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WORKING PAPER

PROPOSALS ON BUILDING
A REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM
IN WEST ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA

RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Russian International Affairs Council

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This paper presents proposals on building a regional security system in West Asia and North Africa. The authors propose to use the term "West Asia" to facilitate new views and approaches on the existing problems and bring economic and geographical interaction to the forefront of the relations between the external and regional actors and within regional actors themselves. The authors emphasize the need to reorganize the economies of the states of the region, including, in particular, the Arab Mashreq subregion. It would help to restore the previously disrupted balance of power. The multiplicity of crises in West Asia and North Africa impairs the effectiveness of the region's international institutions and is not conducive to advancing regional integration projects. Setting up provisional working groups comprised of regional leaders (or using similar formats) appears to be the most adequate solution; strategically, the most adequate way would be to create a comprehensive security system.

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Printed in Russia.

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Introduction

The transformation processes in the Arab world that started in 2011 have seriously undermined the already fragile political power balance in the countries of West Asia and North Africa. Nonetheless, despite the existing and constantly emerging new threats and the high level of dependence on external factors and players, these processes highlight new opportunities for shaping a more stable system of regional relations.

Terrorism, the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation, permanent conflicts and statehood crises are the primary challenges faced by the states in various parts of West Asia and North Africa. The low level of confidence between the principal regional actors and the permanent presence of major foreign actors in these regions remain a key problem. At present, these factors have not yet resulted in the formation of effective regional institutions capable of resolving development issues in the countries of West Asia and North Africa. Of particular significance is the lack of intraregional institutional foundations for maintaining and enhancing security. Socioeconomic problems in the Arab countries are the principal factor exacerbating the instability. Overcoming this situation will require a comprehensive concept for building and enhancing mutual confidence, primarily between the Arab countries and their neighbours, which would have to take the interests of all West Asian and North African states into account. It is therefore necessary to make every effort to create and develop a collective regional security system.

Despite the positive message this initiative contains, creating such a system of relations will cause much controversy. This is largely due to significant differences in the ways that West Asian and North African states and countries involved in the region's affairs view the paths to and methods of building and developing security systems. The existing system of ties between the regional actor states will have a great influence on the process; the chosen priorities of these states at the times of crisis will be decisive. However, the threats and challenges faced by the world today, and by West Asian and North African countries in particular, make the entire complex of connections in the region undergo certain changes.

The present work considers the key problems and promising proposals that could serve as a foundation for discussing the issue of building a collective security system in West Asia and North Africa. Creating such a system would advance the entire process of strengthening both regional and global peace and stability, and form conditions for solving the development tasks faced by the region's states. Suggestions and arguments in favour of building such a system are presented as tenets grouped into several areas.

Summary

Despite the worsening crisis of confidence and mounting security problems in West Asian and North African countries, creating a comprehensive collective security system appears to be the most effective mechanism for stabilizing the situation in these regions. A Security Conference would be a promising work format for such a system. Productive activity within the framework of such a mechanism would largely be tied to developing integration projects in the Arab Mashreq, which includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq. Inter-country projects related to economy and infrastructure will be of key importance, and Russian companies and professionals could play a significant role therein.

- When looking for new regional security solutions, the term "West Asia" could serve as a convenient synonym for the traditionally narrowly used "the Middle East." Not only would this term allow us to take a fresh look at old problems, it would also give us the opportunity to bring economic and geographical cooperation to the forefront, which would create a basis for drawing comparisons with other regions of the world.

- The multiplicity of crises in West Asia and North Africa impairs the effectiveness of the region's international institutions and is not conducive to advancing regional integration projects. Setting up provisional working groups comprised of regional leaders (or using similar formats) appears to be the most adequate solution; strategically, the most adequate way would be to create a comprehensive security system.

- When tackling the issue of creating a collective security system in West Asia and North Africa, the following goals should be addressed as a priority: scaling down the "security dilemma" and restoring confidence between countries; promoting peace and stability in the macro-region; creating instruments to fight extremism and terrorism effectively; and promoting effective political transition in the macro-region's unstable countries. An inclusive regional structure on security issues under the working title of "*West Asia and North Africa Security Conference*" appears to be the most appropriate.

- The Arab Mashreq holds a special place in West Asia. Unlike North Africa and the Persian Gulf, the Mashreq does not have a single integrational project. It does not even have a nominal one. Without stable internal ties within the Arab Mashreq, any collective security system in West Asia is doomed to failure, since it will lack the central link of interaction between the region's various geographic centres.

- To enhance cooperation and overcome conflicts in the Mashreq, it would be advisable to launch an integration initiative for the Arab states of the sub-region. This should be primarily oriented toward ensuring political dialogue between countries and implementing joint economic projects in the sub-region. Such an initiative could be institutionalized and given the working title

of the "*Organization for Cooperation between the States of the Arab Mashreq*" (OCSAM). The consolidation of the Arab states of the Mashreq is considered to be a stabilizing factor in the international relations between the Arab countries and Israel, and within West Asia as a whole.

- The necessity to develop infrastructure in the Arab Mashreq forms the foundation for sub-regional integration and assisting the movement of material goods and human resources. When determining priority infrastructure development projects in the sub-region, we should determine their economic expediency; Russia should pay specific attention to those infrastructure-building and restoration projects that would allow the participation of Russian companies and professionals.

- Should inter-country infrastructure projects with the participation of the countries of the Arab Mashreq (such as the railway communication links between Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, or a gas pipeline project between the Arab Mashreq and Europe) be initiated and implemented and should the situation with the use of water resources in the sub-region improve, we should also expect enhanced constructive interaction between the countries of the Arab Mashreq, the creation of new jobs and the rebuilding of the economies of the states in the region. All this will help prevent the marginalization of certain population groups and decrease migrant flows from the region, which today are putting such high pressure on the public in the EU countries.

- It is of utmost importance that media coverage of the development of the Arab Mashreq countries continues to be positive (in the mass media and on the internet). Special attention should be paid to covering integrational and joint economic projects in the sub-region; their novelty and potential for resolving current conflicts and increasing the population's welfare should be particularly emphasized. Creating a large media holding to cover events in the Arab Mashreq also appears promising.

- Consolidating and perpetuating the fragmentation of states in the sub-region could become the greatest challenge for the states of the Arab Mashreq. Under external pressure and due to internal processes, the current governmental institutions may weaken and give way to quasi-state entities such as terrorist groups or individual tribes.

I. Defining the Region and Geographical Boundaries of a Regional Security System

1. Traditionally, the term "Middle East and North Africa (MENA)" denote Arab countries and their neighbours, which are linked together historically, culturally, geographically, economically and politically, and which possess several similar socioeconomic parameters. To get a greater picture, the narrower notion of the Middle East as the Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab Peninsula taken together is augmented with North Africa and Iran and Turkey. In some cases, given the regions' common problems and their inter-penetration, the Middle East's direct ties with the countries of East Africa and Central and South Asia are singled out. Such augmentations blur the contents of the very notion of the Middle East and have a negative impact on shaping strategic approaches to developing the region's countries.

The term "West Asia" is not infrequently used in UN documents and in research by international relations experts, and we believe it could serve as a convenient synonym for the traditionally narrow term "the Middle East." Not only would a name with a more precise link to a geographical area allow us to take a fresh look at old problems, it would also give us the opportunity to bring economic and geographical cooperation to the forefront, which would create a basis for drawing comparisons with other regions of the world (as opposed to the political component and the historical and geopolitical division of Asia into the Near, Middle and Far East).

2. For the purposes of creating a regional collective security system it would be advisable to distinguish several levels in understanding the region, namely, the macro-regional and the sub-regional.

The macro-regional level constitutes the totality of the countries of North Africa, West and Southwest Asia, and their mutual ties.

At the *sub-regional level*, we should distinguish the *Arab Maghreb* (the countries of North Africa excluding Egypt), *the Arab Centre* (Egypt, North and South Sudan) and *the Arab South* (the states of the Arab Peninsula). Particular attention should be paid to the *Arab Mashreq*, which includes the East Mediterranean states and Iraq. Historically and geographically, this sub-region includes the Levant (or Greater Syria [*Bilad al-Sham*]) and Mesopotamia (*Bilad al-Rafidayn*). Distinguishing between the Arab South and the Arab Mashreq will allow for a more precise definition of the possible interaction between the sub-region's countries and their neighbours, such as Iran, Turkey and Israel, which also play the roles of power centres in West Asia.

II. Problems Involved in Creating a Security System in West Asia and North Africa

3. The multiplicity of crises in West Asia and North Africa enhances their cumulative nature. Resolving these problems is impossible without a comprehensive collective approach. Such a "multi-component" security challenge in the indicated regions could create the perquisites for laying the foundations for joint actions intended to overcome the crisis phenomena.

4. National-level crises in West Asia and North Africa are mostly marked by several tendencies.

Socioeconomic crisis. The tendencies towards reorganizing individual areas of public life, the changing nature of economic relations and the economic mechanisms for implementing them in the context of ineffective political institutions and slowly evolving regimes of the North African and West Asian countries – all this created the grounds for social upheavals, the subsequent radicalization of the situation, and a sharp decrease in production. At the same time, the economy's shadow sector received additional development impetus, which makes it even harder to deal with the task of constructing an effective model of economic relations in the region's countries.

Demographic crisis. North African and West Asian states exhibit a similar tendency in the population's changing numbers and age structure, and the nature of sociodemographic development has become a serious factor in the destabilization of the regions. Given the lack – or improper implementation – of demographic planning programmes, the younger generation has become one of the major forces behind social upheavals; of particular note is the high activity of unemployed university graduates.[1]

Statehood crisis. The question of a national state as the universal form of statebuilding, the fairness and effectiveness of such a state, and the reality of its capacity for subjectivity are the keys both to organizing North African and West Asian society and to building an international relations system in these regions.[2]

Crisis in ethnic and denominational relations. In the countries of West Asia and North Africa, the need to find an identity that is different from the national identity leads to politicization and to the use of ethnic and denominational specifics as political tools benefiting individual actors, which leads to religious intolerance.

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[1] Korotaev A.V., Khodunov A.S., Burova A.N., Malkov S.Y., Khalturina D.A., Zinkina Y.V. Sociodemographic Analysis of the Arab Spring // The 2011 Arab Spring. Systemic Monitoring of Global and Regional Risks / Korotaev A.V., Zin'kina Yu.V., Khodunov A.S., eds. Moscow: Librokom / URSS, 2012, pp. 28–76. URL: http://cliodynamics.ru/download/M3_02Korotayev_i_dr_Arabskaya_vesna.pdf

[2] Timofeev I.N. A State's Dilemmas in Today's World Order // Vestnik MGIMO. 2016. No. 1 (46). P. 29.

5. The regional level augments national crises. The following problematic trends are of particular note.

Weak institutional basis for regional relations. Breaches in the system of international institutions and regulations limit the opportunities for cooperation and have a destructive influence on the confidence between the countries in West Asia and North Africa, as well as on the balance of power and the co-existence of states.[3]

Extensive experience of conflicts and mutual "grievances," primarily between West Asian countries. The region's problem is manifested in the existence of long-lasting and "unresolvable" conflicts.

Destructive competition between regional actors. Given the absence of a clear leader in the region, competition between claimants to leadership has a negative impact on general security.

The weakness of global governance institutions (primarily the UN) in resolving development problems in West Asian and North African countries. Frequently, the UN not only fails to demonstrate a unified approach to solving regional crises, but it also does not possess effective instruments to monitor the situation and implement decisions that have already been adopted. Given the absence of an auxiliary regional structure (or structures), any actions by the UN run into constantly emerging obstacles, which makes moving forward impossible. Under such circumstances, even the League of Arab States (LAS) proves to be sluggish, disjointed and subject to external influence.[4] We should also mention the objective lack of resources, the diversity of regimes and differences in the national development goals in West Asian and North African countries.

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[3] Naumkin V.V., Zvyagelskaya I.D., Kuznetsov V.A., Sukhov N.V. The Middle East: From Conflicts to Stability / Material for Discussion at the Middle East Dialogue of the Valdai International Discussion Club. Moscow, 2016.

[4] Baklanov A.G. Syria as a Systemic Failure of Security Mechanisms. // Russia in Global Politics. 2012. URL: http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Siriya-kak-sistemnyi-sboi-mekhanizmov-bezopasnosti-15539

III. Conditions and Opportunities for Shaping a Collective Security System in West Asia and North Africa (the Macro-Regional Level)

6. Today, changes are taking place both inside and outside the region that could give a different kind of impetus to the negotiations on creating a collective security system in the macro-region, which unites North Africa, West Asia and Southwest Asia. Setting up provisional working groups comprised of regional leaders (or using similar formats) appears to be the most adequate solution; strategically, the most appropriate option would be to create a comprehensive security system.

7. In taking a stance on the issue, Russia could proceed from the following considerations. Russia supports the preservation of, and adherence to, the principle of the sovereign equality of states and is in favour of enhancing the role of the UN and multi-lateral institutions in promulgating the principle of universal participation in multi-lateral international cooperation. Additionally, Russia calls for the creation of a WMD-free zone, the prevention of illegal international intervention in the affairs other states and an end to the export of terrorism, including into other states in the region. The country takes a positive stance towards the strengthening of the current regional multi-lateral cooperation formats and the assessment of its mechanisms (the LAS and other organizations) and promotes interdenominational dialogue and the prevention of politicizing specific ethnic and denominational features.

Security System Prototype: Goals and Tasks

8. When tackling the issue of creating a collective security system in West Asia and North Africa, the following goals should be addressed as a priority: scaling down the "security dilemma" and restoring confidence between countries; promoting peace and stability in the macro-region; creating instruments to fight extremism and terrorism effectively; and promoting effective political transition in the macro-region's unstable countries.

9. The following can be listed as the priority tasks for the regional system of interaction:

a) creating conditions for confidence-building measures between the countries that shape the collective security system;

b) enhancing the nuclear non-proliferation regime and creating a nuclear-weapons-free zone;

c) ensuring interaction between the states themselves and between the new regional system and the UN in ensuring comprehensive security;

d) monitoring the situation "on the ground" and aiding the members of the region's collective security system in overcoming crises;

e) ensuring post-conflict demilitarization of the population and arms control, including weapons of mass destruction.

10. In order to develop the initiative, it is important to take the experience of conflict settlement in the Middle East into account. The comprehensive Madrid Peace Process was launched in 1991 with the aim of resolving regional problems in various areas (environment, security, etc.). However, when the Palestine–Israel dialogue slowed down, the Madrid Peace Process itself shut down. At the same time, in January 1992, a Multilateral Middle-Eastern peace process was launched in Moscow; the Conference included a Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East (WGACRS), which is now also defunct.[5] It is appears that a multilateral format that is not tied to any single process (such as the Palestine–Israel settlement) appears more acceptable. What is important is the permanent nature of the multilateral interaction.

Solving Problems Related to Confidence-Building

11. The previously noted lack of confidence between West Asian and North African countries is a serious obstacle for the development of intra-regional and inter-regional ties. The decision to create a collective security system in West Asia and North Africa could be directly tied to intensified interaction within the existing regional structures: The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). This format is applicable to the OIC and the LAS; however, these organizations exclude some states (for instance, Israel), while the ACD, where all the states are represented, is devoted almost entirely to the trade and economic cooperation. Nonetheless, all these platforms could be employed to initiate a working discussion of the prospects of creating a collective security system for West Asia and North Africa.

12. There are certain prospects for the reformation of existing cooperation in the Persian Gulf region. Significant changes could take place if Iran and Iraq are involved in the meetings of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC) and if the GCC+2 format is established.

13. The creation of a new structure should come as a consequence of developing ties and improving the confidence climate within the organizations and forums that already exist in West Asia and North Africa. An inclusive regional structure on security issues under the working title of the "*West Asia and North Africa Security Conference*" (hereinafter referred to as the Conference) appears to be the most appropriate. It could be an exclusively regional organization. The participation of Russia, China, the United States and the European Union (or the UN, the European Union, Russia and the United States, judging from the experi-

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[5] Baklanov A.G. Syria as a Systemic Failure of Security Mechanisms. // Russia in Global Politics. 2012. URL: http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Siriya-kak-sistemnyi-sboi-mekhanizmov-bezopasnosti-15539

ence of the Quartet on the Middle East) should, given the circumstances, be limited to the role of observers.

14. Current differences between intra-regional actors with regard to current and on-going conflicts could become the principal obstacle that prevents the Conference from being convened. These conflicts are: 1) the Palestine–Israel conflict, 2) the Libyan, Yemen, Syrian and Iraqi crises, and 3) the Saudi Arabia–Iran confrontation. However, there is still the possibility that (given systemic and comprehensive promotion and lobbying) the conflicting parties will support the establishment of such a structure.

Organizational Steps Involved in the Creation of a Regional Security Structure

15. To convene the West Asia and North Africa Security Conference, it would be advisable to conduct a broad diplomatic campaign, starting with bilateral and leading to multilateral consultations at the level of Track 2 and Track 1.5 diplomacy, as a result of which recommendations can be developed and approved. The recommendations will have to set the agenda and conditions of, and procedures for, holding the Conference.

16. The Conference's tentative agenda could include the following items:

a) mechanisms and measures for confidence- and security-building in the macro-region;

b) the threat of nuclear proliferation in West Asia and North Africa and the possibility of creating a nuclear-weapons-free zone;

c) regional conflicts and forced migration;

d) post-conflict rebuilding of the economies of the countries in the region;

e) interdenominational reconciliation;

f) demilitarization and weapons control;

g) humanitarian cooperation;

h) economic, scientific, technological and environmental cooperation.

17. The work on launching the Conference could involve four stages.

Stage One. As part of setting Track 2 and Track 1.5 diplomatic mechanisms in motion (see Paragraph 15), it would be necessary to hold bilateral and multilateral meetings with the participation of representatives of analytical centres that influence foreign policy decision-making in the given countries – future members and observers of the new organization. Each meeting should result in practical recommendations on issues delineated in Paragraph 15. These events could be held under the auspices of the UN, other international organizations, or as part of bilateral contacts and other formats.

Stage Two. Holding the forum under the auspices of the UN or other international organizations at the level of delegates and experts sent by West Asian, North African and observer states (for instance, Russia, the European Union, the Unit-

ed States and China). Developing and approving agreements on all the items on the agenda on the basis of proposals submitted by states members. At the same time, it would be possible to launch an analogue of the "Madrid Peace Process" of 1990–1991, including the establishment of task force on the problems of refugees, the status of water resources, economic development, environment, etc. A comprehensive security concept should be developed for West Asia and North Africa at this stage (or in parallel with this stage) on the basis of those principles that have already been used during the work of analytical centres (at Stage One) for finding common stances of the region's states. After the forum, a set of documents should be submitted to the leaders of West Asian and North African countries, as well as to the leaders of observer states, for additional consideration.

Stage Three. Convening a meeting (Conference) at the level of ministers of foreign affairs of West Asian, North African and observer states, which will approve the recommendations or suggest amendments, demonstrate their stance on certain issues and determine the principal cooperation areas and further steps to be taken. Convening the Conference is a strategic goal. This stage is only possible after task force have started functioning and the states have achieved mutual consent on the major principles of how the future organization will function.

Stage Four. Holding a summit of the heads of state of West Asian and North African countries (members of the Conference), observer states and international organizations. At this stage, Conference members should make their statements, assess the prospects of their joint work, present their views on the development of the situation in West Asian and North African countries and make suggestions on how to improve it, and discuss specific development projects.

IV. Cooperation at the Sub-Regional Level: The New Arab Mashreq Project

18. The Mashreq's geographical location has its own specific features. This sub-region holds the key to building ties between the countries of North Africa and Southwest Asia, and also between Turkey and Iran; it is also significant for inter-action between the Arab countries and Israel. The transit potential of the Mashreq should be taken into account when assessing cooperation opportunities between the Persian Gulf countries and the countries of the Mediterranean and when determining development prospects for economic projects within West Asia. Without stable internal ties inside the Arab Mashreq itself, any collective security system in West Asia is doomed to failure, since it will lack the central link of interaction between the region's various geographic centres. An important feature here is the adoption of a comprehensive approach to security in West Asia, entailing military, economic, humanitarian, environmental and other types of security.

19. The following integration levels can be delineated for nearly all the Arab states, excluding the states of the Arab Mashreq (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Palestine): sub-regional (first-level priority states); Islamic; and the international (third-level priority), where each state recognizes the League of Arab States as the regional structure of the second-level priority. *Yet if the states of the Maghreb and the Persian Gulf acknowledge, if only nominally, certain structures at the sub-regional integration level (for instance, the Arab Maghreb Union [AMU] and the GCC), the states of the Arab Mashreq have no sub-regional integration structures.*

20. The opinion that the Arab Mashreq needs an integration structure used to be quite popular in academic research produced in West Asia. This project is provisionally titled "The New Arab Mashreq." With such an approach, it inevitably runs into competition with another, more hyped-up project titled "The New Middle East." This project rests on cooperation between Israel and the United States and supports Israel's leading role in the region based on its technological, military and political superiority while retaining the ethnic and denominational fragmentation of other countries.[6] Yet it is precisely the consolidation of the Mashreq's Arab countries that is being considered as the stabilizing factor in the international relations, both between the Arab countries and Israel and within West Asia as a whole.

21. As regards Turkey and Iran, the neighbours of the Arab Mashreq, they have ramified official priorities, which often have no connections with West Asia.[7] A similar tendency to establish cooperation outside their own region can be seen in Egypt's official documents as well.[8]

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[6] Salim M.S. The New Arab Mashreq. // al-Ahram. 2001. URL: http://www.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2001/4/2/OPIN9.HTM
[7] Based on an analysis of the websites of ministries of foreign affairs of the region's countries, as well as statements and programmes proposed by ministers and officials. For more details, see: 1) URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2014-04-17/what-iran-really-wants; 2) URL: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/genel-gorunum.tr.mfa
[8] Based on an analysis of the website of the Egypt State Information Service. URL: http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Categories/tmpListArticles.aspx?CatID=972

Political Conditions in the Arab Mashreq Countries and Threats to Cooperation between Them

22. For intraregional integration among the Arab countries in the Mashreq region to develop, priority attention should be devoted to fulfilling a whole set of conditions:

- overcoming the Syrian political crisis and improving the work of the country's state institutions;
- resolving the problems of Iraq's statehood and improving the work of the country's state institutions;
- preventing the crisis situation from spreading into Lebanon and Jordan;
- depriving Islamic State (IS) of the possibility to act in an organized manner;
- providing a fundamental solution to the political future of the Kurds;
- proposing a compromise solution to determining the political future of the Sunnis on territory controlled by IS;
- developing approaches to enshrining the rights (including the political rights) of ethnic and denominational minorities in the region's states;
- achieving rapprochement with regard to the strategic interests of the United States, Russia and major regional actors in establishing security in the Arab Mashreq region.

23. Focusing on resolving security issues in the Mashreq, it is also important to take the serious impact of the following factors into account: the Palestine–Israel conflict; the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and internal political trends in Iraq; the U.S. invasion of Iraq; the launch of de-Ba'athification in Iraq, a process that is particularly painful for Iraqi society as a whole that marginalized entire population groups and ultimately resulted in al-Qaeda's prospering in Iraq; and the Arab Spring that spread from the Maghreb into the Arab Mashreq and gravely undermined the statehood (the state institutions) of Syria and Iraq, the sub-region's two largest countries.

Political Opportunities for Renewed Sub-Regional Cooperation Organization and Resolving Problems Related to Confidence-Building between the Countries of the Arab Mashreq

24. To enhance cooperation and overcome conflicts in the Mashreq, it would be advisable to create an integration union for the sub-region's Arab countries. Ensuring political dialogue and striving toward the implementation of joint economic projects in the sub-region should become the key areas of the union's work. Provisionally, this union could be called the "*Organization for Cooperation between the States of the Arab Mashreq*" (OCSAM).

25. This integration initiative is based on the principle of the territorial integrity and equality of states, at the same time presupposing possibilities for intra-regional and inter-regional interaction (including between neighbouring provinces).

Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq should necessarily take part in establishing this future sub-regional organization.

26. The strategy to gradually integrate the Arab Mashreq should become an important element of the OCSAM, and a significant role in the process could be played by the Sunni regions of Iraq and Syria (located in the western and eastern regions of the respective countries), which have the potential to become the linking part of the process.

It is assumed that the Shia–Sunni conflict that is mentioned so often by a number of researchers will gradually disappear, provided that socioeconomic problems in the Arab Mashreq are resolved, statehood institutions are strengthened, an ethnic and denominational dialogue is launched, and there is a thaw (or the start of a constructive dialogue) in relations between Tehran and Riyadh. It is of crucial importance to prevent the radicalization of the existing situation, which even in current circumstances has a good chance of overcoming the crisis in the ethnic and denominational relations.

27. The process of integration of the Arab Mashreq states could give new impetus to the settlement of the Palestine–Israel conflict. The OCSAM should be used as a constructive party in negotiations with Israel. The Palestinian Authority could join the organization as an observer state, although its participation would be of little effectiveness without Israel's assistance.

28. It is necessary to create the necessary conditions for carrying out political transition in Syria by implementing diplomatic initiatives to reconcile the opposition with President Bashar al-Assad's administration while continuing to support the anti-terrorist effort. At the same time, it is important to prevent terrorists from being moved into neighbouring territories, for instance, into Iraq from Syria and back (that would require coordinated efforts of the governments of both states). It is desirable to conduct negotiations with the aim of withdrawing the units of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and negotiation-capable groups (or at least negotiation-capable parts of those groups) from armed confrontation with the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).

Should elections be held, Syria must remain a secular and inclusive state.

29. Post-crisis development, and specifically integration within the Arab Mashreq, could encounter serious obstacles when attempting to preserve the current political relations regime within the Syrian state. This is tied to resolving the issues of returning refugees (and preventing their persecution), lifting the sanctions and attracting foreign investments (including from the Persian Gulf states and the European Union), and normalizing relations with Turkey.

It is important to prevent the marginalization of the Sunnis and the areas where they live, and to attempt to ensure that the Sunnis have true and proper representation in the central authorities in post-crisis Syria.

The issue of the Kurds' autonomy and the conditions upon which it may be established should be resolved with the participation of all the parties, and it

should be resolved by Syrians themselves; however, it is desirable to preserve Syria's single political space despite the possibility that Kurds could be granted political rights (in the form of cultural autonomy, for instance). The same applies to the partial decentralization of the country's administrative structure and the development of infrastructure projects when providing jobs to the population that currently lives in the IS-controlled territories.

30. Expanding the rights of Syria's provinces is necessary in order to attract investments into specific regions of the country – investments that are necessary to do business locally. However, the central government should retain the function of shaping a single economic strategy, implementing comprehensive measures to restore the country's economy and setting tax policies. Oil deposits in the east of Syria are also in need of major investments (they require modern technologies and experienced professionals), which cannot bypass the central government. This issue may be resolved through the necessary level of cooperation with local tribes after IS has been defeated.[9]

31. Profound problems that plague Iraq's statehood do not allow the country to focus on fighting IS. Iraq's possibilities are limited by the quality of the reforms already in place and the implementation of the political transition. Eliminating IS should be conducted on two fronts at once – in Syria and in Iraq. The Russian military and air force presence in Iraq could prove very helpful in this context. However, U.S. influence is still very strong in Iraq, including in the form of Iraq facilities and enterprises privatized by U.S. companies. When resolving security issues and attracting investments from international organizations, China and Europe into the economy's real sector, it would be desirable to find the right balance between the American influence and the Iraqi state's interaction with other actors. That requires reforms. It also required state institutions to be more open and effective.

32. If Russia succeeds in providing military aid to Iraq (which may be limited to weapons supplies only) and if the Iraqi authorities do their work on the ground (Russia could join the process as an intermediary) to convert Sunni chiefs of tribes and followers within IS-controlled cities to its side, and if that proves effective, then there will be a real chance to restore Iraq's state institutions. In this context, given that Iraq is plagued by war between ethnic and denominational groups, it is necessary to create conditions that would prevent possible future persecution of the Sunnis. Their rights must be protected by more autonomous control in the provinces, ensuring fair and equal political representation, and including Sunnis in branches of Iraq's national security such as the police and the army. The most viable option for the effective functioning of Iraq's security system appears to be to include individual, best-trained units of the People's Mobilization Forces (*Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi*) into the Iraqi army and the law enforcement agencies, and demobilize some of the fighters (while at the same time providing them with jobs).

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[9] Mamedov R. Is the Syrian Federation Key to Solving all the Problems? URL: http://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/ruslan-mamedov/?id_4=2410

33. When political crises and the war in the Mashreq have ended, the Syrian and Iraqi armies will have gained solid combat experience. This factor could influence these states and even point them towards creating joint mobile armed units; at the same time, it will be necessary to demilitarize the populations of these states, perhaps under the auspices of the UN or other internationally recognized structures. Increasing economic wellbeing in the regions of these countries and creating a post-crisis development plan should become the key aspect for decreasing radicalization.

34. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan attempts to conduct more and more balanced domestic and foreign policies. Jordan has close ties with the Persian Gulf monarchies and even expressed desire to join the GCC, which the organization's members welcomed. Nonetheless, the Kingdom is still not a GCC member, and the creation of the OCSAM could be perceived positively by the country's authorities, since Jordan attempts to actively develop bilateral relations with its neighbours and could be interested in benefiting from the existence of such a structure. The same attitude should be expected from Lebanon, due, in part, to its close ties with the sub-region's states.

Possibilities and Limitations of the Integration of the countries of the Arab Mashreq

35. Back in 2001, a project to study integration possibilities in the Arab Mashreq was launched with the participation of researchers from strategic studies centres in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon.[10] The project itself was not implemented due to constantly arising obstacles. Thus, strategic economic interaction between Syria and Iraq during the presidencies of Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein was limited in several aspects due to the nature of the bilateral relations between the two countries. What is more, they had different economic priorities, closed economies controlled by the state apparatus, and sanctions had been imposed on both. Economic reforms in Syria started in the early 2000s. Iraq, on the other hand, suffered the invasion of the coalition forces led by the United States in 2003. In 2006, Lebanon was involved in yet another war with Israel, while Jordan continues to take in ever greater numbers of refugees. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein brought Iraq to closer cooperation with Syria, but the sanctions on Syria are still in place. What is more, the U.S. presence in Iraq, the civil war and the country's permanent instability do not allow cooperation to develop. It should be noted that the European Union is the primary economic partner of each of the Arab Mashreq states, followed by the GCC. Meanwhile, intra-sub-regional interaction is minimal. In this context, it is necessary to develop measures aimed at coordinating the economic development of the countries in the sub-region.

36. The Arab states of the Mashreq participate in a series of initiatives, such as the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA, 2005). However, many of GAFTA's rules are incompatible with the clauses of sub-regional and bilateral free-trade

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[10] The Economic Integration Project in the Arab Mashreq / Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University. 2001.

zone (FTZ) agreements.[11] The effects of cooperation within GAFTA proved insignificant, since GAFTA covered all the region's countries and forced them to employ protectionist measures due to the low mutual complementarity of structure of their commodity turnover and the lack of a harmonized trade policy. When GAFTA was formed, the states themselves laid such foundations, as they agreed, for instance, that certain agricultural commodities in season are not covered by trade liberalization.[12] Besides, the Persian Gulf states, having relatively low non-tariff barriers in the region, used non-tariff instruments for foreign trade regulation.[13] Inadequate transportation and logistical infrastructure, political instability, corruption and administrative bureaucracy, inefficient transportation routes, customs bureaucracy at the borders have also impaired development and impair it still.[14] The need to develop infrastructure is fundamental for sub-regional integration and assistance in the free movement of material and human resources.

37. When determining priority projects in the Arab Mashreq, it is necessary to determine their economic expediency and pay close attention to infrastructure, where Russian companies and professionals could participate in its creation and restoration. They can be founded, for instance, on international railways projects in the Mashreq (the Arab Mashreq International Railway network), which have already been approved and developed, but not fully implemented. It is important to assess the interest, cooperation and competition potential of other parties, primarily the European Union, the United States, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

38. The transportation capacities of the Arab Mashreq attract a lot of attention, given the sub-region's transit potential. *Roads.* According to the World Bank report, in 2010 the Mashreq territory used about 31,000 km of roads[15]. However, in the post-conflict period there will be necessity in rehabilitation and upgrading of certain sections of the existing network.

Railways. The "Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq" project was prepared by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2003 and was ratified by Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt in 2005. However, construction of 60 per cent of the railways under this project has not been completed. Perhaps, a new project is required, or construction priorities should be reconsidered, favouring the East–West axis when implementing the part of the plan that pertains to Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan.[16] This is because the current project focuses on the interaction with the Persian

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[11] Lomakin N.N. The Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement: Goals, Areas and Results // Rossiiskii vneshneekonomicheskii vestnik, 2015 (9), p. 119.

[12] On the restrictive measures in Syria within the context of GAFTA, see the report by the National Agricultural Policy Center of the Ministry of Agricultural and Agrarian Reform of the Syrian Arab Republic: Implementation of the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement. The Case of Syria. URL: http://www.agriportal.gov.sy/napcsyr/dwnld-files/working_papers/en/08_gafta_en.pdf

[13] Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement // The Institute for Domestic and International Affairs, Inc. (director: J. Gendrano). 2007. URL: http://www.idia.net/Files/ConferenceCommitteeTopicFiles/149/PDFFile/U07-LAS-GreaterArabFreeTradeAgreement.pdf

[14] Ibid.

[15] Economic Integration in the Mashreq // World Bank report. Middle East and North Africa. October 2010, p. 11.

[16] Plan of Action for Implementation of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq // ESCWA. United Nations. 2006.

Gulf states along the North–South axis.[17] *Ports.* A large number of ports in the Arab Mashreq improved their 2005–2010 figures on container shipping. However, the ports in Latakia, Tartus, Tripoli, Beirut, Aqaba, Umm Qasr serve as load transfer points to larger transportation hubs.[18] These options could be used during post-conflict settlement, and they are already incorporated into the strategies of several international organizations, such as the World Bank Group working in coordination with the International Finance Corporation and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency to ensure the development of the sub-region.[19] It is important that the influx of international investments leads to the rebuilding of the real sector of economy of the countries of the Arab Mashreq, which will provide people with jobs and stable wages.

39. The energy sector deserves special attention. Together with the traditional interest of external actors in the oil of the Arab Mashreq, the recently discovered gas fields in the Levant basin (with total reserves of a minimum of 3.8 trillion cubic metres[20]) and the unexploited deposits of Syria and Iraq (which require appraisal) have acquired particular importance of late. One of the most important inter-country projects could be tied to the construction of the gas pipeline between the Arab Mashreq and Europe to integrate the gas markets of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria (with the possible involvement of Turkey and Iraq as observers) and Europe. Israel is also taking part in the project. And it may in the future – together with Egypt – become the final supplier of gas to Europe. It should be kept in mind that this primarily applies to the fields in Israel and Egypt, while Cyprus and Lebanon participate to a lesser degree. Large gas fields were discovered in Israel in 2009–2010, namely the Tamar gas field (proven reserves of 280 billion cubic metres) and the Leviathan gas field (620 billion cubic metres). Then the Aphrodite gas field was discovered in Cyprus (120 billion cubic metres of gas). The Zohr gas field (850 billion cubic meters of gas) was discovered in Egypt in 2015. Future plans include connecting an Iraqi pipeline to Europe via Syria and Turkey.[21] Nevertheless, these projects face many obstacles. The fact that the oil and gas sector is strictly regulated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Framework Convention should be taken into account. While this is acceptable for developed countries that can afford to abandon oil and gas, it is not in the interests of developing countries that need industrial development.

40. A programme to create a unified power system was adopted at the initiative of Jordan and with the participation of Egypt. However, the implementation of the programme faces serious obstacles, since the countries depend on foreign supplies of power-generating equipment and electrical machinery (the situation is better in Egypt).[22] In 1973, Lebanon and Syria joined their power grid through

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[17] Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq // ESCWA. United Nations. 2003.

[18] Economic Integration in the Mashreq // World Bank report. Middle East and North Africa. October 2010, p. 7.

[19] Shanta Devarajan. An Exposition of the New Strategy. Promoting Peace and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa // World Bank Group. 2016.

[20] Manafova A. Is the Eastern Mediterranean a New Competitor for Russia on the European Gas Markets? // Russian International Affairs Council. URL: http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=8102#top-content. 2017.

[21] Stonaker M.E. Energy Infrastructure as a Diplomatic Tool: The Arab Gas Pipeline. December, 2010.

[22] Zhdanov S.V. Arab Countries in the Global Economy. Moscow: MGIMO (U), 2015, p. 28

a 66 kW power line. Subsequently, a 230 kW power line was added to increase the power interchange (however, not even half of their capacity is used). Jordan and Syria are in a similar situation: they use two power lines, one of which has a capacity of 230 kW.[23] There are connections in the energy sector between Iraq, Syria and Turkey, but the systems are not synchronized.[24] A promising area in which the active Russian participation is also possible is nuclear power plant unit construction projects which would take the needs of the Arab states of the Mashreq into account. An absolutely necessary condition for the development of nuclear power projects is to ensure military and industrial safety and security in the areas where the nuclear power plants are located. Other alternative power sources could also be considered, but that would require additional analysis.

41. Figuratively speaking, the formula of peace in West Asian countries is frequently expressed as H_2O. Water resources in the region do not have exclusively economic and social significance. Due to their scarcity, resolving the issues of using water sources often becomes a political issue. The geographical location of the region's rivers determines the adversarial nature of interaction among states, which needs to be revised in favour of cooperation in distributing water resources, since there are no other alternatives.[25] Agriculture accounts for about 80–90 per cent of water consumption. However, agriculture has been in a state of crisis in both Iraq and Syria over the past decade as a result of several years of droughts. This exacerbates issues related to the provision of fresh water in the Arab countries of the Mashreq. Water resources are used with low productivity as a result of ineffective policies implemented by the governments in the region. Water resources management requires optimization on the part of the states of the Arab Mashreq, such as developing a pipeline system, creating or improving a disposal system for liquid industrial and municipal waste, and taking technical measures to preserve and fill up underground water sources (the experience of the Persian Gulf countries could be studied as a positive example).[26] Research in this area is mostly done by the specially formed Arab Water Council, the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) and other NGOs.[27] Besides, there is the successful experience of cooperation with Russian centres; for instance, the Central Aerological Observatory under the Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring of Russia (*Roshydromet*) cooperated with countries in the region (specifically, with Syria in the 1990s and in the early 2000s) on the artificial augmentation of rainfall (through the use of an artificial seeding agent on clouds), and the need to go back to the method is pressing even today.[28]

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[23] Economic integration in the Mashreq // World Bank report. Middle East and North Africa. October, 2010. P. 13.

[24] Ibid.

[25] State of the Water Report in the Arab Region / Arab Water Council, 2004. URL: http://www.arabwatercouncil.org/images/Arab-Water-Report/Technical_Report_10_State_of_the_water_report_in_the_Arab_Region.pdf

[26] Isaev V.A., Filonik A.O. Qatar. The Three Pillars (A Socioeconomic Sketch). Moscow, 2015. P. 188.

[27] Arab State of the Water Reports. URL: http://www.arabwatercouncil.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=221&Itemid=345&lang=en

[28] Abbas A. The Study of the Possibility of Increasing Precipitation in Syria with the Help of Artificial Impact on the Cloud // PhD Dissertation. Central Aerological Observatory. Dolgoprudny (Russia), 1998. URL: http://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01000199035 .

42. When creating and implementing these inter-country infrastructure projects (such as constructing and using the railway from Iraq – via Sunni cities – into Syria and Lebanon, or the projected pipeline connecting the Arab Mashreq and Europe) and improving the use of water resources in the sub-region, we should expect enhanced constructive interaction between the countries of the Arab Mashreq, the creation of new jobs and the rebuilding of the economies of the states in the region. All this will help prevent the marginalization of certain population groups and decrease migrant flows from the region, which today are putting such high pressure on the societies of the EU countries.

Practical Steps for Implementing the Integration Initiative in the Arab Mashreq

43. Creating a Regional Bank for Reconstruction and Development seems promising; both West Asian and North African states themselves and participants outside the region could act as founding parties. The Arab Mashreq needs strategic planning and a long-term reconstruction and development programme, and that largely depends on progress being made with regard to conflict resolution in the sub-region. Without a politically confident settlement in Syria, international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are unlikely to participate in development projects within the Mashreq in any substantial manner. The same applies to the sub-region's bilateral relations with Turkey, western countries and the Persian Gulf states.

44. It would be advisable to support the economic integration of the sub-region, coordinating it with possible pan-regional integration projects; pan-regional integration is necessary in order to build confidence between the states in the macro-region. The sub-regional integration plan may succeed thanks to the compatibility of the economies of the Arab Mashreq states. This, however, would require subsequent diversification, the development of political institutions, orienting the governments towards improving the investment climate in their countries, developing a unified sub-regional economic strategy, and creating and developing mechanisms for maintaining political stability and security in the region.[29] Russia could offer international economic institutions its services as an intermediary to research the economies of the Arab Mashreq "on the ground" and establish a dialogue.

45. Education issues must be resolved as a priority. The Arab Mashreq needs an effective system of secular education for the young generation to be created, one which would allow the youth in the region's countries to be protected from being indoctrinated with fundamentalist and extremist views. The post-conflict states will face the pressing question of returning children to a normal life, and that will require providing broad access to education, building schools and publishing textbooks. It would also require teachers doing their job. This problem

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[29] Economic Integration in the Mashreq // The World Bank Report. Middle East and North Africa. 2010, p. 3.

must be addressed comprehensively, with the overall prosperity level of the citizens of the Arab Mashreq being the primary focus. Exchanging experience between states that are successful in returning people to normal life after social upheavals could become a favourable factor. To increase the quality of higher education in the region and to train professionals who already have a higher education, it would be advisable to renew both the system of training foreign students in Russian universities (taking the new realities into account) and the modular education in Arab universities with the involvement of Russian instructors.

46. It is of utmost importance that media coverage of the development of the Arab Mashreq countries continues to be positive (in the mass media and on the internet). Special attention should be paid to covering integrational and joint economic projects in the sub-region; their novelty and potential for resolving current conflicts and increasing the population's welfare should be particularly emphasized. The positive agenda could be solidified by respected scholars and experts on the region's history and economy putting forward favourable opinions on the current situation and on the expediency of developing integration processes in the Mashreq. Such opinions should be promoted through existing Levantine and Iraqi media. At the same time, given the major, leading influence pan-Arab television has on the Mashreq sub-region, it would be advisable to improve relations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

47. Creating a large media holding to cover events in the Arab Mashreq also appears promising. This media holding could compete with the already existing pan-Arab media, yet it should reflect the point of view and the stance of the Mashreq states. It would be useful for the media of the sub-region's states to join forces on the basis of those teams that already compete with the pan-Arab Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, without, however, having similarly large-scale resources at their disposal.

Risks for Sub-Regional Integration Projects in the Arab Mashreq

48. The most significant challenge for the development of the Arab Mashreq could be the fragmentation of the sub-region's states. Under external pressure, the existing state institutions could weaken and give way to quasi-state entities such as terrorist groups or individual tribes. If the region splits into fragments, this process will be very painful, and the newly formed states or quasi-states will be unable to shape and defend their independent agenda. In this connection, it is necessary to constantly monitor the situation "on the ground," using all available channels for obtaining information. This would allow for an adequate assessment of the feasibility of the proposed measures and the security level in the region.

49. Foreign invasion and continued conflicts could ultimately lead to buttressing the ethnic and denominational principle of organizing public life in the countries of the Arab Mashreq, which will produce a chain reaction. In this case, instability and territorial disputes will be preserved, and/or the states of Mashreq will be

more tightly controlled by external forces, which will effectively cut them off from development possibilities. If this scenario unfolds, there will be no regional balance; it will have a negative impact on regional security primarily in West Asia, and it will continue to strengthen terrorist organizations. Given the circumstances, the potential of projects based on ethnic and religious identity, such as creating a pan-Shia state, or forming an independent Kurdish state (or several such states) could increase.

50. It is highly probable that the extremely low level of confidence between the region's countries – the traditional "enemy" of cooperation – will retain its negative influence.

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Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) is a non-profit international relations think-tank working to provide policy recommendations for all of the Russian organizations involved in external affairs.

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RIAC President Igor Ivanov, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation from 1998 to 2004 and Secretary of the Security Council from 2004 to 2007.

Director General of RIAC is Andrey Kortunov. From 1995 to 1997, Dr. Kortunov was Deputy Director of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies.

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