
**FRIENDS
OF ISRAEL
INITIATIVE**

**The Middle East, Israel and
Western Strategic Interests**

Shmuel Bar
August 2016

Strategic
Outlook
Series

1



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 first in the series is a comprehensive view by Dr Shmuel Bar, seeking to discern a new regional picture, detailed implications for external actors – from the Europeans and America to as far afield as China, issues around nuclear proliferation and other relevant topics, all in search of a cohesive narrative for how we should conceive of the post-Arab spring world, its consequences and what may lie ahead. He offers an extensive assessment of what happened and how to analyse events, and in part two an additional detailed breakdown of the implications for the major countries in the region.

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.

I hope this work will be the first of many towards this shared goal between Israel and the West.



Rafael Bardaji

Executive Director, Friends of Israel Initiative



About the author

Dr. Shmuel Bar is Director of Studies at the Institute of Policy and Strategy in Herzliya, Israel and on the steering team of the annual “Herzliya Conference”. He is also a Senior Research Fellow at International Institute for Non-Proliferation Studies, an Adjunct Fellow at the Hudson Institute and has been (2007) Distinguished Koret Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He has lectured at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya on issues relating to Israeli national security.

Dr. Bar served for thirty years in the Israeli government, first in the IDF Intelligence and then in the analytic and operational positions in the Israeli Office of the Prime Minister. Since the mid 1980’s he has specialized in the ideology and operational codes of Islamic fundamentalist movements, particularly of the Jihadi movement that later evolved into al-Qaeda. Between 1998-2002 Dr. Bar served as First Secretary at the Israeli Embassy in The Hague, Netherlands and in that capacity liaised with government agencies in the UK.

Since 2002, Dr. Bar has headed research projects – some of them for US government agencies – and published extensively on issues relating to the Middle East. This includes strategic issues in the Middle East, deterrence in theory and practice, radical Islamic ideology, Iran, Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians. He holds a Ph.D. in History of the Middle East from Tel-Aviv University.

The Middle East, Israel and Western Strategic Interests

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Part One: The Middle East, Israel and Western Strategic Interests

Introduction

*“And in those days there was no King... everyone did as he saw fit”
(Judges 21:25)*

“I and my brother against our cousin; I, my brother and my cousin against the stranger” (Bedouin adage)

*“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Couldn’t put Humpty together again”
(English Nursery Rhyme)*

The Middle East is in the throes of a violent political and social sea change. This is not a “crisis” but the initial stages of a protracted “age of chaos” in the region. The perceived “instability” of the Middle East in the 20th century now, in hindsight, looks like a paradigm of stability. For most of the second half of that century, regimes had full control over their territory and a monopoly over military power in their territory, the leaderships were rational and deterrable (even if they occasionally erred in their rational calculations – errors that resulted in military defeats), the Islamic “genie” remained bottled, the restraining power of the United States was palpable and Israel enjoyed a strategic edge vis-à-vis any conventional threat and credible deterrence against any non-conventional (CW) threat while the risk of a nuclear arms race was subdued. The sub-conventional threat of terrorism was – by and large – manageable through a combination of indirect deterrence, denial and occasional war. The “security envelope” that derived from this reality allowed the Israeli leadership greater flexibility in negotiating relations with its neighbors (particularly vis-à-vis the Palestinians).

The “good old days” are now gone. The Arab state system has collapsed in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Somalia with potential for Lebanon and Jordan to follow suit. The refugee crisis resulting from the Syrian civil war

has also precipitated far-reaching demographic changes in Syria's neighbors that threaten their stability and even their integrity as states and has even spilled over into far-reaching implications for Western Europe. True, most of the countries of the region have withstood the wave, but they are not immune and chaos is an infectious disease.

Restoration to status quo ante is virtually impossible. Like "Humpty Dumpty" in the English nursery rhyme, the countries that have already imploded cannot be put together again. The process in the Middle East reflects a form of "political entropy." States and societies in the region, after having degraded from order to disorder and dissipated their energy, would need far greater energy – economic, military or other – to reverse the process and to restore order. The military and political energy necessary to restore borders that have been erased is far greater than the energy needed to maintain those borders. This energy is not extant within the region and would have to be "imported" from outside. However, no foreign party – including Russia – seems willing and able to invest the amount of political, economic and military capital necessary for the task.

The working assumption, therefore, should be that the new regional disorder is likely to last in various degrees of intensity for at least the next 5-10 years. Another factor that will perpetuate the disorder is the scale of suffering that the populations – particularly in Syria – have endured. The culture of revenge inherent in Middle Eastern custom will feed off almost half a million dead and a quarter of the population uprooted. Reconciliation between the Assad regime and the population of Syria is, therefore, almost impossible.

The Sunni-Shiite conflict that has escalated also feeds off numerous causes – some of them historic root causes that are not amenable to "diplomatic" solutions, such as the hostility of mainstream and certainly fundamentalist Sunni Islam towards Shiites and the hostility between Arabs and Persians. Others are linked to contemporary current events that are not likely to change, such as the Iranian control over the Shiite government in Iraq, the sense of the Sunnis in Iraq that they are disenfranchised, the Sunni-Arab fear of a nuclear Iran and of Iranian subversion and drive for hegemony in the region, and the pressures of the viscerally anti-Shiite Wahhabi and Salafi religious establishments towards Shiites.

The struggle in this new “regional disorder” will be for the foreseeable future between a number of disparate “coalitions”: the Islamic forces (the “Islamic State” (ISIS) and other parallel and successor Islamist movements), which will continue to fight among themselves for predominance, an Iranian-Russian axis with each one’s respective (or joint) proxies such as the Syrian regime and Hezbollah, but with frequently incompatible interests, and Saudi Arabia and its allies such as the Gulf States, Egypt, Jordan and other conservative regimes.

Political chaos and the decline of government can, however, evolve into static “disorder” over a long period of time. Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, China during the Warlord Era and the latter days of the Ottoman Empire had lost the control of central governments but settled into relatively fixed areas of feudal control. Somalia, parts of Afghanistan and other areas of the world today may already be lacking central government and be steeped in extreme violence. However, the “borders” between the different sources of power, as fuzzy as they may be, are not in constant flux: local powers reach the apex of their momentum, carve out their sphere of influence and maintain it with modifications over a long period of time. Thus, while there are no sufficient incentives for the different local players to merge together into a nation state, they have recognized each other as their neighbors, struggle with them and frequently reach a *modus vivendi*.

In the Middle East today, this “stability of chaos” will be absent. The map of the Fertile Crescent now shows fuzzy tribal lines and battle lines that have replaced the Sykes-Picot borders. These lines include tribes in Western Iraq with their kinsmen in Eastern Syria, and in Southern Syria with their tribal relations in northern Jordan. They represent the ever-changing vicissitudes of combat between the Syrian regime and the “Islamic State” and other opposition forces in northern Syria, they are beginning to delineate an ethnically “cleansed” Alawistan along the northern Syrian coast, they include large parts of eastern Lebanon into Syria with no border to speak of and they show a long *de facto* Kurdistan from Iraq to western Syria. The different forces are still in motion, attempting to conquer new areas; the appetite for conflict and the motivation for blood revenge are high and enough to last generations. One may liken this strategic picture to a system of dynamic archipelagos in which islands – small but dangerous for navigators – rise and disappear from the sea and are not discernable from the surface. Mapping

these waters must be a constant cooperative effort, and decisions where and when to enter them must be taken with great caution.

Therefore, the Middle East will remain a “moving target.” Areas of control and influence will fluctuate at a high pace, making the development of long-range strategic relations difficult. Forces that are today predominant may disappear tomorrow. Alliances within the region will constantly change at a pace that will make any external attempts to forge alliances with local forces problematic and temporary at best. Therefore, the classic Western approach to such regions – “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” is a dangerous principle; the enemy of your enemy of today will be your enemy’s friend tomorrow and your enemy the next day. This principle begot the shortsighted support by the West of the Mujahidin movement against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the Pakistani support of the Mujahidin and later the Taliban in Kashmir and Afghanistan and eventually gave birth to al-Qaeda and eventually ISIS.

One of the key features of the new regional disorder is the change in the role of the external powers. The role of the United States in the region has diminished both in the perception of American willingness to support its allies and in its de facto footprint in the region. While a future administration may conceivably attempt to reverse the policy of “leading from behind”, it will be difficult – if not impossible – in the short term to restore the deterrent posture that the US held in the region in the past. Meanwhile, Russia has entrenched itself as the predominant Superpower. However, whereas the American involvement was primarily directed towards maintaining stability, the Russian intervention has the opposite effect and adds fuel to the fire of radicalization, evoking memories of Afghanistan and further encouraging young Muslims to join the Jihad, thus exacerbating the spillover of the region’s conflicts to the West.

The conclusion from all the above is that the situation in the Middle East is not a “crisis” but a strategic sea change – a new status quo. Hence while there are aspects of the situation which call for short-term measures, policy must also be designed for the long haul. Much of the present situation is a result of short-term policies and erroneous assumptions: Arab regimes ceded the public space to Islamists in return for their refraining from subversion of the regime itself; thus by sowing the wind, they indeed reaped the whirlwind.

It behooves us therefore to try to look as far as possible into the future in order to identify the risks that may develop for Europe and the West from the chaos that has engulfed the Arab world and to pre-empt or contain them as best as possible.

The study is based on a series of strategic studies and high-level discussions with former senior European officials and political figures with the aim of defining the interests of Europe and the West that are influenced by events in the Middle East, the role of Israel and other Middle Eastern countries in bolstering or harming those interests, and the projection of scenarios that could impact positively or negatively on European strategic interests and security.

The Misread Map

No crystal ball was necessary to foretell that the revolutions that engulfed the Arab world since the autumn of 2010 would not yield a happy end. The branding of the events in Tunisia and Egypt as an “Arab Spring”, alluding to the “Spring of Prague” of 1968 and the fall of the “Iron Curtain” two decades before, brought many in the West to expect similar outcomes. These expectations ignored the difference between the European experience and that of the Arab world: socio-economics, levels of literacy, gender equality, the predominance of religion (Islam) and tribalism, and the absence of a secular civil society and a tradition of democracy. Hence, the revolutions of the “Arab Spring” devoured themselves in their own flames and turned into a cold winter.

Whilst this took place, the West turned a blind eye to the writing on the wall and drew optimism from local success stories such as elections in Iraq and the processes in Tunisia. But the former took place under American auspices and the latter had, before the revolution, the highest level of literacy, female participation in the workforce, western-oriented schooling (for three generations at least) and secularism. None of these factors appear in the other countries in question. The theory that “moderate Islamist” fundamentalist movements would become a remedy for Jihadi radicalism was a chimera; in the West, democracy and liberalism flourished only after politics was liberated from religion. The process of a “revolutionary” movement becoming sedentary and disengaging itself from its “radical” offshoots is usually slow

and gradual – if at all. Furthermore, the rise to power of Islamist movements on its own encourages the radical branches of the movement.

This shortsightedness derives, *inter alia*, from the post-Cold War European *Weltanschauung*: the faith that the rational interests of people will override all other “counter-rational” drives and that the world after the “end of history” proves the “Lockean” as opposed to the “Hobbesian” nature of human beings. Furthermore, any hint that the Middle East was not ready for real democracy was rejected as politically incorrect, neo-colonialist and Islamophobic. The acceptance of the narrative of Western guilt for the ails of the Arab world – indeed, for all the ails of the “Developing World” and the cult of moral relativism – made objective assessment almost impossible.

The New Regional Disorder

The Arab state system that was artificially constructed by the colonial powers after World War I is rapidly disintegrating. As a result, tribal identity has staged a dramatic resurgence since the “Arab Spring”, filling the vacuum caused by the failure of the nation state, and replacing national identity that is rapidly declining into irrelevance. The chaos that has engulfed the region has reinforced the tendency of individuals to retreat into the most nuclear levels of identification – family, clan and tribe. In the failed or dysfunctional states of the region, devolution of legitimacy from the central organs of the state to local and tribal leadership organs, proliferation of arms in the hands of local warlords (loss of the “monopoly of force” by the state), and breakdown of centralized systems of law and order and their replacement with local and tribal policing and tribal judicial systems are apparent. At the same time, tribes on the side of the border of countries are increasingly involved in support – logistic and otherwise – of their kinsmen. Even in the states that are still intact, there has been a resurgence of tribal identity. The threat to the national framework encourages the tribes to demand a higher price for their loyalty and adherence to the existing order.

The current situation in the Middle East is frequently likened to the deterioration that took place in the former Yugoslavia and the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. However, the analogy of “Balkanization” understates the developments in the Middle East. The communal frameworks

of the Balkans were not tribal; they were large enough to re-crystallize into an alternative regional state system. The role played by religion (Islam vs. Christianity) was superimposed on the national-ethnic divide and was never a prime motivator of the conflict. In the Middle East, religion (Islam/Sunni and Shiite) is a key mover of the process of disintegration. The breakdown of frameworks of identity in the majority Sunni communities is paralleled by renewal of sub-ethnic and religious identification in the minority communities in the region in search of security for those groups: Druze, Christians, Yazidis and – in the future perhaps – even Alawites.

The Syrian and Iraqi theaters are frequently treated together owing to the fact that the enemy of the West in both theaters is the same: the “Islamic State” (Da’esh). However, the complexity in each theater is different and they should be treated separately. The Iraqi theater receives far higher attention and resources owing to both operational and political reasons; access to the Iraqi theater is easier for the US owing to the relations with the Iraqi regime and, at the same time, more difficult in Syria owing to the absence of a relationship with the Syrian regime and the Russian presence in that theater. At the same time, there is a sense in the American administration that since the current situation evolved after the American withdrawal, it “owns” the Iraqi crisis in a way that it does not have responsibility for the Syrian crisis. The result has been a willingness of the United States to defer to Russia in the Syrian theater, even at the price of legitimizing Russia’s strategy of ethnic cleansing and support of the Assad regime.

The consequences of the Syrian Civil War for the West are greater than those of the war in Iraq. Syria is generating a human crisis of refugees that is destabilizing the neighboring countries and creating a refugee crisis in Europe, whereas the Iraqi war with the “Islamic State” is relatively contained within the theater of operations. Furthermore, the American-Russian “mariage de convenance” in Syria – from the Chemical Weapons agreement and up to the recent Munich Agreement – holds far more long-term damage for broader Western interests within and without the Middle East than the short-term relief it offers for the Western fear of intervention.

The Iraqi and Syrian theaters, however, will probably not remain the key focal points in the region. Other theaters may erupt into crisis and impose themselves on the international agenda. Therefore, an analysis of the Middle

East should not restrict itself to the existing areas of crisis but should also attempt to identify those of potential significance and the conditions in which they may achieve that importance.

The disintegration of states in the region has given rise to one of the largest refugee crises in the world since World War II. The short-term concerns relating to the refugees focus on three areas:

- Economic – two main countries of asylum – Jordan and Lebanon – have small populations and limited resources and the refugee presence has already become a significant burden. This burden also relates to water resources that are scarce in Jordan.
- Social stability – while most of the refugees are concentrated in the refugee camps, they have in both countries relative freedom of movement and interact with the local populations. This interaction exacerbates the sense of the latter that the refugees are consuming the local resources.
- Security – the refugees pose a security risk to all the host countries that are identified as opposed to the Syrian regime. If the Syrian regime gains confidence, it is highly likely that it will attempt to deter these countries (particularly Jordan and Turkey that are sovereign countries as opposed to Lebanon and Iraq that have little control over their territories) from supporting US and Israeli actions against the regime or allowing the Muslim Brotherhood or Saudi proxies to operate from their borders.

The US, Russia and China in the Middle East

The United States

The policy of the Obama administration in the region has resulted in a perception of American withdrawal from the region, leaving the field open for other players – mainly Russia. This perception is shared by Sunni Arabs – both moderate and radical – and by Iran and its proxies alike. However, whereas America's traditional allies (the conservative Sunni Arab states) see this development with much trepidation, Iran views it as an opportunity to enhance its status at the expense of the former.

For the remaining months of the Obama administration, its policy will continue to be based on the Obama maxim of “don’t do stupid shit.” Translated into prospects for American political and military initiatives, this means that:

- In the Syrian theater, there will be no significant escalation in the American military intervention. The administration has effectively passed on the responsibility for the fight against ISIS in this theater to Russia and will be willing to forgo the goal of toppling the Assad regime.
- The relations with Russia will be non-confrontational as long as Russia does not infringe on critical NATO interests (particularly the Baltic states).
- In Iraq, the “handover” will be to Iran. The US now recognizes Iran’s special interests in Iraq, much to the consternation of the Sunni Arab states.
- The administration will refrain from reaction to Iranian provocations such as stopping and searching American (and allied) vessels in the Gulf, Iranian missile tests and possible Iranian violations of the JCPOA. In the case of the latter, it is likely that American intelligence will refrain from intrusive intelligence collection that holds the risk of provoking a response from Iran (if discovered) and may uncover information that could force the hand of the administration.
- The administration is likely to be proactive in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and policy will be driven, to a great extent, by the personal animosity of President Obama towards Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. This will be based on initiatives to revive the negotiation process through pressure on Netanyahu’s government to accept an additional settlement freeze, perhaps including in Jerusalem. The administration is aware of the fragility of Netanyahu’s coalition and seems to hope that such pressure will result in the breakdown of the coalition, early elections and possibly the election of a leadership that will not include Netanyahu and will be more pliable to the administration.

Whoever the next incumbent of the Oval Office will be, he or she will not be able to reverse this perception within a short period of time – if at all.¹ This can only be achieved by massive influx of American military clout into

¹ See Shmuel Bar, “The Abdication of America, Friends of Israel Initiative, Paper no. 2, September 14, 2010; America’s Fading Middle East Influence, Policy Review, April-May 2011, pp. 41-52

the region, investment in support of the opposition to the Assad regime and willingness to confront all of the rising claimants to hegemony in the region: Russia, Iran and Turkey. Diplomatic statements of displeasure vis-à-vis Russian bombing of civilians or Iranian subversion in the Gulf will not convince America's allies in the region that the new administration has reversed the policy of its predecessor. The conventional wisdom in the region is that nothing short of a trauma along the lines of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 would draw the United States back into military intervention in the region.

Russia

The Russian intervention in Syria cannot be understood without reference to Russian grand strategy in other theaters and Russia's relative strengths and weaknesses. The Russian game plan involves accruing strategic assets in areas with high sensitivity to the West as leverage in the relations with the West in theaters that are important to Russia. While Russia projects an image of strength and willingness to ignore international public opinion, this image conflicts sharply with Russia's structural economic and social weakness. In the interaction between the West and Russia, however, the "card" of Russia's weaknesses is not played to the full by the former.

In Syria, the Russian game plan remains to consolidate "Useful Syria" – that part of western Syria (Alawistan) that will provide Russia with: a strategic port in the Mediterranean in proximity to gas resources that may become important for Europe; continued leverage over the Syrian-Lebanese-Iraqi theaters; legitimacy as the party that is fighting the "Islamic State" and therefore is saving the West from the "boots on the ground" scenario that all American presidential hopefuls are promising to avoid; the only legitimate point of contact with the Syrian regime that can allow or prevent massacres in Syria; and a presence south of NATO (Turkey). All these assets serve Russia's direct interests in the Middle East but also can be leveraged in turn with the West for concessions in the Russian "near abroad" and the former Soviet bloc (Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic states and even the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland).

The Russian announcement of withdrawal of part of the military forces from Syria reflected the fact that Russia had achieved its original goals and more:

saving the Syrian regime from collapse that seemed imminent before the intervention; preventing the images of a debacle of a Russian armed and trained military; strengthening Moscow's position as the key player in the Middle East and positioning itself as the only party that could "deliver" the Assad regime in a future deal with the Sunni Arabs. Russia had not only saved the Assad regime but also even enabled it to recover some of its lost territory, and it had created a base in Syrian "Alawistan" to which it can revert if and when the situation warrants it. Since Russia's goal was never to defeat and dismantle the Islamic State and Moscow is acutely aware of the need not to get embroiled in a war and a theater that would remind the Russian populace of the financial and human cost of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, particularly on the eve of the November 2016 elections to the Duma, cutting back its presence to a minimum allows Moscow to regulate its involvement and clarifies that the onus of defeating the "Islamic State" is not on Russia. The downscaling of the forces in the field, therefore, does not imply a change in Russia's key goals in Syria. The conflict in Syria, therefore, will continue, albeit at lower intensity levels than in the last few months, with no decisive victories. Notwithstanding, while an agreed settlement based on federalism or partition is therefore unfeasible, partition is already taking place de facto. Meanwhile, the scenario of Russia deploying military forces to Iraq is becoming more likely. In such a scenario, Russia may attempt to leverage its contribution against the "Islamic State" in Iraq in order to extract concessions from the West. Deployment in Iraq would then accord Russia a military presence on the Persian Gulf as well as on the Eastern Mediterranean. GCC states, which no longer consider the US as their reliable protector, might then turn to Russia to guarantee their security, given her influence on Iran. Russia will become the most influential foreign power in the region, unseating the US, for the first time since World War II. Warmer ties between Russia and Saudi Arabia in this context could have an impact on the oil market, if they reach agreement on oil prices.

China

China is the largest importer of crude from both Saudi Arabia and Iran and is heavily dependent on their oil supplies. Any oil supply disruption would be harmful to China's economy. China's emphasis in all its dealings with the region is on economic cooperation, development and stability. At the

same time, China presents itself as above the “Great Game” of the region in order to facilitate its relations with all sides: the Saudi-Egyptian-Gulf State alliance on one hand and the Iranian-Shiite side on the other hand. Hence the Chinese declarations that China does not “seek proxies, to fill a power vacuum or hegemony in the region” and “non-intervention and opposition to interference in the affairs of other countries.” The Leitmotif of China’s economic vision for the region is the integration of the Middle Eastern partners (i.e. the Arabs in general and Iran) into China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” of developing advanced rail and sea trade links to Europe, and that runs through the Middle East.²

There is no expectation in the region that China is going to play the “Big Power” card in the region, since it would force it to take sides in this conflict; this would be out of style for China. However, senior Chinese analysts have indicated that China still views the Arab world as holding greater strategic importance for Beijing than Iran, if only because of China’s energy needs. Saudi Arabia and the other Arab states will attempt to convince China to refrain from demonstrations of rapprochement with Iran and to support the Arab positions vis-à-vis Iranian provocations in the Gulf, Syria and Yemen. While China may show a slight implicit leaning towards the Arab position on these issues, it is not likely to take an unambiguous anti-Iranian/pro-Arab position in the near future.

The Israeli Factor

Israel is both an integral part of the Middle East and an external actor. In a region afflicted by the pandemic of chaos and disintegration, Israel is immune. On the other hand, Israel is facing the breakdown of the “security envelope” that it enjoyed for decades – the stability of peace with a stable regime in Egypt, a robust security relationship with a stable Jordan, and a stable deterrent relationship with Damascus. Terrorist attacks from the Syrian and/or Jordanian borders may return Israel to the paradigm of the 1950s and early 1960s: cross-border retaliatory and pre-emptive military operations against terrorist targets, in the absence of a viable state on the

² *The Belt and Road Initiative (or One Belt, One Road – OBOR) was announced by China in 2013 and comprises two “belts” of multi-lateral economic cooperation: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the “Maritime Silk Road” (MSR). It is a development strategy and framework proposed by China that focuses on connectivity and cooperation among countries primarily in Eurasia. The strategy deals mainly with the need to export China’s production capacity in areas of overproduction, such as steel manufacturing.*

other side. On the other hand, the new map of the Middle East may offer an opportunity to enhance relationships with emerging communities in the region on the basis of common sense of threat from the Jihadi-Salafi wave. The new unstable environment will make concessions on security – or subcontracting security interests to others – in the framework of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement more difficult. In the absence of strong leadership on both sides, the prospects for a settlement remain low.

Israel's relations with Europe have been colored for decades (at least since the 1967 "Six Day War") by the geopolitics of oil that dictated European bowing to pressures by the Arab oil producers, domestic pressures in certain European countries with high percentages of Muslim immigrant populations and an inherent "post-colonial guilt syndrome" that has afflicted many of the European intellectual and political elites. This latter accepts the narrative that the ills of the "Third World" (poverty, dictatorships, ethnic cleansing, wars, governmental incompetence, avaricious leaders and failing regimes) are all the product of the "sins" of Western colonialism. In this context, Israel – as part of the West inside the Middle East – has become viewed by many in the European (and left-wing American) elites as one of those Western "sins" that have caused suffering to the Palestinians and must be amended.

This narrative gave birth, inter alia, to one of the most prevalent conventional wisdoms of the West vis-à-vis the region: the belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the heart of the instability of the region. European politics has dictated that the Palestinian problem receives far more political attention than any other international issue and, consequently, the Palestinians are the world's largest per capita recipients of foreign aid.³ The belief that taking a hard ("even handed") line towards Israel and expression of tolerance towards Palestinian incitement, support of terrorism and rejection of compromise while castigating Israel's settlement policies and perceived intransigence would endear the European governments to the Muslims of the region and contribute to the domestic stability in Western Europe has been proven groundless.

One of the lessons of the last half-decade is that these conventional wisdoms were patently erroneous in the past and have been proven baseless today. The

³ *The biennial budget of UNRWA to service three generations of Palestinian refugees (not only those who left Palestine in 1948, estimated at about 30,000 people, but all their linear descendants) is at least \$1 billion, not including direct US and EU aid not channeled through UNRWA. To compare, the entire budget of UNHCR that deals with all non-Palestinian refugees (estimated as 70 million, including displaced persons within their own country) is \$3 billion.*

key sources of instability and violence in the region are totally disconnected from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Islamic State” terrorists do not behead Yazidis in Iraq and Copts in Libya because of the Israeli-Palestinian impasse, nor were Israeli settlements in the West Bank the cause of the massacre of a quarter of million Syrians by the Assad regime or of the disintegration of Libya and Yemen. European policies based on the above conventional wisdom have damaged European interests insofar as they have eroded the trust between Israel and the EU and prevented the EU from taking full advantage of Israel’s strategic resources in the region. The evolving situation underlines the strategic role of Israel in containing the risks deriving from the chaos in the region. This role stems from Israel’s geo-strategic location, political and cultural orientation to the West, domestic makeup, technological capabilities and the prowess of its military and Intelligence Community.

In the past, Israel’s geographical location has been incidental to the key interests of the West in the Middle East that lay, for the most part, in the energy security of the Persian Gulf. The civil wars in Syria and Iraq, the appearance on the scene of the “Islamic State” and the refugee crisis have changed the focus of Western interests in the region. While ISIS does not directly threaten Israel at this stage, its further expansion poses an imminent threat to Israel. In the struggle for predominance with al-Qaeda, ISIS will attempt to prove its mettle by attacking Israeli targets and drawing Israel into the conflict inside Syria. Its success has also already led to a number of cases of Israeli Arab citizens infiltrating themselves into Syria in order to join ISIS. Therefore, Israel has an interest in reducing the ability of ISIS to radicalize Israeli Arabs. Another threat to Israel from ISIS lies in the recruitment of Palestinians to the ISIS terrorist camp; whereas Israel can – and does – deter both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas from certain types of terrorist attacks, ISIS recruits in the Palestinian areas cannot be deterred in the same way and are less vulnerable to disruption.

Israel straddles the front line of the struggle against ISIS in Syria and is a key partner in protecting the stability of Jordan. A third front that will become no less critical is that of the Eastern Mediterranean; the possibility that Lebanon will collapse under the weight of Syrian refugees and possible success of ISIS in reaching the sea in northern Lebanon raises serious questions regarding security in the Mediterranean.

Israel's domestic make-up also makes it a linchpin for Western interests in the region. Israel is, arguably, the only remaining pro-Western and stable country in the region that does not have any domestic (Islamic and nationalistic) constraints in providing support to Western actions against Islamic terrorism. This should highlight the aspects of intelligence cooperation as a force multiplier, logistic support for contingency operations, deterrence, naval and land operations, energy security, etc. A strategy of containing the chaos of the region – whether it go by the name of ISIS or some other Jihadi-oriented movement – must be based on strong military and intelligence allies surrounding the areas of the enemy.

The European interest should be in promoting open cooperation between the countries that share interests (Israel and the conservative or moderate Arab states). Israeli-European relations – and during the Obama administration Israeli-American relations – have been hostage to the status of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. However, the challenges of the region should change this focus. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is indeed worthy of solution. This conflict is not likely to be solved in the near future. The regional political map that encouraged negotiations in the past is no longer. The political situation in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority is far less conducive to concessions by either side than in the past and the leaderships are far weaker and chained to more hardline political partners.

The Challenge of Islamist Terrorism – Da'esh and Beyond

Arguably the most immediate consequence of the situation in the Middle East is the growing threat of terrorism against Western interests in the region and outside. The ability of Western security organizations to provide sufficient protection to their citizens and business entities in the region or even to official representations is limited. As the chaos in the region grows, and attacks on Western targets increase, there will be a reduction in the official and unofficial presence of the West in these countries. Necessary Western presence will take the form of the American presence in Saudi Arabia – large extra-territorial guarded areas.

The spillover into Europe will exacerbate further as waves of refugees fleeing

from massacres and state collapse and lacking asylum behind the closed doors of the still-functional Arab states will knock on the doors of Europe. The “Islamic State” has succeeded in leveraging the Sunni-Shiite conflict to its advantage and is viewed by many Sunnis as the champions of the Sunnis against the impending Shiite threat. A conservative assessment of the number of foreign fighters from the West stands at about 5,000-7,000. Many of them are already returning imbued with a mission of Jihad in their home countries. More importantly, they enjoy a sufficient degree of social and religious support in the Muslim communities in the West to enable them to operate freely and to avoid security surveillance. Public opinion polls among Muslims in the Muslim world and the West show a high level of sympathy for the “Islamic State”, or at least an unwillingness to join the Western chorus of declaring it “un-Islamic.” The American, Russian, French and British intervention will galvanize the “Islamic State” and other loosely affiliated Jihadi elements to attempt to perpetrate further attacks in those countries.

The attacks in Paris and Brussels and the uncovering of additional terrorist plots in France reflect the extent to which the Middle East has already infiltrated Europe and the scope of the terrorist threat that is already in place on the continent. The attackers were ideologically affiliated with the “Islamic State”; however, there is no evidence of – nor any need for – a central command and control over the operations. The ISIS recruitment and propaganda machine only needs to inspire its supporters and does not need to identify operational objectives, targets, or timeframes. These attacks are seen not only as “punishment” of the West for its intervention in the Muslim world, but also as containing intrinsic value as representing the constant jihad against the “infidel” world (“*Dar al-Harb*”) and as means to recruit young Muslims in the West to the cause.

The definition that is rife in Western media of “lone wolf attacks” does not do justice to the phenomenon. These attacks are not perpetrated by “lone wolves” (i.e. individuals who have been separated from the pack and act on their own) but by small groups that operate on the assumption that they are the proverbial “revolutionary fish in the sea” and that, as such, they enjoy at least tacit endorsement by the silent Muslim communities in which they live. In this context, the mantra that has been self-imposed in the US and Europe, according to which “this (i.e. terrorism by Muslims who “claim” that they are

motivated by Islam) has nothing to do with Islam”, will preclude attempts to understand and hence to defeat the phenomenon.

The struggle against Islamist terrorism calls for a transformation of intelligence collection and analysis, international cooperation and legal standards. Command and Control of these operations, however, is not dependent on international communications, and hence international SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) collaboration – the “forte” of Western intelligence – is less effective. Effective collection on such a threat is possible only through broad nets of local HUMINT (Human Intelligence), penetration into communities and Legal Interception. These activities are highly regulated today by the European legal system, and no strategic change in the European legal system can be effected in a short time frame. Therefore, a gradual divergence between the members of the EU is likely, with each country adopting counterterrorism measures and legal adaptations in accordance with its particular threat estimate. This divergence will encumber European counterterrorism collaboration, and certainly will complicate formulation of a unified NATO policy towards the threat.

Future attacks – like those in Paris and Brussels – will probably be linked to a number of countries: countries of origin of the terrorists, points of access, countries of supply of arms, recruitment centers, etc. This “Pan-European” characteristic of the terrorist threat will have two effects: a demand for broader collaboration in intelligence and disruption; and a demand for tighter local controls at the expense of the EU structure and open borders. These two demands will be often contradictory: broader intelligence collaboration implies loosening restrictions on release of personal information, monitoring social media (including restricted Facebook pages), government-sanctioned “hacking” into telephones of suspects (an issue that has come to light recently in the case of the iPhone of the San Bernardino terrorist) and – more importantly – allowing such information that is procured by one intelligence agency in the courts of law of another country. This calls for a broad review of the European legal system – a review that will not take place in the timeframe necessary to meet the threat.

Further attacks are to be expected. The primary targets for such attacks will remain capital cities such as Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Rome and London. Mass transportation (railway stations, metro systems and airports) will be high

on the target list along with symbolic cultural and religious targets. ISIS and Jihadist elements will probably generate false intelligence regarding threats in order to precipitate such alerts and their disruptive aftermath and to eventually to create a sense of false security. In this context, France, Belgium and the UK will remain the prime targets owing to their roles in the Middle East, the large Muslim – and particularly Arab – populations, the level of radicalism of these populations and the media effects of such attacks. Rome will also be a prime target for religious-ideological reasons – the perception of Rome as the historic capital of “Christendom” and the Pope as the “Commander of the Crusaders.” The areas under Jihadi-Salafi control will remain a magnet for foreign Jihadists who, as they return to their countries of origin with the ideology, training and motivation that they acquire, will be highly motivated to launch such attacks.

Alongside the counterterrorism efforts inside the West, the struggle against Islamist terrorism has focused on a military war against the “Islamic State” that is waged primarily in Iraq and Syria, with minor theaters of combat in Africa against Boko Haram, the Philippines and Afghanistan (still against the Taliban and “old” al-Qaeda). The strategy of “leading from behind” relies on the presence of the Sunni Arab states and Turkey to put themselves in the front line against ISIS. However, all these countries are subject to domestic Islamist pressures against collaboration with “infidels” against Muslims – even if they are “misguided” and terrorist. The belief that Iran can be a reliable ally in the struggle against Sunni Islamist terrorism (or at least against ISIS) does not hold water. Iran has an interest in maintaining its hold over Syria and Iraq, but not in defeating the “Islamic State”, and certainly not at the price of sacrificing large numbers of Iranian troops. Furthermore, co-opting Iran into the “coalition” would only exacerbate the perception of Western and Russian support of Iran as a regional hegemon and fan the flames of support of the “Islamic State.”

However, the more important – and neglected – front is the ideological front. This front is ill defined, nebulous and hampered by self-imposed constraints of political expediency (not to say political correctness) that make any significant movement on this front all but impossible. The ideological Weltanschauung behind the declaration of a modern-day Caliphate is far more confrontational, outward looking and violence

prone than any previous experiment at founding an Islamic regime. The idea of the Caliphate conjures up an autocratic theocratic regime; physical unification of all parts of “*dar al-islam*” under its sway; the unacceptability of Muslim religious pluralism within the Caliphate; extermination of non-Sunni Muslims and the demotion of the “tolerated religions” (Judaism and Christianity) to status of “dhimmis”, waging of “offensive jihad” and the duty to obtain all types of weapons including nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. This Weltanschauung eschews the nation state, which it sees as a construct of the infidels for disintegrating the Muslim Ummah. It precludes a “Westphalian” regional or world order. Therefore, the belief of some Western pundits that a state entity based on such an ideology may be tamed and brought into some sort of a regional order is a chimera.

The disintegration of the Arab state system and the rise of the “Islamic State” has spawned an “archipelagos” of “Jihadistans” in the region and in other Muslim countries in Asia and Africa. The most advanced of them is the “Islamic State” in Syria and Iraq with its self-declared “provinces” in Sinai, Mali, Indonesia and other places. However, the Taliban “Jihadistan” in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the al-Qaeda enclaves in Syria and the Boko Haram movement in North-West Africa are also of concern.

Western interests in all these “Jihadistans” are not equal. The “damage factor” of each such entity will be a function of its geography, its ethnicity (including culture, collective mores and memes), its leadership and command and control, its motivation and ability to strike at “the far enemy”, its vulnerability to kinetic and soft countermeasures, its relations with neighboring entities (Muslim and other) and its stability.

The geographic variable is the key element in determining the “Capability” factor in assessing the risk posed by a Jihadi entity (since the ideological or “intentions” factor may be assumed). The elements of the geographical variable will include:

- The connectivity of the territory of the Jihadistan to the outside world, including to centers of Jihadi movements such as Syria and Iraq;
- The “spillover factor” of the instability of the “Jihadistan” for its neighbors and for the international community;

- The capabilities of the state that the “Jihadistan” inherits in terms of technology, IT and communication infrastructure, financial means, military ordnance, missiles, nuclear and other WMD capabilities;
- The neighboring countries’ levels of border security, regimes, connectivity and access to international transportation (sea, air, land) and to the international financial system;
- The existence of large neighboring Muslim populations or ethnically related populations that can be leveraged by the “Jihadistan.”
- The strength of the Jihadi element in the theater in contrast with the other forces – local, tribal and government – and the feasibility of collaboration with these forces to contain the Jihadi potential for harming Western interests.
- The level of disintegration of the country in which the “Jihadistan” is evolving and the political-strategic orientation of that regime. Syria is a case in point of a country which has totally disintegrated, and in which victory of the regime may not necessarily serve the long-term interests of the West.

From this point of view the Jihadistans of the Middle East and North Africa will remain those with the highest “damage factor.” The Syrian refugee crisis demonstrates that collapse of states with access to the Mediterranean can easily generate new waves of refugees into Southern Europe. Therefore, a North African Jihadistan would probably give birth to a problem far greater than the current crisis; many North Africans (Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians) have relatives in Europe and would be encouraged by them to flee their collapsing countries, and the logistics of the journey would be far simpler than the situation that Syrian refugees face.

The “damage factor” inherent in formation of “Jihadistans” in the Middle East, however, may be overshadowed by that of the fall of Pakistan to a Jihadi regime. The presence of nuclear weapons in Pakistan and of a mortal enemy – “polytheist” India on its borders – would make such a scenario far more dangerous than any other.

On the face of it, Islamist nationalism is an oxymoron. Radical Islamism in its purest form is vehemently opposed to nationalism. The latter is perceived as a form of idolatry, placing the allegiance to the “nation” (which may include non-Muslims) above the loyalty to the Muslim Ummah. Nevertheless, a distinction may be made between national movements that adopt Islamic

narratives and latch on to global Islamist movements (“Islamist Nationalist movements”) and those Islamist movements that “convert” local national movements into local branches, “franchises” or even “provinces” (in the case of the IS of a transnational Islamist movement or entity. This taxonomy is critical for measuring the “damage factor”, as described above, of these entities. The former are less likely to externalize their struggle and to target Western countries or to act outside the territory of their own countries. The latter, on the other hand, will be more likely to become subcontractors of global Jihadi entities and to serve as force multipliers of those entities.

The New Middle Eastern “Völkerwanderung”

The most apparent and immanent spillover of the Middle East into Europe is the refugee crisis. The new “Völkerwanderung”, which has engulfed the Middle East and drawn Europe into it, may have begun with the Syrian Civil War, but it has now taken on a life of its own. Vast numbers of people in the region – and in other parts of the world such as Africa and Afghanistan – are intuitively aware that order will not be restored in their homelands in the foreseeable future or even in their lifetimes (which may be very short owing to the levels of violence in those countries) and, like many waves of migration before them, they are in quest of safe havens. The level of trust in the region vis-à-vis political settlements and externally brokered ceasefires is very low, and these will not have much of an impact on the dynamics (or “stychia”⁴ in Marxist terminology) of the migration phenomenon. The “bandwagoning” of non-Syrian refugees on the wave of Syrian migration will therefore continue to complicate any effort to reduce the problem.

The main drivers of growing immigration from the Middle East to Europe are collapse of states and decline of governance, even where states still exist formally, and ethnic and sectarian struggles for turf and resources. However, not only the political developments are driving the problem: drought and desertification that affect large parts of the Middle East are creating food shortages and population movements. A number of theaters may contribute to exacerbation of this crisis:

⁴ From the Greek for “natural spontaneity”.

- Syria – reoccupation by the regime, with the help of Russia, of large tracts of Sunni-populated territory in the North (Idlib and Aleppo) and South (Dara’a region) would probably result in ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Sunnis who would flee to Jordan and to Turkey and from Turkey to Europe.
- Kurdistan – the political and economic malaise of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq already has brought Kurdish youth to emigrate. Deterioration of the political situation in Iraqi Kurdistan may result in Kurdish civil war that will trigger mass migration of Kurds and also weaken the anti-ISIS coalition that relies heavily on the Iraqi Kurds. Declaration of Kurdish independence may also result in Iraqi Shiite attacks on Kurdistan. Without clear Western (American) support, defeat of the Kurds could trigger mass Kurdish migration both from Kurdistan and of Kurds living in Baghdad who may be targeted.
- North Africa – Libya will continue to contribute its share to the refugee crisis both from its own territory and from sub-Saharan Africa. Algeria may also descend into chaos, resulting in an even more severe refugee crisis that would be directed mainly to France.
- Egypt is facing growing water supply problems, lacks the means to import staples like wheat, and by 2025 will not have the water needed to produce enough food to feed its growing population. More Egyptians may join the immigrants coming to Europe.

Even after the waves of refugees scale down, the implications for Europe’s domestic theater will only be beginning. The atmosphere in Europe is not conducive to “burden sharing” of the refugees in a way that would disperse them across Europe and preclude concentrations of disgruntled, monocultural non-absorbed migrants in the host countries. Aside from the economic burden that the refugees will pose to the host countries, the options for their economic and social integration in the areas where they will be camped and for their freedom of movement represent a devil’s choice. Option A would be to allow integration into the local economies, which would have a severe impact on employment and wages in those areas with likely blowback in terms of hostility towards the migrants. Option B would be to keep them out of the economy and in camps, which would breed hostility towards the

host countries that will make the migrants easy prey for radical recruitment. In the “integration option (B)”, the interaction with local European Muslim communities of refugees from highly radicalized countries and a high degree of hostility towards those who caused their distress will also exacerbate the already radicalized elements in Europe’s existing Muslim communities.

The second order consequence of the refugee problem concerns the political map of Europe. This should be looked at from two main angles: the effects on the integrity, structure and very idea of the European Union and Schengen; and the internal political maps within the countries most affected by the refugee problem. On the former level, the closing of land borders and rethinking of the Schengen arrangement is already happening. This can only be reversed if the initial host countries guarantee that the refugees remain in their territory. If not, we will witness a degrading of the freedom of passage of persons inside the European Union that was the hallmark of the EU for two decades.

Nuclear Proliferation

The nuclear agreement with Iran has not removed the potential of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, but rather placed it in a waiting position. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and even Turkey are now pondering the future of their nuclear programs. Saudi Arabia would probably be the first country to acquire a military nuclear capability through its ties with Pakistan whose nuclear Program Riyadh funded and with whom it has close strategic ties. The potential for deployment of Pakistani nuclear weapons in Saudi Arabia as “extended deterrence” would have a strategic spillover effect on South Asia; for the first time, Pakistan would have a nuclear deployment out of the reach of India’s nuclear weapons and consequently have a “second strike” capability – a development that could undermine stability in the Indian subcontinent.

Others point at substantial differences between the Cold War and the type of nuclear Middle East that may evolve. According to this viewpoint, all of these stabilizing characteristics of the Cold War strategic balance that saved the world from a nuclear war are absent in the Middle East:

- MAD – was based not on small nuclear arsenals in the hands of several countries but large stockpiles in two nations (or two alliances) that really

did assure mutual destruction. The first years of the Cold War, before the two Superpowers developed the capabilities for mutual destruction and the command and control mechanism to prevent such a catastrophe, were the most dangerous and held the highest risk of both nuclear war and local conflicts under the “umbrella” of nuclear deterrence.

- The Cold War was in essence a bilateral struggle between American and Soviet blocs, which simplified the signaling of intentions and prevention of misunderstandings. A nuclear Iran will lead to a “poly-nuclear” Middle East in which the potential for nuclear error will be greatly increased. Nuclear posturing by one party will not be interpreted only by the party it was intended for but by all other parties. Regimes in the Middle East have shown a much higher predilection for brinkmanship than the US and the USSR ever did.
- Both sides to the Cold War were governed by elite decision-making groups with much in common; a centralist executive system and a clear preference (in the case of the Soviet Union, even an ideological preference) for “rational” and “pragmatic” decision making. Public discussion of nuclear weapons in the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War tended to be restricted to experts, so policymakers could develop rational strategies with little public pressure to take a more belligerent position. It is argued that never did crowds in Washington or Moscow demonstrate – as they have in Pakistan – with models of nuclear bombs and calls to use them against historic enemies. Religious and nationalistic fervor have led Arab countries to countless military debacles. There are no grounds to argue that the possession of nuclear weapons will change these patterns of behavior.
- Cold War parties did not have to deal with apocalyptic or suicidal traditions or with the centrality of honor as it is manifested in the Middle East. Eminent scholar of Middle Eastern culture and politics Prof. Bernard Lewis has argued that presenting a threat of destruction to a leader or leadership group which fervently believes in the imminence of the apocalypse would not be a threat but a promise. Muslim belief in the appearance of a Mahdi who will fight on the side of Allah’s soldiers and protect them heightens the risk. Other scholars – while they do not go as far as imputing suicidal apocalyptic goals to these leaders – argue that

their very posturing as believing in such a development or in claiming divine protection from any devastating reprisal from the enemy holds potential for escalation which can get out of control.

- Regimes in the Middle East are notoriously weak and fragmented, with strategic decisions taken for internal political reasons. Elements of regimes tend to latch on to the “strategic issues” confronting those countries as levers for enhancing their clout within the regime. This tendency, if translated into multiple parties involved in nuclear programs – or even in nuclear command and control – would make command and control in the hair-trigger situations that nuclear conflicts can create more difficult than was ever experienced during the Cold War.
- The Cold War did not have at its core an age-old enmity such as the Sunni-Shiite and Arab-Iranian conflict. An Iranian bomb would be perceived in the Sunni Arab world as an Iranian (i.e. anti-Arab) and Shiite (i.e. anti-Sunni) capability.

A nuclear Middle East would not look like a rerun of the Cold War. We should expect that a nuclear Iran will move to assert its dominance in the waters that it likes to remind all is the “Persian Gulf” and to gain hegemony over the Gulf, including dictating oil production levels. Even before the present economic crisis, Iran’s economy was in shambles; the decline in oil prices has exacerbated the situation and Iran will probably attempt to intimidate its neighbors in order to raise prices. Iran will also assert itself in the heart of the Middle East by using terror with impunity. These and the very potential of a nuclear confrontation in the region should bring the Western world to the conclusion that the best option remains prevention at all costs.

Identity Politics in Europe

The spillover of the Middle East into Europe has resulted in exacerbation of civilizational, cultural and social fault lines between new immigrants from the Middle East and even second-generation Muslim citizens and the “original” Europeans. Such a trend can result in growth of Islamist radicalism and extremism and a parallel growth of anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe, extreme right-wing attacks on Muslims and demands for the right to possess firearms and a consequent cycle of extremism and violence. In addition to Islamist

terrorism, Turkey's war with the PKK may spill over into attacks by Kurds in Europe against Turkish government interests and pro-government Turks.

Europe has applied various paradigms for absorption/integration of non-Europeans into the social and political fabrics of the EU countries. The distinction between the paradigms is critical for understanding the current problem: the "absorption" paradigm is based on individuals adopting the language, customs, values and modes of behavior of the host society, leaving only the features of physiognomy and personal history to distinguish between them and "native" Europeans. The key proponent of this paradigm in Europe is France, but it is mainly identified with the American "melting pot" and the Israeli concept of "immigration absorption" (which, owing to the ideological drive in the early days of Israel, included name changes, conscious abandonment of former languages and adopting Hebrew as the language of the home). The "integration" paradigm, on the other hand, addresses "communities" and has been tried in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. In both paradigms, the proponents believed that the second generation would be "absorbed" in to the local culture, so that the existence of subcultures would be a generational issue. In some cases, such as East Asians, this has by and large succeeded. In the case of Muslims, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa, both integration and absorption have not been crowned with success.

The influx of millions of asylum seekers during a short period of time poses a threat to the very concept of European identity. The reality of large mono-ethnic communities in a host country precludes integration into that country and, moreover, alienates those individuals from the surrounding society and fosters xenophobia in that society. The addition of the ingredients of terrorism and social violence (organized sexual harassment, for example) exacerbates the xenophobia.

In Europe, there should be a program for blocking the influence of the "Islamic State" among Muslims in Europe. Counter-radicalization efforts have been severely handicapped by political correctness and an ideologically motivated denial of the religious/Islamic sources of Islamist terrorism. A practical approach to countering Islamic terrorism (or terrorism by Muslims performed by them in the name of Islam) must accept that the real motivation

is Islam, as those terrorists perceive it. A war must be fought with the weapons of the dimension where the war takes place; a naval battle is fought with ships, a land battle with tanks and infantry, and a religious war must employ the weapons of religion. This calls for developing an Islamic-specific “toolbox” for countering Islamic radicalism within Muslim communities in the West and building programs for “Human Influence Operations” against radical groups in order to disorient them and to discredit their leaderships, and drawing a clear “line in the sand” between legitimate religious beliefs and those which will not be countenanced, notwithstanding their valid roots in religious doctrines.

Conclusions

The breakdown of the nation state in the Middle East has precipitated a regression to the fundamental tribal identity as the key frame of reference. The breakdown of borders and weakening or even dissolution of central regimes have brought the tribal common interests to the fore. These tribal relationships will coalesce, making old borders more and more irrelevant. The process of disintegration will follow traditional geographic, tribal and sectarian fault lines within the country and in others redrawing of the maps. Some states will break up formally. In other cases, state disintegration will not necessarily result in formal dissolution of the states, but in the weakening of central government to the point that it becomes merely a formal source of authority, with true authority delegated to or seized by local powers.

Many parts of the region will gradually evolve as opaque non-governed regions that spawn terrorism and export their instability to the West. The defining features of state disintegration – already a *fait accompli* in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen and Libya – are loss of control by the central government; absence of any unified and predominant alternative to the former or weakened incumbent regime; devolution of legitimacy from the central organs of the state to local and tribal leadership organs; loss of the “monopoly of force” by the state; and breakdown of centralized systems of law and order and their replacement with local and tribal policing and tribal judicial systems.

The ethnic, tribal, religious and sectarian identities will determine the alignment of the different actors in crisis situations and the degree of their

amenability to cooperation with external actors. In this context, the Sunni-Shiite dichotomy is the most prominent. The chances of the Sunni-Shiite conflict losing its prominence are slim as it feeds off the continuing civil strife in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon. This dichotomy will determine enmity and alliances within the region and with external forces that will be judged by their support of one or another side with little room for neutrality. The narrative of these forces is in the process of evolution into a zero-sum game that leaves little room for de-escalation. Massacres and “ethnic cleansing” will be commonplace.

Along with the tribal frameworks, Islam as manifested in Islamist movements will be the most powerful force in this new regional disorder. These movements will compete among themselves for predominance in all areas – religious-ideological, economic, military and terrorist attacks against their perceived enemies – the failed regimes, Israel, the pro-Western conservative Arab states and the West. They will also escalate their efforts to acquire advanced weapons, chemical weapons and cyber capabilities and to use them against those enemies.

The current efforts to “degrade” the “Islamic State” by limited military force or to delegitimize it by declaring it “not Islamic” are not likely to bear fruit in the near future. The main theaters that may give rise to branches of the “Islamic State” or alternate “Caliphates” include the other countries of “al-Sham” – Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, North Africa; Western Africa; Egypt; Pakistan; Afghanistan; Bangladesh; the Philippines/Mindanao and Central Asia. The potential in each of these theaters differs according to the level of regime control or chaos in each respective country, the political dynamics of the homegrown Islamist movements, ease of movement to the Iraqi-Syrian theater and checks and balances of local Islamic ideology. The potential for cooperation between Jihadists in different theaters will be greater than that which existed between like-minded movements with different leaderships and natural suspicion of outsiders.

Parts of the region that will fall under the rule of Jihadi-Salafi elements will be a magnet for foreign Jihadists. This phenomenon will eventually spill over into the countries of origin of these foreign fighters as they return with the ideology, training and motivation that they acquire. Counterterrorism strategy will be complicated by the multiplicity of terrorist groups and the

weakness of neighboring states that could play a role in monitoring and countering terrorism.

The presence of international actors in the region will change. The perception of the absence of the United States as a stabilizing force and the enhanced projection of power by Russia will handicap US partnerships in the region. There will be a linkage – though not necessarily declared – between issues in the region where Russia and China have leverage and issues in dispute between the US and Russia in other theaters. China and other Asian countries may increasingly intervene in the region, challenging fading US hegemony, to secure their share of desperately needed imports from the region.

American and allied forces are already engaged in an effort to “degrade, dismantle and destroy” the “Islamic State”, with little strategic success. This has even enhanced its status in the eyes of its supporters as a Muslim entity that stands up to the military might of the “infidel” Superpowers. The intervention by Russia adds fuel to the fire of radicalization, evoking memories of Afghanistan and further encouraging young Muslims to join the Jihad. During the near future, this engagement will raise strategic questions regarding escalation of the engagement, fallout of events as the result of the engagement, the interaction with regional forces (Saudi, the Assad regime, the Iraqi regime, Iran, etc.) and non-regional forces (Russia at this stage), and the strategy of conflict vis-à-vis ISIS – degradation, containment, full destruction. Europe will find itself drawn into the conflict owing to massacres, ethnic “cleansing” and other atrocities.

Islamist terrorism in the West will escalate and become a staple feature of life in Western Europe. This will be the result of local Muslims adhering to the ideology of the “Islamic State” and the implications of such exacerbation for the security paradigm of Europe, security collaboration, legal structures and inter-community relations (including the already apparent boost to the far right in Europe as a result of the sense of threat). The chances of a massive terrorist attack in Europe or the US linked to an entity in the region are high. The areas under Jihadi-Salafi control will become a magnet for foreign Jihadists who, as they return to their countries of origin with the ideology, training and motivation that they acquire, will be highly motivated to launch such attacks.

The disintegration of states in the Middle East and the Arab-Sunni-Iranian-Shiite conflict will also impact on maritime security in the Mediterranean. Gas resources will be prime targets; in addition to the motivation of the “Islamic State” to attack these targets, Russian proxies will have an interest in raising the risk factor of production of gas in the Mediterranean as a “European” alternative to Russian gas. We may also expect escalation of piracy such as that which has developed along the coast of Libya and Somalia both in the Mediterranean and through the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

The Sunni-Shiite will continue to feed off the continuing civil strife in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Communal and sectarian identity will determine enmity and alliances within the region. External forces (e.g. the US and the West and even Israel) will be judged by their perceived support of one or another side and, for the time being, in the light of the American policy vis-à-vis Syria, Iraq and Iran; the conventional wisdom in the region is that the US has adopted a pro-Shiite pro-Iranian stance. Massacres and “ethnic cleansing” will be commonplace.

Massacres of minorities will increase and dominate the international agenda vis-à-vis the region. The spillover into Europe will exacerbate further as waves of refugees fleeing from massacres and state collapse and lacking asylum behind the closed doors of the still-functional Arab states will knock on the doors of Europe.

The influence of the Middle East on Western interests is pivotal and will not wane in the near to medium future. The West can neither go through the ruses of encouraging barren negotiations on reviving dead states nor stand by as the centripetal forces of Middle East politics tears the region apart and raises the risk for Western interests. Therefore, in the medium and long term, Europe – and the West in general – must reassess its strategy based on the goal of restoring the nation states, which have been devoured by the “Islamic State.” Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Somalia are “Humpty Dumpty states”; having never had the requisite characteristics of unified states, once they have disintegrated they cannot be reconstructed by political means and there are no sufficient economic or military resources to impose reunification of those states.

The unwillingness of the international community to come to terms with reality – the Islamic foundations of the Jihadist terrorism and the consequences of the demise of the Arab states – will only exacerbate the chaos and the suffering. The West must realize that it cannot cordon itself off from the spillover from the Middle East, or in the words attributed to Leon Trotsky: “You may not be interested in War, but War is interested in you.”

The energy that is invested in “political processes” and vain efforts to “put Humpty Dumpty together again” could be utilized better. Clinging to a defunct map of the Middle East drawn up at the end of World War I will not enable us to address the key interests of both the regional populations and the West. A Western strategy should address the question of what can be done with the pieces of “Humpty Dumpty.” The refusal of the West to proactively contribute to the emergence of new states and new borders in the Middle East derives from a “post-colonial guilt syndrome” that has become inherent in Western politics. After centuries of having been accused collectively of having imposed artificial state entities and colonial borders on the region, the West is deterred from any action that would smack of “neo-colonial” intervention. Inaction, however, can frequently exact a higher price than action – be it as uncertain and imperfect as it may be; the history of 20th century Europe is replete with such examples.

The growing threat to aerial and maritime transportation will force Europe to reorganize its collective maritime security paradigm. Terrorist entities will take hold of large swathes of land and coastlines and threaten aerial and naval traffic. Potential maritime theaters for such challenges would be the Eastern Mediterranean (if Jihadi elements establish a beachhead on the Mediterranean shores of Lebanon or Syria), the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea (Bab al-Mandeb) and the Suez Canal. Such actions, reminiscent of the era of the Barbary Pirates in the early 19th century, may easily draw Europe into deeper intervention in the region. With acquisition of heat-seeking anti-aircraft missiles, terrorist groups will be able to shoot down civilian airliners flying at cruising altitude. Even limited attacks on such targets would change the parameters of traffic in the region and impose a paradigm shift in transportation security. Such a security paradigm would have to entail actual “coastguard” type operations of seize and search deep in the

sea. But this would call for cooperation – and may create potential conflict – between the littoral states (Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece), other powers operating in the region (Russia, Iran, Turkey, the US) and naval forces of terrorist organizations (Hezbollah, ISIS).

Energy security is one of the most paramount interests of the West in the region. The working assumption of all international parties until the last five years was that the United States would continue to bear the lion's share of the burden of this task. However, the withdrawal of the US from the region and its clear aversion to military intervention has left both the countries of the region and those countries that rely on energy from the region (the EU, China and India to name a few) with no means to secure those resources.

The economies of the countries of the region are dependent either directly or indirectly on the production of oil and gas. In 2011, the share of the Middle East in the world's crude oil production was 32.2 percent, and the region's share in the world's natural gas production was 15.4 percent. With rising demand – and despite the appearance of US oil on the scene – the oil-producing countries will increase their revenues in the following decades. The political purchasing power in both the West and Asia that this will create will serve both goals of ensuring domestic stability and projection of power. In the latter context, the “Qatar syndrome” – oil wealth levered to support terrorism and destabilization – may spread.

Future control over regional resources may range from parties seeking regional energy hegemony (similar to the attempts by Iraq to do so in Kuwait) to extreme decentralization of energy sources, or somewhere in between. The energy disputes will range from the Gulf and Iran to potential conflicts between Egypt and the residue of what was once Libya over the Libyan oil fields and naval conflict over the gas reserves in the Mediterranean. Such events would cause volatility in supply and prices. The disabling of Abqaiq or Ras Laffan, particularly if repairs were not possible (“dirty bomb”), would instantly usher the world into “peak oil” and “peak LNG” respectively. These conflicts, however, may not result in centralization of control but rather in extreme decentralization, leading to bids by local warlords to take over energy and port resources.

The scenario that the West will have to cope with for the next decade can be called “the Age of Chaos.” In this context, the interests of the West – and particularly of Europe – in the Middle East include a number of areas:

- To contain the “Islamic State” inside Syria and Iraq and preclude its spillover to other countries of the region, particularly Jordan and Lebanon and to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. During the near future, this engagement will raise strategic questions regarding escalation of the engagement, fallout of events as the result of the engagement, the interaction with regional forces (Saudi, the Assad regime, the Iraqi regime, Iran, etc.) and non-regional forces (Russia at this stage) and the strategy of conflict vis-à-vis ISIS – degradation, containment, full destruction.
- To contain the spillover of the conflict in the Syrian-Iraqi theaters to other areas of the region – Jordan, Lebanon, the Gulf States, the Maghreb and Egypt.
- Protection of Western interests in the Gulf in the face of potential escalation of the Arab-Sunni-Iranian-Shiite conflict and to block Iranian hegemony.
- Protection of NATO interests in the face of the enhanced Russian presence in the region.
- To stem the refugee movements towards Europe (the Middle Eastern Völkerwanderung) and minimize their impact on the European Union as a borderless entity and the social, political and security implications thereof.
- To prevent the development of “Islamic State Archipelagos” outside of the center of operations in Syria and Iraq (Africa, South and South East Asia) as a threat to stability and to Western interests in those areas.
- To block the exacerbation of the terrorist threat from inside the West as a result of local Muslims adhering to the ideology of the “Islamic State” and the implications of such exacerbation for the security paradigm of Europe, security collaboration, legal structures and inter-community relations (including the already apparent boost to the far right in Europe as a result of the sense of threat).
- To maintain maritime security in the face of the threats emanating from the chaos in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- To maintain energy security in the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In this new regional disorder, Israel has a pivotal role as a potential ally of key European interests. The last few years have convincingly deconstructed the theory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the main source of instability in the region. This should encourage new thinking regarding the focus on the region and the role of Israel. There is an opportunity to derive from the thinking regarding the effects of the Middle East on the West new paradigms regarding an enhanced role of Israel in Western interests.

Another possible scenario is direct military intervention by European ground forces in war zones, owing to humanitarian catastrophes in regions with “lobbies” in the West or affinities between Western countries and their erstwhile colonial territories. This was at the core of the interventions in Libya and Mali. Potential theaters for such a development may be Lebanon (where ISIS massacres of the Christians may galvanize Europe to action) or Algeria owing to the large Algerian population in France. Since no such intervention is likely to bring about resolution of the conflicts in these countries, Europe may find itself drawn into Middle Eastern quagmires, not dissimilar to the American and Russian experiences in the past.

Part Two: An Assessment of Regional Actors in Detail

Syria

Syria has undergone an irreversible demographic revolution. Out of the estimated population of Syria of 22 million, the number of refugees outside of Syria stands at about 4 million, with an additional 8-9 million displaced within Syria who are likely to cross the borders as time goes on. All together more than half of the population of Syria is refugees, either inside Syria or in bordering countries. The Russian-Syrian strategy is directed towards “ethnic cleansing” of the areas surrounding the Alawite areas, in order to mitigate the direct risks to the Assad regime in that area. The de facto acceptance by the West of this strategy (at least by way of non-intervention) will perpetuate this policy and exacerbate the problem. There is little doubt that the situation is breeding more and stronger resentment towards the West among the Sunni Arabs and is creating the next generation of Jihadists, who see the West as the collaborator with Russia, Iran and Assad and will attack Western targets.

The chances of any real progress in the Geneva Talks are almost non-existent, and there is little or no possibility for a negotiated end of the civil war in the foreseeable future. This is evident from the enormous gap between the perceived strategic – or even existential – interests of all the parties involved:

- The opposition will not compromise on its demand that Bashar al-Assad leave power at the start of the transitional period. The civil war has cost the lives of more than a quarter of a million Syrians and turned a huge number of the population into refugees; anything less than the deposal of Bashar al-Assad would not be accepted by the rank and file (and hence by the leadership) of any of the key opposition parties.
- The regime will not accept any process that does not guarantee that the current regime will remain in power. It continues to refuse to negotiate with “terrorists” (a category that includes, in the eyes of the regime, all the opposition) and rejects the Saudi-led discussions to form an opposition representation in the peace talks. The Alawites surrounding Bashar al-

Assad are aware that they must “hang together or hang separately” and that any change in the leadership would encourage the more radical rebels and may endanger the very existence of the Alawite community.

- For the main Arab Sunni actors – Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar – the crisis in Syria is part of a larger struggle between Iran and its proxies and the Sunni Arab world. Hence they can settle for nothing less than a Sunni-dominated Syrian government, under their influence, full dismantling of the Syrian army and intelligence structures that are involved in massacring Sunnis and removing the forces of Iranian, Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies from the country.
- Iran has invested enormous resources to achieve and preserve its strategic foothold in Syria. This foothold is critical for key strategic goals of Iran: direct and safe access to its main strategic asset – the Hezbollah mini-state in Lebanon; and an ability to pose a direct military threat to Israel on the Golan front. These objectives make it crucial that the government in Damascus will be under Iran’s influence.
- The status quo of the civil war is the best scenario for Russia, as long as it does not entail a serious cost in Russian casualties. Russia has invested in the Syrian regime for the long haul. No other regime – even an alternative regime with a predominant Alawite component – will guarantee Moscow the military and naval presence it needs. Putin’s Russia remains traumatized by the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, and does not want to repeat that experience so far from its borders. Furthermore, it has no real interest in removing the “terrorist” threat of the “Islamic State”, as that very threat justifies the Russian presence. Hence the Russian goal is to fortify the borders of “useful Syria” – the Alawite area in the north with a robust corridor from Damascus and contiguity with Lebanon. Furthermore, Russia does not want to be manipulated by Iran to provide an umbrella for Iranian provocations towards Israel and will not curtail the Israeli measures against Hezbollah.
- The intransigence of the Assad regime reflects its confidence that the Russian intervention and the growing perception in the West of the threat from the “Islamic State” will bring the international community to acquiesce to his regime as the lesser evil.

The breakdown of Syria therefore is irreversible. The displacement of the population automatically enhances the status of the Alawites and the Shiites in Syria. While they are still a minority, they remain the only community in place. However, there are question marks regarding the cohesiveness of the Alawite community. While, the current attitude is that they must “hang together or hang separately”, the death of Bashar al-Assad may give rise to discord within the community, with Alawite clans outside the key circles of power questioning the price of loyalty to the Assad regime.

The crisis in Syria has created a new demographic reality for Syria itself and for three pivotal countries on its borders – Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey – and a new military and political reality on the Syrian-Kurdish-Turkish border. While the number of refugees in Turkey is large, their relative weight in the Turkish population is small, and the ethnic difference (Arabs vs. Turks or Kurds) maintains their separation and prevents their assimilation into the fabric of local politics. This is not the case in Jordan and Lebanon where the proportion of refugees to local population is higher and the refugees and local populations stem from similar or almost identical ethnic backgrounds. Their impact on these two countries will, therefore, be greater.

Iraq

The centrifugal forces that have pulled Iraq apart have created a new reality in the country. The disintegration of Iraq is taking place on multiple levels: between its ethnic/sectarian components (Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds) and within each group. The balance of power between the ethnic components and within the Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish communities does not leave room for the victory of one element on one hand or for any multi-lateral and multi-layered accommodation. The Sunni-Shiite crisis has gone too far for the Sunni community to accept what it will perceive as a restoration of Shiite authority and repression, and the internal rifts within the Shiite community will not enable the formation of a government that will demonstrate magnanimity towards the Sunnis. While most of the Sunni community may arguably not support the “Islamic State” as a preferred ideological option, there are no other Sunni options available. The Kurdish Autonomy too has gone too far to ever accept the status quo ante of the federal constitution of Iraq that was drawn up after the defeat of the Saddam Hussein regime.

Iraq remains without a government, and there is little chance that the political crisis will abate. The complex system of alliances of the Shiite factions no longer functions and no faction is strong enough to impose its will. This situation will continue indefinitely with possible short periods in which governments will be formed but will not rule. The absence of government will accelerate the descent of Iraq into chaos and the de facto disintegration of the country and will motivate Kurdish leaders to formalize the independence of the Kurdish Region (or at least to prepare for such a step after the elections in the US). Further ahead, Shiite leaders in Southern Iraq (including Moqtada Sadr) may take advantage of the situation to arrogate to themselves functions that normally would be the role of the now defunct central government.

The “International Coalition” may indeed launch a successful campaign to reoccupy Mosul. However, a victory in Mosul does not change the underlying conditions that facilitate Iraqi Sunni support for the “Islamic State” – the exclusion, marginalization and repression of the Iraqi Sunnis by the Shiite government. Therefore, even if the “Islamic State” is defeated in Mosul, neither the Arab Sunni-majority areas of Iraq nor the Kurdish Region will reintegrate into the Iraqi state. The former will continue to be incubators for entities like the Islamic State or its successors and the latter will continue to strive for an eventual independent Kurdish State.

Jordan

Jordan has been for more than half a decade a buffer state between radical regimes in Syria, Iraq and Egypt and between Israel and terrorist organizations – from the Palestinian organizations of the 1970s to the Islamist organizations of today. As a pro-Western state with a genuinely pro-Western and moderate elite (as opposed to the vacillation of many regimes in the region between different and opposing political camps), Jordan should be seen as a linchpin for Western and Israeli interests in the region.

The Jordanian-Israeli security cooperation is a major factor in the collection of intelligence on terrorist threats and their disruption. The information that passes between Israel and Jordan regularly prevents terrorist attacks that – were they to take place – would have enormous destabilizing potential. But the weakening of the “Hashemite Entity” (as historians have called it)

would not only merely remove that cooperation; it would also probably lead almost inevitably to the necessity for Israel to intervene within the borders of the weakened country in order to pre-empt or disrupt terrorist attacks that were previously dealt with by the Jordanian authorities. This in itself would hold potential for further crisis. Therefore, the implications of breakdown of Jordan would be far greater than the size of the Kingdom, its population or the cost of guaranteeing its stability would seem to warrant.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in Jordan (and in Israel) that Jordan's automatic identification with the West has caused the latter to be taken for granted. The aid provided to Jordan in the current crisis is dwarfed by the sums accorded to Turkey in response to its blackmail, though the cost-effectiveness of aid to Jordan would be far greater than that given to Turkey.

Jordan is coping with about 2 million Syrian refugees and Lebanon with about 1.5 million. The borders of both countries with Syria are easy to cross (as opposed to Turkey that has far more impressive border control). The Syrian refugees in Jordan are already working as illegal laborers for extremely low wages, pushing down the wages for Jordanians and creating large pockets of unemployment. The sentiment against the refugees is also on the rise. The influx of Syrians into Jordan will have a number of almost inevitable spillover effects.

It will have an effect on the demography of Jordan, reducing the relative weight of the Palestinian component in the population. Since many of the Syrian refugees from southern Syria have tribal relations with Jordanians across the border, their "naturalization" may benefit those in Jordan who fear the "Palestinization" of the Kingdom.

The Syrian refugees who are fleeing the Alawite regime may strengthen the Islamist groups in Jordan. The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has historic ties with the Syrian Jihadi movement and the Zarqawi elements in Iraq – many of which are now affiliated with ISIS. These elements will easily find supporters in Jordan who will not hesitate to undermine the stability of the Kingdom. A worst-case scenario would be the rise to power of the Islamist movement, turning Jordan into a radical state exporting revolution.

At the same time, Jordanian security forces have already identified Syrian regime, Iranian and Hezbollah "sleepers" who were infiltrated among the

refugees with the intention to carry out acts of sabotage. The Jordanian security services have also foiled attempts to smuggle weapons from Syria into Jordan. If the Syrian regime gains confidence, it is highly likely that it will attempt to deter neighboring countries (particularly Jordan) from supporting US and Israeli actions against the regime or allowing the Muslim Brotherhood or Saudi proxies to operate from their borders. Such deterrent messages may take the form of assassination attempts against senior officials, terrorist attacks in refugee concentrations and intelligence operations. Syrian regimes have taken such actions in the past (particularly in the era of King Abdullah II's father – King Hussein) and they should be taken into account.

The breakdown of Jordan would do away with a major pro-Western country in the region that is actively cooperating with the West both against the Syrian regime and against the “Islamic State.” The West would lose the facilities and the intelligence assets that Jordan provides. It would also enable the “Islamic State” to break out of its Syrian-Iraqi theater and to link up with the Palestinian Authority, threatening not only Jordan but also the Palestinian Authority. Such a threat against Israel would most probably result in military intervention to prevent the fall of the Jordanian regime. If Jordan falls and disintegrates or becomes a radical state, the outcome would probably be a return to the cycle of terrorist attacks on Israel from Jordanian territory and Israeli reprisals with increasing chances of large-scale military interventions.

Another potential for destabilization of Jordan could arise from the founding of a Palestinian State in the West Bank (or the West Bank and Gaza) without stabilization of the social, political and economic situation in those areas. The Palestinian state will not have an option for expansion to the West (i.e. to Israel) and, lacking the ability or willpower to build its own infrastructure, elements in Palestinian society may attempt to foster Palestinian irredentism on the other side of the Jordan River. Thus, demands for “unification” with Jordan based on Palestinian irredentism on both sides of the Jordan River could well emerge. This could lead to a reactionary rise of a “Jordan for the Jordanians” sentiment among East Bankers leading to a potential descent of Jordan into a civil war. Such a breakdown in Jordan would probably create a vacuum into which Jihadi elements of Jordanian origin would come home to roost. Such elements would probably try to prove their Islamist credentials by cross-border attacks against Israel. In the absence of a strong central

regime in Amman, it is likely that Israel would be drawn into an escalating spiral of retaliation and pre-emption against terrorism from the East Bank, resembling the situation in the 1950s and after the 1967 war. Such a scenario could bear potential for wider conflict with involvement of Islamist elements from other countries with the express support of their regimes.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, 1.4 million refugees are dispersed in all regions of the country of 4.8 million, but mainly in the northern Baq'a Valley and the Beirut area. Unlike in Jordan and Turkey, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not concentrated in camps but have dispersed across the country. The blurring of the borders between Syria and Lebanon over the decades contributed to the ease of crossing the border and assimilating in the local population. The population of Lebanon is estimated as 4.8 million. This makes Lebanon the country with the highest proportion of refugees to local population in the world. This has precipitated a demographic and political change that will probably result in challenge to the hegemony of the Shiite Hezbollah that is identified as supporting the Syrian regime.

The influx of Syrian refugees – mostly Sunnis and Christians – has also changed the political demography of Lebanon – where (despite the absence of any updated census) the Shiites and Sunnis were believed to account for about 27 percent each of the population. The Sunni refugees, therefore, not only tip the balance in favor of the Lebanese Sunnis, but by definition tend to be anti-Alawite and hence anti-Hezbollah, potentially changing the balance of political power in the country. This threat has already instigated a change in thinking among some of the Lebanese Shiite leaders who are not officially affiliated with Hezbollah, and some are advocating that the Shiite community distance itself from Hezbollah.

The Syrian refugees in Lebanon have therefore enhanced the local Syrian Islamist groups and al-Qaeda members among the Palestinian refugees from the destroyed camps in Syria, especially the Yarmouk camp. The fact that many of the refugees are Palestinian refugees complicates the picture, since the Syrian regime has already declared that those Palestinians who do not hold Syrian citizenship will not be permitted to return. The Syrian

refugees in Lebanon, along with local radical Sunni groups in the north of the country, may be the “Fifth Column” that will open the gates of Lebanon to the “Islamic State.” Success of the “Islamic State” in breaking through Lebanon and reaching the Mediterranean would pose a strategic threat to shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean and to energy security in the area. It would also exacerbate the refugee problem and the flow of refugees to southern Europe.

Kurdistan

Alongside the states that have disintegrated into tribal spheres of influence, a new de facto national state is emerging in Iraq and Syria, with spillover into Turkey and Iran. One of the consequences of the present situation is the increasing demand on the part of the Kurds in Iraq and Syria for declaring Kurdish independence. Until now, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership has been loath to declare independence because of the financial dependence of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) on its share of the Iraqi national budget, since its oil revenues have not been sufficient to cover its needs. This consideration becomes less influential as the Iraqi government continues to withhold the KRG part of the budget and the Iraqi state disintegrates. The demand for independence is resonating more and more in the Kurdish area, and the idea of partition of Iraq into three independent states – Kurdistan, “Sunnistan” and “Shiistan” – is gaining currency.

The developments in Syrian Kurdistan will also influence the Iraqi Kurds. The Syrian Kurdish announcement of the formation of an autonomous federation in the northern part of Syria called Rojava that consists of the three enclaves, or cantons, under Kurdish control in northern Syria – Jazira, Kobani and Afrin – will also contribute to the motivation of the Iraqi Kurds to declare independence.

The anti-Kurdish policies of the Erdogan regime in Turkey and Turkish indifference towards the massacre of Kurds by ISIS in Syria have strengthened Kurdish irredentism and self-confidence among the Kurds of Turkey who will become more than half of the population of Turkey by 2025. The results of the parliamentary elections in Turkey were evidence of this sentiment. Hence, the Turkish-Kurdish détente that developed over the last years is unraveling, threatening the integrity and very identity of the Turkish state.

While a declaration of Kurdish independence will be opposed by the US, Iran and Turkey, in our assessment, the emergence of a Kurdistan may now be an inexorable process. Unification of the parts of Syrian Kurdistan in the face of Turkish opposition and under Russian protection will give impetus to the demand to create a political fact of independence in Iraqi Kurdistan. As the principle of Kurdish independence in Iraq gains more and more support and becomes a reality, the irredentist demand for unification of Kurdistan – Iraqi and Syrian – will also begin to be heard.

This is the fulfillment of the Kurdish nightmare that Turkey has always feared. With the deterioration of relations between the AKP government and the Turkish Kurds inside Turkey, an independent Kurdistan will add fire to the flames of the Kurdish rebellion in southern Turkey. It is highly likely that Russia will take advantage of the trend and support the Kurds, effectively turning an American ally into a Russian one. If this happens, the US will have lost an important potential ally in the new map of the Middle East.

The main obstacle to the formal creation of a viable and pro-Western Kurdistan is the political denial by the West that those countries are now defunct. Until recently, the conventional wisdom was that a Kurdish political entity would probably align itself with the West, both for strategic reasons and because of their cultural self-image as ethnically distinct from the Arabs, the relatively low influence of radical Islam in their ranks, their economic interests and their social values (including a high degree of equality of women). However, with the withdrawal of the West from its positions in the region, the emerging Kurdish state may well become an ally of Russia.

North Africa

The diversity of potential Jihadi entities in North Africa (the Maghreb) is greater than any other region in the Arab world. The social structure in each of these countries differs by the level of tribalism, the prominence of the non-Arab (and usually non-Islamist) Berber component and the extent of the integration of that component into the other parts of society, the differences between sub-regions of the countries and other factors. In this context, a distinction should be made between Libya – an already irreparable state disintegrated along tribal lines – and the more homogenous Morocco

and Algeria and between all of them and the far more integrated and secular Tunisia. In any case, it should be kept in mind that while a destabilized Libya is a fait accompli that cannot be reversed in the foreseeable future, destabilization of Algeria, Tunisia or Morocco would impact on the sense of security in those countries of Europe (France, Belgium) where large North African populations reside.

Libya will continue to pose a strategic problem for Europe. The fruitless negotiations for reunification of this tribal society will not succeed. However, Western interests in Libya remain in place: energy, counterterrorism, piracy in the Mediterranean, and mass migration to Europe of both Libyans and others through Libya. The map of Libya is likely to follow tribal fault lines that run, primarily, along the lines of the regions of Tripoli and the Cyrenaica. The tribes that were affiliated with the Qaddafi regime (Magarahi, Qadhafi) are likely to attempt to recoup their lost status by identifying with a Jihadi movement, much the way the remnants of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq joined the IS and even became the backbone of the military structure of that entity. In any case, Libyan “Jihadists” will probably continue to target each other on tribal lines, and the cycle of revenge and blood feuds will characterize Libya for the following decades.

The “damage factor” of Libyan Jihadists will encompass a number of areas: spillover of refugees into southern Europe, compromising of the oil and gas production and export capacity from the territory that used to be Libya, high prospects of increased Jihadi terrorism against shipping in the Mediterranean and against neighboring states. Some of these groups will continue to identify with the IS whereas many others will develop their own local brand of Jihadism. Owing to the tribal nature of Libyan Jihadism, it is less likely that these entities will be able to effectively propagate their ideological influence into the neighboring Maghreb countries. The local particularism of these countries and their disdain for those whom they see as backwards, tribal Libyans will serve as a buffer in the face of their proselytizing efforts.

Tunisia is almost sui generis. Its exposure to France and to the ideas of democracy, its GDP per capita and per capita income during better days and even today (in contrast to its neighbors) the level of literacy, the weakness of the Islamic movement and the role of women are all without comparison

in the region. Its proximity to its large diaspora in Europe also plays a role – for the first time through a positive influence of the diaspora on the home country instead of the negative influences that we have seen over the last decades. The opposition of the Tunisian civil society to Islamist attempts to intimidate and the ultimate acceptance by the Islamist government of the will of the people after its failure in power is an indication of the strength of the secular tendency in the country. The Islamic movement in Tunisia therefore is not likely to give rise to “Jihadists” within the country. Notwithstanding, Tunisia is a major exporter of Jihadi foreign fighters to Syria. Tunisians also have the necessary qualifications for infiltration of the Muslim (mainly Maghrebi) population in Europe.

Of the Arab North African countries, **Algeria** has the lowest level of Jihadi activity inside the country and the smallest number of “exported” Jihadists to the Syrian theater. The regime remains stable and maintains a strong grip on the country through the military and the security services. One reason for the reluctance of Algeria’s populace to flock to the Jihadi ideology may be the memory of the “Black Decade” – the 1990s – during which the country descended into total chaos and hundreds of thousands were killed in the violence between the regime and the Jihadi groups. While the chances of regime breakdown in Algeria are low, the consequences are high. Regime breakdown would turn Algeria into a breeding ground for Jihadi movements, including al-Qaeda and the “Islamic State.” Algeria could under such a scenario cut off gas supply to France – a situation that could precipitate military conflict. Political crisis in Algeria would have an immediate spillover effect into Morocco and Tunisia.

Like Jordan, the royal family of **Morocco** bases its legitimacy on its purported family links to the family of the Prophet Muhammad. While this alone will not suffice to keep the levels of Islamist terrorism low, the current state of affairs in Morocco remains relatively stable. The spate of Jihadi terrorism in the country in the early years of the 21st century precipitated a rejection among the populace of the Jihadi-Salafi ideology, which has been successfully leveraged by the regime. Hence, Morocco is not a prime candidate for development of a “Jihadistan.” However, the lessons of the “Arab Spring” show that a sudden event (assassination, demonstrations that go out of control) can precipitate swift changes. Morocco, under a new nationalist or Islamist regime, takes

control over sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla, of Perejil Island, cutting off the Spanish natural gas supply and they take military action.

Turkey

Turkey – in its incarnation as the Ottoman Empire – was known in the early 20th century as the “Sick Old Man of Europe.” Today, Turkey again is a problematic player in the European theater.

Turkey is on a steady course towards becoming an autocratic and authoritarian “presidential regime” in which not only the authority of the Prime Minister and the government are transferred to the president, but also many of the current authorities of the parliament. In this regime, the principles of democracy and rights of expression, religious freedom and civil opposition will be honored more in the breach than in the observance, and draconian anti-terrorism laws will be used to put down any opposition. As a result, Turkey will continue to move away from the standards of freedom that the EU has set as conditions for concessions (accession to the EU, etc.).

This regime will not only be increasingly autocratic, but also Islamist (in the spirit of the ruling AKP), heavy-handed towards the Kurdish population, and belligerent towards neighbors and foreign countries such as Israel, Russia, the EU and the US. Erdogan’s presidential regime will continue to fan the flames of Turkish nationalism and populism and will continue to manage its relations with Europe through blackmail.

The manifest failure of President Erdogan’s “Neo-Ottoman” vision for Turkey has left Ankara with almost no positive foreign policy options:

- The Russian intervention that escalated into direct conflict with Turkey has put paid to Turkish hopes of creating a “buffer zone” in the Kurdish area of Northern Syria and proven that NATO is not willing to be drawn into conflict with Russia on the account of Turkish adventurism. There are no signs of Russian overtures to Turkey, and the tension between the two along the Syrian border remains.
- Turkey’s “blind eye” policy towards the “Islamic State” has soured relations with many of the other regional parties. Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States, Egypt and Jordan have openly accused Turkey of facilitating movement of

“Islamic State” terrorists. While Turkey has recently modified this policy, it seems to have done so too late, and too little to change the situation on the ground. Turkish military and intelligence authorities are deeply involved and profiting from the relations with the “Islamic State.”

- Turkey’s involvement in Iraq is not returning the dividends it had hoped for in terms of blocking the surge of independence sentiment among the Iraqi Kurds. The announcement by the Syrian Kurds of the autonomous region of Rojava was also a blow to Turkey’s strategic goal of preventing any form of Kurdish independence.
- Having entered into conflict with Russia, Erdogan has been forced to swallow his pride and attempt to mend bridges with Israel despite his innate hostility and anti-Semitism.
- Even the relations with the US have not brought the hoped-for benefits and have soured in the latter days of the Obama administration, leaving little hope for change in the next administration. The Munich Agreement between the US and Russia and the American support for the Syrian Kurdish (PKK affiliated) YPG have placed Turkey and the US at odds with each other.

The EU-Turkish agreement on the refugee problem of 18th March and further European concessions and promises for economic aid were the “crown jewels” of Erdogan’s foreign policy strategy. However, these achievements too may have been a pyrrhic victory. Neither Turkey nor the European partners could hide the fact that the agreements were the response to explicit blackmail on the part of Ankara, which threatened the EU interlocutors that if the EU did not meet its demands, Turkey could open the doors to the refugees and flood Europe with them. The agreement did not go down well with European public opinion, and Turkish heavy-handed attempts to demand that the European governments restrain media criticism of Turkey (specifically of Erdogan) have backfired and caused even more anti-Turkish sentiment. It is highly unlikely that Turkey – encouraged by Europe’s capitulation – will rest on its laurels and assiduously keep up its end of the bargain. It will continue to leverage its control over the flow of refugees to achieve its economic goals from the EU. However, the increase of authoritarianism of the Turkish political system will make European appeasement of Turkey in this regard more and more onerous.

On the domestic front, the series of terrorist attacks in Turkey, both by the PKK and ISIS, highlight the inherent instability in the country that stands in stark contrast to President Erdogan's success in consolidating his control over the political system in the country. The resurgence of Kurdish terrorism can be attributed to the combination of the government's hardening of policies vis-à-vis the Kurds inside Turkey since the end of 2015, the influence of Kurdish irredentist sentiment from the Kurds in Syria and the after-effects of what seemed to be Turkish collusion in the massacre of the Kurds in Kobane. The ease by which ISIS is now operating inside Turkey should be seen in the context of a relatively high level of positive sentiment among the Turkish population towards ISIS and Erdogan's tacit collaboration with ISIS in regards to passage of fighters and arms and marketing of oil. Turkey will continue to suffer from increasing instability exacerbated by heavy-handed security policies and constant deterioration in democratic standards and respect of human and civil rights that will ignite further alienation between the regime and broad parts of the population. The potential for terrorist attacks in Turkey remains very high; the high level of support for the "Islamic State" in Turkey will continue to enable terrorist attacks by that organization, whereas the continued Turkish crackdown on the Kurds will encourage further terrorism on the part of the Kurdish groups.

In this sense, Erdogan has "sown the wind and is reaping the storm." The situation in Turkey recalls the way that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maleki's heavy-handed treatment of the Sunnis in Anbar province on the eve of the Iraqi elections contributed to the rise of ISIS, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's laissez-faire policy towards the Iraqi Jihadists who crossed over from Western Iraq during the insurgency against the American forces.

Erdogan will employ further extreme security measures against the Kurds, but the Turkish capability to root out ISIS supporters among the Turkish population and the Syrian refugees is limited. Therefore, security in Turkey is likely to continue to deteriorate; the measures against the Kurds and Turkish attacks against the Syrian Kurds will contribute to escalation of Kurdish terrorism, while ISIS terrorism will continue unabated. Extreme security measures will have an additional spillover effect with regard to the Turkish-European relations since some of the chapters that must be taken

into account in the negotiations over Turkish accession to the EU deal with human rights.

Turkey will continue to leverage its control over the flow of refugees to achieve its economic goals from the EU – first the lifting of visa restrictions. However, the lifting of visa restrictions – if accepted by all the EU countries – could precipitate an even greater flow of illegal immigrants, among them Kurds suffering from the Turkish war against the PKK, Syrians with forged Turkish passports (including ISIS operatives) and Turks just searching for a better economic future. Meanwhile, while Erdogan will employ further extreme security measures against the Kurds, security in Turkey is likely to continue to deteriorate, and Kurdish and Jihadist terrorism will continue unabated.

At the same time, Turkey is on the cusp of an identity crisis: by 2030 half of the population will be of Kurdish origin, changing the very nature of the Turkish state. This is the prognosis that is driving the current Turkish policy towards Kurdistan – the fear that an independent Kurdistan would serve as a magnet of Kurdish irredentism for Turkish Kurds and eventually threaten the very integrity of the Turkish state.

One possible scenario that is not far-fetched is proxy or even direct military conflict between NATO countries and Russia, to which Turkey could draw European countries as NATO members. This could arise as a result of escalation of the conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK inside Turkey to a full-fledged civil war. In such a situation, the PKK-affiliated YPG (the military branch of the Syrian-Kurdish PYD), emboldened by the creation of a contiguous Russian-supported Kurdish controlled semi-State along the Turkish-Syrian border, could intervene in the Turkish-Kurdish civil war and draw Turkey into ever-escalating military interventions inside Syria that would bring it into direct conflict with Russia. It is not unlikely in such a scenario that Russia would strike targets inside Turkey, bringing Turkey to ask for NATO intervention under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. NATO then would find itself facing the “devil’s choice”: to intervene in a local conflict with Russia that could spread to other theaters, or to refrain from action and lead to further loss of NATO deterrence that would invite even bolder Russian challenges to NATO, in Europe as well as in the Middle East.

Egypt

While the rise to power of 'Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi may have been through military coup, the opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood regime was real and pervasive within the Egyptian public. The American support of the Morsi regime and criticism of al-Sisi has strained Egyptian-American relations, leading Egypt to attempt to play the Russian card.

Egypt under al-Sisi strives to represent a rational model of Islam and as such is an essential ally of the international community in the chaos that has engulfed the region. The good relations with Israel – in sharp contrast to Israeli-Egyptian relations in the Morsi period – contribute to the blocking of terrorism from Sinai and Gaza.

However, Egypt is plagued by economic crisis and water shortages that could bring it quickly to political crisis. The al-Sisi regime has failed to deliver the economic and social benefits that it had promised to the Egyptian people and has even reverted to Nasserist-like oppression of political adversaries. Nevertheless, crisis in Egypt would probably not lead to disintegration and retribalization of Egypt in the way that characterized Syria, Iraq and Yemen. However, it could lead to decline in law and order and of central authority. Such a development that would lead to chaos surrounding the Suez Canal would have immense effects on Western economic interests in the region.

But not only internal disorder threatens Egypt's economic interests. Egypt's key strategic interest is stability of the sea routes leading to and from the Suez Canal. This positions Egypt in sharp conflict with Iran's hegemonic interests in Yemen. Hence, escalation of the conflict in Yemen with potential for Houthi (Iranian) success in taking the area across Bab al-Mandeb would probably galvanize Egypt into intervention into this theater.

Iran

The Iranian nuclear agreement (JCPOA) and the subsequent lifting of sanctions on Iran is a watershed event in the Middle East. While it postpones Iran's breakout, this is not likely to hold for the entire period of the agreement. Once the sanctions are fully removed, it may be expected that Iran will gradually "reinterpret" the agreement, exploiting the ambiguity of some of

its articles and knowing that “snap-back” of sanctions is virtually impossible. Meanwhile, Iran will continue to develop its ballistic missile program, which will mature during this period and will include missiles with ranges of 1,650-1,950 km that will have the capability to carry nuclear warheads. The missile-related sanctions are minor and will not have any real effect.

The question now is whether the Iranian nuclear program will continue. After the lifting of sanctions, we assess that Iran will initiate a parallel nuclear program. This will, of course, be far slower than the program that was dismantled by the JCPOA, but it will be realized long before the 10-year target of the JCPOA. One possibility for Iran to continue its nuclear program is through North Korea. The wording of JCPOA is ambiguous on Iranian nuclear cooperation with other countries that are not a party to the agreement. North Korea could produce the whole chain of nuclear weapons and put it at Iran’s disposal in return for Iranian funding. North Korea would certainly profit economically from such collaboration and would not be risking further sanctions. Such cooperation would be difficult to detect and, even if detected, may not reach the threshold of a material breach of the JCPOA.

The Iranian regime is aware of the theory that economic development will bring about a political transformation in Iran and is taking steps to neutralize such a threat. The fear of “West-toxication” (*gharbzadegi*) – the intentional attempt by the West make the Iranian public “addicted” with the enticement of “decadent” Western culture in order to renew Western control over Iran – has permeated the ideology of the regime since its inception. Hence, the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, is habitually attacking those who believe that Iran must compromise and not stick to its red lines in the face of the American attempt to impose on Iran not only the nuclear JCPOA but also a “regional JCPOA”, a “constitutional JCPOA”, etc. These JCPOAs are intended to empty the Islamic Republic of its Islamic and revolutionary content – to give up sharia and support of the Palestinians, Hezbollah, Yemen, and Bahrain, to desist from missile tests and to dismantle the IRGC and Qods Force – leaving it merely an empty facade that complies with the American plan for the region. Khamenei’s strategy in the face of this threat is to reinforce the effort he called for in the past to build a “resistance economy” that would not be sensitive to international pressures – an idea that recalls the North Korean concept of “Juche” (self-

sufficiency and economic isolation), which the Supreme Leader sees as having “immunized” North Korea to Western pressures.

The anti-America campaign by the Supreme Leader and the IRGC will continue and even escalate. The goal is to tie the hands of the Rouhani government in regard to political and economic rapprochement with the United States and to shift the efforts for reintegration into the world economy in preference for Russia, China and other countries in Asia. While the escalation of expressions of hostility towards the US may not fit the interests of Rouhani and his camp, they are powerless to block the trend and realize that any overt attempts to do so would place them in direct conflict with the real power in Iran – the Supreme Leader and the IRGC.

Meanwhile, Iran will flex its muscles in the region with the goal of changing the rules of the game in the Gulf while trying to demonstrate that the US is, indeed, a “paper tiger.” In our assessment, Iran will continue with shows of force such as the seizing of naval vessels of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, stop and search operations of commercial vessels en route to the Arab Gulf States, naval exercises – including missile tests close to Gulf sea-lanes and to the territorial waters of the Gulf States – in international waterways that implicitly interrupt and threaten shipping in the Gulf, “spooking” of Gulf aircraft and even false flag operations of mining, piracy or attacks by proxies in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea along the Yemeni coast. We may expect as a result possible frontier skirmishes on the shared littoral borders of Iran and Saudi Arabia, gas fields and disputed islands and in the international waters of the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia’s regional and international “modus operandi” has changed. This is primarily the initiative of King Salman’s son – Prince Mohammad bin Salman – who has consolidated power within the Kingdom and launched an activist regional policy that differs fundamentally from the Kingdom’s traditional behavior of acting behind the scenes and serving as a hidden “paymaster.” Saudi Arabia is drawing up its own map of interests and areas of influence that it is projecting as “no-go zones” for Iran – a Saudi “Monroe Doctrine” for the region. The most critical of these are: Yemen (owing to

the potential for threatening the Bab al-Mandeb Straits), subversion in the Gulf States (primarily Bahrain), the Straits of Hormuz and the international waters of the Gulf. To this list one must add the obvious: any Iranian inspired or planned attack on the Saudi homeland itself – government facilities, oil installations, etc. – would be perceived as crossing a clear red line.

The gap between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States is growing. This is not only because of President Obama's Middle East policies, but also because of a basic shift in the attitude of the American political elites, which increasingly blames Saudi Arabia for the spread of Sunni extremism. Regardless of who will succeed Barack Obama in the White House in January 2017, Saudi-US ties will not recover their past closeness, and the Saudi rulers have been searching for new strategic alliances. These already include rapprochement with China, India and even Israel, and an open dialogue with Russia.

This is part of the context the economic plan "Vision 2030" launched by the Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman. The declared goal of the plan is to free the Kingdom of its "oil addiction." It includes raising the capital of Saudi Arabia's Sovereign Wealth Fund to \$2 trillion through transfer of the ownership of Saudi ARAMCO (valued at between \$2 and \$3 trillion) to the fund and issuing an IPO of about 5 percent of the company. Such an IPO would be the largest ever on the international financial markets and would make the Saudi Sovereign Fund the largest in the world. The plan also targets issues that are intended to curry favor with the young population (65 percent of the Saudi population is under 30), such as creating employment opportunities for young educated Saudis, forcing foreign companies to engage local firms and more freedoms for women.

Alongside the economic goals, "Vision 2030" should be seen in the context of the fraying of the relationship with the United States. The glue of that relationship in the past was the Saudi role as prime supplier of energy to the US and its European and Asian allies and the American support of the Sunni Arabs in the face of Iranian regional aspirations. This has now changed: the implications of the development of the American oil production capacity and the American shift to an "even-handed" if not pro-Iranian position in the region have diluted that glue significantly. Hence the Saudi leadership is in quest of a new paradigm for the relationship with the US. The IPO of Saudi

Aramco and changing the basis for the operations of the US military industry in Saudi Arabia are therefore, inter alia, components of this new “glue” for the relationship that can carry the Kingdom into the next decade.

Another motivation for the plan is the personal ambitions of Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman. He is successfully building his image as representing the aspirations of the Saudi young generation, in order to garner public support to build the case for the deposal of the Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Nayef, before the King dies in order to inherit his father’s crown.

The new Saudi strategy also entails building a network of “proxy” states in the region that benefit from the Kingdom’s magnanimity and hence are expected to accept Riyadh’s regional leadership. The success of this strategy will vary. The Gulf States that are traditional “proxies” of Saudi Arabia will not chafe at the bit under the new Saudi strategy. Jordan will be cautious not to expose itself to retaliation by the Syrian regime and/or Iran for activist support of Saudi policies. Egypt, however, is another case. Saudi Arabia has been the staunchest supporter of the regime of President Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi since it toppled the Muslim Brotherhood regime. The Saudi motivation draws on mixed sources: common animosity towards the Muslim Brotherhood, the need to leverage Egypt’s potential role in confronting Iran and in compensating for the Saudi limitations in carrying out military operations and weapons development. The Saudi strategy, however, does not seem to be to forge an alliance of equals with Egypt, but to leverage the Kingdom’s financial clout to turn Egypt into Saudi Arabia’s strategic proxy. However, from the Egyptian point of view, the Saudi financial aid is not a favor; it is a Saudi investment in bolstering the existence of a friendly regime in Egypt, which is primarily a Saudi interest, and not a reward for specific Egyptian policies. The Egyptian elites have a strong sense of Egypt’s importance, if not superiority over the other Arabs as the oldest civilization and the oldest – even one of the few real – states in the region, as well as the country with the largest population in the region and with the strongest military in the Arab world. They therefore believe that Egypt should lead the region, rather than be a satellite of a Bedouin dynasty whose only strength is God-given oil.

While neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran are interested in direct conflict and both would prefer to continue to work through proxies and in areas outside their

respective sovereign territories, the dynamic nature of the situation can easily lend itself to the misreading of such red lines, and such miscalculation may lead to direct confrontation between them. While all-out direct war between Iran and Saudi Arabia remains a low probability, this assessment should be revisited again in the near future.

The Palestinians

The Palestinians are not indifferent to the trends in the region mentioned above. As long as the region moves into the orbit of radical Islamist movements, the Palestinian leadership will follow suit and will be constrained to echo the more radical narrative in order to maintain its already tenuous position. Hence the chances of a historic compromise to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are slim for the next decade at least. Israel will have to maneuver between domestic pressures to change the status quo and growing external pressures to make unilateral concessions or to reach agreements that do not contain suitable security guarantees. The “après moi le déluge” propensity of the Western leadership to look for “quick fixes” to avoid conflict in the present even if they are fraught with danger for the future will be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on a growing scale.

At the same time, the Palestinian “Old Guard” is growing older. Mahmoud Abbas is over 80 years old and his policies and those of Arafat before him have stunted the emergence of any “Young Guard” or legitimate secular opposition in the Palestinian Authority that could contend for leadership. The populace hates the “Old Guard”, leaving the field open to the Islamist camp. The default leadership (as in other authoritarian Arab states) is, therefore, the Islamist movement, and primarily Hamas. The decline of the “Old Guard” may, therefore, signify a strengthening of Hamas with all the obvious implications for Israel.

The predominance of Hamas in the Palestinian theater, however, may not mean a Hamas regime that can be deterred. There exists with high probability the option of regime disintegration of the Palestinian Authority. Such a scenario would leave Israel with neither a partner nor a monolithic adversary to whom deterrent messaging can be addressed.



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