

Abstract

Annual Report on Development in the Middle East No. 20 (2017 – 2018), *Focusing on the Syrian Issue: New Progress and New Trends*, analyzes the involvement of global and regional powers around the Syrian issue, as well as the huge impact of the Syrian issue on the country's economic, social development, as well as the on the regional political balance.

According to the report, the generation and development of Syria issue was the reflection of the intensifying internal conflict within Syria and within the Middle Eastern region, as well as the competition between global powers like United States and Russia, which leading the Syria Issue turning from an anti-terrorist war back into geopolitical competition—the “normal” status of Middle Eastern region. Although the civil war triggered by the Syrian issue is nearing an end, the interwoven complex conflicts have determined that to solve the Syrian issue will take a long process. According to the report, although the Syrian issue appeared to be mainly concentrated within one country, but its influence is spread throughout the region. And from the perspective of geopolitics, surrounding the Syrian issue, the Middle East are forming a structure of four regional powers, namely Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Israel competing with each others. As well as forming two competing alliances, one is consists of Russia, Turkey and I ran's, another alliances is consists of United States, Saudi Arabia, Israel. And the large-scale cross-border refugees flow caused by the war is also bring great trouble and burden to the refugee receiving countries around Syria and in Europe. The report also pointed out that the war, which has lasted for several years, has dealt a heavy blow to Syria's economy and social development, as well as caused a lot of damage to its infrastructure'. And Syria's huge demand for reconstruction post war will also provides an opportunity for China to participate in.

Also in this report, the sector of regional situation analyzes major hotspot

issues in the Middle Eastern region over the past year, such as counter-terrorism in the Middle East, Yemen's civil war, Qatar's diplomatic crisis, the Palestine-Israel issue. In addition, the report also made a comprehensive review of the economic development of Middle Eastern countries, as well as China's cooperation with Middle Eastern countries in trade, investment and Engineering contracting in the past year. And besides, the report also makes a brief analysis of the latest development of Middle East studies both at home and abroad, the major events occurred within this region in the past year, which provides comprehensive and solid information for tracking the development of the regional situation, as well as the frontier of the Middle East discipline.

Keywords: Syria Issue; Middle East Politics; Middle East Economy

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I Main Report

Y. 1 The Syrian Issue and Its New Changes, New Features and New Trends

Wang Lincong / 001

Abstract: The Syrian issue is a pivot of current geopolitical game in the Middle East. The evolution of the situation in the Middle East has shown that the Syrian issue is a “made” process. Either in terms of the outbreak of the Syrian crisis or the formation of the Syrian issue, it is mainly about the intervention of major international and local powers. It essentially determines the nature of the Syrian war, namely the complex struggles of the interventionism and anti-interventionism, the separatism and anti-separatism, terrorism and counter-terrorism in the complex geopolitical context; meanwhile, the transformation of contradictions has also changed the nature of the Syrian issue and accordingly given birth to many new features of the Syrian issue, including externality, multiplicity, compoundity, transactionality and linkage, et al. The evolution of the Syrian issue and the escalation of the Syrian crisis have not only changed Syria’s own development trajectory, but also shaken the foundation of the existing Middle East order, and formed a linkage with other regional hot spots such as the Iranian nuclear issue. Around the Syrian issue, the multi-layered game among the various actors has caused differentiation and reorganization of different power groups, and led to a bi-polarized confrontation. With the victory of the war on terrorism, the Syrian crisis has entered into a new phase of the “post-Islamic state.” The Syrian war is coming to an end, and the Syrian government gradually gains an advantage,

but it is still difficult to dominate the final settlement of the Syrian issue. Focusing on the major issues, including how to end the war, how to promote the political agenda, how to boost post-war reconstruction, and how to help refugee return, multiple powers are increasingly competing with each other and coming to a deadlock. In the long run, the Syrian issue is bound to be long-term: On the one hand, restoring Syria to full membership in the Arab League, and promoting a political solution to the Syrian issue by “multi-track integration” is a necessary choice. On the other hand, however, many factors are mutually constrained, military separatist situation is still difficult to end, extremist remnants are hard to eradicate, and the political process is hard to revitalize. It can be seen that Syria’s evolution from war to peace will go through a long and volatile transition period.

Keywords: Externality; Multiplicity; Linkage; Multi-layered Game; Reshaping Order

II Special Report

Y. 2 The Impact of the Syrian Issue on Middle East Geopolitics

Yu Guoqing / 040

Abstract: The turbulent situation in Syria, which has lasted for many years, took a major turn in 2017 –2018. The Islamic State (IS), a militant group that has ravaged Syria and Iraq for many years, has been defeated in Syria, and territory controlled by extremist groups has been largely recovered, and the so-called “Capital” Raqqa, located in north of Syria, has been captured. In the transition process of the situation in Syria, Russia gradually gained the dominant power of the situation in Syria. The regional forces in the Middle East, such as Turkey, Iran and Israel, are also strengthening their influence on the situation in Syria. At the same time, multilateral international mediation around how to solve the Syrian issue is intensive. As the Geneva talks go on, Russia has dominated the Astana talks and the Sochi talks, Syria is becoming the focus of the Middle East game of the great powers. The future development of the situation in Syria will have a major



impact on the pattern of the Middle East.

Keywords: Syria Issue; Powers; Regional Forces; Geopolitical Pattern in the Middle East

Y. 3 The Current Situation and Future of Syrian Kurdish Issue

Tang Zhichao, Wang Lixin / 063

Abstract: Syrian Kurdish issue comes to be a heating-up focus following counter-terrorism issues in Syria nowadays. It has been a long-standing problem which had undergone three periods: namely period of French Mandate for Syria, under the Arabization policy taken by Syrian government and after the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Based on historic elements, there is also novelty of the issue in the Syrian Civil War. The Kurds, while active in battles with terrorists, seized the chance to expand and acquire autonomy and then built up the North Syria Democratic Federation (NSDF), which is the first Kurdish regime in this country. On the other hand, external supports of countries inside and outside the Middle East are increasing conflict between Kurdish groups and that leading to further divisions. Besides, Turkish interventions are also reaching the new peak. After all, the Kurdish issue in Syria is affected not only by the legacy of colonialism and the manipulation of great powers, but also by its inherent problems. The key to solving it depends on the future direction of the NSDF which is at present facing multiple challenges and a lack of consensus among parties on autonomy rights. The Syrian Kurdish issue is an important part of the Middle East Kurdish issues and even ethic issues across the region. Its future is closely related to that of Syria as well.

Keywords: Kurdish Issue; Syria; Autonomy



Y. 4 The Crisis of the Chemical Weapons and the New

Trend of the Great Powers' Game in Syria

Ma Xueqing / 077

Abstract: In April 7, 2018, Syria launched another chemical weapons attack. Western countries such as the United States, Britain, France and other countries launched an air raid on Syria's military targets. The crisis of the chemical weapons reflects the struggle for predominance in the Syrian war. With the Syrian war situation in favor of the Syrian government in the direction of development, the game of the great powers in Syria is further intensified. China has always advocated a political solution to the Syrian issue, safeguarding Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, actively participating in international negotiations on Syria, providing much-needed humanitarian assistance to the Syrian refugees and actively participating in the post-war reconstruction of Syria.

Keywords: The Crisis of the Chemical Weapons; Syria; Game; Post-war Reconstruction

Y. 5 The American Factors in the Syrian Crisis

Wu Yihong / 093

Abstract: At 9: 00 a. m. et on April 13, 2018, U. S. President Donald Trump announced a military campaign against Syria, carrying out a precision strike on Syria's "chemical weapons facilities." Britain and France later declared war on Syria. A moving video of Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, a veteran diplomat, who was tearful and charged with air strikes by the United States and France, was shown on the Internet afterwards. It is pointed out that the practice of the United States, Britain and France is an attack on international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and on more than 190 members of the United Nations. Syria, one heaven, one hell. Seven years of protracted fighting have devastated Syrian cities and destroyed historic sites. The war is merciless, but it is the innocent people who suffer. No one talks about



freedom here. They just want to live. This paper focuses on the American factors and the role of the United States in the Syrian crisis.

Keywords: United State; Syria; Politics and Military; Contration

Y. 6 The Russian Factors in the Syrian Crisis

Tian Wenlin / 107

Abstract: Russia plays very important role in the Syria crisis. The reason of Russia engaging Syria crisis includes: safeguarding its geopolitical interests in Syria by defending the Bashar government; protecting its security by striking the IS; Increasing its influence in the Middle East. From the view of effect, Russia's military action in Syria is successful: Bashar government taken out of danger; IS Suffering a serious setback; Russia play more important role in the Middle East. However, Russia also faces some risk: a heavy economic burden; risk of plunging into the mire of war; the risk of the confrontation between the U. S. and Russia.

Keywords: Syrian Crisis; Russian; Military Intervention

Y. 7 Turkish Factors in the Syrian Crisis

Wei Min / 121

Abstract: Since the outbreak of the unrest in Syria in January 2011, Turkey has been one of the first international actors involved in the Syrian crisis and has gradually become an important party in the Syrian game. After seven years, accompanied by the continuous evolution of the Syrian crisis, Turkey, under the guidance of its strategic thinking of "Strategic Deepness", used a combination of diplomatic and military strikes to make itself an important regional power to Syria crisis. Turkey gradually cannot be underestimated in the process of mitigating or complicating the issue meanwhile has also become a major factor affecting the political map of Syria in the future. During the Syrian crisis, Turkey made major

adjustments to foreign policy. Based on its understanding and judgment of Syria's geopolitics, the Middle East sectarian pattern and the Kurdish issue, it established a clear strategic intention, that is, consistent with the position of the Western allies, forcing Basal Assad's regime step down, while curbing and disintegrating the Kurdish forces, and ultimately achieving the strategic goal of enhancing the regional influence and international image of Turkey. Around this strategic intention, Turkey's policy toward Syria has also been dynamically adjusted, and the established goals have been achieved. In the future, Turkey will use current situation as a basis to play its role and influence in the evolvement of the Syrian crisis and to maximize its national interests.

Keywords: Syria Crisis; Turkey Foreign Policy; Arab Spring

Y. 8 Iranian Factors in the Syrian Crisis

Lu Jin / 137

Abstract: Ever since 1979 year, Syria and Iran has maintained an inclusive and lasting quasi-alliance. After Syria's crisis broke out, basing on considerations of national security and geostrategic interests, Iran is firmly and energetically supporting the Syria government from politics military and economics. Iran has played an important role in helping the Syrian government forces to fight against the extremist organization "Islamic State" and to reverse the unfavorable situation on the battlefield and promoting Astana Peace Negotiation Process of the Syrian crisis. At the same time, The combat capabilities of Lebanese Hezbollah and other Shiite paramilitary forces supported by Iran have been fully enhanced. President Obama's Middle East policy provides space for Iran to expand its influence in the region. The strategic needs of the common fight against Iran prompted Saudi Arabia to approach Israel. President Trump tried to use its traditional Middle East allies Israel and Saudi Arabia to curb Iran's geopolitical expansion. The Israeli Air Force has increased its attacks on the Iranian forces' bases and installations in Syria. The anti-Iranian coalition led by Saudi Arabia plans to send troops to Syria. In May 2018, Trump announced that the United States withdrew from JCPOA and will



impose heavy economic sanctions against Tehran. Iranian-Israeli direct conflict has escalated. The “psychological, economic and political warfare” of the United States against Iran has caused chaos in the Iranian market, businessmen and the people went to the streets to protest. Internal and external dilemma may prompt Iran to adjust its policy on the Syrian crisis.

Keywords: Iran; Syria Crisis; Lsrael; JCPOA

Y. 9 Syria Rebuilding and China's Participation

Zhang Bo / 156

Abstract: By the first half of 2018, the Syrian Army regained most of its lost territory. The rebuilding of Syria became a common concern. China's participation in Syria's rebuilding has political advantages. China and Syria have traditional friendly relations. Together with Russia, China vetoed 6 UN security council draft resolutions regarding Syria. China pushes forward the political resolution of the Syrian conflict. China offered Syria much aid. Syria welcome China's participations of the Syria's rebuilding. The U. S and the E. U do not support or even boycott Syrian rebuilding. Syrian rebuilding need too much funding. Syria still faces big political and security challenges. Relevant Chinese enterprises should effectively cope with various challenges.

Keywords: Syria Rebuilding; China's Participation; Political Superiorities

Y. 10 The Economic Losses of the Syria Crisis

Liu Dong / 171

Abstract: Although the market oriented economic reform speeded up the economic growth of Syria, the hidden perils, such as unemployment, poverty, regional development gap has not been properly solved, which eventually added up and triggered the outbreak of the Syria crisis. In early 2011, when the Syria crisis broke out, the tough sanctions implemented by the U. S. and European Union, as



well as the physical damaged inflicted by war and armed robbery, both of which exerted huge negative influences on the economic development of Syria, and the influences infiltrated into all aspects of the Syrian economy. In generally, due the crisis, the stability of Syria's macro economy has been severely shaken, its economic growth and income levels have dropped significantly, and its internal and external economies have been seriously unbalanced. And for different economic sectors, except for agriculture, which was less affected, the Syria crisis have been delivered huge blow the oil industries, manufacturing industries, as well as baking sectors of Syria, most business within the above mentions fell into halt in fact.

Keywords: Syria; Crisis; Economic Loss

Y. 11 The Refugee Issue in Syria Crisis

Wei Liang / 190

Abstract: The refugee issue is one of the most important results of Syria crisis. Syrian refugees are the newest and biggest refugee group in the world, and attract world's attention and sympathy. From 2011 till now, Syria refugee went abroad not only in the neighboring countries in the Middle East, but also into EU countries. The flow of big population increases lots of pressure and burden on economy, society and security. Resettlement and return of refugees will be a long process which decided by the future of Syria crisis and struggles of the international community.

Keywords: Syria; Refugee; Humanism

III Regional Situation

Y. 12 The New Situation of Anti-terrorism in the Middle East and Its Influence

Ma Wencheng / 208

Abstract: In 2017, despite major progress in the international fight against terrorism, many of the inherent contradictions that have contributed to terrorism in



the Middle East cannot be resolved and a series of new problems have been raised. The overlapping of old and new problems and the interweaving and interaction of old and new contradictions have made the regional situation more complicated and chaotic. On the other hand, the global counter-terrorism situation will become more and more serious, and ethnic separatism and pan-nationalism will become increasingly rampant. In this case, international terrorism and the speed of the local terrorist organization restructuring accelerated differentiation, and formed many core and multi-level international terrorist network, the international counter-terrorism struggle the situation has become increasingly serious. This situation poses great challenges and threats to China, countries along the The Belt and Road and global security.

Keywords: Middle East; Counter-terrorism; Central Asia; North Africa; Islamic State

Y. 13 The Development and Trend of Civil War in Yemen

Zhu Quangang / 223

Abstract: The Yemen crisis is a unique window to understand the situation of the Middle East. The popular uprisings of the Arab Spring ignited the Yemen crisis, which developed into a bloody civil war. At the end of 2017, the former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ruled in Yemen for 33 years was killed by Houthis. It not only caused pro-Houthi forces and anti-Houthi group internal divisions, but also triggered a new round of fierce military conflicts between the opposing sides. The new UN Special Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths faces an uphill battle to bring belligerent parties to the negotiating table. The civil war perpetuates the humanitarian catastrophe that allow terrorist groups to flourish. To end the conflict and create a lasting peace, the political negotiation is crucial. It is necessary to draw lessons from the previous peace talks, and pay attention to the role of local actors.

Keywords: Yemen Civil War; Death of Saleh; Military Game; Peace Talk

Y. 14 The Impacts of the Crisis of Cutting Diplomatic Ties with
Qatar on the Process of Gulf Integration *Wang Qiong / 238*

Abstract: The crisis of cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar was the second major crisis within the GCC in recent years. The main reason behind the concerned crisis was that when the GCC was founded, the original intention of “keeping warm together” was unable to adapt to the changes of regional situation. Smaller member states represented by Qatar increasingly resist Saudi Arabia’s dominant diplomatic posture within the organization. The current situation has seriously undermined the political, economic and social cooperation achieved by the GCC member states over the years. However, the GCC is still valued by the member states. The GCC must focus more on internal differences and establish effective dispute settlement mechanisms in the future.

Keywords: GCC; Qatar; Crisis of Cutting Diplomatic Ties

Y. 15 New Process of Trump Administration on
Palestinian-Israeli Issues *Gao Ying, Yu Guoqing / 252*

Abstract: Since Trump came to power, he has been moving and provoking on the issue of Palestinian-Israeli conflicts. On the one hand, President Trump is trying to maintain a balance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, to be vague on the “two-states solution”, and to make the Middle East a diplomatic debut for his presidency, in an attempt to advance the Middle East peace process. But on the other hand, Trump has also shown a clear bias toward Israel in developing special relations with Israel, touching a forbidden area where successive US presidents dare not set foot on the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts: publicly declaring that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. And the relocation of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has greatly intensified the conflict between Palestine and Israel. Trump attempts to unveil a



new Middle East peace plan is likely to be difficult because of deteriorating Palestinian-Israeli relations.

Keywords: Trump Administration; Palestinian-Israeli Relations; Palestinian-Israeli Conflicts; Peace Process

Y. 16 2017 Middle East Economic Development

Jiang Yingmei / 272

Abstract: In 2017, the world economy increased significantly, the labor market continued to improve, the global price level has risen gently, the price of commodities rose and the growth of international trade increased. At the same time, the growth of Foreign direct investment was slow, the global debt continued to accumulate, and the financial market bubbled. The global economy is expected to continue to recover in 2018, but the foundation for economic growth is not stable and faces many challenges. As a result of low oil price and regional conflict, the economy of the Middle East region in 2017 has been sharply slowdown, especially the economic weakness of the oil exporters, which is greatly lower than the economic growth in 2016, while the economy of the oil importing countries is growing steadily. 2018 –2019, the economic prospects of the Middle East countries will be modest because of the sustained global recovery, structural reform, the rising oil price and the geopolitical environment. But the factors such as low structural oil price, poor development effect and weakening investor confidence will still limit the accelerated development of the region's economy.

Keywords: Middle East Economy; Oil Exporting Countries; Oil Importing Countries; Oil Price; Economic Reform

IV Market Trend

Y. 17 Foreign Investment in West – Asian Countries in 2017

Xu Qiang / 297

Abstract: During recent years, the inward FDI flow values of the whole West Asia and its all countries remains at relatively low levels as to compare historically. In West Asia, the political and security conditions determine investment environment. In 2016, the inward FDI flow from China to West Asia decreased remarkably as compared with last year and there are few countries' inflow increased. Chinese enterprises did business actively in the West Asia countries with a relatively stable political and security condition. In the future, the Chinese investors or potential investors should search investment opportunities connected with the infrastructure building, industry diversity actions of all West Asia countries, and should take effective measures to avoid investment risks.

Keywords: West Asia; Foreign Direct Investment; Investment Environment

Y. 18 Foreign Trade of West Asian Countries in 2017

Zhou Mi / 317

Abstract: There are still quite some factors that affect the foreign trade of the West Asian countries. Although the global economic recovery has brought some support to the increase of oil price in the international market, which is good for the improvement of the trade of the west Asian countries, few factors still bring challenges to the long term sustainable development of the trade, including the conflicts intensified in the region, more changes of the forms of terrorism and more religious conflicts. China has kept traditional and stable economic relationships with



the west Asian countries. In 2017, the trade volume between these parties increased quickly, while the import of China plays an important role. The order of the main partners and main categories of commodities in west Asian area keeps almost the same. In 2018, the bilateral trade between China and west Asian countries may have new characteristics. The trade imbalance will increase, The Belt and Road Initiative can create more spaces and the cooperation in trade in services may develop more quickly. And it should also be noticed that the super powers are gaming more intensively, US is having more sanctions on Iran and the terrorism has entered a new stage, which may weaken the development trend between China and the west Asian countries.

Keywords: West Asia; Foreign Trade; The Belt and Road

Y. 19 Construction Markets of West Asian Countries in 2017

Jin Rui / 332

Abstract: The international engineering contracting market of Western Asian countries has maintained a general growth trend. Market scale has rebounded and market competition has intensified. Infrastructure projects remain the focus of investment in the region. Under the influence of the instability of the whole environment in Western Asia, Chinese enterprises should regulate the order of management and the mode of innovation and cooperation, increase the strength of the market and keep the overall business development steadily. Looking forward to the future, the prospect of the Western Asia project contract market is optimistic. The Belt and Road Initiative brings unprecedented opportunities for the development of Chinese enterprises, but it still needs to prevent and control the risk.

Keywords: West Asia; International Engineering Contracting; The Belt and Road

V Documentation

- Y. 20 The Progress of Middle East Studies at Home and
Abroad in 2017 *Zhang Bo, Wei Liang and Ma Xueqing / 343*

Abstract: In 2017, Middle East Studies in China and abroad focused on Middle East country case studies, Middle East politics and history, China Middle East Relations, US Middle East relations, Russia Middle East relations, the Syrian Issues, the Kurdish Issues etc. The Middle East studies institutions in China published several Middle East regional reports and country reports.

Keywords: Middle East Studies; Disciplinary Construction; International Relations

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