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## The Arab world, sick man of the globe

By Rami G. Khouri

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Looking around the Arab world this week, it is hard to know what are the region's real priority challenges, because multiple issues stand out as problems, vulnerabilities, weaknesses or threats. Most of the problems in our region can be traced to local incompetence, or, in the worst cases, criminality and irresponsibility in the seats of power – though everywhere there is also an element of foreign involvement or manipulation that should not be ignored. The regional picture is not pretty.

The Somali capital Mogadishu is once again ripped apart by vicious street battles, the state-level equivalent of senseless drug wars among poor urban youth in other parts of the world. Somalia is the sad global laboratory of a society without a state, chaos masquerading as statehood.

Bahrain is once again plagued by street demonstrations and security crackdowns, reflecting a total inability of citizens and leaders to engage one another in a sensible political negotiation over the exercise and sharing of power. Bahrain should have been a leader in sustainable development and social equity in the region, given its small population and its early emphasis on educating men and women alike.

Iraq remains the most dangerous place in the region today, given its combination of internal stress, rekindled high levels of terror and political violence, the inability of the political class to achieve consensus, and the rampant interference of foreign countries.

The destructive ripples that have radiated from Iraq outward to the region and the world in the form of foreign invasion and interference, terror groups, sectarian fighting and nation-state fragility are unprecedented in the modern era.

Lebanon remains trapped in its continuing dilemma of being both the vanguard of Arab liberalism, cultural creativity, intellectual production, tolerance, and multiculturalism, on the one hand, and a perpetual proxy battleground for regional and global powers who link up with fierce local fighters, on the other. The best of the Arab and universal human condition is on display in Lebanon every day, and every few weeks or months this is complemented by street fighting, assassinations, political stand-offs or large or small wars.

Yemen is caught in its own whirlwind of national fragility, polarization and low-intensity disintegration, having several times in its modern history split up and united, fought and reconciled, stabilized and plunged into warfare. Now it embodies a new destructive dimension in the form of militant Salafists linked with Al-Qaeda, making it another local breeding ground and battleground in the global terror industry.

Palestine becomes stronger and stronger as a national identity in the hearts and minds of its own citizens, but also more and more fragmented and disjointed politically on the ground. Several different Palestinian leaderships share legitimacy with some of their own people, but none has been able to achieve the more important international legitimacy or credibility and respect in the eyes of Israeli leaders and society.