CHAPTER 3

Governance and Threat Perception in the Southern Neighborhood

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INTRODUCTION

The nature of national security challenges looks altogether different from a Southern Neighborhood perspective compared to the EU. This could be considered to be the case for three main reasons. First, the divergent foreign policies of traditional regional powers such as Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Iran creates tensions, instabilities, and the potential for conflict which undermines regional security and promotes bilateralism with external security guarantors such as the USA. This is in contrast to the close alignment of the E3: the UK, France, and Germany which coordinate responses to many major foreign policy issues. Second and related to the first, is the absence of any comprehensive indigenous security organization similar to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Third, the priorities of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, which have generally escaped the “globalization of democracy” differ

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markedly from those of democratic states and tend to focus on regime survival first and foremost which skews the concept of national security and the policy response (Diamond 2010). That is partly because the state bureaucracy is dominated by the military and intelligence services, has poorly reconciled sectarian, Islamist and reform-minded groups, and because rentier and semi-rentier states have been in retreat in many cases after the declining oil price from 1986 in conjunction with rapid population growth. This has meant that state interests have narrowed and increasingly diverged with broader national perspectives to the point that the primary threat to these regimes during the Arab uprisings was the nation and an emerging public body politik. The result has often been the use of greater repression and what Heydemann and Leenders (2011) classify as a ‘bunker state’ mentality which prizes fortified presidential palaces and mega-projects over establishing the preconditions for broad-based economic growth.

The Arab uprisings began in Tunisia but quickly spread to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. Within a year Zine al-Abidine of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen and Muammar Qadhafi of Libya were removed from office. Further demonstrations took place in Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Sudan. The result has either been state collapse or the reassertion of authoritarianism incorporating shifts in political legitimacy and modifications to state–society relations. The variation in outcome can be attributed to the level of what Heydemann (2016) calls “stateness” in each case, i.e., the degree to which the dynamic of state elites and social actors engaged in contestation over the limits of state power. During political transitional periods, Islamist groups and civil society organizations were freer to operate and proliferated while political participation expanded and public opinion was more commonly expressed. All are perceived as existential threats to the state. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood-led government was ousted after a year.

This chapter discusses the role of the military in governmental affairs, Islamist threats to the state, economic forces and the status quo, social forces and political pluralism, disconnects between the ENP and MENA state values, and a possible way forward.
THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

The military plays an important security, and sometimes political and economic role in the governance of some Middle East states, especially in Egypt, Algeria, Turkey and Israel. Once a force for reform and nationalism, in these contexts they are now more often the guarantor of the status quo. However, there is wide divergence as to the role of the military in each state in the Southern Neighborhood and their overall effect on state–society relations.

In Egypt, which accounts for one third of the MENA region’s population, the military has played a significant role in overseeing the rise of Arab nationalism but also increasing religious conservatism by casting itself as the defender of Islam. As analysts such as Salem (2014) attest, this tends not to work because few Islamists perceive the state in this way. In the 1970s, President Sadat oversaw a liberalization of Egypt’s politics and economics, peace with Israel and closer relations with the USA and Europe. President Mubarak would then go on to propose a Mediterranean Forum in November 1991 as a way to diversify Egypt’s international relations in the new era of US hegemony (Del Sarto 2006, 153) and regain status following the formation of the Euro-Maghreb 5+5 formula which excluded Egypt (Shama 2019, 99). The forum grew to include Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Greece, Turkey, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Malta by 1997 and included cooperation on development, security, transport, the environment, science, and a broader political dialogue (ibid.). Egypt has been a member of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) since it was established in 2008 where some progress has been made on energy, technology, and youth. Europe remains Egypt’s largest trading partner, second largest aid donor to Egypt and a partner in Egypt’s war on terrorism.

2013 saw the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) intervene to depose the Islamist incumbent president, Mohamed Morsi, after just one year in office. In his place, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the Director of Military Intelligence and Former Minister of Defense, stood in a 2014 presidential election against just one other candidate. Since the 1952 Free Officers coup, the military have increased their activities in the national economy from traditional activities such as manufacturing cement to more recently providing higher education (Reuters 2018). In Algeria, the military remains a cohesive force, able to leverage the civil war in its favor and oil revenues to build alliances. As Quandt (2004) asserts, only when oil
prices have dropped has the government had to engage in token gestures of reform.

Since Turkey’s founding in 1923, six out of nine presidents have had military backgrounds. The military has traditionally played the role of upholding national unity and democracy and has intervened in 1960, 1971, and 1980 and remains an important interest group. But since the alleged military and Gulenist sponsored coup of July 2016, President Erdogan has undermined checks and balances and consolidated power with little regard for building consensus. Turkish politics thus remains polarized along nationalist, populist, and religious lines.

In Israel, the military played a significant role during the Military Government 1948–1966 and continues to form a major part of the lived experience for many Palestinians in the occupied territories. Although a democratic state, politics is often tied closely to security, and politicians from the military, such as Benjamin Gantz, the former military chief and challenger to prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the 2019 elections. Both served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the military remains important in high tech research and development activities which can eventually make their way into the civilian sector. Despite Israeli assertions that it will control all territory west of the Jordan River, Israel has given up security control over parts of the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The military is becoming increasingly important and active in Tunisian politics due to the security challenges the country faces and the lack of expertise among the country’s civilian leaders (Grewal 2016). In Libya, the Libyan National Army (LNA) is dominated by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar who represents an alternative node of power and is pursuing open confrontation with the internationally recognized government in Tripoli. Morocco, like Tunisia, is also undergoing a period of reform in the context of coup proofing and institutionalization which Saidy (2018) points to as allowing for more stable state–society relations based on norms, principles, and procedures.

The PA has a security force of about 30,000 men created after the Oslo Accords which includes politics, intelligence, and civil defense capabilities that are undergoing a period of reform, including crack downs on Hamas (Zilber and Al-Omari 2018). The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are likewise undergoing a period of reform after the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005, supported by the international community as a way to undercut the dualism and delicate balance that exists with
Hezbollah as an autonomous and domestically legitimate security force. Hezbollah is now being sanctioned both as a military and political force in Lebanese politics. Jordan is a monarchy and has undertaken joint ventures with foreign defense companies from Australia to Saudi Arabia, which Marshall (2013) says includes portable drones and armored vehicles within the King Abdullah II Design and Development Bureau (KADDB or “kad-bee”).

Islamists Vying for Political Legitimacy and Influence

Islamist groups have long posed a threat to ruling Arab regimes in the MENA region, but particularly after the poor performance by Arab militaries and Israel’s success in capturing Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War. By the 1970s, the political mobilization of Islamists stood against the backdrop of globalization. The end of the oil boom from 1986 provided a further incentive for Islamist groups to question the retreat of the Arab state from various social welfare programs. Islamist forces form one of the main dividing lines in Middle East politics, along with sectarian lines (Sunni/Shia) and the old establishment, versus radicals in favor of more extensive reform or revolution of the entire political system.

However, Islamist groups are not the only manifestation of Islamic revival or Islamist inspired politics in the Middle East. Traditionally these groups have been prevalent outside of the Southern Neighborhood, in states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Other states such as Turkey, through a Kemalist Islamic discourse, have supported Islamists abroad and continue to do so. In Egypt, the potential impact of Islamist actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) have been absorbed through the cooptation of the religious establishment of Al Azhar, promoting developmental priorities, and limiting public criticism through repressive measures. The notable exception in the latter case was Al Azhar challenging the government in 1994 at the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (Moustafa 2000).

The MB is one of the most prominent groups with political Islam at its core. It’s founding slogan was ‘al-islam huwa al-bal (‘Islam is the solution’). Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the MB, was assassinated in 1949. The group was banned by the Egyptian government and many activists were imprisoned throughout the 1950s in response to increasingly militant activities. The group became prominent again in the 1960s
among the educated middle classes amid a weakening of the secular state and during a rapid modernization process. State repression led Sayyid Qutb to expound a more militant approach against what was perceived to be a decline of the Arab state into the period of *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance) before he was executed in 1966. The MB’s political trajectory cannot be considered simply as a response to postcolonial development, since the discourse on Islam and social change goes back to the eighteenth century. Under President Sadat, the MB activities were constrained to social and religious activities only, with splinter groups rejecting nonviolent alternatives and political marginalization. Islamic jihad would assassinate Sadat in 1981 and Islamist groups morphed into the global jihadi movement, initially led by Al Qaeda. The Egyptian establishment struggled with the MB up to the election of Mohamed Morsi to the Egyptian presidency in 2012. From 2013 many of the MB leadership found refuge in Qatar and Turkey along with other voices such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian religious scholar based in Qatar who found pan-regional influence, including on foreign policy issues, through the broadcasts of Al Jazeera. Amr Khaled, another Egyptian personality who gained a following after calling for dialogue in the wake of the Danish cartoons was forced to leave Egypt in 2002.

As we see in Chapter 9, Algeria experienced a cleavage between the Francophone elite and the religiously observant Arab population. The resulting *Front Islamique de Salut* (FLN) in the 1990s quickly took power in 1991 before the Algerian military stepped into annul the vote. Algeria was one of the states which made most progress before the Arab uprisings in 2010. Zoubir (1993) states that it updated its constitution in 1989 with new provisions which recognize the right of citizens to create associations and other basic rights and freedoms which are guaranteed by law. However, there remained no public debates and due process, while political disintegration of the ruling bloc continued from the 1980s to the October 1988 riots. Essentially, Algeria remains an authoritarian one-party state. While the military has played a defining role in political affairs, Mortimer (2006) notes that under the presidency of Bouteflika the army has been neutralized as the longstanding principal power broker in Algerian politics. Relinquishing his role in government was one of the main demands of protestors against the government as they amassed on the streets in 2019 (News Wires 2019).
The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey is one of the few parties to maintain a pro-Islamist approach, along with a pro-business and anti-corruption approach. Although relations with the EU have suffered over a number of issues, from a collapse in the EU succession process and over Cyprus, as discussed in Chapter 8, Turkey had, up to the attempted coup in 2016, been quite pragmatic in building its global footprint. The AKP also participated in neoliberal economic globalization in contrast to Iran the MB which views globalization as being synonymous with western imperialism and socioeconomic inequality.

The Syrian MB experienced a similar initial trajectory as the Egyptian MB, having grown close to Hassan al-Banna, Mustafa al-Sibai established the Syrian MB in 1945–1946. It was active in politics following independence and favored Syria becoming an Islamic state. Members held government positions until the Ba’ath Party came to power in 1963. The SMB was outlawed in 1964, and it came to challenge the legitimacy of the Alawi Hafez al-Assad regime when it came to power in 1970. In 1979 tensions escalated and the SMB killed over 80 unarmed Alwai cadets in Aleppo. The Assad regime issued Law Number 49 in 1980 declaring membership or affiliation with the SMB a capital crime. In 1982, the Syrian government launched a major attack at the SMB at Hama, resulting in a massacre of tens of thousands of people and forcing the SMB underground. In 1996 the SMB, under Ali al-Din al-Bayanouni, engaged in secret talks with the government in an attempt to normalize relations. In 2000 Bashar al-Assad freed hundreds of prisoners in return for their support for “resistance” policies and the SMB subsequently promoted itself as a political platform from 2004.

In 2005, the SMB joined other groups in signing the Damascus Declaration, a call for democratic transition in the country within the auspices of the regime. But in 2006, Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni joined Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam to form the National Salvation Front which called for regime change. The SMB then sought support from the AKP in Turkey to help ease restrictions on the group but following the uprising in the country in 2011 supported the opposition with a view to eventually annul Law Number 49 and allow exiled members to return. Change was never likely to come. Bashar al-Assad inherited a dictatorial system with a long history of repressive tendencies and broken promises regarding reform and with a bureaucracy of limited interest in reform, probably lacks the skills for even the small incremental reforms being implemented in states such as Jordan and Morocco (Phillips 2016, 57).
The Syrian conflict has weakened prospects for democratic reform as authoritarian restructuring has occurred. The Assad regime, with Iranian and Russian military support, has continued to survive protests, resist an armed uprising and survive international sanctions. State institutions have collapsed, the military has been restructured, and Syria remains dependent on other authoritarian actors. The prospects for the SMB in Syria remains as poor as ever. While other groups such as Al Qaeda (Al-Nusra Front) remain active in Syria, and ISIS has been significantly degraded, the conflict continues and the potential for formal or informal partition of the country remains real. The spillover effects from insurgencies and violent Islamist terrorism remain a serious security threat to regional and international security. The killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 after ten years of searching for him, and of his son Hamza bin Laden in August 2019 (BBC News 2019) shows that the degradation of Al Qaeda is likely to be slow.

At the time of writing, Islamist insurgencies and counterinsurgencies were in effect in Egypt, Libya (being one of the most complex theaters of conflict whereby a failed state is affecting North African security is encouraging proxy warfare), Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. In Morocco, for example, identity, security, economic, and political crises have generated a number of threats. So too the impact from illicit trafficking of drugs and weapons from the Sahel region and the impact of the Western Sahara issue on contention with Algeria. Morocco has responded with strengthening state institutions and international cooperation, including with the EU, better management of religious issues since 2004 including a Charter for imams and better public broadcasting about Islam. It changed its anti-terror laws in 2015 to criminalize the act of joining a terror organization and expanded the scope of terrorist acts.

Security in Tunisia has been compounded by most ISIS fighters coming from the country. There is an urgent need for SSR. The attacks in Tunis and Sousse in 2015 and further attacks against the police illustrate that jihadi activities remain a persistent challenge (Crisis Group 2015). While there is potential to consolidate democratic change after second presidential election and implement meaningful SSR, by 2017 reorientating the labyrinth of security institutions and building trust in the newly aligned security services will take time. Clashes between violent Islamist groups and state security forces include border threats, especially smuggling and human trafficking from the Maghreb, economic insecurity and human insecurity (physical insecurity, economic, food, environmental, and health
issues). Employment rates which are unable to keep up with population growth are likely to make the overall picture worse over time.

The experience of Islamists in power in the region is limited to Iran, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt (2012–2013), and Gaza. But their role in party politics can also be found in Sudan and Tunisia. Islamists have led or co-led governments in deteriorating economic circumstances in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. In 2006, Hamas won a victory in Gaza which was quickly affected by international sanctions and Israeli containment policies. Both the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia have taken unusually pragmatic stances on courting international financial institutions and attracting investment.

**Economic Forces that Undermine the Status Quo**

Most of the Southern Neighborhood is relatively resource poor, except for Israel and Algeria. After the Arab uprisings, the IMF has lent money to Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. More often than not, the IMF gets blamed for any subsequent austerity programs which governments have undertaken to move closer to sustainability. There is increasing evidence to support why this might be the case. For example, in Egypt, while household income has risen 33% between 2015 and 2018, when adjusted for inflation it has actually dropped by 20% (El-Tablawy 2019). Adly (2019) shows that poverty has risen by 5% over the past three years, and has doubled since the early 1990s. The official poverty rate now stands at 32.5% in 2019 (Kaldas 2019). This despite more healthy macroeconomic indicators which show inflation is under control, interest rates have reduced, and the exchange rate is steady. Beyond funding a bloated public bureaucracy, the issue appears to focus on generating more labor-intensive jobs such as those in tourism and construction but which are often low skilled and poorly paid. Austerity including cutbacks in public expenditure to service billion dollar bailouts without a long-term growth strategy is not sustainable. Poor tax collection and tax holidays are another aspect which affect governments’ ability to generate more substantial income. But it is the combination of austerity and alleged government mismanagement or corruption which is one of the biggest threats to regime security. In September 2019, Friday protests began in Egypt again due in part to accusations by agitators often based in European countries such as Spain broadcasting via youtube videos. Mohamed
Ali, a building contractor turned whistleblower after the military allegedly failed to pay him $13 million, is one such individual (Saleh 2019).

The issue which underpins the status quo is the close relationship between the state and bourgeoisie which demand protection from foreign competition. Hinnebusch (2014, 25–26) finds that this contributes to a nationalist foreign policy while excluding the popular strata or methods of distributive capitalism. States have a choice: bandwagon with the core as they begin to liberalize and implement structural adjustment programs which means being unable to provide welfare to the masses, or veto austerity programs and find another way forward. So far, rather than engaging in meaningful economic reform, states such as Egypt have favored military production and dominated industries benefitting from no-bid contracts which deter foreign investment.

In other contexts, economics plays a different role. Mason’s work (2013, 405–425) highlights the Palestinian battle against an Israeli closures policy and attempts to develop the capacities of state which could be assisted further by the international community. Although Jared Kushner put forward an economic plan for Palestine, it was generally viewed as a pre-packaged deal which favored existing Israeli policy. No amount of promised investment can seem to sway the Palestinian leadership into compromise which further erodes its core bargaining position, and especially not before a new unity government can be established between Fatah and Hamas. In the mean time, the Israeli economy continues to improve, growth is strong and unemployment is falling. The OECD (2018) found that a dynamic high-tech sector, accommodative macro policies, and planned investments in offshore gas fields will spur further economic growth.

The EU blames Turkey’s increasingly authoritarian rule under president Erdogan for backsliding in the economy as well as the judiciary (Emmott 2019). Turkey has moved away from the market reforms imposed since the early 2000s and closer ties to Russia have alarmed western financial institutions which have affected the currency value. The Lebanese economy is set to shrink as it struggles with high interest rates, a high public deficit, political infighting including disagreements over structural reforms needed (Fahy 2019). Some plans about offshore gas exploration and extraction have surfaced, but given the geopolitical turmoil surrounding Lebanon and its own energy shortages, most will probably be earmarked for domestic use.
Seeking alternatives to the neoliberal economic model, MENA states are looking east to the Gulf States and China, but neither of these are likely to be in a position to provide long-term solutions. Modest trade and investment will provide support and likely stave off financial crisis in the near term. Longer term, these states might look to Israel, with a focus on innovation and establishing the macroeconomic conditions for successful enterprise. As Belhaj and Arezki (2019) at the World Bank suggest, there are still opportunities to participate in the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” through technology and mobile devices. Establishing broad-based economic growth across diverse industries may be the economic answer for states with large populations and high birth rates, but they may bring with them additional unwanted social changes which are more effective at contesting governance.

**Social Forces and Political Pluralism**

The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor who was humiliated by an official and had his wares confiscated on December 17, 2010, set in motion a series of protests which spread across the rural south and into the coastal cities of Tunisia. Uprisings quickly followed across the Middle East (notably in Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Libya), where people demanded jobs, better living conditions and greater freedoms. The Arab uprisings recalibrated our notion that the MENA region was largely devoid of popular social mobilization. Although highly variable across the region and subject to security (i.e., repression), as well as political and economic forces, social mobilization has been a feature of the region for many years. Israel and Turkey offer the greatest degree of openness in relatively democratic systems and had experienced the largest protests prior to 2010. Cammett et al. (2015, 390–391) show how these protests intensified in Israel in 2011 over Tel Aviv house prices and issues surrounding social justice. In Turkey, protests erupted over the urban development planned for Gezi Park in 2013. Even under repression, the Egyptian working class carried out strikes and protests from 1998 during the implementation of market-led economic reforms and from 2004 against single-party rule. In Tunisia, protests from 2008 generally involved dissatisfaction with unemployment, nepotism, and other forms of corruption. What would occur in the Arab uprisings was unusual not in the protest itself but in the frequency, intensity, and mass mobilization of the protests.
Generally the Arab uprisings have been categorized as issues related to political opportunity or openings, movement resources and the people’s perceptions of the issues at stake whether singly or collectively in groups or as a nation. The duration of the uprisings and the post-uprisings environment has generally been dominated by two changes. First, states removing further opportunities to protest, through repressive and other practices. Second, some states such as Morocco and Jordan learned from more negative experiences of the Arab uprisings and have engaged in limited reforms which have served to, at least temporarily, change the framing of the situation. Their mode of governance, as monarchies, cannot be discounted as a factor in their analysis and decision-making. Neither can identity politics which is often cited as the primary mode of social organization whether through religion or tribe. While this is still apparent, the political context for social organization has changed amid nonexistent or failed policies and ideologies.

Western attempts to encourage human rights, the rule of law and democratization from 2001 have been compromised by double standards and their own narrow interests concerning the region. This has allowed elites to maintain old international bonds with push back, promises of reform, or limited reforms being made. Old habits concerning state-centric security and neo-patrimonial networks continue to compromise the wealth and social mobility of the majority of the population. Western-dominated NGOs which push for reforms often have limited room for autonomy, being based in a country’s security and legislative context as well as a function of relations between host and head office states. The legal context can also shift. Egypt, for instance, introduced a 2017 NGO law Number 70 which placed severe limits on foreign NGOS, placing a narrow focus on their operations being development related, and adding a heavy security oversight and prison terms for those in breach of its provisions. It was amended in 2019 but TIMEP (2019) states that it still lacks widespread freedom of association and therefore runs contrary to Article 75 of the Egyptian Constitution. Civil society goes beyond NGOs to the role played by ordinary citizens in the country and since the Egyptian government is blamed for curbing freedoms and jailing dissenters to a high degree, while potentially extending the presidential term, the overall context looks to be unsatisfying from this point of view.

In Israel, EU countries have been told to stop funding left-wing human rights organizations which it accuses of delegitimizing Israel in the international community (Rettman 2015). In Turkey, there has been a
“backsliding” regarding civil society. EU supported NGOs are no longer included in legislative consultation processes in parliamentary committees since the attempted coup, while the European Commission (2019, 15) notes that pro-government organizations have continued to gain a more prominent role. In Morocco, although the NGO field looks more abundant, arbitrary bans have been reported, as has a general lack of consultation with civil society with regard to justice reform, a law on violence against women, and another on discrimination (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network 2015, 9–10).

In recognition of lack of traction on human rights and democracy, most EU activity is now confined to programs which support youth and culture in the Southern Neighborhood. The tensions will inevitably come down to regime security concerns often articulated as concerns about penetration from external interests in the context of colonial memory and postcolonial struggles, as well as within the context of first tackling terrorism. It is important to note that the role of NGOs is not only threatened in the Southern Neighborhood but also within the EU itself. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2018a) report on civil society highlights threats and smear campaigns, legal challenges, shrinking budgets, and a lack of appropriate consultation. Only in the UK and Slovenia has there been a special position created by the government to foster civil society–state relations. Poland and the Netherlands have headed in the opposite direction (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018b, 45). More serious intimidation and physical attacks have been reported in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and the Czech Republic (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018b, 48).

**Disconnects Between the ENP and MENA State Values**

The first EU-League of Arab States summit was a useful snapshot of current relations between the EU and states of the Southern Neighborhood which has tended to hinge on the issue of migration cooperation since 2015, specifically in curbing migration to Europe. While the summit was a positive step in itself, and in the bilateral meetings that took place on the margins, tensions were apparent and public. The divide between the EU and MENA was on clear display at the first EU-League of Arab States summit in Sharm El Sheikh when Herszenhorn (2019) reported President
Sisi as saying: “We have our ethics and morals. And you have your ethics. You have your morals.” The enthusiastic response by the Egyptian press was met with cynicism by Donald Tusk who responded “I really appreciate how enthusiastic your media are. It’s impossible in Europe to have such a reaction. Congratulations” (Barker and Peel 2019). The summit declaration was weak on the role of civil society, an area where the EU understands that there is little room for headway.

**Conclusion**

The greatest weakness of the Southern Neighborhood—governance—has been turned into a great strength for autocrats, in a form of leverage over the EU. Certainly states such as Egypt, with a population of 100 million and a high birth rate, are too big to fail. Coupled with their geostrategic position, North African states in general are effectively a buffer zone between sub-Saharan Africa, also with serious governance issues and the highest birth rates in the world, and Europe. This means the Southern Neighborhood is likely to be treated strictly in security terms over the coming decades. Covid-19 and the heightened sensitivities to transnational public health issues will most likely contribute to this mindset.

There are clearly opportunities for enhanced Euro-Med cooperation around certain themes such as stabilization and counterterrorism as discussed in the next chapter. The question on further cooperation is likely to be around what issues and institutional setting will be most appropriate: a role for the Arab League with limited capacities to deliver, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which has been compromised by the Qatar crisis since 2017, or the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which could address other global issues and include other normative influences and resources from non-MENA states? Certainly more dialogue between the EU and the Southern Neighborhood is necessary, as is a Middle East regional security framework which could facilitate indigenous security solutions and limit the much maligned external intervention which EU member states have played active roles in.
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