

Migration and non-traditional security issues in the MENA-region. The case of pre-revolt Syria

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Migration plays an important role in the political and economic positioning of the Middle Eastern states. Syria, being one of the larger producers of migrants in the MENA-region, is obviously influenced by the historical, political and societal changes over time. The article describes and analyzes the Syrian migration to Lebanon and the Gulf, taking its theoretical point of departure in the concept of non-traditional security. Migration is challenging national security as a result of its anarchistic character and this theme plays a significant role in the article. Furthermore the article focuses on to which degree the migration phenomenon can be seen as an expression of transnational integration. Syrian migration to Lebanon has been (and is) an important economic asset for the huge amount of Syrian workers who have taken care of many different, but often unskilled, job functions in Lebanon – and for the Syrian state. It has been influenced by the turbulent political relations between the two states, not the least following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. For the Syrian state migration to the Gulf constitutes an irregular and unstable factor for the Syrian economy but also in a political sense. Whereas Lebanon has a rather weak position vis-à-vis Syria, despite the economic importance of the income of the Syrian workers in Lebanon, the Gulf-states appear stronger and more able to dictate the conditions related to migration processes in the Gulf-region.

Syria is among the top ten countries regarding migration in the Middle East. The country is playing a role as a large producer of migrants leaving Syria, the bulk of which are work migrants going to Lebanon, the Gulf-states and Saudi-Arabia, Libya, Turkey etc. The two largest groups of Syrian migrants are those in Lebanon and in the Gulf. Syria is also a recipient of large amounts of migrants and refugees from other Middle Eastern states and a transit migration country for migrants from Asia and Africa. The largest group of migrants in Syria is the Iraqi refugees, arriving after the US invasion in March 2003 (Lischer, 2008). Together the complex migration patterns paint a picture of socially significant population movements, having evolved in the Syrian context over the last decades.

The article will describe changes in Syrian migratory movements to Lebanon and the Gulf over the last ten years and discuss the effects of the migration phenomenon for the Syrian state in a non-traditional security perspective. It is the idea to analyze how historical, political and societal changes in the region over time have created new tendencies in Syrian migration dynamics, which have significant political and economic repercussions.

Furthermore the article focuses on to which degree the migration phenomenon can be seen as expression of transnational integration in the Arab region and also whether this tendency leads to changes in the conditions for citizenship in the relevant countries. As emphasized by Thomas Faist, transnationalism refers to “sustained cross-border ties, events and processes across the borders of several national states” (Faist, 2010) In this sense transnationalism differs from internationalism, which is concerned with relations between states and their agents and also from globalization, taking world-spanning structures as point of departure. Transnational integration thus represents developments, where integration processes are crossing borders, but not generated by states and resulting in harmonization of state practices.

Transnational migration formations challenge national security, as discussed by (among others) Fiona B. Adamson, because they touch upon fundamental notions of the territorial state (Adamson, 2006). In a wider perspective migration challenges existing national codes of practice concerning citizenship in the sense that long term migration relations (like for instance the more or less permanent presence of Syrian workers in Lebanon) some times, but not necessarily has a tendency to lead to a *de facto* assimilation. Still, of course, these processes can be interrupted by political developments, where state to state relations changes due to dramatic incidents, wars, foreign intervention etc. The article intend to demonstrate that migration processes in the Middle Eastern context to a large extent are subordinated national interests and that the Syrians working in Lebanon and the Gulf (and elsewhere) are seen as a cheap, well functioning labour force, which in times of crisis – be it economic or political – has been and will be manipulated accordingly.

Theoretically the article, taking Syrian migration as point of departure, will discuss the concept of non-traditional security, showing that migration constitutes a phenomenon, which is becoming more and more important and at the same time constitutes an anarchistic element in the relations between states, which goes beyond

traditional foreign policy means and therefore might be included in what the so-called Copenhagen school has termed non-traditional security issues (Buzan et al., 1998). Migration is here to be seen as one of several such “non-controllable” phenomena in a context where developmental problems, environmental disasters, illegal and irregular migration, rapid urbanization and problems related to the uncontrolled growth of mega-cities represent other possible trends related to non-traditional security. The characteristics of threats like this are that they do not originate from state actors, that they are often transnational and that they have an unexpected, anarchistic character. States in the Middle East might not consider this type of threats as just as important as “normal” security threats attached to state behaviour, but they are nonetheless of great and probably growing importance in challenging the weak, authoritarian states in the MENA-region.

The discussions within IR on the emergence of a new security environment in the 21st century have led to new insights related to the analysis of globalization and security, which underlines that there is no linear pattern in the response by certain states to the imperatives of globalization (Cha, 2000: 401). A similar logic can be shown related to non-traditional security issues, which also tend to complicate the nature of security and therefore must be analyzed in their specific context, where all relevant conditions and actors are involved in the analysis and taken into consideration. Some Syrian sources claim that the number of Syrian expatriates around the world count more than 10 million (Waed). Obviously this population abroad creates a field, where the regime is not in possession of total control.

As mentioned by Latha Varadarajan the “constructivist turn has been largely responsible for opening up of analytical space by focusing on questions of identity, such as what national security means, how those meanings have come about, the nature of the subject (the nation-state) that needs to be secured and the kind of threats it needs securing from” (Varadarajan, 2004: 320). The important point here, however, is that national security always is historically constituted, unstable; dependent on given local, regional and international circumstances and conditions. The article claims that only by focusing closely on the shifting historical conditions determining national security interests can the impact and significance of phenomena like migration be sufficiently analyzed and understood.

Syrian migration to Lebanon and the Gulf

According to the World Bank the stock of emigrants and immigrants in the Middle East in 2010 are 18.1 million and 12.0, respectively. The World Bank estimates, that Syria in 2010 had a stock of emigrants abroad numbering 944.600 and that the number of immigrants in Syria was 2.205.800, or almost one tenth of the population. It is estimated, that Syria in 2010 received an equivalent of more than 1.4 billion US \$ in remittances, obviously a valuable asset for the regime (Ratha et al., 2011). The emigration is welcomed by the regime, since an excess labour force which leaves the country of course means less public expenses.

Syria has experienced an extreme population growth, according to the official population census at this rate: 1970: 6.304.685, 1981: 9.052.628, 1994: 13.782.315, 2004:

17.90.844 and 2009: 23.027.000, respectively (Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005). This dramatic demographic development of course is part of the reason why Syria has obvious advantages in getting rid of its surplus labour force. According to official Syrian sources, Syrian migrants abroad are to be counted by the millions: 800.000 in Lebanon, 500.000 in Kuwait, 700.000 in Saudi-Arabia and 150.000 in the United Arab Emirates.¹ These figures, as it can be seen, are much larger than the estimates by the World Bank and must be taken with great caution.

Syrian workers in Lebanon and the Syrian-Lebanese contradictions

It is a well known fact, that since the end of the Lebanese Civil War, a large number of Syrians have worked in Lebanon in connection with the reconstruction activities in Beirut and elsewhere in the devastated country. The narratives attached to the Syrian migrants in Lebanon have changed over time. According to Chalcraft “positive constructions of Syrian migrant labour before the civil war gave way to negativity and controversy in a context of economic crisis and Syrian control (...) Syrian workers started to be seen as a threat to Lebanese sovereignty, polity, economy and society” (Chalcraft, 2006: 1). It is my view that this might be right, but that it represents something of a simplification. It was and is a rather complex phenomenon with both political and every-day life discursive connotations.

My fieldwork in Syria and Lebanon in the late 1990's left the impression, that the Syrian workers in Lebanon broadly speaking were looked at with some skepticism by the Lebanese, but that they were considered a necessary evil, first of all because they took care of the so-called 3D-jobs (dirty, dangerous, demanding) – often job functions, which the Lebanese did not want themselves (Seeberg, 2000). The passive acceptance of the Syrian political dominance in Lebanon and a rather hostile, often discriminatory public discourse about the unskilled Syrian workers were mixed together in a general negative image of Syria – which, for obvious reasons – were left unspoken.

Seen from the Syrian side Lebanon served as an important outlet for surplus Syrian labour, as mentioned by Mona Yacoubian, “with an estimated 300.000 permanent Syrian workers in Lebanon. The figure rises to one million when including seasonal laborers who come to Lebanon to work on construction projects and in the agricultural sector” (Yacoubian, 2006). An important aspect of the presence of Syrian workers was (and is) a significant amount of remittances, which the migrants brought home with them after the work period or send home to relatives. Obviously even small transfers would – by the sheer number of migrants – sum up to rather large figures, which would represent a valuable contribution to the Syrian national economy. Some areas of Syria were dependent on remittances from Syrian workers in Lebanon, as mentioned by Bassel Salloukh (Salloukh, 2005: 19).

Following the Civil War 1975-1990 Syrian women no longer worked as domestic workers in Lebanese homes, since these positions were overtaken by women from Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Ethiopia (Jureidini, 2009) - See also, in this volume, the article on migrant domestic workers by James Sater. A number of Syrians have over time been naturalized as citizens in Lebanon (Hourani and Sensenig-Dabbous, 2011). Apparently they represent very different groups of people, ranging from Syriac

Orthodox, Assyrians, Kurds and traditional Sunni-Muslim Syrians. A large segment was formed by Beduin nomad tribes who – before the establishment of the modern states – used to bring their herds from different areas in Syria, Turkey or Israel to graze in the fertile Bekaa Valley. According to Hourani and Sensenig-Dabbous these Beduins settled permanently in Lebanon during the Civil War and bought land from Christians, who had fled the country. The Beduins then built houses on the newly bought land and settled down for good.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War in 1990 it was essential for Syria to dominate the Lebanese political sphere in order to secure control and legitimacy for supporting Syrian interests in Lebanon. The Syrians orchestrated the first parliamentary election and it was implicitly accepted by Israel, the European powers and the US, that the Syrians established a hegemonic leadership maintaining stability and security. The fear of Lebanon returning to war and chaos made for a long period up for ideal democratic considerations, and the Syrians took advantage of that by Syrian interference in all important aspects of political life in the tormented country.

The Syrian interference had several different manifestations, both as direct political pressure in connection with appointing new political leaders in Lebanon, but also related to foreign policy issues, the role of Hezbollah in relation to Israel etc. Furthermore the Syrian influence was reflected in political practices in connection with the elections in Lebanon, where the naturalized Syrians actually tipped the demographic balance in some areas and thereby affected the outcome of the elections (Hourani and Sensenig-Dabbous, 2011). The negativity and controversy were related to Syrian de facto governing Lebanon and had primarily to do with the influence from the Ba'ath-elite in Syria, the 12.000 Syrian troops and the pervasive Syrian intelligence network, which played an active role internally in Lebanon.

Contrary to that the unskilled Syrians workers were not considered a problem by the Lebanese. The “Green Guys” taken as example as the Syrian workers dressed in the Solidere-owned Sukleen Company’s green waterproofs were called in the arrogant Lebanese jargon, were not feared but accepted. The Syrians had a low status in the ethnic-religious hierarchy of immigrants, only the Asian workers (from Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Pakistan and India) were lower paid. In the long, relatively peaceful period from 1990 to 2005, where the reconstruction of Lebanon and particularly Beirut underwent dramatic reconstruction, the Syrian work force there, were not explicitly associated to the dominant Syrian regime.

They were exposed to a liberalist labour market characterized by the absence of control of the working environment, low wages and long workdays, but accepted this in order – in a few months – to earn what might be the equivalent of the annual earnings in Syria. Some Lebanese companies did not officially use poorly paid foreign labour, but it was easy to hide this in the uncontrolled Lebanese labour market. However, the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri 14 February 2005 changed these conditions almost immediately, because the Syrian labourers in Lebanon became scapegoats for the tragic incident. Many Lebanese, being aware of the fact that Hariri was unpopular in Damascus, believed that the Syrian regime was directly responsible for the assassination. The frustration was deepened by the persistent rumours in

Lebanon, that despite the withdrawal of the Syrian military in the spring of 2005, the Syrian intelligence network prevailed and still played a political role in Lebanese internal affairs.

The post-Hariri reality in Lebanon produced a situation, where the Syrian workers were persecuted and in some cases exposed to lynching by the Lebanese. After the killing of Hariri the presence of Syrian workers was a major grievance, as described by John Chalcraft: "There were even a number of attacks on these workers during the "Independence Uprising" (...) By May, it was reported that Suq al-Sabra in south Beirut – also known as Suq al-Hamidiyya (...) because of the numerous Syrians there – was virtually deserted" (Chalcraft, 2005: 28). Fabrice Balanche mentions that between 27 February and 23 March 31 incidents were reported, where the homes of Syrians workers were set on fire (Balanche, 2007).

According to Chalcraft the Syrians headed back to Lebanon after the turmoil related to the murder of Hariri and the Syrian troop withdrawal of April 2005. This is also mentioned by Philippe Fargues, stating that "it is believed that they returned en masse to Syria. Today, however, most are believed to be back in Lebanon" (Fargues, 2009: 553). To which degree this is the case, is very difficult to estimate, since a large part of the Syrian migration to Lebanon is temporary and takes place "by chance" – organized by the Syrian workers themselves. According to official Syrian statistics the number of Syrian workers in Lebanon count more than 800.000 in 2010 and is supported by a Lebanese government run agency, which, based on talks with the Syrian side, takes part in organizing the migration process (Wahbe, 2008).

The migration has of course been affected by the development of the relations between Syria and Lebanon since the war in the summer of 2006 and also by the development related to discussions in the UN about the situation in Lebanon. The Syrian state was put under pressure by a French-American alliance in the UN, which 2nd September 2004 resulted in the approval of Security Council Resolution 1559, insisting on the "withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from Lebanon".² The Syrians did not immediately bring home all troops; for them the situation was part of a complex tactical maneuvering, where they secured their influence by prolonging the term for Lebanese president Emile Lahoud and demonstrated that they partly took the UN-decision seriously by pulling out a small number of troops and moving some of the rest to the eastern part of the Bekaa Valley (Nizameddin, 2006: 96). The pressure, however, grew stronger after the assassination of Hariri, and Syria pulled out the last of its troops by 26 April 2005 (2010).

Syria has since then attempted to renew its influence in Lebanon – first of all in the foreign political field. This has been done via a permanent close relation with the Hezbollah, which since 2006, despite a certain lack of popularity among the Christian and Sunni-Moslem population, still is an extremely strong organization. The Hezbollah is able, partly because of its strong backing from Iran and Syria, to establish what I elsewhere have termed a "dual power" situation in Lebanon (Seeberg, 2009, Cordesman, 2006). The Iranian influence can be seen as double edged sword for Syria, since on one side the Iranian ally in principle gives Syria strength. On the other side close relations with Iran can also be a problem for Syria, if it in a specific context wants

to deal with more moderate actors in the Middle East, like Turkey or Saudi-Arabia. The overall result might then be that Syria is maintaining a picture of itself as being one of the radical states in the MENA-region and a part of the 'axis of resistance' against Israel.

As for the legal relations between the two neighbours, Syria and Lebanon, a landmark agreement was reached in mid-July 2008, when it was announced that they were going to establish normal diplomatic relations with each other, open embassies etc. Syria formally recognized Lebanon's independence on 13 October 2008 and opened its first embassy in Beirut in December the same year and upheld its former dominance via the usual channels, i.e. by influencing the appointments of the Lebanese leaders, as described in the section on Syria in "The Middle East and North Africa 2011":

Before the diplomatic exchange took place, Syria ensured that the Lebanese domestic balance of power had been, if not directly to its own advantage, then at least conducive to its own interests. The election of President Suleiman, probably Syria's favourite candidate for the job, and Gen. Michel Aoun's alliance with Hezbollah, brought relief to Syria (2010).

As mentioned the official Syrian statistics estimates the number of Syrian migrants in Lebanon in 2010 to 800.000.³ It is not precisely defined which groups are ex- or included. In principle they have an advantage compared to the other foreign immigrants in the sense that they can be more flexible than the others, for whom going home is difficult and costly. And gradually the negative attitudes from the Lebanese have changed. The development as to economic relations between Syria and Lebanon are also important, not the least for the Syrian state, because the migrant workers represent an economic asset. The migrants bring home an income, which they have earned in Lebanon, and some (who stay in longer periods in Lebanon) send home remittances. The saved expenses for the excess labour in Syria are also a significant element in the complex relation and altogether Syrian migration to Lebanon contributes substantially to the (weak) Syrian economy.

Summing up the overall picture is that migration in the relation between Lebanon and Syria cannot be considered an expression of transnational integration. There is very little evidence of improved cross-border ties as a result of many years of Syrian migration to Lebanon. The important point in relation to this article, however, is that the complex development of the security situation in the relations between the two countries is reflected in the migration phenomenon. In this perspective migration can be seen as an important non-traditional security issue, which is affected by the local and regional political development over time.

The Syrian migration to Lebanon is extremely complex and differentiated. It covers a wide field from seasonal employment to situations, where Syrian workers succeed in becoming a Lebanese citizen. From time to time a number of non-Lebanese have applied for citizenship and obtained it – and thereby ending in *de facto* assimilation. A situation like that is hardly in the interest of Syria, and this obvious conflict of interest underlines the lack of possibility of controlling the phenomenon.

Migration is in this perspective a dependent variable, which fluctuates according to political conditions. It is subordinated the handling of national interests on behalf of Syria, and establishes a paradoxical, antagonistic relation between Syria and Lebanon, where on one side Syria is dependent on the income from the migrants working in the (richer) neighbouring state, but on the other side is politically dominant.

The dominance is in itself exposed to shifting historical conditions with 2005 as a kind of turning point in the sense that before 2005 Syria is more or less dictating what happens at the political level in Lebanon. After 2005 the relation changes and becomes more indirect – Syria is now making its influence count through the Syria-Hezbollah strategic alliance and through the Syria-Hezbollah-Iran axis. The in the introduction mentioned anarchistic, uncontrolled character of the migration phenomenon does certainly apply to the Syrian work migration in Lebanon. The migration in this context is highly dependent on the historical and political developments and in this sense – as mentioned – subordinated foreign policy and security interests.

The Gulf and the significance of Syrian migration

The “classical” article on labour migration in the Arab World by Fred Halliday distinguishes between four different types of migration, 1. migration within the states of the region, 2. migration from the Arab world to countries outside the region, 3. migration from one Arab country to another and 4. migration from outside the Arab world to the Arab states (Halliday, 1984). The migration to the Gulf is represented both in type 3 and 4, and as for the recent ten year period type 4 outnumber type 3. But still the Arab migration to the Gulf is significant. The attraction and main pull factor has to do with the relatively high wages. Onn Winckler analyzed the Syrian migration to the Gulf-states in the late 1990s and found that the salaries offered to industrial workers in the Gulf States exceeded wages in Syria by 700 per cent (Winckler, 1997: 108).

According to Winckler the Syrian migration to the Gulf in 1970 was larger than the migration to Lebanon, 58.821 workers compared to 33.800. The number of Syrians in the Gulf increased during the 1970s and the 1980s, but in 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, 110.000 Syrians left Kuwait and returned home. Many of them returned to Kuwait again, however, after the end of the war in 1991. Nevertheless the war probably can be seen as something of a turning point in the sense that the beginning of the 1990s was the time when a rapid increase in Asian migration to the Gulf took place. The migration to the Gulf has been a cause of concern for the Syrian state, because it has had a tendency of creating a shortage of specific categories of professional workers in Syria, the so-called brain-drain. At the same time the Syrian state has been interested in maintaining the obvious economic advantages related to the huge amounts of remittances from the Gulf to Syria.

Many Syrians have spent long periods as guest workers in the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar. It is estimated that around 1 million Syrians are living and working in this wealthy, rentier-state region (Braine, 2010). According to Maya Braine there are in recent years two groups of Syrian workers in the Gulf-states. The first group is rather well-off skilled labour, living there with their families. They have been there for decades, are doing well and will probably stay there. They still

send home remittances, but do not spend much time in Syria except for short visits and holidays. The second group of workers has arrived more recently and is typically younger. They are often single, young men, and if they are married they travel to the Gulf without their wives. The migration period is, like it is the case for the migrants in Lebanon, rather short, and they are there with the purpose of saving up money to buying a home, getting married or make possible private investments in small-scale businesses.

Also Martin Baldwin-Edwards demonstrates that the migration to the GCC-states has a long history, which goes back to the times before the oil boom in the region. There was a small, local migration attached to the pearl diving and the fishing, but the rapid development in the migration processes came after the so-called oil-crisis in the beginning of the 1970s. By 1972, according to Baldwin-Edwards, there were about 800.000 migrant workers in the Arab OPEC countries, but only three years later, in 1975, 3.5 million foreign workers lived there, constituting 40% of the total population (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005).

The labour market in the Gulf has a special character in the sense that one of the expressions of the closed character of the region is the system of Kafala, contracts, where the individual migrant must find a sponsor in order to be able to enter the specific country. It might seem that in recent years some of the Gulf-states have begun to abandon the Kafala system – this is at least the official version of the story. The question is, however, to which this in reality is the case. The system locally to have a tendency of producing mechanisms to exploit the system by denying the migrants proper wages and conditions, retaining passports or threatening to report them to the police, as mentioned Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (Castles and Miller, 2009).

From the start the Syrian migrants were one of the larger groups, even though they only counted a fraction of the migrants from India, Pakistan, Egypt or Yemen. According to official Syrian statistics the number of Syrian migrants in the Gulf-states in 2010 counted more than a million.⁴ The largest recipient is Saudi-Arabia, which has attracted more than 700.000 Syrian migrant workers, followed by Kuwait (500.000) and UAE (150.000). The majority of Syrian migrants in the Gulf perform low-skilled job functions, but still some of the Syrians are having more well-paid jobs working as engineers and doctors, teachers and businessmen.

The Gulf-states are attractive for the Syrian migrants in the sense that the wages there are rather high. The expenses in connection with going there are of course much higher than when going to Lebanon and the costs of living are also higher. The labour market in the Gulf is very tough and the Syrian migrants have to compete with large amounts of migrants from Asia, especially from the Philippines, Pakistan and India. Together with them (and the Egyptian migrants) the Syrians constitute the lowest ranks of the migrant's hierarchy. It seems that the Syrians on average are better paid than the Asian workers, but still belong to the lowest ranks compared to migrants from other parts of the world, with Turkey in a middle position and Europeans and Americans at the top level. They are under all circumstances part of what we, referring to Arjun Appadurai, can speak of as ethnoscapas, "persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guests workers and other

moving groups and persons who constitute an essential feature of the world" (Appadurai, 1990).

Sulayman Khalaf and Saad Alkobaisi analyze different cases of migrants in a Gulf context, taking a group of Syrian migrants from a rural community in the north-east of Syria as one of their case-studies (Khalaf and Alkobaisi, 1999). They are skilled labourers who plan to stay for long periods in the Gulf and deliberately lay plans for bringing relatives to the Gulf and arrange for them to become employed within the same work field as themselves. The point is that migrants are not to be considered as mere victims of socio-economical or structural developments, but as persons making rational decisions, strategic decisions on behalf of the specific family member and/or the family as a whole.

For the specific group of Syrian migrants in the case analyzed by Khalaf and Alkobaisi it seems that they rely on their work skills in order to obtain possibilities for permanent work positions and for bringing family members to the Gulf. They are in a relatively privileged position – a position which not necessarily is typical for all Syrians, but on average is more common for Syrians than for Asian migrants in the Gulf. The problem for the Syrians, despite rather low wages, is the fact that they often, as mentioned, on average have been used to higher wages than what it is possible to negotiate with Asian workers.

The gradual shift from Arab to Asia regarding the countries of origin has simply to do with traditional labour market mechanisms. There is a tendency, if it is possible for the specific migrant receiving state and its labour market to seek replacement of any labour force if a cheaper labour force with similar qualifications is provided. But there is certainly also political dimensions attached to the whole issue. Political issues also plays a role, as mentioned by Tabutin et al: "Among the other factors that have helped to stimulate immigration by Asian workers are their more "controllable" behaviour – they are less politicized and less inclined to protest than Arab populations – and their shorter stays" (Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005: 577) The reverse aspect of this is naturally also important. "Politicized" migrants, who have left their country of origin – *in casu* Syria – will in the nature of the case cause less trouble for the Syrian regime, while they are abroad.

The Syrian migration to the Gulf is for several reasons very important for Syria, not the least for economic reasons. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of workers and the difference between the official Syrian numbers and estimates from for instance the World Bank is large (Baker, 2010). The Syrian Government estimates the volume of remittances from expatriate Syrians to about two billion dollars in 2007, while a report by the World Bank noted that the transfers did not exceed 850 million dollars for the same year. The transfer of parts of the earnings from Syrian nationals in the Gulf makes it possible for Syria to improve a deficit in the balance of payments and thereby finance a necessary import of foreign technology. Probably the remittances from the Gulf (and also from Lebanon) have functioned as a pretext for inaction in the sense that they have enabled the regime to postpone liberalization measures with their well known negative effects on the regime's social welfare commitments. The wealth

originating from the remittances functions thereby like the income from oil in the rentier economies of the Middle East, but – of course – on a different, lower level.

As such it is important for the political situation internally in Syria, where less pressure is put on the government from the young, often unemployed Syrians. The Syrian regime is, as described by Søren Schmidt, built on a combination of repression and “a precarious legitimacy based on economic subsidies to peasants, state employees and the general public, as well as on handouts to businessmen closely connected to the regime” (Schmidt, 2006: 93, Hinnebusch, 2008, Hinnebusch and Schmidt, 2009). Syria’s public sector is characterized by corruption, bureaucracy and inefficiency and the Syrian state has an in many ways problematic reputation for being a radical, “rogue” state. This is viewed with some skepticism by the conservative states in the Gulf and has on some occasions resulted in reprisals for the Syrian migrants living and working in the Gulf states.

There is therefore a discrepancy between the Syrian foreign policy interests and the interests of the Syrian workers in the Gulf, who do not share the views of the Ba’ath-regime in Damascus. As with the case of Syrian migration to Lebanon the migration to the Gulf cannot be seen as an expression of regional integration, to some degree rather the opposite. The point is underlined in connection with larger regional conflicts, for instance when in 1990 the Kuwait-war resulted in the expulsion of large numbers of migrants from the Gulf states, some of which from Syria. The Syrian state is economically dependent on the remittances from the Syrian migrants, but can hardly be said to pursue a policy, which represents efforts in support of the interests of the migrants.

The labour market in the Gulf is characterized by being regulated both by local law and practices related to visa issues etc. But added to that, as mentioned, the *kafala*-system works as a very efficient, but not officially controlled mechanism. The overall conditions might be subject to planning, as when, according to The Middle East and North Africa 2011, Saudi-Arabia decides to insist on specific distribution of labour, so that expatriates (in 2007) “were mostly employed in private companies, while jobs in the civil service, autonomous government institutions and parastatal organizations were reserved exclusively for Saudi nationals” (2010: 1008). The same source informs that non-nationals comprised 88% of the 5.36 total workforce in the private sector and that the Saudi state has tried, with limited success, to limit the share of foreign workers. In the long run, however there is a tendency to enforcing the Saudiization policy.

Summing up the combination of normal measures like the possibility of regulating the number of foreigners through the visas and the general immigration policy (and the Saudiization policy) is an efficient tool. The system with the local *kafeel*, who in the end is responsible for the contract negotiations, adds another anarchistic element to the overall picture. It is at the same time a phenomenon, which can have problematic aspects, as Anh N. Longva summarizes an analysis of the Kafala system in the Gulf: “sponsorship severely circumscribes some of the most fundamental freedoms of migrant workers and exploits their dependency and vulnerability. The migrants

structural dependence explains their readiness to comply with the sponsor-employer's dictates" (Longva, 1999: 22).

From the Syrian side these measures are potentially highly problematic. A state like Syria is over-dependent on external resources, of which the remittances phenomenon is an important example. For the Syrian state migration to the Gulf with its dependency both on the Gulf states and the local kafeels becomes a non-traditional security issue, which constitutes an irregular, unstable and potentially devastating factor for the Syrian economic balance vis-à-vis its trading partners but also in a political sense. The Syrian regime might seem extremely efficient in its repression of its population, but, as pointed out by Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, the authoritarian regimes are characterized by a certain frailty, as we saw it in Eastern Europe in connection with the fall of the Berlin wall and as it can be seen in 2011 with the Arab uprisings (Teti and Gervasio, 2011: 321).

The Syrian migration to the Gulf does not lead to transnational integration. Rather the conclusion seem to be, that political contradictions between the conservative Gulf and radical Syria lead to self protection on behalf of the Gulf states in the sense that they gradually replaces Syrian (and other Arab) workers with an Asian workforce, which accepts lower salaries and creates less trouble. Security measures and national interests are the main determinants for the relations between Syria and the Gulf states, when dealing with the issue of migration. The interests are double sided: As emphasized by Castles and Miller migrants "have often been used by their host countries or countries of origin to further political agendas" (Castles and Miller, 2009: 164).

Conclusion

The idea of this article is to discuss migration in the context of non-traditional security. Taking the development in Syrian migration to Lebanon and the Gulf and the inflow of refugees and migrants to Syria as point of departure it has been analyzed how complex patterns in migration related to Syria constitute anarchistic, uncontrollable elements, which affect the authoritarian regime by challenging its security. The article has furthermore discussed how transnational migration does not necessarily result in transnational integration across borders – in the case of Syria rather the opposite. It is demonstrated that only by focusing closely on important shifts in the historical conditions determining national security the impact and significance of phenomena like migration can be sufficiently analyzed and understood.

The relation between Lebanon and Syria cannot be considered an expression of transnational integration. There is very little evidence of improved cross-border ties as a result of many years of Syrian migration to Lebanon. The Syrian migration to Lebanon is extremely differentiated in the sense that it covers a wide range of migration types from seasonal employment to situations, where Syrian workers after years of employment in Lebanon succeed in becoming Lebanese citizens. Some Syrians have applied for citizenship in Lebanon and obtained it – a phenomenon that is hardly in the interest of Syria and this obvious conflict of interest underlines the lack of possibility of controlling the phenomenon. The Syrian work migration to Lebanon is

subordinated the handling of national interests on behalf of Syria but as a result of the shifting historical conditions due to the dramatic course of events in 2005 and 2006 it lives up to the in the above mentioned anarchistic, uncontrolled character of the phenomenon.

As shown in the analysis of Syrian migration to the Gulf a state like Syria is dependent on the remittances. For the Syrian state the migration to the Gulf with its dependency both on the Gulf states and on the local kafeels becomes an important non-traditional security issue. It is an unstable factor for the Syrian economy. In spite of the notorious efficiency of the Syrian regime in its repression of its population, it is characterized by a certain frailty – a reality which becomes more and more obvious in 2011, where the Arab uprising has a specific, tragic Syrian variety, but still challenges the usual established image of unshakeable authoritarianism in the Middle East (Teti and Gervasio, 2011: 321). The Syrian migration to the Gulf does like the migration to Lebanon not lead to transnational integration. Rather the political contradictions lead to self protection on behalf of the Gulf states, resulting in a gradual “replacement migration” in the sense that the Syrian workers are replaced with an Asian workforce (see the Introduction to this Special Issue and the article on Citizenship and Migration in Arab Gulf Countries).

The conclusion seems to be that again security measures and national interests are the main determinants when dealing with the issue of migration. Transnational migration does in the Syrian case not lead to transnational integration, but first of all to the making and maintenance of a significant non-traditional security issue for Syria. The Syrian migration demonstrates the anarchistic character of the migration phenomenon. Migration is difficult to control and does not without resistance lend itself to state regulation. Partly in opposition to that, the Syrian state is trying to take advantage of the migration dynamics, but has to realize that the economic interests related to the remittances have political repercussions. Regarding the two areas discussed in this article it seems that the perspectives are somewhat different. Whereas Lebanon has a rather weak position vis-à-vis Syria, despite the economic importance of the income of the Syrian workers in Lebanon, the Gulf-states appear strong and able more or less to dictate the conditions related to migration processes in the Gulf-region. Therefore, if it seems appropriate for the regimes in the Gulf to replace immigrant workers from the MENA-states (including the Syrian migrants) with people from Asia, there is not much the Syrian state can do to influence such decisions. Migration remains an anarchistic and highly politicized element in the political and economic positioning of the Middle Eastern states.

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Notes:

¹ See Ministry of Expertise. Official Statistics of Syrians in the exile. Damascus: Faculty of Arts forum, University of Damascus. 2010, <http://www.adab-sy.com/forums/showthread.php?t=17791> (accessed 21/8-2011).

² See http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions04.html

³ Ministry of Expertise. Official Statistics of Syrians in the exile. Damascus: Faculty of Arts forum, University of Damascus. 2010, <http://www.adab-sy.com/forums/showthread.php?t=17791> (accessed 27/8-2011)

⁴ Ministry of Expertise, op. cit.