GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE LEVANT

Conflict, transactional relationships and identity dynamics

LAURA ADAL

FEBRUARY 2021

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE LEVANT

Conflict, transactional relationships and identity dynamics

Laura Adal

February 2021

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Adal is a senior analyst at the GI-TOC, where she provides research for a number of projects, analyzing a diverse range of organized-crime flows across the world. Laura is part of the core team in the development of the Organised Crime Index, which evaluates the relationship between criminality and country responses. She is a trained lawyer and previously worked at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Terrorism Prevention Branch, where she engaged in research related to terrorism and violent extremism, and provided legal counter-terrorism technical assistance to member states.

Cover: © *Delil Souleiman/AFP via Getty Images*
Cartography: Liezel Bohdanowicz

Please direct inquiries to:
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland

www.globalinitiative.net

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

GDP   gross domestic product

ISIS   Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

MENA   Middle East and North Africa

ODA   official development assistance

PKK   Kurdistan Workers' Party

PMF   Popular Mobilization Forces (Iraq)

PYD   Democratic Union Party

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

YPG   People's Protection Units (Syria)

Syrian refugees wait to cross into Jordan. Effects of the Syrian conflict have spilled over into neighbouring states, contributing to extended organized criminal flows. © *Khalil Mazraawi/AFP via Getty Images*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The coronavirus pandemic has placed additional burdens on infrastructure systems in the Levant. Here a worker sprays disinfectant in Jordan's archaeological city of Petra. *© Khalil Mazraawi/AFP via Getty Images*

The Middle East, a region with a long history and culture, has made important contributions to society as the cradle of civilization. Unfortunately, in contemporary times, the region has been marred by instability, power plays and conflict, most recently against the backdrop of the global coronavirus pandemic. This volatility not only undermines the roles of the region's institutions, national economies and the day-to-day lives of its populations, but has also had a significant impact on organized crime and illicit flows.

Throughout the 20th century, the Levant region (and in particular Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq, which are the focus of this report), has experienced a series of defining shifts, from the creation of states and changes in governing powers, to the discovery of crucial natural resources, military coups and the rise of religious extremism. Most recently, the Arab Spring of 2010 became a crucial turning point for the Levant and the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, when a series of anti-government protests and uprisings took place in response to oppressive regimes, low standards of living, and high unemployment rates for a largely young population.

Although organized crime has always been a feature in the region, illicit activities and flows have begun to rise in the context of this recent tumultuous backdrop – a growth facilitated by public disorder, deterioration in the capacity of state law-enforcement agencies and economic hardship. In the Levant, the effects of the Arab Spring a decade ago have triggered a protracted and brutal conflict in Syria, which has not only made violence and instability the norm in the country, but also affected its neighbours' political stability, social cohesion, and licit and illicit economies. Additionally, like much of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed further strain on the Levant's already weakened health, economic and social structures, fuelling uncertainty about citizens' welfare and the region's ability to recover. COVID-19 has also renewed opportunities for illicit activities to thrive and become a permanent and pervasive fixture in the region – even after the conflict ends and a vaccine is found.

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, analysis of the Levant region has been seen primarily through the lenses of national politics, identity and ideology. Nevertheless, there has been a growing awareness of the destabilizing impact of transnational and cross-border criminal economies, such as the regional mass movement of drugs, weapons, people and armed groups – particularly within the context of COVID-19, which has highlighted the interconnectedness of states and the consequences of both licit and illicit cross-border flows.

The illicit drug trade, most notably involving Captagon, a recreational amphetamine, has been a major illegal economy in Syria and even more so in the context of war. As drug trafficking becomes more prevalent, so does the potential for addiction and increased abuse by Syrians, refugees and local populations in neighbouring states. Moreover, the potential for pharmaceutical crimes has risen, as seizures of fake medical products related to COVID-19 have been reported in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.[1] Arms trafficking has also increased to meet the demands of war and resulted in increased levels of violence while emboldening traffickers. Finally, the displacement of millions of people has created large diasporas operating outside Syria, creating more external links that have the potential to contribute to extended organized criminal flows and spread the contagion, while at the same time, placing a heavy strain on the already tenuous public and economic services of their host countries.

The borders between the countries of the Levant have always been highly permeable. However, with the conflict, the distribution of power and the structure of the Syrian economy have largely changed into a state of affairs where scarcities in basic food-stuffs, materials and people have developed. Newer illicit economies have emerged to meet these shortages (in addition to the formalization of existing ones, like the illicit weapons and drugs markets), and with them, new actors (both foreign and local) have come into play. These dynamics have only been reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, illicit flows across shared borders with Syria have exacerbated pre-existing and somewhat latent political, economic and social tensions. In Lebanon, sectarian divides have been deepened and frustrations among its people experiencing difficult living conditions (made only more difficult by the influx of Syrian refugees) have contributed to the current unrest, the consequences of which remain to be seen. In Iraq, people have suffered the consequences of their own war and the rise of religious extremist groups, with seemingly no results to emerge from it yet (current protests by frustrated civilians have not been met with a peaceful response).[2] The escalating instability in these countries has affected financial flows both into and out of Syria. While in comparably stable Jordan, a country in which a major portion of the population is in fact Palestinian, dealing with the flow of arms and refugees across its vast desert borders has the potential to destabilize what is seen by external actors as a relatively neutral anchor in the region. While the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to effectively bring life (and societal frictions) to a standstill and divert public attention temporarily, illicit flows throughout the region continue and tensions have only risen amid the perceived inadequacy of government responses.

Internal and external dynamics

Both within and outside the context of COVID-19, an accurate analysis of organized crime and illicit flows in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan can best be carried out in two overlapping layers – one that looks at the interplay of local actors, and one that looks at the role of external actors in the region. This is a complex group of states, where elite figures, who are often lacking in democratic traditions, have a monopoly on resources, and where actors compete for resources, power and legitimacy, while strategically predicating this struggle on the notion of identity. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, resources and commodities that were once under government monopoly, are now controlled

by non-state actors either through violence, tense negotiation or a combination thereof. This competition for control between local state and non-state actors has now extended to the current health crisis, as the decimation of formal economies gives way to a greater reliance on illicit and informal flows, while 'legitimacy' is sought by criminals who offer citizens healthcare and the economic means to survive.

At the same time, various external powers have intervened in these complex regional dynamics, in pursuit of their own economic, political and/ or security interests. In doing so, they have either intentionally or unintentionally affected illicit cross-border activities. In this sense, patterns of criminality in this region should not necessarily be viewed within a criminal context, but through a political and economic lens. In other words, it appears that all actors involved have their hands in the proverbial pot when it comes to organized crime, leaving a destabilized and often violent environment for civilians in the region.

The intersection between these two layers – external political-economic forces and internal power-seeking self-interest – is nowhere more evident than in the ebb and flow of territorial control. Over the course of the Syrian conflict, as local actors (both state and non-state) gain territory, aided by external proxies, they simultaneously gain access to informal markets and illicit flows within these territories, using them to their advantage in furthering war efforts and building legitimacy, which are often justified by identity-based alliances. This is true both within Syria as well as its neighbours' borderlands. In parallel, external actors, through either ideological, political or economically motivated support, bolster local actors in their bid to gain or lose territory, thereby shifting control of illicit flows. Amid these strategic

power plays, it is local people who inevitably suffer the most, living with violence, sectarian tensions, weakened infrastructure and economic instability.

As the conflict in Syria winds down and the region adapts to handling COVID-19 in the long term, war-to-peace transitions provide a window of opportunity to create and reinforce new political economy dynamics, either positive or negative, which become much more difficult to adapt once fully established. Ensuring regional stability in an environment of changing political economies that are linked to the Syrian conflict and the current health crisis poses a significant challenge to limiting the negative impact in Syria and on neighbouring countries. Understanding regional dynamics, actors and impacts is essential in developing realistic interventions in the region that promote stability, peace and adherence to the rule of law within the short, medium and long term.

This report analyzes organized-crime economies in the political-economic context of Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, and their links to the current Syrian conflict and amid the pandemic. In the first section, key transnational organized crime markets of the region are identified and their intersections and impact mapped out. The second section explores the drivers and political dynamics affecting local illicit economies and how they interrelate with issues of regional stability, not only in terms of violence and armed conflict, but also in terms of how they contribute to fragility through corruption, by undermining institutions and weakening the rule of law in the COVID-19 era. The third section focuses on regional and country contexts, outlining key players and dynamics. The paper concludes by exploring how these illicit market and flows pose challenges to development and stability objectives, and proposes recommendations on focus areas for establishing effective development programmes.
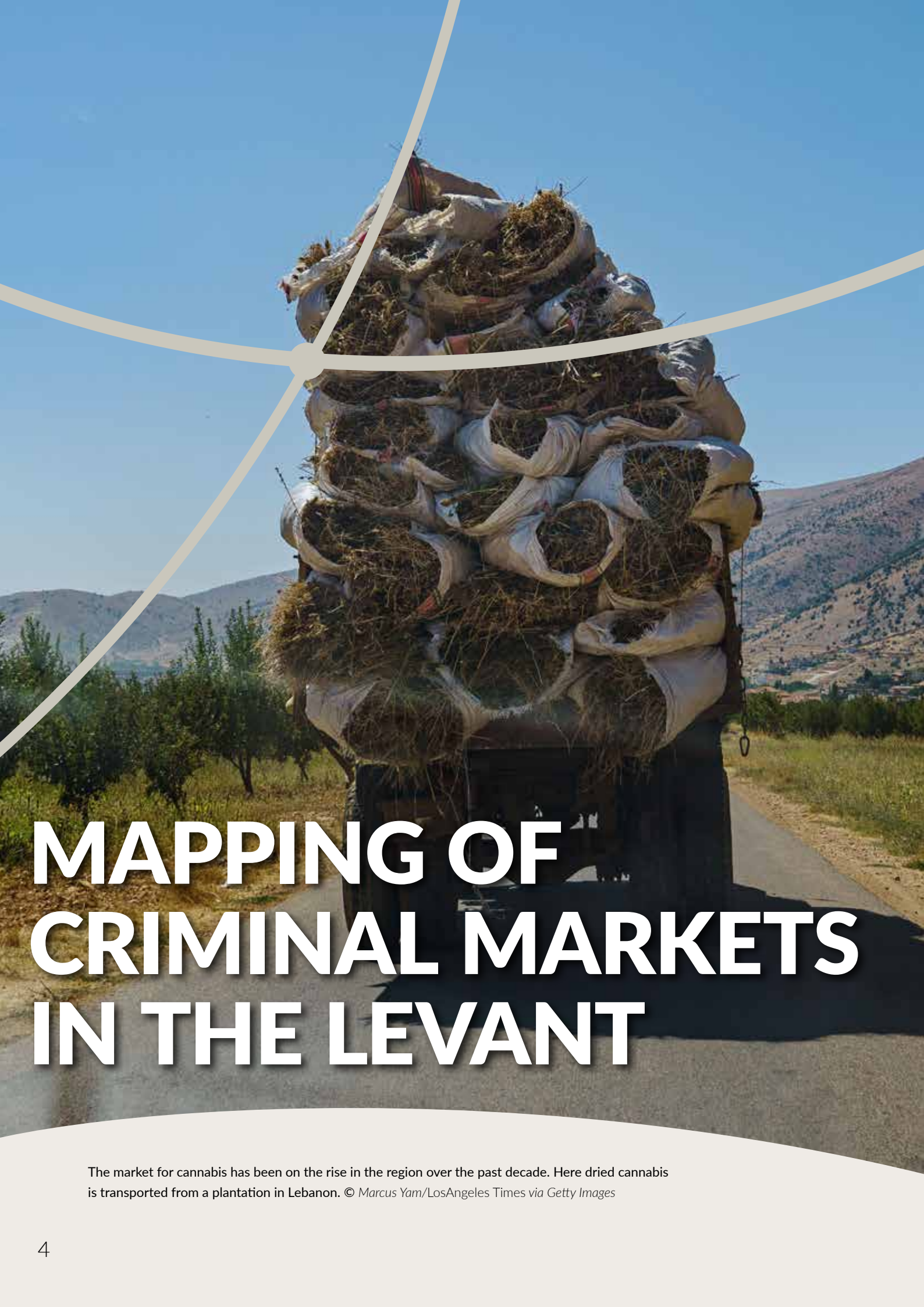
MAPPING OF CRIMINAL MARKETS IN THE LEVANT

The market for cannabis has been on the rise in the region over the past decade. Here dried cannabis is transported from a plantation in Lebanon. © *Marcus Yam*/LosAngeles Times *via Getty Images*

O rganized crime and illicit economies in the Levant are as varied as they are prominent. The region's location on the Mediterranean Sea and at the intersection between Europe, Africa and Asia make this area particularly well placed to facilitate the transnational movement of commodities and people (both formally and informally).

Organized crime in the region is tied firmly to a legacy of historical links and dynamics. Syria and Lebanon in particular are tightly bound commercially, linguistically, socially and politically, and these ties translate into an environment where illicit economies in one country directly affect society in the other. Likewise, Syria's lengthy desert borders with Jordan and Iraq have been historically fluid, with local tribes moving across them. Lack of border control is owed to limited political will, coupled with the practical challenges of providing meaningful coverage over these vast borders that extend along tough terrain. These circumstances allow for criminals and other locals to move commodities illicitly between countries with little difficulty.

Known as both the Fertile Crescent and the cradle of civilization, the Levant is rich in foodstuffs, natural resources and cultural artefacts, all of which have been exploited and enveloped by the illicit economy, and even more so within the context of war and the coronavirus pandemic.[3] For the purposes of this report however, analysis of criminal markets will be limited to the illicit drugs, arms and people markets, as these economies have arguably been the most prominent drivers of regional instability and violence.

The following sections provide an overview of these illicit economies, including the flows of goods and people; regional hotspots of each illicit trade; associated prices of illicit commodities and trade, where available; and the impact of these illicit economies.

Drug trafficking

Even in regions that are free of conflict, the illicit drug trade can have devastating effects on countries' economies, and the health and well-being of users and their families. Within the context of war and in an already unstable region, however, profits from the drug trade detract from the formal economy and are often used to sustain violence. Meanwhile, illicit drug trafficking encourages addiction in local communities, among those suffering from the trauma of conflict, as well as combatants seeking a boost to their fighting abilities.[4] With state resources directed towards heath and security measures, little oversight is given to cultivation and proper uses of precursor chemicals and ingredients, leading to a free-for-all in the production of narcotics, with untold effects. As the global health crisis continues to unfold, temporary disruptions to regional supply chains are accompanied by new opportunities for criminal expansion, as counterfeit drugs and substandard medical supplies circulate in an uncharted and chaotic environment.
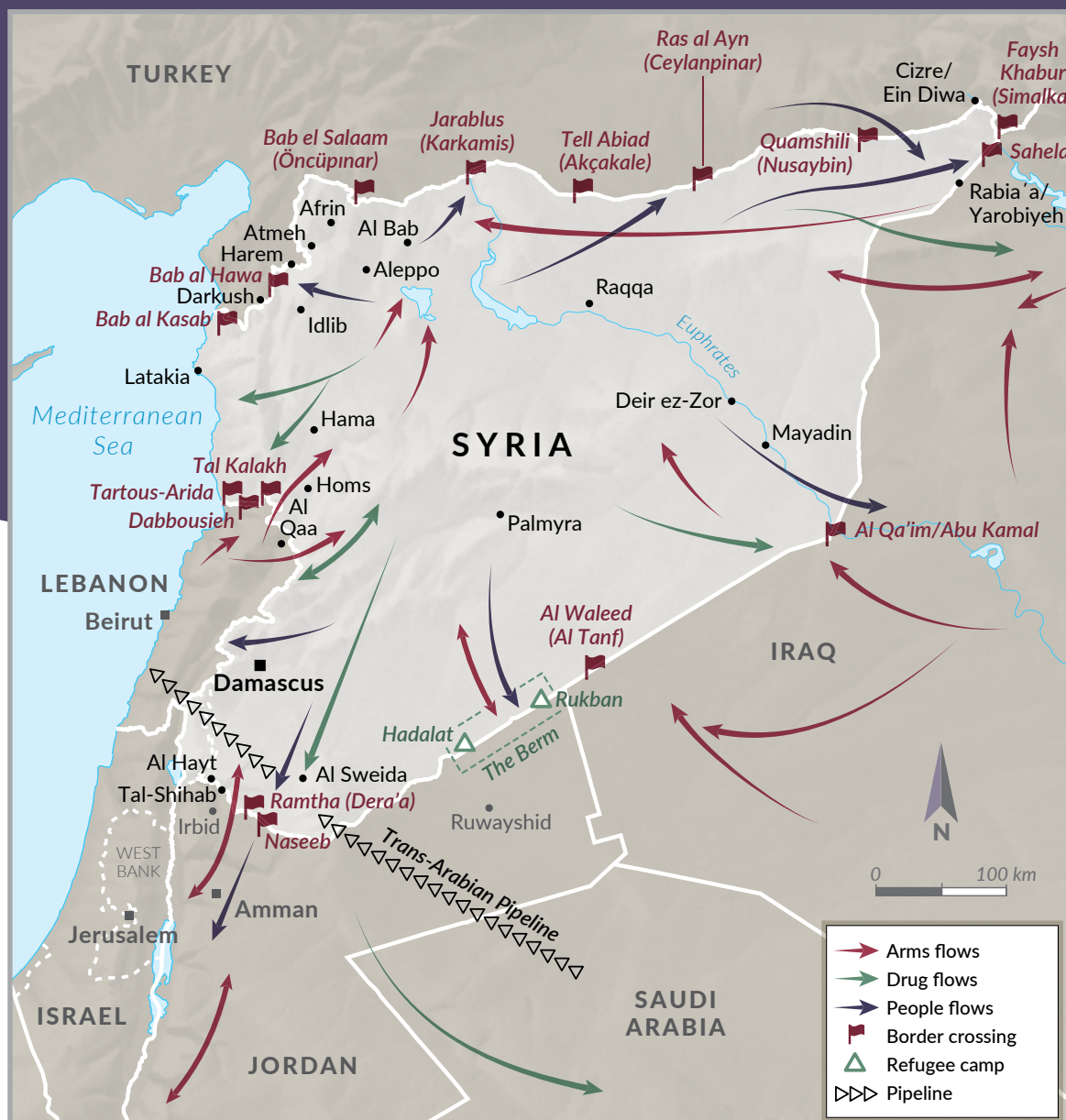
In July 2020, Captagon tablets originating in Syria with an estimated value of approximately US$1.13 billion were seized.

Drug trafficking in the Levant is a significant phenomenon, and reportedly on the rise, particularly in cannabis and synthetic narcotics, and, to a lesser degree, opioids, since the war in Syria began. Although trafficking of drugs such as cocaine and heroin occurs in the region, trade in these products is comparably smaller due to their high costs and limited local demand. The Levant serves primarily as a transit zone for shipments of such high-value drugs bound for the Gulf states, Turkey and Europe.[5] Heroin originating from Afghanistan is trafficked through Iran and Iraq, entering Syria (concentrated in Damascus, Aleppo and along the coast) for redistribution into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey and onward to Europe.[6]

Notable hubs in the drug trade include the Syrian port cities of Tartous and Latakia, near the borders of Lebanon and Turkey, respectively.[7] In Syria's western regions, actors involved in the drug trade are closely connected with Lebanese counterparts concentrated primarily in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. As both countries have access to the sea and most of Lebanon – to its north and east – borders with Syria, illicit goods, including drugs, are able to pass to and from the neighbouring countries with relative ease.

Drug flows from Syria also pass through Jordan's northern border, through towns such as Al-Mafraq, coinciding with the influx of refugees, and are transported south towards Egypt and the Arabian Gulf.[8] Although there is comparably less information on drug routes between Syria and Iraq, border towns, such as Al-Qa'im, on the Euphrates, and Sulaimani in Iraqi Kurdistan, have been identified as smuggling hubs.[9]

Synthetic drugs, and specifically Captagon, account for a very large portion of Syria's drug economies.[10] Captagon is exported to Lebanon, and by land, sea and air to the Arabian Peninsula (primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), as well as to neighbouring Jordan and Turkey, and beyond.[11] Although Captagon production and trafficking was happening in Syria long before the conflict broke out (manufacturing was shifted from South Eastern Europe and Turkey to Syria),[12] research suggests that the breakdown of the rule of law in the country has allowed production and trafficking of this highly lucrative narcotic to accelerate. For example, along the Syria–Lebanon border between 2013 and 2014, it was

FIGURE 1 Major border crossings in Syria (official and unofficial) and illicit flows.

NOTE: It is currently unclear which border crossings are official and which are unofficial.

estimated that around 30 million pills were seized, nearly double the volume seized the previous year.[13] In July 2019, Greek authorities seized 33 million Captagon pills, worth more than US$660 million, a value that is greater than all of Syria's 2017 exports combined.[14] Most recently in July 2020, a reported 84 million Captagon tablets originating in Syria (with an estimated worth of approximately US$1.13 billion) were seized by Italian law enforcement agencies.[15] The seizure has been described as the largest drug bust of amphetamines in the world, and offers both a clear indication of the continuation of illicit flows amid a global crisis,[16] and a telling illustration of the sheer magnitude of this single illicit market.[17]

Recently, the Captagon market has reportedly expanded into neighbouring countries, particularly Lebanon.[18] A surge in seizures in that country suggest that it has transformed from being a transit zone into an alternative point of production. The market for this drug in Lebanon has enormous export revenue potential, with a batch of 200 pills in Lebanon selling for about US$70, compared to US$10–20 for a single pill

Synthetic drugs, particularly Captagon, shown here, account for a large portion of Syria's illicit drug economy.
© *Louai Beshara/AFP via Getty Images*

in Gulf states.[19] In 2016, estimates indicate that the Captagon business in Lebanon was worth more than US$1 billion.[20] In April 2019, Lebanese law enforcement confiscated more than 800 000 Captagon pills, worth over US$12 million, with the help of Saudi authorities.[21] An enabling factor for the spillover into Lebanon is availability of the precursor chemicals.[22] Moreover, lack of monitoring of pharmacies and pharmaceutical manufacturing plants have made chemicals used for drug production cheap and easy to obtain.

In addition to synthetic drugs, the market for cannabis has also been on the rise in the region over the past decade due to widespread demand and its low costs (research on Syria revealed that, on average, 100 grams of cannabis does not exceed US$10).[23] Lebanon is one of the most prolific producers of cannabis in the world: a 2016 UNODC assessment indicated that the country is the world's third-largest producer of hashish.[24] Concentrated primarily in the Beqaa Valley in the east of the country, the cultivation of cannabis dates back to before the country's civil war era, after which the industry has subsequently flourished.[25] According

to one estimate, almost 40% of the available agricultural land in Beqaa is currently used to grow cannabis, which is then distributed throughout the region and abroad.[26] On 16 March 2020, one day after Lebanon announced a lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19, authorities made the largest cannabis seizure in the country's history, confiscating about 25 tonnes of cannabis en route to Beirut's port, bound for Africa.[27] The sheer size of the seizure suggests that the cannabis market is not only continuing undeterred by the pandemic, but actually growing.

In contrast to Lebanon, which firmly serves as both a source and transit country, Jordan and Iraq are described as primarily corridors for the illicit drug trade. The triple border of Jordan, Syria and Iraq is a recognized smuggling hub for the regional illicit drug economy, where seizures of Captagon, methamphetamine and prescription drugs have reportedly been on the rise.[28]

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the climate of lawlessness in Iraq has created an environment conducive to smuggling. The Syrian conflict next

door, coupled with the Iraq's already atrophied criminal-justice system post-2003, has enabled drug flows to increase through the country, emboldening traffickers to accelerate these illicit activities. In addition to desert towns such as Al-Qa'im[29] on the Syrian–Iraqi border, there have been several reports of drug-trafficking cases in Iraqi Kurdistan. In May 2017, for example, 316 people were detained in Sulaimani on drug-trafficking offences.[30] In the south-east of the country, the port of Basra has been identified as a drugs hub, where oil smuggling has been replaced by the trafficking of heroin and methamphetamines. Over 80 kg of narcotics were seized in Basra – largely meth and cannabis – between January and August 2016, a significant increase from the 7 kg seized in the area throughout 2015.[31] Other major hubs in the country include the towns of Maysan, Amara, Abdali and Safwan,[32] through which drugs are trafficked on the way to the Gulf. In July 2018, Kuwaiti authorities detained a Syrian truck driver in Abdali (on the Kuwait–Iraq border) carrying over 300 000 Captagon tablets.[33]

In Jordan, although little information can be found on the illicit drug trade, reports do indicate that drug trafficking is also on the rise in that country. In 2018, large amounts of precursor chemicals, including benzyl cyanide (a compound typically used for anti-biotics) were seized in a Jordanian Captagon laboratory.[34] Overall, however, Jordan, like Iraq, has generally been described as a transit zone, though, in recent years, a growing domestic consumption market has also been reported, with hashish being the most commonly consumed drug.[35] Officials have reported an increase in seizures of narcotics along Jordan's border with Syria. In 2018, authorities seized a record of 47 million Captagon pills, 2 093 kg of hashish, 155 kg of 'joker' (a term used for synthetic cannabis), 74 738 kg of marijuana, 10 557 kg of heroin, 1 693 kg of cocaine and 820 790 various pills.[36] While in 2017, Jordanian authorities seized over 41 million Captagon pills, 61 kg of heroin, 2 038 kg of hashish and 331 kg of marijuana.[37] In the same year, there were 29 reported cases of attempted border infiltration from Syria – these included incidents of drug smuggling and terrorism.[38] Most recently, in 2020, numerous reports indicate that Jordanian law enforcement foiled several attempts by drug smugglers to bring cannabis and synthetic pills from Syria, illustrating the persistence of the drug market in spite of COVID-19 border closures.[39]

Jordanian officials have said that drug smugglers target richer Gulf countries because one Captagon pill in the Gulf is worth seven Jordanian dinars (US$10), whereas its market value in Jordan is around one Jordanian dinar (US$1.50) per pill.[40] According to interviews in the region, prices for higher-value drugs range from 70 to 90 dinars (approximately US$98–126), per gram of heroin and 100 to 150 dinars (US$140–210) per gram of cocaine.[41]

These stark variations in drug prices further support inferences of the size and dynamics of the drug market in the Levant. Higher prices for narcotics such as heroin and cocaine may suggest that consumer markets for these drugs are smaller in Jordan as well as other countries that are more impacted by the Syrian conflict and have suffered from stunted economies. At the same time, the sharp increase in drug prices for narcotics such as Captagon support Jordan's (as well as Syria, Lebanon and Iraq's) role as a provider of narcotics to the Gulf, a consumer market where organized criminals stand to make greater profits than in the domestic market.

2018 SEIZURES
Jordan–Syria border

47 million
Captagon pills

2 093 kg
Hashish

155 kg
'Joker'

74 738 kg
Marijuana

10 557 kg
Heroin

1 693 kg
Cocaine

820 790
Various pills

Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, the criminal drug market has not only been able to adapt, but expand, as the health crisis has presented a new opportunity for the production and sale of counterfeit or substandard medicines and medical supplies. In July 2020, it was revealed that an INTERPOL-led operation targeting criminal networks in the wider MENA region, including Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, seized nearly 20 million illicit medical products worth an estimated US$14 million.[42] Although the specific products seized in each country are unclear, among the illegal products, including Captagon pills, Tramadol, tranquillizers, syringes and face masks, 360 sanitizing products were confiscated in Jordan.[43] Meanwhile, in Lebanon reports indicate a rise in the manufacturing of fake cleaning and sterilization supplies that are proven ineffective against the coronavirus.[44] In Iraq, widespread reports of misinformation surrounding COVID-19, compounded with an inability to enforce border closures[45] and mass shortages of adequate medical equipment and supplies[46] suggest a high risk of black-market smuggling in these items.[47]

Arms trafficking

Volatility in the Levant has made the region a host to enormous stockpiles of weapons over the past decades. With government controls weakened, proliferation of weapons has increased, particularly at the hands of non-state actors and civilians. Governments (both local and external) either openly or clandestinely supply arms to factions they favour for political reasons or for access to resources, with no guarantee that these weapons end up where they were intended. Moreover, the proliferation of arms has allowed organized-criminal and terrorist organizations to use violence or the threat thereof to further their illicit businesses (in the form of extortion and illicit taxation). For ordinary citizens across the region, conflict in Syria has fuelled a sense of urgency in the face of which they feel the

Seized weapons on display at a Syrian Democratic Forces base. Conflicts in the region have resulted in huge stockpiles of weapons, fuelling arms-trafficking networks. *© Chris McGrath/Getty Images*

Guns on display at an arms market in Erbil, in the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, August 2014.
© UPI/Ayad Rasheed via Alamy Stock Photo

need to arm themselves for protection in an increasingly unstable environment.

The illicit arms trade has increased significantly since the Syrian conflict began. Although most of these weapons have been in the region because of previous wars (for example, most arms circulating in Lebanon today were from the civil war or imported from Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein),[48] the redistribution of weapons since the Syrian conflict began has resulted in the widespread arming of combatants, criminals and civilians throughout the Levant, furthering violence and the loss of life.

Before the conflict began in 2011, Syria had comparably fewer arms in civilian hands than its neighbours.[49] However, as the war waged on, small-scale local arms-smuggling groups were soon replaced by criminal organizations involved in more 'professional' arms trafficking to and from Syria and its neighbours. Taking advantage of the war and the consequent chaos in

Syria, arms-trafficking networks capitalized on the situation and their trade saw an unprecedented surge.[50]

Today, neighbouring countries serve primarily as source points of arms flows into Syria, though there have also been reported increases in unlicensed weapons among the general populations throughout the region.[51] Arms are not only easily smuggled across borders (often hidden in trucks carrying produce)[52] – reports also suggest that purchasing a weapon is easy, and that they can be bought online or by using encrypted instant messaging phone apps.[53] In parts of Syria, particularly in the north-east and extending into Iraqi Kurdistan,[54] weapons are displayed and sold in bazaars, highlighting the openness and ease with which arms are available to anyone who can afford them, and which makes them particularly difficult to trace.

In Lebanon, there are reports of arms traders (particularly in the north of the country) who act as

intermediaries, buying weapons from Lebanese citizens and selling them to Syrian rebel groups (primarily the Free Syrian Army at the beginning of the conflict). Tripoli, a town in northern Lebanon, and a stronghold of Sunni Muslims, a denomination opposed to the Syrian regime, has been cited as a major hub for transporting arms to Syria to support the rebel cause.[55] Arms smugglers move weapons towards the al-Nahr al-Kabir al-Janoubi river on the border, and the Wadi Khalid area.[56] From there, they are transported inland towards Syria, reaching illegal crossings found throughout the rugged terrain between Arsal and Ras Baalbeck.[57] In Syria, the unlicensed arms trade has become widespread in rural Aleppo and surrounding cities such as Al-Bab, Azaz, Afrin and Marea, where civilians can easily acquire weapons.[58]

Syria has also been a recipient of arms from Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Libya, although these flows are considerably more limited than those originating in Lebanon. From Iraq, arms circulating since the fall of Saddam Hussein are smuggled from Iraq's western province of Anbar (by both Sunni Iraqi tribes and pro-regime groups) into eastern Syria (via Deir ez-Zor) bound for counterpart forces.[59] Anbar also borders Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and with its remote hills and caves, has long been a haven for smugglers.

In the north of the country, Iraq's Kurdistan Region's Independent Commission for Human Rights has said that there is a growing illegal trade in guns and weapons in Sulaimani (a known drug-trafficking hub) due to a lack of gun controls.[60] Reportedly, all that is needed to obtain a gun is cash and an Iraqi ID card.[61] Research found that in 2017, the cheapest gun for purchase was a Turkish pistol (cost: 40 000 Iraqi dinars, or US$34), while an AK-47 (known locally as an 'Osama') fetched approximately US$2 500.[62] The northern Iraqi city of Mosul has also been reported to be a weapons hub, with media coverage in 2017 of arms from Afrin (a Kurdish controlled area in north-western Syria) reaching the city via the Rabia border crossing.[63]

Before the Syrian regime recaptured its southern provinces, arms flows from northern Jordan

into opposition strongholds, such as Dera'a, substantially increased after the Syrian conflict began. Seizures were reported at the Tall Shihab border crossing of arms intended for the Syrian villages of Burayqah and Kudnah, near the Golan Heights.[64] Government security agencies in Jordan seized 300% more weapons and firearms at its border with Syria in 2013 than in the previous year.[65] In 2018, Jordanian officials reported uncovering a drug- and weapons-smuggling operation along the disused 1 200-km Trans-Arabian Pipeline, linking Saudi Arabia to Lebanon via Jordan.[66]

Arms flows from Jordan have also been reported to pass through the Al-Hammad Desert between Al-Tanf and Al-Sweida.[67] Like Syria, there have been a number of cases in Jordan of weapons being sold at 'arms bazaars', particularly in the town of Ma'an in the south, in Sahab, near the capital, Amman,[68] and in the Jordan Valley, where anyone with sufficient cash could purchase a firearm. It has been reported that smuggled arms have also passed through the Al-Rukban refugee camp on the Syrian–Jordanian border, where criminal networks aligned with various factions in the Syrian conflict have been reportedly hiding.[69] In 2019, unconfirmed reports suggest that weapons smuggled in from Syria transited through Jordan into Israel destined for pro-Palestinian groups.[70]

In the context of the Syrian conflict, Syria's neighbours serve primarily as either source or transit zones for the flows of arms. However, research shows that the war in Syria has also brought about a growing proliferation of arms domestically in these countries. The instability next door, coupled with a flood of refugees exiting Syria (who pose an increased risk of becoming radicalized), has led to a growing demand for arms among civilian populations in countries like Lebanon and Jordan for self-protection.[71] Organized-crime 'entrepreneurs' have been all too willing to meet this demand.

Lebanon, for example, has had a long history of arms trading since its own civil war, driven mainly by sectarian tensions within the country. With more radicalized groups emerging throughout the country, aligning themselves with different factions

in the nearby Syrian conflict, a growing local market for unlicensed arms purchases has been reported, particularly among Christian communities, who feel threatened.[72] The Small Arms Survey estimated that in 2018, there were almost 2 million firearms in civilian possession, with a rate of 31.9 firearms per 100 persons, ranking Lebanon ninth in the world for the number of civilian-held firearms.[73] Market demand in Lebanon can be said to be contingent on inter-communal flare-ups,[74] which, in turn, are connected to identity-based factions in the Syrian conflict. In August 2020, Lebanese authorities intercepted thousands of rounds of ammunition being smuggled across the border from Syria.[75] According to reporting, following the explosion that month at the Port of Beirut, prices for arms have been rising, with the most in-demand weapons being of Russian or American origin, ranging from US$500 to US$1 500.[76]

In Jordan, although the country's tribal Bedouin history and culture have meant that arms are more normalized than in Lebanon, the government has tried to limit the flow of unlicensed arms circulating in the country.[77] Concerns over spillover from the Syrian conflict, have led to a growth in the domestic illegal arms economy, as flows into Syria inevitably feed into the local black market. In 2014, the commander of Jordan's Border Guard Forces said that two-way arms-smuggling activity along the 370-km border with Syria had increased threefold and infiltration attempts by 250% since the previous year.[78] Despite a lack of more recent statistics on Jordanian arms trafficking, available figures clearly highlight the imbalance between legally and illegally obtained weapons. In 2014, it was estimated by the country's interior ministry that more than a million unlicensed guns were in circulation in the country, whose population at the time was 7 million, compared to a mere 120 000 licensed weapons.[79]

Prices for arms in Jordan have also increased since the Syrian war began. While Turkish-made pump-action shotguns and tactical M7 pistols are reportedly favoured because of their affordability, prices of some weapons have rocketed tenfold recently, with a Belgian-made M9 Browning pistol leaping from 200 Jordanian dinars (US$280) before the Syrian conflict to more than 1 800 dinars (US$2 620) in 2014.[80] Similarly, the price of an AK-47 automatic rifle soared from 200 dinars (US$280) in 2012 to more than 3 000 dinars (US$4 230) in 2014.[81]

Although little information is available on arms smuggling in Jordan over the past five years, the recent government crackdown on illicit sales suggest the criminal market has become rampant.[82] In 2019, the Jordanian government was set to pass a new arms law to curb arms smuggling, and the country's security campaign has led to the arrest of 750 people on firearms charges and the seizure of nearly 900 illegally owned weapons over a two-month period in the summer of 2019.[83]

In this highly weaponized region, illicit arms and conflict are linked in a cycle in which one sustains the other. Arms remain in circulation after their initial use and become deployed by others, often falling into the hands of unintended users (such as Islamic State in Iraq), creating a highly volatile environment where the lives of citizens are continuously threatened.

**2018
LEBANON**

2 million firearms
in civilian possession

31.9 firearms
per **100** people

9th
World ranking for
civilian-held firearms

A refugee camp in Idlib, Syria. The conflict has spawned a regional market for human smuggling and trafficking.
© Muhammed Said/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Human smuggling

Perhaps the largest of the illicit economies in the Levant has been built around the movement of people. The human-smuggling market that has been spawned in the region as a result of the Syrian conflict – and, associated with it, human trafficking – is the illicit economy that has undoubtedly garnered the most attention internationally. The illicit arms and drugs markets have had devastating effects on the Levant, prolonging the war and fuelling violence and instability. But it is human smuggling and the ensuing migration crisis that have had the biggest direct impact on not only Syria's immediate neighbours, but also the rest of the world – particularly Europe (and even more so amid the COVID-19 pandemic).

Often smuggled voluntarily across borders, asylum-seekers face financial hardship, homelessness and uncertain futures, leaving them vulnerable to being trafficked. At the same time, the sheer numbers of migrants flowing into neighbouring countries, particularly Lebanon and Turkey (the latter is by far the largest host country for Syrian refugees in the region),[84] compounded by the length of the conflict and the current health crisis, have placed a heavy burden on already fragile infrastructures. The result is an alarming amount of disenfranchised, alienated people who live in often hostile host environments, who are not only vulnerable to being trafficked, and contracting and spreading the virus, but are also at risk of being radicalized and who may participate in organized-criminal activities as a means of deriving an income.

Notably, with the Syrian conflict nearing an end, the direction of the human-smuggling flows has, in some instances, reversed. The worsening situations in host countries, coupled with the discrimination Syrian refugees face in neighbouring countries, have led some to seek ways to be smuggled back into Syria. Although there are no official numbers concerning the returnees, local sources confirm that people from Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan and Lebanon, have managed to re-enter the country illegally.[85]

The UN has estimated that since 2011, approximately 6 million people have had to flee their homes in Syria to escape the horrors of war.[86] In the early years of the conflict, there was a free flow of Syrian nationals moving into neighbouring countries. Later, the deterioration of health, housing and economic infrastructure, coupled with mounting bureaucratic requirements introduced by host countries designed to mitigate the influx of refugees, however, led to the emergence of thriving smuggling markets. In Syria, professional smugglers and other actors often demand thousands of dollars to move people to Turkey or Lebanon to escape violence, or to avoid military service or being arrested by the regime.[87] In such cases, individuals are typically provided with so-called security identity cards under a different name, and their exit from Syria is arranged using military vehicles to avoid their being stopped at checkpoints.[88]

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world and in the region have imposed restrictions both at borders and within countries to limit the movement of people in an effort to curb the spread of the virus. While little has been reported so far on the impact of COVID-19 on human smuggling in Syria and its neighbours specifically,[89] it is likely that border controls may have reduced the illicit market in the short term. For the Levant, however, the health crisis has only compounded the dire living conditions of individuals who already cope with violence and a lack of livelihood. With safe official routes to escape these conditions now closed off, more individuals may turn to smugglers, who may charge higher prices to match the heightened risk. In other words, COVID-19 may in the end add to the drivers that fuel human smuggling, making migrants and refugees more vulnerable to exploitation and leading to potentially significant growth in the human smuggling market in the region post-COVID-19.[90]

Migrants in Lebanon

Because of its vicinity to and close cultural, social, economic and political ties with Syria, Lebanon has borne the brunt of the migrant crisis compared to Jordan and Iraq, serving as both a destination country and transit point for people looking to flee the region. Official estimates put approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon, nearly a quarter of the country's population.[91] Smuggling operations take place along the entire length of the country's 375-km border with Syria – a boundary that has five official border control points but, reportedly, 120 to 150 illegal crossings (see Figure 2).[92]

Perhaps the largest of the illicit economies in the Levant has been built around the movement of people

FIGURE 2 Official Lebanese-Syrian border crossing points.

Many Syrians attempt to cross the border legally but are faced with a US$2 000 'hotel fee' imposed by the Lebanese General Security, forcing many to turn to Lebanese smugglers to cross the border.[93] The Masnaa border crossing (see Figure 2) has been identified as a major smuggling hub,[94] as have several points in the Beqaa Valley, an area known to be a hive of other illicit activities, including arms and drug trafficking.[95] While current prices amid the COVID-19 crisis are not yet known, reports indicate that generally, the cost to cross into Lebanon from the Syrian border is around US$100, but this increases to somewhere between US$500 and US$1 500 if the individual seeking to enter Lebanon is either wanted by the regime for rebel activities or has been conscripted for military service.[96]

Once in Lebanon, conditions for Syrian refugees are often bleak. Initially, Lebanese authorities were welcoming to incoming asylum-seekers, but the number of Syrians entering the country has increased so dramatically that an enormous burden has been placed on Lebanon's already weak public infrastructure, and even more so during the pandemic. As the country is saturated with a growing population,

refugee and host communities compete with each other for housing, jobs, medical care and education, and Syrians are often faced with discrimination from locals.[97] Years of overcrowding and declining public services to the wider public have significantly added to social tensions, and this is regularly cited as one of the factors in the current protests that began in the country in October 2019.[98]

In the COVID-19 era, and particularly following the Beirut explosion in August 2020, growing strains on the healthcare infrastructures has led some communities to adopt more restrictive measures against irregular migrants and refugees (from Syria and elsewhere).[99] For example, some municipalities have reportedly enforced extra curfews on Syrian refugees,[100] while other reports include hospitals turning undocumented workers away or setting excessively high prices for treatment.[101] These measures not only increase the risk of trafficking, but also raise the likelihood of those unable to receive treatment to become vectors of the virus in host communities throughout the country.[102]

Since January 2015, all Syrians older than 15 and registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are now required to pay an annual US$200 renewal fee to the Lebanese state – a lot of money for the 70% of Syrians in the country who live below the poverty line.[103] Moreover, those who had not registered with the UNHCR are required to secure the 'sponsorship' of a Lebanese national. According to a paper published in the *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Lebanese authorities grant only temporary papers to unregistered Syrian refugees, with strict deadlines for producing legal documents, failure to produce which would mean they would be deported to Syria.[104] Since mid-2014, Lebanon has been monitoring border crossings in order to 'deregister' Syrian refugees who cross back into Syria – with 68 000 Syrians having their status revoked between June and October 2014 alone.[105] Although there are conflicting numbers, the Lebanese General Security Directorate estimates that over 170 000 Syrians returned to Syria between December 2017 and March 2019.[106]

These restrictions have provided an opportunity for criminal groups to step in. Those who cannot afford exorbitant fees or the risk of being sent home seek smugglers to facilitate their entry into and exit from Lebanon. Moreover, the country's sponsorship scheme has led to the exploitation of many Syrian refugees by Lebanese citizens, increasing their risk of being trafficked. According to a December 2014 directive by the General Security Directorate, Lebanese contractors are forced to bear the cost of sponsoring each Syrian worker – estimated at US$2 000 annually, including the cost of work and residence permits, health insurance and notary contracts. In order to tolerate the risk, a sponsorship 'market' has emerged.[107] According to one source, Lebanese sponsorships are sold for up to US$1 000 to new arrivals to allow them to meet Lebanese legal requirements.[108] Once inside, refugees are at the mercy of their sponsors and are at risk of being trafficked.[109]

Exploitation of migrants takes on many forms, one of which is sex trafficking. According to reports, many women trafficked into Lebanon enter the country under what is called an 'artist visa', which has become synonymous with forced prostitution.[110] Lured into Lebanon with the promise of work, upon arrival, they are told they must pay back the money spent on their work papers and often have their travel documents seized. In 2016, it was reported that 75 Syrian women, who had been enslaved, beaten and forced into prostitution, escaped the red-light district of Maameltein, north of Beirut.[111]

Smuggling activities in Lebanon are not only concentrated on the border. Reports describe brokers from 'travel agencies' in the Sabra area of southern Beirut who look for clients and negotiate their crossing by selling the journey as an adventure and downplaying the dangers.[112] Most clients include Syrian refugees with uncompleted Lebanese residency permits, who would have to pay a fee to arrange their papers.[113]

In light of the pandemic, recently imposed restrictions on movement, while necessary to curb the spread of the virus, could serve to isolate trafficked victims, and increase the vulnerability of others to exploitation.

Asylum-seekers in Jordan

While Lebanon is often the first-choice destination for Syrians in western Syria, Jordan has also become a significant destination for asylum-seekers. Since June 2011, it is estimated that over 1.4 million Syrians have fled to Jordan, equivalent to 14% of the Jordanian population.[114] Between 2011 and 2012, the country at first accepted hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. However, following an influx in 2013, the Jordanian government implemented severe border policies, closing the western part of its border with Syria.[115] In 2014, Jordan then closed its eastern border as well, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis for Syrian asylum-seekers from Hama, Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and Dara'a.[116]

The border closures led to a rise in smuggling activities between the two countries. Smuggling operations into Jordan have been monopolized by tribal groups present in the Badiya Desert, rural Damascus and eastern Homs, including the tribes of al-Umour (Palmyra and Homs), Bani Khaled (near the border of central Hama and Homs, and prominent in Jordan), al-Rawalah and al-Shaga'a (eastern Qalamoun and rural Damascus), al-Ghiath, al-Hassan, al-Masaid and al-Sherfat (Jordan and Syrian tribes on the border of Sweida) and Naeem (Palmyra).[117] People hoping to reach Jordan usually congregate about 145 km north of the border, at the popular smuggling point of Palmyra (and other areas), before driving to the demilitarized zone between the two countries.[118]

The well-known Za'atari camp, established in 2012 to host Syrian refugees, has seen a dramatic increase in the number of inhabitants; at one point it became the

world's second largest refugee camp, behind Dadaab in eastern Kenya, hosting some 120 000 refugees.[119] Movement out of the camp was only loosely restricted prior to the pandemic, and many refugees have fled, though it is unknown to where or for what purpose, potentially posing security threats in the country.[120] The camp has also seen increasing disease and crime levels, and numerous riots have erupted as a result of the harsh conditions.[121] While COVID-19 measures have been put into place in the camp, there are concerns that overcrowding and the poor levels of sanitation and hygiene are inadequate to prevent the spread of the virus.[122]

Research shows that the many Syrians entering Jordan also settle in two informal encampments in a demilitarized zone between Jordan and Syria at the northern Rukban and southern Hadalat crossings, set up along two dirt border demarcations called the 'berm'.[123] By 2016, the total population in both camps had climbed to 85 000.[124] Conditions are described as dire, with the growing refugee population along Jordan's northern border putting extreme pressure on an already scarce water supply, as well as civilian and security infrastructure.[125]

Outside of these camps, there are estimated to be hundreds of thousands of Syrians (along with refugees from Iraq and Palestine) throughout the rest of Jordan. According to UNHCR, when combining the number of refugees with the number of foreign workers in Jordan, the estimated figure of non-citizens in the country amounts to over 5 million – potentially over half of the country's population.[126] This influx has created socio-economic problems for the Hashemite Kingdom, including increased poverty, unemployment, budget deficits, and pressure on healthcare and education infrastructure. This strain has led to increased political instability and corruption. In 2018 alone, the country witnessed unprecedented changes in government leadership and policy in response to widespread public demonstrations by Jordanians against proposed economic reforms and increasing demands for more transparency

and better government services amid a strained economy compounded by the influx of refugees.[127]

From the onset of the pandemic, Jordan implemented one of the strictest and most comprehensive COVID-19 responses.[128] Since March 2020, the country has sealed and re-opened its borders a number of times to curb the spread of the virus.[129] With these border closures, it is likely that people seeking asylum from desperate conditions in neighbouring countries will continue to seek informal ways to enter Jordan. While the country has fared better than other countries in the Levant in terms of cases, the resource-poor kingdom and the complexity of Jordan's pluralistic society has made the health crisis more acute. For example, many foreigners in the country are not registered as refugees and this makes delivering COVID-19 assistance more difficult.[130] A UNDP rapid pandemic impact assessment published in June 2020 revealed that nearly three-quarters of people surveyed reported difficulties in meeting basic needs and accessing healthcare under lockdown.[131]

As is the case in Lebanon, discriminatory practices in healthcare and the economy reflect the imbalances in Jordanian society. While the Jordanian government has since lowered health access costs for non-Syrian refugees, individuals were obliged to pay 80% of the foreigner rate, making access to healthcare unaffordable for most. The lowering of costs now means that all refugees in Jordan will pay the uninsured Jordanian rate.[132] A recent rapid assessment by the International Labour Organization conducted to explore the impact of the pandemic on employment conditions and livelihoods revealed that social security coverage for Syrian respondents was limited to 24%, while 63% of Jordanians had social security coverage through their employers. Similarly, health insurance coverage for Syrian respondents was 15%, while 42% of Jordanians reported that they had (access to) health insurance through their employers. The survey also highlighted that income loss was more pronounced for Syrian refugees, whose average income fell below the set monthly minimum wage of 220 Jordanian dinars (about US$310) since the lockdown began.[133]

FIGURE 3 Key border towns and crossings between Syria and Iraq.

Refugees in Iraq

Of Syria's neighbours, Iraq has the longest shared border (see Figure 3), yet it has taken far fewer Syrian refugees than Jordan and Lebanon (largely because of the country's own internal instability, which makes it a less attractive prospect for migrants fleeing conflict in their home state); the number is still high, with approximately 250 000 Syrian refugees residing in the country.[134] Most smuggling routes are concentrated in the north, in and around Iraqi Kurdistan,[135] where the vast majority of asylum-seekers arrive from Syria's Al-Hasakah province (followed by the areas around Aleppo and Damascus), resulting in an increase in Iraqi Kurdistan's population by nearly 30% over the past few years.[136] The remaining minority of Syrian refugees are registered in central and western Iraq, particularly in and around the border town of Al-Qa'im.

Prior to the pandemic, although the border between Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan was officially open (through the official Faysh Khabur crossing), Kurdish checkpoints on the way to Iraq did not allow people from Syria to pass to the other side of the border.[137] As a result, reports describe a thriving smuggling market that has emerged – because, reportedly, the only way for Syrians fleeing the conflict to enter Iraqi Kurdistan is to pay between US$400 and US$1 000 at the border.[138] This means that most smuggling routes go through the smaller border crossings into Iraq, a

few kilometres south of Faysh Khabur.[139] Most Syrians settle in refugee camps, such as those at Bardarash (about 140 km east of the border) and Domiz (near the Iraqi city of Dohuk), where conditions are described as dire and resources are dwindling.[140]

With the COVID-19 health crisis, the Kurdistan Regional Government has banned movement in the region (except for acquiring food and other necessities). Nevertheless, a number of arrests of smugglers attempting to bring individuals over the border from Iran and elsewhere have been made.[141] On 2 March 2020, the government announced the closure of all land borders, including the Sahela crossing, as a preventative measure to control the spread of COVID-19, and by doing so curtailed the formal movement of Syrians across the border into Kurdistan.[142]

Smuggling activities are not only limited to cross-border operations but also include informal movement within the country. In March, five drivers were arrested by local authorities for attempting to smuggle 50 people from Kirkuk into the Kurdistan region.[143] On the other side of Iraq, smuggling operations have continued. Initially, the Iraqi government was relatively slow to respond to the pandemic and although they announced the closure of all border crossings with Iran (the virus epicentre in the region) in late February, the border between the two countries has remained porous, suggesting that the smuggling market has continued.[144] Like Syria, Iraq is experiencing a humanitarian crisis, with nearly 2 million people displaced in the country, and is vulnerable to both exploitation and the coronavirus.[145]

Syrian refugees at the Bardarash camp in Iraqi Kurdistan; there is a thriving human smuggling market in the region. © *Safin Hamed/AFP via Getty Images*
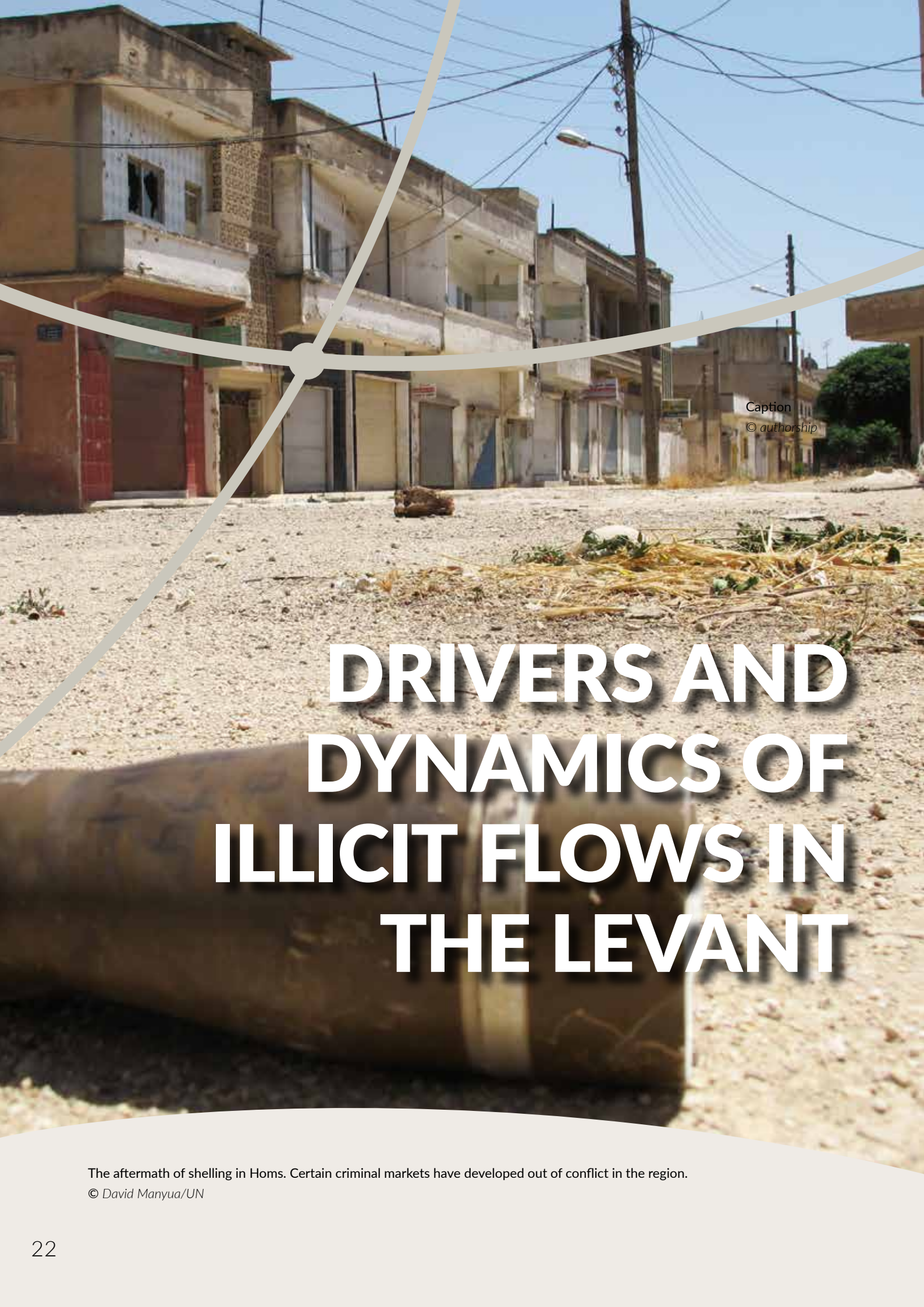
DRIVERS AND DYNAMICS OF ILLICIT FLOWS IN THE LEVANT

The aftermath of shelling in Homs. Certain criminal markets have developed out of conflict in the region.
© *David Manyua/UN*

Organized crime has always been a staple in the region – both during peacetime and war. In times of peace, civilians have long relied on smugglers for foodstuffs, cigarettes and other licit goods for their daily lives. Across Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, years of trafficking such commodities gave rise to networks of illicit entrepreneurs (made up of local tribes, small-scale smugglers and larger organized networks) who knew and trusted one another, and knew how to smuggle things across the region's borders. However, since the war in Syria, the region's political, economic and governance dynamics have shifted, with organized-crime activity expanding in terms of flows, commodities and actors involved. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, a new impetus has been provided for these organized-criminal activities to grow.

It would be difficult to overstate the extent to which the conflict in Syria has reshaped the Levant. Over the past nine years, there has been a clear trend in the illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and people – all three criminal markets have grown, spilling over into neighbouring countries, further weakening the fragile status quo, while spreading instability and violence.

An analysis of the region needs to be multifaceted, as politics of local and external actors, criminal markets and impacts overlap, making the picture convoluted. In order to understand the Levant's organized-crime landscape, interactions between these actors within a context of war and the pandemic and how they have impacted illicit flows can be carried out in two layers, both on a local and external level. With war, power becomes decentralized and redistributed among many actors, each with their own interests, and this fragmented power solidifies through engagement in illicit activities (and is often maintained through violence). In other words, organized crime has become the fuel for actors in the Levant to seek and exert power and control in an unstable war environment – a paradigm that threatens to remain even in a post-war context and in the COVID-19 era.

Within these local and external layers, actors may vary in terms of their ties to the region, underlying motivations in seeking power and influence (both social and economic), as well as the ways in which they carry out illicit activities (see Figure 4). Although not always clearly defined, generally, patterns in actor typology emerge that not only help one understand regional dynamics but that may also contribute to a foundation for building interventions post-conflict and amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Ideological/political groups	Small-scale/tribal groups	Criminal entrepreneurs/ businessmen	Professional organized crime groups
Background	May be interwoven in local political economy prior to conflict or emerged afterwards; may or may not have territorial ties.	Historically interwoven in local political economy; may have been disenfranchised or excluded; often strong territorial ties.	May be interwoven in local political economy prior to conflict or emerged after.	May be historically embedded in the region prior to conflict or emerged after; operating in parallel illicit economy; do not necessarily have territorial control.
Motivation	Engagement in illicit activities to further ideologies and political influence.	Enhance engagement in illicit activities to counter historical exclusion.	Engagement in illicit activities to expand business; and/or obtain political influence.	Enhance engagement in illicit activities in order to break into formal economy; and/or obtain political legitimacy.
Modus operandi	Patronage networks; violence; extortion; legitimacy-building activities.	Build on social and economic ties already present in local communities.	Build social and economic ties on already in place; engage with new criminal actors; strong crossover with legal business.	Patronage networks; violence; extortion; legitimacy-building activities.

FIGURE 4 Types of criminal actors in the Levant.

The dynamics within each layer exist simultaneously and are connected through gains and losses of territory over the course of the conflict. While some actors, such as tribal groups and small-scale smugglers, may have drawn on their historical ties and knowledge of the local lands to expand already existing or historical illicit trade activities during the conflict, territorial wins by other groups (including those either ideologically or economically driven) have introduced 'new' actors who may seek to expand their gains through engagement in illicit activities. Territorial control is essential to understanding who controls which commodities, where and how smuggling routes change, and areas of vulnerability. Beyond war, the issue of territorial control has become even more pronounced in the context of COVID-19, as the licit and illicit movement of goods and people brings an additional health, security, and economic element to a regional analysis.

Arms trafficking allows actors to gain and hold territory and control other illicit flows through violence. Illicit drug production and trafficking, particularly along border areas, provide a steady revenue stream for warring groups. The informal flows of people shift in response to the gain and loss of control of border closings by different groups, either to avoid violence or quarantine, or to follow the opening and closing of crossing points. These dynamics have only been reinforced by the current health crisis, which in a sense may be described as a 'war' itself, in that it has led to an uncertain environment where resources are imbalanced, the well-being of citizens is insecure, and power and legitimacy are decentralized.

Territorial control within Syria is linked to alliances in neighbouring countries, which exert control over their respective border regions. Historically distant from the political and economic centres of their respective countries, these border regions are marginal areas that are difficult to control by central governments, and have become spaces where local and external actors interact. Populations in these liminal areas are often marginalized and rely more on informal economies with Syrians just over the border, than on their own countries' resources. Such economic exchanges have fostered relationships that endure even in the context of war and a health crisis, and are supported by identity-based alliances with warring factions on the other side of the border.

Local dynamics

At the local level, smugglers familiar with informal trade routes saw an opportunity to leverage their knowledge and skills to gain power in an increasingly lawless conflict environment, smuggling illicit commodities, such as arms and drugs, for neighbouring warring factions as well as providing a lifeline for Syrians wanting to escape the conflict. This allowed them to exert control in their areas of activity and ensure a steady stream of profits.

As the war in Syria progressed, another transition took place, in that local smugglers and traders had to make room for new actors to engage in illicit activities, as more warring groups recognized the strategic advantages of controlling cross-border flows and trafficking became formalized.

In contexts of conflict, pre-existing governance dynamics generally become challenged through violence, creating opportunities for emerging vying groups to establish their legitimacy.[146] Violence is essential to gaining and maintaining power and territory,[147] but it is only one part of the formula for establishing legitimacy. What is also needed is control over economic (or illicit economic) activities both to ensure revenue is generated for the war effort, and to provide services to populations suffering from the effects of war. Actors can do this by using violence to secure access to resources (i.e. by directly engaging in illicit flows) and by imposing criminal 'rents' (i.e. through illegal taxation of organized-criminal activities) through the creation of protection economies.[148] These can both be undertaken through a scheme of identity (religious, ethnic or otherwise) when it suits the actors involved.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, so does the pursuit of legitimacy, and the issue of health and wellbeing itself has become securitized and identity-based. As is the case with other essential services in wartime, states struggle to provide for their people, leaving space for non-state conflict actors to step in. While in a sense, the coronavirus has presented the region with a new, common enemy, the pandemic coincides with continued unresolved political, social and economic challenges in the region, leaving an even more chaotic environment for organized-criminal activities to spread. Both state and non-state actors have transformed COVID-19 into a resource itself to further their power-seeking objectives.

Non-state conflict actors serve as economic and political regulators of populations in these areas through their involvement in criminal markets. They not only use revenue generated from illicit flows to provide basic services to communities (when governments are either unable or unwilling to do so), but also provide protection from other groups seeking to control these territories. This way, such actors not only gain legitimacy in the eyes of local populations, but their control of territory and illicit flows also serve to further isolate their territories from formal economic activities, making it more difficult to deconstruct these dynamics in a post-conflict setting.[149]

These local dynamics are not limited to non-state armed groups. The challenges they pose to government strongholds mean that government actors struggle to maintain their power, joining non-state actors in competing for resources and regaining state territorial control; consequently, in many cases, state actors also resort to engaging in

A truck in Jordan. The country's government has worked with the Syrian regime to ensure border security and reopen formal trade. © *Eddie and Carolina Stigson/Unsplash*

organized-crime activities to achieve this. As the pandemic continues to spread, governments in the region have used the virus as a way to exert control in their territories, clamping down on criticism in an effort to maintain the status quo[150] and weaponizing healthcare support by withholding it from territorial or identity-based opposition elements.[151] Expanded powers and outwardly strict measures in the name of health and safety may serve to hide clandestine corrupt practices and engagement in illicit activities, further driving divisions and unrest.

External dynamics

In parallel to these local dynamics, external foreign states have intervened, and continue to do so, in the region, forming political alliances with local actors that suit their own agendas, such as securing business interests in the region post-war,[152] or reinforcing religious and ideological influence. These foreign interventionists provide support to local warring groups aligned with their interests through financial means, or by providing weapons and men, either to reinforce challenges to governance dynamics or maintain the status quo. Most recently, these dynamics have extended to the provision of aid to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.[153]

Such interventions affect illicit flows in the process – either intentionally or unintentionally. For example, sanctions force local actors to rely on illicit flows to secure supplies they need, and criminal markets, like drug trafficking, provide profits for warring groups with which to buy weapons and pay recruits. Arms supplies sent to assist a particular warring faction inevitably end up on the black market, and therefore they become available to anyone who has the ability to purchase a weapon. This allows the lives of arms to extend beyond their intended use, furthering the potential

for violence and expanding the capacity of different groups to gain territory. Monetary aid provided to opposing groups can be used to further illegal-revenue-producing activities, such as the production of drugs, while the political weaponizing of borders redirects migrant flows, spawning formalized smuggling markets. The result is essentially a war within a war, where the local and external dynamics interplay can be seen through changes in territorial control over the course of the conflict.

In the Levant, nothing is geographically fixed: controlling territory essentially hinges on being able to control cross-border infrastructure and therefore the trajectories of illicit flows. As territory is gained and lost over the course of war (by local groups, who are supported by external actors), illicit flows change in two ways, either by who controls them or in terms of their geographic location. The result is that organized-crime actors and violent political actors become one and the same. Control of illicit flows has transformed them into integral parts of the regional war economy, generating sufficient funds to allow conflict actors to buy weapons, pay combatants, provide social services and establish institutions in communities in the areas under their control.

These activities all serve, ultimately, to sustain the conflict, while they gain legitimacy for actors among locals, solidifying and sustaining their future roles long after the conflict – and the pandemic – has ended.

Lebanon's cannabis production is concentrated in the Beqaa Valley. © *Greg Demarque*

COUNTRY CONTEXTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE LEVANT

A view of Iraq's northern autonomous region of Kurdistan. *© Safin Hamed/AFP via Getty Images*

Syria's transactional role in regional political-economic dynamics

Before the conflict, although organized-criminal groups in Syria competed for profits and control of business stakes, it was always clear that the state was the ultimate authority in terms of governance, that the government was (or at least appeared to be) in firm control of the land, public services and the population – through violence or otherwise. Often, the regime would bolster public services in areas that most supported its authority, reinforcing its power but at the same time spreading a simmering dissatisfaction in parts of the country that did not receive the same state largesse. Syria's neighbours, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, remained at least superficially 'quiet', with social tensions muted enough for its citizens to carry out their daily lives in relative stability.

Since 2011, however, the weakening of the Syrian regime through the loss of its territorial control, has created a platform for both state and non-state actors to compete for authority, legitimacy and control, often under the guise of religious identity. In fragile neighbouring countries, this has led to the rise of both pro-regime militias and opposition actors that pursue their own agendas generally (although not exclusively) along Sunni or Shiite lines, and that support their counterparts in Syria, particularly in border regions, where government control has tended to be weak.

For example, Lebanon's eastern border with Syria, and in particular the Beqaa Valley, has always been detached from the Lebanese state authority – either because this region was under the influence of Syrian occupation following Lebanon's civil war or owing to a tense combination of self-rule by local clans and Hezbollah.[154] In Jordan, the country's northern regions along the Syrian border are geographically and politically distant from Amman, and dominated by local tribes.[155] While in Iraq, the country's north was recognized as an autonomous Kurdish region and the western desert provinces have been controlled by native tribal families.[156] These politically and economically marginal regions became ideal areas for non-state actors and entrepreneurs to influence and be influenced by the conflict in Syria next door, as well as the current health crisis.

Syrian President Bashar Al Assad addresses an international conference on the return of Syrian refugees to their home country, November 2020. *© Sergei Bobylev\TASS via Getty Images*

Although over the past nine years, hundreds of groups and actors have been involved in the Syrian conflict, merging and dividing as the war waged on, for ease of comprehension, analysis will remain limited to a number of key conflict actors, grouped along regime- and opposition-aligned lines.

The weakening of the Syrian regime has led to its reliance on a number of actors to maintain and regain its power, namely Lebanon's Hezbollah party and Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)[157] at the local level, as well as Russia and Iran externally. These actors have played a tremendous role in assisting the Syrian government and securing its current control over the majority of the country's territory. While Russia has been primarily responsible for filling Syrian government arms stockpiles, Iran has provided support more indirectly – by bolstering Hezbollah's (illicit) activities in neighbouring Lebanon and Shiite interests in Iraq, aligning with the Alawite Syrian regime.[158]

Within the context of the global pandemic, these external actors continue to support the regime's position. The Syrian government's weaponization of medical support by withholding aid to opposition-controlled territories, particularly in the north-east of the country and through Iraq, as well as in the south and through Jordan, has been reinforced by Russia through its veto power over Security Council resolutions aimed at authorizing cross-border aid.[159] In opposition territories, the lack of aid means people's reliance on black-market goods to survive and the need to escape uninhabitable conditions, fuelling illicit flows.

Syria's opposition forces have been supported primarily by local Sunni tribes situated along the borders in neighbouring countries, as well as western or Sunni-majority countries, including the United States and Saudi Arabia, through neighbouring states like Jordan and Turkey. These proxy powers provide both monetary, political and material support, and have significantly influenced the local gain and loss of land in the process.

While not directly falling in line with other opposition objectives, other actors have played a major role in the transformation of illicit flows throughout the region in part to advance self-deterministic agendas of their own. Turkish and Kurdish forces have pursued their own interests: Kurdish groups demand federalism,[160] while Turkish forces seek to eliminate Kurdish influence, largely seen as terroristic in nature.[161] Finally, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) sought to establish an Islamic caliphate within Syria and Iraq, and exert universal leadership of Muslims worldwide.[162] Although ISIS has subsequently been expelled from the territories it held until 2017, the group remains a threat in the region, particularly with the onset of the pandemic,[163] and analyzing its rise and control over large swathes of the region provides an important example of the evolution of illicit flows through territorial control.

Over the course of the conflict, hundreds of actors involved in Syria's conflict have merged and disbanded. Figure 5 shows the relationship between major players discussed in this report.
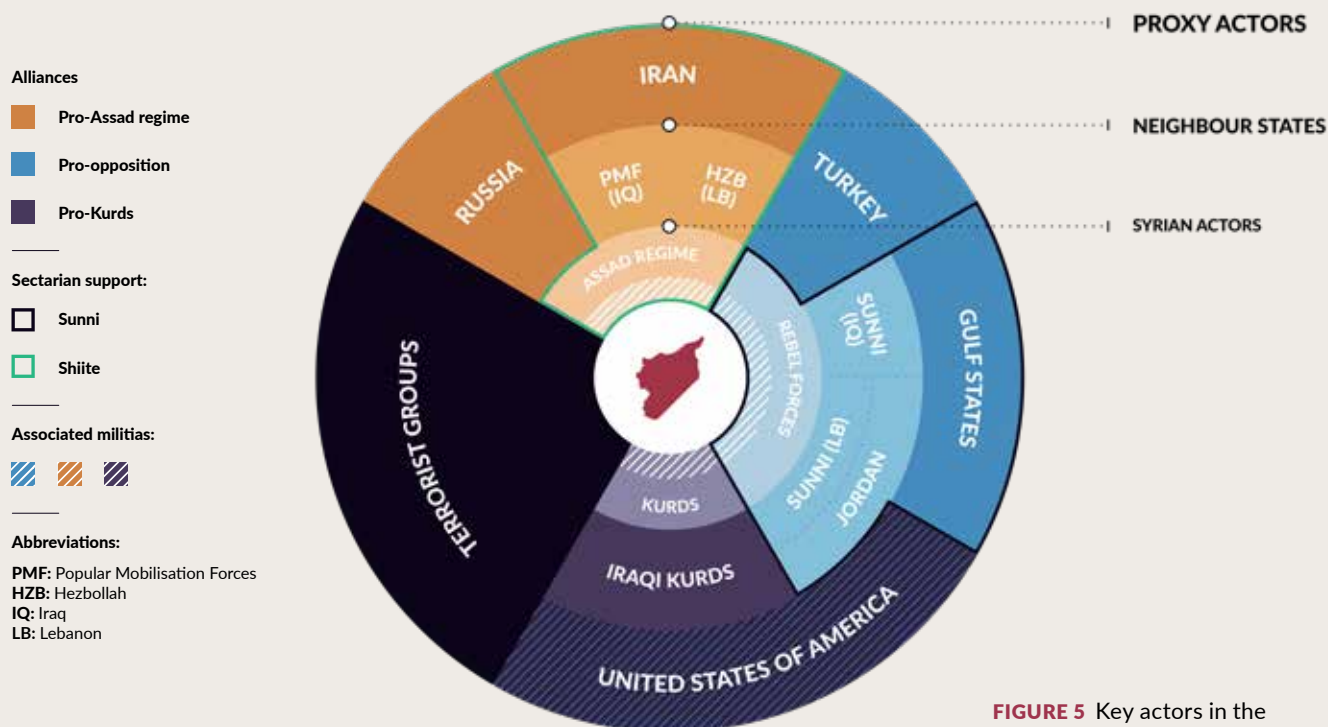
Alliances

- 🟧 Pro-Assad regime
- 🟦 Pro-opposition
- 🟪 Pro-Kurds

Sectarian support:

- ⬜ Sunni
- 🟩 Shiite

Associated militias:

▨ ▨ ▨

Abbreviations:

PMF: Popular Mobilisation Forces
HZB: Hezbollah
IQ: Iraq
LB: Lebanon

FIGURE 5 Key actors in the Syrian conflict since 2011.

Although both local and external dynamics have been frequently driven by ideological motives, it is important to highlight the fluidity in adherence to identity-based alliances as a convenient pretext in pursuit of more practical, economic interests. For example, Hezbollah (pro-Assad regime and Shiite) is known to play an active role in the production of Captagon and hashish, where a large consumer market is based in the Sunni majority Gulf (supporters of the opposition).[164] Profits from this trade are, in turn, used to support the Syrian (Alawite) regime, in direct opposition to Sunni interests. Similarly, although ISIS's ethical and religious edicts forbade drug use, in reality, several reports indicate the group's involvement in the illicit drug trade either as extortionists, direct perpetrators or consumers of drugs (the latter to give its militants a boost during fighting).[165]

The Syrian conflict established a 'free-for-all' that has continued amid the pandemic, emboldening criminal entrepreneurs both in Syria and its neighbours to leverage their activities and services for power and sovereignty over the territories they controlled, leading to the formalization of illicit economies in these areas. For example, in Syria and along the borders of neighbouring states, all parties in the war, including, rebel groups, pro-regime militias, the army and branches of the security agencies have set up checkpoints in order to monitor flows of people and illicit commodities, and to extort money, either directly or by renting out checkpoints for others to do so, thereby ensuring a steady stream of revenue.[166] Indeed, reports of the production of and trade in illegal commodities and control of illicit flows by various groups coincide with territorial gains and losses over the course of the nine-year Syrian conflict (Figure 6).
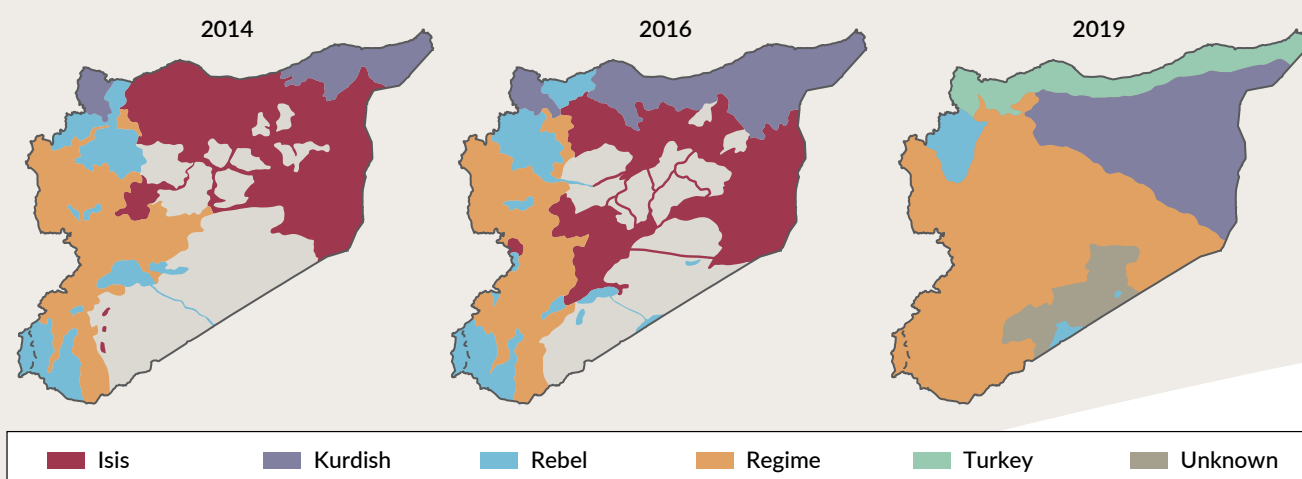
| 2014 | 2016 | 2019 |

| Isis | Kurdish | Rebel | Regime | Turkey | Unknown |

FIGURE 6 Changes in Syrian territorial control, 2014–2019.

Over the course of the conflict, as the various mix of warring factions, from pro-regime militias and secular rebels,[167] to Kurds and Salafist groups, gained territory, they also gained control of trade infrastructure and resources. Both the acquisition and maintenance of these areas are achieved through a combination of violence and activities that help them gain legitimacy, with long-lasting impacts on local civilian populations.

Lebanon: Syria's civil war spills over

Syria's civil war has had a dramatic impact on neigh-bouring Lebanon. Syria has played a dominant role in the historical, geographical and cultural ties between the two countries, making it impossible for Lebanon to escape the consequences of the Syrian conflict. The country has long been characterized by domes-tic polarization and marginalization among its Sunni, Shiite and Christian communities (see Figure 7), but the Syrian war exacerbated sectarian divisions by reinforcing Lebanese alliances with their identified counterparts in the Syrian conflict. These alliances were most notably visible along the Lebanese politi-cal spectrum between the opposition supporting the March 14 alliance (led by the Sunni Future Movement political group) and the pro-Syrian government March 8 alliance (of which Hezbollah is a part).[168]

As the war in Syria spilled over into Lebanon's border regions, Sunni- and Shiite-dominated groups sup-ported warring factions along identity lines, smuggling arms, drugs and other supplies to conflict actors across the border. For example, the northern port city of Tripoli (a Sunni stronghold) has received ship-ments of arms and has been used to despatch fighters to rebel groups in north-western Syria.[169] When the Lebanese Future Movement endorsed Syrian opposition groups, it led many Sunni Lebanese to join the rebel groups in fighting across the border, and to lend support to Syrian refugees and to procure sup-plies and illicit commodities for the Syrian opposition via Sunni-dominated border regions.[170] The Syrian regime has accused anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians of leveraging their power to secure illicit flows into Syria to support opposition forces. Most notably, Future Movement MP Okan Sakr was alleged to have acted as an arms coordinator between rebel groups and Arab Gulf funders.[171]

As the war progressed, Salafist groups, namely ISIS and Al-Nusra Front, gained territory in the Sunni areas along the Lebanese–Syrian border, particularly in and around the town of Arsal in the Beqaa Valley, which lies on a smuggling route to Syria.[172] Their presence not only radicalized many already economically mar-ginalized Sunnis in the region, but they also gained control of significant areas of cannabis cultivation and Captagon production facilities.[173] Indeed, the period-ical presence of ISIS in this area between 2014 and 2017 coincides with reports of the group's involve-ment in the drug trade, presumably through extortion of local drug producers in the area.[174]
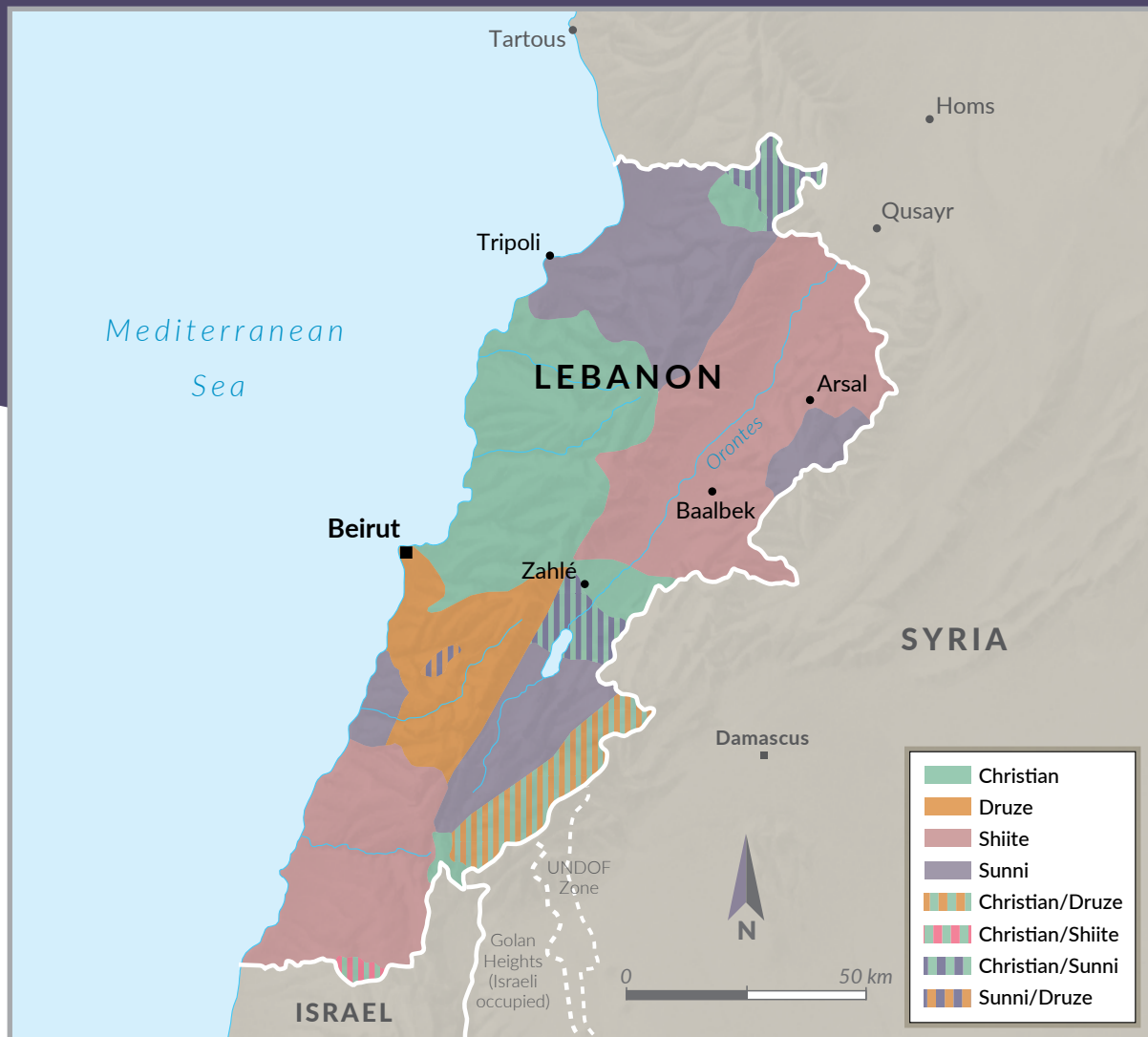
FIGURE 7 Major sectarian distribution in Lebanon.

NOTE: The areas are to be taken as an approximation only, as the situation remains fluid.

By 2017, Hezbollah (largely considered Lebanon's strongest political-military force), working with pro-Syrian-regime militias and under the justification of protecting the border from Sunni extremists, had ousted these Salafist groups, solidifying their control of the Beqaa.[175] At the same time, violence compelled hundreds of civilians to escape, redirecting smuggling routes to Turkey.

Hezbollah's current control of the Beqaa Valley, a region long associated with illicit activities (namely drugs and, to a lesser degree, arms), has allowed the group to generate revenue to support the Syrian government and thereby strengthen their monopoly of the organized-crime economy all along both sides of the Lebanese–Syrian border.[176] This relationship between

Hezbollah and Syrian regime counterparts can be illustrated in the Syrian border town of Qusayr,[177] where, in 2013, supplies of Captagon in the region rose after Syrian rebels lost the city to Hezbollah fighters backed by the Syrian army. Qusayr has since been transformed into a stronghold of Shiite traffickers and a drug production and distribution hub (of hashish and cannabis). Trade networks rely on corruption in the Syrian government and military to distribute Hezbollah's commodities in government-controlled areas,[178] with interviews revealing that a US$5 000 bribe paid to a Syrian military officer will allow a cannabis shipment to pass through a checkpoint.[179]

Drugs and arms are not the only illicit commodities under Hezbollah's control. Research from 2019,

indicates an uptick of people smuggling between Syria and Lebanon; this trade is now facilitated by Hezbollah from the Lebanese side and by the Army's Fourth Division from the Syrian side.[180] Regional monitoring asserts that a major smuggling route exists between the Syrian town of Serghaya and the Lebanese towns of Ham and Maarabon,[181] areas that are controlled by both Lebanese and Syrian actors.

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, in addition to its political and military control in Lebanon's border areas, has paved the way for the establishment of a trans-border zone under its direct and immediate control, despite the presence of the Lebanese military in the area. For example, in 2016, it was reported that the group negotiated with ISIS for the return of 30 Syrian families from across the border, while the Lebanese Armed Forces were largely absent from the process, merely escorting the families over the border.[182]

Hezbollah has played an important role for residents of the Beqaa, building up its role as a perceived legitimate governing structure in the region, and providing jobs and social services to citizens who have long been ignored by Beirut. Funds generated by organized-crime activities are also used by Hezbollah to recruit Lebanese Shiite fighters, who can earn approximately US$600 a month and have access to an extensive social welfare system of schools, hospitals and clinics.[183] Families of fallen soldiers are also provided for, creating incentives to join the fighting next door in a region that offers few other economic opportunities. The group's relationship with residents of the Beqaa region is one of mutual benefit: while local smugglers and traffickers help secure illicit flows to supply pro-regime forces in Syria, Hezbollah, in return, helps provide them with political protection from occasional government crackdowns in the area.[184]

Within the context of COVID-19, Hezbollah's role as an alternative governing structure in Lebanon was reinforced through the politicization of responses to the pandemic. Identity-based political parties in Lebanon have capitalized on the pandemic in highly publicized campaigns, branding medical supplies, such as masks, and posting videos of party members providing healthcare support.[185] The country's Free Patriotic Movement, as well as the Christian-based Lebanese Forces' party and their political rivals, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, have posted images of members sterilizing streets in the country.[186] By comparison, however, Hezbollah has implemented the largest response to the health crisis by far (presented as complementing the government apparatus), setting up field hospitals and test sites, and mobilizing thousands of medical staff in its territory, as well as monitoring positive cases.[187]

Hezbollah's (and therefore the Syrian regime's) support largely comes from Iran, which, according to US officials, provides Hezbollah with some US$700 million a year and has helped the group build an arsenal of some 150 000 rockets and missiles in Lebanon.[188] With the majority of the initial positive coronavirus cases in Lebanon originating from individuals coming from Iran and given the group's stronghold over the country's border with Syria, Hezbollah's political rivals have blamed the group for spreading the virus and for continued smuggling activities.[189]

During the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah has reportedly worked with counterparts in Iran's Quds Force (a unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps) to develop weapons and illicit smuggling pipelines through Syria and into Lebanon, which can be leveraged to greatly

Social tensions: Lebanese demonstrators in Beirut. The Syrian war, COVID-19 and economic insecurity have contributed to widespread civil unrest in the country. *© Anwar Amro/AFP via Getty Images*

expand Iran's influence.[190] The Syrian regime's regaining of most of the country's territory means that Iran is well placed to exert influence in the region, much to the dismay of external actors, particularly the US and Saudi Arabia.

The Syrian war has been a primary driver of the most recent unrest throughout Lebanon, and this unrest has laid the groundwork for heightened instability amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Hezbollah's extensive political and economic influence in both Syria and Lebanon, along with Sunni alienation, has fuelled a Sunni–Shia divide in the country. Feeling alienation at home has led some Sunnis to turn away from the state and look for alternative sources of support and protection, including joining Islamic groups that provide services, and working with criminal networks in exchange for money.[191] Most notably, the rise of Sunni extremism in the Syrian conflict has unleashed disturbing religious and security dynamics in Lebanon, with groups like Al-Nusra Front launching Lebanese chapters and sending many to cross the border to fight in Syria's Idlib region.[192]

The conflict has also had a major impact on key sectors, such as tourism and other economic activities.[193] The large influx of Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers in Lebanon has not only strained the country's public resources and heightened social tensions among its citizens, who now have to share these thinly spread resources, but has also increased the opportunity for organized-crime flows to and from Syria. Reports indicate that the population of 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country has led to an estimated 200 000 Lebanese being pushed into poverty and resorting to the informal economy.[194] Unemployment, lack of infrastructure and social security, together with a deep sectarian divide, is a mix that has catalyzed widespread discontent among the Lebanese citizens have had enough of the status quo. These conditions have been exacerbated by the health crisis and, most recently, the explosion in Beirut's port, which has dealt a crippling blow to the country.[195]

Current protests in the country reflect the collapsing economy and banking crisis,[196] which have affected formal and informal commercial ties with Syria. Over the course of the war, US sanctions on Syrian business has meant that many Syrians rely on Lebanon to carry out transactions or hold their savings in a climate where the lines between smuggling and formal trade have become blurred.[197] As Lebanon has near depleted all of its hard currency, its role as a vital source of funds for Syria could end, leading to greater dependence on black-market transactions.[198]

A view of the destruction caused by the explosion of a large amount of ammonium nitrate stored at Beirut's port in August 2020. *© Kaveh Kazemi/Getty Image*

Looking ahead: What's in store for Lebanon?

Even before the pandemic, Lebanon was on the brink of collapse. Since October 2019, the country has seen an eruption of widespread protests by a citizenry facing a declining economy and fed up with the country's corrupt elite, who capture resources and funnel them though patronage networks at the expense of local citizens. According to a 2016 World Bank report, political elite capture costs Lebanon an estimated 9% of GDP annually, due to a lack of sanctions on illicit activities by wealthy political actors.[199] The country has a large wealth gap – the richest 1% of the population receive 25% of the national income.[200]

Lebanon's economic crisis has all but depleted its national reserves, and led to a devaluation of the Lebanese lira by approximately 40% on the black market and risks hyperinflation.[201] According to reports, the country faces a debt-to-GDP ratio of 150%,[202] and with more people withdrawing their money, an increase in currency smuggling is likely to occur. Moreover, it was estimated that over 200 000 people have lost their jobs since the protests began in October.[203] With widespread poverty,[204] citizens may turn to illicit activities in order to survive.

Although Lebanon has been marked by sectarian divisions (which have only been exacerbated by the Syrian conflict), these current protests are different, in that participants are unified across

sectarian lines in demanding sweeping social and economic reforms from what is seen as a largely dysfunctional government. Even if protests in the country are fuelled by local grievances, they have the potential to impact illicit flows in the region as well.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, support for local governing actors, such as Hezbollah, who have thrived in a sectarian-based status quo, were weakening, possibly affecting the group's support for the Assad regime and their control of illicit flows between the two countries. Moreover, the Syrian government's involvement in Lebanon's opaque financial sector meant that a lack of cash flow could have potentially led to a shift in illicit flows elsewhere.

Within a matter of months however, the COVID-19 health crisis has not only exacerbated the economic downturn and crippled the country's healthcare system, but also offered a lifeline to both the government and Hezbollah to regain legitimacy in the eyes of its population. The pandemic temporarily halted local grievances and shifted focus to the immediate health threat. Under these circumstances, the country's pro-sectarian governing authorities have stepped in to respond to the crisis. As seen in the political branding of coronavirus responses, the Lebanese authorities have perpetuated the status quo, and presumably the illicit flows that accompany these dynamics.

On 4 August 2020, the massive explosion at Beirut's port sent shockwaves through the country and the rest of the world, killing nearly 200 and leaving 300 000 people homeless. The port, an economic lifeline for the country, housed the country's only grain silos and receives 80% of its imports.[205] Its destruction has added to the problems of the country's nearly non-existent economy, with an estimated US$5 billion in damages.[206] Since the blast, Lebanese citizens have a renewed impetus to express their dissatisfaction with the perceived inadequacy of Lebanon's governing powers.

It is likely that exchange-rate controls will persist, and the black-market pricing for the lira remaining so sharply divergent from the official rate will create incentives for money laundering and the illicit movement of funds into Lebanon. Hezbollah has long-standing proven capacity to move funds to evade currency controls and sanctions[207] – a service that they could provide domestically in exchange for political leverage or other incentives, and which may strengthen their hand in regards to other illicit activity.

On the other hand, unless Lebanon receives an infusion of hard currency, there is the risk that the progressively violent protests and the country's increasing instability may descend into civil conflict, creating a security vacuum and allowing sectarian-driven actors to step in to provide protection and gain legitimacy, once again furthering a cycle of organized crime and conflict.

The situation in the country is rapidly evolving, but with economic devastation compounded by COVID-19, and nearly half of the country's population living in poverty,[208] the risk of widespread starvation and uninhabitable conditions may provide a market for illicit flows to continue through mass emigration, with or without the current governance framework.

Jordan: a neutral regional platform?

Jordan's role in the Syrian conflict has been primarily as a platform for external actors to intervene in the region (particularly the US and Arab Gulf countries). Unlike Lebanon, the Jordanian government has generally been unified in its stance, aligned with locals, particularly in the country's border lands, who support the rebel cause. Overall, however, the kingdom has tried to remain neutral, with the ultimate objective of keeping violence and extremism from spilling over the border.[209] To that end, the Jordanian government has recently worked with the Syrian regime and Russian counterparts to ensure border security and reopen formal trade.[210] Removed from the local sectarian divides that have fuelled competition for territory and resources in Lebanon, the Jordanian context revolves around balancing mutually dependent international relations (particularly with Syrian opposition-aligned states) that have both directly and indirectly contributed to the expansion of illicit markets, while seeking to maintain an even keel despite a deteriorating security, economic and social situation domestically.

Jordan's northern regions border the once strongest rebel-controlled areas in Syria.[211] Over the course of the conflict, Syrian missiles and artillery shells have landed several times in Jordanian cities and towns, and increased smuggling and infiltration of weapons and contraband from across the border has intensified the burden on the
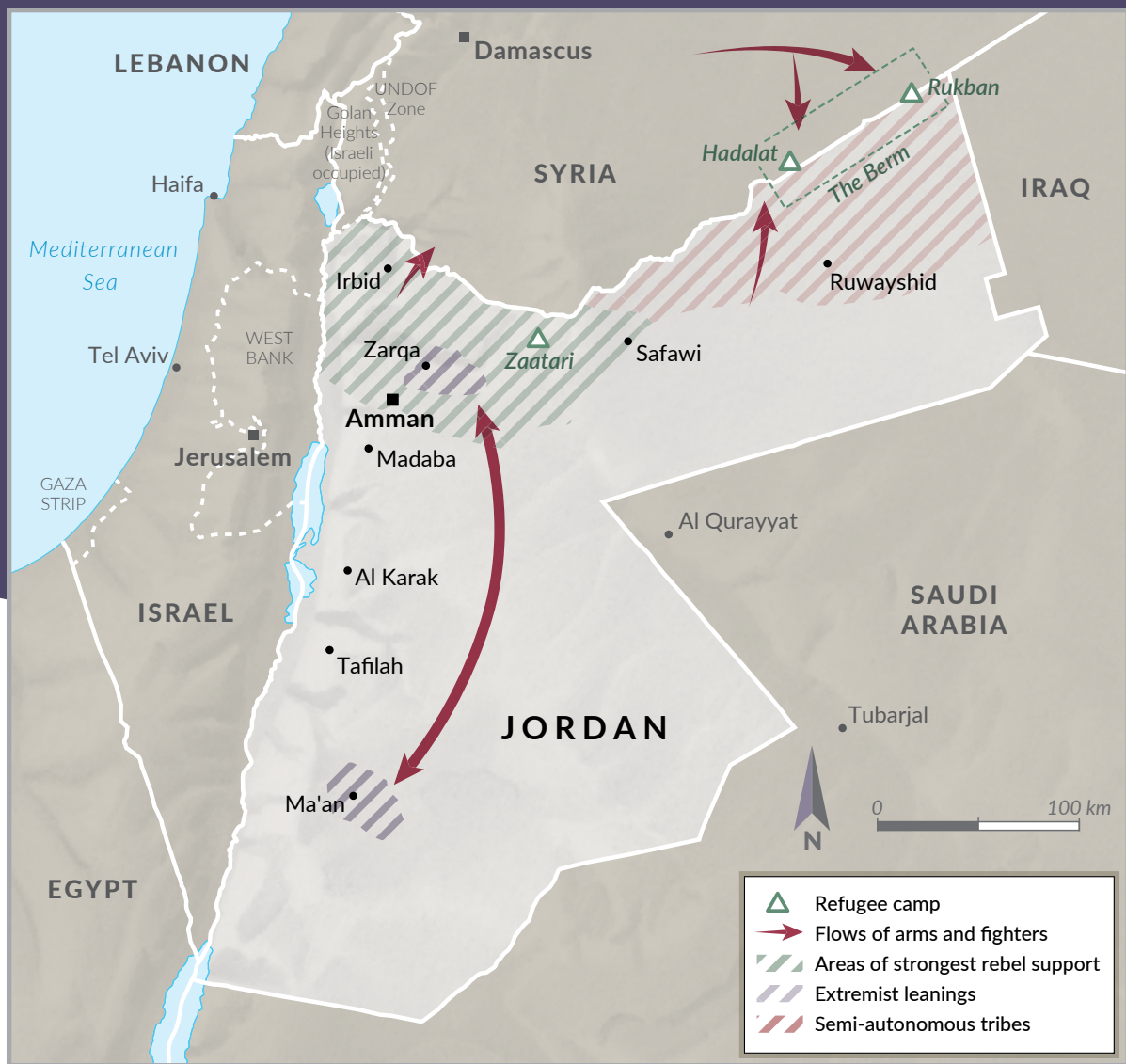
FIGURE 8 Major illicit flows in and through Jordan.

security services. Prior to the Syrian regime's recapturing of its southern provinces, weapons streamed in from northern Jordan into opposition strongholds, such as Dera'a.[212] This has raised concerns about the spread of extremist Islamist cells in the country (particularly in towns like Ma'an and Zarqa) which, as in Lebanon, sympathize with their comrades in Syria.[213]

To deal with the negative impacts of the Syrian conflict next door, Jordan has relied heavily on foreign aid from external powers aligned with Syrian opposition factions, namely the US and Sunni Gulf states. In return, these external powers have promoted a strong anti-Assad-regime stance in Jordan, and there have been reports that monetary and material aid to the country has also been channelled to rebel forces in Syria.[214] For example, in 2016, it was discovered that a secret US Central Intelligence Agency programme code-named 'Timber Sycamore' was set up in Jordan to train and arm moderate Syrian rebels in the conflict next door.[215] Corrupt Jordanian officials were revealed to have stolen US arms, diverting them to the black market, and making them untraceable and available to anyone who could afford them (including extremist groups).[216]

In Jordan, the movement of people escaping violence in neighbouring Syria has been the major conduit fuelling illicit flows across the shared border. The Syrian regime's weaponizing of food and other basic supplies as it gradually gained control over its southern territories have led to mass migrations into Jordan. In an effort to curb the influx of refugees entering the country, viewed as increasing the risk of radicalization and violence, the Jordanian government has periodically restricted its border policies, creating a humanitarian crisis and redirecting migration flows. When the influx reached a peak in late 2012 (after the creation of the Za'atari refugee camp) and early 2013, the government sought more border restrictions[217] in an attempt to control the growing numbers entering and to address security concerns associated with an enormous spike in weapon seizures along the border.[218]

These policies allowed smugglers to step in. Situated throughout Jordan's remote northern and western deserts, local Sunni tribes have long played a major role in the governance of these areas, including their control over traditional smuggling routes throughout the barren lands spanning Syria, Jordan and Iraq.[219] These semi-autonomous tribes have facilitated the smuggling of people (along with other commodities, including arms and drugs) across both sides of the Syrian–Jordanian border. The kingdom's relations with local tribes, who serve as auxiliary governance structures in the remote areas of Jordan, have also contributed to state-sanctioned illicit flows in order to bolster security and minimize the effects of radicalization. For example, reports indicate that upon some border closures, Jordanian border officers actually encouraged Syrian asylum-seekers to use informal crossings and smuggling channels instead, underscoring the government's balance of objectives and the latitude with which non-state actors are treated in the country.[220]

Smugglers not only charge large sums to smuggle people to Jordan, but with a significant portion of Syrians settling in refugee camps along the border (particularly around the berm), the increasing need for basic supplies and humanitarian aid has also led to the capture of these services by local tribes who control the area. For example, tribes have been known to limit refugee access to supplies, such as food and medicine, in exchange for a fee.[221] External efforts to deal with the growing refugee situation and mitigate radicalization in camps where living conditions are unsatisfactory have been met with little success.[222]

The effects of the Syrian conflict in Jordan have exacerbated domestic tensions among its population. The government's ability to provide the basic requirements of life for citizens, such as food, water, housing, healthcare, education and legal services, has declined, while poverty, unemployment, marginalization, injustice, corruption, lack of oversight and accountability have become widespread. The large numbers of Syrian refugees in Jordan have led to a reduction in tourism and foreign investment, and disrupted regional trade routes.[223] Meanwhile, a decline in employment rates, in part due to host and refugee populations competing for jobs, has also put a further strain on the country's ailing economy.

These strains have led to rising discontent among Jordanians and the potential for Islamic extremism to spread. Since the Syrian conflict began, thousands of sympathetic Jordanians have gone to fight with groups like Al-Nusra Front and ISIS, and with them, illicit flows have increased.[224]

Although money laundering has not posed a major problem in the country, there have been anecdotal reports that certain sectors, such as real estate, have been used to launder funds from illicit activities to support the war next door.[225]

Compared to Syria's other neighbours, Jordan has managed to remain relatively stable over the course of the past nine years. However, the country has the potential to become destabilized, even as relations with the Syrian regime normalize and the conflict nears an end. Currently, within the context of COVID-19, Jordan's continued stability will in large part depend on the government's response to the health crisis both in the short and long term.

Looking ahead: What's in store for Jordan?

Jordan's relative stability compared to its neighbours has been largely contingent on the kingdom's ability to remain neutral (to the extent that that is possible) throughout the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, the growing number of refugees in the country and the potential for extremism to spread threaten to destabilize the kingdom, making these issues a top priority for the Jordanian government in the years to come. For example, in 2018, Jordan was ranked in the top ten countries in the world for military expenditure relative to national income.[226]

As the Syrian government regains more control of its territory, Jordan's general support of the Syrian opposition has started to wane, and the country has shown signs of resumed domestic relations with the Assad regime and Russia in order to assuage domestic tensions. In 2017, the three countries agreed to a de-escalation zone in Syria's southern provinces[227] bordering Jordan's northern regions, and have cooperated on security of their shared borders[228] and resumed regional trade.[229]

The ten year war next door has contributed to a socio-economic crisis in Jordan including a slowdown in trade, increased unemployment (at nearly 40% for young people prior to the pandemic),[230] budget deficits and strains on social infrastructure. In 2018 and 2019, the country witnessed widespread public demonstrations calling for economic reforms and increased government transparency.[231]

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Jordan has chosen to prioritize public health at the expense of the economy, imposing extreme restrictions[232] (including a three-day complete lockdown) to curb viral spread. These measures have proven successful and the country has

The Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. The country's policy on migration contributed to a rise in the human smuggling economy.
© Mark Garten/UN

largely been deemed a success story in the region. Despite the severity of the restrictions, recent surveys indicate that government response has, for now, improved social cohesion, with the vast majority of the public (approximately 74%) approving government measures.[233]

Nevertheless, two major factors will determine the country's domestic stability, and consequently, illicit flows. First, while the government's immediate securitization of the health crisis may have succeeded in the short-term, the continuation of extreme restrictions may lead to growing dissent from the public. Reports from May 2020 show a number of arrests made by Jordanian authorities of media workers for sharing news that would 'cause panic' about the pandemic based on a decree issued in April carrying a penalty of up to three years in prison.[234] Human rights groups say the arrests show a growing intolerance by authorities for criticism.[235] This could also lead to declining trust in the government and the possibility for protests to erupt again.

Secondly, while health was prioritized in the response following the immediate outbreak of the virus, the country's economy (already weakened by the Syrian conflict), has been dealt a significant blow by the pandemic. In the first quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate stood at around 19%,[236] with economists expecting that figure to rise to 30% by the end of the year.[237] Major challenges are expected for all economic sectors, including the disruption of the tourism and service industries, and reduced remittances from workers abroad.

Despite these tensions, it is unlikely, however, that Jordan will descend into any civil conflict or witness mass uprisings over the societal impacts of the Syrian conflict. Rather, the country's ailing economy may lead many to rely on informal markets and illicit activities to meet their basic needs.

Moreover, the growing dissatisfaction among the cohort of young people who have limited opportunities may breed violent extremism in a country where it is estimated that between 2 500 and 4 000 people have joined to fight for Salafist groups,[238] making Jordan one of the highest per capita contributors of foreign fighters in the world.[239]

Iraq: the remnants of extremism

The relationship between Syria and Iraq in the context of the Syrian conflict can be described as mutually chaotic. Most research on the Syrian conflict's impact on Iraqi organized-crime flows has focused primarily on ISIS's role in the conflict. Although the terrorist organization's territorial holdings have officially been eliminated, there are undoubtedly elements of ISIS's influence remaining in Iraq, which has struggled with instability since the 2003 invasion by the US-led coalition, only to be exacerbated by the more recent Syrian conflict.

Today, the most visible links between the Syrian war and organized-crime flows in Iraq are concentrated in Iraqi Kurdistan. These are linked to the human-smuggling market and migration crisis. Like the smuggling dynamics in the north of the country, Iraq appears overall to fall in line with Syria's other neighbouring countries, in that illicit economies are run by sectarian groups that align themselves with corresponding factions in the Syrian war. Moreover, the close alliance between the Iraqi government and Iran in relation to Syria has had several implications for the spread of Iranian influence throughout the country and the rest of the region.

FIGURE 9 ISIS-controlled territory at its height in 2015.

SOURCE: Adapted from BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034

Iraq had already been experiencing major political, economic and social crises of its own when the Syrian conflict began. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq's Sunni Arab minority went from being rulers to ruled overnight.[240] The restructuring of the system of governance in Iraq post-2003 created an Iran-backed Shiite-dominated central government and led to Sunni disengagement from the state and political process.[241] Moreover, the country's democratization process after the 2003 invasion has resulted in identity-based political dynamics, dividing the population along sectarian lines. This created fertile ground for championing the Sunni cause, including the emergence of ISIS.[242]

Espousing the creation of a caliphate and seeking universal leadership of the Muslim community worldwide, ISIS became a juggernaut, disrupting both rebel and government forces' efforts in Syria. Opposing factions at times fight alongside one another to eliminate the terrorist group.[243] ISIS funded itself largely through involvement in organized-crime activities (including extortion, arms and human trafficking), generating an estimated US$6 billion for its operations in Iraq and Syria at its height in 2015.[244] The role of ISIS in the Syrian conflict and the ensuing violence only worsened Iraq's fragile economy and resulted in the displacement of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi civilians.

Notwithstanding other methods of financing, including alleged support by Arab Gulf states,[245] ISIS garnered most of its revenue through the occupation of territory. At one point it controlled an area roughly the size of the United Kingdom and home to about 8 million people (see Figure 9).[246]

The group established a zone of exclusive authority in the territory that it controlled through a scheme of violent governance, whereby it not only engaged directly in organized-crime activities, but also collected taxes and tariffs on everything under its purview, including from local smugglers and other organized-criminal networks.[247] In

2015 alone, it was estimated that the group generated approximately US$360 million from extortion alone, under the auspices of providing protection from other conflict actors.[248]

As the group gained control of large swathes of territory, it also exploited resources in these areas to procure strategic illicit revenue streams. For example, a report examining how Islamic State smuggled Iraqi antiquities from heritage sites in Nineveh Province[249] illustrates the group's calculated methods of securing ancient Iraqi artefacts to sell on the international black market to fund their operations. In contrast to videos it distributed in which Islamic State portrayed its members seemingly destroying Iraqi artefacts for ideological motives, the group were reportedly accompanied or directed by archaeologists to determine the value of these artefacts in order to trade the highly prized cultural treasures for profit. In 2015, a Financial Acton Task Force report on the group's financing stated: 'ISIL's ability to earn revenue from the illicit sale of antiquities is contingent upon the presence of antiquities within territory where ISIL operates, knowledge of their existence, and ISIL's ability to recognize materials as artefacts and develop some estimation of their value.'[250] In other words, through exploitation of the territory that ISIS controlled, the group firmly solidified its role as a sophisticated criminal enterprise.

The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service after an area of Mosul is retaken from ISIS. *© Fadel Senna/AFP via Getty Images*

The group used its funds to carry out attacks in Syria and Iraq, while seeking to bolster its appeal as a legitimate entity by providing public services to the people.[251] ISIS's stronghold was primarily in Iraq's western Anbar province, along the desert

border with Syria, where several reports indicate widespread illicit flows of arms, drugs and trafficking of minority groups.[252] Human-smuggling flows of Syrians and Iraqis were redirected in order to avoid the group's brutality. For example, Syrians from the country's northern regions crossed illegally into Turkey and then into northern Iraq to circumvent the group.[253]

Today, despite the eradication of ISIS's territory in Iraq, the pandemic appears to be fuelling the chaotic environment that the Syrian conflict once did, providing an opportunity for the group to increase in strength and render more frequent attacks in recent months.[254] According to one report in May 2020, attacks by ISIS increased in the city of Kirkuk by as much as 200%.[255] Moreover, the deep sectarian divides that allowed the group to emerge in the first place remain.

As is the case in Syria's other neighbouring countries, domestic groups align themselves with counterparts in Syria and work to support them, including through criminal activities. For example, various Sunni tribes (most notably the Albu Mahal tribe) in Iraq's sparsely populated Anbar province engage in smuggling arms and military equipment, and send foreign fighters to their comrades in Syrian opposition groups.[256]

The Syrian conflict has, if anything, amplified existing polarization and radicalization in Iraq, including among Shiite groups in favour of the Syrian regime. Iraq's PMF are reportedly part of a criminal network that engages in the smuggling of drugs and arms in the Levant and beyond.[257] Research indicates that their presence in the Syrian-Iraqi border town of Al-Qa'im has allowed them to move goods, weapons and militiamen into Syria to fight alongside forces aligned with Iran (in addition to taxing smugglers by setting up checkpoints), increasing resentment and tensions in the Sunni-dominated area the town is located in.[258] In addition to generating revenue from illicit activities, PMF has been able to leverage its military capacity and territorial control, and thus gain political influence following the expulsion of ISIS, solidifying Iranian influence within the Iraqi government.[259]

Through its regional proxies, Iran's role in Iraq – and the Syrian conflict in general – has had Western and Sunni majority countries on high alert, directly impacting illicit flows. In 2019, Iranian proxies reportedly started constructing tunnels across Iraq and Syria (through the Abu Kamal–Al-Qa'im border crossing) to connect to Lebanon in a so-called Shia Crescent, or Shiite sphere of influence.[260] While currently little more is known about this, its construction would mean that fighters, weapons and other illicit commodities would be easier to move across the region to reach pro-Iranian actors in their war efforts, allowing Iran to gain an influential advantage in the region.

Since the global pandemic began, however, Iran has become a regional epicentre for positive cases, and as the country struggles to curb the spread, Iraq has seen a rise in smuggling incidents despite closures with its eastern neighbour.[261] While Iran's military and financial support to Iraq's Shiite government has begun to decline amid the health crisis, illicit flows by opportunistic groups continue throughout the country. Reduced funding for pro-Iranian groups has meant that these groups have begun to follow regional patterns of criminal activity, seeking alternative funding sources and weapons to carry out their activities, through links across Iraq and through Syria.[262]

Through exploitation of the territory that ISIS controlled, the group firmly solidified its role as a sophisticated criminal enterprise.

Alliances

■ Pro-Assad regime (orange)
■ Pro-opposition (blue)
■ Pro-Kurds (purple)

Sectarian support:

□ Shiite

Associated militias:

(hatched icons)

Abbreviations:

HZB: Hezbollah
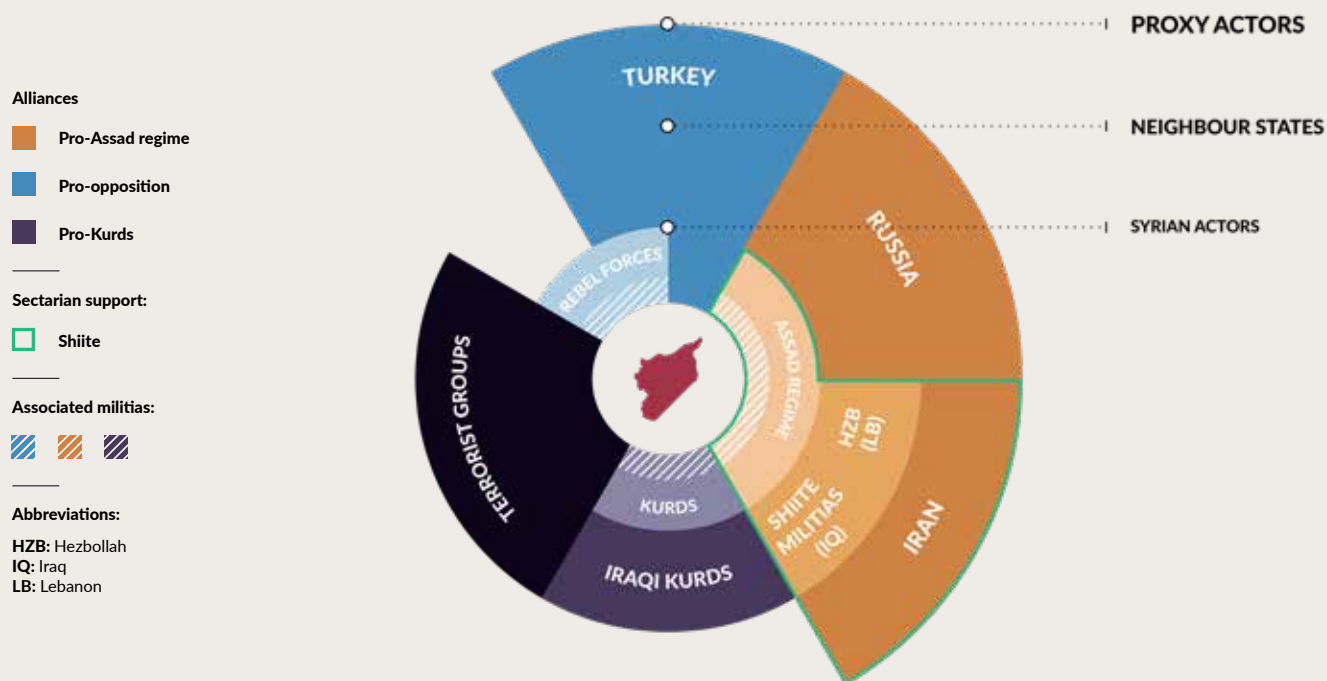**IQ:** Iraq
LB: Lebanon

FIGURE 10 Key actors in the Syrian conflict since 2020.

To the north of Iraq, large-scale migration of civilians escaping the conflict in north-ern Syria has inundated the Kurdistan Region of Iraq while at the same time providing a steady stream of income to local smugglers in the region. Over the course of the Syrian war, Syrian Kurdish forces, namely the US-backed Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its affiliated militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG),[263] have expanded their control over the country's north-eastern region bordering Iraq, gradually gaining territory from ISIS while simultaneously taking control of trade lines and smuggling routes.[264] However, with ISIS strongholds defeated, the US retracted its support.[265] As a result, Turkey has shifted its role in Syria from being a rebel supporting external actor, to directly engaging in the conflict in the country, fighting what it sees as a national security threat posed by Kurdish expansion.[266]

Fighting between Kurdish and Turkish forces has led to a sharp increase in smuggling markets as (mainly) Syrian Kurds have fled to Iraqi Kurdistan.[267] The YPG's control of the border between Kurdish Syria and Iraq (most importantly the Faysh Khabur border post) has meant flows between Turkey, Syria and Iraq are essentially all illic-it.[268] Facing violence on all sides, refugees have little choice but to pay smugglers to reach Iraq.[269]

Both marginalized Sunni groups and Iran's proxy actors in Iraq engage in organized crime domestically and in Syria, not only prolonging the conflict next door, but also exacerbating local social tensions. This has left ordinary citizens faced with wide-spread corruption, economic failure and sectarian violence – all of which have fuelled the country's October 2019 protests that continue today.[270] Like the Syrian conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated these conditions and fuelled sectarian ten-sions, as the country struggles to deal with the health crisis.

Looking ahead: What's in store for Iraq?

Like Lebanon, Iraq has been marred by sectarian divisions and has continued to witness widespread protests since October 2019, with its citizens seeking an end to corruption, high levels of unemployment, strained infrastructure and a withdrawal of foreign interference from Iran. In response, protests have been met with violent repression, with hundreds of people killed and thousands injured at the hands of military forces since demonstrations began.[271] Sources suggest that the government's heavy-handed response to protesters may be a sign that Iran is concerned about losing influence in the country.[272] The demonstrations have also been denounced by Iraqi government officials as a plot by the US embassy and Gulf states set on toppling Iraq's Shia government.[273]

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi
© *Christian Marquardt/Pool/Getty Images*

Since 2003, Iraq's government has been characterized by a quota system that allocates government positions based on sectarian and identity lines.[274] Although the system was aimed at ensuring ethno-sectarian proportional representation, the scheme has deepened divides and fuelled patronage networks. According to polls conducted in 2019 in five Arab-Sunni majority provinces, there was an increase in respondents from the previous year stating that they felt their group did not get its fair share of services compared to other groups in the country.[275]

Overall, however, the same polls show that sectarianism on the ground is getting better, and there has been an increase in social cohesion. Nevertheless, as with the protests in Lebanon, although demonstrations in Iraq have largely been unified against the government, the violent government responses may trigger further conflict, creating opportunities for organized criminals to step in. With the breakdown in security flowing from the protests, Iraq risks actually perpetuating sectarianism, in opposition to protesters' aims. Additionally, the movement of soldiers and paramilitary groups across the region raises health risks.

The Iraqi government's failure to respond effectively to COVID-19 has fuelled mistrust of the government and weakened health structures – Iraq has just 1.4 hospital beds and 0.8 physicians per 1 000 people.[276] Moreover, since March, the price of oil, which accounts for 90% of the government's revenue, has declined drastically, worsening the political situation.

Temporarily halted by the outbreak of coronavirus, Iraqis, like the Lebanese, have now renewed their demonstrations against the government, which have again, been met with violence. The pandemic and protests have diverted security forces away, leaving the risk of a resurgence by ISIS, [277] and possibly renewed sectarian tensions. Sunnis continue to be isolated economically and politically from the Iran-backed Shiite government, risking a renewal of violent extremism.

While the country appointed a new prime minister in May 2020,[278] it continues to face unrest and economic stagnation. In the north of the country, volatile tensions between north-eastern Syria and the border with Turkey may trigger further instability and human smuggling into Kurdistan, and the potential spread of the virus in a region that is comparably better prepared than the rest of the country.

Currently, the political unrest, economic insecurity and the health crisis in Iraq mean that there is a strong likelihood that the country will continue to experience violence and see illicit flows spread, potentially leading to a renewed civil conflict.

PROGRAMME MAPPING

Humanitarian aid is seen distributed by the Russian military in Jamlah, Syria.

© Andrei Gryaznov/TASS via Getty Images

Given the volatility of the Levant region and the heightened risk of organized-crime flows becoming increasingly embedded in the social, political and economic fabric of the region, donor programming in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq faces strategic and operational challenges. A desk review of current programming in the region that focuses on addressing organized-crime flows was undertaken to help shape donor priorities, identify opportunities for collaboration and avoid duplication of efforts.

Information on donor activity in the region was primarily gathered from OECD International Development Statistics and the International Aid Transparency Initiative. Travel restrictions and other disruptions resulting from the global pandemic have meant that access to the most recent project documents and evaluation reports was limited to those publicly available. Despite these constraints, the following offers a snapshot of the current donor climate to help shape an overview of activities in the region and support planning.

In addition to providing military capacity-building and equipment supply from countries as outlined above (including Iran, Russia and the Persian Gulf countries), major donors to the region, in terms of development, reform and peace-building processes, are the United States, Germany, the European Union, the Netherlands and Canada.[279] With a few exceptions (i.e. Canada), official development assistance in the region is largely driven bilaterally rather than through multilateral channels (i.e. the UN), with the EU favouring distributing funds for 'budget support' with the aim of bolstering recipient country ownership.[280]

Generally, donor priorities in the region include a heavy emphasis on institutional capacity and reform (see Figure 11), and are largely directed towards stabilization efforts, emergency humanitarian aid, particularly to refugee populations, and healthcare support for the pandemic. There are significantly fewer initiatives with strategic objectives that focus directly on combating organized-crime flows. Of those programmes that do, there tends to be an emphasis on building capacity of border control and management as well as technical assistance to law enforcement. A table of notable activities currently being implemented in the Levant is given in the annex to this report.

Donor	Focus areas	Geographic focus
Germany	Frames its policy under the overarching point of 'fighting the root causes of displacement'; focus on migration, forced displacement; food security; health measures.	Jordan and Iraq were among the top 10 recipients of German ODA in 2018.
Canada	Under its Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada applies a human rights-based approach to its core action area – gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls – and five other action areas: 1) human dignity (including health education, humanitarian assistance, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and food security); 2) inclusive economic growth; 3) environment and climate change; 4) inclusive governance; 5) peace and security.	Syria, Jordan and Iraq were among the top 10 ODA recipient countries in 2018.
EU	Migration-related issues and humanitarian assistance.	Levant
Netherlands	Supporting the reception of refugees in the region, including education and employment for refugees and host communities.	Lebanon was the top country to receive Dutch ODA in 2018, although the Netherlands is increasing cooperation with Jordan and Iraq as well.
United States	Under the Trump administration, programming is strongly linked to US national security concerns and economic growth; cuts to health initiatives; USAID directs support towards self-reliance of recipient countries.	Jordan was the top recipient of US ODA in 2018.

FIGURE 11 Major donor priorities in the region.

SOURCE: OECD Donor Tracker, https://donortracker.org/countries

In Jordan, support generally focuses on reinforcing democratic institutions and the rule of law, as well as promoting regional stability, most likely due to the country's perceived role as a stable anchor in the region and its comparably developed criminal justice, governance, and social institutions. Although Lebanon has the highest number of refugees per capita, Jordan receives a significantly larger amount of donor funding directed at the facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility than its neighbours. It received US$27.3 million in ODA in 2018 (compared to Lebanon's US$5.6 million and Iraq's US$1.6 million)[281]. In line with other countries in the region, donor emphasis is placed on enhancing institutional capacity rather than engagement with non-state security sector and justice providers (with the exception of CSOs focused on legal aid).

In terms of small arms and light weapons control, the country received only US$50 000 in 2018, and no funding information was found relating to narcotics control, which includes activities such as police training and awareness campaigns to restrict drug trafficking. Rather, a number of projects are currently being implemented focusing on border management generally. The biggest donor in this area is the EU through its delegation and Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace.

In 2019, the EU, along with UNODC and the International Centre for Migration Policy and Development, launched a 6-million-euro project, Reinforcing Jordan's Capability at the Eastern Borders, which is aimed at promoting an integrated approach to border management and strengthening capacities to counter transnational crime and enhance trade through the creation of a multi-agency logistical hub. The EU has funded similar projects in the country, including Upgrading Karamah Border Crossing Point: Improved Access to Economic Development and Enhanced Stability,[282] which focused on offering technical assistance to border officials along the country's eastern border with Iraq to support economic recovery and stability, and to mitigate security risks. Additionally, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations is currently supporting a project on integrated border management in Jordan. Its objectives include the 'smooth trans-border flow of persons and goods'. The 36-month action will continue through July 2022.

Jordan is also a part of a number of projects with a regional scope that largely target refugee populations and promote social cohesion. For example, the German government (in partnership with the Berghof Foundation) has funded a project to support local

dialogues and regional exchanges between Sunni religious leaders and community actors to address community tensions and prevent radicalization (along with Lebanon).[283]

Funding activities in Jordan may be described as overcrowded in the security sector space, which has led to fragmented international support and various project implementation arrangements. The lack of cohesion may undermine the government's ability to implement effectively.[284] Moreover, while there are some initiatives on healthcare reform, thematic areas that require more focus are drug trafficking, and correction and rehabilitation centres.

Where Jordan's donor climate is overcrowded, development initiatives in Iraq can be described as more disjointed and overwhelmingly focused on recovery. Given Iraq's volatility post-2003 and throughout the Syrian conflict, donor priorities have emphasized stabilization efforts and humanitarian aid, particularly centred on refugees and internally displaced persons, border management and de-mining. The country received US$284.7 million in ODA for initiatives around conflict, peace and security.[285] By contrast, comparably little focus has been placed on anti-corruption efforts: total ODA from member countries of the Development Assistance Committee for anti-corruption among institutions and organizations was just $25 000 in 2018.[286]

Ongoing donor support to Iraq's institutions is mainly delivered through UNDP's Country Programme, a multi-donor pooled fund with nearly US$15 million allocated to peace, justice and strong institutions, running during the period 2020–2024.[287] Iraq is also a recipient of smaller-scale bilateral initiatives, including Denmark's three-year (2019–2021) Syria-Iraq Peace and Stabilisation Programme, which focuses on short- and medium-term stabilization efforts centred on three thematic objectives: peacebuilding and justice; resilience and recovery; and security governance. Germany, Canada, the Netherlands and the US are also involved in actions that support community policing, including the establishment of community policing forums to promote social cohesion, enhancing political representation and trust between law enforcement and the communities.

Although support to Jordan and Iraq has increased in the past few years, donor funding to Lebanon has seen little growth, though there has been a renewed impetus for emergency reconstruction and humanitarian aid following the Beirut port explosion.[288] According to the OECD, support to the country's governance and security sector saw significant declines from 2005 to 2019.[289]

In terms of security, Lebanon falls in line with its neighbours, in that security-driven donor assistance is more institutionally focused, with operational support largely directed towards the Lebanese army and Internal Security Forces. As in Jordan, the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations provides Lebanon support through integrated border management, with the second phase of the programme set to end in June 2021. Lebanon is also part of the UNODC's Container Control Programme, which works to establish effective cargo controls to prevent trafficking across the land border with Syria and its ports. Other initiatives include Transparency International's Defense and Security Programme, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provides technical assistance and capacity building to help identify corruption risks among military and defence ministry personnel.

By and large, donor community engagement in Lebanon has a strong focus on social cohesion, with a number of initiatives geared towards easing tensions between refugees and host communities, inter-sectoral dialogue and regional exchange. By contrast, no ODA funding directed at reintegration and small arms and light weapons were received in 2018. In terms of drugs, US$250 000 in ODA was allocated to the country in 2018, as well as US$110 000 for agricultural and non-agricultural alternative development for projects to reduce illicit drug cultivation. Increasingly, a number of programmes are being implemented that focus on economic growth and job creation.

Generally, the donor climate in Lebanon can be described as directed at niche thematic areas with lower coordinated efforts. Moreover, in light of current protests and calls to overhaul the government, donor funding has become increasingly dependent on the country being able to reform its government.[290]

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The creeping influence of illicit economies in the region have cast a spotlight on the inadequacies of state institutions to respond to socio-economic and humanitarian challenges. © *Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images*

The destabilizing impact of the Syrian conflict has clearly helped solidify the role of the illicit economy in perpetuating violence and instability in the Levant region. As Syria remains subjected to one of the most comprehensive sanctions regimes ever implemented, including trade restrictions, arms embargoes, travel bans and asset freezes on key Syrian officials, sophisticated means for evading those sanctions have become well established. Illicit economies have been a key part of the system that has fuelled the conflict, and they have become entrenched in Syria's neighbouring countries.

As the protracted and brutal Syrian conflict remains unresolved to this day, the final balance of power cannot be fully understood. While the scale of violence in Syria has declined now that the major challenges to the regime's authority have been quashed, full acceptance of its hegemony remain under question, especially given the continued human-rights abuses and contraventions of international humanitarian law by the regime. Continuing uncertainties over the fate of Idlib and the north-eastern regions, and the challenges to the legitimacy of the regime both by domestic and international actors mean that a lasting solution to Syria's conflict, with the restoration of the rule of law and capacity for effective governance, remains a distant prospect.

For ordinary people in Syria and its neighbours trying to sustain themselves, nine years of war have progressively eroded the economy, infrastructure and their livelihoods, and triggered mass displacement. Cross-border smuggling of a wide range of goods has supplemented and supplanted what remained of legitimate trade. As the war nears an end, refugees and internally displaced people will need to return to Syria and may have no choice but to rely on informal networks to do so. Illicit trade structures solidified over the course of the nine years are likely to remain, as the actors involved are unlikely to surrender power in the territories they have gained during the war. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's burdened health and economic infrastructures have exacerbated the dire conditions for people, and while the coronavirus's full impact on organized crime in the region remains to be seen, it is likely that the uncertainty surrounding the virus will be taken advantage of by local and external actors in their power-seeking efforts.

Organized-crime activities are both a source and consequence of the war in Syria, whereby demand for illicit commodities, such as drugs and arms, has allowed actors at all levels to carve out control of these criminal markets. These actors, including local crime groups, non-state factions as well as state entities themselves, have been involved in illicit economies to further their own objectives. There have been no real efforts to stop these illicit economies in the Levant – local objectives to curtail illicit markets are implemented only if flows support an opposing group. External operations have often contributed to these illicit trades. Essentially, the Levant can be seen as a context where rule of law has largely dissolved as a concept, and revenue sources are harnessed and weaponized to support the political objectives and self-determination goals of local, national and international interests. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced these power-seeking dynamics.

The result has been a creeping influence of illicit economies throughout the region, casting a spotlight on the inadequacies of state institutions to respond to underlying inequalities and unsustainable political, health and socio-economic conditions. Illicit commodities such as drugs have infiltrated communities, as evidenced by the increase in addiction and trafficking cases. Syria's neighbours have become more weaponized as more and more civilians procure arms to protect themselves where state institutions have failed to provide for their security. The mass migration of people escaping conflict and the dire conditions brought on by national lockdowns and the smuggling markets that facilitate their exodus have magnified the fact that healthcare, economic and social infrastructures are unable to meet the needs of the people. This dereliction of service delivery has led to resentment and growing popular dissent against governments, instability and the spread of radicalization – as seen in the most recent protests in Lebanon and Iraq.

With the conflict in Syria dying down and amid the current health crisis, there is an opportunity to introduce new positive political-economy dynamics designed to reduce the fragility of vulnerable populations, offer greater stability to neighbouring countries, and allow them to focus on responding to and extracting themselves from the prevailing illicit economies in which they have become ensnared. As such, development interventions are urgently needed to promote and strengthen positive dynamics in the region.

Recommendations

At the outset, it is important to recognize that development initiatives should be framed with an understanding of their limits. The blurring between illicit economies and war economies, and their impact, is extensive and chronic, and changes to these dynamics will be slow. Therefore, programmes will need to assess the timeframes between implementation and results, with the aim of creating a stable and prosperous Levant region for the long term. The following points are key recommendations for interventions in the region based on the organized crime–political economy dynamics of Syria's neighbours and current trends in donor aid.

1. Building the evidence base through targeted research

The dearth of current programming in the Levant that is designed to directly target organized crime means that little is known about criminal dynamics in the region. Thus, as a preliminary consideration, organized crime-related initiatives in the region must be based on a thorough understanding of key issues underlying illicit activities and their impact. Targeted research and analysis of local contexts and the role organized crime plays in local economies and in the social and political spheres can help shape intervention efforts and minimize the risk of inadvertently contributing to illicit flows and/or removal of livelihoods.

Analysis that includes a mapping of the pervasiveness of particular criminal markets and how they have evolved over time in a particular locale, identifying key actors (local or external, state and non-state) involved in illicit flows, their motivations, as well as those working to build resilience against organized crime, is crucial in not only forming an evidence base upon which targeted and effective programmes can be established, but also to build political will, raise social awareness of how these negative dynamics affect local and regional contexts, and identify linkages to broader sectoral reform. Moreover, given the volatility of the region, investment in consistent monitoring of the ever-changing dynamics in local contexts and making findings publicly available can contribute to new ideas for intervention, exposure and coordination.

2. Working with institutions and non-state actors

Efforts to enable countries to push back against illicit economies ultimately rest with those in power, and it is important to recognize the value in working with non-state entities that may have de facto control in key areas to implement effective interventions. While current donor funding places an emphasis on institutional capacity building (primarily border management and law enforcement technical assistance), local non-state actors, such as local clans in the border regions of Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, as well as the private sector (local businessmen) and political groups (such as Hezbollah), may have gained legitimacy in the eyes of communities, so collaborating with them in some form is essential in ensuring that development programmes are accepted and integrated by the communities. Moreover, while there is a tendency to downplay the role of states in perpetuating illicit flows and conflict, it is imperative to understand governance and structural deficiencies, and where other actors may have fulfilled these roles. Engagement with civil society actors should also be enhanced, particularly in countries where civil society is active (e.g. Lebanon and Jordan) and often play a bigger role in resilience to organized crime activities than state institutions.[291]

Additionally, in light of the limited support for anti-corruption initiatives in the Levant, engagement with local interlocutors should be built around programmes in which accountability and monitoring measures are embedded. Over the course of the Syrian conflict, a range of actors (both state and non-state) have been involved in exerting territorial control and monopolizing resources, while working to appeal to local communities. For example, as outlined above, groups with political ties have been known to be involved in cross-border trafficking of arms and human smuggling in Lebanon and Iraq (to varying degrees). Areas such as building the capacity of public finance management budget planning, communication, monitoring and evaluation have tended to be under-supported in the region and should be expanded.

At the same time, the pandemic has also overburdened countries' basic governance functions, exacerbating corruption, and cemented the governance role of non-state actors. These actors may perceive engagement with development entities as a threat to their control and restrict policymakers' ability to monitor implemented programmes. It is therefore essential to promote the importance of development interventions as a benefit to all, framing monitoring and accountability measures as a component of the overall joint efforts in ensuring successful implementation. To ensure that development aid is allocated and implemented as effectively as possible, practical measures, such as clear communication of spending plans both by donors and recipients, as well as creating and/or strengthening the recipient accountability instruments and frameworks, are needed. Moreover, conditions on aid (including credible incentives to comply) may be a useful tool in addressing corruption and vested interests.

3. Targeting interventions to specific vulnerable groups impacted by criminal activities

The COVID-19 crisis has intensified the growing regional discontent as a result of the Syrian conflict. Popular mistrust of governments in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, along with tensions between different communities – sectarian-based groups, hosts and refugees – have left the region more volatile than ever before. The social impact of the Syrian conflict and the pandemic are largely similar: people have been displaced or are isolated from their communities; access to education has been halted; and, in many cases, the distribution of aid is imbalanced or discriminatory. These social undercurrents contribute to resentment among communities who feel marginalized, risking increased use of drugs, radicalization and the mobilization of weapons.

In this regard, development programming should overcome social fragmentation by targeting three key vulnerable groups. First, the plight of refugees and migrants, both during the coronavirus pandemic and after a vaccine is found, has been a donor priority and should continue to be one. Mass displacement brought on by the conflict in Syria and the current health crisis undermines stabilization and development assistance, requiring programmes to grapple with the reality that aid should not only be directed at countries' citizenry, but encompass the large numbers of undocumented people in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, who are highly vulnerable to extremism and may rely on the illicit economy to survive. While many initiatives in the region focus on short-term humanitarian aid to vulnerable population groups, particularly amid the pandemic, there is an expanding space for longer-term economic and social integration. Additionally, there should be a focus on legal reform (particularly in Lebanon and Jordan), so that the status and rights of refugees and irregular migrants are clarified and enforced, which would reduce reliance on smugglers and mitigate vulnerability to trafficking.

Secondly, while donor funding tends to focus on refugee populations, comparatively little attention has been directed towards those affected by the drug trade. The rise in drug trafficking and use in the region as a reaction to instability and violence poses not only health risks and infrastructural burdens, but also feeds social stigmas towards addicts and local communities in the region. This is particularly true for 'high stress' groups, such as the unemployed, migrants and refugees. Efforts in narcotics control programmes should be bolstered, as well as offering alternative livelihoods to locals who have traditionally been involved in the cultivation of narcotics.

Finally, the border regions of Syria's neighbours have been traditionally isolated from their countries' central political and commercial processes, and therefore development initiatives should centre on improving integration between these marginalized communities and the formal economies. By focusing on border region assimilation while respecting local social ecosystems that extend across national boundaries, reliance on informal or illicit sources of livelihoods becomes reduced and the risk of radicalization minimized. To that end, policymakers and development actors should also be wary of creating initiatives that perpetuate a cycle of aid dependency in border communities, focusing rather on productive economic projects that encourage ownership of livelihoods and increase social stability.

The pandemic has in a sense levelled economic insecurity within countries in the Levant. Everyone has been impacted by the virus, and the extensive damage to the region's formal economies may lead to an imbalanced reliance on the informal sector and criminal flows, not just in the immediate term (as a means of survival), but as a secondary impact of the pandemic. Economic infrastructures in the Levant were weak before the COVID-19 outbreak, with Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq's economies either heavily dependent on outside remittances and the global community to pump cash into their borders, or concentrated in a few key sectors (such as oil or tourism). Economic interventions should be balanced between short- and long-term objectives. While programmes that focus on immediate aid to alleviate humanitarian crises are urgently needed, initiatives that aim to diversify economic sectors and minimize foreign aid dependency would limit the risk of engagement in illicit economies.

Similarly, the pandemic has only exacerbated economic imbalances in the Levant, with those in the lower socio-economic groups having little to no opportunity for engagement in the formal economy. As witnessed by the Syrian conflict, criminal entrepreneurs pursue opportunities to expand their illicit activities in times of instability. As businesses collapse amid lockdowns and economic uncertainty, middle-class business and commerce becomes vulnerable to criminal capture, as criminal actors seek predatory funding opportunities.

Consequently, support that focuses on the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid, aimed at small to medium-sized entrepreneurs and vocational training, would be a step towards alleviating poverty, limiting economic dependence on predatory actors with vested interests, and promoting economic inclusion, innovation and job creation. These efforts are more critical given that the Levant, like the rest of the Arab world, has a largely young population who not only have the potential to serve as a resource and as drivers of economic growth, but in the absence of opportunity in formal sectors, also have the potential to become seriously vulnerable to criminality.

ANNEX

Non-exhaustive list of relevant programming activities in the Levant

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES	
Stakeholder	European Commission DG NEAR
Geographic focus	Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq
Priority	Social cohesion
Project/programme	Promoting religious tolerance and mutual understanding within and between faiths in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq
Budget	US$967 324
Time period	December 2018–November 2021
Description	Overall objective: To combat religious intolerance and discrimination among target communities in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq by enhancing mutual understanding and respect between different faiths and sects. More specifically, support CSOs/NGOs and faith-based organizations through sub-grants to promote dialogue.
Stakeholder	UNHCR; UNDP
Geographic focus	Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq
Priority	Refugee aid
Project/programme	Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP)
Budget	US$1 557 041 433 (as of August 2020)
Time period	2015 (ongoing)
Description	Combines humanitarian and development responses to the Syria crisis into a single coherent plan in line with national plans and priorities, under the co-leadership of UNHCR and UNDP. It comprises one regional plan, with five standalone country chapters covering Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. The 3RP has two interconnected components: the refugee component addresses the protection and humanitarian assistance needs of refugees, while the resilience component addresses the resilience, stabilization and development needs of impacted individuals, communities and institutions, aiming to strengthen the capacities of national actors.
Stakeholder	Germany; Berghof Foundation (implementing NGO)
Geographic focus	Lebanon, Jordan
Priority	Social cohesion
Project/programme	Supporting local dialogues, regional exchange and prevention capacities of Sunni religious and social actors
Budget	-
Time period	August 2019–October 2021

Description	Key areas of engagement: (1) support local level dialogues to enhance practical, grounded prevention efforts in different areas – key Sunni strongholds where grievances fuelled radicalization in the past and mixed areas with potential for community tension and polarization; (2) strengthen the capacities for dialogue, mediation and prevention efforts of (young) Sheikhs, insider mediators and bridge-builders (male and female) from all over Lebanon enabling them to undertake concrete mediation, dialogue/outreach and prevention efforts in their respective areas; (3) a structured regional exchange will be initiated between religious authorities, scholars and civil society figures in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Iraq to analyze and extract lessons learned from prevention efforts in these countries, develop strategic recommendations and devise joint initiatives.
Stakeholder	UNODC; Norway
Geographic focus	Lebanon, Syria
Priority	Border management
Project/programme	Container Control Programme
Budget	-
Time period	2019–2020
Description	Support the establishment of effective cargo controls to prevent trafficking and other illicit container and cargo crime at the land border crossing with Syria (Masnaa) and enhance legitimate trade; strengthen trade security and facilitation at the seaports of Beirut and Tripoli with the ultimate goal of (1) contributing to strengthened border control and coastal zone management; (2) stability; and (3) economic improvement.
Stakeholder	Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Geographic focus	Syria, Iraq
Priority	Stabilization
Project/programme	Syria – Iraq Peace and Stabilisation Programme (2019–2021)
Budget	397 million Danish krone
Time period	2019–2021
Description	Overarching aim is to reduce regional insecurity, terrorism, irregular migration and protracted displacement by meeting immediate and medium-term stabilization needs in Syria and Iraq.
COUNTRY-TARGETED ACTIVITIES	
Stakeholder	EU, Jordan, UNODC, ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development)
Geographic focus	Jordan
Priority	Border management
Project/programme	Reinforcing Jordan's Capability at the Eastern Borders
Budget	€6 000 000
Time period	18 months; launched November 2019
Description	Support Jordan to develop an integrated approach in border management and to strengthen capacities to counter transnational crime and enhance trade traffic for land, sea and air border centres.
Stakeholder	Germany; IOM (implementing)
Geographic focus	Iraq
Priority	Policing
Project/programme	Supporting Community Policing and Stabilisation in Iraq
Budget	€5.7 million
Time period	January 2021–December 2022
Description	Overall aim: To contribute to enhancing peace, security and stability through rebuilding trust between law enforcement officials and communities, and to contribute to a conducive environment for returns through strengthened social cohesion and increasing access to rights and political representation.

Stakeholder	Germany; UNDP
Geographic focus	Iraq
Priority	Law enforcement capacity building
Project/programme	Strengthening Criminal Investigations and Crime Scene Management Capacities in Iraq
Budget	US$1.13 million (grant)
Time period	-
Description	Aims to increase the reliability and effectiveness of criminal investigations, ensuring they are well integrated and proactively conducted by local police. The action will also improve the performance of police investigators, making their role in criminal investigations more accountable. Activities under this project include comprehensive training sessions for investigating officers from local police stations, relevant directorates and investigating judges.
Stakeholder	Canada
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Economic
Project/programme	Supporting Productive Sectors Development Program in Lebanon
Budget	US$7.6 million
Time period	March 2020–March 2021
Description	Aims to support Lebanon's manufacturing (agro-food) and agriculture sectors, which have been identified as having a high potential for job creation for women and youth in disadvantaged areas. The project works to promote equal access to economic opportunities for women and men in productive sectors, in order to support social and economic equality and stimulate economic growth. Project activities include: (1) developing strategies and legislative reviews; (2) supporting infrastructure investment; and (3) enhancing skills and production capacities for farmers, cooperatives and small businesses.
Stakeholder	EU; implemented by IOM and UNODC
Geographic focus	Jordan
Priority	Border management
Project/programme	Upgrading Karamah Border Crossing Point: Improved Access to Economic Development and Enhanced Stability
Budget	€1 million
Time period	June 2018–December 2019
Description	The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the economic recovery and stability of Jordan and the region while ensuring that security risks are mitigated in cros-border movements of goods and people.
Stakeholder	European Commission DG NEAR
Geographic focus	Jordan
Priority	Border management
Project/programme	Support to Integrated Border Management in Jordan
Budget	-
Time period	December 2019–July 2022
Description	The overall objective of this 36-month action is to contribute to the development of the long-term capability of the national authorities to control and manage its international borders, thus ensuring greater security for citizens and visitors, guaranteeing respect of the rule of law and sustainable development processes for the country. This project will entail support to a smooth trans-border flow of persons and goods, and hence contribute to economic and fiscal growth.

Stakeholder	EU (FPI); UN
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Social cohesion; healthcare
Project/programme	Preventing tensions between refugees from Syria and host communities in the context of the COVID-19 crisis in Lebanon
Budget	-
Time period	April 2020–December 2021
Description	The action aims to prevent inter-community tensions by reinforcing the capacity of the Lebanese health system (public hospitals in particular) to cope with COVID-19 and any future pandemics, thus supporting national resilience and social stability.
Stakeholder	European Commission DG NEAR
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Economic
Project/programme	Promoting the local economy in North East Bekaa
Budget	US$13 million
Time period	-
Description	Promote local economy in border regions; agricultural development, SME development; decentralization and support to subnational government
Stakeholder	UNDP
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Social cohesion
Project/programme	Tensions Monitoring System
Budget	-
Time period	June 2018–December 2020
Description	This project outlines a tensions monitoring system led by UNDP, with close coordination with UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Affairs, over a three-year period from 2018 to 2021 to track these tensions.
Stakeholder	USAID; Baladi CAP (implementing)
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Economic
Project/programme	General funding
Budget	-
Time period	September 2013–March 2021
Description	Tailored capacity development assistance and small grants to local civil society organizations. This includes supporting (1) a new cohort of faith-based, non-governmental organizations to provide basic essential services to religious and ethnic minorities in under-served communities; (2) three intermediary service organizations and their CSO members to further expand their reach and amplify the impact of their advocacy efforts; and (3) civil society organizations to increase transparency and to combat corruption by providing much-needed technical knowledge and expertise on public procurement and other government oversight issues.

Stakeholder	European Commission DG NEAR; ICMPD
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Border management
Project/programme	Enhanced capability for Integrated Border Management (IBM Lebanon 2); Supporting Lebanon in Fostering Human Rights-Based Border and Migration Management
Budget	-
Time period	November 2018–November 2020 (phase 1); phase 2 upcoming
Description	Through the provision of technical support and equipment, the programme will continue to support integrated border management in Lebanon by strengthening the operational systems at the legal border crossing points and within the institutions. This ambitious objective will mobilize several security institutions (General Security, Customs, LAF, ISF, Civil Defence etc.) and rely on the best available expertise among the EU member states.

Stakeholder	UNDP; EU Commission DG NEAR
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Border management
Project/programme	Sustainable Energy for Security: Interventions for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) along the North-eastern Lebanese border
Budget	US$3.9 million
Time period	June 2019–December 2021
Description	To promote security of border communities and to strengthen the logistic at the north-eastern borders through the operationalization of the LAF Sustainable Energy Strategy. The use of sustainable energy systems will enhance the security of both the Lebanese borders communities and the LAF personnel by increasing their level of comfort in remote border areas to levels that are acceptable, which, in turn, will ensure better operational readiness and ability.

Stakeholder	USAID; Chemonics International
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Economic
Project/programme	Lebanon Enterprise Development (LED)
Budget	US$19.3 million
Time period	September 2017–September 2022
Description	The activity applies a market-led approach and partners with local firms to facilitate the provision of business development services and solutions that address critical technical constraints, and better enable them to increase productivity, boost sales and create jobs. The activity builds the local market for business consultancy services so that it is more commercial and in no further need of subsidies and foreign assistance.

Stakeholder	Economic and Social Fund for Development; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Economic
Project/programme	Boosting economic growth and job creation in specific targeted areas in Lebanon
Budget	-
Time period	-
Description	Contribute to the revival of the local economy and enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations living in areas with high concentration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The specific objective is to create job opportunities (to Lebanese and non-Lebanese citizens) in the problematic targeted areas by providing financial and non-financial support to Lebanese small and medium enterprises.

Stakeholder	European Commission DG NEAR
Geographic focus	Lebanon
Priority	Anti-corruption
Project/programme	Promoting Transparency and Combatting Corruption at National Level
Budget	US$944 212
Time period	March 2019–February 2022
Description	The overall objective of the project is to address corruption and transparency by improving good governance in Lebanon through the support of the Lebanese government's effort in combating corruption, including the implementation of the National Strategy, and support civil society in that respect. The specific objectives of the project aim to strengthen public accountability, and improve transparency through capacity building of control bodies, among others.

Stakeholder	European Commission DG NEAR
Geographic focus	Iraq
Priority	Governance; anti-corruption
Project/programme	Strengthening public finance management oversight and accountability institutions in Iraq
Budget	-
Time period	2021
Description	Technical assistance activities to strengthen public finance management oversight and accountability institutions.

Stakeholder	World Bank
Geographic focus	Iraq
Priority	Stabilization
Project/programme	Iraq Emergency Social Stabilization and Resilience Project
Budget	-
Time period	2017–2021
Description	The development objective of the Emergency Social Stabilization Project for Iraq is to: (1) increase livelihood opportunities in liberated areas; (2) increase access to psycho-social services in liberated areas; and (3) strengthen the systems to expand the provision of social safety nets. This project has three components. The first component, cash for Work (CfW), social support, and livelihood opportunities, is to increase access to short-term employment in areas affected by the succession of crises by financing a CfW programme, while providing livelihood opportunities for sustainable stabilization. The component includes three subcomponents: 1) Cash for work; 2) psychosocial support services; and 3) livelihood opportunities. The second component, Resilient Social Safety Nets, is to strengthen the capability of the current social safety net programmes through promoting flexibility and scalability in the programme design. It will not finance cash transfers to beneficiaries.

NOTES

1 Operation in the Middle East and North Africa targets pharmaceutical crime, INTERPOL, July 2020, https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2020/Operation-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa-targets-pharmaceutical-crime.

2 Iraq says nearly 560 killed in anti-government unrest, Arab News, July 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1712241/middle-east.

3 Carlie Porterfield, Smugglers are using coronavirus lockdowns to loot artifacts, Forbes, April 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlieporterfield/2020/04/30/smugglers-are-using-coronavirus-lockdowns-to-loot-artifacts/#7892d4e036bf; Naharnet News, Lebanon's Subsidized Diesel Oil, Flour Smuggled to Syria, May 2020 http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/271717.

4 Patrick Radden Keefe, The drugs of war – Captagon and the Islamic State, The Century Foundation, April 2016, https://tcf.org/content/report/the-drugs-of-war/.

5 UNODC, Afghan opiate trafficking through the southern route, June 2015, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Afghan_opiate_trafficking_southern_route_web.pdf.

6 US Directorate of Intelligence, Heroin trafficking: The Syrian connection, 2012, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T00586R000200160004-8.pdf; High finance: ISIS generates up to $1bn annually from trafficking Afghan heroin, RT News, March 2015, https://www.rt.com/news/238369-isis-drug-money-trafficking/.

7 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, The nexus of conflict and illicit drug trafficking in Syria and the wider region, 2016, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-nexus-of-conflict-and-illicit-drug-trafficking-Syria-and-the-wider-region.pdf; Stephen Kalin, War has turned Syria into a major amphetamines hub, Reuters, January 2014, https://www.businessinsider.com/war-has-turned-syria-into-a-major-amphetamines-hub-2014-1?IR=T.

8 Suspected drug dealer arrested in possession of 10,000 pills in Mafraq, *The Jordan Times*, March 2019, http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/suspected-drug-dealer-arrested-possession-10000-pills-mafraq; Drug smuggling attempt foiled at Syrian border, Ammon News, December 2019, http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=42269#.XkTydmhKg2w.

9 Mushreq Abbas, Smugglers easily cross Iraq's borders, Al-Monitor: The pulse of the Middle East, October 2013, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/smugglers-easily-cross-iraqi-border.html; Kurdistan used by drug traffickers to transmit drugs to other countries: official, NRT News, February 2019, https://www.nrttv.com/En/News.aspx?id=10070&MapID=1.

10 Phone interviews (2019) in the region reveal that prices are relatively low in Syria and do not exceed US$30 per 200 tablets of Captagon.

11 Currently, there is little evidence that Captagon is moved in large quantities from Syria directly into Iraq. This is probably because the conflict there reduces the stability required for consistent trafficking. However, According to the 2015 INCSR report, 'Fenethylline pills (an amphetamine-type stimulant, or ATS) are trafficked via the Iraq Syria border for domestic consumption and for shipment to other countries in the Middle East.' (See Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, The nexus of conflict and illicit drug trafficking in Syria and the wider region, 2016, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-nexus-of-conflict-and-illicit-drug-trafficking-Syria-and-the-wider-region.pdf).

12 Ibid.

13 Stephen Starr, Syria's next big export: Illegal pills, OZY, August 2019, https://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/syrias-next-big-export-illegal-pills/95965/.

14 Greece seizes record amount of amphetamine Captagon shipped from Syria, Reuters, July 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-drugs/greece-seizes-record-amount-of-amphetamine-captagon-shipped-from-syria-idUSKCN1U01IH.

15 Was 'IS' trying to sell €1 billion worth of drugs in Europe?, DW, July 2020 https://www.dw.com/en/was-is-trying-to-sell-1-billion-worth-of-drugs-in-europe/a-54077440; Italian police confiscate $1 billion worth of 'Islamic State-made' drugs, Al Monitor, July 2020 https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/07/italy-captagon-seize-drugs-isis-syria-confiscate.html

16 Another smuggling attempt of Syrian amphetamines was foiled by Saudi Arabian authorities in May 2020, https://middleeastaffairs.net/2020/05/01/saudi-arabia-foils-attempt-to-smuggle-19-mln-amphetamine-pills-in-syrian-containers/.

17 Ibid.

18 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, The nexus of conflict and illicit drug trafficking in Syria and the wider region, 2016, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-nexus-of-conflict-and-illicit-drug-trafficking-Syria-and-the-wider-region.pdf).

19 Stephen Starr, Syria's next big export: Illegal pills, OZY, August 2019, https://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/syrias-next-big-export-illegal-pills/95965/.

20 Captured by Captagon? Lebanon's evolving illicit drug

economy, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, May 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/TGIATOC-Captured-by-Captagon-Lebanon_s-evolving-illicit-drug-economy-web.pdf.

21 Lebanon-Saudi police seizes 800,000 Captagon pills, *The National*, April 2019, https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/lebanon-saudi-police-seizes-800-000-captagon-pills-1.848507.

22 Ibid.

23 Phone interview, Syrian judge, October 2019.

24 Captured by Captagon? Lebanon's evolving illicit drug economy, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, May 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/TGIATOC-Captured-by-Captagon-Lebanon_s-evolving-illicit-drug-economy-web.pdf.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Lebanon makes largest ever cannabis drug bust, France 24, April 2020, https://www.france24.com/en/20200410-lebanon-makes-largest-ever-cannabis-drug-bust.

28 Karzan Sulaivany, Iraqi forces foil 'biggest' drug smuggling attempt at Jordanian border, Kurdistan 24, 26 April 2018, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/84230e62-243a-4a74-a9ab-8e5c1821dab5.

29 Mushreq Abbas, Smugglers easily cross Iraq's border, Al-Monitor: The pulse of the Middle East, 2013, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/iw/originals/2013/10/smugglers-easily-cross-iraqi-border.html.

30 Illegal arms sales in Iraqi Kurdistan on the rise: human rights, *Ekurd Daily News*, May 2017, https://ekurd.net/illegal-arms-sales-kurdistan-2017-05-24.

31 Basra: The epicenter of Iraq's drug problem, *The New Arab*, January 2018, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2018/1/2/basra-the-epicentre-of-iraqs-drug-problem; Danielle Woodward, Iraq's growing drug problem: From corridor to producer, Addiction Now, January 2017, https://www.drugaddictionnow.com/2017/01/24/iraqs-growing-drug-problem-corridor-producer/; Mushreq Abbas, Smugglers easily cross Iraq's border, Al-Monitor, October 2013.

32 Haider al Husseini, Hash, pills and speed: Drug smuggling In Iraq supported by Maysan's tribes, Niqash, https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/security/5204/; Iraq border guards thwart attempt to smuggle drugs to Kuwait, December 2019, https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2840030&language=en.

33 Syrian trucker caught with massive cache of drug pills, *Arab Times*, July 2018, https://www.arabtimesonline.com/news/syrian-trucker-caught-with-massive-cache-of-drug-pills/.

34 Precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances – 2019, International Narcotics Control Board, 22, https://www.incb.org/documents/PRECURSORS/TECHNICAL_REPORTS/2019/EN/Precursors_with_annexes_E_ebook.pdf; Adam Dempsey, Captagon's grip on the Gulf, Voices of Arabia, July 2020 https://insidearabia.com/captagons-grip-on-the-gulf/.

35 Cannabis: The most consumed drug in Jordan, Roya News, December 2018, https://en.royanews.tv/news/15606/Cannabis--the-most-consumed-drug-in-Jordan.

36 Rana Husseini, AND foils attempt to smuggle 600,000 illegal narcotic pills, June 2019, https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/and-foils-attempt-smuggle-600000-illegal-narcotic-pills.

37 Iffat Idris, Serious and organized crime in Jordan, February 2019, https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/537_Serious_and_Organized_Crime_in_Jordan.pdf.

38 Ibid.

39 Jordan thwarts attempt to smuggle drugs from Syria, Aharq Al-Awsat, April 2020, https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2232916/jordan-thwarts-attempt-smuggle-drugs-syria; Smuggling attempt foiled by JAF, Roya News, June 2020 https://en.royanews.tv/news/21365/2020-06-30; Jordanian authorities foil attempt to smuggle narcotics into Jordan, Royal News, September 2020, https://en.royanews.tv/news/22119/2020-09-01.

40 Rana Husseini, AND foils attempt to smuggle 600,000 illegal narcotic pills, June 2019, https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/and-foils-attempt-smuggle-600000-illegal-narcotic-pills.

41 Phone interviews with Jordanian and Syrian security-sector officials in Jordan, November 2019.

42 Operation in the Middle East and North Africa targets pharmaceutical crime, INTERPOL, July 2020.

43 Ibid.

44 Lebanese expats pushing up number of COVID-19 cases, Arab News, April 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1656776/middle-east; Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, المجارك تضبط كمية كبيرة من «السبيرتو» المزور (فيديو), https://bit.ly/32ZU1Sy.

45 Coronavirus: Iranian goods trucks still entering Iraq despite official ban, Middle East Eye, April 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-iraq-iran-border-trucks-deliveries-militias-ban; Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, How a fragile Iraq is facing the COVID-19 challenge, April 2020, https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/how-fragile-iraq-facing-covid-19-challenge-25648.

46 Coronavirus in Iraq: Bullets, repression, Iran trump COVID-19, DW, March 2020 https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-in-iraq-bullets-repression-iran-trump-covid-19/a-52624119.

47 Drug smugglers planning to smuggle COVID drugs to Iraq through Vande Bharat flight busted, *The Tribune*, July 2020, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/drug-smugglers-planning-to-smuggle-covid-drugs-to-iraq-through-vande-bharat-flight-busted-119036; COVID-19 drug racket: How Remdesivir was being smuggled to Iraq from India, August 2020, https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/article/ground-report-covid-19-drug-racket-how-remdesivir-was-being-smuggled-to-iraq-from-india/632826.

48 Diego Lynch, Lebanon, an arms trading hub for Iran, and everyone else, Lima Charlie News, https://limacharlienews.com/mena/lebanon-an-arms-trading-hub-for-the-middle-east/.

49 Comparable rates of civilian firearm possession per 100 population, 2007, GunPolicy.org, https://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/syria.

50 While the focus of this section is the role of Syria's neighbours in the illicit arms trade, it should be noted that a significant portion of weapons circulating in Syria (including among

the opposition) are from the illicit sale of the Syrian govern-ment's own stockpiles.

51   Mussa Hattar, Gun prices, sales rise in Jordan over Syria war fears, *The Daily Star*, January 2014, https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Jan-16/244192-gun-prices-sales-rise-in-jordan-over-syria-war-fears.ashx; Baghdad gun shops thrive after Iraqis rethink gun control policies, Reuters PRI, August 2018, https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-08-19/baghdad-gun-shops-thrive-after-iraqis-rethink-gun-control-policies.

52   Lebanon targets cross-border arms smugglers, Al-Mashareq, June 2017, https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2017/06/01/feature-02?url_path=www.diyaruna.com.

53   Adam Rawnsley, Eric Woods and Christiaan Triebert, The messaging app fueling Syria's insurgency, *Foreign Policy*, November 2017, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/06/the-messaging-app-fueling-syrias-insurgency-tele-gram-arms-weapons/.

54   Sangar Ali, WATCH: Weapon dealers in Kurdistan look for legitimacy, October 2018, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/b76f5e65-be20-4c1f-9023-495d227e970d; Kurd-ish government shuts down arms market in Iraq's Erbil, *The New Arab*, January 2016, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/1/27/kurdish-government-shuts-down-arms-market-in-iraqs-erbil.

55   Lebanon holds ship 'carrying weapons for Syria rebels', BBC, April 2012, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17885085.

56   Lebanon targets cross-border arms smugglers, Al-Mashareq, June 2017, https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2017/06/01/feature-02?url_path=www.diyaruna.com.

57   Ibid.

58   Gun control coming to Syria's Aleppo province, Al-Moni-tor, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/fsa-bans-unlicensed-arms-merchants-aleppo-countryside.html.

59   Arms smugglers thrive on Syrian uprising, Reuters, 25 November 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syr-ia-weapons/arms-smugglers-thrive-on-syrian-uprising-idUS-TRE7AO1GA20111125.

60   Illegal arms sales in Iraqi Kurdistan on the rise: human rights, *Ekurd Daily*, May 2017, https://ekurd.net/ille-gal-arms-sales-kurdistan-2017-05-24.

61   Iraqi Kurdistan rife with unlicensed guns, gun violence, *Ekurd Daily*, May 2017, https://ekurd.net/iraqi-kurdistan-unli-censed-guns-2017-05-20.

62   Ibid.

63   Omar al-Jaffal, Baghdad clamps down on cross-border arms smuggling, Al-Monitor, 2018, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/originals/2018/04/iraq-syria-border-mosul-weap-on-smuggling.html.

64   Bahad Ja'afari, Arms trafficking from Jordan to Syria, Voltaire Net, August 2016, https://www.voltairenet.org/arti-cle193130.html.

65   Kheder Khaddour, Syria's spillover effect on Jordan, Carnegie Middle East Center, November 2018, https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/54509.

66   Jordan foils militant pipeline smuggling plot, says army, Arab News, February 2018, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1248671/middle-east.

67   بزح«و ماظنلاو «شعادة» ةياعرب ..ندرألا ىلإ بيرهتلا هللا", Almodon, April 2019, https://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2019.

68   Ali Younes and Mark Mazzetti, Weapons for Syrian rebels sold on Jordan's black market, June 2016, Al Jazeera, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/cia-weapons-syrian-rebels-jor-dan-black-market-160626141335170.html.

69   Aisha Han and Rachel Rossi, Why the situation in Rukban is deteriorating, Atlantic Council, December 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/why-the-situa-tion-in-rukban-is-deteriorating-2/.

70   Pinhas Inbari, Weapons smuggling from Jordan into the West Bank, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, February 2019, https://jcpa.org/weapons-smuggling-from-jordan-into-the-west-bank/.

71   Syria's war triggers a spike in gun sales in Jordan, a country where one in four owns a firearm, *The National*, January 2014, https://www.thenational.ae/world/syria-s-war-triggers-a-spike-in-gun-sales-in-jordan-a-country-where-one-in-four-owns-a-firearm-1.320020.

72   عم نواعتو ةماتلا ةيرحلا نع حّرصي حالس رجات :ريرقت أجهزة الدولة, https://yallafeed.com/tqryr-tajr-slah-ysr-h-an-alhryh-altamh-wtaawn-ma-ajhzh-aldwlh-0417.

73   Aaron Karp, Estimating global civilian-held firearms numbers, Small Arms Survey, June 2018, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-Civilian-Fire-arms-Numbers.pdf.

74   Lebanon's illegal arms dealers, Vice News, February 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=237&v=Xx-umsOQMxLE.

75   See https://www.arabnews.com/node/1726731/middle-east.

76   Ibid.

77   See 79 unlicensed weapons seized by PSD, Roya News, December 2019, http://en.royanews.tv/news/18026/79-unli-censed-weapons-seized-by-PSD.

78   Asharq Al-Awsat and Mohamed Al-Daameh, Arms smug-gling along Syria–Jordan border triples: Jordanian official, December 2013, https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/mohamed-al-daameh/news-middle-east/arms-smuggling-along-syria-jor-dan-border-triples-jordanian-official.

79   Syria's war triggers a spike in gun sales in Jordan, a country where one in four owns a firearm, *The National*, January 2014, https://www.thenational.ae/world/syria-s-war-triggers-a-spike-in-gun-sales-in-jordan-a-country-where-one-in-four-owns-a-firearm-1.320020?videoId=5711823858001; Jordan foils bid to smuggle ammunition from Syria, National News Agency, February 2014, http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/22073/nna-leb.gov.lb/en.

80   Syria's war triggers a spike in gun sales in Jordan, a country where one in four owns a firearm, *The National*, January 2014, https://www.thenational.ae/world/syria-s-war-triggers-a-spike-in-gun-sales-in-jordan-a-country-where-one-in-four-owns-a-firearm-1.320020?videoId=5711823858001.

81   Ibid.

82   Deadly celebratory fire prompts Jordan crackdown on gun ownership, *The New Arab*, July 2019, https://www.

alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/7/7/deadly-celebra-tory-fire-prompts-jordan-crackdown-on-gun-ownership.

83 Jordan: Firearm law creates controversy, Asharq Al-Aw-sat, July 2019, https://aawsat.com/english/home/arti-cle/1806476/jordan-firearm-law-creates-controversy; 750 arrested in Jordan on firearms charges in two months, Middle East Monitor, August 2019, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190823-750-arrested-in-jordan-on-firearms-charges-in-two-months/.

84 As of February 2020, Turkey hosted approximately 3.5 million Syrian refugees; see https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113.

85 Jeanne Carstensen, Syrian refugees are now paying smugglers to take them back, PRI, November 2016, https://gpinvestiga-tions.pri.org/syrian-refugees-are-now-paying-smugglers-to-take-them-back-6fa9ef8242e3.

86 UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Syria refugee crisis ex-plained, UNHCR, March 2019, https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/.

87 Lina Khatib and Lina Sinjab, Syria's transactional state – how the conflict changed the Syrian state's exercise of power, Chatham House, October 2018, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/re-search/2018-10-10-syrias-transactional-state-khatib-sinjab.pdf.

88 Ibid.

89 See https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/refugees-and-covid-19-case-syrian-and-rohingya-crises. There have been a number of reports on the impact of COVID-19 on the human smuggling market generally; see, for example, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/covid/COVID-relat-ed-impact-on-SoM-TiP-web3.pdf.

90 Lucia Bird, Smuggling in the time of COVID-19, GI-TOC, April 2020, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/up-loads/2020/04/GIATOC-Policy-Brief-003-Smuggling-COVID-28Apr0930-proof-4.pdf.

91 Dina Eldawy, A fragile situation: Will the Syrian refugee swell push Lebanon over the edge?, Migration Policy Institute, February 2019, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syri-an-refugee-swell-push-lebanon-over-edge.

92 A micro-mapping is needed to determine the locations of unofficial border crossings between Syria and Lebanon; cur-rently none exist; see 124 Illegal border crossings between Lebanon, Syria increase deficit, Asharq Al-Awsat, June 2019, https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1777726/124-ille-gal-border-crossings-between-lebanon-syria-increase-deficit; Security meeting held in Lebanon to address illegal border crossings, Asharq Al-Awsat, September 2019, https://aaw-sat.com/english/home/article/1895396/security-meet-ing-held-lebanon-address-illegal-border-crossings.

93 Acil Tabbara, Desperate Syrians pay ultimate price in bid to reach Lebanon, UNHCR, February 2018, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/2/5a814fc74/desperate-syri-ans-pay-ultimate-price-bid-reach-lebanon.html.

94 Human trafficking from Lebanon to Syria a thriving business, Asharq Al-Awsat, July 2018, https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1325566/human-trafficking-lebanon-syr-ia-thriving-business; Refugees found frozen in Lebanon near Syria border, Al Jazeera, January 2018, https://www.aljazeera.

95 United States Department of State, *2017 Trafficking in Persons Report – Lebanon*, 27 June 2017, https://www.refworld.org/docid/5959eca1c.html.

96 بين سوريا ولبنان.نلبنان:تهريب البشر يتزايد برعاية «البراءة» و«الحزب", Almodon Online, March 2019, https://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2019/3/20/.

97 Human Rights Watch, Lebanon: Mass evictions of Syrian ref-ugees, April 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/20/lebanon-mass-evictions-syrian-refugees.

98 Syrian refugees caught in Lebanon's uprising face a difficult choice, *The New Arab*, December 2019, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2019/12/5/syrians-caught-in-leban-ons-uprising-face-difficult-a-choice.

99 Refugee-led local responses in the time of COVID-19: Pre-liminary reflections from North Lebanon, April 2020, https://refugeehosts.org/2020/04/03/refugee-led-local-responses-in-the-time-of-covid-19-preliminary-reflections-from-north-lebanon/.

100 Estella Carpi, The COVID-19 among MENA refugees: A great humanitarian concern, ISPI, April 2020, https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/covid-19-among-mena-ref-ugees-great-humanitarian-concern-25679; Lina Khatib, COVID-19 impact on refugees is also political, Chatham House, March 2020, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/covid-19-impact-refugees-also-political?gclid=C-j0KCQjwhb36BRCfARIsAKcXh6FT_QSPezZkXthMEVT-nar8l64ygepq4gNUqqlsIMXQQMcmnPZfPTVsaAsrCEALw_wcB.

101 Timour Azhari, Undocumented in Lebanon: No papers, no coronavirus test, Al Jazeera, March 2020, https://www.alja-zeera.com/news/2020/03/undocumented-struggle-access-coronavirus-tests-lebanon-200328114859620.html; Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon must be protected during COVID-19 pandemic, Amnesty International, April 2020, https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/migrant-domes-tic-workers-in-lebanon-must- be-protected-during-covid-19-pandemic/.

102 UNHCR, COVID-19 and mixed population movements: Emerging dynamics, risks and opportunities, https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/covid19-response/emergingdynris-kopp76474.pdf.

103 Norwegian Refugee Council, Information, counselling and legal assistance programme, March 2014, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/40323; 70 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live below poverty line, January 2017, EFE, https://www.efe.com/efe/english/world/70-per-cent-of-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-live-below-pover-ty-line/50000262-3141673.

104 Gerasimos Tsourapas, The Syrian refugee crisis and foreign policy decision-making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 4, 4 (2019), 464–481.

105 Maja Janmyr, UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: Negotiating status and registration in Lebanon, *The Interna-tional Journal of Human Rights*, March 2017, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2017.137114 0; Samia Kullab, Borders still open to refugees, UNHCR says, *The Daily Star*, October 2014, https://www.dailystar.com.lb/

News/Lebanon-News/2014/Oct-23/275015-borders-still-open-to-refugees-unhcr-says.ashx.

106 Human Rights Watch, Lebanon: Syrians summarily deported from airport, May 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/24/lebanon-syrians-summarily-deported-airport.

107 Abby Sewell, Syrians' sponsorship is now a business, *The Daily Star*, April 2019, https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Apr-08/480636-syrians-sponsorship-is-now-a-business.ashx.

108 Human Rights Watch, Lebanon: Residency rules put Syrians at risk, January 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/12/lebanon-residency-rules-put-syrians-risk.

109 Lebanon has a notorious reputation for poor treatment of migrant labourers, including from East Africa (particularly Ethiopia) and Asia (particularly the Philippines), and a legal system that heavily discriminates against foreigners, often facilitating exploitation and contravening human rights. More information can be found at https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/lebanon; https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_524149.pdf.

110 Daniela Sala, The Syrian women and girls sold into sexual slavery in Lebanon, Al Jazeera, February 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/syrian-women-girls-sexual-slavery-lebanon-200128131326841.html.

111 Dozens of Syrians forced into sexual slavery in derelict Lebanese house, *The Guardian*, 30 April 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/30/syrians-forced-sexual-slavery-lebanon.

112 Human trafficking from Lebanon to Syria a thriving business, Asharq Al-Awsat, July 2018, https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1325566/human-trafficking-lebanon-syria-thriving-business.

113 Ibid.

114 Alexandra Francis, Jordan's refugee crisis, Carnegie Endowment, September 2015, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_247_Francis_Jordan_final.pdf; Omer Karasapan, Jordan's Syrian refugees – what a difference a year makes, World Bank Blogs, February 2016, http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/jordan-s-syrian-refugees-what-difference-year-makes.

115 Human Rights Watch, Jordan: Syrians blocked, stranded in desert, June 2015, https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-syrians-blocked-stranded-desert.

116 Jordan and the Berm Rukban and Hadalat 2017–2018, Humanitarian Foresight Think Tank, March 2017, https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Sensitive-Jordan-and-the-Berm-1.pdf.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Greg Beals, One year on: Jordan's Za'atari refugee camp mushrooms into major urban centre, UNHCR, July 2013, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2013/7/51f698ee6/year-jordans-zaatari-refugee-camp-mushrooms-major-urban-centre.html.

120 Security concerns rise at Syrian refugee camp despite police presence, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/apr/06/security-concerns-syrian-refugee-camp.

121 Life in Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan's fourth biggest city, Oxfam, https://www.oxfam.org/en/life-zaatari-refugee-camp-jordans-fourth-biggest-city.

122 UNHCR COVID-19 appeal, March 2020, https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20COVID-19%20Appeal%20-%20March%202020.pdf; Syrian refugees adapt to life under coronavirus lockdown in Jordan camps, UNHCR, April 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/5e84a3584.

123 Jordan and the Berm Rukban and Hadalat 2017-2018, Humanitarian Foresight Think Tank, March 2017; Syrians at the berm: surviving in nightmarish conditions and with an uncertain status, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, October 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrians-berm-surviving-nightmarish-conditions-and-uncertain-status

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 See https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/Jordan-response-COVID19-pandemic-Middle-East.

127 Z Harel, Ongoing protests in Jordan threaten to destabilize the regime, The Middle East Media Research Institute, March 2019, https://www.memri.org/reports/ongoing-protests-jordan-threaten-destabilize-regime; Rana F Sweis, Resentment grows against Syrian refugees in Jordan, May 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/09/world/middleeast/09iht-m09-jordan-syria.html.

128 See https://www.mei.edu/publications/jordans-rising-economic-challenges-time-covid-19. According to data compiled by Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government, the level of severity in Jordan's governmental response to the pandemic, or its 'stringency index', increased from 80% to 100% during mid-to-late March. In comparison, scores for bordering Iraq and Lebanon floated around 80%, see https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/what-lies-ahead-as-jordan-faces-the-fallout-of-covid-19/.

129 Jordan reports its highest daily tally of COVID-19 cases, Reuters, August 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-jordan-tally/jordan-reports-its-highest-daily-tally-of-covid-19-cases-idUSKBN25Q0TN; Jordan bars entry from West Bank, Israel, Iraq, Egypt due to coronavirus, Arab News, March 2020, https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article_12712/; Jordan to close border with Syria after spike in COVID-19 cases, Reuters, August 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-jordan-border-cros/jordan-to-close-border-with-syria-after-spike-in-covid-19-cases-idUSKCN2581KX; Most schools reopen in Jordan amid COVID-19 spike, Middle East Monitor, September 2020, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200901-most-schools-reopen-in-jordan-amid-covid-19-spike/.

130 See https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/Jordan-response-COVID19-pandemic-Middle-East.

131 In Jordan, survey finds most struggle to meet basic needs and access health care under lockdown, UNDP, June 2020, https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/Jordan_survey_finds_most_struggle_meet_basic_needs_and_health_care_under_lockdown.html.

132 COVID-19 emergency response update #11, UNHCR, August 2020, https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20MENA%20COVID-19%20Update%20-%205AUG20.pdf.

133 Facing double crises – rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable workers in Jordan, ILO, May 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_743391.pdf.

134 Charlie Dunmore and Dalal Mawad, Erbil reaps rewards by allowing Syrian refugees to flourish, UNHCR, December 2018, https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2018/12/5c137ba94/erbil-reaps-rewards-allowing-syrian-refugees-flourish.html; Iraq: Syrian refugees statistics, UNHCR, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73398.pdf.

135 It is estimated that over 95% of people who have fled Syria to Iraq settled in Kurdish-controlled areas in the north.

136 Syrian crisis: Impact on Iraq, European Parliament Think Tank, April 2017, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI%282017%29599387.

137 Hannah Lynch, Syrian refugees resort to smugglers to enter Kurdistan region of Iraq, October 2019, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/16102019.

138 Ibid.

139 Mark Mackinnon, Syrian Kurdish refugees forced to turn to smugglers after closing of border crossing to Iraq, *The Globe and Mail*, October 2019, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-syrian-kurdish-refugees-forced-to-turn-to-smugglers-after-closure-of/.

140 Refugee arrivals to Iraq pass 7,000 mark in seven days, UNHCR, October 2019, https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/refugee-arrivals-iraq-pass-7000-mark-seven-days; Hannah Lynch, Syrian refugees resort to smugglers to enter Kurdistan region of Iraq, October 2019, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/16102019.

141 Kurdistan arrests over 100 for smuggling people from Iran to avoid quarantine, Kurdistan 24, March 2020, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/24d1eeec-2a11-4c5f-92cb-4a049d4361b1; Laura Mallene, Iraq: Smugglers profiting from lockdown of Kurdistan region, Organized Crime And Corruption Reporting Project, March 2020, https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/11932-iraq-smugglers-profiting-from-lockdown-of-kurdistan-regioniraq-smugglers-profiting-from-lockdown-of-kurdistan-region; Kurdistan charges 23 more for smuggling people from Iran, defying coronavirus measures, Kurdistan 24, April 2020, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/820e326f-7c18-4818-a03d-1e632aae2acb.

142 UNHCR, North-East Syria Update October 2019–April 2020, https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/north-east-syria-update-october-2019-april-2020.

143 See Rudaw, March 2020, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/21032020?ID=502666.

144 Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, How a fragile Iraq is facing the COVID-19 challenge, ISPI, April 2020, https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/how-fragile-iraq-facing-covid-19-challenge-25648.

145 Ibid.

146 Mark Shaw and Tuesday Reitano, Centrifugal forces: Exploring the nexus of global illicit flows and local conflict dynamics, United Nations University, Centre for Policy Research, May 2017, https://cpr.unu.edu/centrifugal-forces-exploring-the-nexus-of-global-illicit-flows-and-local-conflict-dynamics.html.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Tuesday Reitano and Marcena Hunter, Protecting politics: Deterring the influence of organized crime on public service delivery, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2016, https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/protecting-politics-deterring-the-influence-of-organized-crime-on-public-service-delivery.pdf.

150 Saud Al Sharafat, Securitization of the Coronavirus crisis in Jordan: Successes and limitations, The Washington Institute, May 2020, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/COVID-19-Jordan-Middle-East-Securitization.

151 Roger Lu Phillips and Layla Abi-Falah, Bashar al-Assad is criminally responsible for Syria's COVID-19 crisis, Just Security, August 2020, https://www.justsecurity.org/71805/bashar-al-assad-is-criminally-responsible-for-syrias-covid-19-crisis/.

152 Dmitri Trenin, Russia's interests in Syria, Carnegie Moscow Center, June 2014, https://carnegie.ru/2014/06/09/russia-s-interests-in-syria-pub-55831.

153 Aron Lund, Diplomats battle over key Syria aid resolution, The New Humanitarian, December 2019, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2019/12/16/Syria-UN-United-Nations-Security-Council-aid-Russia-Turkey; Syria: aid restrictions hinder COVID-19 response, Human Rights Watch, April 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/28/syria-aid-restrictions-hinder-covid-19-response.

154 Nour Samaha, Hezbollah unites clans to raise border force, Al Jazeera, June 2013, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/06/201369143923622272.html; Nour Samaha, Meeting the clans of Lebanon, Al Jazeera, August 2012, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/08/201281820453929203.html.

155 Jordan's angry tribes, Al Jazeera, July 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2019/07/jordan-angry-tribes-190704085944812.html; Do Jordan's tribes challenge or strengthen the state?, May 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/05/28/do-jordans-tribes-challenge-or-strengthen-the-state/.

156 Joost Jongerden, Governing Kurdistan: Self-administration in the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, Ethnopolitics, November 2018, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17449057.2018.1525166; Iraqi Kurdistan Profile, BBC, April 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28147263.

157 A group of Iranian-backed Shiite militias involved in ousting Islamic State.

158 The president of Syria, Bashar Al-Assad is an Alawite Muslim. Alawites are a minority sect closely linked to Shia Islam.

159 Syria: Aid restrictions hinder COVID-19 response, Human Rights Watch, April 2020; Bashar al-Assad is criminally responsible for Syria's COVID-19 crisis, Just Security, August 2020; WHO should stand by appeal for cross-border aid to Syria, Human Rights Watch, April 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/30/who-should-stand-appeal-cross-border-aid-syria.

160 Who are the Kurds and why is Turkey attacking them in Syria?, *The New York Times*, October 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/14/world/middleeast/the-kurds-facts-history.html.

161 Ibid.

162 Tim Lister, What does ISIS really want?, CNN, December 2015, https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/11/middleeast/isis-syria-iraq-caliphate/index.html.

163 Audrey Alexander, The security threat COVID-19 poses to the northern Syria detention camps holding Islamic State members, Combatting Terrorism Center, July 2020, https://ctc.usma.edu/the-security-threat-covid-19-poses-to-the-northern-syria-detention-camps-holding-islamic-state-members/.

164 Max Kravitz and Will Nichols, A bitter pill to swallow: Connections between Captagon, Syria, and the Gulf, *Columbia Journal of International Affairs*, May 2016, https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/bitter-pill-swallow-connections-captagon-syria-gulf.

165 Activists in Raqqa, the once de facto capital of the Islamic State, have reported widespread drug use among ISIS fighters and sales of Captagon.

166 Lina Khatib and Lina Sinjab, Syria's transactional state: How the conflict changed the Syrian state's exercise of power, Chatham House, October 2018, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2018-10-10-syrias-transactional-state-khatib-sinjab.pdf.

167 The Shahiba are one of the best-known pro-regime groups. Meanwhile, there are over a thousand rebel groups that have merged and disassembled over the course of the Syrian conflict.

168 Abbas Assi, The sectarian dimension of the Syrian Civil War and Lebanese-Syrian relations, Middle East Institute, July 2018, https://www.mei.edu/publications/sectarian-dimension-syrian-civil-war-and-lebanese-syrian-relations.

169 Michelle Nichols, Weapons being smuggled between Lebanon, Syria: U.N., Reuters, May 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-lebanon-weapons/weapons-being-smuggled-between-lebanon-syria-u-n-idUSBRE8471EV20120508.

170 European University Institute, Lebanon's border areas in light of the Syrian war: New actors, old marginalisation, March 2018, https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/52564/RSCAS_PR_2018_03.pdf.

171 Martin Chulov and Ian Black, Arms supplies to Syrian rebels dry up amid rivalries and divisions, *The Guardian*, October 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/10/arms-supplies-syrian-rebels-rivalries; https://www.voltairenet.org/article176930.html.

172 Salim Daccache, Lebanon's response to religious violence, Oasis Center, October 2018, https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/salafism-jihadism-in-lebanon.

173 Jesse Rosenfeld, 'This is where ISIS gets its weed', *The Daily Beast*, July 2017, https://www.thedailybeast.com/this-is-where-isis-gets-its-weed; Vanda Felbab-Brown, Harold Trinkunas and Sultan Barakat, Breaking bad in the Middle East and North Africa: Drugs, militants and human rights, Brookings Institute, March 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/03/22/breaking-bad-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-drugs-militants-and-human-rights/.

174 ISIS's main source of funding is through extortion. Traders in Beqaa affirm that Hezbollah fighters found Captagon in Islamic State's possession, as well as with Al-Nusra Front fighters in the border area.

175 Yaroslav Trofimov, With win over Islamic State, Hezbollah gains new sway in Lebanon, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/with-win-over-islamic-state-hezbollah-gains-new-sway-in-lebanon-1504171801.

176 Jeff Neumann, Amphetamines fuel both sides of the Syrian war, *Newsweek*, November 2015, https://www.newsweek.com/2015/11/13/some-middle-east-enclaves-growing-appetite-amphetamines-390237.html.

177 The city, which was once home to roughly 60 000 mostly Sunni residents, lies on a strategic route linking Damascus to the Syrian regime's Mediterranean coastal stronghold of Latakia, https://www.newsweek.com/2015/11/13/some-middle-east-enclaves-growing-appetite-amphetamines-390237.html.

178 Research shows the regime-aligned Shabiha, a small group of Syrian government militias (mainly Alawites) who were involved in trafficking and smuggling in 1980s and 1990s, have expanded their reach during the conflict by working with Lebanese counterparts to smuggle commodities between the two countries; see https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.522/print/.

179 Production, abuse and smuggling of drugs spreading in Syria, November 2018, https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2018/11/production-abuse-and-smuggling-drugs-spreading-in-syria/#ixzz6Ds1kXLHS.

180 بين سوريا ولبنان.:تهريب البشر يتزايد برعاية "الحزب" و "الرباعة", https://bit.ly/3i5Welt.

181 Ibid.

182 Lebanon's border areas in light of the Syrian war: New actors old marginalisation, European University Institute, March 2018, https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/52564/RSCAS_PR_2018_03.pdf; Refugees return to Syria from Lebanon in Hezbollah-mediated deal, Reuters, July 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-lebanon/refugees-return-to-syria-from-lebanon-in-hezbollah-mediated-deal-idUSKBN19X1Y6.

183 Opposition activists have accused Hezbollah of importing and promoting the use of cannabis among Syrian youth as a way of making money to fund their intervention in Syria.

184 Nour Samaha, Meeting the clans of Lebanon, Al Jazeera, August 2012, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/08/201281820453929203.html.

185 Euan Ward, In Lebanon, coronavirus presents a political lifeline for the sectarian-based elite, Al Arabiya, April 2020, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/04/06/In-Lebanon-coronavirus-presents-a-political-lifeline-for-the-sectarian-based-elite.

186 Ibid.

187 Iran-backed groups in Lebanon and Iraq seek public support through coronavirus fight, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-backed-groups-in-lebanon-and-iraq-seek-public-support-through-coronavirus-fight-11587980816.

188 Matthew Levitt, Hezbollah's procurement channels: Leveraging criminal networks and partnering with Iran, Combatting Terrorism Center, March 2019, volume 12, issue 3, https://ctc.usma.edu/hezbollahs-procurement-channels-leveraging-criminal-networks-partnering-iran/.

189 Betsy Joles, Syria has confirmed its first cases of coronavirus. An outbreak there would be hell, March 2020, https://www.vox.com/world/2020/3/27/21195860/coronavirus-syria-idlib-covid-19-cases-outbreak-middle-east; Lebanon vows crackdown on smuggling into Syria, *Middle East Affairs*, May 2020, https://middleeastaffairs.net/2020/05/15/lebanon-vows-crackdown-on-smuggling-into-syria/. There are even reports of Hezbollah building an unofficial border crossing with Syria, see https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/07/08/Lebanon-s-Hezbollah-opens-illegal-border-crossing-with-Syria-Report.

190 Ibid.

191 Hilal Khashan, Why Lebanon's Sunnis support ISIS, *Middle East Quarterly*, 2015, https://www.meforum.org/5316/lebanon-sunnis-isis.

192 Lebanon's response to religious violence, https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/salafism-jihadism-in-lebanon; Exclusive – Lebanon fears return of extremists from Syria's Idlib, Asharq Al-Awsat, October 2018, https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1441646/exclusive-lebanon-fears-return-extremists-syria%E2%80%99s-idlib.

193 International Labour Organization, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@arabstates/@ro-beirut/documents/genericdocument/wcms_240130.pdf.

194 Anchal Vohra, Lebanon is sick and tired of Syrian refugees, Foreign Policy, July 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/31/lebanon-is-sick-and-tired-of-syrian-refugees/.

195 Beirut explosion: How the port blast will hit Lebanon's economy, Middle East Eye, August 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/beirut-explosion-lebanon-economy-port-will-hit.

196 Protests have raged since October 2019. Lebanon's economy grew just 0.2% in 2018, and its public-debt burden is the third highest in the world.

197 Paul Cochrane, Syria's economy goes from very bad to worse as Lebanon's crisis hits, *Middle East Eye*, January 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/bad-worse-syrias-financial-crisis-hit-lebanons-economic-free-fall.

198 Rohan Advani and Walid Al Nofal, How is the Lebanese crisis affecting Syria?, Syria Direct, December 2019, https://syriadirect.org/news/how-is-the-lebanese-crisis-affecting-syria/; Paul Cochrane, Syria's economy goes from very bad to worse as Lebanon's crisis hits, *Middle East Eye*, January 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/bad-worse-syrias-financial-crisis-hit-lebanons-economic-free-fall.

199 World Bank, Lebanon: Promoting poverty reduction and shared prosperity, June 2015, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/698161468179049613/pdf/97498-CAS-P151430-SecM2015-0202-IFC-SecM2015-0073-MIGA-SecM2015-0047-Box391476B-OUO-9.pdf.

200 Lydia Assouad, The Lebanese are united in revolt, but their political system is not made to calm the rage, Carnegie Middle East Centre, 18 November 2019, https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80367.

201 Natasha Turak, In Lebanon, default is 'virtually certain' after start credit downgrades, CNBC, 24 February 2020, https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/24/lebanon-crisis-debt-default-is-virtually-certain-after-credit-downgrades.html.

202 Lebanon protests: How WhatsApp tax anger revealed a much deeper crisis, BBC, 7 November 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50293636.

203 Maya Yaha, Lebanon risks more lost decades if protesters' demands aren't met, *World Politics Review*, 24 February 2020, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28554/in-lebanon-protests-could-lead-to-more-lost-decades.

204 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Lebanon Humanitarian Fund – Annual Report 2017, 31 December 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2017.

205 Ibid.

206 See https://time.com/5876052/beirut-explosion-lebanon-economy/.

207 See, for example, US Department of Justice, Lebanese businessman tied by Treasury Department to Hezbollah is sentenced to prison for money laundering scheme involving the evasion of US Sanctions, 8 August 2019, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/lebanese-businessman-tied-treasury-department-hezbollah-sentenced-prison-money-laundering.

208 Lebanon to form debt restructuring plan by year-end, Naharnet, March, 2020 http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/270546.

209 Lina Haddad Kreidie and Jesse Marks, Jordan's interest in a stable Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77094; Abdulrahman al-Masri, Jordan's increased involvement in Syria, *The Arab Weekly*, June 2017, https://thearabweekly.com/jordans-increased-involvement-syria; https://www.meforum.org/58683/end-syrian-civil-war-jordan.

210 The Nasib border crossing between Syria and Jordan officially reopened in October 2018.

211 Assad forces retake Syrian rebel stronghold of Deraa, *Financial Times*, 12 July 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/8b57c8b4-85ee-11e8-a29d-73e3d454535d; Deraa, birthplace of Syria uprising, retaken by government forces, BBC, July 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44806045.

212 Aron Lund, Opening soon: The story of a Syrian-Jordanian border crossing, The Century Foundation, September 2017, https://tcf.org/content/commentary/opening-soon-story-syrian-jordanian-border-crossing/.

213 Lucrezia Savasta, Jordan and the ISIS threat, April 2017, https://www.eastwest.ngo/idea/jordan-and-isis-threat.

214 Deborah Amos, Saudi aid boost to Syrian rebels puts Jordan at risk, NPR, March 2014, https://www.npr.org/2014/03/16/290609402/saudi-aid-boost-to-syrian-rebels-puts-jordan-at-risk.

215 CIA arms for Syrian rebels supplied black market, *The New York Times*, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/27/world/middleeast/cia-arms-for-syrian-rebels-supplied-black-market-officials-say.html.

216 Weapons for Syrian rebels sold on Jordan's black market, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/cia-weapons-syrian-rebels-jordan-black-market-160626141335170.html.

217 These measures included closing its borders even to Syrians holding valid passports.

218 Syrians do not need a visa for entry into Jordan.

219 Aisha Han and Rachel Rossi, Why the situation in Rukban is deteriorating, Atlantic Council, December 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/why-the-situation-in-rukban-is-deteriorating-2/.

220 Gerasimos Tsourapas, The Syrian refugee crisis and foreign policy decision-making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 4, 4 (2019), 464–481.

221 Jordan and the Berm Rukban and Hadalat, 2017–2018, March 2017, https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Sensitive-Jordan-and-the-Berm-1.pdf.

222 Policing and protection for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Jessica Watkins, October 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77511; Diab Al-Badayneh, Strains and radicalization among Syrian youth refugees in Jordan, *International Journal of Scientific Research*, July 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317936937_Strains_and_Radicalization_Among_Syrians_Youth_Refugees_in_Jordan.

223 Ragui Assaad, How has Jordan been affected by the Syrian refugee influx?, The ERF Policy Portal, May 2018, https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2018/05/10/jordan-affected-syrian-refugee-influx/.

224 Jordanian journalists: Hundreds of thousands of young Jordanians support ISIS – and the authorities aren't dealing with it, MEMRI, May 2017, https://www.memri.org/reports/jordanian-media-warns-about-extent-of-support-for-isis-in-kingdom; Pro-ISIS sympathies simmer in Jordanian city, CNN News, September 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/30/world/meast/jordan-isis-supporters/index.html.

225 See Jordan, https://www.knowyourcountry.com/jordan1111.

226 Nan Tian et al, Trends in world military expenditure 2018, SIPRI factsheet, April 2019, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/fs_1904_milex_2018_0.pdf.

227 Ellen Francis, U.S.-Russian ceasefire deal holding in southwest Syria, Reuters, 9 July 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/u-s-russian-ceasefire-deal-holding-in-southwest-syria-idUSKBN19U08D.

228 See http://www.ammonnews.net/article/365821.

229 Chloe Cornish, Reopening of Syrian-Jordan borders revives regional trade, *Financial Times*, 30 October 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/e580c1a6-d6de-11e8-aa22-36538487e3d0.

230 Jordan youth unemployment rises to almost 40 per cent, Al Jazeera, 3 October 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/jordan-youth-unemployment-rises-40-percent-191003142605920.html.

231 Z Harel, Ongoing protests in Jordan threaten to destabilise the regime, MEMRI, 11 March 2019, https://www.memri.org/reports/ongoing-protests-jordan-threaten-destabilize-regime.

232 According to data compiled by Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government, the level of severity in Jordan's governmental response to the pandemic, or its 'stringency index', increased from 80% to 100% during mid-to-late March. In comparison, scores for bordering Iraq and Lebanon floated at around 80%, see https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/what-lies-ahead-as-jordan-faces-the-fallout-of-covid-19/.

233 Drastic, early action seems to keep a lid on Jordan's COVID-19 outbreak, CBS News, April 2020, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-in-jordan-seemingly-kept-in-check-by-drastic-early-lockdown-measures/.

234 Jordan: Free speech threats under COVID-19 response, Human Rights Watch, May 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/05/jordan-free-speech-threats-under-covid-19-response.

235 Ibid.

236 See https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/COVID-19-Jordan-Middle-East-Securitization.

237 Jane Araf, Jordan's prime minister says his country contained COVID-19 by 'helping the weakest', NPR, July 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/07/23/894687319/jordans-prime-minister-says-his-country-contained-covid-19-by-helping-the-weakes?t=1599062982297.

238 Sean Yom and Katrina Sammour, Youth radicalization in Jordan: Social and political dimensions, *CTC Sentinel*, 10, 4 (April 2017), https://ctc.usma.edu/counterterrorism-and-youth-radicalization-in-jordan-social-and-political-dimensions/.

239 Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, Fighting ISIS in the digital space in Jordan, October 2018, International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328566214_Fighting_ISIS_in_the_Digital_Space_in_Jordan.

240 Renad Mansour, The Sunni predicament in Iraq, Carnegie Middle East Center, March 2016, https://carnegie-mec.org/2016/03/03/sunni-predicament-in-iraq-pub-62924.

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid.

243 What's happening in Syria, BBC, October 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186.

244 Colin P Clarke, An overview of current trends in terrorism and illicit finance, Rand Corporation, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT498/RAND_CT498.pdf.

245 According to a 2015 study by the Financial Action Task Force, ISIS's other primary sources of revenue included fundraising through modern communication networks; material support provided by foreign fighters; donations from neighbouring states, often disguised as 'humanitarian charity'; and kidnapping for ransom.

246 Wilson Center, ISIS after the caliphate, November 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/isis-after-the-caliphate-0.

247 Colin P Clarke, ISIS's new plans to get rich and wreak havoc, *Foreign Policy*, October 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/10/isiss-new-plans-to-get-rich-and-wreak-havoc/; Human Rights Watch, Iraq: ISIS abducting, killing, expelling minorities, July 2014, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/19/iraq-isis-abducting-killing-expelling-minorities; Rosie Perper, ISIS made millions from taxes that it then used to run garbage collections and even a DMV, Business Insider, April 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/islamic-state-used-taxes-to-grow-power-and-offer-services-2018-4?IR=T.

248 Colin P Clarke, ISIS's new plans to get rich and wreak havoc, *Foreign Policy*, October 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/10/isiss-new-plans-to-get-rich-and-wreak-havoc/.

249 Tom Westcott, Destruction or theft? Islamic State, Iraqi antiquities and organized crime, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, March 2019.

250 Ibid.

251 World Economic Forum, 12 ways ISIS gets funding, November 2015, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/11/12-ways-isis-gets-funding/.

252 Timeline of the rise and fall of the Islamic State group, Associated Press, March 2019, https://apnews.com/482578c-254c349ec826a11885d2f2265.

253 The struggle for survival by Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs, European Commission, European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/field-blogs/stories/struggle-survival-syrian-refugees-and-iraqi-idps_en.

254 See https://www.arabnews.com/node/1668881/middle-east.

255 Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, ISIS is using coronavirus to rebuild its terrorism network in Iraq and Syria, NBC news, May 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/isis-using-coronavirus-rebuild-its-terrorism-network-iraq-syria-ncna1215941.

256 Federico Borsari, Syraq: Into the lost border, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, March 2019, https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/syraq-lost-border-22462.

257 Who are Iraq's Iran-backed militias?, Associated Press, December 2019, https://apnews.com/57a346b17d6da07ae-732ba1437520fd2.

258 The Hashd is dead, long live the Hashd, Chapter 3: Earlier trends persist: August–December 2018, Clingendael, https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/the-hashd-is-dead-long-live-the-hashd/3-earlier-trends-persist-augustdecember-2018/; The Washington Post, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/as-iraqs-shiite-militias-expand-their-reach-concerns-about-an-isis-revival-grow/2019/01/09/52da575e-eda9-11e8-8b47-bd0975fd6199_story.html .

259 Iraq legislating the status of the Popular Mobilization Forces, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/iraq-legislating-the-status-of-the-popular-mobilization-forces/; Ranj Alaadin, Legalising PMF in Iraq: Why it's not all bad news, Al Jazeera, December 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/11/legalising-pmf-iraq-bad-news-161129140729509.html.

260 Patrick Clawson, Hanin Ghaddar, and Nader Uskowi, Middle East FAQs Volume 1: What is the Shia Crescent?, The Washington Institute, January 2018, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/middle-east-faqs-volume-1-what-is-the-shia-crescent; Iran is secretly moving missiles into Iraq, The New York Times, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/04/us/politics/iran-missiles-iraq.html.

261 See https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/voa-news-iran/irans-kurdish-sufis-dash-iraq-funeral-exposing-covid-border-control.

262 See https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-iraq-proxies-insight/coronavirus-and-sanctions-hit-irans-support-of-proxies-in-iraq-idUSKBN2432EY.

263 the YPG form a multi-ethnic militia called the Syrian Democratic Forces.

264 Michael Safi, What is the situation in north-eastern Syria?, The Guardian, October 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/09/what-is-situation-north-eastern-syria-turkey-kurds.

265 Turkey v Syria's Kurds: The short, medium and long story, BBC, October 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49963649.

266 The PYD is heavily influenced by the ideas of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency for over three decades in Turkey for Kurdish political and cultural rights. The PKK is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the US and the European Union. According to the Turkish government, the PKK is indistinguishable from the PYD and YPG.

267 Ulf Laessing and Raya Jalabi, Displaced by war, Kurdish families stuck at Syria–Iraq border point, Reuters, October 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-border/displaced-by-war-kurdish-families-stuck-at-syria-iraq-border-point-idUSKBN1X0211.

268 Fatma Tanis, Syrian Kurdish refugees say Kurdish forces tried to prevent them from fleeing to Iraq, NPR, November 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/11/07/777183277/syrian-kurdish-refugees-say-kurdish-forces-tried-to-prevent-them-from-fleeing-to; Transformations of trans-border areas in the context of the Syrian conflict, February 2014, https://www.noria-research.com/transformations-of-trans-border-areas-in-the-context-of-the-syrian-conflict/.

269 Hannah Lynch, Syrian refugees resort to smugglers to enter Kurdistan region of Iraq, Rudaw, October 2019, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/16102019.

270 The Iraq protests explained in 100 and 500 words, BBC, December 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50595212.

271 Iraq: Protest death toll surges as security forces resume brutal repression, Amnesty International, 23 January 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/01/iraq-protest-death-toll-surges-as-security-forces-resume-brutal-repression/.

272 Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, Iraq's young protesters count cost of a month of violence, The Guardian, 29 October 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/29/iraqi-protesters-demonstrations-month-of-violence.

273 Sarhang Hamasaeed, As protests continue in the street, Iraq reaches a crossroads, US Institute of Peace, 8 November 2019, https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/11/protests-continue-street-iraq-reaches-crossroads.

274 Arwa Ibrahim, Muhasasa, the political system reviled by Iraqi protesters, Al Jazeera, 4 December 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/muhasasa-political-system-reviled-iraqi-protesters-191202201939755.html.

275 National Defense Institute, NDI poll: Iraqis welcome improved security and social cohesion, but discontent with government undermines stability, 29 July 2019, https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-poll-iraqis-welcome-improved-security-and-social-cohesion-discontent-government.

276 See https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2020-04-23/iraq-war-paved-way-coronavirus-catastrophe.

277 See https://www.newsweek.com/isis-operative-charged-covid-scam-doj-allegedly-sold-fake-ppe-online-raise-money-terrorist-1524955.

278 See https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/05/iraq-new-cabinet-mustafa-kadhimi-economy-security-cov-

id19.html.

279 See International Aid Transparency Initiative, d-portal, http://d-portal.org/ctrack.html#view=search.

280 OECD Donor Tracker, https://donortracker.org/countries.

281 See https://bit.ly/37UKLl9.

282 Project duration: June 2018 to December 2019.

283 See Berghof Foundation, https://berghof-foundation.org/work/projects/supporting-local-dialogue-and-faith-based-insider-mediators.

284 Security and justice sector governance in the Middle East, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, October 2019, https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/155986/3249263.

285 See https://bit.ly/2VMgn6x.

286 See https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=1&y=6&f=2:82,4:1,7:1,9:85,3:296,5:3,8:85&q=2:82,85,95+4:1+7:1+9:85+3:294,295,296,52,321,258,60,61,62,63,64,65,74,112,129,155,204,205,G44+5:3+8:85+1:2+6:2018,2019.

287 See https://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/library/iraq-cpd-2020-2024.html.

288 See https://donortracker.org/policy-updates/sweden-increases-support-lebanon; https://donortracker.org/

policy-updates/european-commission-commits-us73-million-emergency-funding-lebanon; https://donortracker.org/policy-updates/south-korea-provides-us1-million-relief-following-exploson-lebanon; https://donortracker.org/policy-updates/germany-pledges-us23-million-emergency-assistance-lebanon; https://donortracker.org/policy-updates/uk-commits-us25-million-humanitarian-support-lebanon; https://donortracker.org/policy-updates/canada-creates-task-force-support-victims-beirut-explosion; https://donortracker.org/policy-updates/norway-will-support-lebanon-aftermath-beirut-explosions-additional-funding-us5.

289 Security and justice sector governance in the Middle East, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, October 2019, https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/155986/3249263.

290 Samia Nakhoul and John Irish, 'No free lunch' for Lebanon anymore, donor states warn, Reuters, https://www.reuters.com/article/lebanon-crisis-idINKBN27X233.

291 Arab.org maintains a database of prominent CSOs and NGOs operating in the region based on country and sector; see https://arab.org/portal/.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net

Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office