

Strategic Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean



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B'nai B'rith International executive vice president Dan Mariaschin, former Italian foreign minister Giulio Terzi, Greek minister of defense Panos Kammenos, and Conference of Presidents executive vice president Malcolm Hoenlein (l. to r.)

In partnership with B'nai B'rith International, the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies hosted in February the first conference of its kind in Israel on Mediterranean security, and specifically on the Eastern Mediterranean as a strategic environment.



Prof. David Abulafia, Dr. Michael Doran and Mr. Dan Mariaschin (l. to r.)



Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead, Mr. Gary P. Saltzman and Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman (l. to r.)

“The Eastern Mediterranean has become a key area for global security, with two dangerous challenges, and an important opportunity,” says **Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman** of the BESA Center, who co-convoked the conference with **Mr. Alan Schneider**, director of the B’nai B’rith World Center in Jerusalem.

“The challenges are the regional refugee crisis due to chaotic conditions in Syria, Libya and beyond; and the growing hold upon Mediterranean shores of totalitarian Islamism in its various forms. The opportunity lies in energy cooperation between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Greece and Cyprus (with a role for Italy); and perhaps with Turkey too.”

The conference was capped by addresses from **Mr. Panos Kammenos**, the Greek Minister of Defense; **Mr. Giulio Terzi**, former Foreign Minister of Italy; and Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead, head of the politico-military department in the Israel Ministry of Defense. Visiting members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations participated in this session.

Kammenos offered a comprehensive and very forceful articulation of Greece’s views on the dangers of radical

Islam, the problematic behavior of Turkey, and his country’s new alliance with Israel.

Opening the conference was **Prof. David Abulafia** of Cambridge University, scion of a family which has left its mark on Mediterranean history, and the author of *The Great Sea*. Abulafia reminded participants that trade and cultural links have existed across the Mediterranean since the dawn of civilization; but warned against the impact of present divisive trends. **Dr. Michael Doran** of the Hudson Institute and **Prof. Efraim Inbar** of the BESA Center also spoke of strategic



Panos Kammenos, Greek Minister of Defense

dangers and instability, fueled by the loss of US authority in the region.

This was followed by a comprehensive survey of the changing strategic dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the rising danger of Islamist terror and subversion. **Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror** offered the Israeli point of view; former Greek Minister of Internal Security **Vassilis Kikilias** gave a spirited explanation of his country’s views; and former Israeli Ambassador in Egypt **Zvi Mazel** sounded the alarm as to Egypt’s economic and political prospects.

Adding to the understanding of this highly complex strategic landscape were scholars and practitioners from France (**Bruno Tertrais**, who related, among other, to the West’s growing military involvement in Libya), Cyprus (DCM **Michalis Firillas**), and Turkey (scholar and journalist **Burak Bekdil**). The range of reaction in the international community to these challenges was discussed by Dr. Jonathan Rynhold; by the German DCM in Israel **Monica Iwersen**; and by Russia expert Dr. **Anna Geifman**.

Dr. Ehud Eiran of Haifa University presented the findings of an ongoing project on Mediterranean security, reminding participants of Ben Gurion’s

strong commitment to the role of the sea in Israel’s future, and linked it to the present challenge of protecting Israel’s EEZ and sustaining regional stability against the rising threats.

Prof. Hillel Frisch of the BESA Center surveyed radical Islamist organizations operating in the region. **Dr. Amit Mor**, among Israel’s leading energy experts, explored the implications of the gas finds in the Eastern Mediterranean for regional cooperation.

Avivit Bar Ilan, the leading authority in the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

on Euro-med cooperation, discussed the role that the “Union for the Mediterranean” could play in regional cooperation. **Ambassador Arye Mekel** of the BESA Center (former Israeli envoy to Greece) focused on strategic commonalities between Israel, Greece and Cyprus.

Dr. Lerman published a BESA Center study in March, *The Mediterranean as a Strategic Environment: Learning a New Geopolitical Language*, which argues that it is time to let go of the old colonial concept, the “Middle East,” and re-learn to think in

Mediterranean terms. “Israel has an interest in anchoring its identity in the Mediterranean’s multi-colored landscape; as opposed to floundering as an isolated, super-modern Jewish state in a hostile and deteriorating Arab Middle East environment,” Lerman says.

Among the B’nai B’rith International leaders who participated in the conference were **Mr. Gary P. Saltzman**, President; **Mr. Dan Mariaschin**, Executive Vice President; **Mr. Irving Silver** and **Mr. Martin Oliner** – who generously supported the conference.



Dr. Amit Mor, Mr. Alan Schneider, Mr. Vassilis Kikilias and Ambassador Zvi Mazel (l. to r.)



Mr. Martin Oliner