

## I. Shifting Alliances in the Middle East

### Acronyms and abbreviations

**GCC**—Gulf Cooperation Council, an intergovernmental political and economic union. Its member states are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

**PKK**—Kurdistan’s Workers’ Party

**UAE**—United Arab Emirates

### Glossary

**King Abdullah II:** Current King of Jordan, Abdullah ascended to the throne on February 1999 after the death of his father, King Hussein. Before that, he was a Major General in the Jordanian Special Forces.

**Abdel Fatah al-Sisi:** The 6th and current President of Egypt, Sisi took over the Egyptian executive office after ousting President Muhammad Morsi in 2013. Sisi was Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces and Minister of Defense before running for president in the election in 2014.

**Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi:** Current President of Yemen, Hadi was Vice President of the country from 1994 until 2012 when he took over an interim role after President Abdullah Saleh was injured in an attack on the Presidential Palace. Hadi fled Yemen after Houthis rebels set up a revolutionary government. With the backing of Saudi Arabia, Hadi has returned to his role as President.

**Al-Nahda:** Translated to the “Renaissance Party,” al-Nahda is a Tunisian political party formed after the government’s collapse during the Tunisian revolution of 2011. The party won a majority of votes in the first free election in Tunisian history and took power only to secede it during the drafting of the new constitution.

**Al-Qaeda:** A militant Islamic organization founded by Osama bin Laden during the final years of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), and headquartered in Afghanistan. The international terrorist network is associated with the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

**Arab League:** A confederation of 22 Arab nations, including Palestine, whose broad mission is to improve coordination among its members on matters of common interest. Critics say it has traditionally been more representative of its various autocratic regimes than of Arab citizens.

**Arab Spring:** A series of pro-democracy uprisings in the Arab world that began with a 2010 protest in Tunisia. Movements in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen led to the ousting of leaders. Uprisings and protests also erupted in Bahrain and Syria, as well as in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan.

**Hafez al-Assad:** Former President of Syria (1971–2000). He is the father to current Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

**Hamas:** An Islamic organization primarily based in the Gaza Strip. Because of their fighting against Israel, the U.S. has designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.

**Houthis:** A Yemeni revolutionary Shi’a group founded in 1994. The Houthis led a rebellion against the Government of Yemen in 2004 and 2011. The Houthis belong to the Shi’a tribesmen with a separate sect of Islam, making up about 45% of the population of Yemen.

**Imam:** Title given to the Muslim leader of the community or mosque.

**Justice and Development Party (AKP):** Turkey's ruling party, which has reformulated itself as a social conservative democratic party, with a strong pro-Western, pro-American stance. It has been criticized for increasingly authoritarianism under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who founded the party in 2001.

**Muhammad Morsi:** The 5th president of Egypt, he led the country from June 2012 to July 2013 when he was removed by General al-Sisi. He was the first democratically elected leader of Egypt. He is currently being held at an Egyptian Military base awaiting trial for inciting violence and leaking information to foreign countries.

**Muammar Qaddafi:** Former leader of Libya (1969–2011). He was disposed during the Arab Spring, plunging the country into instability that, eventually, led to the current Libyan civil war.

**Muslim Brotherhood:** A Sunni Islamic religious and political group founded in Egypt that believes that the Quran and sharia law should be the basis for society. The Brotherhood gained power after the Arab Spring when their candidate, Muhammad Morsi, won the election before being quickly deposed by the military establishment.

**Pan-Arabism:** An ideology mostly found in North Africa and the Middle East that attempts to bring all countries of the "Arab World" together. The ideology feeds off of Arab nationalism and those that want to see a single, united Arab state.

**Recep Tayyip Erdoğan:** President of Turkey since 2014. He served as Prime Minister (2003–2014), and founded Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2001.

**Salafi Islam:** Derived from *salaf*, meaning predecessors, the Salafis are an ultraconservative branch of Sunni Islam aimed at returning to the ancient "orthodox" teachings of Islam. Although the term salaf has appeared in Islamic religious scholarship for centuries, Salafism started as a reform-oriented movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and was particularly Egypt-centric.

**Security Dilemma:** It occurs when two or more states each feel insecure in relation to other states. None of the states involved want relations to deteriorate, let alone for war to be declared, but as each state acts militarily or diplomatically to make itself more secure, the other states interpret its actions as threatening. An cycle of unintended provocations emerges, resulting in an escalation of the conflict.

**Shi'a:** The second largest denomination of Islam, constituting 15–20% of the world's Muslim population and 40% of the Middle East's entire population. Divided with Sunnis over the proper successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Today, there is still great tension between the two denominations.

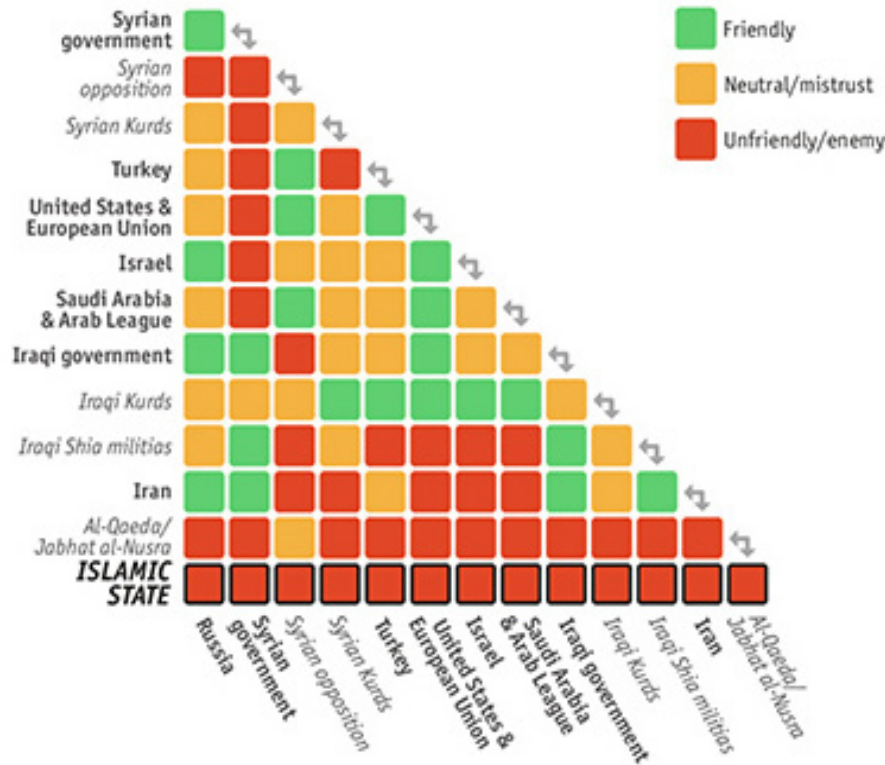
**Sunni:** The largest single religious denomination in the world. In the schism from Shi'aism, Sunnis argued that the leaders of the Muslim community didn't have to come from the Prophet Muhammad's lineage. Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph after Muhammad.

# The Middle East's alliance network

The Middle East is fraught with instability, conflict and hostilities. Underlying this violence is a network of alliances between countries as well as non-state actors that strikes an uneasy balance of power and influence in the region. The figure below gives an idea of the plethora of actors and their relations toward one another.

## The messy political mosaic

Relations between:



Source: *The Economist*

**Still confused?** Here are additional resources that help understanding the political dynamics in the region :

Patrick Martin, “Untangling the Middle East: A guide to the region’s web of relationships amid the battle against Islamic State,” *The Globe and Mail* (Dec. 22, 2015). **Link:** [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/untangling-the-middle-east-guide-to-regions-web-of-alliances/article21533409/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/untangling-the-middle-east-guide-to-regions-web-of-alliances/article21533409/)

Joshua Keating and Chris Kirk, “A guide to whom is fighting in Syria,” *Slate* (Oct. 6, 2015). **Link:** [www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_slatest/2015/10/06/syrian\\_conflict\\_relationships\\_explained.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2015/10/06/syrian_conflict_relationships_explained.html)

Sergio Peçanha, Sarah Almkhtar and K.K. Rebecca Lai, “Untangling the overlapping conflicts in the Syrian war,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 18, 2015). **Link:** [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/16/world/middleeast/untangling-the-overlapping-conflicts-in-the-syrian-war.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/16/world/middleeast/untangling-the-overlapping-conflicts-in-the-syrian-war.html)