



THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Mediterranean as a Strategic Environment: Learning a New Geopolitical Language

Eran Lerman



**THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dramatic events in 2015 have brought into focus two dangerous challenges – and an important opportunity – turning the Eastern Mediterranean into one of the key areas for global security:

- The refugee crisis due to chaotic conditions in Syria, Libya and beyond;
- The growing hold, upon Mediterranean shores, of totalitarian Islamism in its various forms – Iran's camp; Islamic State; and the Muslim Brotherhood (with Turkey and Qatar as allies).
- The prospects for cooperation in the field of energy.

All of this is giving rise to closer cooperation within the Mediterranean framework, as demonstrated by the January 27 2016 tripartite summit of Israel, Cyprus and Greece (a parallel process already links Egypt and the two Hellenic countries). The Union for the Mediterranean is important as a symbol of cooperation, but weak and underfunded: thus, such building blocks are a step in the right direction.

Export oriented gas policies can help cement links between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Greece and Cyprus (with a role for Italy). This is not an effort to isolate Turkey, but rather to create a regional balance of power in which she can find her place once her leaders change course.

Significant cultural affinities have a role of their own to play in promoting a Mediterranean strategic identity. This would serve Israel's long term interests – as well as those of Europe and of the U.S. Time to let go of the old colonial concept, "Middle East", and re-learn to think in Mediterranean terms.

The Mediterranean as a Strategic Environment Learning a New Geopolitical Language

Eran Lerman

INTRODUCTION: WHY THE MEDITERRANEAN MATTERS

The Mediterranean world is in turmoil. “Our Sea,” said EU High Representative Federica Mogherini at a Med conference on December 11, 2015, “is at the center of the world” - for all the wrong reasons, as conflicts, above all in Syria, spill over into terror and mass migration, turning the region into a focal point of international disorder. Still, as often happens, this sense of crisis can and should generate an opportunity for re-tooling regional strategies. At stake are the prospects for a (gradual) geo-political convergence of interests and the emergence of a community of like-minded regional players, with a common thread of identity, to pose a credible alternative to today’s fragmented and dangerous landscape.

While complex tensions persist across the region, key states in the Eastern Mediterranean (as well as Italy, increasingly aware of her duties as a central factor in this equation) are coming together in a “variable geometry” of strategic cooperation formats. There are specific issues under active consideration, ranging from cooperation against various Islamist threats, of which the so-called “Islamic State” is but one; to action against human traffickers on the high seas; to the dramatic promise of joint energy projects.

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Moreover, the commonalities do not end there. As both Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and King Abdullah II of Jordan said at the same Med conference, an affinity of ideas and cultures must be part of the strategic response. In a dynamic world, in which ideologies do matter, Arabism as a project is dead, and Islamism is deadly, and thus the time may have come for the re-emergence or at least re-examination of other ideas. The vision of a Mediterranean strategic, economic, and political identity - *mutawassatiyyah* (“mediterraneity”) - was put forward in the second quarter of the twentieth century by the prominent Egyptian thinker Taha Hussein. He saw it as a natural continuation of Egypt’s role in history. It was subsequently submerged by Arab nationalism and Islamist radicalism, but its value endures.

Common strategic interests, as well as economic prospects and similarities in lifestyle, can indeed all serve as bridges, insofar as they can modify the way the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin - Arabs, Jews, Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Croats and others on the Adriatic coast; and at its western gates, Italians and Maltese - see themselves, interpret their heritage, and contend with the threats and dangers which have multiplied in recent years. A hard-headed look at these challenges, and the necessary responses, is at the core of this study; and yet the study is also based on the premise that a common identity needs to be part of the solution, for the Mediterranean as a whole and its Eastern shores in particular.

This vision is different in nature from the rival projects of totalitarian hegemony of modern times, such as “Arab Unity” as conceived by Nasserism two generations ago, or today’s variations on the theme of the Islamic ummah - some led by Iran, some by the so-called Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, some by the Muslim Brotherhood. The vision is open, pluralist and multi-faceted: a Mediterranean of sovereign nations, tolerant and diverse. Given the stamp of Roman heritage left everywhere along the shores of *Mare Nostrum*, the obvious image is that of a mosaic, in which quite colorful pieces, including Israel (otherwise often depicted, among Arab and Muslim neighbors, as the odd one out) find their rightful and useful place.

We need, in other words, to get used to thinking and speaking about Mediterranean dynamics in new conceptual and strategic terms. The institutional architecture of regional security should reflect these new

realities. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is a useful, even fascinating project, serving proof that “things can be different” - as demonstrated by the role of the organization’s Israeli deputy secretary general, Professor Ilan Chet, in the creation of the Mediterranean University Campus in Fez - but it remains underfunded and politically immature, and its strategic presence is still marginal. On the other hand, growing importance should be placed, at this stage, on the smaller building blocks of regional cooperation, as exemplified by the 5+5 in the Western Mediterranean, and now the two Eastern Mediterranean triangles - Greece-Cyprus-Egypt and Greece-Cyprus-Israel - as well as by Italy’s potential role. The need is urgent. By the end of 2015, a convergence of major events has made it more necessary than ever to re-consider how the “Great Sea” (to use the title of David Abulafia’s masterly study of Mediterranean history¹) is perceived in the context of policy and political perspectives.

It is certainly still necessary to think of the Mediterranean (and the Red Sea)² as a vital Sea Lane Of Communications (SLOC) between the Atlantic and Asia, much as the great maritime powers have been doing since the Suez Canal was dug; all the more so in the age of Beijing’s aggressive promotion of the of “One Belt, One Road” concept.³ But it is no longer sufficient as a response to current challenges. It may also be tempting to think of it as a broad moat, protecting Europe from the terrors on its other shore⁴, or as Braudel has called it, “the great divider, the obstacle that has to be overcome.”⁵ But this idea no longer holds water, as a human wave of refugees does overcome it on a daily basis, willing, in Braudel’s own language, to pay the price of passage, and dramatically re-shaping Europe’s political and social agendas.

It is therefore necessary to re-write the language of discourse. “Mare Nostrum” is now a pluralist political and cultural space, not a Roman domain. In line with what Efraim Inbar has called “The New Strategic Equation in the Eastern Mediterranean,”⁶ it is emerging as the scene of a strategic realignment. The present crisis may also generate a new sense of commonality in adversity. The very term “Middle East, after all, is by now a linguistic relic from the days in which the proper ordering of the world reflected the relative distances from London or Paris. A Mediterranean frame of reference is now considerably more relevant.

New challenges - and new opportunities - thus arise which are specifically Mediterranean. This was already implicit, to some extent, in former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007⁷ initiative, and the subsequent emergence of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as an institutional structure; however, as already indicated, the promise of this institution has yet to be realized. Meanwhile, it is becoming equally clear that a number of key players now recognize the need for closer cooperation, with Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt increasingly involved in various modes of dialog, and Jordan also involved less directly (the latter, while not a littoral state, is an "honorary Mediterranean," and a regular participant in the Barcelona Process/UfM, NATO's Med Dialogue, and the Mediterranean activities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). This is tied to unprecedented levels of practical interaction between Israel and her Arab peace partners.⁸ Given the overwhelming importance of the strategic challenges listed below, neither the Temple Mount crisis (which Jordan helped to allay, but met with Palestinian resistance) nor the recurrent Israeli-Egyptian tension over the so-called "Israeli nuclear capabilities" vote at the IAEA (which Israel won by a wide margin) was allowed, under the circumstances, to disrupt the security cooperation: indeed, by the beginning of 2016 an Egyptian ambassador was once again in Israel, more than three years after his predecessor's recall.

The same imperatives led to the summit meetings in Cairo and Nicosia, and the tripartite agreement on energy cooperation between Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt in May 2015.⁹ They were also reflected in the exchange of visits, at the highest level, between Israel and Cyprus (President Anastasiades came to Israel on June 15, 2015,¹⁰ his second visit while in office, a visit reciprocated by Prime Minister Netanyahu on July 28 that year).¹¹

Even more demonstrative of the intensity of the effort were the visits in Israel of Greek leaders. First came Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias, who arrived in Jerusalem just one day after the dramatic "ochi"("No") vote in his country's referendum on the European economic proposals, held on July 5. In his own words, he came to speak about the need for a "line of stability" connecting Israel, Greece, and Cyprus (and by implication, others such as Egypt), amidst the wider triangle of instability anchored

in Libya; Iraq and Syria; and Ukraine.¹² On November 25-26, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras followed, showing great warmth and easily conversing with Israelis on the street, as well as all but endorsing Israel's claims in Jerusalem. The next step, a tripartite summit, was set for late January 2016.¹³

Three interrelated issues, surveyed in detail below, apparently drive this awakening:

1. **Mass migration**, the consequence of the chaotic collapse of several states, as part of the so-called "Arab Spring"(which should perhaps be renamed "the mother of all misnomers"). Libya and Syria hold key strategic locations on Mediterranean shores, and both experienced a bloody descent into civil war, fratricide and slaughter, now increasingly translated into mass migration upon Mediterranean and Aegean waters into Europe. Coming against the background of a reduced American imprint on regional stability, this has become, by the end of 2015, the most prominent issue on the European political agenda.

2. **Islamist totalitarian forces**, The most dangerous aspect of the present situation is the threat to the "line of stability" (to use Kotzias's phrase) posed by the rise of revolutionary Islamists (often mistakenly referred to as "fundamentalists"). While in conflict, often murderous and vicious, with each other, all three branches of the same poisonous ideological tree - Iran and its allies, proxies, and agents, from Lebanon to Yemen; the global Salafi Jihadists, currently dominated by the "Islamic State" (the so-called Khilafah, caliphate, of the man who calls himself Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi);¹⁴ and the Muslim Brotherhood with its various manifestations and allies (mainly Qatar and Erdogan's Turkey) - have now acquired a presence on Mediterranean shores.

3. In economic terms, and at the more positive end of the spectrum of relevant events, are the opportunities provided by the **significant off-shore energy finds** in recent years (including ENI's announcement on Egyptian fields),¹⁵ which could be equally dramatic insofar as they can positively bolster the ability of the forces of stability to hold and consolidate power against the disruptive forces outlined above.

Important as these drivers may be, they cannot yet be translated into concrete policy agendas without other contributing factors, which might help cement the sense of “like-mindedness,” and re-affirm the profound historical and cultural affinities of key players. As important, yet still far from maturity, is the supportive institutional structure. But at least the journey has already begun. Meanwhile, more needs to be done:

- While Israel needs to do her part, it is time for Arab players, and their friends, to realize that “de-radicalization” and “countering violent extremism” cannot stop halfway. Nothing is more radical, violent, and extreme than extolling extermination and making heroes of those who stab (or, as we know now about the PLO’s 1972 Munich terror attack, torture and mutilate) their Jewish victims. The culture of hate is an enduring obstacle not only to peace but to regional integration.
- Turkey, having successfully used the refugee crisis (largely of her own making) to force Europe to resume the integration talks, nevertheless finds herself in a bind. Already forced to re-think the consequences of their current regional strategy, her leaders need to change course: to end the present practice of harboring active Hamas cells; resolve the impasse with Israel; and above all, stop playing multiple games with terror groups in Syria, and shoulder their country’s responsibilities as a strong NATO ally in the expanding war against Islamic State forces.
- In the central Mediterranean, the fate of Libyan lands - with significant areas already held by IS - may well become the measure of the ability of Europe, and certainly of Italy as a pivotal presence in Mediterranean affairs, to bring about an end to an ongoing tragedy and advance a coordinated and comprehensive agenda of military effectiveness accompanied by political and structural change.

SEA-BORNE TRAGEDIES: FACING THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHAOS

The full implications of the so-called “Arab Spring” - the political upheaval in much of the Arabic-speaking world - for the region and for the world, are beyond the scope of this study, and have been dealt with in detail in a steadily-growing body of research and commentary, including

other BESA publications.¹⁶ Still, aspects of it need to be addressed in the specific context of the challenges to Mediterranean security and stability. In effect, there are two interwoven categories of threats, generated by the events of the last five years, which stand out: those mainly arising from the increasingly chaotic disintegration of some of the Ottoman Empire's artificial successor states; and those posed by radical Islamist totalitarian forces, actively seeking to use the growing disorder so as to establish themselves as the dominant and formative forces of the future (albeit in deadly rivalry with each other). Both are dangerous to the wellbeing and basic stability of the Mediterranean community of like-minded nations.

By the end of 2015, much of the world's (and certainly Europe's) attention has been drawn to the fate of the huge flow of "Syrian" refugees,¹⁷ itself a misleading term, since many of them (including Aylan Kurdi, the toddler whose death by drowning tore at so many heartstrings), are actually Kurds, with no allegiance to the broken-up state to which they once belonged. With a deliberate shift in Turkish policies leading to thousands of refugees arriving in Greece every day throughout the summer and fall of 2015 (some 20,000 in Kos in one week, causing near-collapse of basic services),¹⁸ and with growing numbers overwhelming European border controls in their quest to reach Germany and other preferred safe havens, the cost of Syrian collapse has now come to dominate European and international discourse. Diplomatic efforts to remove its root causes are yet to bring about any change on the ground; and it is to be equally doubted that the recent Russian intervention will do much to reverse the effective partition, confessional cleansing, and ongoing warfare, which have turned more than half of the Syrian population into refugees or internally displaced persons.

Simultaneously, stability in the Mediterranean basin is threatened by the ongoing collapse of another littoral state, formerly the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyyah, now broken between two self-declared governments, as well as myriad tribal domains and local fiefdoms.¹⁹ An agreement on a unity government was announced on October 9, 2015 by outgoing UN envoy Bernardino Leon, after long, convoluted and often frustrating talks.²⁰ The agreement began to unravel almost immediately, and the petty squabbles and ideological rivalries - with one government, in exile, closely identified with the Egyptian-

led forces of stability in the region, and the other, in power in Tripoli, aligned with Sisi's enemies, the Muslim Brotherhood - have again frustrated Leon's efforts (and after November 2015, Martin Kobler's). This led to a major political intervention by Italy: Rome hosted a Libyan summit, finally producing, on December 17, an agreement on a united "Presidency Council," which was unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council six days later.²¹ Yet in the absence of a commitment (backed by military capability) to intervene on the ground, its effective implementation will remain in doubt.

Still, significant action was taken during 2015 with regard to a more limited type of military action in the Mediterranean arena: one aimed at defeating the human traffickers and crime rings organizing the sea-borne migration, who knowingly charge exorbitant fees for the use of unsafe boats, dramatically overloaded and provided with little or any means of survival. Within the span of a few months, the need for preventive action - to stem the tide, as well as reduce the horrifying numbers of lives lost at sea - was raised at both the European and the international levels. Indeed, by February 2015, given the growing tide of Libyan refugees reaching Italian shores (or drowning in large numbers on their way), serious thought was being given in Rome to the prospect of a military intervention by an Italian-led coalition.

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi ultimately took a firm stand against rushing to implement this option as a unilateral step, rejecting what he called a leap "from total indifference to hysteria and an unreasonable action."²² But the very fact that such discussions took place was telling. This was quickly followed by some rather remarkable European decisions, given the overall reluctance of EU institutions to take up active military measures. At the time, rapid advances by IS affiliates - and the horrifying execution of 21 Copts on the beach near Sirte - gave rise to a sense of immediate need. Later in the year, this urgency subsided somewhat: the Jihadists suffered some reverses, and as indicated above, hopes were pinned on Bernardino Leon's diplomatic efforts to advance the Libyan political agreement, and thus presumably create a responsible Libyan government able to control her own shores. Still, the implications of chaos in Libya, and of the flow of migrants from further afield, including Africans who make their way to the Mediterranean's southern shores and

from there to Europe, remained acute. Thus, within weeks of bringing up her initiative, Italy found firm support in Brussels:

1. On April 23, 2015, the European Council resolved to “mobilize all efforts to prevent further loss of life at sea, tackle the root causes of the human emergency in the Mediterranean - in cooperation with the countries of origin and transit - and fight human smugglers and traffickers.”

2. On May 18, a “Crisis Management Concept for a military CSDP operation” (that is, a plan for joint European military action), designed to “disrupt the business model” of the trafficking networks in the Mediterranean, was presented and adopted (Council Decision 2015/778). It was determined that this mission would be limited in time to 12 months, after reaching what the plan defined as “full operational capacity.”

3. On June 22, in order to implement “Operation Sophia,” the EU established a command structure (EUNAVFOR MED) authorized to “identify, capture and dispose of vessels as well as enabling assets” used by traffickers. With headquarters in Rome, an Italian commander (Rear Admiral Enrico Credentino), and an Italian flagship (the carrier *Cavour*), this is clearly an extension of Italy’s original concept for action.

4. On September 28, anticipating UNSC authorization, the EU Security Committee authorized the beginning of “phase 2” of the operation - action in international waters—as of October 7. “Phase 3,” once launched, would include “the disposal of vessels ... and the active pursuit of the traffickers.”²³

In parallel, steps were taken at the United Nations to provide legitimacy for Operation Sophia. As early as May 2015, Britain circulated a draft UNSC resolution aimed at authorizing the action outlined by the European Council in April.²⁴ After long deliberations, this led to the adoption of UNSCR 2240 (on October 9, 2015, by 14 votes to 0, with Venezuela abstaining), deploring the “maritime tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea,” and authorizing member states - “in these exceptional and specific circumstances, for a period of one year” - to inspect, intercept, and seize vessels suspected of migrant smuggling, after making “good faith efforts” to obtain the consent of their flag

states.²⁵ It has been pointed out that this resolution does little more than reaffirm existing universal practices as to illegal trafficking, but its significance lies in giving the necessary green light for a hesitant Europe to take action (setting a precedent that may yet be expanded elsewhere in the Mediterranean arena).

It remains to be seen how effective EUNAVFOR MED will be, but in terms of an open discussion about joint European military action, these have been unprecedented steps. They also reveal an architectural problem. Massive waves of sea-borne immigrants - whether they try to come by dinghies to the storied isle of Lesbos, or by dilapidated and overcrowded fishing boats to Lampedusa²⁶ - are not the only danger arising from the present chaotic conditions. Drug smuggling, gun running, and organized crime have all been identified as potential dangers, and all have been compounded by the crisis of political authority. To some extent, they were meant to be tackled by the naval patrols of NATO's Operation "Active Endeavour."²⁷ But given its narrow mandate, and its meager impact so far, doubts have been raised as to this operation's relevance and its future.²⁸

The problem is compounded by the lack of coordination between the two "Big Brussels Bureaucracies," the EU and NATO, largely due to Turkish resistance: Turkey is a member of NATO but remains outside the EU, while Cyprus (that is, the Greek part of the island) is a member of the EU but not of NATO. This makes it all the more difficult to respond effectively both to the chaotic conditions described above, and to the active dangers posed by ambitious Islamist political movements establishing their presence in the region. As the challenges multiply, it will be increasingly urgent for both the EU and NATO to shake off this obstacle, if they are to launch effective operations in the Mediterranean, and also to find effective ways to coordinate and cooperate with Israel, Egypt, and other Med Dialog/European Neighborhood Policy partners, who can contribute to policy implementation.

ENEMIES AT THE WATER'S EDGE: TOTALITARIAN ISLAMIST FORCES ON MEDITERRANEAN SHORES

The problems facing the Mediterranean security architecture are more acute than ever not only because of the chaotic conditions and criminal conspiracies discussed above, but also due to the rise of dangerous and powerful political phenomena. These need to be described - despite the difficulty, for many post-modern Europeans, of even thinking, let alone speaking, in such terms - as enemies: regimes and movements committed to the violent overthrow of the existing order, and in many cases, acting brutally and in open defiance of the laws of war and the most elementary norms of human conduct.

These forces are by now gaining ground on Mediterranean shores. All of them, in one way or another, are aggressive offshoots of the modern political category properly described as totalitarian Islamism.²⁹ All are armed and dangerous, and all have established a presence, or at least a toe-hold, amidst the wreckage of Mediterranean littoral states. In general, they can be categorized as belonging to three variants on the theme of Islamism, bitterly hostile to each other: one, in many ways the most dangerous, is led by Iran; the second is dominated by Baghdadi's "caliphate" or Islamic State (IS); and the third is the camp of the Muslim Brotherhood, with its various local manifestations and two influential allies, Turkey and Qatar.

The revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran, under Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, is still an active danger, despite the pious hopes which some in the West seemed to attach to the nuclear "deal" (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, so as not to call it a treaty, the ratification of which would have required a two-thirds majority in the US Senate). It is not about to transform into a force for stability. In fact, it remains committed to overthrowing the present balance of power in the region, to see Israel wiped off the map, and to undermine the existing dispensation in world affairs. This is the Supreme Leader's overarching directive, and this is President Rouhani's creed, even if Rouhani does present it with a smile and in a more sophisticated manner, and has even learned how to package Iran's mission as leading a "World Against Violence and Extremism".³⁰ In style, this is an improvement on his

predecessor, Ahmadinejad, who could hardly hide his belief that the wrong side won in World War II. But in substance, they are less apart than meets the eye.

Some of Iran's recent strategic and ideological battles are being fought elsewhere, in Yemen, and by means of terrorist proxies worldwide; but the Iranian camp's assets on the Mediterranean are Tehran's most prized possessions. Above all others, Hezbollah - always a loyal, deeply-indoctrinated component of Iran's revolutionary reach - has established itself as Iran's most reliable proxy. In essence, Hasan Nasrallah can be said to be dual-hatted, being both the leader of a Lebanese political party (and militia) holding parliamentary and cabinet seats, and Ali Khamenei's loyal and unwavering personal representative in Lebanon.

In formal terms, Lebanon is still sovereign, with a delicate balance of power between the anti-Syrian ("March 14") and pro-Syrian ("March 8") movements, which has led to stasis, dysfunction (as in the recent "garbage crisis," when local power struggles led to the collapse of sanitary services), and the prolonged inability to elect a president. Yet at any critical moment Hezbollah are bound to be strong enough—much stronger than the Lebanese Army - to use Lebanese soil as they wish. This is what happened in 2006, and can happen again, as Iran seeks to "turn the West bank into the next Gaza" (and necessarily destabilize Jordan in order to gain access), and use Hezbollah's presence in the Southern Golan as a strategic tool.

As for Syria, it has been an ally of the Iranian Revolution since the latter's inception in 1979, sympathizing with it in the face of both Sadat's "betrayal" and Saddam's ambitions. This is despite the lack of religious and ideological affinity, as the Assad clan's "hereditary republic" has, after all, been the proudly secular bastion of a non-Muslim sect (even if Iran, for political reasons, deigns to treat the so-called Alawites, or Nusayries, as some sort of deviant Shi'a sub-sect³¹). By now, in any case, the level of the Syrian regime's dependence upon Iran, and upon the sacrifice of Hezbollah regulars in battle, is such that its rump state in Western Syria can well be described as an Iranian dependency, or at best a condominium (shared by Iran with Putin's Russia).

Iran can thus be said to be in possession of two (overlapping) strategic assets in the Eastern Mediterranean. Even without a land link connecting them to the main Iranian domain (and the Iranian-dominated Shi'a state in what remains of Iraq), both Lebanon and the North-Western remnant of Syria are part of an openly declared sphere of Iranian control, which gives Tehran a broadening scope for further revolutionary ambitions. These include an ongoing commitment - indeed, an injunction by the Supreme Leader - to pursue the goal of destroying Israel; which is, in turn, a way of asserting that revolutionary Shi'a Iran can achieve for the cause of Islam what the secular or conservative Sunni regimes have failed to do. It is also a springboard for greater influence in the Muslim regions of the Balkans and beyond.

It is against this background that Iran's influence in Gaza, and its inroads among Palestinians elsewhere, become significant. True, Hamas as a movement is not an Iranian proxy. It is very anxious to sustain its "independence of decision," and in ideological terms it is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood - Sunnis with a strong dislike for Shi'ites. Still, the military wing of Hamas has developed a taste for Iranian military supplies, funds, and training³². Meanwhile, in order to reinsure against potential Hamas "defection," Iran has built a strong alternative force more directly controlled by the IRGC, namely, Ramadan Shalah's Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a well-armed terrorist organization with an independent military infrastructure that Hamas does not try to dismantle.

This affiliation, which cuts across denominational lines - like almost all Palestinian Muslims, PIJ is Sunni - means that a significant force in the Gaza Strip can be added to the list of Iranian assets in the Eastern Mediterranean; perhaps not in the same sense as in Syria or Lebanon, given the secondary standing of PIJ in a Hamas-governed entity, yet useful enough to enable Iran to raise regional tensions at will, and push its proxies to action at a moment of need (or opportunity). It raises the specter of coordinated attacks on Israel from north and south, bracketing the country and heightening the effect on the civilian populations targeted by Iranian-supplied rockets. It offers, moreover, a lever for Iran in pursuit of efforts to destabilize Jordan, and gain a presence in the West Bank (utilizing the PA's manipulation of religious tensions), in pursuit of Khamenei's broader agenda.

By comparison, the grip of the “Islamic State” and other Sunni Jihadists on Mediterranean shores is still (at this point) quite limited, tenuous and reversible. But it is a threat nevertheless, as the downing of the Russian airliner demonstrated. Various Salafi Jihadist elements have been active across the region for some time: In Algeria, despite the relative stability achieved after the bloody years of the civil war, Belmokhtar’s al-Qaeda affiliate, and similar terror groups, still strike from time to time (Belmokhtar himself may have been killed in action recently).³³ And in Tunisia, the spectacular attacks at the Bardo Museum and on the beach at Sousse, which claimed the lives of dozens of tourists, revealed security vulnerabilities and reflected the effort of violent Islamists to undo the country’s democratic transition (which was recently honored by the Nobel Peace Prize).

Still, in neither country - nor in Morocco, the other important player in the Maghreb - are there, at least for now, so-called “UGAs” (Un-Governed Areas, in American military parlance) where IS affiliates or al-Qaeda elements hold sway, and which they can use as a territorial base. Much the same can be said for Gaza. True, occasional rocket fire aimed at Israel (but often falling short) has been claimed by a group, “Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade,” describing itself as an IS affiliate,³⁴ but unlike PIJ, this remains a marginal force in the local balance of power.

The situation is somewhat different in Libya, where significant local forces - some of them with access to coastal areas - have sworn allegiance to Baghdadi.³⁵ A similar problem has arisen in parts of Sinai. Unlike the rest of Egypt, where strong action was taken after Mursi’s removal, in Sinai terror has persisted, and “Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis” (a name chosen in direct reference to the organization’s proximity to Israel and Jerusalem) has sworn allegiance to Baghdadi’s IS and has a large, albeit covert, presence in the Rafah-Sheikh Zuwayd-al-Arish triangle in the north-east.

Baghdadi’s “caliphate” can thus be said to have acquired a toe hold on the Mediterranean, but little more than that. The implications for regional and European security are indeed troubling, but remain more potential than real. In Libya, where the main struggle is between the Egyptian-backed “legitimate government”(all such descriptions in collapsed

states should be taken *cum grano salis*) in internal exile in Tobruk, and a Turkish-based Muslim Brotherhood “government” in Tripoli, the IS elements have been pushed back, although by the end of 2015 they were again showing signs of resurgence. In Sinai, the Egyptian military has launched an extensive campaign to hunt and destroy IS and other terror elements.³⁶ With the Russian and Iranian intervention also aimed at preventing IS forces (and other Jihadi groups) from spreading westwards in Syria, and from endangering the coastal Alawi heartland, IS is not yet a major force in the Mediterranean balance of power.

It is more difficult to assess the security impact of the third grouping of Islamist forces: those associated with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, some closely (such as Hamas), and some more loosely (such as al-Nahdha in Tunisia). This ambiguity is largely due to their decision to utilize the instruments of democracy, with generally successful results. Back in January 2006, Hamas - the self-defined Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood - won the Palestinian parliamentary elections (although the question does arise as to whether an election in which the competing parties bear arms can truly be considered democratic). In the wake of Mubarak’s fall from power, Muhammad Mursi was elected president of Egypt in July 2012, with 52 percent of the vote—a real vote, certainly not the 99.9 percent results so familiar in Arab dictatorships until recently. Al-Nahdha did not even win a majority - just a plurality - in the elections which briefly brought it to power in Tunisia. Most significantly, the long reign of Erdogan’s AKP in Turkey, including its November 1, 2015 parliamentary victory, exemplifies the utility of democratic tools for Islamist parties seeking legitimate power.

This choice of tools in turn gave rise in the West, once again, to the familiar debate as to the nature of political Islamism.³⁷ Many, including some decision makers in Washington and in Europe, were willing to give the Muslim Brotherhood the benefit of the doubt, or even treat them as a relatively moderate force, on the threshold of becoming a Muslim equivalent of Christian Democrats in Europe. Others remained wary, and with good reason. While the debate is old, new realities in the Mediterranean arena have clearly confirmed the need for caution: under the guise of democratic practices, dangerous ambitions continue to lurk. Thus in Gaza, Hamas took effective power in June 2007 not through the

ballot box but by force, and has since held onto power using brutal tools of repression, despite military reverses in three rounds of fighting with Israel so far.³⁸

By June 2013 - just less than a year after Mursi came to power - large numbers of Egyptians, participating in the massive demonstrations organized by the “Tamarud” (rebellion) coalition of forces opposed to his rule, apparently came to the conclusion that over time, the Brotherhood’s undeclared intentions would take Egypt into a similar abyss.³⁹ They resented Morsi’s policies, including aspects of his position on Syria and his ramblings about possible conflict with Ethiopia, but mainly they feared that the Brotherhood as a movement would once again submerge Egypt’s hawiyyah (unique identity) in a broader Islamist framework, as Nasser once did in a pan-Arab context. They also resented the perceived willingness by the United States to befriend Mursi and legitimize the Brotherhood as a political force.⁴⁰

Beyond Egypt, Tunisia, and Gaza, questions about the legitimacy of Brotherhood-backed political forces, and their impact on Mediterranean security, are now also central to the Libyan tragedy. Elements identified with the Brotherhood form the large part of the rebel “Libya Dawn” government in Tripoli, contesting the rule (or the remaining fiction of central governance) of the internationally recognized government, now in internal exile in Tobruk. This has inevitably raised fresh doubts in key European capitals - particularly in Rome - as to the intentions of the movement and its backers, including Turkey.⁴¹

Indeed, the stance of the Muslim Brotherhood’s active backers contributes significantly to the worries generated by the movement itself. Since Mursi’s ouster in 2013, in fact, the MB has been in decline, with Gaza (and parts of Tripolitania) now the sole remaining territories under its direct rule. But with two powerful players deeply committed to its cause, it is still far from being a spent force. Often acting in close coordination with each other, as was evident during the 2014 military conflict in Gaza, Turkey and Qatar have taken up positions in support of the Brotherhood across the region (and beyond, as in Muslim areas in the Balkans and among Muslim minorities in the West). Their foreign ministers acted together to promote an outcome to the conflict which would serve

Hamas's core interests, whereas Egypt under Sisi's leadership took a firm line against the organization.⁴² In effect, both have become key sponsors of Hamas - a terrorist organization - and of subversive elements elsewhere in the region.⁴³ This remains one of the key obstructions to the restoration of Israeli-Turkish relations.

Turkey's angry reaction to Mursi's removal from power brought it to the verge of crisis with the new Egyptian leadership, whom it refused to recognize as legitimate. Erdogan's active sympathies with the Muslim Brotherhood in its various manifestations had already been demonstrated during the Mavi Marmara crisis in 2010, when he took an aggressive stand in support of the attempt by a radical Turkish-based organization, IHH, to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza. The incident, in which ten Turkish participants were killed, led to the degrading of bilateral relations with Israel. These positions are clearly rooted in Erdogan's own ideological outlook, and in the dynamics of AKP politics.

He may have been forced to modify his stance, to some extent, so as to avoid a total breach of Turkey's relations with Cairo and most of the Gulf states (Qatar is quite deliberately the exception to the Gulf Cooperation Council rule, on this as on other issues).⁴⁴ However, when Qatar did find itself under heavy pressure from her neighbors - to the point of withdrawal of their ambassadors from Doha -and agreed to expel some of the exiled Muslim Brotherhood leaders from its borders, it was Turkey again which offered them sanctuary, clearly delineating Erdogan's position in the ideological struggle for the future of the region.⁴⁵

It is yet to be seen whether the delicate position his country faces following the crisis with Russia would indeed, as some of his own statements indicate, push Erdogan further towards reconciliation and cooperation with the forces of stability. Following the downing of the Russian fighter, he has spoken more than once of the fact that "Turkey and Israel need each other" (although some Israelis found it jarring that he did so while at the same time using Hitler as a template for his vision of a Presidential regime). This may be lip service paid at a moment of real difficulty, but it might also signal a serious reconsideration of Turkey's priorities against the background of unfriendly regional realities.

In the Mediterranean context, after all, Turkey - unlike IS, or even Iran - is not simply an external disruptive force seeking to overthrow the existing order. Erdogan's vaulting ambitions are in fact modified not only by internal dynamics and expectations, but also by Turkey's place in the global economy; her dependence upon the tourist trade, which craves stability and peace; and her strategic need to secure her place within NATO, made ever more relevant by the recent clash with Russia. On matters of trade, and the prospects for energetic cooperation, Ankara has clearly signaled that it wishes to be thought of as part of the solution, and among other things, has so far acted to ensure that the diplomatic breach with Israel would not be translated into any damage to the flow of trade, which has continued to grow impressively despite the turmoil. This opens up options for future economic and energetic cooperation, as a significant building block for a new regional architecture, if the recalibration of Turkish priorities turns out to be real and enduring.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN: TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND ENERGY COOPERATION

The presence of several common threats, emanating from political and social chaos and from the rise of Islamist forces, is not the only reason for like-minded nations in the Mediterranean region to enhance their cooperation with each other. Also of great importance in shaping the agenda for national policies and regional alliances is the range of serious economic challenges many of them face, and the equally significant opportunities which are bound to arise if trade relations are allowed to develop in a relatively stable environment. Of particular importance is the potential for cooperation in the field of energy, once it can be fully realized. It is a necessary condition for the proper exploitation of the Eastern Mediterranean gas finds of recent years, and others which may yet follow, as well as for better utilization of modern clean technologies and the harnessing of renewable resources.

These opportunities are now more vital than ever for the future of the region. Economic trends in the Mediterranean basin as a whole have been largely negative over the last five years. Southern European economies

have suffered either long-term stagnation or worse, a distinct decline accompanied by very high levels of unemployment. Greece, which found itself at the epicenter of the worst crisis in the history of the Eurozone, was engulfed by political as well as social turmoil, bringing her economy to the point of collapse.⁴⁶ This led, in turn, to a derivative financial crisis in Cyprus, which threw a hitherto lively economy into a dangerous tailspin, as an imposed “haircut” for bank depositors ruined many small businesses and households.⁴⁷

Moreover, the immense investment of European resources in the Greek stabilization effort (and the smaller, but still significant, Cypriot bailout) inevitably limited the ability of EU institutions, and of key member states such as Germany, to offer more incentives for broader, long-term investment in the Mediterranean arena. European priorities were also reset, at least until the eruption of the present refugee crisis, by the emerging security challenges posed by Russian policies and the war in Ukraine.

Added to all of this, given the dismal record of political repression and regression in most of the countries affected by the Arab turmoil, was a growing sense of European skepticism. As a Euromed Survey indicated, “the dynamism for political transition and democratic reforms which was prevalent in the southern neighborhood in 2011 has largely disappeared in 2014. Where partner countries are unwilling to reform, the EU has no possibility to provide support for the political process.”⁴⁸ It remains to be seen whether the lessons of the tragic refugee crisis can permanently reverse these attitudes, which tend to downgrade the importance once accorded to the so-called Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The most dangerous aspect of this apparent drift towards neglect of Europe’s southern neighbors may be its impact on the future of Egypt, and therefore on the prospects for regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. While a systemic discussion of Egypt’s economic predicament lies outside the scope of this paper, the importance of President Sisi’s efforts to promote viability and growth, and to offer a viable alternative to Islamist extremism, cannot be overstated. In the short term, stern measures against the Muslim Brotherhood, a military campaign against IS, constitutional changes, and “managed”

parliamentary results can shore up the existing order; but in the long run, troubles lie ahead, and not just for Egypt, unless significant segments of Egyptian society have a stake in stability.

The omens are, at best, still ambiguous. At the investment “summit” held in Sharm al-Sheikh - by its formal name, the “Egypt Economic Development Conference” (March 13-15, 2015) - impressive pledges by the tens of billions were indeed made, reflecting a willingness by corporate leaders to listen to Egyptian promises of a new, more open business climate.⁴⁹ Implementation, however, lags behind. Moreover, the fragile efforts of recovery have been derailed even further by the damage to the tourist industry - a cornerstone of the Egyptian economy and its quest for modernization, accounting in total for well over 12 percent of the GDP and of overall employment⁵⁰ - caused by the loss of the Russian airliner, apparently to a terror attack which exploited breaches of security at Sharm al-Sheikh Airport.⁵¹

All this lends emphasis to the options for growth and cooperation implicit in improving economic ties among Mediterranean nations. Trade is a relevant aspect here. As has always been the case, southern Mediterranean countries (which once upon a time were being urged to unite in a Pan-Arab system) do not trade much with each other, and less than 10 percent of their traffic is intra-Arab. Instead, their focus lies across the sea: for the Maghreb countries, the EU has accounted for the majority of their overall trade.⁵² The more opportunities are provided, through instruments such as the proposed Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with Morocco and Tunisia, the better the chances for Europe’s southern neighbors to achieve economic stability.⁵³ Bringing Egypt into the fold could be of great importance in this context.

Even more dramatic in terms of the immediate impact of opportunities for trade and cooperation could be, and should be, joint ventures in the broad field of energy, and specifically, effective use of the large gas fields discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean in recent years. These have been the subject of some heated controversy in Israel throughout 2015, leading to complex political maneuvers under the pressure of populist opposition to gas exports. As it happens, this also obliged the government to take a clear stand as to the importance of regional cooperation.

The exact trajectory of development and use of these fields has yet to be determined. It is clear, however, that exports would serve more than just economic interests: they can, and indeed must, be seen as a tool for cementing relations with key neighbors:⁵⁴

- As things stand (and the situation is fluid), Egypt is likely to remain a potential client for Israel and/or Cyprus, jointly or separately. In recent years, as demand rose and supplies fell (not least because of poor maintenance of the gas fields, due to past low returns caused by government-imposed prices), blackouts became common, and public anger began to rise. The government felt obliged to act, and moved dramatically and courageously to reduce Mubarak's ruinous energy subsidies, and re-direct all local gas to domestic consumption. This will reportedly remain Egypt's policy even after the significant ENI finds in the offshore Zohr field.⁵⁵ This attitude, in turn, threatened to alienate the foreign companies (Fenosa and British Gas) whose LNG facilities, built for export, now lay idle -leading not only to litigation, but to an increased reluctance to invest in Egyptian infrastructure. Closer cooperation within the Egyptian-Israeli-Cypriot triangle, if it provides solutions to this problem, may still be relevant and constructive.

- Meanwhile, the prospects for an LNG facility in Cyprus have dimmed (but not vanished) due to questions of economic viability. However, given the limited size of Cypriot production, other modes of cooperation, including joint export from the two countries' adjacent fields, and possibly electricity generation in Cyprus (with connectivity to Greece), may be attractive for both sides.

- Israel is also well positioned to become Jordan's main energy supplier. While not a littoral country, Jordan has in fact been an important player - an "honorary Mediterranean" - in all the architectural designs for the region, and stability and prosperity there is of paramount importance for regional stability.

- To this may be added, despite the current, ongoing outbreak of violence, Israel's ability to supply gas to a future Palestinian power station being planned near Jenin, while also enabling the exploitation of the Gaza Marine field.

- It is yet to be seen, as Turkey charts her course after the Russian crisis, and as work on a Cyprus settlement continues (with some expecting these talks to make real progress), whether political conditions will enable Turkey to be woven into this network.

Interestingly enough, even in Lebanon - where Hezbollah is a powerful political player - there are prospects for practical understandings with Israel over delineation of the EEZ. Business is business, and it is clear to all concerned that any hope for the emergence of a Lebanese energy sector is fully dependent upon stability and the reduction of tensions along the lines of control in the Eastern Mediterranean.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS: BILATERAL (AND TRILATERAL) LINKS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

These prospects for energetic cooperation, listed above, are in turn an important part of a broader emerging pattern of practical cooperation between key like-minded players in the Eastern Mediterranean arena. As Efraim Inbar has indicated in his study, this is driven to some extent by growing doubts about the willingness and ability of the United States to provide a stable security environment, in the face of the mounting challenges and threats.

Thus, for Egypt - a key to regional stability - the fantasies of Pan-Arabism have been receding further and further, amidst the chaos and the patterns of radicalization, and her place in the regional order has been undergoing a subtle but significant change. The claims to lead and even unify the Arabs, while never officially abandoned, have declined in importance, and the now-marginal role of the Arab League, as an institution, reflects this change. More focused bilateral and trilateral relations, whether within or beyond the confines of the Arabic-speaking world, have become more relevant to Egypt's real needs. The Turkish and Qatari connection was, as indicated above, central to Mursi's policies; but with the shift of orientation under Sisi, Egypt has firmly established herself at the core of the regional forces supporting stability.

Admittedly, not the Mediterranean but the Gulf players have been Egypt's key partners, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE committed to helping the new leadership navigate the transition period. The visit of Prince Muhammad bin Salman, the King's son and second in line for the succession, now serving as Saudi Defense Minister (and considered to be the driving force behind the new and active profile in regional affairs), produced the "Cairo Declaration," issued on July 30, 2015, which affirmed the two countries' cooperation in military affairs as well as in trade and investment; it also included a cryptic reference to the settlement of their maritime border; and quite significantly, not a word on the Palestinian question.⁵⁶ President Sisi's visit to the UAE in October 2015 reflected a similar spirit of cooperation.⁵⁷

Still, the Mediterranean dimension remains relevant. Egypt's intervention in Libya (aided by the UAE, whose air force participated in strikes against Islamist targets) was limited in scope, but clearly designed to support elements opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood and the radical militias.⁵⁸ Its decision to step in and offer continuous support to General Haftar's forces, despite his lackluster performance so far, reflects Egypt's own national security concerns - the desire to avoid the rise of a Brotherhood-dominated government on her border, and the ongoing problem of arms smuggling - as well as the realization that they require a proactive policy. Given what has already been said about Libya's centrality in the Mediterranean, and the impact of the crisis there on European concerns, Egypt's inevitable involvement is bound to remain an important contribution to regional security writ large.

The same is true of Egyptian-Jordanian relations. These have not been free of tensions over the years, not least because of mutual resentment over their respective roles in Palestinian affairs, but since 2013, the predominant factor has been the commonality of interests in the face of similar challenges. Mursi's departure was seen in Amman as removing a threat to the Kingdom's stability (although the Hashemites, unlike Mubarak or Sisi, always found ways of bringing the Muslim Brotherhood into the political fold, co-opting them, and then inducing strife into their ranks). Significantly, despite Jordan's attentiveness to US concerns, the King joined Saudi Arabia and the UAE in voicing early support for Sisi, even when the initial reactions of the Obama Administration seemed to reflect dismay at the turn of events in Egypt.⁵⁹

While some economic issues remain unresolved, and there are differences of policy, or at least of nuance, as regards the Syrian situation, relations have grown distinctly warmer. King Abdullah II was the first foreign leader to visit Cairo after Mursi's overthrow, and Sisi reciprocated in December 2014. This was followed by a visit by Egyptian PM Mahlab, who came to discuss specific economic and service issues, and particularly the treatment of the large Egyptian workforce in Jordan, who had been subject to some suspicion during Mursi's period in power.⁶⁰ While this cannot be described as an intimate alliance, it is nevertheless another structural element in the emerging security architecture.

Two other, non-Arab, Mediterranean countries stood out in their support for the new regime in Egypt, which has become a litmus test for strategic orientations in the region: first Cyprus, then Greece. While much of Europe took an openly critical stand towards Mursi's overthrow, Cypriot Foreign Minister Kasoulides was among the first to welcome the change of government, followed by President Anastasiades's visit in December 2013.⁶¹ From a Cypriot point of view, this produced spectacular results: in an October 2014 meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in New York, Sisi demanded the denial of observer status from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,⁶² which was granted to it in 2004. Greece, both under Samaras and under Tsipras, took a similar stand. Egypt is too important, her stability too vital, and her open rift with Turkey too inviting, for Athens to ignore. With the prospects for energy cooperation added to the list of common interests, the foundations were laid for the tripartite summit in Cairo on November 8, 2014, which produced a remarkable document in which Sisi, Samaras, and Anastasiades, "cognizant of the immense challenges to the stability, security and prosperity of the Eastern Mediterranean," pledged to "nurture our tripartite cooperation ever stronger for years to come."⁶³

The change of government in Greece, and the rise to power of Syriza, a party drawing upon the traditions of the radical left, did not reverse this commitment to cooperation with Sisi (despite the Greek left's residual anger towards the colonels' military coup in 1967). On April 30, 2015, Tsipras joined Anastasiades and Sisi in Nicosia for another tripartite summit, cementing the relationship and emphasizing its practical implications, such as resolving EEZ delineation issues and promoting

trade, as well as the need to stand together against terror. Almost by definition, this exacerbated Turkey's growing sense of isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean - which was in fact one of the undeclared purposes of the trilateral relationship.⁶⁴

So far, no position was offered to Israel in this framework; and indeed, the texts of the Cairo Declaration, and the subsequent declaration issued in Nicosia in April 2015, include standard language on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, which reflects the familiar views of the Arab League (and the EU). The Greek parliament voted overwhelmingly, in December 2015, to recommend recognition of a Palestinian state (a recommendation which Tsipras chose not to follow). Old habits die hard. In practical terms, however, Israel does enjoy an increasingly close bilateral dialogue with all three countries, as well as with Jordan, focused upon common security challenges as well as economic opportunities, and these relations can be considered to be components, or even pillars, of the emerging regional structure.

Israeli relations with Jordan have become more intimate and complex over the years, and despite some public acrimony over the Temple Mount, have served to negotiate (with American help) a practical framework for the reduction of tensions (which the Palestinians resisted).⁶⁵ Too much is at stake for this relationship to be disrupted by external provocations. Since well before the Peace Treaty of 1994 (and some would say, since the Faisal-Weizmann agreement of 1919), Israel and the Hashemites often faced the same deadly enemies, from Hajj Amin al-Husseini in the 1930s and 1940s, to the Soviet-backed Palestinian factions and Syrian invasion in 1970, to the "Islamic State" and the ambitions of Iran today. Indeed, Israel's presence in the Jordan Valley and Jordan's own impressive capabilities complement each other in frustrating Khamenei's directive to turn the West Bank "into the next Gaza."⁶⁶

Without Jordanian-Israeli security coordination (backed by AIPAC's efforts on behalf of a larger US aid package) it would have been difficult for Jordan to face and defeat the dangers on her Eastern and Northern border. In economic terms, too, the benefits and "peace dividends" of cooperation with Israel are recognized as sufficiently important - particularly against the background of the challenges arising from

absorbing massive numbers of Syrian refugees - so as to withstand hostile reactions from within Jordanian society.⁶⁷

Israeli-Egyptian relations have also been transformed since 2013, particularly in the field of security cooperation. With the return of an Egyptian ambassador to Israel, this reality was given a formal seal of approval. Both countries face an active danger from terrorist infrastructures in Sinai, and share a broader list of enemies in common (although not necessarily in the same order of priorities). This was manifest during the fighting in Gaza in the summer of 2014, when Egypt did not bother to hide her hostility towards Hamas, and it continues to evolve under present circumstances. Among the most significant indications of this change has been Israel's willingness to adopt a flexible interpretation of the provisions of the Peace Treaty's Military Annex, and to give her consent to the deployment of far larger Egyptian forces than are allowed under the agreement, so as to enable them to operate against terror groups and restore effective control of north-eastern Sinai (including the destruction of the smuggling tunnel system across the border with Gaza).⁶⁸

To all this should be added the potential energy connection analyzed above, which was actively sought by the Egyptians, at least until a crisis erupted over the arbitration decision on debts to Israel's Electric Corporation. There is an ongoing effort to enlarge the scope and relax the limits on the QIZ (Qualifying Industrial Zones), where factories with an Israeli input can gain access to the American market as part of the US-Israeli Free Trade Zone.⁶⁹ This trilateral arrangement, which had its parallel in Jordan until the Kingdom signed its own FTA, is part of a broader pattern: Israel has been promoting closer US-Egyptian relations, and acting to bridge the gaps that have opened up since 2013. Although Egyptian commentators try to ignore or dodge this aspect,⁷⁰ one of the major reasons for the positive shift in American attitudes towards Sisi has been the work put in by Israel (and AIPAC). Israel raised a similar argument with key European players as well, and was joined in this effort by Greece and Cyprus.

An intimate discussion of the need to sustain regional stability has indeed been one of the main elements which have brought Israel and Greece ever closer in recent years. This rapprochement was seen in the visit of Foreign

Minister Kotsias (which came, as already mentioned, immediately after the referendum of July 5), and then the remarkably warm visit of Prime Minister Tsipras in late November 2015. For leaders whose roots are in the Greek hard left - with its long tradition of hostility towards Israel - to follow comfortably in the footsteps of both Papandreou (PASOK) and Samaras (ND) in advocating a closer friendship with Israel is a remarkable testimony to the ability, in Athens, to appreciate the value of the relationship. It comes against the background of dramatic events in the Eastern Mediterranean, and also, it should be admitted, under the influence of the positive shift in popular attitudes towards Israel, in both Greece and Cyprus, which came as a direct result of the sharp downturn in Israeli-Turkish relations, and particularly the Mavi Marmara incident.

This transformation, after years in which Greece was almost considered “the 22nd member of the Arab League” (particularly during Andreas Papandreou’s term of office; whereas his son, George, did his best to undo this part of his legacy) did not begin in 2010. Back in February 2000, albeit still a hopeful moment in the Israeli-Arab peace process, the Greek Defence Analysis Institute organized a conference, in Thessaloniki, on the relationship “in a changing Regional Environment,” and the proceedings clearly reveal, despite past bitterness on both sides, a lively interest in an Israeli-Greek rapprochement.⁷¹ By 2008, the first (and sizable) joint exercise of the two air forces was held, curiously called Glorious Spartan. But it was only after Papandreou’s unplanned dinner with Netanyahu in Café Pushkin in Moscow on February 16, 2010, followed by the Mavi Marmara incident in May (which Greece was quick to denounce in public, but assessed quite differently in private), that the doors finally opened to a very different type of bilateral relationship, involving military as well as economic cooperation.⁷² By the time of the Carmel Fire in December 2010, Greece and Cyprus were the first countries Israel turned to for help, and the first to send it.

As the breakthrough in Israeli-Greek relations took shape and became a steady aspect of foreign policy for both countries, there was also a dramatic shift in Israel’s interactions with Cyprus. Interestingly, this was initiated (in this case, too, against the background of Israel’s worsening relationship with Erdogan’s Turkey) during the presidency of Dimitris Christofias, who, as leader of AKEL, was the only Communist head of

state in Europe. As in the case of Greece, but in reverse order, his visit to Israel in March 2011,⁷³ reciprocated by Netanyahu a year later (the first ever visit by an Israeli head of state to Cyprus), proved that the drive towards closer cooperation transcends party lines and ideological divisions. Chrisofias's right-wing successor, Nikos Anastasiades, took the relationship even further, choosing Israel as his first foreign destination after his election victory in May 2013, and coming again in June 2015, followed just six weeks later by Netanyahu's return visit, which he in turn reciprocated in November.

The parallel evolution in the relations between Israel and the two Hellenic states was bound to lead to the exploration of trilateral options. With Greece as the main protagonist, the secretaries-general of the three foreign ministries met in Athens in November 2014, and produced a declaration calling for further cooperation on economic and social policies (deliberately omitting any overt reference to security and military matters). Several ministerial meetings followed, and with the Tsipras visit in Israel, the ground was set for a tripartite summit, with gas cooperation defined as the key subject, but with a wide variety of other common interests, and rising security concerns, expected to be on the agenda. Moreover, other Mediterranean players, with Italy in the lead, are taking note of this emerging element and may be looking at opportunities to expand this type of modular dialogues.

CEMENTING THE BRICKS: THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF MEDITERRANEAN IDENTITY

Underpinning the evolution of political, military and economic inter-relationships between Eastern Mediterranean players is an ambiguous, less salient, but nevertheless significant dimension of cultural and historical association among the peoples of the realm once known to the Romans as *Mare Nostrum*. When he welcomed President Anastasiades in Jerusalem on the latter's second visit, Prime Minister Netanyahu began by recalling his impressions from the Nicosia Historical Museum, where artifacts clearly reflected the "common roots" and the ancient links between the two lands.⁷⁴

In a similar vein, the Egyptian-Greek-Cypriot tripartite declaration in Cairo included an explicit reference to this aspect: “We recall the strong historical ties and rich cultural common heritage that we share, which is the result of two great human civilizations both with a unique universal legacy for all humanity.”⁷⁵ This is clearly an expedient linguistic compromise: on the one hand, it echoes the notion of a dialogue of civilizations, in this case, presumably, between Islam and (Greek) Christendom; on the other hand, it speaks of a “cultural common heritage” bridging the barrier between the two. It is the latter which raises interesting questions as to the nature of this commonality, and the essence of the Mediterranean identity which these “strong historical ties” have forged. Indeed, in their opening remarks at the Mediterranean Dialogues Conference in Rome, both Prime Minister Renzi and King Abdullah II of Jordan referred not only to the common dangers but also to the cultural dimension which links the like-minded nations of the region.

As Irad Malkin has pointed out, back in 2003, this commonality evokes the work of Taha Hussein, whose controversial argument in favor of Egypt’s *mutawassitiyyah*, “mediterraneity” - in his formative work, “The Future of Culture in Egypt,” written in 1937 -was still arousing interest, and controversy, more than 70 years later: “He saw the need for Egypt to identify with a transnational culture that was neither Islamic nor oriental nor Arabic, but explicitly Mediterranean.”⁷⁶ That the Egyptian authorities in 1996 saw fit to praise the paper, printed once again by their own publishing house, is an interesting comment on the power of ideas. Going back to the links between Egypt and the ancient Aegean peoples, Taha Hussein reminded his readers of the existence (by Pharaoh’s permit) of Greek “colonies” on Egyptian soil, back in the first millennium BC; and argued that while Egypt sustained a “Western” identity, it had been “Eastern” forces - the Persians in ancient times, and the Turks more recently - who endangered it.⁷⁷ This has something of a current ring to it, even if we live in a world in which Taha Hussein’s talk about the iniquities of the “Turkish race” has by now become obsolete.

Can the notion of a Mediterranean identity or “idea” - perhaps better expressed, as Malkin suggests, by the concept of Mediterranean “paradigms” in historiography - be relevant to the more mundane business of forging economic and security cooperation among littoral

nations? The question is rendered even more complex by the legacy of another prominent voice: Albert Camus, once perceived as a “prophet of Mediterranean secular humanism” due to his essay on “the New Mediterranean Culture”(again, in 1937 - against the background of the rise of fascism in Europe, and Barcelona’s role in the Spanish civil war). His quest for a Mediterranean tradition that puts man at the center was later denounced as the effort of a “well-meaning colonizer,” because he was unable to conceive of political independence for his native Algeria.⁷⁸ This critique was, in a sense, echoed in our time, when the nations of the Maghreb reacted suspiciously to Sarkozy’s call for a Mediterranean Union.⁷⁹

And yet the challenge today is not how to bind the peoples of the southern shores of the Mediterranean to their former colonial masters, but rather how to help their countries save themselves from a descent into murderous chaos and new form of totalitarianism. With Arabism a dead fantasy, and Islamism a deadly one, there is merit in offering a vision of Mediterranean commonalities as a viable, and indeed humanist, alternative. The elements of this cultural affinity are after all quite obvious for any traveler to see: from the ubiquitous glories of Roman archeology, to the modern Mediterranean diet; from the joys of certain types of music to the pleasures of the seaside (“How fascinating it is to be in a country where you can go to beach and see a Muslim woman, a gay couple kissing, and a Hassid sharing the same small place?” wrote a delighted and surprised Egyptian student about his experience of Tel Aviv;⁸⁰ much the same could once have been said of Alexandria, long ago, before the ravages of Arabism, Islamism, and more recently, floods).

Perhaps they can be best observed when the great Mediterranean cities are placed in juxtaposition with other national centers - Istanbul and Ankara, for example,⁸¹ Barcelona and Madrid, Alexandria and Cairo, Naples and Milan, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem - in a manner which adds a “Mediterranean modifier” to the national and civilizational heritage. In Israel, this quest for a Mediterranean identity was also linked to the internal tension between Jews of “Western” (in fact, mainly Eastern European) traditions and those of the “East” (a somewhat confusing term, since the Maghreb, from where many of them hail, literally means “West” in Arabic). The work of path-breaking intellectuals such as

Jacqueline Kahanoff, who sought to translate the experiences of her youth, in a relatively tolerant pre-Nasserist Egypt, into an agenda for a transformed Jewish identity, is now gaining in resonance.⁸² How can these elements of commonality help cement in place the various building blocks of bilateral and trilateral cooperation, already emerging, and thus give rise to a stable regional architecture? A note of caution is necessary here. The vision of a Mediterranean identity cannot, in itself, produce stability and prosperity in a region rife with conflict. Offering what he described as a vision of Pax Mediterraneo, Ambassador Uri Savir, one of the central figures in Israel's peace efforts in past decades, waxed lyrical:

“Discovering the factors which unite the 22 societies surrounding the Mediterranean, constituting a potential community which could ultimately live in peace and co-existence, certainly justifies deeper pursuit of this issue. At first sight, the most obvious common aspect of these communities is their monotheistic faith. The Mediterranean basin is the cradle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the civilizations built around these religions spread cultural affinities across the region. The Mediterranean is poetic: rich with culture and history, naturally calm, suffused with unique aromas, a source of inspiration and creativity. This common identity, joined with a common will to put an end to war and bloodshed, gives rise to a vision of comprehensive peace in the Mediterranean.”⁸³

This is beautiful. But it is also dangerously misguided, not because the vision need not be put forward, but because of the faith put in it as a force in itself. The cart of Mediterranean commonalities and identity politics, while indeed loaded with the rich variety of legacies and experiences described above, should not be hitched before the horses. For peace to prevail, poetic paeans (and other “soft power” measures suggested by Savir, such as grand declaratory postures, and the creation of “glocalized” networks of like-minded cities) are not enough. They can, and indeed should, have their place, but the underlying threats, and active enemies, must first be dealt with through the agency of hard-headed strategic coalitions. In the concluding sections of his book, David Abulafia points out the reason why the visions of unity have so far failed to generate a different political climate:

“One might have thought that an opportunity has arisen to turn away from Brussels and Frankfurt and to create closer economic and cultural bonds between Mediterranean Europe and North Africa and the Levant. But building ties across the Mediterranean is also frustrated by uncertainty about the future of the Arab countries along its shores.”⁸⁴

In other words, it is the political alliances of like-minded forces, willing to confront the firestorm of destructive forces threatening the future of the countries on the southern shore, which must first find the ways to put their capabilities and efforts together; and through the evolution of existing architectures of cooperation, and the emergence of new ones, create the conditions under which the vision of regional commonality can be realized.

MEDITERRANEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURES: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The broad challenges lying ahead - facing the tragedies and dangers of chaos; confronting Islamist totalitarian enemies in their various manifestations; and creating the right conditions for the realization of the Eastern Mediterranean's economic potential - all must be met by utilizing existing architectures for regional security, as well creating new ones where necessary. “Soft power” issues of identity and cultural commonalities should play a useful supportive role, but cannot be an alternative to effective action.

What are the relevant structures, and what should be the ensuing policy? This stabilization project must rely on existing organizations, and above all on the two “Big Brussels Bureaucracies.” Since the mid-1990s, a hopeful time in regional and international affairs, there have been several evolutionary changes in the role of existing organizations - NATO, the EU, and the emergence of the UfM - in offering frameworks for cooperation:

- NATO initially established the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) as a tool of collective cooperation with all relevant regional players at the same table: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and

Mauritania (two of which are “honorary Mediterraneans,” whose inclusion is a function of their neighbors’ interest - Jordan because of Israel, and Mauritania as part of the Arab Maghreb). This entailed, however, a cumbersome process through which parties less interested in progress - and in fact, politically committed to limiting Israel’s role - could reduce common activities to a minimum. Hence the decision, by the time of the Istanbul NATO summit of 2004, to overcome this barrier by moving ahead with ICPs (Individual Cooperation Programs) with each country separately, while retaining the MD framework, mainly in the field of training programs and seminars. NATO cooperation is further hampered by the deliberate resistance of Turkey to cooperation with Israel (as long as relations remain downgraded, as they have been since the Mavi Marmara incident), and to coordination with the EU (due to the Cyprus problem). In addition, while some progress was made on NATO cooperation with the Maghreb countries, they continued to lag behind Egypt, Israel, and Jordan in terms of the level of integration in NATO plans and activities.⁸⁵ The magnitude of the challenges lying ahead requires, first of all, a mechanism which would enable NATO to overcome Turkish obstructionism; and then a more flexible cooperative structure which would facilitate greater integration of non-NATO Eastern Mediterranean allies, such as Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, and Jordan, in Alliance plans and operations. Created to confront a specific opponent, NATO can still spell the word “enemy”(which the EU never could), and hence the Alliance’s continued importance in Mediterranean affairs, as long as Islamist challengers are still armed and dangerous.

- The EU, meanwhile, advanced the grand vision of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership through the Barcelona Process, established in November 1995 (in the presence of Yasser Arafat, among other peacemakers). With ambitious goals, and the capacity to offer specific benefits - a system of association agreements; aid to the Palestinians; scientific partnership with Israel; a customs union with Turkey; support for the private sector in Tunisia; and so on - the EU seemed well positioned to offer transformative help in the years ahead.⁸⁶ Much of this remains valid 20 years later. But by 2004 it was clear to the EU, as to NATO, that the visions for large-scale regional cooperative ventures were making little progress, not least, because of the failure of

Israeli-Arab peace efforts. The emphasis therefore shifted to the more individual efforts of the ENP (European Neighborhood Policy), with each of Europe's Mediterranean and Eastern European interlocutors being addressed separately. Promoting cooperation on energy, environment, business, and trade (interestingly, the elegant brochure on this last subject chose to display Tel Aviv's Azrieli towers⁸⁷), the EU has been utilizing its capabilities to foster prosperity and stability. The effort failed, however, to bring Mediterranean partners together; and absent an effective European military capability (an issue raised in March 2015 by the president of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker),⁸⁸ there was little the EU could offer to counter active threats to regional stability. This may change in the context of the military effort in the central Mediterranean against Libyan migration, but the test of that effort still lies ahead. If it evolves - and a note of skepticism is well due - this may in time have an impact on the Eastern Mediterranean balance of power.

- Cognizant of these enduring weaknesses, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy launched a new initiative to revive the vision. In his election campaign of 2007; his victory speech, which indicated this as a priority; and his diplomatic efforts, which led to the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean in the Paris Summit of 2008, he offered an ambitious prospect of integration, albeit one stamped with the specific concerns of French society, challenged by complex relations with a growing Muslim minority. The institutional manifestations of his initiative -the Secretariat in Barcelona, and the Parliamentary Assembly in Rome - are a unique achievement in themselves: with a Moroccan director general, an Israeli deputy secretary general for higher education and research (Professor Ilan Chet, who helped establish the new branch of the Mediterranean University Fes), a Palestinian deputy secretary general for environment and water (Nasser Tahboub), and Turkish, Cypriot, Italian, French and Portuguese colleagues, it at least symbolizes the possibility of a different pattern of cooperation.⁸⁹

Still, the full potential of the Union for the Mediterranean, as an institution and as the standard bearer of an idea, has yet to be realized. Two major factors have hindered its development:

- Limited financial support from Brussels, which retains a predominant position in allocating resources to neighborhood projects;
- More fundamentally, the decision, taken under pressure from Germany and other EU member states, to integrate the full membership of the EU into the UfM, and to establish a role for the Arab League. This modified, and to some extent undermined, Sarkozy's original design. While Germany and Saudi Arabia, Finland and Qatar, can all make their contribution to Mediterranean prosperity in a supportive role, the core capabilities for integration and commonality in security and economic matters, and the parallel effort to enhance a sense of regional identity, need to remain the responsibility of the Mediterranean littoral states (with non-littoral Jordan and Portugal added as natural extensions thereof).

It is in this respect that the various bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral building blocks of regional cooperation, as described above, can find their place in a Mediterranean "variable geometry" architecture. One such sub-regional structure, the Western Mediterranean "5+5" (on the European side, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Malta; and on the southern shore, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania) can serve as a model for a similar Eastern Mediterranean sub-group, working in coordination with the broader UfM framework.

Thus, an effort to bring together the key like-minded players - working, at first, through informal and semi-formal ("track one-and-a-half") channels, perhaps with Italy's active help - would be a vital step forward. Facing the immense challenges outlined above, all five countries - Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, and Jordan - have forged links with each other which amply demonstrate the commonality of their perspectives and interests. They now need to find a way to translate these into concrete and enduring forms of cooperation. Almost twenty years ago, ideas were already being put forward in Israel advocating Mediterranean Cooperation Centers on anything from water to cultural tourism.⁹⁰ More recent events, from the Carmel Fire to the current wave of sea-borne refugees, underline the need for common emergency responses. Above all, intelligence sharing and operational coordination are necessary in confronting resolute and dangerous enemy forces.

Will this be seen as an essentially anti-Turkish alliance? It is easy to construe it that way, but while fear of Turkey's ambitions, and resentment of her current support for terrorist and subversive elements, does play a role in pushing the Five together, the emergence of an effective balancing block is not necessarily hostile to Turkish national interests. Indeed, as the future of Turkish policy hangs in the balance after Erdogan's recent election victory, a solid association of the forces of stability can be seen as an invitation for Turkey to reconsider her past course and find her proper place in a stable Mediterranean architecture.

All this requires a fresh perspective in Washington too. It is high time for the United States, whose early involvement in the Mediterranean was one of the formative aspects of the young republic,⁹¹ to learn to think of the region not merely as a Sea Lane of Communication (SLOC, in US Navy usage), but as a strategic environment in its own right. Engagement with the UfM, which does incorporate two of the US partners in the G7, would have symbolic resonance; more immediately, so would open or covert support for closer integration and combined security planning among the Eastern Mediterranean "Five." With backing from within American civil society, where Jewish and Hellenic organization have already been joining hands to promote such cooperation, this could transform the nature of American involvement. It should be complemented by pressure on Turkey, as a NATO ally, to reverse her traditional obstructionism, and enable the Alliance to establish closer cooperation and coordination with both Israel and the EU.

These points (and other recommendations, such as drawing Cyprus closer to NATO, and enhancing US naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean) have in fact been made in a useful and hard-hitting paper published in December 2014 by the Hudson Institute, which urged the Administration not to squander the opportunity inherent in the Eastern Mediterranean energy finds.⁹² They are even more appropriate now.

As for Israel, a strategy for the utilization of the "Mediterranean Opportunity" would require awareness and attention at the highest level, in line with the remarkable efforts already made under Netanyahu to transform relations with Greece and Cyprus, and deepen Israel's strategic cooperation with Egypt and Jordan. Regional institutions, such

as the UfM, should also be given their due, and an effort should be made to secure continued Israeli representation in Barcelona at the deputy secretary general level.

Above all, developing the prospects for utilizing Israel's gas resources as a tool for regional integration must remain a central pillar of Israeli strategy; and so should a conscious effort to make a Mediterranean strategic presence, and a Mediterranean identity, an important and enduring part of the effort to secure for the Jewish people its rightful place among the nations. After all, as Abulafia points out, the key to the future of the Mediterranean is the acceptance of diversity; and in the in the colorful mosaic of the Great Sea, Israel's own evolving identity would find a much more comfortable home than in the "Middle East," predominantly Arab and Islamic, as presently defined.

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