was happening 'on the ground' and in response to the economic situation,[93] although their appetite for risk was, for obvious reasons, significantly higher.

Turkey. Turkey is another country whose donor capacity largely increased throughout the 2000s. However, it became a major player the following decade on the back of the huge amounts of aid (90 per cent of its total ODA) to Syria, which the OECD counts as humanitarian assistance. This aid goes to the territories in the northwest of the country where Ankara gained control during 2016's Operation Euphrates Shield and 2018's Operation Olive Branch. Turkey pumps significant amounts into these areas, although its approach differs depending on the area in question. According to experts from the Clingendael Institute in The Hague,[94] in non-Kurd territories (where Operation Euphrates Shield took place), Ankara practices so-called 'Turkification', which is understood as the establishment of Turkish-style institutions, creating the necessary conditions to attract Turkish investments and encouraging refugees to return to their homes. Turkey is actively repairing buildings, including schools, and building infrastructure facilities, involving national companies in these efforts. Tellingly, it is developing school curricula in the Turkish language, which is a clear sign of its true intentions in this part of Syria. Turkey has provided significant humanitarian aid to the population of Idlib Governorate: in 2020, against the background of yet another escalation of the conflict that led to the massive displacement of the population in the north of the province, Turkish organizations started constructing tens of thousands of houses to temporarily accommodate these refugees and thus prevent their inflow into Turkey, which was already the largest receiver of Syrian forced migrants in the region.

I should also note Turkey's activities in Iraq here, which have been studied in depth by Altunay Aliyeva of the Center for Security and Development Studies at the School of World Politics at Lomonosov Moscow State University.[95] These activities include both security and humanitarian aid. In the case of the former, the turning point came when ISIL started its territorial expansion. Turkey responded by enlisting Special Forces Command officers, so-called "Maroon Berets", to train Iraqi military personnel. The first beneficiaries of this aid were the

[93] For more detail, see: V. I. Bartenev. The Gulf States' Assistance to Egypt after the 2011 Revolution: Logic, Dynamics, Systemic Impact [Vestnik RUDN. International Relations], 2019, no. 4, pp. 566–582. [In Russian].

[94] Van Veen E., van Leeuwen J. Turkey in North-Western Syria: Rebuilding Empire in the Margins // Clingendael Institute. June 2019. URL: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/PB_Turkey_in_Northwestern_Syria_June_2019.pdf.

[95] See A. I. Aliyeva. Turkey's Assistance to Iraq After 2014: Key Determinants and Components [Moscow University Journal of World Politics], 2020, no. 1, pp. 121-149. [In Russian].

peshmerga detachments, which began their training in November 2014. A total of 1500 Kurdish fighters received military training during the first six months of the programme. Turkey also trained Sunni troops from the Nineveh Plain Protection Units, as well as Yazidi, Shia Arab, Christian and Iraqi Turkmen fighters. Training camps were set up near Erbil, Duhok, Kirkuk and other Iraqi provinces.

Non-military aid to Iraq has not been nearly as significant. In 2014, Turkey provided a little under $30 million in non-military aid to Iraq, although this figure has fallen to almost zero since. The main recipients of humanitarian aid were refugees (approximately 143,000 Iraqi citizens have found refuge in Turkey), as well as internally displaced persons who received assistance from the Turkish Red Crescent and NGOs in Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk, Fallujah, Babil, Najaf, Karbala and several other areas. It is telling that the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid from Turkey were Iraqi Turks.[96]

Turkey's involvement in Iraq grew significantly after victory was declared over Islamic State. No other participant in the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq held in Kuwait in February 2018 pledged as much as Turkey. Ankara promised to provide a $5-billion concessional loan to the country, a move clearly designed to attract companies from the Turkish construction sector (which has been experiencing difficulties in recent years) and announced that it would extend further $50 million for development assistance programmes and projects. What is more, as Aliyeva points out, Turkey is actively involved in the restoration work in Mosul, building hospitals and reconstructing bridges and cultural heritage monuments in an attempt to create a favourable image of Turkey in the eyes of the Iraqi and world community.[97] Lastly, during the war with Islamic State, Turkey carried out projects to educate and train Iraqi specialists in various fields, demonstrating that it could use all types of aid instruments in the region.

The increase in Turkish assistance to Libya is also worthy of note here. In 2017–2018, Turkey ranked sixth in terms of ODA provided, a sure sign of Ankara's unprecedented military, political and diplomatic activity in the country in support of the National Transitional Council in recent years.

Iran. Like Qatar, the Islamic Republic of Iran does not report to the OECD on the aid it provides, which makes it impossible to compare its activity with that of other GCC members or Turkey, for example. In general, Iran provides aid to three countries in the region, namely, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. This aid comes in the form of security assistance, as well as economic and humanitarian aid. In terms of security assistance, Iran primarily supports friendly Shiite groups and movements such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (the "League of the Righteous") and the Badr Organization in Iraq, and the Houthi movement in Yemen. It is extremely difficult to estimate with any degree of accuracy exactly how much support Iran provides. For example, the U.S. Congressional Research Service believes that Iran spends $700 million per year on economic and military assis-

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., p. 138.

tance to Hezbollah,[98] far more than the United States sends to Lebanon through official channels (approximately $200 million per year), as well as around $1 billion per year on support for Shiite groups in Iraq since 2014. As for Yemen, researchers do not provide exact figures, but judging by individual publications, the amount of support supplied with the help of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is likely to be more modest.[99] Predictably, experts in the West and the GCC member countries, see support from Iran as a threat to the statehood of these countries, although these Shiite movements have contributed greatly to the destruction of the Jihadist quasi-state in Syria and Iraq.

As for economic and humanitarian aid, the key recipients are Syria and Iraq. Iran has used a wide range of aid instruments in Syria. In terms of economic aid, this has come mostly in the form of three credit lines opened between 2013 and 2018 worth a total of $ 6.6 billion. I am talking specifically here about so-called tied loans, which oblige the country to purchase goods and services exclusively from Iranian companies. Many experts believe that Iran will use Syria's debt dependence to obtain real economic preferences in key sectors and expand its political influence in the country. Furthermore, Iran has helped prop up Syria's national currency, supplied feed for livestock at discounted prices, built medical centres, renovated schools and provided the local population with electricity, all with the purpose of earning the goodwill of the Syrian people, among other things.[100] Some experts believe that Iran is actively using aid instruments to not only stir up support for the Assad government, but also to counter Russia's expanding influence in the country, particularly in those sectors where their interests collide directly.

Iran is also active in Iraq. For example, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif attended the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq in Kuwait in 2018, but did not make any specific pledges, preferring instead to mention that his country had been helping the reconstruction effort in Iraq well before the other donors came onto the scene. He even refused to have his picture taken with the rest of the attendees.[101] Later, Vice-President of Iran Eshaq Jahangiri announced at a meeting with Haider al-Abadi that his country would be extending a credit line of up to $3 billion to Iraq in order to get Iranian companies involved in the reconstruction of the country. He also talked about the need to remove restrictions in the banking sector and connect the railway systems of the two states, which "would enable Iraq to have access to the Central Asia and China and link Iran's railway to the Mediterranean".[102] This has made Iran the second largest donor in the region in terms of the amount of funds committed (behind

[98] Katzman K. Iran's Foreign Policy // Congressional Research Service. 27.06.2016.
URL: https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20160627_R44017_f37be3e5ccbf6b9555216b40d03abaa31a990742.pdf

[99] Juneau T. Iran's Policy Toward the Houthis in Yemen: A Limited Return on a Modest Investment. [International Affairs], 2016, vol. 92, no. 3, pp. 655–658.

[100] Hatahet S. Russia and Syria: Economic Influence in Syria // Chatham House Research. 08.03.2019.
URL: https://syria.chathamhouse.org/research/russia-and-iran-economic-influence-in-syria

[101] The Iranian Position on the Reconstruction of Iraq // Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies. 17.02.2018.
URL: https://rawabetcenter.com/en/?p=5351.

[102] Lee S. Iran Offers $3bn LOC for Iraq Reconstruction // Iraq Business News. 10.03.2018.
URL: https://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2018/03/10/iran-offers-3bn-loc-for-iraq-reconstruction/

Turkey), alongside the United States (which has limited itself to providing export credit in the same amount) and far ahead of its competitors in the GCC.

The response of the Iranian government to the explosion in the Port of Beirut is also worth mentioning here. Humanitarian aid (food and medical supplies) was dispatched the very next day through the Iranian Red Crescent Society. Forty medical professionals were also sent to provide primary care, treating some 1500 people over the next ten days at the field hospital set up near the site of the explosion.[103] Those who had been injured were also offered further treatment in Iran.[104] These actions once again demonstrated Tehran's desire to consolidate its influence in Lebanon, where one of its most influential and long-standing allies, Hezbollah, has seats in parliament.

Finally, it should be noted that, unlike other actors in the region, Iran does not actually use multilateral channels of assistance, including those of the UN agencies. There are no joint trust funds to assist the countries in the region – nothing similar to the Deauville Partnership, in which all the key Arab donors and Turkey have participated. This approach reflects both the Iran's financial constraints, and the nature of Tehran's foreign policy, which is geared towards building bilateral ties, often clandestinely.

3.4. Aid Strategies of Western Donors in the MENA Region

The United States. In 2011, the United States was the number one donor for the majority of countries in the region. The main recipient of the US aid was Israel, and by a wide margin. The Jewish state has received roughly the same amount of aid as all of MENA Arab countries combined, to the tune of approximately $3 billion under a long-term memorandum signed by the George W. Bush administration in 2007.

Egypt and Jordan are the main beneficiaries of the U.S. aid from among the Arab countries in the region. Both have signed peace treaties with Israel and have played a huge role in the United States' strategy in the Middle East. In the case of Egypt, most of the aid came in the form of grants tied to the supply of U.S. weapons under the Foreign Military Financing programme (worth over $1 billion annually). Meanwhile, Jordan benefitted from direct budget support that helped the authorities maintain the balance of payments.

During the 2000s, Iraq became one of the main recipients of U.S. aid. After the removal of Saddam Hussein, the United States Congress appropriated tens of billions of dollars to rebuild Iraq, including building capacity of the Iraqi Army and security forces, although if the reports of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction are to be believed, a significant portion of this huge amount was misused.[105] Be that as it may, aid to Iraq had already started decreasing as

[103] Lebanese Health Minister Lauds Iran for Humanitarian Aid // Tehran Times. 16.08.2020. URL: https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/451317/Lebanese-health-minister-lauds-Iran-for-humanitarian-aid

[104] Iran's Humanitarian Aid to Lebanon to Continue, Spokesman Says // Tasnim News Agency. 07.08.2020. URL: https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2020/08/07/2322872/iran-s-humanitarian-aid-to-lebanon-to-continue-spokesman-says

[105] See, for example: Learning from Iraq. A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. March 2013. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2013/sigir-learning-from-iraq.pdf (accessed: 18.11.2020).

the 2000s rolled into the 2010s. Given the rather tough budgetary constraints that the United States had to face in the wake of the global financial crisis, the Obama administration was forced to balance the desire to rely on development assistance programmes with the need to maintain a reasonable level of investment in security assistance programmes, with the latter clearly being easier to justify to taxpayers.

Since 2011, the structure of U.S. aid to the region has undergone a transformation of sorts, although some of its basic characteristics have remained unchanged. Like before, not a single Arab country could compete with Israel in terms of the amount of aid from the United States. Israel has continued to receive at least $3 billion per year from the United States over the past decade, mainly in the form of grants under the Foreign Military Assistance Program, as part of long-term memoranda that set out the minimum amount funding.[106] The last of these agreements was signed during the Obama administration and ensured the allocation of $38 billion between 2019 and 2028[107] – $3.3 billion per year in Foreign Military Financing funds and $500 million in annual missile defence funding.[108]

The amount of aid sent to Arab countries looked rather modest in comparison, but the fact that the United States stepped up its assistance to the region following the Arab Spring is telling in and of itself. On the one hand, the United States tried to provide wide-ranging support to the countries where revolutions had taken place (Tunisia and Egypt). On the other hand, it wanted to maintain stability in Morocco and Jordan, where the monarchies survived but were in desperate need of additional financial resources.

Democratic transition moved along rather successfully in Tunisia at first. But this was not the case in Egypt. The watershed moment came in the summer of 2013 when General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi led a coup against the government and installed himself in power. This put the Obama administration in an extremely difficult position, as U.S. legislation stipulates that aid to another country should be suspended in the event of a military coup d'état. While it ultimately chose to do nothing, the clampdowns of the new Egyptian government in the autumn of 2013 forced the White House's hand. Military aid was partially suspended, a bold move that nevertheless turned out to be a massive failure. The United States Congress also put some rather strict conditions in place that the Egyptian authorities had to satisfy in order to receive the full amounts that had been appropriated– although it did provide the U.S. administration with a right to issue a waiver for national security reasons.

The United States failed to maintain this hard-nosed approach, however, primarily due to domestic factors. Tying of U.S. military aid to Egypt, which effectively

[106] For more details on the specifics of U.S. aid to Israel, see: L. R. Khlebnikova. Foreign Aid Instruments in the Context of the United States – Israel Relations (1948–2014). [Moscow University Bulletin of World Politics]. 2014, no. 3, pp. 115–149.

[107] White House. Office of the Spokesperson. Fact sheet: Memorandum of Understanding Reached with Israel. 14.09.2016. URL: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/14/fact-sheet-memorandum-understanding-reached-israel (accessed: 25.07.2020).

[108] Zanotti J. Israel: Background and the U.S. Relations in Brief. Updated 18.05.2020. CRS Report R44245. URL: https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44245.pdf (accessed: 25.07.2020).

amounted to a subsidy for American defence companies, meant that any reduction (not to mention termination) of aid would threaten job losses, a fact that led U.S. arms manufacturers to lobby for their interests in Congress. These efforts were duly rewarded as the importance of budgetary savings increased. The influential pro-Israel lobby also actively called for continuing aid to Egypt.

We should not underestimate the role of external factors in the U.S. assistance to Egypt. The United States never wavered in its desire to develop constructive relations with Egypt, regardless of the pace of democratization and its questionable human rights record. Cooperation with Egypt brought objective strategic dividends to both the United States and its allies, primarily Israel. At the same time, Washington sought to prevent Egypt from reorienting itself to other states, especially Russia. The combination of these factors meant that, regardless of who was in power in Cairo and Washington, the United States was never going to make radical cuts to or freeze large amounts of the aid it provides.[109]

Jordan has seen the biggest increase in the U.S. aid, which has come a time when the country's finances are floundering due to the influx of Syrian refugees. The increase is the result of a new bilateral memorandum signed in 2015 on the allocation of a fixed amount of aid to the country for 2015–2017, which was increased to $1 billion per year from the previous $600,000. This has moved Jordan into second place in the list of aid distributed under the International Affairs Budget, well ahead of Iraq in third place (see Table 13).

However, two points must be kept in mind here: the Obama administration earmarked massive resources for the provision of humanitarian aid through multilateral channels, as well as huge amounts from the defence budget for various programmes, including to help partner security forces to fight against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and to support the Syrian opposition.

The arrival of the Trump administration brought with it certain changes in the aid provided to Arab states.[110] On the one hand, the new president demonstrated a transactional approach to foreign assistance, which involved providing aid as a tool to secure mutually beneficial deals. On the other hand, he wanted to minimize the costs for the United States when dealing with the Middle East challenges and to focuse the country's policy in the region on the most urgent tasks only: countering terrorism and the spread of Iranian influence, ensuring the peace process, etc. As a result, the Trump administration proposed significant cuts in aid to MENA as part of unprecedented cuts in the foreign assistance budget (albeit MENA was not hit as hard in this respect as other regions). However, these cuts were extremely selective.

The White House effectively took two different approaches, one towards the largest beneficiaries in the region (Egypt and Jordan) and another towards all other recipients. Aid to Cairo and Amman was preserved as much as possible. The

[109] For more detail, see: V. I. Bartenev. U.S. Assistance to Egypt after the Arab Spring: Domestic and External Determinants. [USA & Canada: Economics, Politics, Culture]. 2019, no. 8, pp. 54–74. [In Russian].

[110] For more detail, see: V. I. Bartenev. Specifics of Foreign Assistance Allocation under Trump Administration: From Inauguration to 'Ukrainegate'. [Moscow University Journal of World Politics], 2020, no. 4, pp. 131–170. [In Russian].

Table 13. U.S. Bilateral Assistance to Israel and Arab Countries in the 2012–2018 Fiscal Years

Country	Aid amount (USD million)
Israel	
Arab countries	
Middle East	
Iraq	4578.6
Jordan	9303.4
Lebanon	1609.5
Palestine	1919.2
Syria	828.2
Yemen	1806.3
North Africa	
Algeria	37.9
Egypt	11,675.8
Libya	262.0
Morocco	312.9
Tunisia	959.4

Source: A. Miller. President Trump's FY21 Budget: Examining U.S. Assistance to the Middle East and North Africa in the Shadow of COVID-19 // Project on Middle East Democracy. 10.06. 2020. URL: https://pomed.org/fy21-budget-report/

question of suspending aid to Egypt never even came up, and the latest (third) Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Jordan was signed for a period of five years, rather than the traditional three-year period, and for a significantly larger amount ($6.375 billion in 2018–2022, or $1.275 billion annually). Meanwhile, aid to Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Iraq was cut significantly. These cuts were not supported on Capitol Hill, however, and Congress tried to minimize them as much as possible, although legislators were more generous towards other regions of the world.

It is also important to note that the United States started withholding aid under Trump (in the cases of Lebanon and Palestine) and imposing extraterritorial sanctions against countries planning to engage in the reconstruction of Syria. All this cases will be discussed in greater detail below.

On the whole, an examination of U.S. aid flows does not really support the commonly held belief that the United States is scaling back its presence in the region.

Engagement has only been reduced in countries that are not a high priority in terms of ensuring the American vital interests. However, given the increased inter-state competition, this was enough to knock the United States off the top spot as the main donor in the region, where it has been replaced either by regional donors (primarily the Gulf states) or by individual European countries (mainly Germany or the EU institutions).

European countries.[111] European donors have pumped massive amounts of funds into the MENA region since the Arab Spring, although they have done so in completely different ways. This is a reflection, on the one hand, of the varying economic dynamics in donor countries during this period, and of the differences in how they see the changes in the regional political landscape, which they interpreted based on their understanding of international development cooperation goals. The pieces for these different approaches were in place long before the Arab world was shaken by the new wave of turbulence.

Back in the 2000s, two groups of donors emerged, each of which followed a completely different aid strategy. The first group included the Mediterranean countries, France, Spain and Italy, which have traditionally been more active when it comes to developing trade and economic ties with Arab countries, depend to a greater extent than other European states on energy imports from the MENA region, and accept most of the migrants coming to Europe either from or in transit through these countries (primarily Libya). France, Spain and Italy have historically played a key role in promoting Euro–Mediterranean cooperation (which had found a concrete form within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean, the brainchild of then President of France Nicolas Sarkozy that undergone a considerable transformation under pressure from Germany). These countries focused on providing aid to North Africa (primarily the Maghreb countries), mostly in the form of development assistance to boost the economies of these states.

The non-Mediterranean countries, on the contrary, did not initially have such strong ties to the Arab region. The MENA countries were never significant trading partners for them. Energy dependence was several times lower, and they were never in the thick of the fight against illegal immigration, as those coming from the Arab world tended to settle in Southern Europe. What is more, these donors sent most of their ODA to the least developed nations, located primarily in sub-Saharan Africa (in the case of the United Kingdom aiming to maintain ties with its former colonies). This logic also applied to Germany, which focused its efforts primarily on strengthening relations with large developing countries on the one hand (the BRICS, Indonesia, etc.), and with post-Soviet states, where it openly challenged the role of the United States as the number one partner, on the other. At the same time, Germany's foreign aid programme was so extensive that it easily became the largest European donor in the Arab world, behind only France,

[111] This section presents the results of the following paper: Bartenev, V. European Donors in the Arab World: Redistribution of Resources and Roles. [Contemporary Europe], 2020, no. 6, pp. 76-89. [In Russian]

even though German political class did not develop strong ties with the ruling elites of the Maghreb countries.[112]

Not only did the Arab Spring fail to eliminate these differences, but it actually made them even more pronounced. A rapid redistribution of roles took place at the highest level of the hierarchy (among the "Big Three") during the 2010s, with France slashing the amount of aid it provided to developing countries, and Germany and the United Kingdom doing the exact opposite. In the case of the United Kingdom, this was primarily due to David Cameron's decision to make good on his election campaign promise to reach an ODA target of 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2013. The German government, which weathered the crisis far better than the rest of continental Europe and strengthened its influence within the European Union and globally, also made a political promise to increase aid. This was achieved in part thanks to Germany's policy on receiving asylum seekers, whose expenses for the first year of stay in the host country are counted as ODA. Germany took in hundreds of thousands of immigrants from developing countries (including those in the MENA region), at a cost of billions of dollars, which put it well ahead of the United Kingdom and France in terms of the amount of aid provided. France, on the contrary, was forced to temper its ambitions as a donor. Aid began to decline under President François Hollande against the background of budgetary constraints. However, the turnaround in France's financial fortunes, together with the coming to power of Emmanuel Macron, who tends to pursue a more ambitious foreign policy, in 2017, allowed the country to reverse this trend, with ODA returning to the level it was at ten years ago. Paris increased aid to the MENA countries, while scaling back support to other countries.

In the meantime, the differences in the behaviour of the two groups of donors became even more pronounced. While the countries without an access to the Mediterranean almost doubled the share of aid to the MENA countries on average during the 2010, the Mediterranean countries did not follow the same pattern. France and Spain did increase aid to the MENA countries, but not nearly in line with the requirements for external assistance, while Italy even reduced the share of aid being channelled into the region.

That said, Italy and Spain continued to direct healthy amounts into those countries where, for historical, geostrategic or other regions, they have special interests. For example. Italy is among the top ten donors in Libya (a former colony), Iraq (where it has been an active participant in the military operations of the "coalition of the willing" since 2003) and Tunisia. And Spain is of course one of the main donors in Morocco and Algeria, countries that it has strong historical ties to and which receive significant funds from Madrid – to combat illegal immigration, among other things.

A comparison of the historical data on the aid received by the MENA countries and the rest of the world sheds an even starker light on the differences between the two groups of European donors. Most donors increased their aid to the MENA

[112] Schäfer I., Koepf T. Franco-German Foreign Policy Cooperation Towards the Maghreb – Converging Goals, Diverging Policies [Genshagen: Genshagen Foundation], 2017, no. 23, p. 7.

countries proportionately to aid increases to other countries, and in spite of the fact that aid to certain regions was scaled back. But this was not the case for Italy, Spain and France. The key lies in the structure of their respective portfolios. The MENA Arab countries accounted for between one and two thirds of all the humanitarian aid in the portfolios of most non-Mediterranean donors, which is significantly higher than before the Arab Spring. That growth was especially noticeable in the case of Germany: before 2011, humanitarian aid accounted for just 5.4 per cent of the country's ODA to the MENA Arab countries; that figure had risen to almost half (44.1 per cent) by 2017–2018. Meanwhile, humanitarian aid occupied a significantly smaller part of the aid portfolios of France, Italy and Spain, amounting to just 3.0 per cent in the case of France.[113]

Paris has lost clout in the region as a result, while Berlin's has been growing. France is now behind both Germany and the United Kingdom in terms of appearances in the rankings of key donors to the MENA countries (see Table 11). The only countries where French aid outstrips that of Germany from among the 12 ODA recipients in the MENA region are two Maghreb states (Algeria and Morocco). Germany is the largest European donor in all the remaining countries, with the exception of Yemen and Sudan, where the United Kingdom is the leading benefactor. According to these indicators, Germany is either ahead of or tied with the United States and the EU institutions. What is more, Germany is ahead of France (as well as the United States) in terms of the number of the MENA countries in their respective lists of ten largest recipients, behind only the EU institutions. This clearly indicates a change in regional priorities in Germany's development assistance strategy compared to the 2000s.

This situation gives the impression that donors have consciously divided their responsibilities. However, in practice, the leading actors compete with each other, and attempts to coordinate development cooperation efforts such as the 2019 Treaty on Franco-German Cooperation and Integration (the Aachen Treaty) are unlikely to extend to the Middle East or North Africa, given how Paris is taking Berlin's growing status in the Maghreb.

A few words about EU policy. In the 2000s, the European Union played a significant role in MENA, primarily through the implementation of its European Neighbourhood Policy, which entailed large-scale multi-year indicative programmes in a number of countries in the region to the tune of several hundred million euros per year. Despite their inclusive nature, governance issues faded into the background, as the imperatives of democratization gave way to the need to ensure stability and cooperate with authoritarian regimes to counter cross-border security threats.[114] The Arab Spring caught EU bureaucrats by surprise and forced them to rethink their strategies, shifting the emphasis from ensuring security and promoting trade and economic interests to facilitating democratic transition. Funds were redistributed in almost every area within the updated indicative

[113] OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: France 2018 // OECD.
URL: http://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-france-2018-9789264302679-en.htm

[114] For more detail, see: L. D. Oganisyan. Evolution of the EU Policy Approaches Towards the Arab Awakening Countries // Global South in the Polycentric World (Global Development, iss. 19). – Moscow, IMEMO, 2018. Pp. 148-156. [In Russian].

programmes to political sectors, which was particularly evident in the case of Morocco. However, as the situation in the region worsened, and the 2015 migration crisis unfolded, Europe was forced to return to the previous (i.e. pre-2011) model of relations with the countries in the region.[115]

During this period the European Union became the main collective donor of humanitarian aid to the countries of the region, primarily Syria and its neighbours, and played a key organizational role in mobilizing funds from other countries and organizations through the Brussels conferences. EU donor activities also spread beyond the Southern Mediterranean. Iraq is a perfect example of this. As Lida Oganisyan from the CSDS notes, the European Union's growing interest in Iraq in recent years stems not only from concerns about the country turning into a source of cross-border challenges and threats, but also from the conviction of EU officials that Iraq might become the cornerstone of a new regional security architecture.[116] The European Union provides Iraq with both humanitarian aid and development assistance that is aimed primarily at eliminating the root causes of instability and radicalization. However, it prefers to assist Iraq indirectly, through the UN organizations, delegating the relevant risks to them.

3.5. Russia and China as Donors of the MENA Countries

Russia's donor activities had been gradually expanding over the five years before the Arab Spring. The initial impetus was provided by its chairmanship in the G8 in 2006, as well as the ratification of the Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance in 2007.[117] At the same time, Russia tended to follow the practices of established donors, namely the OECD DAC member states. Priority was given to channelling funds through multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. MENA was languishing in fourth place in the list of priority regions, behind the CIS, the Asia-Pacific and Africa, and one place above Latin America, suggesting that aid to Arab countries would be provided using funds left over from other higher-priority programmes.

The Arab Spring changed Russia's calculus, although it did not happen overnight. At first, Russia wanted to show its commitment to using multilateral mechanisms, hence its active participation in the Deauville Partnership. At the G8 Finance Ministers Meeting held in Marseille on September 12, 2011, Deputy Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation Sergei Storchak outlined Russia's interest in improving education standards in the MENA countries, training professionals in various disciplines (from skilled workers to diplomats) and restoring the investment climate in the region. He also stressed Russia's interest in extending "the current programme of assistance" to these countries, in order "help strengthen

[115] Ibid.

[116] See L. D. Oganisyan: The European Union's Policies Towards Iraq (2014–2020). [Moscow University Journal of World Politics], 2020, no. 1, pp. 87–120. [In Russian].

[117] Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance dated June 14, 2007 // Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation.
URL: https://www.minfin.ru/common/upload/library/2007/07/concept_rus.pdf [In Russian].

public finance system and establish an effective treasury".[118] Russia was reasonably active in the MENA Transition Fund, which was established in 2012 under the auspices of the World Bank, and made a pledge of $10 million. The first tranche was transferred in 2013, followed by a second in February 2014. Despite the fact that the remaining G8 countries pulled out of the Sochi Summit on March 3, 2014 in response to the political crisis in Ukraine, Russia continued to participate in the Deauville Partnership events and stress the importance of its participation in the MENA TF, promising to continue its in the Fund's activities .[119] And Russia stayed true to its word.

Russia provided aid to almost every single country in the region through bilateral channels, although these were typically token amounts. However, the events in Libya and the beginning of the war in Syria forced Russia to change its stance. Russia started focusing its efforts on Syria, which became the only country in the region to make it to the list of main recipients of Russian aid. Syria clearly falls under the category of "States with long-standing friendly relations with Russia", which, according to the updated version of the Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance, is the second most important category of recipients after the former Soviet republics.[120] In some years, over 80 per cent of Russian humanitarian aid went to Syria.[121]

Russia provides aid to Syria on both bilateral and multilateral basis.[122] The first tranche of bilateral aid was delivered back in March 2012. The Russian military has played an increasingly important role in accomplishing the country's humanitarian mission in recent years. This includes, first and foremost, such structures as the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring in the Syrian Arab Republic and the International Mine Action Center of the Russian Federation Armed Forces, as well as the involvement of special medical detachments and teams of doctors and nurses.

These activities were covered in detail in a report published by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which was edited by the Director of the Institute's Research Center Nikolay Plotnikov.[123]

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[118] Statements by Sergei Storchak Following the G8 Summit in Marseille. 12.09.2011. URL: https://m.minfin.ru/ru/press-center/?id_4=32112-vyskazyvaniya_s.a._storchaka_informatsionnym_agentstvam_po_itogam_sammita_g8_v_marsele [In Russian].

[119] TASS. Russia Attaches Great Importance to Cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa // TASS. 05.03.2014. URL: https://tass.ru/g8/1023899 [In Russian].

[120] Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance (Approved by Decree No. 259 of the President of the Russian Federation dated April 20, 2014) // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.
URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/64542

[121] Y. Zaytsev and A. Knobel. Russia as an International Donor in 2017 // Monitoring of Russia's Economic Outlook. Trends and Challenges of Socio-Economic Development, 2018, No. 20 (81). November / A. Bozhechkova, A. Deryugin, A. Knobel, T. Tishchenko, P. Trunin and Y. Zaytsev, edited by S. Drobyshevsky, V. Gurevich, P. Kadochnikov, A. Kolesnikov, V. Mau and S. Sinelnikov-Murylev. Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, p. 18. URL: https://www.iep.ru/files/text/crisis_monitoring/2018_20_81_November.pdf [In Russian].

[122] For more detail, see: E. Stepanova. Russia's Humanitarian Role in the Conflicts in Donbass and Syria (in the Context of the "Responsibility to Protect") [Pathways to Peace and Security], 2018, no. 1 (54), pp. 129-181. [In Russian].

[123] N. Plotnikov. The Russian Army's Humanitarian Operation in Syria. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2019. 42 pp. [In Russian].

According to the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring in the Syrian Arab Republic, a total of 2640 humanitarian actions (for the delivery and distribution of 4576.6 tonnes of food, water and basic necessities) had been organized and carried out with Russian participation as of mid-November 2020. In addition, 132,900 Syrian residents had received assistance; 3358.6 hectares of land had been demined; and 3112 buildings (structures) and 273.4km of road had been cleared.[124]

Unfortunately, the exact financial parameters of Russian bilateral aid to Syria are not known. However, much can be gleaned from the speech of the Head of the Interdepartmental Coordination Headquarters of the Russian Federation for the Return of Refugees to the Syrian Arab Republic M. Myzintsev at the International Conference on the Return of Refugees to Syria on November 11, 2020, where he stated that, "For humanitarian purposes, restoration of power grids and industrial production, objects of religious worship, Russia has allocated more than 1 billion dollars", although he did not specify the period during which the funds were provided.[125] The head of Rossotrudnichestvo, Yevgeny Primakov, put that figure at $150 million per year, admitting that the agency is finding it hard to calculate the exact amounts itself.[126]

These figures, however, are not included in the official data on Russian ODA that the Ministry of Finance reports to the OECD annually, although they are fully ODA-eligible (taking into account the latest reporting directives).

The data reported to the OECD thus does not reflect the significant contribution that Russia makes to educating students from the MENA countries (as well as from other countries around the world). That includes budget expenditures for scholarships, discounted student housing and tuition fees. For example, in 2018, Russia increased the annual quota for the number of budget-financed Syrian students to be admitted by 2.5 times (from 200 to 500), and 541 Syrian citizens were offered places in Russian universities in 2019.[127] The number of students from Yemen studying in Russia is also fairly high. In a February 2019 interview with *Kommersant* columnist M. Belenkaya, Russian Ambassador to Yemen Vladimir Dedushkin said that more than one thousand Yemeni citizens were currently studying in Russia, all paid for by the federal budget, and that over 50,000 had graduated from Soviet and Russian universities.[128] According to the statistics on the number of foreigners entering Russia on student visas, which the Border Ser-

[124] Bulletin of the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (November 19, 2020) // Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.
URL: http://syria.mil.ru/peacemaking/info/refugee_migration/more.htm?id=12325380@egNews [In Russian].

[125] Russia Has Allocated Over One Billion Dollars in Aid to Syria // RIA Novosti. 11.11.2020.
URL: https://ria.ru/20201111/siriya-1584087521.html [In Russian].

[126] Russia Regularly Supplies Syria with Humanitarian Aid // Official Website of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation. 14.11.2020.
URL: https://rs.gov.ru/en/news/78606 [In Russian]

[127] Ministry of Education and Science Releases Foreign Student Figures // Parlamentskaya gazeta ("Parliamentary Gazzette"). 14.11.2019. URL: https://www.pnp.ru/social/v-minobrnauki-nazvali-kolichestvo-inostrannykh-studentov-obuchayushhikhsya-v-rossiyskikh-vuzakh.html [In Russian].

[128] "Russia Does Not Divide Yemeni Population into Friends and Foes." Russian Ambassador to Yemen on the Settlement of the Yemeni Conflict // Kommersant. 21.02.2019. URL: https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3890074 [In Russian].

vice of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation started publishing in 2019, Iraq, Egypt and Morocco are among the top 20 countries in terms of the number of students admitted in Russian universities.[129]

The zero values in the corresponding columns in Russia's reported data on ODA, as well as the absence of data on expenditures on refugees during their first year of stay in Russia, significantly distorts the true scale of Russia's contribution to the long-term socioeconomic development of the MENA countries, and to meeting their emergency needs. This creates a legitimate political problem, as it is this incomplete official data that the West, and the United States in particular, uses in the information war to highlight how far Russia lags behind in terms of improving the lives of ordinary Syrians.

In fact, the reported data on Russian aid to the MENA countries, in particular Syria, only includes earmarked contributions to multilateral organizations earmarked. For example, in 2019 alone, 1 billion roubles (approximately $17 million) allocated to Syria from the Russia's federal budget was directed through UN channels (including $5.8 million through the United Nations Development Programme, $5 million through the UNICEF, $3 million through the World Food Programme and $3.1 million through the United Nations Population Fund).[130]A one-time voluntary contribution of $20 million has already been allocated this year to the World Food Programme for its "Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Assistance to the People Affected by the Crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic" project in 2020–2021.[131]

Significant (by Russian standards) and symbolic (in comparison with the Western donors' contributions) amounts have been directed also to Lebanon and Palestine. Meanwhile, Russia prefers to develop relations with the countries of North Africa primarily on a commercial basis, albeit with some state support (for example, in 2017, VEB issued counter-guarantees to finance projects in Morocco and Egypt).[132]

Syria will undoubtedly remain Russia's number one priority in the MENA region in the near term, although investments will become more important than official aid, as the recent decision to open a Russian trade mission in Damascus would suggest. However, the adoption of the Caesar Act in the United States means that the key role here will likely be played by Russian companies that are already under U.S. sanctions. The format of Russia–Syria relations will take a concrete form once the relevant agreements are signed at the next meeting of Russian-Syrian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade -Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation in December 2020. That said, judging by the comments made by

[129] P. Zvezdina. For the First Time Ever, FSB Publishes Data on Number of Foreigners Studying in Russia // RBC 19.09.2019. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/society/19/08/2019/5d5694d89a79471a151e5e5f [In Russian]

[130] Decree No. 3038-r of the Government of the Russian Federation dated December 14, 2019 // Government of the Russian Federation. URL: http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201912170021 [In Russian].

[131] Decree No. 131-r of the Government of the Russian Federation dated January 29, 2020 // Government of the Russian Federation. URL: http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202001300022. [In Russian]

[132] 2017 Annual Report // State Corporation Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs (Vnesheconombank). URL: https://вэб.рф/files/?file=d0e9e33eee25ea1c9f112a3da18d58c7.pdf. [In Russian].

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov during his first trip to Damascus in eight years, the main focus will be on creating the conditions necessary to attract international assistance.[133]

Russia's commitment to this policy course is demonstrated by the fact that it played a key role in the convening of the International Conference on the Return of Refugees to Syria held in Damascus on November 11–12, 2020. Delegations from 27 countries (including China, Iran, India, Pakistan, Venezuela and North Korea, as well as a number of Arab countries – Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, etc.) attended the gathering. Predictably, representatives of Western countries boycotted the event, once again citing the lack of necessary conditions for refugees to return to their homes.

Preservation of this "mutually assured obstruction"[134] calls for encouraging the Assad government to make certain concessions, which is the main point being pushed by experts in Europe today,[135] including in joint publications with Russian colleagues,[136] some of whom recognize the need to reach consensus on the matter.

Russia attaches special importance to cooperation with its partners in the Middle East, as evidenced by the speed with which it delivered humanitarian aid to Lebanon following the explosion at the Port of Beirut. The Ministry of Emergency Situations sent rescuers and doctors to the Lebanese capital and set up an air-mobile hospital providing medical treatment to almost 600 victims of the blast.[137] In addition, the Russian Cultural Center helped transfer aid to the state hospital in Baabda, a suburb of Beirut. There is every reason to believe that demand for Russian humanitarian aid in the region will only grow thanks to its effectiveness.

China has been actively building up its presence in the Middle East and North Africa in recent years, primarily as an investor, as the region is part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2013. However, high political risks associated with the engagement in the regional affairs mean that Chinese aid instruments in MENA are not geared towards expanding the country's influence. For all intents and purposes, Chinese assistance is mostly limited to isolated cases of humanitarian aid provided to individual countries. Part of this aid is channelled through UN agencies, including in the form of earmarked contributions (approximately

[133] M. Belenkaya. The Economy Should be Pro-Syrian // Kommersant. 08.09.2020. URL: https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4483025. [In Russian].

[134] For more detail see: V. I. Bartenev. Mutually Assured Obstruction? Russia, the West, and the Political Dilemmas of Syrian Reconstruction // [Vestnik RUDN. International Relations], 2018, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 755–774. [In Russian].

[135] Ways out of Europe's Syria Reconstruction Conundrum. Middle East Report No. 209 // International Crisis Group. 25.11.2019. URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/209-ways-out-europes-syria-reconstruction-conundrum

[136] Squaring the Circle: Russian and European Views on Syrian Reconstruction: RIAC Report No. 48/2019 / [A. Kortunov, J. Hiltermann, R. Mamedov; T. Shmeleva and I. Ivanov (Editor-in-Chief)]; Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2019, 32 pp. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia-EU-Syria-Report48-En.pdf; Asseburg M., Aksenenok A. Economic Reconstruction in Syria – An Area for EU–Russia Selective Engagement? // German Institute for International and Security Affairs / Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. 16.06.2020. URL: http://188.127.251.150/wp-content/euinrussiapdf/EUREN_Brief_16_Asseburg_Aksenenok.pdf

[137] Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations Team Pulled out of Lebanon // Izvestiya. 15.08.2020. URL: https://iz.ru/1048611/2020-08-15/gruppirovka-mchs-rosssii-polnostiu-vyvedena-iz-livana. [In Russian].

$50 million per decade, judging from an analysis of data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) for almost all the countries in the region that have been directly affected by armed conflict (Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq) and for neighbouring Arab countries that have taken in most of the Syrian refugees (Lebanon and Jordan). More than $1 million has been transferred to Palestine since 2018.[138]

China also uses bilateral channels to deliver aid, primarily to Syria and Iraq. For instance, even before victory over Islamic State was declared in July 2017, President of China Xi Jinping announced that an aid package of approximately 80 million yuan ($11.7 million) was on its way to the Iraqi government to help with the post-war reconstruction effort.[139] Experts in Iraq, particularly those at the Al-Bayan Center, believe that it is in China's strategic interests to develop relations with Iraq, as it would ensure uninterrupted oil supplies, help prevent Iraq from turning into a haven for groups that are hostile to China, and promote Chinese interests in Syria. Reasoning from this fact, they recommend that Iraq try and get the Chinese government to use its development model, tested in other regions of the world, for the restoration of infrastructure in cities affected by the Islamic State[140].

As for Syria, China plays a significantly smaller role in that country than Russia and Iran, although the Assad government did initially name China among the countries that would be given priority in the reconstruction process, and it has repeatedly confirmed its interest in further Chinese investments and aid. However, for the time being, Chinese involvement is limited mainly to humanitarian aid (China provided $40 million in humanitarian aid in 2017, for example).[141] China acts very cautiously primarily because no one knows for sure when or even whether the conflict will be resolved. There is also the very real threat following the introduction of the Caesar Act that the United States could impose sanctions against countries that participate in the reconstruction of Syria.

Even the modest amounts of aid from China (as well as from Russia) are treated with suspicion in the West. This creates new risks that decision-makers need to take into consideration when planning their donor activities in Iraq and Syria. And it limits somewhat the room for coordination of their efforts, something that has not been attempted at all.

[138] See: Humanitarian Aid Contributions 2020 // Financial Tracking Service. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: https://fts.unocha.org.

[139] Lee J. China Offers Iraq $11.7m for Reconstruction // Iraq Business News. 13.07.2017. URL: https://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2017/07/13/china-offers-iraq-11-7m-for-reconstruction/

[140] China's Belt and Road Initiative: An Opportunity for Iraq // Al-Bayan Centre for Planning and Studies. April 2018. URL: https://www.bayancenter.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/867563522.pdf

[141] Al-Ghadhawi A. China's Policy in Syria // Chatham House. March 2020. URL: https://syria.chathamhouse.org/research/chinas-policy-in-syria.

4. Obstacles to the Aid Provision

4.1. Fiduciary Risks

Throughout the 2010s, fiduciary risks were an important factor when choosing between bilateral and multilateral channels for delivering aid to the ultimate beneficiaries in the MENA Arab countries. They were most keenly felt in the conflict-ridden states of Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq.

For security reasons, the national development agencies of Western countries were forced to withdraw their staff from war zones. Assistance to Syria (both humanitarian aid and stabilization assistance) was monitored from their respective headquarters, or from neighbouring countries, primarily Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, while aid delivery to Libya was monitored from Tunisia, and so on.

Donors have often had no choice but to transfer funds to multilateral organizations (the UN system) or international NGOs, many of which do not have a field presence in these countries, but rather work through local organizations. The chain could be extremely convoluted. For example, one of the partners of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) would distribute the funds among three "hubs" in neighbouring countries: funds were directed to two organizations in Turkey, nine in Lebanon, and three in Jordan, while six organizations engaged additional partners (in some cases more than one).[142] The Syria Crisis Unit established as part of the MENA Department at the DFID headquarters in London did not have enough information on all partners and significantly underestimated the fiduciary risks (due in part to the lack of managers with experience in assessing fiduciary risks in conflict-affected environments), which required immediate corrections.[143] Those British already posted in Yemen made necessary adjustments to correct these errors, although their understanding of the local context was initially better there (but they were also pulled out of the country for security reasons). USAID also noted the negative impact of monitoring aid remotely on the funds distribution demanded regularly that international organizations improve the relevant oversight practices.[144]

Fiduciary risks may arise at every stage of the delivery of funds to beneficiaries, especially in the work of organizations such as the WHO, whose internal rules allow funds to be transferred to the private accounts of employees to speed up the purchase and delivery of goods and services to a given crisis zone. The increased fiduciary risks are accepted because these organizations want to prioritize the health and lives of beneficiaries, and any misappropriation would thus receive a greater media coverage . This is exactly what happened with the WHO's opera-

[142] The UK's Humanitarian Support to Syria. A Performance Review // Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI). May 2018. URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICAI-Syria-Report-final.pdf.

[143] DFID's Approach to Managing Fiduciary Risk in Conflict-Affected Environments. A Performance Review. // Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI). August 2016. URL: https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-Performance-Review-DFIDs-approach-to-managing-fiduciary-risk-in-conflict-affected-environments.pdf.

[144] Insufficient Oversight of Public International Organizations Puts U.S. Foreign Assistance Programs at Risk // U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) – Office of Inspector General. 25.09.2018. URL: https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2018-09/8-000-18-003-P.pdf.

tions in Yemen. An internal investigation conducted in 2019 revealed that head of the WHO Country Office in Sana'a, Nevio Zagaria (an Italian national) had acted in an unethical manner: "unqualified people were placed in high-paying jobs; millions of dollars were deposited in staffers' personal bank accounts; several contracts were approved without the proper paperwork, and tonnes of donated medicine went missing".[145] Twelve people in total were suspected of being part of corrupt schemes involving with representatives of both sides in the conflict. It is telling that even when an online campaign called "Where is the Money?" was launched in Yemen demanding that the United Nations provide financial reports on its expenditures, the United Nations launched a counter-campaign of its own entitled "Check our Results" that did not provide detailed financial reports on how aid money was spent.[146]

Another difficulty in delivering aid through local partners in conflict-affected areas is that many of them have access to certain "problematic" areas and understand local conditions, but they often have poor credit histories, are often unfamiliar with humanitarian principles and lack experience with donor requirements for accountability and value-for-money.[147] The same problem is evident in non-humanitarian aid, although to a lesser extent.

Fiduciary risks also affect those countries in the region that have not suffered war. The World Bank study "Elite Capture of Foreign Aid Evidence from Offshore Bank Accounts" singles out Jordan in particular. However, after other publications appeared that put Jordan in first place in terms in the amount of international aid transfers to offshore accounts,[148] World Bank representatives were forced to clarify that there was no evidence for aid diversion in this country.[149] Fiduciary risks were noticeably more evident in Lebanon. I am talking here about both traditional aid programmes and aid to Syrian refugees in the country, where evidence of the misappropriation of funds by both international and local organizations started to appear in 2015.[150] The increase in volume of external support directed to the county has become one of the reasons for a sharp deterioration of governance, which I will discuss in the next section.

4.2. Security Risks

The destabilization in several MENA states at once is one of the main reasons why attacks on humanitarian workers have doubled around the world over the

[145] Michael M. UN Probes Corruption in its Own Agencies in Yemen Aid Effort // Associated Press. 05.08.2019. URL: https://apnews.com/dcf8914d99af49ef902c56c84823e30c.

[146] Ibid.

[147] The UK's Humanitarian Support to Syria. A Performance Review // Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI). May 2018. P. 15. URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICAI-Syria-Report-final.pdf

[148] Andersen J.J. et al. Elite Capture of Foreign Aid Evidence from Offshore Bank Accounts. Policy Research Working Paper 9150 // World Bank. February 2020. URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/493201582052636710/pdf/Elite-Capture-of-Foreign-Aid-Evidence-from-Offshore-Bank-Accounts.pdf.

[149] Clarification on the Reference to Jordan in the World Bank's Working Paper "Elite Capture of Foreign Aid: Evidence from Offshore Bank Accounts" // World Bank. 20.05.2020. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2020/05/20/clarification-jordan-world-bank-working-paper-elite-capture-foreign-aid-evidence-offshore-bank-accounts.

[150] Akiki V. Corruption Creeps into Refugee Aid in Lebanon // Al-Monitor. 08.03.2015. URL: https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/sites/almonitor/contents/articles/politics/2015/03/lebanon-corruption-syrian-refugees-aid.html.

last decade. The undisputed deadliest place is Syria, where 238 people have been killed since the start of the civil war, according to the Aid Worker Security Database. Almost one third of all humanitarian worker deaths globally between 2017 and 2019 occurred in Syria.[151] In 2019 alone, 47 aid workers were caught up in attacks, with 36 losing their lives, mostly as a result of airstrikes, but also from mines and other explosives.[152] These figures propelled Syria to top position in this metric for the first time during the period under review.[153] The second most dangerous country in the region is Yemen (sixth most dangerous country in the world with 11 attacks in 2019).[154]

In many cases, it is impossible to determine where the attack came from. And by no means are all attacks politically motivated – sometimes robbery is the intent. Whatever the reason, however, reports of such attacks have become part and parcel of information wars, where one side constantly seek to discredit the other, accusing it of attacks on humanitarian convoys, etc. Moreover, in many cases, attacks on convoys are seen almost as a war crime and a good reason for imposing sanctions. This is precisely what happened in 2016, when the Russian Armed Forces were accused of being involved in an attack on a humanitarian convoy near Aleppo in Syria. In 2017, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

found no evidence of Russian involvement in the attack, yet was unable to identify the perpetrators.[155] However, this did not stop the compilers of the Aid Worker Security Database from pointing out in their official report that Syrian and Russian planes were responsible for attacks on hospitals and humanitarian convoys, as well as on those providing assistance to civilians and victims.[156] These accusations are hardly surprising, given that the preparation of these reports is funded by the USAID.

What is unique about the Syrian case is that the Bashar al-Assad government is under international sanctions and is not supported by most countries around the world. International organizations, as I have already mentioned, have for the most part moved their activities to neighbouring countries, delegating aid to local partners that often do not have the necessary experience or expertise, thus putting their lives in even greater danger.[157]

Some experts have noted that it is becoming increasingly unsafe to provide humanitarian assistance in the region. There have also been attacks where aid

[151] Parker B. In the news: Three Aid Workers Killed in Syria // The New Humanitarian. 20.02.2020. URL: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/02/20/oxfam-aid-workers-killed-Syria.

[152] Aid Worker Security Report 2020. Contending with Threats to Humanitarian Health Workers in the Age of Epidemics // Humanitarian Outcomes. URL: https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/awsr2020_0_0.pdf

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid

[155] UN Commission Fails to Identify Perpetrators in Attack on Humanitarian Convoy Near Aleppo // RBC. 22.12.2016. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/politics/22/12/2016/585b15939a7947f641d25dcf [In Russian]

[156] Aid Worker Security Report 2020. Contending with Threats to Humanitarian Health Workers in the Age of Epidemics // Humanitarian Outcomes. URL: https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/awsr2020_0_0.pdf

[157] Scott E.K.M. Yes, Aid Workers are Getting Killed More Often. But Why? // The Washington Post. 06.12.2019. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/06/yes-aid-workers-are-getting-killed-more-often-why/

workers were not killed, but the aid packages were captured by one of the warring sides. For example, in February 2017, a humanitarian convoy of 35 trucks carrying aid (food, medicine and winter clothing for 35,000 people) to the city of Homs was attacked by unknown persons who made off with part of the cargo.[158]

In Yemen, employees of international organizations also run the risk of being killed during military operations,[159] or being taken hostage by rebels,[160] often forcing them to hide their logos, badges, signs and any other identifying symbols.[161] UNICEF, for example, has to warn the leadership of the Saudi-led coalition about the movements of its unmarked vehicles to avoid coming under attack.[162]

The problem of guaranteeing the security of humanitarian workers is acquiring not only a political and diplomatic dimension, but also a military-strategic one. In the autumn of 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense started to press Congress to give it greater authority in ensuring the safety of diplomates and humanitarian workers involved in carrying out U.S. Department of State and USAID stabilization initiatives in "otherwise unreachable areas."This move, according to experts, were aimed primarily at the countries of the Middle East, in particular Yemen.[163] However, such an initiative, which is not motivated solely by humanitarian considerations, may aggravate the problem, as it will contribute to the further politicization and militarization of humanitarian aid to the region, which is prohibitively high as it is.

4.3. Blocking Humanitarian Access

It has been the actions of both insurgents and the official authorities in the MENA countries that have made the risks of blocking humanitarian access in the region a reality during the 2010s. The most striking examples of this are Yemen and Syria, both of which deserve special attention here.

Yemen. The difficulties in ensuring humanitarian access in Yemen became quite obvious at the very beginning of the active phase of the civil war in the country. This led to the adoption in 2015 of UN Security Council Resolution No. 2216, which named violations of the arms embargo imposed by UN Security Council Resolution No. 2140 (2014), as well as the obstruction of humanitarian aid to Yemen or blocking access to or the distribution of humanitarian aid within Yemen, among the acts that threatened peace, security and stability in the country. The Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen was tasked with monitoring such violations. The latest report (published in January 2020) provides evidence of violations

[158] Red Cross Humanitarian Convoy Attacked in Syria. Perpetrators Unknown // RBC. 21.02.2017. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/58ac6e549a794763e67650d0 [In Russian].

[159] Goodman J. Yemen War: Billions in Aid, but Where's it Going? // BBC. 12.12.2020. URL: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46469168.

[160] Slemrod A., Parker B. US, UK Threaten to Cut Yemen Aid due to Fraud and Obstruction // The New Humanitarian. 12.02.2020. URL: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/02/12/Yemen-Houthis-aid-corruption-UN-US-UK-Saudi.

[161] UN Security Council Resolution No. 2165 dated 14.07.2014 // UN. URL: https://undocs.org/ru/S/RES/2165(2014)

[162] Michael M. UN Probes Corruption in its Own Agencies in Yemen Aid Effort // Associated Press. 05.08.2019. URL: https://apnews.com/dcf8914d99af49ef902c56c84823e30c.

[163] Detsch J. Pentagon Rethinks How to Protect Diplomats, Aid Workers in Mideast War Zones // Al-Monitor. 27.11.2019. URL: https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/11/pentagon-aim-protect-diplomats-mideast-warzones.html

on both sides, albeit of a completely disparate scale. For example, the Yemeni government was accused of delaying nine medical and nutritional shipment for a period between 16 and 169 days at the port of Aden, and an entire subsection of the report was dedicated to a description of violations in areas under the control of the Houthis. Facts that caused concern included:

- arrests and intimidation of humanitarian workers;
- illegal seizures of the personal property of humanitarian workers and property belonging to humanitarian organizations in Sana'a;
- non-respect for the independence of humanitarian organizations;
- denial of access to certain areas or denial of travel authorization because they had refused to share information on beneficiaries or personal information about their national staff;
- the adoption by the Supreme Political Council of a decree stating that 2 per cent of the budget of each humanitarian project approved will serve to finance this new entity.[164]

In addition, a confidential report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen that the Associated Press managed to get hold of stated that the Houthis had pressured humanitarian organizations into hiring employees loyal to their cause, threatening to revoke their visas and aiming to control their movements and projects.[165] Western media, particularly the BBC, saw the attempts by the Houthis to restrict access to humanitarian aid as a way of consolidating their control over the occupied territory.[166]

By the spring of 2020, the issue of humanitarian access in Yemen had become one of the most talked-about topics in connection with the stance of the World Food Programme. Over the past few years, the World Food Programme has been helping to feed more than 12 million Yemenis every month, 80 per cent of whom live in Houthi-controlled territory.[167] The logic of the organization's official statements on the matter was that aid eventually ends up in the hands of those who have weapons, and not those who need it most.[168] For example, World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley said that aid is only reaching 40 per cent of eligible beneficiaries in Sana'a, and only a third are receiving aid in the rebel-held Saada. He added that the organization would have no choice but to suspend aid if the situation does not change, a rare threat from an international official of this level.[169] This in turn forced Houthi representatives to issue rebuttals, accusing the World Food Programme of corruption and

[164] Letter dated 27 January 2020 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen Addressed to the President of the Security Council // UN. URL: http://www.undocs.org/ru/s/2020/326.

[165] Michael M. UN Probes Corruption in Its Own Agencies in Yemen Aid Effort // Associated Press. 05.08.2019. URL: https://apnews.com/dcf8914d99af49ef902c56c84823e30c.

[166] Doucet L. Yemen: World Food Programme to Cut Aid by Half in Houthi-Controlled Areas // BBC.com. 10.04.2020. URL: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52239645.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Houthis Stole Food "From The Mouths" of Hungry Yemenis: UN // Al-Jazeera. 31.12.2018. URL: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/houthis-stole-food-mouths-hungry-yemenis-181231143128776.html.

[169] Yemen's Houthis Deny WFP Accusations of Stealing Aid // Al-Jazeera. 01.01.2019. URL: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/yemen-houthis-deny-wfp-accusations-stealing-aid-190101152046453.html.

poor management of aid flows.[170] A special meeting on the issue was held in the spring of 2020 under the chairmanship of the European Union and Sweden. In the run-up to the meeting, the United Kingdom and the United States threatened to cut aid to Yemen, but other states, including Saudi Arabia, were not ready to take such drastic steps.[171]

The only country that threatened to halt all aid to areas controlled by the Houthis if they did not comply with the requirements despite the outbreak of the coronavirus, which only made the situation worse, was the United States.[172] As a result, the Houthis were forced to scrap the 2 percent "tax" on humanitarian activities and started cooperating with international organizations.[173] This was confirmed in a letter to USAID signed by representatives of six international NGOs, which gives some hope that the problem, which only further complicates the already catastrophic situation in Yemen, may somehow be resolved.[174]

In September 2020, Human Rights Watch released a report entitled "Deadly Consequences: Obstruction of Aid in Yemen During Covid-19," which focused entirely on obstacles to humanitarian assistance in Yemen and was based on the interviews of more than 30 humanitarian workers. While much of the report focuses on the obstacles created by the Houthis, it does concede that both sides have exploited humanitarian access for political gain.[175]

Syria. The problem of guaranteeing humanitarian access has been politicized in Syria as well. From the very beginning the Bashar al-Assad government has been extremely hostile to the idea of organizing cross-border supplies of humanitarian aid, seeing them as channels of possible external support of the opposition.

Humanitarian organizations saw the risks in a completely different way. Over the years, they have accused entities such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme of distributing aid disproportionately in favour of government-controlled areas. Their cooperation with the Syria Trust for Development, which was founded in 2001 and is run by Bashar al-Assad's wife Asma,[176] and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which has been accused of diverting aid intended for the people living in opposition-controlled territories to loyalists, has received heavy criticism.[177]

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[170] Doucet L. Yemen: World Food Programme to Cut Aid by Half in Houthi-Controlled Areas // BBC News. 10.04.2020. URL: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52239645.

[171] Slemrod A., Parker B. US, UK Threaten to Cut Yemen Aid Due to Fraud and Obstruction // The New Humanitarian. 12.02.2020. URL: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/02/12/Yemen-Houthis-aid-corruption-UN-US-UK-Saudi.

[172] La Forgia M. U.S. Cuts Health Care Aid to Yemen Despite Worries About Coronavirus // The New York Times. 27.03.2020. URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/world/middleeast/yemen-health-care-aid-coronavirus.html.

[173] "Time is Running Out": Humanitarian Groups Plead with US to Resume Aid to Yemen // Middle East Eye. 20.08.2020. URL: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemen-us-humanitarian-groups-suspension-aid.

[174] Joint INGO Letter to USAID // The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. August 2020. URL: https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/joint-ingo-letter-usaid.

[175] Deadly Consequences: Obstruction of Aid in Yemen During Covid-19 // Human Rights Watch. 14.09.2020. URL: https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/14/deadly-consequences/obstruction-aid-yemen-during-covid-19.

[176] Syria Trust for Development. URL: http://www.syriatrust.sy.

[177] International Crisis Group. U.S. Sanctions on Syria: What Comes Next? // ICG. 13.07.2020. URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/us-sanctions-syria-what-comes-next.

As in the case of Yemen, the issue of ensuring humanitarian access in Syria has been broached at the level of the UN Security Council. In 2014, at a time when Damascus controlled a much smaller part of the territory, the Security Council adopted Resolution No. 2165, which declared that "all Syrian parties to the conflict shall enable the immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to people throughout Syria, by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, on the basis of United Nations assessments of need and devoid of any political prejudices and aims, including by immediately removing all impediments to the provision of humanitarian assistance."[178] The resolution authorized UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners to use routes across conflict lines and the border crossings of Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa (on the Turkish–Syrian border), Al Yarubiyah (on the border with Iraq) and Al-Ramtha (on the border with Jordan), in addition to those already in use, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reaches people in need throughout Syria through the most direct routes, with notification to the Syrian authorities.

At the same time, Russia insisted on the observation of UN General Assembly Resolution No. 46/182 (1991), which states that cross-border deliveries must be carried out in coordination with the central government. Moreover, Russia and China have cited a number of cases where humanitarian aid has ended in the hands of terrorists, and where border crossings have been used not only for delivering humanitarian aid, but also for smuggling various goods.

By 2019, the situation "on the ground" had changed: 7.2 million out of the 11.7 million Syrians in need of assistance and the 3.8 million of the 6.2 million total IDPs were already in government-controlled regions. In this situation Russia started calling for a review of the system for organizing humanitarian access. UN Security Council Resolution No. 2504 was adopted in January 2020.[179] It called for the border crossings with Iraq and Jordan to be closed, as these territories had long been controlled by the Syrian Army. At the same time, Russia criticized the United Nations for its inability to organize the delivery of humanitarian aid to Idlib via Damascus under the pretext that it was concerned about the risk of coronavirus spreading from the government-controlled areas. In April 2020, Damascus approved the delivery of humanitarian aid to Darat Izza and Athareb in the west of Aleppo Governorate (part of the Idlib de-escalation zone), but the United Nations was unable to arrange the relevant convoys. Finally, on July 11, pressure from Russia and China led to the adoption of a resolution that would guarantee the delivery of UN humanitarian aid to Syria for another year, until July 10, 2021, but only through the Bab al-Salaam border crossing. Two reasons were given for this decision: 1) 85 per cent of all humanitarian aid goes through this crossing; and 2) the territory under the control of terrorists in Idlib has fallen by 30 per cent. Russia and China came under fire for pushing the decision through from some Western observers, who pointed out that the closure of Bab al-Salaam crossing would deny aid to 1.3

[178] UN Security Council Resolution No. 2165 dated 14.07.2014 // UN. URL: https://undocs.org/ru/S/RES/2165(2014)

[179] UN Security Council Resolution No. 2504 dated January 10, 2020 // UN. URL: http://undocs.org/ru/S/RES/2504(2020).

million Syrians (including 500,000 children) living in cramped camps in Aleppo countryside.[180]

Given all this, some Russian experts are calling for the establishment of a joint monitoring mechanism that would make it possible to channel aid to the areas both under and out of government control in exchange for the aid going through Damascus. Russia insists on this, but the United States and the European Union are having none of it, which further complicates the "Syrian puzzle."[181]

4.4. Volatility of Aid

External aid to the countries of the MENA region in the 2010s was exposed to all hypothetically possible risks stemming from the changes in the domesic environment in the donor country.

First and foremost are economic risks. At the beginning of the decade, these risks fully manifested themselves in those countries that have direct access to the Mediterranean, namely France, Spain and Italy. The European sovereign debt crisis limited the ability of these countries to provide international aid, including to priority regions, such as MENA. Other donors such as the Nordic countries and the Netherlands cut assistance in the 2010s too, but nowhere near as much as Spain. The economic slump, coupled with record high unemployment rates that were comparable to those of the MENA countries, made it impossible for Spain to continue to provide aid in the same amounts as it had done previously. As a result its ODA channeled to the Arab countries fell almost tenfold (!) by 2014. Italian ODA fell too, by one third over the course of 2011–2012. These fluctuations in aid volumes made it difficult for the countries in the Southern Mediterranean to plan programmes and projects.

Special attention should be paid to the fluctuations in aid amounts to the MENA region caused by the 2015 European migrant crisis. Faced with an influx of refugees from Middle Eastern countries as a result of the escalation of internal conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and due to the expansion of the Islamic State, those countries in Europe that had admitted a large number of refugees were forced to spend huge amounts on providing food and housing to them on their territories and on preventing the crises in these countries from getting worse. This included allocating large sums to Syria's neighbours, namely Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. These actions were also natural from the point of view of domestic policy, a response to pressure from right-wing nationalists. This notwithstanding, an analysis of quantitative data paints a rather ambiguous picture.

On the one hand, if we compare data on the pledges that donors have made in recent years within the framework of the Brussels conferences to assist Syria and its neighbours, then the picture looks rather optimistic. In 2016–2019, donors exceeded their pledges (see Table 14). This included $10 billion in grants in 2019

[180] Vohra A. Block Aid: Russia and China's Response to the Caesar Act // Inside Arabia. 22.07.2020. URL: https://insidearabia.com/block-aid-russia-and-chinas-response-to-the-caesar-act.

[181] Khlebnikov A. The Future of Humanitarian Aid Delivery to Syria: What is Russia's Rationale?? // Russian International Affairs Council. 31.07.2020. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-future-of-humanitarian-aid-delivery-to-syria-what-is-russia-s-rationale/.

Table 14. Funds Raised at the Brussels Conferences in 2017–2020 (USD billion)

Year	Conference	Pledges	Contributions[183]	
			grants	loans
	London Conference	For 2016: 6	8.1	
2017	Brussels I Conference	For 2017: 6	7.5	30.0, including 2.3 as concessional contributions
		For 2018–20: 3.7		
2018	Brussels II Conference	For 2018: 4.4	6	For 2018–2020: 21.2
		For 2019–2020: 3.4		
2019	Brussels III Conference	For 2019: 7	10.0	
		For 2020 and beyond: 2.4	1.7 (as of February 2020)	For 2019 and beyond: 21.01 (18.5 as of February 2020)
2020	Brussels IV Conference	For 2020: 5.5[184]		For 2020 and beyond: 6.1
		For 2021 and beyond: 2		

(compared to the $7 billion that had been pledged), an increase of 143 per cent on the initial pledges. Of the 41 donor countries, 34 met or exceeded their commitments. What is more, as of February 2020, international donors had provided $1.7 billion in grants (71 per cent) and $18.5 billion (88 per cent) in loans for 2020 and beyond.[182] Obligations were fulfilled in all neighbouring countries in 2019, with the exception of Iraq.

However, the key question is whether the funds provided by donors covered the needs, and it is here where the picture becomes not so rosy. In the 2010s, every single country suffered from a shortfall of external financing, with needs typically being covered by just 50–60 per cent (the exception here is Iraq, where at least 70 per cent of needs covered every year since 2014). Some rather significant fluctuations were noted: aid deficits could move up or down ten or more percentage points in any given year.

Let us take Syria as an example. The humanitarian response plans of the United Nations show that Syria's aid requirements have grown by more than 17 times since 2012, yet the size of the funding gap has grown even more (by 20 times). The country's external financing needs have not been covered by more than 68 per cent in any year since 2012 (that result was achieved in 2013), and it looks

[182] Supporting Syria and the Region: Post-Brussels Conference Financial Tracking. Report Nine // The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ec-syria-tracking-report_nine.pdf

[183] In addition, states and international organizations took on multi-billion dollar loan commitments.

[184] Loan amounts for 2020.

like the figure for 2020 will be markedly lower, with just 43 per cent of needs being covered as of early October.[185]

There is every reason to believe that the coronavirus pandemic will only exacerbate aid fluctuations. For example, a virtual event aimed at raising fund for Yemen was held on June 2, 2020, which was predominantly attended by Arab and Western states. Around $1.35 billion in aid was pledged – far less than the $2.41 billion requested by the United Nations (for the period June to December 2020) and well behind the $3.6 billion mobilized in 2019. Oxfam notes, citing consolidated data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, that over half of the 20 of the most generous government donors to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen over the past three years have cut their funding by over a third since 2019, and five of them had failed to provide any direct assistance at all as of the report's publication in late 2020.[186] Given all this, UN representatives fear that 30 of the 41 programmes currently being implemented in Yemen will have to be closed, which will hit not only those in need, but also representatives of local organizations through which aid is delivered, leaving over 1500 Yemenis without jobs.[187] However, UNHCR representative in Yemen Jean-Nicolas Beuze said that it was clear there was going to be a funding shortfall even before the pandemic due to the donors' concerns about aid diversion and fraudulent use of resources. And the spread of COVID-19 will only make the situation worse.[188]

The Fourth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region in 2020 raised less money than the previous gathering: in 2019, donors pledged $7 billion in grants for 2019 and a further $2.4 billion for 2020 and beyond; in 2020, they pledged just $5.5 billion and $2 billion for 2021 and beyond. Loans have also decreased severalfold: $21.01 billion in 2019 (for 2019 and beyond), compared to just $5.5 billion in 2020, which is almost four times less.[189]

The main – although not the only – reason for the decrease in funding is the fact that the pandemic has forced international donors to redirect funds to meet domestic (primarily healthcare) needs. And it is not only Western donors that will be reducing foreign aid, as the GCC countries will be doing so too. Experts already see this as a serious risk that could exacerbate the situation in a number of countries in the region, including Lebanon and Egypt, among others.[190]

Donors have not been influenced by economic factors alone in making these

[185] Humanitarian Aid Contributions 2020 // Financial Tracking Service. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: https://fts.unocha.org.

[186] Oxfam. Funding the Humanitarian Response in Yemen: Are Donors Doing Their Fair Share? Oxfam Briefing Note. October 2020. URL: https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/funding-humanitarian-response-yemen-are-donors-doing-their-fair-share.

[187] Al-Shamahi A. Yemen Coronavirus Cases Expected to Surge as UN Aid Dries Up // Al Jazeera. 24.06.2020. URL: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/yemen-coronavirus-cases-expected-surge-aid-dries-200622124439279.html.

[188] Al-Ahmadi A. Funding Shortfall Risks COVID-19 Spread in Yemen: UN // Anadolu Agency. 15.07.2020. URL: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/funding-shortfall-risks-covid-19-spread-in-yemen-un/1911305.

[189] Supporting Syria and the Region: Post-Brussels Conference Financial Tracking. Report Nine // The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ec-syria-tracking-report_nine.pdf.

[190] Khulood F. Kuwait and Qatar: Big Donors, Different Approaches // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 09.06.2020. URL: https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/09/kuwait-and-qatar-big-donors-different-approaches-pub-82005.

decisions, as domestic political factors related to the change of governments and their priorities have no doubt played a role. Perhaps nowhere has this been more evident than in the case of the United States. I am talking here first and foremost about the significant cuts in aid to all countries in the MENA region (with the exception of Egypt and Jordan) proposed by the Trump administration, which Congress by and large managed to soften, as well as about the more active use of restrictive measures by both branches of the government with respect to aid recipients and other donors. This latter point requires closer examination.

4.5. Sanctions Risks

MENA has become a hotbed of all kinds of sanctions risks without exception after the Arab Spring.

The first type of risk is the occurrence of events that can serve as a reason to block aid, which is precisely what happened in Egypt as a result of the military coup in the summer of 2013. However, the Obama administration refused to acknowledge the events as such and instead tried to manipulate aid provision in order to obtain certain concessions from the new Egyptian authorities on matters of human rights protection and democratization, albeit without success.

Sanctions risks have also manifested themselves in the case of Palestine. In this case, the sharp reduction in aid was inextricably linked to the rather extraordinary situation that arose as a result of the deterioration in relations between the Palestinian National Authority and the United States in connection with the decision of the Trump administration to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the legislative activity of Congress, which passed two laws in 2018 significantly limiting the possibility of interaction between the United States and Palestine.

The Taylor Force Act passed in March 2018 suspended all aid to Palestine provided through the Economic Support Fund (with specific exceptions for the East Jerusalem Hospital Network and a certain amount for wastewater projects and vaccination programs).[191] Reinstatement of aid was contingent on the Palestinian National Authority and Palestinian Liberation Organisation putting an end to acts of violence against Israeli or U.S. citizens, terminations payments to persons imprisoned for committing a terrorist act or members of their families, revoking legislation authorizing or implementing a system of compensation for imprisoned individuals , publicly condemning such acts of violence and cooperating in investigations of such acts to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act of 2018 passed in October 2018 sated that a defendant consented to personal jurisdiction in U.S. federal court for lawsuits related to international terrorism if the defendant accepted U.S. foreign aid (after the law had been in effect for 120 days) [192]

In response, Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority Rami Hamdal-

[191] Taylor Force Act. Pub.L. 115-141 // The United States Congress. 23.03.2018. URL: https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1164/text.

[192] Anti-Terrorism Clarification of 2018 Act. Pub.L. 115-253. // The United States Congress. 03.10.2018. URL: https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2946/text.

lah notified the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that his country would no longer be accepting bilateral assistance from the United States, which was then duly stopped on January 31, 2019.

I should also mention the unexpected emergence of sanctions risks in Lebanon, which affected U.S. military aid in the country. The Lebanese Armed Forces have received over $2 billion in grants from the United States since 2006. Some in the U.S. support this kind of aid,[193] while others are firmly against it, [194] believing that this assistance could fall into the hands of Hezbollah and that it would be worth looking into cancelling support for the Lebanese government, where the group plays a key role.[195] In September 2019, the Office of Management and Budget of the Executive Office of the President withheld $100 million in military aid to Lebanon that had already been approved by Congress and the Pentagon without explanation. However, pressure from Congress and the Ukrainegate scandal caused the ban to be lifted in December of that year.

Lastly, the risks associated with so-called "secondary" (extraterritorial) sanctions and the danger that international aid might not achieve its goals due to sanctions pressure on the recipient country is most eloquently illustrated in the case of Syria.

The U.S. (introduced before 2011) and the European Union (introduced in 2011) restrictive measures against Syria prohibited providing all types of aid except humanitarian to the Syrian government.[196] However, the United States eased its restrictions in July 2013 to enable the provision of aid to the opposition and those living in the territories under its control. U.S. companies and individuals were now allowed to export and re-export a range of goods to Syria, including equipment needed for reconstruction, to these areas.[197]

The arrival of the Trump administration marked the beginning of the U.S. sanctions becoming more extraterritorial in nature. In November 2018 and March 2019, the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Department of the Treasury warned foreign companies that supplied crude oil and petroleum products to Syria that they could fall under sanctions. In October 2019, President Trump gave the Department of the Treasury and the Department of State the authority to levy sanctions against those responsible for actions that threaten the peace, security, stability or territorial integrity of Syria, for committing serious human rights violations, and for providing financial, material or technological suport to

[193] Seligman L. "We Are Telegraphing Abandonment" // Foreign Policy. 03.12.2020. URL: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/03/chris-murphy-q-and-a-lebanon-we-are-telegraphing-abandonment/.

[194] Bednarek J., Natonski R. Congress Should Be Wary of Funding the Lebanese Armed Forces // RealClear Defense. 19.02.2019. URL: https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2019/02/18/congress_should_be_wary_of_funding_the_lebanese_armed_forces_114191.html

[195] Karabatak Z. The U.S. Finally Released Military Aid to Lebanon. Here's What it Will – and Won't – Achieve // The Washington Post. 09.12.2019. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/09/us-finally-released-military-aid-lebanon-heres-what-it-will-wont-achieve/.

[196] For more detail, see: Sanctions Policy: Goals, Strategies and Tools: A Reader. Second Edition, revised and expanded / [compiled by I. Timofeev, V. Morozov and Y. Timofeeva]; Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2020, 452 pp. [In Russian].

[197] Syria Sanctions // U.S. Department of State. URL: https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/syria/index.htm.

sanctioned persons.[198]

Finally, in December 2019, the so-called Caesar Act[199] was passed as part of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act[200] and allowed sanctions to be imposed against the following categories of persons who:

- provide significant financial, material or technological support to, or knowingly engages in a significant transaction with the Syrian government (or entities owned or controlled by the Syrian government);201
- are military contractors, mercenaries or members of paramilitary force knowingly operating in a military capacity inside Syria for or on behalf of the Government of Syria, the Government of the Russian Federation, or the Government of Iran;
- work with sanctioned Syrian nationals;
- knowingly sell or provide significant goods, services, technology, information or other support that significantly facilitates the maintenance or expansions of the Government of Syria's domestic production of natural gas, petroleum, or petroleum products; or aircraft or spare aircraft parts that are used for military purposes in Syria, as well as significant goods or services associated with the operation of such aircraf or provides significant construction or engineering services to the Government of Syria.

Experts from the International Crisis Group believe that the ambiguous word "significant" has been used in the text of the Caesar Act deliberately. On the one hand, it could clearly "deter third parties from considering deals with Syria", but on the other, "it leaves wide discretion discretion for U.S. policymakers to decide on how to prioritise the sanctions' implementation".[202] In turn, the President's "right to waive" the application of sanctions allows the White House to offer certain sanctions relief in exchange for more incremental concessions from the Assad government and from Russia.[203] In this context, it is important to link the law with other regulations – sanctions can be imposed for interacting with any person on the sanctions list, and more and more reasons for imposing sanctions are appearing.

New sanctions include freezing the assets of persons convicted of prohibited activities and banning them from entering the United States. Sanctions can be fully or partially suspended under the following circumstances:

[198] Executive Order 13894 of October 14, 2019. Blocking Property and Suspending Entry of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Syria // Federal Register. URL: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/10/17/2019-22849/blocking-property-and-suspending-entry-of-certain-persons-contributing-to-the-situation-in-syria.

[199] The "Caesar Act" ("Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act) is named after a Syrian war photographer who fled the country with an archive of photographs documenting the atrocities taking place in Syrian state prisons and who testified before Congress in 2014. It took five years for the law to be passed.

[200] The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020. Pub. L. 116-92 // U.S. Government information. URL: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-116publ92/pdf/PLAW-116publ92.pdf.

[201] Including grants, loans and export credits.

[202] U.S. Sanctions on Syria: What Comes Next? // International Crisis Group. 13.07.2020. URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/us-sanctions-syria-what-comes-next.

[203] Ibid.

1) The air space over Syria is no longer being utilized by the Government of Syria or the Government of the Russian Federation to target civilian populations;

2) Areas besieged by the Government of Syria, the Government of the Russian Federation, the Government of Iran, or a foreign non-state actor have regular access to humanitarian assistance, freedom of travel and medical care;

3) The Government of Syria is releasing all political prisoners and is allowing full access to the same facilities for investigations by appropriate international human rights organizations;

4) The forces of the Government of Syria, the Government of the Russian Federation, the Government of Iran and foreign non-state actors are no longer engaged in deliberate targeting of medical facilities, schools, residential areas and community gathering places, including markets, in violation of international norms;

5) The Government of Syria is taking steps to verifiably fulfil its commitments under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction;

6) The Government of Syria is permitting the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Syrians displaced by the conflict;

7) The Government of Syria is taking verifiable steps to establish meaningful accountability for perpetrators of war crimes committed by the Assad regime.

The Caesar Act entered into force following a six-month grace period on June 17, 2020. Three rounds of sanctions have followed since: on 39 individuals and legal entities in June; 13 in July, including Bashar al-Assad's 18-year-old son; and six in August.

Even before the first extraterritorial measures were introduced, unilateral U.S. sanctions had significantly impacted the situation surrounding Syria. On the one hand, they hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid: as experts, particularly Ruslan Mamedov, have noted, some humanitarian organizations refuse to work in Syria or limit the scope of their activities in order to safeguard themselves against additional risks.[204] The Caesar Act will undoubtedly exacerbate the situation. According to the International Crisis Group, third parties may refrain from providing humanitarian assistance for fear of real or perceived sanctions, as well as from carrying out mall-scale rehabilitation projects amid uncertainty as to how the U.S. authorities will define "humanitarian aid" and "reconstruction."[205] Humanitarian organizations have already noted that the adoption of the Caesar Act has significantly complicated the supply of medicines to Syria; insurance companies are refusing to cover certain procedures; and ATMs have shut down,

[204] Mamedov R. How American Caesar Act Will Affect the Situation in Syria and Moscow's Policy // Institut für Sicherheitspolitik. 04.08.2020.
URL: https://www.institutfuersicherheit.at/how-us-american-caesar-act-will-affect-the-situation-in-syria-and-moscows-policy/.

[205] International Crisis Group. U.S. Sanctions on Syria: What Comes Next? // ICG. 13.07.2020.
URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/us-sanctions-syria-what-comes-next.

causing relief workers to "waste precious time standing in line to withdraw their salaries".[206] To mitigate these risks, the International Crisis Group has recommended that the United States expand the scope of humanitarian exemptions from sanctions.[207]

On the other hand, Western sanctions have undoubtedly limited the potential of aid to alleviate the suffering of ordinary Syrians, although experts disagree as to how much. The Syrian government and its supporters are trying to blame the West for the economic crisis, but factors totally unrelated to the sanctions, most notably the fact that Damascus has lost access to oil and gas fields, as well as to approximately $40 billion held in Lebanese banks due to the liquidity crisis in the country, also played a part in it.[208]

Whatever the case may be, the adoption of the Caesar Act exacerbates the situation for all actors capable of contributing to the reconstruction of Syria. U.S. extraterritorial sanctions are mainly focused on the GCC states, in particular the United Arab Emirates, which has a track record of developing ties with Bashar al-Assad (having opened an embassy in Damascus in late 2018), including sending trade delegations to Syria and strengthening cooperation between the intelligence services of the two countries (as part of the confrontation with Turkey).[209] In March 2020, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohamed Bin Zayed even called Assad to express his support in the fight against coronavirus, forcing the U.S. Special Representative for Syria Engagement Jim Jeffrey to warn the UAE leadership against further cooperation with the Syrian government, going as far as directly threatening sanctions.[210]

The Caesar Act has also had a destructive effect on Lebanon, which had long been a key channel for aid flows to Syria. Banking cooperation between Damascus and Beirut took a particularly heavy hit, as Lebanon's CSG Group stopped servicing ATMs in Syria.[211]

The Caesar Act also sends a clear signal to Europe, which had been deliberating on a partial resumption of the dialogue with Damascus in order to obtain certain concessions from the Syrian government that could pave the way for the return of refugees. Some think that the introduction of new sanctions on the part of the United States devalues the significance of the European Union's own restrictive measures against Syria, since it cannot use the possibility of lifting the sanctions as a negotiation tool in talks with Syria and the states that support it: even if the European Union wants to lift its sanctions, trade normalization will be impossible

[206] P. Verma, V. Yee. Trump's Syria Sanctions "Cannot Solve the Problem," Critics Say // The New York Times. 04.08.2020. URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/world/middleeast/trump-assad-syria-sanctions.html.

[207] U.S. Sanctions on Syria: What Comes Next? // International Crisis Group. 13.07.2020. URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/us-sanctions-syria-what-comes-nextt.

[208] Ibid.

[209] US threatens UAE with Caesar Act Sanctions Over Normalisation with Syria // The New Arab. 18.06.2020. URL: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/6/18/us-threatens-uae-with-sanctions-over-normalisation-with-syria.

[210] Mohamed Bin Zayed // Twitter. 27.03.2020. URL: https://twitter.com/MohamedBinZayed/status/1243613323519762432?s=20.

[211] I. Matveev. The Caesar Act: A New Challenge for Syria? // RIAC. 07.08.2020. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-caesar-act-a-new-challenge-for-syria/.

due to secondary US sanctions.[212]

Experts in Russia and the West believe that the Caesar Act will hinder China's potential involvement in the rebuilding of Syria. Bashar al-Assad's claims that the Chinese side has already found ways to circumvent the sanctions are nothing more than bravado, as its interest in Syria is not strong enough to risk losing access to the American financial system.[213]

As for Russia, as a senior research fellow at the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies Russian Academy of Sciences Igor Matveev has rightly pointed out, Crimea and Abkhazia's potential as intermediaries has grown, despite the fact that they are under sanctions themselves.[214] Russian companies that are already under U.S. sanctions will also be able to consider interaction with the Syrian government, while the rest will avoid it at all costs. This does not stop certain experts on the region from the United States, in particular Steven Heydemann, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, from asking why the Trump administration has not sanctioned Russian individuals and entities, seeing this as evidence of the White House's unwillingness to take actions against Russia, and thus questioning the credibility of sanctions regime as such.[215]

One of the few countries that may even benefit from the introduction of the US secondary sanctions is Iran, because it has absolutely nothing to lose in the current climate.[216] It is telling that on the very same day the Caesar Act entered into force, an Iranian delegation led by advisor to the first vice-president Hassan Danaeifar arrived in Damascus to hold talks on expanding economic, cultural and scientific bilateral cooperation, and the agreements signed were immediately seen in Syria as an example of getting around the sanctions.

Be that as it may, the sanctions nevertheless create uncertainty around Syria's future. They are seen as a rather serious threat to the al-Assad government. However, experts at the International Crisis Group believe that sanctions are unlikely to help achieve the stated goals and may not be an effective means of ensuring unrestricted humanitarian access or consolidating a sustainable ceasefire.[217] They believe that some of the conditions set out in the Caesar Act are completely impractical (for example, releasing all forcibly held political prisoners or holding war criminals to account), although certain concessions may be achievable in the humanitarian sector. The International Crisis Group believes that Russia could

[212] Mamedov R. How American Caesar Act Will Affect the Situation in Syria and Moscow's Policy // Institut für Sicherheitspolitik. 04.08.2020.
URL: https://www.institutfuersicherheit.at/how-us-american-caesar-act-will-affect-the-situation-in-syria-and-moscows-policy/.

[213] Assad: Syrian Businessmen Ready Help Rebuild the Country // RIA Novosti. 09.12.2019.
URL: https://ria.ru/20191209/1562187762.html [In Russian]

[214] Ibid.

[215] Verma P., Yee V. Trump's Syria Sanctions "Cannot Solve the Problem," Critics Say // The New York Times. 04.08.2020.
URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/world/middleeast/trump-assad-syria-sanctions.html.

[216] Behravesh M. US Caesar Act Sanctions Push Syria Closer to Iran // Inside Arabia. 04.08.2020.
URL: https://insidearabia.com/us-caesar-act-sanctions-push-syria-closer-to-iran/.

[217] U.S. Sanctions on Syria: What Comes Next? // International Crisis Group. 13.07.2020.
URL: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/us-sanctions-syria-what-comes-next.

follow a more "transactional" logic, and that some Russian businesses may be interested in working with Syria and, thus, in the Syrian government making certain concessions that would keep the level of violence to a minimum and reduce suffering while not harming Russia's overall strategy in the country. According to the International Crisis Group's logic, the United States could in theory provide waivers (for individual Russian and Arab companies). Moreover, it believes that the United States and the European Union should use possible concessions to establish a dialogue with Russia on expanding humanitarian programming in government-controlled areas, provided that Damascus observes internationally recognized humanitarian standards.

The prospects of any kind of deal being signed that would further tie the sanctions (or the lifting of sanctions) to humanitarian and development assistance in Syria are still very much up in the air, and the upcoming U.S. elections are unlikely to make matters any clearer. The Caesar Act was introduced for a period of five years, and a change of administration will not lead to its abolition. There is no reason to expect the Democrats to ease up on the sanctions regime either.

5. Risks Accompanying Aid Delivery

5.1. Declining Quality of Governance

The Arab world is one of those regions where international aid has a visible negative impact on governance. I am talking primarily here about the pernicious dependence of the region's countries on external assistance, which has an effect similar to that of the "resource curse." A comparison of the key indicators measuring the impact of this effect – net ODA per capita; net ODA/GNI ratio; net ODA volume compared to gross capital formation and import of goods, services and primary income in 2010 and 2018 (see Table 15) – demonstrates that, since the start of the Arab Spring, the situation has deteriorated in the conflict-affected countries (Yemen, Syria, Libya), the states that have been most affected by the Syrian conflict (Lebanon and Jordan), and in North African countries that have gone through a revolutionary regime change (Tunisia and Egypt).

Quite naturally, in states with a large population, such as Egypt, relative net ODA volumes turn out to be several times smaller than in Tunisia, for instance, which receives far less aid. The inverse dependence is also clearly visible, as can be seen from the example of Palestine: in absolute figures, Palestine receives amounts comparable to Egypt, but its net ODA per capita is nearly 25 times higher ($490 vs $21 respectively) (Table 16). Algeria is the last on the informal ranking of the MENA Arab countries by net ODA per capita (merely $3 per capita).

If we take countries with a population of over one million people (thereby excluding small island states that are by default the hands-down winners, and also Montenegro), the list of top five aid recipients in the world will be made up exclusively of Arab states (see Table 16). Consequently, the volatility of ODA flows may have a particularly negative impact on these states.

The unsolvable problem of aid fungibility is also on full display in the MENA countries. Billions of dollars pouring in as external assistance not only help ineffective governments stay in power, but also exacerbate their ineffectiveness by causing fiscal misconduct.

Due to the region's high geopolitical significance, international donors are often unwilling to put serious pressure on the governments of recipient states to improve the quality of governance by either providing aid without any strings attached (as in the case of Lebanon and Iraq), or setting some formal conditions (as the United States does in Egypt), although ways to circumvent these conditions are exploited time and again.

Today, Lebanon is probably one of the Arab world's most vivid examples of external aid having a destructive impact on the functioning of a state's political system. For decades (until 2018), donors had claimed to be aware of the negative impact that external assistance was having on Lebanon's governance, but they preferred to close their eyes to that fact and maintained the status quo as they were wary of upsetting the complicated balance of political powers in the multidenominational

Table 15. Key Indicators of External Aid Dependency by Arab Countries (2010, 2018)

Recipient	Net ODA per capita (USD)		Net ODA to GNI (%)		Net ODA to gross capital formation (%)		ODA to imports of goods, services, and primary income (%)	
	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018
Middle East								
Iraq	131	254	3,6	6,0	12,2	32,4	4,9	10,5
Jordan	73	60	1,6	1,0	9,9	8,0	4,6	3,8
Lebanon	29	280	2,3	–	–	–	5,3	–
Syria	90	207	1,2	2,5	4,6	12,9	1,4	3,9
Yemen	664	490	26,4	13,2	130,8	63,4	46,7	25,1
West Bank and Gaza	6	591	0,2	–	0,7 *	–	0,6	–
North Africa								
Algeria	6	3	0,1	–	0,3	0,2	0,4	–
Egypt	7	21	0,3	0,8	1,4	4,9	0,9	2,4
Libya	1	45	0	0,6	0,3**	–	0	–
Morocco	30	23	1,1	0,7	3,1	2,1	2,5	1,4
Sudan	44	23	3,5	2,5	13,4	12,2	12,9	9,5
Tunisia	52	70	1,3	2,1	4,7	–	2,1	3,1

* data for 2007; ** data for 2008
Source: Aid Dependency // World Bank. URL: http://wdi.worldbank.Org/table/6.11

Table 16. Top 5 Recipients of Net ODA Per Capita (among countries and territories with a population of over 1 million)

No.	ODA recipient	Net ODA per capita (2018, USD)
1	Syria	591
2	West Bank and Gaza	490
3	Yemen	280
4	Jordan	254
5	Lebanon	207

Source: Aid Dependency // World Bank. URL: http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/6.11

state.[218] In that respect, they were responsible for "subsidizing the broken system they hope to fix."[219] Since 2018, attempts have been made to change course by making reforms a condition of providing further aid, but it was done too late to produce any tangible results: Lebanese politicians were incapable of assuming responsibility for implementing these reforms, as they feared losing their privileges and public support. As a result, Lebanon went the way of Iraq (it has recently been a battlefield of clans fighting each other for access to foreign aid[220]) and saw major protests in 2019 that nevertheless failed to prevent the state from the sovereign default.

However, it was the explosion of 2750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at the Port of Beirut that highlighted the highly flawed nature of the approach of external actors and the dysfunctionality of the political system these actors uphold. As I have already mentioned, donors pledged approximately $300 million in emergency aid, but the question of mobilizing funding for the country's long-term reconstruction still remains open.

Immediately after the explosion, Emmanuel Macron flew to Beirut, where he said openly that aid "will not fall into corrupt hands" and that the government that had discredited itself must change. Germany, Lebanon's second largest donor, made similar statements.[221] The Chair's Conclusions of the International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People in Paris states, "Assistance should be timely, sufficient and consistent with the needs of the Lebanese people" and it should be "directly delivered to the Lebanese population, with utmost efficiency and transparency."[222]

Some experts demand that reconstruction aid be predicated on cooperation in investigating the causes and circumstances of the explosion:[223] instead of a multilateral trust fund established in coordination with the recipient country, a binding agreement should be concluded stipulating that funds will be provided in exchange for measurable and real results in reconstructing the city and the port.[224] Proposals also include establishing a special body, the International Beirut Reconstruction Authority, whose top management should include members of Lebanese civil society and representatives of donor states who will be involved in the selection of contractors. Even more radical requests are being put forward:

[218] Serwer, D and R. Slim. Help Lebanon Help Itself // Foreign Affairs. 28.08.2020. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-08-28/help-lebanon-help-itself

[219] Parreira C. The Art of Non-Governing. How Lebanon's Rulers Got Away with Doing so Little for so Long // II Synaps. 23.10.2019. URL: https://www.synaps.network/post/lebanon-protests-uprising-poor-governance

[220] Mamedov R. S. External Aid to Iraq: Donors' Promises and Political Elites Compromise . [Asia and Africa Today], 2020, no. 3, pp. 59–64. [In Russian]

[221] Beirut Blast: How to Stop Aid Being Lost to Corruption // The National. 09.08.2020. URL: https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/beirut-blast-how-to-stop-aid-being-lost-to-corruption-1.1061266

[222] International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People – Chair's Conclusions (Fort de Brégançon, 09 Aug. 2020) // Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic. URL: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/lebanon/news/article/international-conference-on-assistance-and-support-to-beirut-and-the-lebanese

[223] Serwer D. and R. Slim. Help Lebanon Help Itself // Foreign Affairs. 28.08.2020. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-08-28/help-lebanon-help-itself.

[224] Ibid.

for instance, Bente Scheller, director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Middle East office, believes that since many Westerners and Western properties also suffered losses, the international community can seize the assets abroad of Lebanese politicians: "If you freeze their personal assets, until it's clear who bears the responsibility for the explosion, can't you then ask for a court order on how these should be used to rebuild the Lebanese state or to rebuild Beirut?"[225]

The World Bank put Lebanon on the 2021 list of fragile and conflict-affected situations, which is an indirect indication of the Lebanese government's inability to prevent a crisis in the country. There is every reason to believe that Lebanon is on that list to stay.

The case of Egypt demonstrates the crucial role played by the expanding financial capabilities of non-Western donors, particularly the GCC states, in exacerbating the negative impact of external assistance.[226] Aid from these countries has played a key role at every stage of Egypt's difficult political transformation since 2011. Billions of dollars transferred directly to the Central Bank of Egypt and loans tied to the purchase of petrochemicals from the GCC member states provided a much-needed influx of additional resources into the Egyptian treasury. These resources facilitated a macroeconomic stabilization and allowed the Egyptian state to fulfil its vital functions, since they helped the authorities, through aid fungibility, to divert extra funds to maintain domestic stability, purchase arms from France and Russia and counteract Jihadi groups on the Sinai Peninsula.

However, the growing ambitions and capabilities of the Gulf monarchies are not the only reasons why these states are playing an increasingly greater role in Egyptian political and economic life, as the overcautious attitude of Western states, primarily the United States, has also had an effect. While the latter would begin to manipulate aid instruments at key points or take time to think things over, the Gulf monarchies, be it Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates or Qatar (at different stages) acted decisively and promptly. These differences stemmed not only from their radically different decision-making mechanisms, but also from the fact that interaction with Egypt is of far greater importance to Arab states' national interests. Taken together, these factors ultimately created the image of Arab states as more reliable partners.

Aid from the Gulf states was not predicated on governance-related demands, but it had direct impact on political developments in Egypt. Time and again, multibillion dollar transfers from the Gulf allowed the Egyptian authorities to delay the signing of an agreement with the IMF that would be conditioned to implementing socially and politically awkward reforms. These funds made it possible to ignore the demands of the United States and Western Europe for democratization and human rights protection, which negatively affected the ability of the West to influence Egypt.[227]

[225] Vohra A. The World is Planning to Rescue the Lebanese, Not Lebanon // Foreign Policy. 19.08.2020. URL: https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/19/the-world-is-planning-to-rescue-the-lebanese-not-lebanon/

[226] For more detail see: Bartenev V. I. The Gulf States' Assistance to Egypt after the 2011 Revolution: Logic, Dynamics, Systemic Impact [Vestnik RUDN. International Relations], 2019, no. 4, pp. 566–582. [In Russian].

[227] Hecan M. Comparative Political Economy of the IMF Arrangements after the Arab Uprisings: Egypt and Tunisia. [The Journal of North African Studies],2016, vol. 21, no. 5, p. 790.

This logic of risk realization was not unique to Egypt. It also applied to other relatively stable Arab states, such as Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, etc. In conflict-affected states such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, this logic took some very special forms, as it was tied to another type of risk – the risk of conflict escalation in the recipient state.

5.2. Conflict Escalation

The decisions that donors make with regard to providing international aid had major impact on the overall level of conflict propensity in the MENA countries. Donors only bothered to assess this phenomenon when there was risk of aid going to forces that they believed were a threat to their own interests. And, on the contrary, donors would typically set aside the "conflict-sensitive approach" when providing aid to those actors (official authorities, or conversely, opposition groups) that they believed could help them further their interests. This applies both to those states that are now embroiled in internationalized internal conflicts and to more stable states.

For instance, aid provided by the West (primarily the United States) and the Gulf states directly to opposition groups and civilians in the trans-Euphrates territories controlled by these groups certainly was a factor that complicated reconciliation with the Bashar al-Assad government. Similarly, Turkey continues to spend massively on organizing life in the norther regions of Syria under its control, both in the form of humanitarian aid and to help rebuild infrastructure facilities. This aid strengthens ties between these territories and Turkey and makes the task of the Syrian government restoring control over the entire country within its 2011 borders, all the more difficult, thus creating new long-term fault rifts. Additionally, it is crucial that we take an ever deeper look at the situation and focus on the unequal distribution of aid within the territories controlled by any single party to the conflict. Esther Meininghaus justly notes that "significant imbalances in the distribution of aid between different geographical areas, as highlighted in the current Syrian war, threaten not only the immediate survival of civilians, but also their future."[228]

The same is true for Libya and Yemen, where, owing to aid fungibility, the aid that governments receive from international donors (even humanitarian aid) frees up additional resources that can be channelled into fighting the forces of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar (in Libya) or the Houthis (in Yemen), thereby whipping up the desire for a military victory rather than a victory at the negotiating table. By formally providing aid to officially recognized governments, the West, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are not violating any international norms. However, the funds they send become an additional factor in the respective conflicts.

The situation is exacerbated by aid diversion practices, a problem that is particularly acute in Yemen. For instance, in 2018, the Associated Press found out that humanitarian aid sent to families in Taiz – Yemen's third-largest city besieged

[228] Meininghaus E. Humanitarianism in Intra-State Conflict: Aid Inequality and Local Governance in Government- and Opposition-Controlled Areas in the Syrian War. [Third World Quarterly], 2016, vol. 37, no. 8, pp. 1454–1482.

by government forces – was confiscated by both parties and either sent on to fighters or resold.[229] World Food Programme Executive Director in Yemen David Beasley told the UN Security Council that there was "serious evidence that food was being diverted and going to the wrong people." Further confirmation of this appeared in 2020, when international aid supplies were found in warehouses in a town abandoned by the Houthis, whose fighters had evidently been using the supplies as sustenance.[230] The subject of governments diverting aid intended for civilians in Houthi-controlled territories receives much less coverage, but there are such precedents as well.

The issue of aid falling into the wrong hands is of concern for international donors in Lebanon as well. For instance, Pentagon Spokesperson Jonathan Hoffmann said on allocating aid for the reconstruction of Beirut: "We're well aware of some of the concerns with whom the aid would go to [Hezbollah – V.B.], and ensuring that the aid gets to the people of Lebanon that need it most."[231] At the same time, as they ponder the issue of providing aid for the reconstruction of Beirut, certain experts call for examining the experience of Hezbollah's reconstruction projects implemented in 2006 after the war with Israel. These experts stress that although this group is indeed part of the system that is to blame for the explosion, excluding it may result in alienating a significant part of the population that supports it,[232] which could be an additional destabilizing factor in Lebanon.

However, immediately after the 2013 military coup in Egypt, neither Saudi Arabia, nor the United Arab Emirates nor Kuwait were in any way concerned about many billions of aid dollars sent to the new authorities headed by el-Sisi going to help cruelly suppress the resistance of the Muslim Brotherhood's supporters and consequently sowing the seeds of a conflict that could blow the country up from inside. Fundamentally, this had never been a determining factor of any importance in the decisions made by the Obama administration since 2013, or by the Trump Administration since 2017. Year in year out, they continued to send a minimum of $1.3 billion in military aid to Cairo, which once again confirms that the "conflict-sensitive approach" crumbles upon contact with Middle Eastern realities, where every major donor tries to use aid as a tool to advance their own selfish interests.

5.3. Amassment of External Debt

The problem of the external debt burden growing as a result of receiving external aid has already manifested itself in many countries of the Arab world. An analysis of the World Bank data on foreign debt (although not available for all states) demonstrates that, compared to 2010, external debt calculated in relation to GNI

[229] Houthis Stole Food "From The Mouths" of Hungry Yemenis: UN // A Jazeera. 31.12.2019. URL: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/houthis-stole-food-mouths-hungry-yemenis-181231143128776.html

[230] Abo Alasrar F. Houthis' Diversion of Aid to Fighters Sustains Conflict // Arab News. 30.04.2020. URL: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1667476

[231] Lee M., Baldora L.C. US aid begins flowing to Lebanon in wake of deadly explosion // AP News. 06.08.2020. URL: https://apnews.com/article/qatar-iran-middle-east-lebanon-politics-4983a5f4237d22b46549d17724e5b392; Parreira C. The Art of Non-Governing. How Lebanon's Rulers Got Away with Doing so Little for so Long // Synaps. 23.10.2019. URL: https://www.synaps.network/post/lebanon-protests-uprising-poor-governance

[232] Serwer D., Slim R. Help Lebanon Help Itself // Foreign Affairs. 28.08.2020. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-08-28/help-lebanon-help-itself

grew in most MENA states (with the exception of Algeria), and sometimes drastically so. The highest growth rate was observed Egypt and Lebanon (more than two-fold), and Tunisia and Jordan showed significant increase as well (see Table 17).

Table 17. Debt Burden in Some MENA Arab States

Country	External debt stocks (% of GNI)		Total debt service (USD m)		Total debt service (% of GNI)	
	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018
North Africa						
Algeria	4.5	3	676	217	0.4	0.1
Egypt	17.1	40	3065	7881	1.4	3.2
Morocco	29.7	42	3306	3867	3.6	3.4
Tunisia	53.5	90	2373	2788	5.7	7.3
Sudan	36.8	57	496	216	0.9	0.9
Middle East						
Jordan	65.1	76	798	2264	3.0	5.4
Yemen	22.2	26	257	111	0.9	0.4
Lebanon	65.8	145	11,196	16,409	29.5	30.0

Source: World Bank. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/

Simultaneously, the cost of external debt increased, too, and in some cases (Jordan, Tunisia, Egypt) its grew faster than the GNI. In the vast majority of Arab states, external debt consists of loans from donor states and international organizations (including the IMF), as well as from private organizations (officially supported export credits that in some states, for instance the United States, count as international aid).

Perhaps nowhere were the risks associated with the growing debt burden more clearly demonstrated than in Lebanon. By 2018, Lebanon's external debt had grown to 145 per cent of GDP and the cost of debt servicing had skyrocketed to $16.5 billion (30 per cent of GNI). This figure is comparable to the cost of servicing the total foreign debt of all other Arab states combined. Critics saw this as a direct consequence of the uncontrolled lending in the 1990s. Increased payments curtailed the Lebanese government's ability to provide public services and hindered it from responding effectively to the refugee crisis.[233] Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of donors continued to offer aid to the country as concessional loans (see Table 18).

On the one hand, given the massive scale of corruption in Lebanon, offering the bulk of funds as loans was probably the only way to force the Lebanese govern-

[233] Making Aid Work in Lebanon. Joint Agency Briefing Paper // The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies – Oxfam. April 2018. URL: https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/making-aid-work-lebanon

Table 18. Distribution of Funds Pledged at the 2018 Economic Conference for Development through Reforms with the Private Sector (*Conference economique pour le developpement par les reformes et avec les entreprises*,' CEDRE) (USD million)

	Loans	Grants	Total
Multilateral institutions			
World Bank Group	4000		4000
EBRD	1353		1353
European Investment Bank	984		984
Islamic Development Bank	750		750
Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development	500		500
Arab Fund for Social & Economic Development	5000		500
European Union	185		185
Donor states			
Saudi Arabia	1000		10,000
France	492	185	677
Qatar	500		500
Netherlands	369		369
Turkey	200		200
Kuwait	180		180
Italy	148		148
United States		115	115
United Kingdom		85	85
Germany	74		74
Japan	10		10
Finland	7		6
TOTAL	11,252	385	11,637

ment to implement reforms. However, Lebanon failed to service its foreign debt. In March 2020, the Lebanese government defaulted, which only exacerbated the situation.

These risks were also manifest in Jordan, another state that has had never-ending difficulties with financing the budget deficit (even with the massive non-repayable funds provided, in particular, by the United States). Jordan has received plenty of external support over the years. In 1994, the country had its debt writ-

ten off after it signed a peace agreement with Israel, and in the late 2000s, several state-owned enterprises were privatized. However, since 2011, the cost of servicing its foreign debt has almost tripled to $2264 million, or 5.4 per cent of its GNI. Multilateral institutions and donor states account for nearly 60 per cent of this debt, and they are interested in continuing to support Jordan. Long-term, however, this situation is certainly not sustainable. Jordan's debt burden is growing against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the government received another IMF loan of $1.3 billion, and another emergency loan of $395 million in May. In July, the government had to issue Eurobonds with maturities of five (worth $500 million) and ten years (worth $1.25 billion). Consequently, the government debt will ultimately exceed 100 per cent. That, in turn, means an increased need for resources required to service the external debt, and that borrowing on international markets will cost the country's authorities even more. It is also likely that this development will force the Government of Jordan to introduce austerity measures, which will lead to further public discontent and become another destabilizing factor in the country.[234]

5.4. Aggravation of Interstate Rivalries

Donor countries monitor each other's activities in states that are of particular interest for them very attentively, and the actions of their competitors in providing aid can whip up a rivalry not only within these states themselves, but also at the regional and global level.

This is exactly what happened, for example, in intra-GCC relations: Qatar's unprecedented post-2011 activity in supporting Islamist movements throughout the region, in particular its transition to being almost the sole sponsor of Egypt during the reign of Mohamed Morsi (2012–2013), as well as Doha's involvement in the Libyan conflict certainly, escalated tensions that ultimately resulted in the 2017 severance of diplomatic relations with Qatar, as several states accused it of supporting terrorism and extremist ideology.

Iran's use of external aid instruments in the Middle East, primarily in Syria (supporting the Bashar al-Assad government), Yemen (supporting the Houthis) and Lebanon (supporting Hezbollah) is the source of even greater irritation for the Gulf states and the United States, which traditionally see this aid as another element of the "Iranian threat," and the aim to counter this threat effectively sets the tone for their entire regional strategy. Turkish aid to the opposition forces in Syria has, in turn, exacerbated the contradictions between Ankara and Tehran, while Turkey's large-scale military and economic aid to the Government of National Accord led by Fayez al-Sarraj served to additionally complicate relations with the United Arab Emirates, which supports Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army.

The logic described above also manifests itself in the interactions of non-regional actors, primarily the United States and Russia. Moscow's large military and humanitarian aid to Syria is yet another item of the list of Russian actions that the United States, starting with the Obama administration, views as destructive and

[234] Werman A. Jordan's Rising Economic Challenges in the Time of COVID-19 // Midde East Institute. 27.08.2020. URL: https://www.mei.edu/publications/jordans-rising-economic-challenges-time-covid-19

undermining American interests, which increases tensions in relations between the two nuclear "superpowers." Tellingly, the United States strives to downplay Russia's (and China's) aid contributions to the Middle Eastern countries. For instance, at the Atlantic Council in October 2019, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker stressed that Russia's aid to the region did not exceed $100 million, while U.S. aid was about $58 billion.[235] However, if Russia's influence on the state of affairs in the Middle East were measured in such figures only, the United States would have had no cause to be so worried.

The United States is also increasingly wary of China's donor activities in the Middle East and similarly strives to emphasize that Chinese contributions are incomparable to its own.[236] Regional actors pour more oil into the flames as they actively play the Chinese card in an attempt to influence the stance of Western countries on providing aid via bilateral or multilateral channels. This logic underlies, for instance, Bashar al-Assad's comments about agreements that have been allegedly concluded with China in circumvention of the sanctions. The President of Syria apparently wanted to convey the idea that the sanctions do not work and that the European and Gulf states should hurry and abandon their obstructionist stance on Syria's reconstruction.

Some politicians in Lebanon have attempted to do the same. For example, on June 17, 2020, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said that "Chinese companies are ready to bring in money, and without any of the complications that we talk about in Lebanon. We don't have to give them money, they will bring money into the country."[237] Following the resignation of several cabinet members who were responsible for negotiations with the IMF, the government held a well-publicized meeting with Wang Kejian, China's Ambassador to Lebanon that was attended by ministers of public works, transportation, tourism, energy and environment. Information resources with ties to Hezbollah started to spread rumours that China was willing to invest about $12 billion in the Lebanese economy, citing secret letters that the government had received from Chinese companies, in particular, SinoHydro. Since accepting the IMF's terms would mean, among other things, closing down border crossings with Syria, which Hezbollah wants to keep opened, the organization most likely used the Chinese card to obtain some concessions at its talks with the Fund.[238]

The examples cited in this section do not mean that the situation in providing international aid to MENA pre-determines the nature of regional or global geopolitical rivalry. However, mutual negative perceptions of such aid by rival parties certainly gives it additional dynamics, which, in turn, results in new risks that impede the provision of aid and reduce its effectiveness and also affect the very foundations of the political and economic systems in the recipient states.

[235] Schenker D. China and Russia: The New Threats to Middle East Security and Stability Remarks at the Atlantic Council // U.S. Department of State. 08.09.2019.
URL: https: https://2017-2021.state.gov/china-and-russia-the-new-threats-to-middle-east-security-and-stability/index.html

[236] Ibid.

[237] Ohanes G. Pivoting East. Will China Come to Lebanon's Rescue // The New Arab. 03.07.2020.
URL: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2020/7/3/pivoting-east-will-china-come-to-lebanons-rescue

[238] Ibid.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

1. International aid is one of the main tools that regional and non-regional actors use in MENA to manage the emerging opportunities and risks for both the political and socioeconomic development of Arab states and for advancement of their own national interests. Dozens of states and multilateral institutions, as well as a large number of private donors, use mechanisms of transferring funds as grants or loans and grants to some degree or other in every country in the region. This creates an immense tangle of connections impacting each other in a large number of ways and dimensions.

2. The sharp increase in the use of international aid tools in MENA in the 2010s demonstrates that, even in the new and more complicated circumstances, donors generally do not avoid getting involved despite the extremely high level of contextual risks (fiduciary risks, security risks, the lack of humanitarian access, etc.) and accompanying risks stemming from their actions. Moreover, donors do not exhibit any particular willingness to delegate the risks to international organizations (with the exception of providing humanitarian aid). The cases of pooling funds in multilateral trust funds are very few, and the amount of money transferred via such funds is for the most part modest. Donors have clearly preferred to operate on a bilateral basis. Risk diversification has also been largely sporadic and non-systemic. The 2010s have seen also some kind of inertia and the willingness to utilize the same instruments that have been in use for decades.

3. The rare use of advanced risk management methods in MENA and the fact that donors generally accept high residual risks (particularly in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon) show that donors policies are primarily focused on "selfish" interests. In their desire to retain economic or political influence or, conversely, to expand their geopolitical capabilities, Western donors are frequently forced to look for ways to not set any rigorous conditions for aid recipients or not impose sanctions for violating those conditions. This model is encouraged by the conduct of non-Western actors, who do not impose such conditions and who have simultaneously stepped up their activities. This trend has grown stronger after the 2008–2009 global financial crisis and reflected the increasing global geopolitical competition of the late 2010s that came on the heels of the cooling-off of the Russia–West relations in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis and the change in America's policies after Trump's coming to power. These developments show that traditional classification of risks is of limited use as it has been created in purely developmental purposes that ignore the dangers of damaging the donors' national interests, even though these dangers are very visible in the MENA fragile states.

4. The high risk appetite displayed by the overwhelming majority of donors is one of the key factors ensuring the unprecedented politicization of humanitarian aid in MENA, among other things. This politicization can be seen in entirely different contexts, but it is certainly most starkly manifested in the case of Syria. The

challenges of ensuring humanitarian access and creating conditions for refugees to return to their homes have from the outset become the objects of political haggling and a part of the "big game" of regional and global powers. What made Syria's case truly unique was the provision of humanitarian aid under rather harsh primary sanctions that were then augmented with secondary (extraterritorial) sanctions, the negative humanitarian consequences of which in some instances offset the positive effects of providing humanitarian aid.

5. The willingness of donors to accept residual risks in their interactions with the MENA countries results in mistakes and neglected signals that unerringly indicate deteriorating governance and the need to revise approaches even in those countries that have not been affected by armed conflicts. This is particularly obvious in Iraq and Lebanon, which find themselves on the brink of an abyss owing, among other things, to the stance of their external sponsors.

6. Medium-term and long-term forecasts of regional developments f leave no doubts: the number of reasons to provide aid to the region will grow. These forecasts rest on persistent and troubling megatrends such as urbanization, increasing inequality, exacerbating water and food shortages, deterioration of environment, etc., and on the unexpected shock of the coronavirus pandemic with consequences of a yet undetermined scale. Not only does the pandemic aggravate the lack of humanitarian access in some MENA states and amplify their economic difficulties, but it also curtails the capabilities of Western and non-Western donors, who are forced to re-assign funds to their domestic needs. This development will create new risks in the region, where many countries are simply not accustomed to living within their means and rely on their own funds to cover the shortfalls in their budgets. And these risks may manifest themselves in the near future.

B. Recommendations

In the 2010s, the Russian Federation made a rapid and rather effective return to the Middle East. Thus far, Russia has been using international assitance tools on a far smaller scale than the United States, the European Union, Turkey and the GGG states. Still, given Russia's special global standing, the issues of risk management are as urgent for Russia as they are for other actors, if not even more so. Below I offer a series of recommendations to federal executive bodies on improving effectiveness in promoting Russia's national interests in the region through aid provision.

1. Introducing a risk-based approach to managing international humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid flows to MENA. Currently, Russia's decisions on allocating assistance to a particular country are very rarely preceded by calculating the risks of such action, although this practice has become widespread globally. The risk-based approach should account: first, for risks stemming from the deteriorating situation in the aid recipient countries and their impact on safeguarding Russia's national interests; second, for risks that hinder the provision of aid (including sanctions risks); and third, for accompanying risks created by one's own actions. There should be an awareness of the fact that support for countries with high levels of corruption is fraught with serious long-term risks both for aid recipients

and for their external sponsors (as the case of Lebanon clearly shows). This awareness should help re-assess the risks of Russian policies in Syria as the country where Russia is most highly involved as a donor.

Scenario forecasting should be an integral part of this risk-based approach. One should proceed from several development scenarios in a given MENA state, in the region as a whole, and at the global level. This approach should also account for the impact that these scenarios could have on aid flows from other international donors, both Western and non-Western.

A risk-based approach might be especially relevant in the current situation given the increasing concerns of the Russian authorities about the efficiency of budgetary expenditures on aid provision. Accordingly, I am talking not only about identifying risks, but also about ranking them and monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of risk-management strategies.

2. Reducing the scale of transferring (delegating) risks to multilateral organizations. In recent years, Russia has been sending significantly more funds via multilateral channels than most other donors, which is largely related to the stance of the Ministry of Finance and the apparent shortage of institutional and staffing capacities on Russia's part for bilateral project management. It appears, however, that Russia should not necessarily be guided by the same logic of assessing the reputational risks associated with providing aid to the MENA fragile states that Western states follow and that frequently prompts them to use multilateral channels. At the same time, Russia needs to consider ways to neutralize the contextual risks, which are traditionally high in all Middle Eastern states. This requires mitigating the threats to safeguarding Russia's national interests, and that can only be achieved through greater use of bilateral channels.

3. Diversifying the structure of aid flows to the region. According to current statistics, Russia's ODA to MENA is concentrated in Syria. While admitting the geostrategic significance of interaction with Damascus, it appears important to start implementing concrete projects in other countries of the region, including Iraq (as part of involvement in the post-ISIS reconstruction) and Lebanon (as part of involvement in the reconstruction of Beirut following the explosion at the city's port). Moscow's regional policy of providing assistance should account for both the individual needs of recipient states and for the national interests of Russian Federation itself. It is extremely important to continually reassess the relevance of various aid tools at any given time in the context of the changing global and regional political and economic environment.

4. Diversifying the bilateral aid tools in order to diversify risks. Russia uses a very small bilateral toolkit: humanitarian aid and debt relief. Direct budget support and project financing are not used. This is generally typical for Russia as a donor, including for its policies in priority regions, for example the post-Soviet space. However, when interacting with the MENA states, this approach may be counter-productive.

5. Expand the use of concessional loans. Currently, Russia uses the mechanism of governmental lending rather sparingly. Open sources contain only a few men-

tions of such loans, and Iran is the only country in the region to have received one. However, it appears that this instrument may be used for middle-income countries that are of particular interest for Russia, e.g. Egypt and Iraq. If such concessional loans are extended, relevant statistical information should be included in the reports that the Ministry of Finance submits to the OECD, since this data is being analysed so attentively by Russia's strategic competitors.

6. Expanding the use of officially supported export credits in relations with the MENA states. Russia has two key government institutions for export promotion: VEB.RF state corporation and the Russian Export Center (REC), which is a part of VEB.RF. VEB.RF uses export credits and export guarantees, while the REC uses instruments of both financial and non-financial support. The most interesting of these are loans extended by Eximbank of Russia, investments in bonds and guarantees, and export credits issued by Russian banks and underwritten by the Russian Agency for Export Credit and Investment Insurance

EXIAR. It is important to both increase the scale of such support for the MENA states and include relevant information in the reports on Russia's budgetary contributions to development cooperation in the MENA .

7. Using the mechanisms of trilateral (triangular) cooperation. As Russia does not have a large amount of funds at its disposal to provide ODA to the MENA countries, it should explore the possibility of engaging in development cooperation not only as a donor, but also as a partner in triangular formats. This includes offering beneficiary countries technical assistance, which is in demand in the region, financed by a third state. At first glance, it would seem that China is the only country in today's difficult geopolitical climate that could act in this capacity. However, there are grounds to believe that other countries in North-East Asia that do not have such a large presence in MENA but are interested in stabilizing the situation in the region and minimizing political risks for their trade and economic activities, could also play a part. Russian technical assistance and expert assessments could be highly relevant in a variety of areas, and the dividends from providing such assessments could be felt by potential sponsors of trilateral projects in such spheres, as ensuring peace and security, and in restoring objects of cultural heritage.

8. Leaving open the channels for interaction with Western donors. In the Middle Eastern context, geopolitical risks and the prospect of a misunderstanding between the sides in global competition may significantly reduce the overall effectiveness of aid efforts. Consequently, it is necessary to maintain both official and unofficial channels to discuss ways of using aid to improve the situation with Western donors, and this may even apply to Syria.

9. Expanding the use of "tied" aid. This involves sending Russian experts (taking every precaution in order to ensure their safety), as well as allocating budgetary funds for projects that entail the procurement of goods and services specifically from Russian companies, NGOs, etc. This will allow Russia not only to increase the political effect of aid as a tool for spreading its influence in the region, but also to expand its non-commodity exports.

10. Increasing the number of scholarships for students from the MENA countries to study at Russian universities as part of the planned increase of quotas for foreign students in Russian universities (from 15,000 to 30,000).

11. Prioritizing those sectors in which Russia has a competitive edge over other donors. In particular, Russia should concentrate on improving the standing of the Russian language and try to capitalize on the spike of interest in the language across the region. Russia should also offer technical assistance in building the capacity of law enforcement agencies, including in countering terrorism, demining, financial and tax management, and training professionals in oil and gas production, geological exploration, etc.

12. Optimizing statistical accounting for the entire range of measures that entail transfer of budgetary funds on gratuitious or repayable basis which benefit the citizens of the MENA countries. Statistical accounting of ODA-eligible governmental expenses has long been one of the sore points of Russia's international development assistance. I assess unaccounted aid at approximately $1 billion, which is comparable to the total aid reflected in the reports that the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation submits to the OECD every year. The reports do not account, among other things, for such traditional donor expenditures as the cost of training citizens from developing countries and the funds provided to refugees during the first 12 months of their stay in a donor country. Currently, official statistics on Russian ODA has zeros for all those indicators, which does not reflect the true situation. Russia allocates funds to train students from the MENA states within the established quota, as well as to accommodate persons from the Middle East granted temporary asylum.

Integrating data on the humanitarian aid and development assistance that Russia provides to Syria through the Ministry of Defence is a difficult, yet theoretically solvable task. Although this aid meets the revised ODA criteria, it does not make its way into official reports. Since the Ministry of Defence submits aggregate data (not broken down by project), the recently established Inter-Agency Commission on International Development Cooperation could work out a mechanism for exchanging summary (non-detailed) information between ministries with a view to subsequently aggregating data on Syrian aid obtained from other agencies and filling the appropriate OECD forms.

Reflecting "underreported data" in the official reports is of principled importance from the point of view of positioning Russia as a key donor in the MENA region and counteracting the deliberate attempts of the Western countries, and the United States in particular, to downplay Russia's contribution, for which purpose they use the OECD data.

13. Paying greater attention to training personnel with sufficient competences in risk management and international aid provision. Although Russia has been building up its donor capacity since the mid-2000s, the government has not yet contracted Russian universities to train specialists in international development assistance. Expanding Russia's donor presence in the MENA countries may serve as an additional stimulus for making progress in this area.

14. Paying greater attention to information support for providing assistance to Arab states. Russia should use all available channels for conveying information on the volume of aid it provides to the Middle East and North Africa both to the general public in Arab countries (which should be done primarily in Arabic), as well as to other donors (primarily in English and the other official languages of the United Nations), since the weak coverage of Russia's donor activities dramatically reduces the effect that aid has, even with comparable levels of involvement. The regular publication of the relevant information on the websites of Russian embassies, in *Rossotrudnichestvo* offices (Russian Centres for Science and Culture) and on other official resources (for example, on the website of the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring in the Syrian Arab Republic) is certainly necessary. But this is not enough. One of the most obvious options is to use the platform of Russia Today: devote more air time to Russian aid effort in the region, make vivid and interesting reports that could buttress the dry language of figures with stories of real people from Arab states who have benefitted from Russian assistance, and use the key social networks to spread the relevant content as actively as possible.

At the same time, the only way to ensure a truly transformative effect is to get civil society more actively involved.

I am talking first of all about specialized NGOs that are directly involved in providing international aid and are very active in the region (the Russian Humanitarian Mission is a good example). When providing these NGOs with federal subsidies, it would be worthwhile earmarking funds for increasing the efficiency of information assistance for their useful efforts.

Second, there are non-profits that work in public and expert diplomacy. The Russian International Affairs Council, the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club, among others, have extensive networks of connections with experts from other countries and could more actively promote this topic – especially with appropriate governmental support.

Third, regarding Russian educational and academic institutions with the greatest competences in the Arab studies or in studies of foreign assistance and international development. As far as universities are concerned, these are Lomonosov Moscow State University, MGIMO University and the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia. As for academic institutions, these are the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences. These institutions employ a number of eminent scholars, including world-renowned specialists who are highly respected both in the MENA countries themselves and in the West. If these experts were to become more involved in discussion of the provision of international aid to Arab countries – not only in academic publications, but also in the form of expert comments on information portals with larger audiences and on social networks – they could make

an invaluable contribution to eliminating the shortage of reliable information on Russia's policies as a donor in the Arab world.

These recommendations, therefore, cover the entire process of managing aid to the MENA states. The greater part of the recommendations can be extended to other areas of Russia's policy as a donor, and their implementation will require that radical changes be made to the national system of providing international development assistance. However, these changes have long been overdue, and the Middle East is a region where such transformations could produce tangible dividends.

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