FRIENDS OF ISRAEL INITIATIVE

The New Middle East and its Consequences

Essays from an Israeli, American and European Perspective

Jonathan Spyer, Elliott Abrams & Bruno Tertrais

August 2016

Strategic Outlook Series 2

The Friends of Israel Initiative (FOII) is a global organization devoted to fighting the delegitimization of the State of Israel and to support its right to live in peace within safe and defensible borders. FOII believes that Israel is an integral and vital part of the West, a dynamic, vibrant and prosperous democracy, and as such Israel deserves to be fully accepted as a normal Western nation, and treated with fairness as any other democracy in the world. FOII was founded in 2010 as a group of global leaders, former Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and Defense Ministers, and eminent personalities from diverse fields. In order to further its message, FOII members engage their peers in direct and frank dialogues, invite relevant people to field trips to Israel, call on expert groups to prepare reports and policy papers, disseminate analysis affecting the future of Israel, and publish opinion editorials in pertinent media outlets, among other activities.

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Series Editor: Davis Lewin

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Foreword

The Friends of Israel Initiative (FOII), brought to life in 2010 by former Prime Minister of Spain Jose Maria Aznar and consisting of a board of distinguished statesmen and thought leaders, always had at its core a dual mission: First, we fight to demand a fair debate about Israel. At its simplest our call is not just to recognise that Israel is an essential part of the West, but to caution that if we let it fall in the face of the slanders it faces, our own nations will fare no better. Today, sadly, it is all too discernable that this argument was a prescient one. However, if the first mission is an immediate one – asserting a fair debate – the second important mission FOII fulfills is as a crucial forum for debate on the longer-term outlook – to understand the new realities of a rapidly changing world, and how our Western alliance with Israel fits into this difficult picture.

In this spirit I am pleased to introduce our latest policy paper initiative – the Strategic Outlook Series. This new occasional series is aimed at investigating a set of interrelated challenges: What happened in the Middle East over the last decade, what does it mean for the region, what does it mean for the West, what does it mean for Israel – and above all what are the implications for the interrelationship between all these?

The second in the series is an attempt to understand these new realities through regional eyes: Beginning with a comprehensive view of the situation following the Arab Spring as seen from Israel, and an examination of that country's national security policy making, two further papers explore the state-of-play following the upheavals in the Middle East from American and European eyes, explaining the state each polity finds itself in and the resultant reactions. Throughout these pieces runs the thread of what this means for the essential alliance between the West and Israel.

The paper, much as the Strategic Outlook Series as a whole, seeks to make a comprehensive, expert contribution to the debate in the field, to further discussion and policy solutions, and to discern the best way forward in what will remain a strategic burden shared by Israel and our own nations – to ensure our continued security and prosperity in the face of myriad threats and a rapidly changing international scene.

Rafael Bardaji
Executive Director, Friends of Israel Initiative

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Abrams has written numerous books and articles and is widely cited in the media. He is a former chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and of the board of the National Endowment for Democracy. He currently teaches U.S. foreign policy at Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

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The New Middle East and its Consequences

Essays from an Israeli, American and European Perspective

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Facing a Changed Middle East – Israeli strategic thinking after the Arab Spring

Jonathan Spyer

Introduction: A Transformed Region

The last half decade in the Middle East has been witness to profound instability and rapid change. Regimes of long standing departed the scene in a number of Arab countries – in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya. Once major players on the regional stage have collapsed into fragmentation and internal strife. Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq are beset by multiple civil wars and the effective disappearance of authoritative central government. For a long period, the political order of the Arabic-speaking Middle East was dominated by a combination of economic, social and educational failure and relative political stability. This period has now decisively ended.

Amid the chaos and fragmentation, new powers are rising. The Islamic Republic of Iran, now emerging from the sanctions regime imposed on it because of its nuclear program, is playing a key role on a series of regional fronts. The Iranians lead a coherent and united regional alliance, consisting overwhelmingly of Shia and minority regional forces.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, deeply concerned at the rise and advance of Iran, is seeking to mobilize a counter-alliance of Sunni forces. The Saudi intervention into renewed civil war in Yemen may offer a blueprint for similar action by Sunni powers against Iranian expansion elsewhere.

Turkey, under the leadership of its authoritarian President Recep Tayyep Erdogan, combines increasing internal repression with attempts to wield influence in neighboring Syria and Iraq, even as it faces renewed Kurdish insurgency from within. Egypt, similarly, faces renewed insurgency in northern Sinai, but its alliance with Saudi Arabia constitutes a key regional power axis, and the government of President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi appears stable.

The tone of regional politics is today dominated by political Islam, and to a lesser extent by ethnic and tribal identity.

These developments – the fragmentation and collapse of states, the emergence of would-be successor entities making war among the ruins, the growth of political Islam as a powerful force for mobilization and the attempts by regional actors to gain advantage and undercut rivals in this confused space – together constitute a profoundly transformed region.

The Middle East assembled by the Western powers after the defeat and

collapse of the Ottoman Empire now effectively no longer exists. What will take its place is still in the process of emerging. Some commentators have compared the process now under way with the Thirty Years' War in Europe in the 17th century. Then, too, state borders were challenged, and religious-based ideologies clashed.

Amid this chaos, Israel today is to be numbered among the areas of relative stability and strong governance. An "isolated island" in a "stormy sea" according to a former Israeli national security adviser.[1]

This fact of Israel as an island of relative calm amid roiling instability in itself constitutes a profound change. For a long period, the notion that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians constituted the key causal factor for regional instability was widely accepted in the chancelleries of the West and among scholars. This was a theme enthusiastically pursued also in the public diplomacy of authoritarian Arab states.

Today, such a contention appears absurd. To be sure, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute remains unresolved and appears not close to resolution. Hamas-controlled Gaza remains in a state of ongoing conflict with Israel. The West Bank and Jerusalem have, since October, witnessed a renewed campaign of violence against Israelis. Yet the level of instability and violence in this area is dwarfed in scale by events further afield.

These profound changes in the region raise important questions for Israeli national security policy. How should Israel respond to the changed environment? What are the new challenges? Are there advantages to be gained from the processes under way, as well as concerns?

This paper will seek to look into the areas of most importance to Israel's national security, and ask how these have been affected by the process of regional change, and how Israel is responding to them.

We will look at the nature of the threats represented by the Iran-led regional bloc. A consensus remains among the professional echelon dealing with national security policy in Israel that Iran and its allies constitute the most potent threat facing the country, for reasons which will be examined here. We will focus also on the different but significant challenge represented by the proliferation of Sunni political Islam across the region. Here, we will

1 *Interview with Ya'acov Amidror, former National Security Adviser, Ra'anana, April 2016.*

consider both the threat represented by Salafi jihadi organizations of the IS/ al-Qaeda type, and also the challenge constituted by Muslim Brotherhood type movements and governments.

Finally, we will consider the opportunities, as seen by Israeli national security decision-makers, inherent in the current regional situation. These take the form of possibilities for enhanced cooperation because of the possession of shared enemies.

First, however, it is necessary to focus on the process by which Israeli national security policy is made, and the bodies responsible for it.

The National Security Decision-making Process in Israel

National security policymaking in Israel is characterized by a high degree of informality. It is also notable for its clandestinity. Israeli prime ministers tend to gather around themselves a small number of trusted confidants who form the key policy decision-making body. The "kitchen" of Golda Meir is perhaps the most noted body of this kind, the "septet" of Benjamin Netanyahu in the period prior to the elections of 2013 (Ehud Barak, Avigdor Lieberman, Benny Begin, Moshe Yaalon, Eli Yishai and Dan Meridor) an additional example.

It is similarly noteworthy that on a number of occasions, Israeli leaders have worked through unofficial channels on key matters, ignoring or opposing the advice given to them by the official assessment structures.

Most famously, the peace process with the Palestinians in the 1990s was managed in its initial stages not by civil servants, but by private individuals close to then foreign minister Shimon Peres.[2] An additional example is the contacts maintained by then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with the Syrian regime in the 1998 period, over the issue of a peace process and possible territorial concessions by Israel in return for the termination of conflict between Israel and Syria.

Israeli prime ministers may find that the nature of Israeli coalition governments limit their ability to freely maneuver on national security policy.

In this regard, though, the number of areas in which real controversy is likely is small. In the Palestinian arena, and perhaps to a lesser extent on

2 *Lior Lehrs, "Israel's Undercover Peacemakers," Ynet, May 17, 2014 available at: http://www.ynetnews.com*

the issue of the Golan Heights, large constituencies exist among the public for this or that option. More broadly, however, there is a large degree of public trust in Israel for the security decision-making process and hence little demand for a greater public role in the national security discussion. Israel is and sees itself as a country living in a dangerous neighborhood and therefore subject to a kind of permanent "atmosphere of crisis."

Against this background, the public appears content to leave the discussion largely to the professional echelon. The Israeli public is sensitive to military casualties, however, so national security policy must also be made with this unseen and difficult-to-quantify factor in mind.

In terms of the bodies producing assessments for policymakers in the Israeli system, a comprehensive National Intelligence Estimate is presented to the Cabinet at least once a year. IDF Military Intelligence (MI), the Israel Security Agency (ISA) and the Mossad espionage agency are involved in the preparation of this estimate.

At one time, Military Intelligence enjoyed an undisputed senior status as the "national assessor."[3] This situation has changed, with the growing desire of both the ISA and Mossad to play a greater role in the policymaking process and the provision to policymakers of these organization's own estimates.

The result is a reality whereby there is today no single, united assessment emerging from the professional echelon in Israel to the political echelon. Rather, each agency briefs ministers in its area of expertise.

The National Security Council, founded in 1999, reports directly to the prime minister on questions of national security on an ongoing basis and is headed by the Prime Minister's National Security Adviser. Its role is a consultative one and it is not involved in decision-making. The prime minister is not required by law to accept its recommendations.[4]

So the Israeli decision-making process on matters of national security, as in other areas, is characterized by an absence of firm and obligating structures, a tendency toward improvisation and informal arrangements, and often an important role for non-official structures reporting to the prime minister.

3 *Shmuel Eve and David Siman-Tov, "The National Intelligence Estimate Mechanism in Israel," Strategic Assessment, Vol 18, no. 1., April 2015, available at: http://www.inss.org.il.*

4 *Ibid.*

With regard to the Palestinian issue specifically, it is also influenced by the centrality of this issue in public debate, and by the nature of coalition government in Israel. Coalitions may contain parties with sharply differing views on the Palestinian question, and this is likely to constrain the freedom of maneuver of prime ministers on this specific matter.

The nature of the IDF as a conscript army and the sensitivity of the Israeli public to casualties in the military also play a role in influencing the debate over options on national security policy, though this cannot of course be quantified.

The perspectives outlined in this paper are derived from interviews conducted in Hebrew with former and serving members of Israel's national security staff and with analysts of national security in Israel, and by perusal of the Israeli media and available literature. Some of the individuals contacted preferred not to be named or directly referenced.

On the Palestinian issue, for reasons noted above, there is not a consensus, though there are clearly discernible "schools" of thought. On the other issues discussed herein, what is being presented is the majority or consensus view as understood by this author to pertain among the professional policymaking echelon in Israel.

Conventional Military Threat Replaced by Militias

From the Israeli point of view, the events of the last decade in the Middle East have completed a process which began with the peace treaty in Egypt in 1979. This is the process of the gradual disappearance of the threat to Israel represented by conventional armed forces around its borders.

In the period 1948–73, Israel fought no fewer than four full-scale conventional wars against the armies of the neighboring Arab states. Following the conclusion of peace treaties with Egypt in 1979 and then with Jordan in 1994, the two remaining powerful armies in the hands of neighboring regimes formally committed to Israel's destruction were the armies of Iraq and of Syria.

Neither of these armies today exists. Indeed, the states to which they belonged have themselves undergone a process of fragmentation. In the

Iraqi case, the armed forces of Saddam Hussein were dismantled following the 2003 Western invasion. The current Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are of poor quality, and Iraq in any case is effectively divided into three – Kurdish Regional Government, (Sunni Arab) Islamic State and (Shia Arab majority) Baghdad government, and is the site of multiple internecine conflicts. There is no prospect for the revival of a unified Iraqi state in the foreseeable future.[5]

Syria, similarly (and more significantly from Israel's point of view), has fragmented, though the Ba'athist regime has survived and still rules over one of the remaining enclaves. But the Syrian Arab Army built by the Ba'athist regimes in Syria is today a shadow of its former self.[6] Exhausted and depleted by five years of civil war, riven along sectarian lines, and in any case not even having control of the border area with the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights (except a small section in the north), the army of Bashar Assad will not conceivably be in a position to mount a conventional challenge to the IDF in the period ahead.

This means that the threat to Israel of conventional Arab armies has effectively ceased to exist. This, of course, represents a deeply significant improvement in the threat scenarios facing Israel. As of now, the prospect of Israel's destruction at the hands of hostile conventional armed forces is zero. The prospect even of Israel's engagement in a conventional war with a neighboring army is close to zero.

The disappearance of the conventional threat has not, however, meant the end of all danger. The eclipse of powerful state armies has not been in any way accompanied by a decline in hostility to Israel in the areas concerned.

Rather, as a result of the collapse or weakening of neighboring states, or their takeover by hostile forces, Israel today finds itself facing a series of irregular or semi-regular political-military organizations that have taken root in the relevant areas, and which seek to engage Israel in a long, societal war of attrition.

Of these, the Lebanese Hizballah is exponentially the most powerful. In addition to Hizballah in Lebanon, we should include in this list Hamas in the

5 *See "Fixing the Iraq Mess," New York Times, February 27, 2016 (available at: http://www.nytimes.com) for an interesting debate on this issue.*

6 *"Ex Defense Official Says Syrian Threat to Israel Greatly Reduced," Times of Israel, March 26, 2016. http://www.timesofisrael.com*

Gaza Strip, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and two Salafi organizations affiliated with Islamic Jihad – Wilayat al-Sina in Sinai and Shuhada al-Yarmuk in south west Syria.

Hizballah: a Semi-conventional Force

Hizballah today is a 'semi-conventional' military force, with a firepower capacity overshadowing that of the militaries of many NATO countries. The movement possesses around 150,000 rockets, according to Israeli estimates.

These include the Iranian-made Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 long-range missile systems. The Fajr-5 has a range of 75 km, enabling it to reach the port of Haifa. Hizballah is also thought to possess the Zelzal-1, with an estimated range of 150 km, capable of reaching Tel Aviv. The Fajr-3 has a range of 40 km and a 45-kg (99-lb) warhead.

The movement possesses anti-aircraft missiles, including the ZU-23 artillery and the man-portable, shoulder-fired SA-7 and SA-18 surface-to-air missile (SAM). Also, it has an anti-ship capacity, including the C-701 anti-ship missile.

Hizballah also has assembled a fleet of pilotless drones, for intelligence-gathering purposes and for attacks. The Mirsad 1 and Ababil drones used by Hizballah are supplied by Iran.[7]

The movement's rocket and missile infrastructure has been placed in built-up areas of southern Lebanon, including private homes, according to Israeli and foreign estimates.[8]

Estimates of the movement's precise manpower capabilities vary from a probably excessively low estimate of around 1,000 full-time fighters plus 10,000 reservists to estimates of 20–30,000 at full mobilization.

At the present time, Hizballah is deeply mired in its engagement in the Syrian civil war. Around 6,000 of the movement's fighters are deployed in Syria on any given day.[9] As such, the immediate likelihood of renewed conflict with Israel is considered to be low. However, with the Syrian war potentially moving into a kind of 'frozen conflict' status, this may change. The movement has paid a

7 *Milton Hoenig, "Hezbollah and the Use of Drones as a Weapon of Terrorism," Public Interest Report, Spring 2014, Vol. 67. No. 2., available at: https://fas.org/wp-content*

8 *Yaacov Katz, "Maps Released of Hizballah's Military Sites, Bunkers," Jerusalem Post, March 30, 2011, available at: http://www.jpost.com.*

9 *Dan De Luce, "Syrian War Takes Rising Toll on Hizballah," Foreign Policy, July 9, 2015, available at: http://foreignpolicy.com.*

price during its involvement in Syria. Israeli estimates suggest that up to 1,500 Hizballah fighters have been killed in the Syrian war.[10] But it has also gained valuable battlefield experience – a cause for Israeli concerns. Specifically in the spheres of fighting in built-up areas, and operating in unfamiliar terrain with a long logistical "tail," Hizballah has gained new experience which could be of particular relevance in renewed conflict with Israel.

Israel has been at pains to point out that a future war between Israel and Hizballah would not take the restricted form that characterized the 2006 conflict. Rather, Israel considers that there is no longer any meaningful division between Hizballah and the Lebanese state itself, and would intend to end the war as quickly as possible through the employment of firepower on a broad scale.[11]

While the antimissile systems David's Shield and Iron Dome would certainly play an important role in defending Israeli civilians from Hizballah rocket and missile attacks, Israeli planners are aware that they would not stop everything. Therefore, Israel would seek to end the war in the shortest possible time in order to stop the threat to Israeli population centers.

At the same time, former senior officials interviewed for this paper noted that despite Hizballah's build-up of strength, the border has been exceptionally quiet since the war of 2006. Israel's performance during that war was the subject of both internal and external criticism. Deterrence is difficult to measure. But it appears that a measure of it was attained vis-à-vis Hizballah by Israel as a result of the war.[12]

Hamas

The other Islamist political-military organizations facing Israel are vastly less able than Hizballah. A former Israeli national security adviser described Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group as "90%" weaker than the Lebanese group.[13]

Hamas possesses neither the resources, nor the favorable geographic location, nor the strategic alliances of Hizballah. Nevertheless, the movement is in no danger of losing its de facto hold over the Gaza Strip.

10 *Avi Issacharoff, "A Third of Hezbollah's Fighters Said Killed or Injured in Syria," Times of Israel, December 15, 2015, available at: http://www.timesofisrael.com.*

11 *Ya'acov Katz, "The Dahiyeh Doctrine – Fighting Dirty or a Knockout Punch," Jerusalem Post, January 28, 2010, available at: http://www.jpost.com*

12 *Interview with Dr Eran Lerman, former Deputy National Security Adviser, Jerusalem, April 2016.*

13 *Amidror.*

Since Operation Protective Edge in mid-2014, Hamas too has largely prevented rocket fire from Gaza. At the same time, the movement is engaged in seeking to develop its infrastructure for future conflicts. It is seeking to rebuild its tunnel network. It is also making efforts to rebuild its terror infrastructure in the West Bank, where it hopes to foment renewed insurgency along the lines of the 2000-04 Second Intifada.[14] The bus bombing in Jerusalem on April 18, 2016 was but one of a large number of attacks the movement has tried to carry out. Numerous other attempts have so far been thwarted by the Israeli authorities and by the security forces of the Palestinian Authority.

Unlike Hizballah, which is a Shia organization firmly aligned with Tehran, Hamas has faced a series of strategic dilemmas since the outbreak of regional unrest in 2011. At that time the movement, despite its origins in the Palestinian branch of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, was aligned with the predominantly Shia Iran-led alliance. The ascent to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, strongly supported by Qatar and Turkey, and the outbreak of the largely Sunni Arab Syrian rebellion, placed Hamas before a dilemma. In the course of 2012 the movement quietly dismantled its headquarters in Damascus, relocating to Qatar and to Turkey.

But with the military coup in July 3, 2013 in Egypt, and the stalling of the Syrian rebellion, the prospects for a birth of a new Muslim Brotherhood power bloc in the Middle East receded. Hamas was left beached by this process. No commonly accepted solution to this problem has subsequently emerged in the movement. Rather, clear strains have been apparent. The Ktaeb al-Qassam (Qassam Brigades), the armed wing of Hamas, is reported to favor reviving the Iranian link.[15] Iranian funding has been provided for the rebuilding of the tunnel networks damaged during Operation Protective Edge.

But there is evidence of a split in perspective between the Qassam Brigades, who want Iranian help to recommence the long war against Israel, and the political leadership of the movement, who prefer to develop links with the Sunni Arab states of the Gulf and with Turkey. Movement Secretary-General Khaled Meshaal recently had a planned visit to Tehran cancelled after he

14 *Yasser Okbi, "Hamas Leader Haniyeh Vows 'Jerusalem Intifada' Will Continue," Jerusalem Post, April 15, 2016, available at: http://www.jpost.com.*

15 *Shlomi Eldar, "Why Gaza's Militant Groups Are Cozying up to One Another," Al-Monitor, May 10, 2016, available at: http://www.al-monitor.com.*

visited Saudi Arabia.[16] The Iranian authorities, who are engaged in a regional contest with the Saudis, evidently considered that Hamas must make a choice between itself and its regional rivals. The movement has not made this choice but rather is split between elements favoring different options in this regard.

Salafi Jihadi Groups on Israel's Borders

The Salafi jihadi organizations on Israel's borders have not yet made major attempts at striking Israel. Wilayat al-Sina, formerly Ansar Beit al-Makdis, has carried out attacks against Israel in the past. But this movement is currently engaged in an all-out struggle against the security forces of Egyptian President Abd al Fattah al-Sisi in northern Sinai and is thus not in a position to launch a campaign against Israel at the present time.

In the north, the Shuhada al-Yarmouk organization is similarly locked in a battle against other rebel groups led by Jabhat al-Nusra, and thus also cannot currently divert its attention toward Israel. Both these organizations are relatively small (fewer than 1,000 fighters) and with inferior capabilities to Hamas, and of course Hizballah.[17]

In addition to these, we should mention Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the list of political-military organizations. This small Palestinian Islamist group is financed and controlled by Iran.

The "Muqawama" (resistance) Doctrine[18]

So the stable states and conventional armies that once surrounded Israel have been replaced by fragmented or fractious states, from which political-military organizations seek to make war against the Jewish state. The power differential is very significant. These groups cannot hope to defeat the defense structures of Israel. What, then, is the strategic doctrine behind their war?

It is important to understand this doctrine, because it is a factor that links these organizations to other elements of the threat facing Israel. As formulated in the founding documents of Hizballah and Hamas, these organizations regard themselves as in a process of long war against the Jewish state, which

16 *"Report: Iran Furious at Hamas' Warming Ties with Saudis, Cancels Delegation's Visit to Tehran," Jerusalem Post, August 9, 2015, available at: http://www.jpost.com.*

17 *"Wilayat Sinai," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, available at: http://timep.org.*

18 *Ehud Ya'ari, "The Muqawama Doctrine," Jerusalem Report, November 13, 2006, available at: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org.*

is intended to end in the destruction of the country and its replacement by an Islamic and Arab authority.

Such an objective is considered feasible, despite the obvious discrepancies in power between the sides, because it is an article of faith for these organizations that Israel's apparent strength conceals a hidden weakness.

This view of Israel as an unnatural, anomalous entity rather than a legitimate state among others has informed Arab opposition throughout the conflict. It underlies the BDS campaign and to a considerable degree at a deep level also informs non-Islamist Palestinian politics. It is of long standing, and appears to be impervious to influence or evidence to the contrary.

This does not mean that such groups do in fact pose a threat to Israel's existence. By any objective measure, they do not. But it also means that they are unlikely to decline and disappear as a result of an early failure to achieve progress toward their objective.

The Game of Camps

Looking out at the Middle East landscape today, beyond the limited but real threat represented by the militias along the borders, Israeli policymakers see a chaotic region in which a number of intact regional states are seeking to gain advantage and turn back their rivals. A series of rival alliances may be discerned. One former deputy national security adviser refers to this reality as a "game of camps."

The camps are:

1. The alliance led by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and including the Assad regime in Syria, the Shia militia organizations of Iraq, Hizballah in Lebanon, the Ansar Allah ("Houthis") in Yemen, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
2. The stability bloc, consisting of Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq and a number of smaller players, importantly including the Ramallah Palestinian Authority. Israel sees this bloc as its "natural home."
3. Muslim Brotherhood-associated and supporting governments and movements: Turkey, the Emirate of Qatar, the Hamas authority in Gaza. The Muslim Brotherhood is a much weakened trend currently in the region. In

2012, after electoral victories in Egypt and Tunisia and strong representation among the Syrian rebels, with backing from Qatar, it appeared to be set to emerge as among the most powerful regional blocs. Now, out of government in Egypt and Tunisia and marginalized even in the retreating Syrian rebellion, it is much weakened but still existing. The recent signing of a security cooperation agreement between Qatar and Turkey and a meeting in December 2015 between Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal and Turkish President Recep Tayepp Erdogan offer tangible evidence of these close links.

4. Salafi Jihadi groups: Most important among these are the networks of the Islamic State, and of al-Qaeda. Islamic State, of course, possesses a territorial holding in Iraq and Syria, but also maintains franchises elsewhere, as does the rival Salafi Jihadi network of al-Qaeda. Significant Salafi forces not aligned with either of these networks, such as the Ahrar al Sham organization in Syria, should also be noted.

In regard to the interactions and rivalries among these camps, it must be understood that they are not formal alliances, and at times the dividing lines between them may be blurred.

For example, Saudi Arabia cooperates with Turkey and Qatar on the issue of support for rebel militias in northern Syria. Qatar, similarly, maintains contact in Syria to al-Qaeda associated forces. And evidence has emerged that the Hamas authority in Gaza has cooperated with Salafi elements in northern Sinai. Iran, meanwhile, as noted above, maintains relations with Hamas, in particular its military wing.

So there are no cast iron borders between these blocs. Nevertheless, they do operate as broadly identifiable alliances, united by shared interests and to a greater or lesser extent a shared outlook.

How does Israel view these blocs, and the relative threat or opportunity represented by them?

There is a consensus in the Israeli policymaking echelon that the most dangerous element for Israel remains the alliance led by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This is related not to the level of ideological hostility to Israel felt by Iran in comparison with other regional states or movements. Rather, Israeli officials note the unique combination in Iran's case of openly stated politicidal

intentions toward Israel, combined with an active attempt to acquire nuclear weapons (which Israel sees as postponed, but almost certainly not nullified by the JCPOA agreement), a ballistic missile program openly intended to put Israel within range, and a peerless capacity for the creation and/or support and sponsoring of irregular military forces fighting Israel.

That is, if the main immediate physical threat to Israel today is the presence of irregular units in the poorly governed spaces close to its borders, this threat reaches its most acute form because of Iranian state sponsorship and support to these organizations – most importantly Hizballah and to a much lesser extent Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Iran, as demonstrated in the war in Syria and in Iraq, has an ability to effectively mobilize its proxies in a way possessed by no other regional actor. In the Revolutionary Guards Corps and its expeditionary Qods Force, Tehran possesses agencies specifically geared towards the establishment and support of political-military proxies. Lebanese Hizballah is the prototype product of this, but there are many other examples.

It may well be that Tehran's goal of emerging as a regional leader or hegemon is beyond its reach. Observation of Iran's regional allies and proxies indicates that Tehran, despite its self-image as a pan-Islamic force, has great difficulty in building deep alliances outside of Shia Arab populations and other minorities. The only clear exception to this as of now is the case of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. But this movement is less an independent actor than a kind of employee of the Iranian state interest. With Hamas, an authentic, Muslim Brotherhood inspired Islamist movement, relations have become strained as a result of the emergent dynamic of regional conflict along sectarian lines.

But while Iranian hopes for regional hegemony may well be inherently flawed, this country and its clients nevertheless possess a capacity to do harm not possessed by other of Israel's regional antagonists.

Sunni Islamist groups

This does not mean that Israel is indifferent to the threats represented by non-Iran aligned elements, emerging from both the Salafi Jihadi and Muslim Brotherhood blocs. Hamas is a Brotherhood oriented force, which sought in the 2011–12 period to go over from the Iranian alliance to the emergent

bloc of then MB-dominated Egypt and of MB-supporting Qatar. Hamas's political leadership remains resident in Doha today. Hamas continues also to maintain an office in Ankara.

Similarly, with regard to Salafi elements, Israel is watching both the southern and northern borders carefully. There have also been a number of manifestations of activity by individuals supportive of the Islamic State within Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In December, it was revealed that the Israeli authorities had arrested five Arab citizens of Israel from the town of Nazareth for forming a cell and swearing allegiance to the Islamic State. The group had, according to reports, already begun training with firearms.

The revelation of the Nazareth group was only the latest in a series of indications of active support for IS on the fringes of Israeli Arab communities. In October, an Arab citizen of Israel paraglided over the Golan Heights to join the Shuhada al-Yarmouk organization aligned with IS. In July 2015, Israeli authorities arrested six Israeli Arabs for organizing in support of IS. There are around 40 Israeli Arabs currently fighting with IS, according to Israeli estimates (along with unknown numbers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.)[19]

As such, there is concern in Israel at the possibility of fighters returning from the battlefields of Syria and Iraq and participating in terror attacks within Israel (in addition to the concerns regarding the two franchises of IS in Sinai and south west Syria).

The "game of camps," however, if effectively played, in the view of the Israeli policymaking echelon, can deliver benefits for Israel, as well as containing threats.

Israel sees itself as a natural member of the stability bloc, led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This alliance consists of states traditionally allied with the US and the West. For the most part, the countries in question are critical of elements of recent US Mid-East policy, and consider that practical bilateral cooperation between countries faced by shared threats is necessary. The states in this bloc are opposed to the regional ambitions of Iran, to the advance of the Muslim Brotherhood and, of course, also to the regional networks of Salafi Jihadi Islamism.

19 *Dan Williams, "Israel Says Arab Citizen used Paraglider to join Syria War," Reuters, October 25, 2015, available at: http://www.reuters.com*

Israel has the same enemies. On this basis, practical cooperation becomes possible. Again, this alliance is not a simple one. Nor do all the countries within it share identical priorities. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel are primarily concerned with the advance of Iran; Egypt's and Jordan's central concern is the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis, and so on. Nevertheless, the network of shared enemies makes possible levels of hitherto unseen bilateral cooperation.

Israel and Egypt

Israeli security officials note, for example, that the level of cooperation between Israel and Egypt is today higher than at any time since the concluding of the peace agreement between the two countries in 1979. This is because of shared concerns regarding the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi Jihadis. Egypt is facing an insurgency in northern Sinai, by a franchise of the Salafi Islamic State group. Israel is concerned about this, but is primarily focused on the Hamas-controlled enclave in Gaza. Hamas is a franchise of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood is, of course, the main domestic foe of the al-Sisi government in Egypt.

Evidence has emerged to suggest that a level of cooperation exists between the Hamas authority in Gaza and the Wilayat al-Sina movement in Sinai. According to both Israeli and Egyptian intelligence, the Sinai IS franchise uses the tunnel network from Sinai to Gaza to smuggle advanced weapons into Sinai. Wilayat al-Sina leader Shadi al-Mani'I visited the Strip as the guest of Hamas officials in mid-2015 to discuss cooperation between the movements.[20]

This fact underlies the close cooperation between Jerusalem and Cairo on this file.

Israel has permitted Egypt to stray from adherence to the limitation of forces permitted in Sinai as laid down in the 1979 Camp David Accords. Cooperation in intelligence is taking place. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in an interview with *The Washington Post* in March 2015, said that he speaks to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu frequently, sometimes

20 *David Daoud, "Hamas Hosts ISIS Commander in Gaza to Expand Terror Cooperation," Algemeiner, December 4, 2015, available at: https://www.algemeiner.com.*

several times a month.[21] According to an Israeli official quoted recently in al-Monitor: "As far as the Egyptians are concerned … the Muslim Brotherhood is comparable to the Nazis. Hamas is perceived as an arm of the Muslim Brotherhood; thus, they are viewed as an enemy that must be destroyed. The Islamic State has joined this equation recently, and they share the exact same rubric."[22]

Cooperation has taken concrete and beneficial form in the Egyptian flooding and destruction of tunnels maintained by Hamas for bringing materials into Gaza from Sinai. Hamas-IS cooperation was the concrete motivation for the government of Egypt to undertake this task – which was quite unprecedented in terms of the actions of previous Egyptian governments.

The return by Egypt of the Sanafir and Tiran islands to Saudi Arabia, with Israeli approval, is a further indication of how much things have changed.

Cairo is less concerned by the Iranian threat, since tangible Egyptian interests are not presently threatened by the Iranians. For the Gulf monarchies, however, the Iranian threat is paramount, and this underlies their changing attitude toward Israel.

Israel and the GCC countries

Of course, there are no formal diplomatic links between Israel and any of the GCC countries. This situation will almost certainly not change for as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved. As a result, the precise nature and extent of contacts between Israel and GCC countries is difficult to gauge.

But there are ample indications of contacts. Joint public appearances and conversations between former senior officials have become commonplace. Former Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Turki al-Faisal published an article in a major Israeli newspaper calling for peace between the two countries (on the basis of the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute).[23]

21 *"Egypt's President says he talks to Netanyahu 'a lot,' says his country is in danger of collapse," The Washington Post, March 2015, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/egypts-president-says-he-talks-to-netanyahu-a-lot/2015/03/12/770ef928-c827-11e4-aa1a-86135599fb0f_story.html.*

22 *Ben Caspit, "The Israeli-Egyptian Love Affair," Al-Monitor, February 29, 2016, available at: http://www.al-monitor.com*

23 *Turki al-Faisal, "Peace Would be Possible with the Arab Peace Initiative at Its Core," Haaretz, July 7, 2014, available at: http://www.haaretz.com.*

The joint concerns regarding Iran, and the joint sense that the United States no longer entirely shares these concerns, is the basis for the sense of commonality perceived by Israel and in particular Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The decisions by the Saudi Arabsat broadcast network to ban the Hizballah-associated news channels al-Manar and al-Mayadeeen, and then by the GCC on March 2, 2016 to declare Hizballah as a terrorist organization offer concrete examples of the way in which the Gulf countries are acting on concerns shared with Israel.

A further indication of the tacit cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia became apparent when the continuation of Israeli free passage through the Straits of Tiran was guaranteed by the Saudis after they had received the Sanafir and Tiran islands from Egypt. Free passage was guaranteed according to the terms of Israel's 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, but Riyadh is, of course, not a party to this agreement.

This tacit arrangement reflected the two salient aspects of relations between Israel and the Gulf countries (or more broadly, the countries of the "stability" camp): namely, concrete shared interests because of shared concerns and shared enemies, and at the same time an unwillingness on the part of regional players to translate these commonalities into formal and overt diplomatic ties.

In regard to countries with which Israel has formal relations, such as Egypt and Jordan, the same logic nevertheless applies. Cooperation is deep and extensive on the basis of shared interests. But again, the civil societies of these countries remain mainly hostile. The cooperation is at an elite level, and rarely spoken about. This logic also applies to the extensive but discreet relations between Israel and the Kurdish Regional Government of President Massoud Barzani in Iraqi Kurdistan – from which Israel currently purchases about 75% of its oil.[24] (However, in the Kurdish case, the discrepancy between elite and public opinion appears largely absent. The discretion is for practical reasons.)

Relations with the Palestinian Authority

According to one Israeli former deputy national security adviser, this logic also applies in part to Israel's relations with the Ramallah Palestinian Authority

24 *David Sheppard, John Reed and Anjli Raval, "Israel Turns to Kurds for Three Quarters of its Oil," Financial Times, August 23, 2015, available at: https://next.ft.com*

of President Mahmoud Abbas.[25] The Palestinian Authority is also a member of the "stability" bloc, closely aligned with Jordan, and with al-Sisi in Egypt. This is reflected in the high levels of cooperation between the Israeli security authorities and the security forces of the PA. This cooperation is one of the reasons why the wave of stabbings of Israeli citizens by Palestinians after October 2015 did not ignite a full-blown uprising. PA security forces have been responsible for 40% of arrests in the West Bank related to the round of violence that began in October 2015.

At the same time, the PA's links to regional forces with which Israel is also linked does not portend an imminent resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is because on core issues such as the future of Jerusalem, the borders of a future Palestinian state and the question of refugees, the sides have irreconcilable positions. Many in Israel's professional policymaking echelon consider that the core ethos of Palestinian nationalism also prevents the possibility of a final settlement of the conflict, since this would imply an acceptance of the permanence of Israel.

Rather, the Palestinian Authority is currently engaged on a strategy of seeking to increase pressure on Israel through international forums, while at the same time maintaining cooperation on security. This is related to Abbas's own internal weakness, and perhaps also to an inability to finally sign off on the conclusion of the conflict.

It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that there are clear differences in the perception of many in Israel's security establishment regarding the Palestinian Authority when compared with the prevalent conception among some members of the right wing of the ruling Likud party and the Jewish Home religious nationalist party, which is a member of the ruling coalition.

In those circles, the relationship of Israel and the PA is perceived as a zero-sum game, in which the latter is a foe engaged in a long war against Israel, and must be defeated. These circles, of course, are also committed to the eventual extension of Israeli sovereignty over the entirety of the West Bank.

The prevalent perspective in Israel's security establishment is different. The PA, or at least its "deep state" structures, are seen as partners in certain areas, while the more political parts of the PA are seen as adversaries in others.

25 Lerman.

Some in the professional echelon are also of the view that political/coalition considerations prevent the adoption by the government of Israel of a more flexible and proactive policy with regard to the PA, the absence of which may in the end damage the current relationship of cooperation.

But throughout, there is little optimism regarding the chances of a diplomatic breakthrough leading to a final status accord with the Palestinians and a two-state solution at any time in the immediate future.

Relations with the US

It is universally acknowledged in Israeli policymaking circles that the strategic relationship with the United States is the linchpin of Israeli strategy. The relationship at present is solid in terms of cooperation in the key defense and intelligence fields. The Obama Administration has remained committed to maintaining Israel's "Qualitative Military Edge" over other regional states. Strategic political, military and intelligence cooperation is extensive.

Of particular note is Israeli-US cooperation in the three complementary systems designed to protect Israeli population centers from rocket and missile attack – namely the Iron Dome short-range rocket interceptor; the David's Sling system designed to intercept tactical ballistic missiles, medium- to long-range rockets and cruise missiles; and the Arrow ballistic missile interceptor. In the development of all three of these systems (of which two are now operational), the American financial contribution has been crucial.

But despite the maintenance of cooperation in core areas, there have been deep disagreements between the Netanyahu government in Israel and the Obama Administration on regional policy. In the key areas of policy toward the Iranian nuclear program and Iranian regional ambitions, the Palestinian question and the role of Sunni political Islam, the two have parted ways. For the Obama Administration, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement on the Iranian nuclear program represents a major foreign policy achievement. The government of Israel regards it as, in the words of Prime Minister Netanyahu, a "stunning historic mistake."

US backing for the elected Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt in the 2012–13 period, and dismay at the military coup of July 3, 2013, contrasted directly with Israeli relief and support for al-Sisi.

US-stated concerns over Israeli settlements in the West Bank and construction in Jerusalem were a further source of friction. And the government of Israel were skeptical from the start regarding Secretary of State John Kerry's efforts to revive the Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process.

None of the differences in these areas has been resolved. They relate to deep and fundamentally different conceptions of regional dynamics between the present US Administration and the government of Israel. However, as noted by Ya'acov Amidror, former national security adviser, Israel's relations with the US are based on three levels – the popular level, the level of elected officials, and the level of the White House.

On the first two levels at least, the relationship remains warm and deeply rooted and support for Israel solid. With the current White House there have been real differences, but even here these are combined with a base level of support which has not been eroded. As such, Israeli policymakers remain optimistic regarding the core situation and the trend lines for the US-Israeli alliance.

BDS and Delegitimization

In addition to questions of physical and hard strategic threats, the issue of the Delegitimization Campaign against Israel and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign (BDS) form part of the agenda when considering the list of threats to the country. The Delegitimization Campaign, at its strongest in a number of western European countries, seeks to build a perception of Israel in Western public opinion that Israel is an illegitimate state, in the belief that this will eventually lead to a knock-on effect on policy toward Israel.

The threat is taken seriously in Israel, but is not regarded as constituting anything close to an existential challenge in its current dimensions. The goal, according to Eran Lerman, former deputy national security advisor, is not to completely eliminate this activity, which is probably impossible, but rather to ensure that it is kept at a sufficiently low level that it remains without influence on decision-making. As of now, this is the case, but the task is ensuring that it remains so.[26]

As to how Israel intends to achieve this goal, a number of interviewees for this paper stressed the issue of what they regarded as the disingenuous

26 Lerman.

nature of the BDS and Delegitimization Campaign – both in terms of its goals (the dismantling of Israel as a Jewish state, "disguised" as a campaign concerned with civil and human rights), and in terms of its structures and funding.[27] Exposure of these elements is seen as a central part of the battle against the Delegitimization Campaign, a battle to be taken up by NGOs as well as official Israeli bodies.

Conclusion

As Israel enters its 68th year, the prospects for the Jewish state are generally good, in the eyes of those tasked with its defense. The most potent conventional enemies have disappeared. The economy is stable, civil society flourishing, the political system stable. There are storm clouds discernible, of course. The JCPOA has not, in Israeli eyes, permanently solved the problem of Iranian regional ambitions and nuclear plans. Tehran remains the most powerful antagonist facing Israel, its Hizballah proxy the most formidable local military actor.

The Palestinian issue remains unresolved and apparently not close to resolution. Since October 2015, a relatively low-scale campaign of violence against Israeli civilians has been under way.

The fundamental rejection of Israel's legitimacy remains a given among the great masses of the population of the Arabic-speaking world, with hostility to Jews a norm, according to all available evidence.

Yet none of these elements at the present time constitutes an existential threat to Israel, because of the Jewish state's own strength, and because of the firmness of its alliances. Thus, as of now, the elements discussed above constitute serious threats, but not ones likely in the period ahead to constitute potential hazards to the continued maintenance, existence and flourishing of Israel.

27 *See Dan Diker, "Unmasking BDS: Radical Roots, Extremist Ends," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, available at: http://jcpa.org/unmasking-bds/.*

Is There an American Foreign Policy Strategy?

Elliott Abrams

In April a "new Middle East" began to appear before our eyes, and keen observers in Washington – outside the government – noticed. It was not the "new Middle East" Shimon Peres had predicted in the 1990s, with all the lions lying down with lambs,[1] but it was nevertheless real change.

First came the Egyptian-Saudi agreement under which two islands in the Strait of Tiran, Tiran and Sanafi, were returned to Saudi control during a visit to Cairo by King Salman. That decision by President al-Sisi led to protests in Egypt, but there was another aspect that caught the eye. When in 1979 the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty was signed, the Saudis denounced it and broke relations with Egypt. Now, however, the kingdom has apparently agreed in writing to respect the terms of that treaty, including this clause: "The Parties consider the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba to be international waterways open to all nations for unimpeded and non-suspendable freedom of navigation and overflight. The parties will respect each other's right to navigation and overflight for access to either country through the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba."[2]

In other words, the Saudis are buying into that peace treaty with Israel. They, Egypt, and Israel are acting – dare one say it – like good neighbors rather than enemies. There are many rumors about secret Saudi-Israeli talks, and on May 5 a Washington think tank hosted a public dialogue between former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Washington Prince Turki al-Faisal and the former Israeli National Security Advisor Gen. Ya'acov Amidror.[3] Neither is in office today, but these are men of influence, and neither would participate if his government were to raise a red flag. How does one explain this still mostly invisible rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia? Similarly, how does one explain the Emirati decision to allow Israel to open a diplomatic office in Abu Dhabi,[4] accredited to be sure to the UN International Renewable Energy Agency but nevertheless a diplomatic presence in the Gulf for the Jewish State?

The beginning of the Obama visit to Riyadh on April 21 gave the answer. King Salman had that day been to the airport to greet arriving GCC heads of state on the tarmac. I had been through such greetings when arriving as

1 *Shimon Perex with Arye Naor, The New Middle East (Henry Holt & Co, 1993).*

2 *"Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty," March 26, 1979, available at:* http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-egypt%20peace%20treaty.aspx, *last visited: July 19, 2016.*

3 *"A Conversation on Security and Peace in the Middle East," May 5, 2016, available at:* http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-conversation-on-security-and-peace-in-the-middle-east.

4 *"Israel to open office for renewable energy in Abu Dhabi," November 27, 2015, available at:* http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/israel-open-office-renewable-energy-abu-dhabi-151127184424647.html.

part of George W. Bush's visit in 2008, and the entire royal family appeared at the airport for the receiving line. But Obama was snubbed: he was greeted neither by the King nor by either of the crown princes.[5] The governor of Riyadh greeted him, and the arrival ceremony was not given the customary airing on Saudi television.

In fact, the new relations between Arabs and Israel are the achievement of Barack Obama, and stem from the feeling in the region that he has abandoned the hitherto reliable American leadership role. Obama's Iran policy, his Syria policy, and his deliberate distancing from allies in the Gulf and the Levant have destroyed his credibility among those who depend on American security guarantees.

For Obama this was not an unwelcome by-product of unavoidable policy decisions, but a policy goal. He had signaled since coming to office that he wanted to reduce American alliances and commitments in the Middle East, especially military commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq. He had moved quickly to distance the United States from the Israeli government,[6] backed away from Hosni Mubarak, and left Gulf Arabs wondering when their turn would come. He had remained quiet when the Green Revolution arose in Iran in June 2009,[7] choosing to work closely with the Islamic Republic's rulers rather than embrace the revolt of the Iranian people. His goal was a nuclear agreement, and it was reached finally in 2015 on terms that many in the region viewed as catastrophic: Iran could continue work on centrifuge modernization, continue its ballistic missile program, receive a huge cash windfall and full liberation from nuclear-related sanctions, and emerge in a little more than a decade to pursue nuclear weapons without hindrance.

In Israel and the Arab states, the real question – and it is posed to visiting Americans repeatedly – is whether the Obama approach represents the new American strategy for the Middle East, or is an aberration that will disappear on January 20 of next year when Obama goes off to build his presidential library. Will the United States turn to a new isolationism? Are Gulf allies

5 *"Obama meets with King Salman after being snubbed at the airport in Riyadh amid mounting pressure to declassify papers that 'show Saudi Arabian connection to 9/11'," April 20, 2016, available at:* http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3549480/Obama-lands-Saudi-Arabia-talks-Gulf-allies.html.

6 *"More 'daylight' between Netanyahu's Israel and the U.S. – is that what Obama wants?" March 19, 2015, available at:* http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0320-boot-israel-election-20150320-story.html.

7 *"Denying the Green Revolution," October 23, 2009, available at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704224004574489772874564430.*

dispensable now that North American energy independence is but years away? Is there a new policy toward Iran that evaluates the Shia Persians as more useful partners than the Sunni Arabs and the Jews? Are the alliance relationships built since the Second World War now to go the way of the empires that preceded them?

These are fair questions, and distinguishing the idiosyncratic Obama approach from policies that a new president is likely to adopt is not easy. The region has changed in the Obama years in ways that any new president must understand and that American policy must reflect.

But we should begin by putting Middle East policy in its proper context. Obama Middle East policy has reflected his overall assessment of the American strategic position in the world, which was that the United States was over-extended, relying too much on military power and creating enormous problems for Americans and the rest of the world. His task, then, was to restrain American power and in fact reduce it – not only by withdrawing from current conflicts but also by reducing military budgets. The temptation to use American power would be blunted by reducing the amount of that power. When action was unavoidable, pinpricks were to be preferred – drone strikes preferred over troops on the ground or significant air strikes – and nothing would be done at all when he could escape action, even when he had to break a commitment to achieve this. The most famous case of this unwillingness to act came in Syria, when Obama declared and then abandoned the "red line" against the use of chemical weapons.[8]

Similarly, while the search for a diplomatic agreement to end the Iranian nuclear program was very widely supported, the particular Iran deal Obama negotiated had only partisan support and the rapprochement with Iran was never broadly backed.

Does a good majority of Americans agree that restraining American power is today a morally and strategically proper goal? In 2014 Stephen Sestanovich of Columbia University and the Council on Foreign Relations published *Maximalist*, his history of American foreign policy since Truman.[9] The book is the story of policy discontinuity, as presidents alternated between

8 *"'The President Blinked': Why Obama Changed Course on the 'Red Line' in Syria," May 25, 2015, available at: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-president-blinked-why-obama-changed-course-on-the-red-line-in-syria/.*

9 *Stephen Sestanovich, Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama (Vintage, 2014).*

"maximalism" and retrenchment: Truman then Eisenhower, Carter but then Reagan, and so on. This cyclical or pendular theory may not work in every case, but it does when it comes to Bush and then Obama, and it suggests that the retrenchment under Obama will end when his second term does. But the next president will need to do more than turn away from an ideologically based desire to limit American power: he or she will need to reflect on the Arab Spring and its failure, the rise of Iran and of ISIS, changes in Saudi Arabia, and the developments in energy markets, and the weakness of American alliances in the region, and devise a new strategy for the Middle East.

What are US interests?

What are American interests in the Middle East? There is broad agreement in Washington on fighting terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, securing oil and gas supplies for the world market, and defending close partners such as Jordan and Israel. Beyond that there is discord: how important is it really to blunt the new Russian role? Do we really care if Iran becomes a major regional power with whom (to quote Obama in a recent interview) our Sunni allies must learn to "share" the region? Are our alliances with the Gulf nations, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and our NATO ally Turkey really worth preserving?

Begin with fighting terrorism. From the American perspective, the goal of a "pivot to Asia" is devoutly to be wished – for all the obvious economic and financial reasons, and to put more resources into the rivalry with China – but unlikely to be consummated. Americans were reminded of this in the fall of 2014, when ISIS beheaded three Americans. Whatever the temptations of isolationism, whatever the fatigue with the Middle East's seemingly intractable violence, those murders were a turning point. They killed Rand Paul's isolationist campaign for president,[10] though it took another fifteen months for him to admit it and leave the 2016 race. After the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels there is little doubt in the United States that ISIS will come for us next, and my own private conversations with Obama administration officials suggest that they think an attempt inevitable. If it is "successful" in the sense that the Paris and Brussels attacks were, American involvement in the war against ISIS will grow far faster than President Obama may truly like. He will have no choice, especially if he is trying to help Hillary Clinton get elected.

10 *"ISIS Killed Paul Rand's White House Hopes," January 15, 2016, available at: http://www.nationalreview.com/article/429811/rand-paul-candidacy-isis-victim.*

The problem with Obama's ISIS policy has been his Syria policy, or the lack of one. Determined to avoid involvement in Syria, he rejected the advice in 2012 from then-Secretary of State Clinton, Secretary of Defense Panetta, and his CIA Director Gen. David Petraeus, to help build a non-jihadi Sunni rebel force.[11] Instead he stood back, even when Assad used chemical weapons, and the vacuum was filled by a different Sunni force: ISIS. Even now, when the Saudis and other Arabs continue to demand the ouster of Assad as part of any Syria deal, Obama hangs back – or more specifically, does too little too late. In late April he announced the dispatch of 250 more "trainers" to Syria, and the administration carefully describes them as such so that they cannot be called combat troops. But that is his personal allergy to such a commitment, not that of public opinion:[12] if he said "we need to send a few thousand troops to Syria to destroy ISIS," he would have bipartisan political and broad public support. There are actually now about 5,000 American soldiers in Iraq as well, having been sent in dribs and drabs by an administration determined to maintain its "we're getting out of Iraq" narrative. There is no public protest, nor would there be if that number were to be doubled or tripled.

Seen from Washington, ISIS is a spreading cancer that must be eliminated. To achieve this, however, two things are needed: American leadership, and an end to the mass killing of Sunnis in Syria. The Saudis, French, and others have made it clear that they would join such an anti-ISIS effort if the United States were to lead it and commit military force to it. Obama would likely do this after a serious terrorist attack in the United States, but not before. His successor, taking a fresh look, is far more likely to say, "Let's get this done," especially when advisers say this can be a great first-term victory – and warn that an ISIS attack in the United States could cripple the new administration just as it is getting under way.

The problem of ISIS is not an inevitable product of life in the Arab Middle East today, but rather of the specific problem of state collapse in Iraq and Syria and of the sentiment among Sunnis that they are under attack in both countries. Americans have been slow to recognize this. I recall very well a conversation with a Gulf Arab, a Sunni, shortly after American air strikes had saved thousands of Yezidis in northern Iraq. It seemed to me that Obama had finally done the right thing. Yes, the Arab diplomat said, "You think so; you've saved all those

11 *"Senate Hearing Draws Out a Rift in U.S. Policy on Syria," February 7, 2013, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/us/politics/panetta-speaks-to-senate-panel-on-benghazi-attack.html?_r=1.*

12 *"Poll: Most Americans say send ground troops to fight ISIS," December 7, 2015, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/06/politics/isis-obama-poll/.*

Yezidis, you are all so proud. But I'll bet there weren't 100 people in the whole United States who even knew what a Yezidi was. Meanwhile Assad has killed 250,000 Sunnis and you Americans don't give a damn."

One can only hope that a new president sees the point before there is an attack in the United States. What is needed is a policy of destroying ISIS and working to build a military coalition that will achieve that – and speedily. An American-led effort, backed by French, British, and Gulf military forces, could make short shrift of ISIS – but could not solve the problems underlying its expansion, the Iraqi and Syrian state collapse.

If the fighting can be brought to an end in Syria, and ISIS can be defeated, the immense Syrian refugee flows can be halted. Those flows have not only placed huge burdens on Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, but have also become a threat to the European Union. It was ironic in April to see Obama traveling to Britain to plead with British citizens not to vote for Brexit because the EU and Britain's role in it were so important.[13] But where was that concern when it came to stopping the mass killing in Syria that was producing the refugees whose arrival, month after month, was shredding European unity?

A new American policy toward Syria, designed to defeat ISIS and seize the territory it now holds, necessarily involves building up non-jihadi Syrian rebel forces significantly. In turn that means a decision about confronting Iran and Russia and their support for Assad, for the Assad killing machine is the best recruiter ISIS has. This will be a major strategic question for the next president, and involves the broader question of Iran's role in the region. Simply put, the issue is whether the United States not only abandons the Obama rapprochement with Iran, but also decides to resist Iranian expansionism and Russia's role in it.

In Syria, what would resistance look like? Repeatedly, former officials of the Obama administration have urged action against Assad's continuing use of chemical weapons and of barrel bombs targeting civilians. Hillary Clinton and many others have advocated a no-fly zone or safe zone where Syrian displaced persons could find refuge.[14] All this requires the use of military power: a no-fly

13 *"Obama's 'Brexit' Plea," April 22, 2016, available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/obamas-brexit-plea/479469/.*

14 *"Despite Pentagon concerns, Clinton doubles down on Syria no-fly zone,", December 20, 2015, available at: http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Despite-Pentagon-concerns-Clinton-doubles-down-on-Syria-no-fly-zone-437873.*

zone would have to be enforced, and stopping Assad's use of helicopter-borne barrel bombs might require shooting down those aircraft in the air or at their bases. If a safe zone is declared, it must be defended from Assad's forces. The defense of inaction has been that these steps are too dangerous: they might bring us into confrontation with Iran, Hizballah, or the Russians.

That the United States, seeking to prevent mass murder, should be deterred by fear of Putin is a remarkable assessment of the power balance. In the theater, the United States and its allies have escalation dominance in the air and a vast advantage in the number of combat aircraft. Putin, who has been careful in his selection of places to use his military, would have to seek a confrontation with allied aircraft – American, European, and Gulf – who are performing a humanitarian mission. Would he not be the one deterred?

This is precisely the kind of question the next president will face, and in this sense we see again that decisions made about Syria and the rest of the region will continue to have a major impact in Europe. Who deters whom? What would an America unwilling to stop mass murder in Syria out of fear of confrontation with Russia do when it came to a Russian move in Moldova? In Estonia? The larger issue is not what happens next in Syria, but whether the United States is willing to reassert its leadership of an alliance system, and protect the interests of its allies.

Iran's surge

The expansion of Iranian influence in the "Shiite crescent" has more than fulfilled King Abdullah of Jordan's warning about it in 2004.[15] Iran is the major outside influence now in Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut, and its own forces and proxies are on the ground in Iraq and Syria. Its role in Yemen and in Bahrain has also been disruptive and violent.

This vast expansion of Iran's role began with the assertion of control of the streets of Beirut by Hizballah and by the American removal of Iran's rival, Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, both of which occurred during the George W. Bush years. But that expansion has gained speed under Obama. His withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, against the advice of the US military, and his failure to act as Iran took over Assad's struggle for power in Syria, allowed Iran to expand its reach in both countries. To this was added the nuclear agreement

15 *"Jordan Fears Growing Shiite Influence," November 17, 2006, available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/17/AR2006111701024.html.*

and the resources (cash and foreign investment) that it brings for Iran. What has troubled American allies in the region is not that Iran managed to gain despite American resistance, but that Iran's gains appear to be blessed and even facilitated by the Obama government. To take but one example, the decision that the United States would buy heavy water from Iran,[16] for cash, seemed to critics a remarkable stretch to assist Iran and enrich it – when the alternative was simply to tell Iran to stop producing heavy water and dispose of its stocks.

A new president is likely not to share Obama's welcoming view of Iranian gains, his dreams that Rouhani is a "moderate," or Kerry's great friendship with and trust in Zarif. Iran is an enemy of the United States, because it has chosen to be so – as the rhetoric of its top leaders continually reminds us.[17] Moreover, it is an enemy of our closest partners there, whom it is actively subverting through its backing of Hizballah, Hamas, Bahraini militants, and the Houthis in Yemen. The only change the nuclear deal has brought is that Iran now has more resources; its conduct throughout the region remains destabilizing.

So a new president must resolve to adopt a policy close to the activist containment policy of Ronald Reagan toward the Soviets. That is, a successful containment policy cannot be passive, and cannot be solely military. It must have economic, military, and ideological aspects. On the economic side, the Obama administration is intervening to promote investment in Iran and the expansion of the economic benefits it receives in the short term.[18] Unbelievably, from the viewpoint of American security interests but acting with determination to protect its nuclear agreement with Iran, it is promoting Iranian economic growth. Its role in securing Iranian access to dollars, and reassuring banks that they may deal with Iran,[19] is arousing Congressional opposition and seems well beyond the bounds of the nuclear deal. Proponents, such as Kerry, speak of the "spirit" of the deal,[20] but such sentiments invite derision – and get it in Tehran.

16 *"U.S. to by heavy water from Iran's nuclear program," April 22, 2016, available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa-idUSKCN0XJ25G.*

17 *"Iran: 'Death to America' is still our slogan," November 9, 2015, available at: http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/260719/iran-death-america-still-our-slogan-dr-majid-rafizadeh.*

18 *"Kerry Tries to Drum Up Some Business in Europe for Iran," May 10, 2016, available at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/kerry-tries-to-drum-up-some-business-in-europe-for-iran-1462902185.*

19 *"U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry Meets With European Bankers in Iran-Business Push," May 12, 2016, available at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/kerry-meets-with-european-bankers-in-iran-business-push-1463045793.*

20 *"Kerry: 'Iran Deserves the Benefits of the Agreement they Struck,' Not Surprised By Their Provocations," April 5, 2016, available at: http://www.breitbart.com/video/2016/04/05/kerry-iran-deserves-the-benefits-of-the-agreement-they-struck-not-surprised-by-their-provocations/.*

This boosterism for the Iranian economy is the kind of activity that shocks American allies in the Middle East, and it will end or be greatly reduced in a new administration of either party.

Instead, America's strategic interests call for weakening the Iranian economy, strictly adhering to the terms of the nuclear deal and insisting that Iran does so, and enforcing non-nuclear sanctions (human rights, anti-terrorism) to the letter. International banks must be warned against involvement with Iran, not coddled and urged to do business there. Their reluctance to jump into the Iranian market reflects their fears of the kinds of immense fines the US Government has imposed in recent years, and their knowledge that Iran's financial structures are riddled with corruption, illegal transactions, support for terrorism, and likely future liability in the billions. Those fears can easily be reinforced by the US Treasury.

The "danger" is that Iran will pull out of the nuclear agreement. The size of that danger can only be measured by one's own assessment of the agreement, which at best delays Iran's nuclear program by a decade – while legitimizing its ballistic missile program and its experimentation with advanced centrifuges, and its acquisition of nuclear weapons when the agreement expires. The agreement has moved Iran out of pariah status and ended its economic isolation. The collapse of the agreement might be in the interests of the West, because it would mean the danger of the Iranian nuclear program would again be front and center.

The most important move for a new administration to make is to reassert, credibly, that Iran will never be permitted to acquire nuclear weapons. This has long been the American and European position, and President Obama continued to assert it before and after making the nuclear deal. But no one believed him, at least since he failed even to enforce his own red line on Syrian use of chemical weapons. If he would not even undertake that easy military action, how likely was it that he would move against Iran? That credibility can be restored, at least in significant part, by a clear assertion by the new president that all means, including military, will be used to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons – if that declaration is then followed by a Congressional vote supporting it. Also essential will be the assertion of American military power in the Gulf, which was badly undermined by the incident in January where Iran captured two small American boats,

detained the crews, and then in violation of international law used them for propaganda videos[21] – all without the slightest American reaction except a startling expression of thanks from Kerry to Zarif. That is precisely the kind of action that further undermines American credibility and makes allies and partners in the region wonder about American foreign policy and strategy.

Stopping Iran's expansion of influence in the region will be no easy matter, although it is easy to say how it starts: with a policy determined to achieve that objective, and with close coordination with allies such as the GCC countries and Israel. Iran is actually no colossus: its economy is weak, it has a population of perhaps 70 million of whom half are not Persian, and many in its population clearly loathe the regime. So we return to the Reagan approach, whose meaning is that military action to prevent expansion must be matched by an ideological initiative. Reagan negotiated with the Soviets while he called them an evil empire whose animating ideology of Communism would end on the "ash heap of history."[22] That ideological element has been entirely missing in Obama's approach to Iran, which he has treated with kid gloves. The vulnerabilities of Iran's theocracy are many, and in its clerical class itself there are many who no longer believe in *velayat i faqih*, the rule of the clerics. A serious effort at delegitimizing the regime and at spreading more information about its vast corruption and horrifying human rights abuses must obviously be undertaken, both for its international impact and to undermine regime legitimacy at home even further. And as we know from the Soviet experience, blunting the regime's international achievements is a critical contribution to denying it popular appeal at home.

Does the Middle East matter?

To all of the above one rejoinder may be made that simply asks, why? Why bother, beyond the need to stop terrorist attacks on the United States? Why risk money and soldiers yet again?

The isolationist impulse best seen in the Rand Paul campaign (as in that of his father four years before) is not strong in the United States, but both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump have challenged conventional assessments of

21 *"US Navy rips Iran after new footage shows captured sailor crying," February 11, 2016, available at: http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/02/11/us-navy-rips-iran-after-new-footage-shows-captured-sailor-crying.html.*

22 *"Ronald Reagan – The Evil Empire." June 8, 1982, available at: http://reagan2020.us/speeches/the_evil_empire_2.asp.*

American strategic interests – and both have gained rather than lost votes by doing so. No doubt this can partly be explained by the voters' fatigue with the costs of international commitments, especially after years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For many Americans, the Middle East does not seem like the modern analogue of Korea, where we have troops 60 years after the end of the Korean War, or of the Balkans, where Bill Clinton intervened in 1999 – briefly. In both those cases, the American combat role came to a definitive end and the crisis slipped from public attention. By contrast, the Middle East appears to many Americans to be a hopeless case, the proverbial bottomless pit where all that is gained is lost over and over again, and where there is no gratitude for American expenditures of treasure and blood. In this year's presidential campaign, Trump has successfully built on that feeling that the system is now stacked against the United States, which bears an undue financial and military burden. "We don't win anymore," has been a constant trope for him, reminding voters of past glories and of the unsatisfying complexities of international politics today.

To this he adds trade complaints, arguing that current trade arrangements – with adversaries like China, but also friends like Mexico – cost millions of American jobs. These arguments have an echo in the Sanders campaign's focus on Wall Street, which like all those clever foreigners makes victims out of American workers. These arguments are electoral strategies, but they would if turned into policies have strategic consequences.

The fundamental problem is that many millions of Americans no longer perceive the value of our alliances. The groundwork for this problem lay first in the Iraq and Afghan wars, which were never seen by most Americans as grand alliances. The important contributions of literally dozens of allies in Afghanistan were never fully understood, and Iraq was worse: the United States was thought to be fighting and dying alone, or alone but for Tony Blair.

Barack Obama's approach to world affairs made these sentiments far worse because he deprecated not only the value of those wars, but also of American alliances more generally. His purpose, he made it clear, was to reach out to those who were *not* allies – to reset relations with Russia,[23] to speak as he

23 *"Barack Obama calls for 'reset' in US-Russia relations," July 7, 2009, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/07/barack-obama-russia-moscow-speech.*

did in Cairo in June 2009 to the "Muslim world," to "unclench his fist" when it came to Iran and Cuba.[24] Of what value were "allies," when the United States intended to engage with adversaries rather than fight them? What role did "allies" have except to pull the United States into squabbles it meant to escape? Thus the early decisions to distance himself from Israel and to cancel in 2009 the missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, and thus the curious lack of close personal relationships with any allied leaders – of the sort that Bill Clinton and George Bush maintained with heads of government from countries such as Australia, Japan, Israel, the UK, and Saudi Arabia.

Seven years of this approach following years of war in the Middle East have had a real impact. I teach at Georgetown University, where my students are on average 20 years old. The first president they recall is George W. Bush; Bill Clinton is to them a white-haired man who is Hillary Clinton's husband. My accounts of the Reagan years are viewed by them as akin to reports on conversations with Charlemagne. The Cold War with its great Western alliance policies ended 25 years ago, so Americans under the age of about 40 have no real memory of it – and they are roughly two-thirds of the American populace. The importance of the Western alliance, the value of NATO, the achievement of NAFTA and other trade treaties, the wonder of seeing Europe unite, the fall of the Berlin Wall – all are matters they learn, or more likely do not learn, in school.

Thus they are open to counter-arguments and alternative policies such as they are seeing and hearing about now: from Obama that we must seek accommodation with adversaries rather than strengthen alliances, and from Trump that alliances are suckers' deals ensnaring America into relationships that tie us down and weaken our economy. What is needed to defeat these arguments and policies, and explain that an American grand strategy, or successful regional policies, must be built on precisely the alliances that brought the 20th century to such a glorious finale?

The answer is Leadership. It was not inevitable that Truman would announce the Marshall Plan to a nation tired of war and huge expenditures in Europe. Nor that George H.W. Bush would push German reunification, nor that Clinton would enter the Balkan wars; these decisions and many more like them required

24 *President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, January 21, 2009, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/01/21/president-barack-obamas-inaugural-address.*

a leader to make a decision and then to be its champion in the court of public opinion. There is always (in most of our countries) an audience for carping at allies who do too little or commitments that might prove dangerous, and always an openness to arguments that the magic formula is more nationalism, keeping foreigners out, and "nation building at home." American strategic interests do not exist up in the sky, available for anyone to discern who has a sufficiently powerful telescope. Their description is the product of a national debate that requires political leaders to explain where American interests lie and why clear and identifiable current risks and expenditures are actually necessary for our long-run gain. Politicians are always reluctant to provide such leadership because they understand the immediate political cost, and also know the gains may come long after they will bring them any political benefit. In this sense we are all lucky at the quality of leadership the United States has often had since the Second World War.

There is a debate now in the United States over what American strategic interests really are, what its alliances are worth, and why it must provide costly leadership and be engaged with so many problems around the globe. The lessons of history are too infrequently taught or remembered. There are persuasive spokesmen and apparently large audiences for alternative paths. They have already greatly affected the national debate, but in my view they will neither win that debate nor determine the nation's course in the next four years. Their current prominence reflects fatigue with two long wars and exasperation at the slow, shallow economic recovery from the previous decade's economic crisis. And they reflect a phenomenon seen much in Europe: a widespread disbelief and lack of confidence in national elites, who are viewed as often out of touch, politically correct, and unwilling to speak of much less solve problems staring most voters in the face. When someone who will not pronounce the words "Islamic extremism" despite beheadings of your countrymen then tells you all is well with border security, you are unlikely to be reassured.[25]

But that is not a structural change: it is failure of leadership. It does not suggest a new isolationism nor a permanent unwillingness to assume burdens or take risks. American nationalism can be harnessed to build resentment of foreigners, but far more often in modern American history has been the basis

25 *"Why Obama Won't Talk About Islamic Terrorism," February 16, 2015, available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/02/why-obama-wont-talk-about-islamic-terrorism/385539/.*

for building military strength, strong alliances, and global leadership. We can ironically thank the so-called "Islamic State" and other terrorist groups for reminding Americans, as they are likely to do again and again, that America's fate and that of its friends are intertwined and that in unity there is strength. "Fortress America" will always be a temptation to some Americans but will prove impossible to build in the 21st century. The pendulum will continue its swing back to an American policy, and an American understanding of where its strategic interests lie, that embrace a traditional American leadership role.

Arab dreams, European nightmares?

Dr Bruno Tertrais

The Arab upheavals happened on a continent still marked by the post 9/11 context, in the midst of an identity crisis and a debate about values (the place of Islam, etc.), and most importantly as a severe financial and budgetary crisis was unfolding (the "Euro" crisis – which itself came on the heels of the 2008 global financial crisis, with Greece as a focal point). 2015 was a turning point because of the migrant crisis and the beginning of a series of major terrorist attacks on the continent. Overall, the direct and indirect consequences of the Arab Spring have acted as a multiplier of the European crisis, with important and long-lasting domestic political ramifications.

1. Caught by Surprise

Europe's relations with the Middle East and North Africa date back to the 1960s (first negotiations for association agreements with Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria were initiated in 1963) and were, for the better part of the relationship, focused on trade. Although political reform emerged in European approaches to the region from the 1990s onwards, policies towards its Southern Neighborhood, enshrined in the many agreements signed with the eight states South and West of the Mediterranean, had always been one of economic liberalization and rather mild pushes for democratic reform.

When political unrest erupted first in Tunisia in late 2010, nothing indicated the regional turmoil that was about to follow. After all, social turmoil had shaken countries in the region at considerable scale repeatedly: in 1977, 1984, 1988, 1996 and, more recently, in 2008. None of them ever managed to topple a regime and were met usually with force. This time, however, things were different: riots lasted longer, grievances had accumulated considerably, global connectivity through satellite channels (Al-Jazeerah…) and social media (Facebook…) multiplied the unrest extensively. Most importantly perhaps, neither the Tunisian nor the Egyptian military were willing to employ force to protect the regime.

When first Tunisia's President Ben Ali and two weeks later Egypt's President Mubarak stepped down, European decision-makers were, as many others, surprised – and felt guilty. In a speech to the European Parliament, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, admitted: *"Too many of us fell prey to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region. This was not even*

realpolitik. It was, at best, short-termism – and the kind of short-termism that makes the long term ever more difficult to build."[1] French foreign minister Alain Juppé echoed Füle's sentiment, stating: *"For too long we thought that the authoritarian regimes were the only bastions against extremism in the Arab world. Too long, we have brandished the Islamist threat as a pretext for justifying to an extent turning a blind eye on governments which were flouting freedom and curbing their country's development."*[2]

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the main framework in which the European Union has engaged with its Southern neighbors since 2003, was seen as the main culprit – despite its many references and programs related to political reform, it delivered mainly on economy, but not on democratization. An audit of pre-Arab Spring European support for Egyptian governance (especially fighting corruption and supporting democracy) came to the conclusion that it was *"well-intentioned but ineffective."* More specifically, it stated that *"the main human rights programme was largely unsuccessful. It was slow to commence and was hindered by the negative attitude of the Egyptian authorities. The Commission and the EEAS did not use the financial and political leverage at their disposal to counteract this intransigence. Some elements of the programme had to be dropped completely. Funds channelled through Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were not sufficient to make a discernible difference."*[3] The report echoed a generalized feeling regarding European relations with the Southern countries: that support to democracy had been "*softly softly"* as one of the auditors put it.

European leaders spoke out mostly in support and even enthusiasm for what seemed to be a regional movement for democracy. Comparisons with European revolutionary democratic movements in 1848 and 1989 were drawn. José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, stated emotionally : "*From Brussels I want to say this particularly to the young Arabs that are now fighting for freedom and democracy: we are on your side,"*[4] an expression British Prime Minister David Cameron used as well.

1 *Štefan Füle, Speech on the recent events in North Africa, European Parliament, Brussels, February 28, 2011.*

2 *Alain Juppé, Arab Spring Symposium – Closing speech by Alain Juppé, Ministre d'Etat, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Arab World Institute, April 16, 2011.*

3 *European Commission, EU Support for Governance in Egypt – "well-intentioned but ineffective", say EU Auditors, June 18, 2013.*

4 *European Commission, Statement by President Barroso on the situation in North Africa, Brussels, March 2, 2011.*

But while Europe was quick to hold itself responsible for the dismal situation in the South, concerns over possible ripple effects of the events were just as quick to emerge. British Prime Minister David Cameron warned that economic instability could lead to extremism and mass migration.[5] When the crisis in Libya and Syria degenerated into violence, humanitarian concerns were added to the list. The possible use of chemical weapons and large-scale use of violence against civilians led to French and British support for a UN-mandated operation against the regime of Muammar Qaddafi; Germany abstained from the vote. European leaders, while supportive of the general movement for democracy and good governance, did not agree on the means. Meanwhile, morethan a million refugees fled Libya, raising prospects of a potentially larger refugee crisis.

While Europe was pulled in different directions of support, guilt and concern, it was also overwhelmed. Just recovering from the financial crisis and challenged in the East by Russia in Ukraine, it was strategically stretched. More generally, it also failed (and still does) to perceive the Arab region as one strategic space, instead focusing on its ENP range of countries. This meant that conflicts and potential for more instability in Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq and even Saudi Arabia went largely unnoticed in Brussels. There are several reasons for this fragmented perception of the region: geographic proximity to North Africa and the Middle East has translated into historical, cultural and economic ties; political ties – whether in the shape of colonialism or cooperation – reinforced this strategic preference.

2. Different Levels of Interest

Matters were not helped by the fact that as a foreign policy community, Europe was and is an emerging force only. Its diplomatic wing with the European External Action Service (EEAS) barely operational in 2011 and a High Representative frequently attacked in the media were not the unifying force necessary in this time of crisis. Instead, European states tilted towards their general posture towards the region.

Broadly speaking, European states fell into three groups when it came to their strategic ranking of events in the region. States with a global ambition

5 *The Telegraph, "Arab Spring will add to extremism if we do not help, says David Cameron," May 27, 2011.*

– and a permanent seat in the UN Security Council – France and the United Kingdom saw it as a priority. A second ring of states interested were those in geographic proximity and traditionally interested in the region, such as France, Spain, Italy and Greece. A third ring of states were those with a sizeable (5-6%) Muslim and Arab population, notably Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. The remaining states were either focused on the East and Russia or had no pronounced policy. This became visible at the G8 meeting in May 2011 – of the European states, only France and the United Kingdom pledged extra funds beyond the initial €3.5 billion provided by the European Investment bank – France €250 million to Egypt, and the United Kingdom £110 million, stretched out over four years.[6] In sum, Europe's very initial reaction was indeed slow, incoherent and divided. A *"cacophonous start"*, as an informed observer put it.[7]

3. From Activism to Skepticism

The years 2011–2012 were very much inspired by a sense of renewal and enthusiasm. The events in the region were henceforth to be the impulse for an entirely new European approach to the Middle East and North Africa – oriented strongly towards political reform. Along with EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security Affairs Catherine Ashton, Füle presented a Joint Communication on March 8, 2011 – nearly one month after Mubarak had stepped down. In the document, the European Commission proposed a *"Partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean."* From now on, the Union would offer *"more for more;"* it would provide generous assistance in terms of aid, trade and mobility to countries that introduced democratic reforms. A second document, published two months later, was named "A new response to a changing neighbourhood". Both documents outlined how the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and other EU instruments could be used to advance democracy in Arab countries – where cooperation had focused only marginally on political change, it now shifted primarily to democracy promotion. An additional €1.2 billion (principally for the Southern Mediterranean countries) were disbursed to the €5.7 billion already budgeted for ENP (which as a whole also covers

6 *The Guardian, "G8 summit to pledge £12bn for Arab spring states," May 27, 2011.*
7 *Rosa Balfour, EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring, PapersIEMed, n° 16, 2013, p. 11.*

Eastern European countries) from 2011 to 2013 inclusive. Ashton lobbied successfully for an extension of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) mandate, now allowing it to spend almost €2.5 billion in the Southern Mediterranean countries annually. The EBRD also increased its funding in the region immediately, mainly through its facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership which provides funding to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It launched the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility (a tool designed to strengthen the role of civil society through capacity building) as well as the European Endowment for Democracy (a foundation designed to promote European values of freedom and democracy), an important shift for EU policy in the region and elsewhere, with half of its budget devoted to Southern neighbors.

Relations with the League of Arab States were relaunched with the second ministerial meeting in November 2012 in Cairo (the first one had been held in 2008). More than 20 European foreign ministers attended the meeting with their entourage – more than 400 diplomats attended. A regular and structural political dialogue was launched at Senior Officers' level, and the EU offered League officials training courses. In a joint declaration, the two organizations pledged to work together on election observations, human rights, civil society, women's empowerment and more. High Representative Catherine Ashton visited Egypt several times – her first visit came barely a month after Mubarak's ousting. In her remarks, Ashton stressed the importance of political reform and dialogue – she also added that the EU had no intention to *"dictate outcomes or impose solutions."*[8] European thinking on the region briefly moved to local ownership, humility and outspoken support for reform. Ashton returned on a number of occasions to Cairo, including to meet President Mohammed Morsi.

Meanwhile, 10 European states were actively involved in the French- and UK-inspired NATO-led Operation Unified Protector in Libya (March–October 2011). Triggered by increasing violence and Qaddafi's open threats to civilians in Benghazi, it was supported by both the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The EU imposed a weapons' embargo and other financial sanctions on the country's leadership; the European Commission allotted €140 million in humanitarian aid to address humanitarian needs in

8 *European Commission, "Remarks by HR/VP Catherine Ashton at the end of her visit to Egypt," February 22, 2011.*

Libya and neighboring countries, and opened an office in Benghazi in May 2011, when Tripoli was still under regime control – but beyond that, Europe as a union remained absent, in security terms, from the Libyan crisis. Divided on the use of military force, the EU could not act as one. A letter jointly written by France's President Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron to the European Council, arguing for the implementation of a no-fly zone over Libya, did not change the minds of Germany, Poland and Estonia – whose President implicitly criticized France and the UK when he stated*: "Poland and Estonia know well that bringing down a despotic regime is easy, but what's much harder is to build up a new democratic society. Poland knows much better what to do in Libya than those who have supported dictators for the sake of stability."*[9] A European mission, EUFOR Libya, designed as a humanitarian mission delivering aid under a military umbrella, never saw the light.[10]

At least initially, Europeans were less divided on Syria. Member states began to recognize the Syrian opposition as a legitimate interlocutor or representative of the Syrian people early on, and in February 2012 the European Union as a collective recognized the Syrian National Council as *"a legitimate representative of the Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change."* Six weeks later, it enhanced this status to *"a legitimate representative of the Syrian people"* (some member states, like France, went even further by recognizing it as the sole representative). The EU also imposed unilateral sanctions not prescribed by the United Nations. It did so as early as May 2011 and increased the measures progressively as the conflict escalated. The sanctions originally included an arms embargo, travel bans, asset freezes and a ban on the import of Syrian oil. But member states differed on two crucial things pertaining to Syria in the summer of 2013: firstly, both France and the United Kingdom pushed for a lift of the weapons embargo in order to deliver weapons to the Syrian opposition. Whereas the British House of Commons voted against such a move, France has never acknowledged such deliveries. Two months later, the use of chemical weapons in Syria pushed the two countries into contemplating military action – which the House of Commons voted against, again, and France saw itself isolated as US President Obama favored a negotiated disarmament.

9 Nouvelle Europe, "Military Intervention in Libya: where is ESDP?" April 20, 2011.
10 EUObserver, "Was EUFOR Libya an April fool's joke?" July 13, 2011.

The summer of 2013 proved to be, in all, a turning point in how Europe saw the region's change: the toppling of President Morsi by the Egyptian military, the ongoing war in Syria, increasing turmoil in Libya and the assassination of two opposition politicians in Tunisia, along with the EU Auditor's damning report on European ways of promoting democracy, triggered another phase of doom and gloom.

4. Six Years Later: A "Multiplier" of the European Crisis

Within a few years, the events of 2011 turned from a moment of change to becoming the starting point for an even more profound crisis affecting Europe in more than just foreign policy terms. By 2015, Europe was challenged owing to events directly and indirectly linked to the Arab Spring in economic, social, political and security terms.

The first indication of this was the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (IS) on the Syrian battlefield. Originally based in Iraq, IS managed to expand into the Syrian space thanks to the ongoing fighting between regime and opposition. Its first battlefield success, the conquest of Raqqa, originally occurred alongside Syrian opposition forces (including al-Qaeda outlet Jabhat al-Nusra) in March 2013. By the late summer of that year, IS had established full control over the city. However, it gained notoriety only in 2014 when it managed to capture the Iraqi city of Mosul in June 2014. In a public relations coup, IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi announced the re-establishment of the caliphate, abolished in 1923, in the territories under IS control – territories the size of Great Britain. The announcement led to an unprecedented wave of European nationals traveling to the IS in order to participate in its campaign. Between June 2014 and December 2015, IS managed to more than double its intake of foreign fighters from 12,000 to between 27,000 and 31,000. This trend applied to the European cohort, too, which doubled to 5,000. The main sending countries were France (1,700), Germany (760), the United Kingdom (760) and Belgium (470), according to unofficial statistics.[11]

Major ISIS-inspired attacks happened in Brussels and Nantes (2014); in Paris, Copenhagen, Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, the Thalys train, and Paris again

11 *The Soufan Group, "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq," December 2015.*

(2015); in Brussels, Magnanville, and Nice (2016). France was particularly targeted for several reasons ranging from political culture of secularism and tolerance, as well as the fact that it hosts the most important Muslim community in Europe, to its colonial past and – according to some – its leading role in military operations against jihadi terrorism.

While security officials warned of the implications of a large European presence in the ranks of an extremist organization, member states as well as the European Union as a collective failed to react to these developments in time. In May 2014, an armed attack on the Jewish museum in Brussels, leaving four dead, was only the first in a series of terrorist attacks with a direct link to Syria. Both the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in 2016, as well as the failed attack on the Thalys train from Amsterdam to Paris in August 2015, were conducted by European nationals who had travelled to Syria and trained with the Islamic State. The attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and the kosher supermarket in January 2015 were equally linked to the Islamic state (though Chérif Kouachi, one of the perpetrators, claimed to have acted on behalf of Al-Qaeda in Yemen). At first glance, the Nice attack in July 2016 had no link to Syria – instead, to Tunisia, which has itself become an exporter of jihadists to Syria since the Arab Spring; however, it was clearly part of a series of "IS-inspired" terrorist acts.

These terrorist attacks highlighted two things: firstly, that European security was intimately linked to a conflict thousands of kilometers away; and secondly, that Europe – both as a union and as individual member states – did not have the provisions in place to deal with transborder crime of that extent. Two aspects stand out particularly: Schengen, the European space in which people move freely without border controls, has been abused by those terrorist networks; and European security cooperation was – and is – not at the necessary level to face such a continental phenomenon.

The foreign fighters identified the flaws in Schengen and used them to move in and out of Europe undetected. A popular method is the exit and entry from and to countries of which the individual is not a citizen, and the conduct of an attack in another country. In most cases mentioned above, terrorists moved in three or more European countries. The attacker of the Jewish museum for instance, Mehdi Nemmouche, was a French national who had re-entered Europe through Germany and traveled on to Belgium after his stay in Syria.

The Paris attackers (most of which were of Belgian nationality or residency) of November 2015 had trained in Syria, entered through Greece and Germany and orchestrated attacks in France. One of the attackers, Abdelhamid Abaoud, openly claimed to have moved around freely in Europe despite an arrest warrant in his name. Another of the Paris attackers, Saleh Abdelslam, escaped after the attacks from Paris to Brussels without being apprehended by the police. The Thalys train attacker, Ayoub El Khazzani, lived in France, Spain and Belgium.

While European states do have an information exchange system in place, it is not equipped for the challenges the Union faces now. SIS-II (Schengen Information System II) is a database to which member states can add names and objects of legal interest (e.g. stolen cars). France had added Nemmouche, the Jewish museum attacker, to the database with the marker 'alert'. When he entered Germany in Frankfurt, German border guards notified French authorities of his whereabouts. Although this was later portrayed as having let him slip away, the 'notify' marker is not the same as an arrest warrant. Even so, the European Arrest Warrant, created in 2004, can only be issued for the purposes of conducting a criminal prosecution, not merely an investigation. Individuals who are suspected to become violent can consequently not simply be detained. Furthermore, SIS-II does not contain details of the reasons why the requesting state wishes to be notified. As German authorities later stated, had they been aware of Nemmouche's extremist profile, they would have detained or monitored him. In addition, neither Frontex – the EU's border management agency – nor Europol – the EU's agency coordinating member states' activities against organized crime – have access to SIS-II. Lastly, not all member states use SIS-II as diligently as the situation would require it. Approximately 80% of its content is provided by only four member states, and not all border posts in Europe are equipped to automatically access SIS-II.

Until today, Europe has no comprehensive database of all European nationals and residents who have travelled to Syria. Although a task force exists at Europol – Focal Point Travellers – which gathers this information, member states have used different methods to detect the departure and return of individuals, and not all share this information with the EU.

Lastly, individuals who have returned have been prosecuted – only to highlight the shortcomings of European legal systems when it comes to crimes

committed elsewhere. Although several European states have introduced laws criminalizing the travel to a conflict zone with the intention to fight, it has proven difficult to prove these acts from afar. Consequently, verdicts have been minimal – a German jihadist who had posted pictures of himself holding severed heads in Syria on social media was convicted and sentenced to two years. Most jihadist returnees receive no more than four years in prison.

In spite of the clear link between European terrorism and the Islamic State in Syria, European states are still hesitant to use force against the organization. Although several European states are involved in the air campaign against IS that began in the summer of 2014 (Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom – all of which participated in the 2011 campaign against the Libyan government), and others, such as Germany and Italy, provide assistance to the Iraqi military, the vast majority of strikes is conducted by the United States (76% in Iraq and 94% in Syria). In part, this is the result of the interventions in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011: both are seen to have created instability rather than produced a sustainable state. The case of Syria, in which no intervention has taken place, shows, however, that the absence of European or Western military forces does not lead to appeasement either – in fact, it encouraged Russia to act freely in Syria alongside the regime.

Around the same time, refugee flows from the region to Europe exploded almost overnight. In 2015, the number of asylum requests to an EU country doubled to 1,200,000, nearly half of them from war-torn countries of the Middle East (Syria: 360,000; Iraq: 120,000). Germany alone received 476,000 new asylum requests; Hungary coming second with 177,000. Overall, 300,000 were granted asylum in 2015. Pending asylum requests number 900,000 at December 31, 2015.

Greece has found itself at the epicenter of the European crisis. It is one of the most important entry points into the European Union, by sea and by land. Weakened by the financial crisis, Athens was even less able to cope.

The refugee question quickly became a polarizing factor both within European states and amongst them, and was associated with an increased risk of terrorism in large sections of European public opinion. Large-scale sexual harassment on New Year's Eve in Cologne by young Arab men provoked a heated debate about identity and values. Meanwhile, the Islamic State sought to deliberately create a link between refugees and fighters by having the

Paris attackers leave a trail between Syria and France as registered refugees. Things are not helped by the fact that Syrian refugees in Germany are from the same cohort as IS fighters: two-thirds of Syrians in Germany are men between 18 and 35 years old. Already polarized after the financial crisis, European societies are tilting further in this direction. A survey showed that large numbers of refugees leaving Iraq/Syria is seen as major threat to their country by majorities of Poles (73%), Hungarians (69%), Greeks (69%), Italians (65%) and British (52%).[12] The assertion, *"Refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in our country,"* is now supported by clear majorities of Hungarians (76%), Poles, Dutch, Germans, Italians, Swedes, Greeks and British.[13] Likewise for the opinion, *"Refugees are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits,"* which is shared today by large majorities of Hungarians (82%), Poles, Greeks, Italians and French.[14] A total of no less than 46% of Italians, 37% of Hungarians, 35% of Poles, 30% of Greeks and 25% of Spaniards believe that *"most"* or *"many"* Muslims in their country support ISIS.[15] Majorities have unfavorable views of Muslims in Hungary (72%), Italy, Poland, Greece and Spain. [16]

Increasingly, European populist parties – be it in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom – thrive on xenophobic and anti-European slogans. Right-wing violence has multiplied from 120 incidents in 2014 to more than 1,500 in 2015 in Germany. For 33% of "Brexiters", the main reason behind their vote was that they believed leaving *"offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders."*[17]

Meanwhile, instability is endemic in the region and raises prospects for even more impacts on European security. Particularly the violence in Libya since Qaddafi fell has given way to an increased presence of the IS there with now 6,000 fighters, potentially making Libya the next front. But Yemen, where political instability followed the ouster of President Saleh in the Arab Spring, has also become a fertile training ground for extremists, particularly al-Qaeda

12 *Pew Global Research, Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.*
13 *Pew Global Research, "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs," July 11, 2016.*
14 *Ibid.*
15 *Ibid.*
16 *Ibid.*
17 *"How the United Kingdom voted… and why," Lord Ashcroft Polls, June 24, 2016.*

in the Arab Peninsula. Europeans are also deliberate targets for terrorists such as in Tunisia, where in June 2015 an attacker shot 39 Western tourists in a resort – he had trained in Libya.

Most importantly, all of these events also impact Europe at the strategic level. Although France invoked Article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty (which contains a clause on common defense in the case of an aggression), not all Europeans share the perception that this is a common European problem. In fact, current pressures have led to a retrenchment into national realms. Opinion polls echo this rise of isolationism in Europe: in the Spring of 2016, 83% of Greeks, 77% of Hungarians, 67% of Italians, 65% of Poles, 60% of French, 52% of British and 51% of Dutch chose *"our country should deal with its own problems and let other countries deal with their own problems as best as they can"* over *"our country should help other countries deal with their problems."*[18] Meanwhile, Europe failed to find a common solution to the refugee question, leaving Germany, which had accepted nearly a million in the hope of European redistribution and a quota system, isolated. The British referendum on leaving the Union, as well as the temporary suspension of Schengen at several borders, reinforces the perception that the European Union as a political project is now under threat.

The EU belatedly decided in July 2016 to transform the FRONTEX ("FRONTières EXTérieures", external borders) into a true permanent corps of border guards. However, it will be several months, if not years, before the possible concrete effects of this change will be seen by public opinions.

5. Outlook and Consequences for Relations with Other Countries

Overall, the direct and indirect consequences of the Arab Spring have acted as a true "multiplier" of the European crisis, with important and long-lasting domestic political ramifications. In addition to its own internal crisis, Europe is now facing a single set of inter-related external strategic challenges from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, with Russian assertiveness in Syria having connected both its Eastern and Southern dimensions.

18 *Pew Global Research, Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.*

The importance of domestic challenges and institutional reforms (especially since the UK decision to leave the European Union), "war fatigue", as well as alleged unwanted consequences of Western military interventions (Iraq, Libya), are likely to make European attitudes vis-à-vis the Middle East more conservative, more status quo-minded, and less interventionist in the coming years. This would be especially true in the absence of clear US leadership for military interventions in the region, as has been the case since 2009 (and might change in 2017 after a new US president comes into office).

Impact on Relations with Turkey

The Arab Spring happened in a context already marked by disenchantment on both sides for Turkish entry in the European Union, owing to identity concerns (in the post 9/11 context) in Europe and to Turkish economic success, which have made Turkish EU membership less and less popular on both sides. More recently, Erdogan's policies and image have made the prospect of Turkish membership more distant; in addition, the attempted July 2016 coup has almost certainly created the perception of a perpetually unstable country which should not belong to the Union for the foreseeable future.

However, Turkey's pivotal role in the Syrian and refugees crisis has given it additional weight in European policy-making. On 18 March 2016, EU Heads of State or Government and Turkey agreed to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU and replace it instead with legal channels of resettlement of refugees to the European Union. The aim was *"to replace disorganised, chaotic, irregular and dangerous migratory flows by organised, safe and legal pathways to Europe for those entitled to international protection in line with EU and international law."*[19] The price for Turkey's new role in managing the migration flows was, inter alia, the acceleration of the "visa liberalization roadmap" and of the accession process, with the promised opening of new chapters. Whatever the merits of the agreement (a pact with the Devil according to some commentators), this is sure to have a negative impact on perceptions of EU policies.

Impact on Relations with Iran

The Arab Spring had few consequences on Europe's relations with Iran. The EU, just like its negotiating partners (and Iran itself), had been keen

19 *European Commission Fact Sheet, Implementing the EU-Turkey Statement – Questions and Answers, June 15, 2016.*

to separate the negotiation of a deal on Tehran's nuclear program with the broader relationship with Iran. To their credit, European countries, while keen to benefit from the contracts bonanza expected from the suspension of EU and UN sanctions, have maintained this disconnect despite Tehran's calls for "increased cooperation" in the light of the IS "common threat." Likewise, they have resisted the temptation to "trade horses", i.e. to sever links with Saudi Arabia in favor of a rapprochement with Iran.

Impact on Relations with Israel

Israel has widely been seen as an island of stability in the midst of a troubled region.

However, European perceptions of the country continue to be tarnished by the image of its current government and by the Palestinian issue, with the continuation of settlements policy being widely and continuously seen as an "obstacle to peace." Despite good relations between Israeli and major European countries' intelligence services (including Israeli offers to increase bilateral counterterrorism assistance), and recognition that *"some of the threats [Israel is facing] are the same that Europe is facing,"*[20] this has had an impact on bilateral cooperation on security questions, which is not as deep as it could be.

One issue of contention is a perceived Israeli-Russian convergence of interests in Syria (support for status quo, absence of visible Israeli criticism of Russian methods...) and a perceived lack of solidarity for European concerns viz. Moscow's actions on the continent.

Although a probably misguided perception, the notion that it is "urgent" to solve the Palestinian question because of the context of the Arab Spring is widely shared in Europe. France partly justified its spring 2016 diplomatic initiative on peace in the Middle East by the need to avoid fueling the attractiveness of ISIS.

20 HR/VP Federica Mogherini at Press Point with President Juncker and President Rivlin, June 23, 2016.

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