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## THE MEDITERRANEAN RESET:

Geopolitics in a New Age

Editors: Anoushiravan Ehteshami,
Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello

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**Contents**

Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello

Sally Khalifa Isaac and Haidi Esmat Kares

Nicolás de Pedro

Jordi Quero

Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Ariabarzan Mohammadi

Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Ariabarzan Mohammadi

Aybars Görgülü and Gülşah Dark

ASI-REM

Anouhiravan Ehteshami and Ariabarzan Mohammadi

**Project Identity**

## Contributors

Anoushiravan Ehteshami is Professor of International Relations and the Nasser al-Sabah Chair, Director of HH Sheikh Nasser al-Sabah Research Programme, and Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies, School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University.

Ariabarzan Mohammadi is Research Fellow in the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University.

ASI-REM (Arab Studies Institute – Research and Education Methodologies) is an independent, non-profit research and pedagogical organisation based in Beirut, Lebanon.

Aybars Görgülü is Projects Manager at the Center for Public Policy and Democracy Studies (PODEM), Istanbul.

Daniela Huber is Senior Fellow at the IAI in the Mediterranean and Middle East Programme and Gerda Henkel Guest Researcher at LUISS University.

Gülşah Dark is Project Officer at the Center for Public Policy and Democracy Studies (PODEM), Istanbul.

Haidi Esmat Kares is Assistant Lecturer of Political Science (International Relations) at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt.

Jordi Quero Arias is Researcher in the Middle East Department at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and Lecturer in International Relations at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona.

Maria Cristina Paciello is Senior Fellow at the Mediterranean and Middle East Programme of the International Affairs Institute (IAI) and Adjunct Professor at the University Ca' Foscari of Venice (Political Economy of Islamic Countries and Economic Policies of Arab countries).

Nicolás de Pedro is Research Fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).

Sally Khalifa Isaac is Associate Professor of Political Science (International Relations) at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt.

# Introduction

*Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello*

The Mediterranean waterway has acted as both a bridge and a barrier between continents for millennia. History is riddled with examples of empires and emerging powers seeking to project their power in and around the Mediterranean, and all have made use of it as a communications and transmission route. The Mediterranean has facilitated access to different continents, and those entities with the means and the will have used it to project power and to secure a comparative advantage against their adversaries. One must also be mindful of the reality that much of the political landscape of the Mediterranean – its geopolitical reality – was shaped by European interventions, and in this the "local external" is in fact a dialectical relationship. Indeed, without taking into account the colonial period, one might overlook the fact that historically the Mediterranean has also been imagined as a bridge allowing the projection of European power into Africa and West Asia.

At the height of the Cold War the Mediterranean was a central zone of conflict between the superpowers, and the Sea's riparian states found it difficult to maintain their space between the NATO alliance on the one hand and the Warsaw Pact on the other. Inevitably, some Mediterranean states veered to the West while others stayed close to the Soviet bloc. But, as the example of Egypt demonstrates, these relationships proved to be far too transient to provide either superpower with a firm strategic footing in the Mediterranean. The region thus has its own unique dynamics engendering significant inter-state conflicts which included a rather substantial region-external component, as the 1956, 1967 and 1973 wars show. Conflicts and securitized tensions of a more 'local' nature are also in evidence: the Turkish occupation of Cyprus, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the simmering tensions between Greece and Turkey are good examples of these, all of which cause fissures between states and communities of this area.

In the immediate post-Cold War period the European Union entered into a first attempt at forging comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean relations through the Barcelona Process in a global environment where the West called the shots. The geopolitics of the Mediterranean region has, however, changed in the twenty-first century, partly as a result of local state dynamics and partly as a product of transformational changes at the international and broader regional levels. As opposed to the early 1990s, the EU today is no longer the dominant or key actor in the Mediterranean and it now has to balance its policies and interests against the perceptible influence of a range of major and regional powers. The major powers exhibiting clear influence are the **United States, China** and the **Russian Federation**, each pursuing its own set of interests in this area. Alongside them are a number of regional powers, several of which are relative newcomers that bring with them very different priorities for and narratives about the Mediterranean region: **Iran, Qatar** and **Saudi Arabia**. And then there are the 'resident regional powers' of **Turkey** and **Israel** which have considerable presence in the Mediterranean and which also have longstanding relations with the European Union.

As the EU seeks to open a new chapter in its foreign policy in the Mediterranean and beyond – as evident in its new Global Strategy – it needs to understand how these eight powers perceive the Mediterranean, interact with and within it, and conduct themselves in pursuit of their identity and interests. **This volume is the first of its kind which aims at shedding light on how these powers have been constructing, or at least have attempted to construct, different geopolitical imaginations of what the EU has labelled the Mediterranean as part of its foreign policy and**

**geopolitical considerations, and analyses which actors, methods, and policy areas it has focused on.** In so doing, it aims at staking out the areas of divergence, competition and conflict, as well as the basis on which the EU can cooperate with one or more of these influential states.

**Conceptualizing the Mediterranean**

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab uprisings in the 2010s have led to instability on the geopolitical level which link Iraq, Iran, the Persian Gulf, and key international actors such as the US, Russia, and China closely to the region the EU has defined as the Mediterranean. New conflicts in the Mediterranean do not have clear boundaries, spreading into the wider region, also causing a massive movement of population so that migration and mobility is becoming a cross-regional issue which transits the Gulf-Horn-Libya-Europe link. Furthermore, the Arab uprisings have led to the proliferation of new political ideas from a variety of state and non-state actors that not only challenge domestic and regional structures, but have also led to a growing influence of Persian Gulf countries on regional developments. Fearing the spread of new political ideas in the region, they have largely supported counter-revolutionary and military forces to take power from elected governments as, for example, in Egypt. New political ideas are not only challenging domestic and regional structures, but might also conflict, compete, or converge with the EU understanding of issues such as democracy, civil liberties and that of human rights. Similarly, the policy area of agriculture and water is key for the geopolitical stability of the region. It is a source of conflict, specifically as it is crucial for food security, environmental sustainability, and the everyday existence of people in the region. Southern Mediterranean countries, which are strongly dependent on food imports for their food security, not only have Europe as their agricultural geo-economic partner, but two-thirds of their supply comes from Russian, Ukrainian, and US grain (Lacirignola 2014: 252). In the case of water, there are links between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia on one hand, and Turkey, Iraq, and Syria on the other. Finally, industry and energy are key issues in the Mediterranean as they are concerned with the prospects for sustainable and inclusive development. Energy is a particularly contentious issue as energy resources are concentrated in the MENA and used for income generation but local energy demand is growing, which is putting pressure on the sustainability of the countries' energy models, potentially impacting future economic development, social stability, and security across the region as well as putting at risk the region's traditional role as an energy supplier for European consumers. Furthermore, a shift in power dynamics combined with the economic crisis in Europe have accelerated a trend already visible in several Southern Mediterranean countries, namely the diversification of trade partners outside the EU and particularly in promotion of South-South cooperation. While progress in trade negotiations between EU and Southern Mediterranean countries has stalled, with the exception of Morocco, many Arab countries such as Tunisia and Egypt have deepened economic relations with Iran, Gulf Arab countries and Turkey. In the case of Tunisia, for example, over the last two years Qatar has become the first foreign investor in the country to supersede France. With Europe facing serious economic difficulties, Morocco is also increasingly turning towards Africa in the hope of strengthening economic ties.

These brief examples highlight the importance of a broad regional focus that acknowledges the interconnection of different policy issues and the influence of a multitude of actors. In order to enhance the relevance of EU policies in a divided, multi-power and conflictual Mediterranean, its geometry needs to become more inclusive in terms of a variety of relevant partners, more flexible in terms of its policy instruments, and more responsive to diverse but deeply inter-linked policy issues. To be able to assess the full obstacles and potentialities of EU policies in the region, this volume conceptually redefines the region through an approach which is actor-driven. It acknowledges that the Mediterranean widely defined might include besides the EU member states also its accession candidates, the Mediterranean tier states, as well as Jordan, Iraq, Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council states, the Horn of Africa, Sudan, and the Sahel; but rather than pre-defining the region, it will observe how its multiple stakeholders perceive the region, and talk and practice it into being on the geopolitical level.

Geographical definitions or claims, as the literature associated with critical geopolitics has shown, "are necessarily geopolitical, as they inscribe places as particular types of places to be dealt with in a particular manner" (Kuus et al. 2013:6). This applies also to the concept of 'the Mediterranean' which has been constructed in a specific way by the EU, first in the 1970s and then more comprehensively from the 1990s onwards as the result of a political process driven by European economic and security interests (Bicchi 2007), rather than identity concerns (Behr et al. 2012: 16). Its narrow geopolitical construction of the Mediterranean has led the EU to engage with a small number of state actors (a group of southern neighbours) and, with its emphasis on bilateral methods, has limited its own range of action, thus seriously compromising its capacity to deal with policy issues that are strongly interconnected in an increasingly fragmented, multi-polar, and conflictual regional context (Behr 2012).

The European literature on Euro-Mediterranean relations has to a substantive degree adopted the EU's definition of the Euro-Mediterranean area, so marginalizing the multitude of contending perspectives/constructions of regional security and geopolitical views by state and non-state actors. Broader geopolitical dynamics which deeply influence this strictly defined Mediterranean region – including from areas such as the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, but also from the global level – have thus been tendentiously blended out of the analysis. Importantly, this lacuna also applies to the study of EU bilateral and regional strategies which have not been contextualized in these emerging geopolitics, despite having an important bearing on their feasibility and effectiveness. While the EU is losing influence in the Mediterranean region, there is an increased competition from other international players, old and new. Notably, the literature on EU-Gulf relations has been hardly linked to the literature on EU-Mediterranean relations. There is a paucity of studies dealing with EU-GCC relations, especially with a view to Euro-Mediterranean relations, and there is a tendency to look at the Persian Gulf subregion from an energy viewpoint only, as well as at the Gulf as a coherent whole rather than a number of distinct countries that have differences and rivalries (Legrenzi 2011, Colombo 2014, Nonneman 2006). In sum, neither EU policies nor the literature examining it are currently prepared to deal with such a complex geopolitical context that is very different from the 1990s when the Barcelona Process was created (Behr et al. 2012: 11).

To move away from this Euro-centric approach, this special issue starts from a different proposition. It considers the region as including but not being limited to the EU's definition; the Mediterranean is not a "pre-given geographical fact", but the result of interests, identity, narratives, practices, and interactions (Kuus et al. 2013). *The Mediterranean exists through the various imaginations of its stakeholders.* Thus, the region may include other geographies and geopolitical dynamics which are currently excluded from the EU's construction, but are of key importance for the future effectiveness and potential of EU policies in the region.

**Theoretical and methodological framework**

EU policies have frequently been characterized as monologues which have marginalized the perspective of the other. The literature has repeated this trend. The key concepts with which the Mediterranean region has been studied have relied on Western International Relations and Comparative Politics approaches which have not spoken to local perspectives and perceptions (Ferabolli 2014). To move away from this Euro-centrist tendency, guiding theoretical framework of this volume is constructivism which seems particularly adequate for its specific research design. Constructivism's common ground, as Stefano Guzzini (2000: 147) has argued, is "epistemologically about the social construction of knowledge and ontologically about the construction of social reality". Constructivism so defined allows us to take account of the diverse constructions of the Mediterranean region which are emerging on both shores, being able to integrate multiple and area-crossing perspectives.

This theoretical approach is accompanied with a more reflexive methodology which identifies alternatives to prevailing structures (Hopf 1998: 180). Discourse analysis is used by all authors to investigate the different constructions of the Mediterranean by the eight key regional and external players (China, Russia, US, Israel, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar). Discourse analysis is both a theory and a transdisciplinary method which has gained in prominence in IR since the 1990s. A variety of diverse approaches exist (Dijk 2011; Wodak and Meyer 2009), whose common ground is that discourse is not just a description of reality, but "the layer of reality where meaning is produced and distributed" (Waever 2009: 199). We specifically relied on the approach of Jennifer Milliken, who has highlighted three dimensions of discourse: Discourses as 'structures of signification which construct social reality'; discourses as 'being productive (or reproductive) of things defined by the discourse', highlighting how a discourse constructs reality (who is authorized to speak, the process of production, etc.); and the study of 'dominating or hegemonic discourses, and their structuring of meaning as connected to implementing practices and ways of making these intelligible and legitimate' (Milliken 1999).

In order to inquire into how other stakeholders in the Mediterranean perceive and practice 'their' Mediterranean into being on the geopolitical level and in respect to geopolitically relevant and contentious policy areas, the following questions guided the research in this volume:[1]

How do alternative discourses construct/predicate the Mediterranean – perhaps in resistance to the dominant knowledge produced by the EU? What are the oppositions, exclusions and silences that their discourses/practices regarding the region entail? How can they be compared to those of the EU? How do their discourses regarding the Mediterranean overlap with each other and with those of the EU? How do the other stakeholders construct the EU's role in the Mediterranean? How do these powers frame the four policy areas (political ideas, agriculture and water, industry and energy, and migration and mobility) with regard to the Mediterranean? Which priorities do they set in this respect?

To explore these questions, all the official documents including policy documents of the key powers on European initiatives, the 'Arab Spring' (e.g., declarations, communications, common strategies, Action Plans and Strategy Papers) and specific key policy sectors (political ideas, agriculture and water, energy and industry, and migration and mobility) and key speeches by the governmental leaders of the above states were analysed. All authors also pursued a literature review of relevant scholarly books and articles, as well as documents produced by the key think tanks which also help the key states shape their policies or which criticize the EU and its role in the Mediterranean, notably the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the Aljazeera Center for Studies and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar; the Emirate Center for Strategic Studies and Research and the Future Center for Advanced Researches and Studies in the UAE; the al-Ahram Centres' *al-Siyasiyya al-Dawliyya* ('International Politics') and al-Ahram Strategic File in Egypt; the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Lebanon; the Institute of Diplomatic Studies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia; the Gulf Research Center (GRC), Shanghai Institute of International Studies, the Institute of West Asian and African Studies and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in China; the Centre for Strategic Research, Majlis Research Center, the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) and the Iranian Journal of Foreign Affairs in Iran; the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and the Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) in Israel; the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), the Institute of World Economy and International Relations and International Affairs (journal) in Russia, and others including review of the grey literature in the local language not usually taken into account by Western authors.

**Book overview**

The contribution by **Khalifa Isaac** and **Esmat Kares** demonstrates an obvious divergence in the priorities that the **United States** and the EU assign to various Mediterranean sub-regions and affairs, whereby the US focuses almost exclusively on the Eastern Mediterranean, while the EU has a more comprehensive approach to the region. At the same time, the authors also denote a remarkable similarity and complementarity in both actors' approaches to rising security threats, democracy and governance efforts, and economic development projects in the Mediterranean. Particularly, they highlight the consistency in both actors' practices in the securitization of weapons of mass destruction and energy issues, as well as the politicization of democracy promotion and economic development in the Mediterranean for the sake of stabilization.

**de Pedro** shows that the Mediterranean does not constitute the basis for defining and conceptualizing a region in the strategic thinking of the **Russian Federation**. As the US, also Russia mainly focuses on the Eastern Mediterranean. Mainly related to Russia's aspiration to enjoy a great Power status, the region has regained a central role in Moscow's calculus. Russia's official discourse does not coincide with that of the European Union. There are some potential complementarities when it comes to security and stability, but strategic distrust will prevail in the foreseeable future. Moscow presents itself as a stability-provider confronting the West. Hence there is a limited ground for effective and meaningful cooperation despite apparent shared goals of fighting terrorism or preventing further destabilization.

**Quero** examines the mental maps of the major **Chinese** foreign policy decision-makers in relation to the Mediterranean region, also alternatively referred as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). There is no single mental map or geopolitical cartography used by Chinese officials to refer to the focus region. Rather, Quero identifies at least four major geopolitical maps used by the Chinese officials to approach the MENA region, namely the "Arab countries/states", the "Middle East", the "Eurasian continent" and the broader category of "developing countries". Thus, China does not conceive of the region as a coherent unit, hence the multiple geopolitical cartographies existing side by side. Most of them seem triggered by Beijing's economic interest in the region and are used alternatively only depending on finalist considerations. However, as Quero also points out, China is increasingly distancing itself from its traditional constructions of the Mediterranean and embracing the highly securitized conceptions repeatedly used by global actors – not only the EU but most significantly the US – might be in the process of materializing.

**Ehteshami** and **Mohammadi** show that the term and concept of the Mediterranean as a region is absent in **Iran**'s discourse. Rather, the emphasis as indicated in its discourse rests on a set of Muslim countries which are part of the Islamic Ummah. This is in line with Iran's claim to leadership in the Muslim world. What is important in the region for Iran is its counter-hegemonic Axis of Resistance, with supporting the Palestinian cause and upholding an anti-Israeli position as one of the main principles of its foreign policy. This contrasts hugely with the EU's position which regards Israel as an associate member of the European Union. However, with the re-election of moderate Hassan Rouhani as president in Iran in May 2017 and his election promise that all the sanctions against Iran including the ones not related to the nuclear issue would be removed (in order to achieve this Rouhani has indicated that his government will use the 5+1 negotiation example as a model for resolving Iran's longstanding issues with the West), it seems that there is an opportunity for negotiations between the EU and Iran aimed at finding ways of de-escalating tensions between Iran and Israel.

The Mediterranean as conceived by the EU does not really figure much in the **Saudi** and **Qatari** discourse, which instead tends to concentrate on the Arabic and Islamic world. **Ehteshami** and **Mohammadi** point out that Saudi Arabia and Qatar see the Mediterranean either as part of Islamic/Arab world or as a space between two significant regions, the EU and the Middle East. Saudi

Arabia's and Qatar's priorities vis-à-vis the Mediterranean are geopolitical and security-oriented as evident in their interferences in the region, in particular following the Arab Spring. However, in some areas such as business development, which brings high profit return, the priorities of Saudi Arabia and Qatar overlap with EU policies. Yet in social and civil affairs, whereas the EU's policy is to support civil society in the Mediterranean, the two countries' activities in the Arab Mediterranean are more towards securing their own geopolitical interests and safeguarding their security. The authors argue that geopolitical considerations, especially safeguarding the security of the state against perceived threats from Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, are the most decisive factors that could explain Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's framing of the Mediterranean. Yet, this by no means suggests that all of their foreign policy decisions can be explained from this perspective. In fact, these decisions are usually multicausal.

**Görgülü** and **Dark** demonstrate that the Mediterranean does not exist as an individual region in **Turkey**'s foreign policy, although the country has implemented several initiatives to widen its sphere of influence. The adoption of a proactive foreign policy towards the region indicates that Turkey tries to leverage its strategic role there while addressing the global challenges at the same time. Turkey's self-image vis-à-vis the Mediterranean is built on having an impact in the region through better economic and political relations as well as its soft power instruments. In this context, Turkey's relations with the EU are crucial. The future of EU–Turkey relations appears gloomy and there exists a growing risk that Turkey's EU accession process will break down. If Turkey's membership process is suspended, it is quite probable that we will witness less cooperation between the two, in the context of the Mediterranean.

**Israel**, as ASI-REM points out, constructs the Mediterranean according to a Manichean schema whereby it classifies the countries which constitute the area as either nations it considers allies or nations and socio-political movements it considers threatening. Furthermore, in certain cases, this construction leaves space for attempting to move countries from the latter category to the former. For the former, the Israeli construction of security discourse consists of trading and military compacts, as well as friendly diplomatic ties. For the latter, Israeli construction of the Mediterranean is based on a discourse of deterrence – preventing such countries from threatening Israeli interests, as Israeli planners understand them – as well as attempting to weaken such countries when possible. ASI-REM also identifies four departure points crucial for appreciating how Israeli construction of the EU mediates Israeli construction of the Mediterranean as a securitized space – as well as a space whose substance and stability rest on an EU friendly to Israel, namely Israel's management rather than solution of the conflict, the EU's formal but not substantive position on the two state solution, the EU's formal and substantive commitments to Israel in the realms of political relations, defence and commerce, and the sharp and mounting disjunctures between popular opinion in the EU states and elite activity, which call into question the endurance of the first three points, and perhaps threaten to reverse their polarity in the long run.

In the **conclusion** to this volume, **Ehteshami** and **Mohammadi** present four key findings, namely that, firstly, security drives policy of all key powers; secondly, the definitions of 'security' by these powers is incompatible and at times competing; thirdly, these powers do not conceive the Mediterranean as a single space, let alone a shared space. Which, fourthly, leads to dramatic divergences in their approaches and priority areas. With all actors securitizing the region, but under different parameters, it is difficult for the EU to develop a single comprehensive approach towards them. It is suggested that a way forward would be to widen the Euro-Med contact group to include non-Mediterranean states in order to facilitate discussion of some initially very limited issues of common concern. Furthermore, by desecuritizing its own approach the EU could contain the other parties' securitized approach as well and identify pathways towards a more cooperative interaction with the emerging actors.

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**Notes**

1. The authors wish to acknowledge the crucial input of Cebeci and Schumacher (2016) in this respect.

## 1. US

## American Discourses and Practices in the Mediterranean Since 2001: A Comparative Analysis with the EU

*Sally Khalifa Isaac and Haidi Esmat Kares*

### Introduction

The United States has been steadily rising as an important actor in the Mediterranean since the post-WWII reconfiguration of the world order, as a result of the transformation in its interventionist and internationalist foreign and security policy that paralleled its rise as a superpower (Zoppo 1982). In fact, the US political, diplomatic and military engagement in the Middle East, North Africa, Southern Europe and the Balkans has increased to such an extent that the Mediterranean has even been described as essentially "an American lake" (Buchanan 2014: i[j]).

The importance of the Mediterranean however has witnessed shifts in US conception and strategy, particularly after the end of the Cold War and the consolidation of the European integration experience. The demise of the Soviet threat and the expansion of the EU's role in its "neighbourhood" had their repercussions on US perception and action in the Mediterranean. Nonetheless, the growing role of the EU in the Mediterranean was not met by an American withdrawal from the Mediterranean Sea itself nor from the various lands it connects. This fact poses questions regarding the compatibility of US and EU perceptions, priorities and actions in the Mediterranean in recent years, and whether such roles represent patterns of complementarity or rivalry.

To explore these questions, this paper examines US conception and practices in the Mediterranean since 2001 in comparison with those of the EU. By adopting a critical constructivist approach and extensive discourse analysis of US documents,[1] the paper enquires into US alternative discourses to construct the Mediterranean; US policy practices in the Mediterranean in the fields of security, democracy and economic development; and how such US discourses and practices can be compared to those of the EU (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016).

Accordingly, the paper is divided into two parts. The first tackles US conception of and interests in the Mediterranean since 2001, which brings into focus how the USA clearly distinguishes between the importance it accords the Sea itself in terms of "pre-positioning" and "communication", and the weight given to the various Mediterranean sub-regions. These range in importance from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to the Aegean, the Adriatic (Western Balkans), and Southern Europe. The second part provides a comparative analysis of US and EU approaches, practices and actions in the fields of security, promotion of democracy, and support for the Mediterranean's economic development.

### 1. US Conception of and Interests in the Mediterranean Since 2001

Among other consequences of 9/11, the events served to renew American interest in the Mediterranean. As before, the US conception of the Mediterranean space continued to derive its impetus mainly from European and Middle Eastern security, indicating that the US perception of the Mediterranean was maintained through a security lens. Additionally, the USA has continued to attach a high importance to the Mediterranean Sea itself, in its function as a main strategic route to important Mediterranean sub-regions. These include not only the Aegean and the Adriatic, but also

the Black Sea, the Middle East and the Gulf. In this respect, the US mapping of the Mediterranean distinguishes between the Mediterranean Sea and the various sub-regions it connects. Thus, as noted by Lesser (2015: 5), the US approach to the Mediterranean "has rarely if ever been accompanied by a strong sense of the Mediterranean as a coherent strategic space, and area of U.S. interest per se". This fragmented vision of the Mediterranean resembles that of the EU, which also perceives the Mediterranean as a conflictive space composed of distinctive sub-regions.

*1.1 The Mediterranean Sea: A Strategic "Pre-Positioning" for Rapid Military Engagement*

US military projection in the Mediterranean has long been perceived as a cornerstone in American worldwide military deployment and naval strategy. As stated by one task force within the US Sixth Fleet, "this pre-positions U.S. military cargo at sea. Should a military or humanitarian crisis arise in theater, the squadron can deliver its cargo ashore, enabling a faster U.S. response" (US Sixth Fleet website). Together with military contributions from European allies and NATO, the USA perceives its permanent military deployment as providing "forward presence in the Mediterranean for security cooperation, maritime security, and crisis response missions" (US Navy 2015: 16).

Three important facts underscore the high strategic importance that the USA attributes to the Mediterranean Sea as a "pre-positioning" point. *First*, US Naval Forces Europe-Africa (US Sixth Fleet) and other military presence in the Mediterranean has been steadily growing, more so than any other indigenous navy in the Mediterranean (Miskel 2000: 147). *Second*, the US Sixth Fleet is the only entity in American policy/military structure that has a "Mediterranean mandate" (Lesser 2015: 6), since the northern part of the Mediterranean has been usually dealt with under "European and Eurasian affairs" and the southern shore under "Near Eastern affairs". *Third*, the US military presence in the Mediterranean is a permanent one, which as Miskel (2000: 149) describes, is maintained for its merits in "crisis management and peacetime engagement". This point highlights how the USA perceives its pre-positioning in the Mediterranean in its function to engage both in the Mediterranean and in other surrounding areas. This differs from European forces/naval policy in the Mediterranean, which emphasizes the importance of the Mediterranean Sea for "European citizens", European "maritime zones" and "cross-border" issues (Council of the European Union 2014b).

US perception of the Mediterranean Sea itself as a strategic location for military pre-positioning has long sustained the idea of the USA as a Mediterranean power and signified its practical readiness to engage, whether in the Mediterranean or in nearby regions/lands. Perhaps this is one key difference between US and European approaches to security in the Mediterranean, especially hard/material security. Additionally, in terms of security priorities, since 2001 – and even before – the USA has been practically stressing the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean, which derives its importance from its southern proximity to the Middle East and the Gulf and from its northern proximity to the Aegean and the Black Sea. This contrasts with European focus on the entire Mediterranean area, where issues of terrorism, energy dependence, state fragility, near conflicts, and organized crime – especially cross-border trafficking in drugs, women, illegal migrants and weapons – all encroach on European security by virtue of "Neighbourhood" (Council of the European Union 2003). The following subsections on the US conception of various "lands" on the Mediterranean further highlight US conception of and priorities in the Mediterranean as well as America's special emphasis on the Eastern Mediterranean.

*1.2 Northern Allies: Western Europe, the Adriatic and the Aegean Sea*

On the northern flank of the Mediterranean, Washington sees its allies, with whom it shares the "transatlantic alliance" and the process of "Euro-Atlantic integration". However, among those allies, the USA differentiates between southern Europe, the Adriatic/Western Balkans, and the Eastern Mediterranean/Aegean Sea area.

In the Adriatic, and ever since the Cold War years, the USA has worked on bolstering close relations with Yugoslavia for geostrategic reasons related to the East–West confrontation. The same perceptions were shared by Europeans, since Yugoslavia has been long dealt with as one of the littoral states on the Mediterranean. By 2001, US interest in the Adriatic/Balkans area was renewed for geostrategic reasons related to Washington's war on terrorism. This is because, according to Lesser (2005: 12-13), an enhanced US engagement in MENA necessitated "a reasonably predictable environment for access and cooperation". Such environment was perceived in cooperation with Washington's partners in the Adriatic, and also in the Black Sea and the Gulf. Therefore, and in line with Washington's support for NATO's open door policy, the Bush administration welcomed in 2002 the creation of the Adriatic Charter with Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, which was officially signed in May 2003 and then expanded in 2008 to include Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina. US interest in the Western Balkan/Adriatic area remained functional, in terms of their support to the NATO mission in Afghanistan and in the framework of the US-led Coalition in Iraq.

In the Eastern Mediterranean/Aegean Sea area, the US emphasis has been continually on the "geostrategic" importance of its "allies": Turkey, Greece and Cyprus.

With regard to Greece, the United States has gradually constructed an image of that country that denotes its immense importance in terms of geostrategic position, energy route and economic stabilizer in the less-developed Balkans. In terms of geostrategic importance, Washington notes that Greece "occupies a strategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean on the southern flank of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)" (US Department of State 2016a). Such a location enhances the importance of Greece in US and NATO military strategy since Greek ports are important in maintaining logistic lines of communication (Norton 2001). As for energy, Washington stresses Greece's "central position between energy producers in the Caspian and energy markets in Western Europe" (Burns 2007). It has repeatedly highlighted Greece's "growing role in European energy security" (Kerry 2015), which was prominent before 2010 in US endorsement of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline and the Greece–Bulgaria Interconnector, and after 2010 in the huge East Mediterranean gas discoveries. As a potential stabilizer in the Balkans, the US perceives "Greece's leadership" in economic development, which, according to Nicholas Burns, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs (2007), has "helped promote rapidly growing economies, create jobs and infrastructure, and bring a sense of stability to the region".

Similarly, both George W. Bush and Barack Obama depicted Turkey as a "critical ally" (Obama 2009b). This was on several fronts. First, as it has always been since the early 1950s, Turkey is a NATO member of high geostrategic importance, and "serves as NATO's vital eastern anchor, controlling […] the straits of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, which link the Black Sea with the Mediterranean" (US Department of State 2016b). This geostrategic importance was emphasized in US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which benefited from the "blanket overflight clearance" and "extensive logistic support" Turkey has provided to US troops there. Through this "critical lifeline", the US shipped 74 percent of its cargo to Iraq (Fried 2007). Second, the US emphasizes Turkey's importance in "Europe's energy security" through the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan and the South Caucasus gas pipelines, which according to Washington "can change Eurasia's strategic map" by offering "Europe" gas supplies that "will allow diversification away from a deepening European reliance on Gazprom" (Fried 2007). Third, Turkey has been steadily perceived as "an important part of Europe" (Obama 2009b), which explains how it is that Turkey has been dealt with in the US Department of State under the Bureau for "European and Eurasian Affairs". Besides, and in recognition of its East Mediterranean and Middle East importance, Washington notes how Turkey "is a key partner for U.S. policy in the surrounding region" as it "borders Iran, Iraq, and Syria" (US Department of State 2016b). Further, Turkey is perceived as an important US ally for its "strategic partnership with Israel" (Bryza 2008a). This partnership has been regarded as essential to US policy in the Middle East since, according to Matthew Bryza (2008a), former Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian

Affairs, it brings together "the Middle East's only two democracies […] to pursue their common security and economic interests".

The immense geostrategic importance that the US attributes to both Greece and Turkey has thus been further stressed since the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent Afghanistan and Iraq wars and until the international coalition to fight the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq. The Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, however, have long represented conflictive sub-regions in the Mediterranean due to outstanding Greek–Turkish and Turkish–Cypriot disputes as well as the less significant Turkish–Israeli clash. This situation has pushed continuous US efforts to promote Greek–Turkish consensus and also to seek "reconciliation" between Turkey and Israel as a "very important development that will help advance the cause of peace and stability in the region" (Kerry 2013a). Another new factor for the increasing importance of the Eastern Mediterranean since 2011 has been huge gas discoveries, which worked to further enhance the geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean seabed and more broadly of US allies in the Aegean Sea and the Middle East. In this respect, US and European interests converge, especially in promoting regional stability and cooperation among conflictive countries as well as in lessening European dependence on Russian gas (Johnson et al. 2015).

*1.3 The Middle East and North Africa: "Vital Interests" and "Deep Engagement"*

The USA sees the Eastern/Southern Mediterranean flank as one of the most important sub-regions on the Mediterranean. This perception has gradually developed since the 1950s with Washington's stress on its "vital interests" in the Middle East. Such vital interests have historically revolved around securing access to oil and ensuring Israel's security (Markakis 2016: 16), which further highlights how US focus in the Mediterranean has inclined towards its Eastern rim.

This is why the USA sees Israel as its closest "ally" in this sub-region. As Obama (2009c) put it, "America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable". Besides, Washington has long constructed a conception of Israel as a sufferer among hostile neighbours – first and foremost Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas, but also a broader range of sceptical Arab countries and hostile sub-state actors. This is evident in how Washington is "committed to Israel's security" (Mitchell 2009) – a commitment that is "rock solid" and "unshakeable" (Obama 2012 and 2011a) – as well as to Israel's "right to defend itself against legitimate threats" (Obama 2009a); in short, it is seen as essential for "America's national security to ensure that we have a safe and secure Israel, one that can defend itself" (Obama 2016b). In fact, not with any other MENA country has the USA repeatedly used such words of commitment and sympathy, including those countries that Washington deems as Arab allies, such as Egypt and Jordan. In US reference to Israel's diversity, it has also stressed the "shared history and shared values" that bolster the US–Israeli bond (Obama 2011a).

Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that the USA rarely mentions the Mediterranean in addressing MENA affairs. For instance, in our review of public speeches of the G. W. Bush administration (28 speeches on the "Middle East Partnership Initiative" from 2002–2006 and 14 speeches on the "Broader MENA" from 2004–2008) the word "Mediterranean" appeared only once. This was in Secretary Powell's definition of the Middle East as "the lands between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf" (Powell 2002). This further highlights the US conception of the "Mediterranean Sea" and the various "lands" it connects. As Kerry (2016) later noted, the Mediterranean "remains today a body of water still", in an area that "presents us […] with a land of instability and a sea of opportunities". This phrase in fact aptly sums up the constructed image of the MENA in US perception since 2001: "a land of instability". It also shows how the USA has placed itself together with Europe on one side vis-à-vis this "land of instability". Since 2001, many elements of MENA instability have been stressed by Washington:

*First, terrorism*: Following 9/11, MENA was portrayed by the G. W. Bush administration as a source of radicalization and terrorism. As noted by Secretary Powell (2002), American victims of 9/11 were

killed by "terrorists born and radicalized in the Middle East". G. W. Bush (2003b) also highlighted how Middle Eastern threats encroach on American security by stressing the two threats of "global terror" and "weapons of mass destruction", and how "the bitterness of that region can bring violence and suffering to our own cities". With US engagement in Afghanistan still ongoing, President Obama (2009c) noted also that the USA would "relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security". Terrorism gained a new momentum with the surge of ISIS, which pushed Obama to stress that "the greatest threats" to the USA in MENA comes from groups like ISIS, as "radical groups exploit grievances for their own gain" (Obama 2014b).

*Second, authoritarianism and underdevelopment*: Since 2001, Washington has constructed an image of Arab MENA as a zone of closed societies, authoritarian rule and economic underdevelopment, characteristics that were construed as posing security problems. As Powell (2002) expressed: "too many Middle Easterners are ruled by closed political systems" and "the countries of the Middle East are […] absent from world markets". Later, when the G. W. Bush administration adopted the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002, Washington assumed a modernizing role in bringing "change", "reform" and "modernity" to the Middle East (Powell 2002). Also, in his Cairo University speech, Obama (2009c) stressed the objectives of "democracy", "religious freedom", "women's rights", and "economic development" in US relations with "Muslim communities around the world". Then, by mid-2011, when the Arab uprisings had become a certain fact in many MENA countries, Obama (2011a) committed that "it will be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy".

*Third, regional conflicts*: The USA has long developed its conception of MENA as an area rife with conflict. Front and centre, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict continued to represent a major concern in the Middle Eastern policy of various US administrations. Yet, other conflicts continued to emerge, which worked to deepen American perception of MENA's instability. During the G. W. Bush administration, the primary focus was on "the war on terrorism, disarming Iraq, and bringing the Arab-Israeli conflict to an end" (Powell 2002). But also unnerving was "the further spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)" (W. Burns 2003) and the hostile policies of Iran, which Washington perceived as the "world's leading sponsor of terror" (Cheney 2005). The destabilizing role of Iran was perceived not only in its ambitions for nuclear weapons, but also in its provision of "financial support, weapons, and training" to Hezbollah; its policies aiming at "the destruction of Israel"; and its support for Syria, which was perceived as "another state sponsor of Hezbollah" (Bush 2006b). Similarly, under Obama, the events of Arab transformation worked to emphasize the "security risks" and "epic struggle" in the MENA region. Such self-representation portrays Washington as an outsider, rather than an active actor, in the region's conflicts. Among such risks, Secretary Kerry (2014b) enumerated "the security risks of terrorism, aggression, proliferation, organized crime", in an epic struggle extending "from the Sahel to the Maghreb, from Yemen to Syria". In view of such mounting instability, Kerry explained that Washington would "have to be deeply engaged – deeply engaged – in this region in its entirety because it is directly in the interest of our national security and our economy" (Kerry 2014b). At the end of his term in office, Obama (2016a) acknowledged that the Middle East is "rooted in conflicts that date back millennia", with problems that range from the "breakdown of order" to "sectarian conflicts" and the "changing climate", which has been fuelling Middle Eastern "competition for food and water" (Obama 2016c).

## 2. American Approaches to Security, Democracy and Economic Development in the Mediterranean, Compared with Those of the EU

This section analyses US approaches and policy practices in the Mediterranean, and compares them to those of the EU. These approaches are dealt with thematically in three sub-sections: security, democracy and economic development.

*2.1 Security*

The USA has represented itself as a military power, security actor and political stockbroker in the Mediterranean, engaging principally in high politics. These roles have been largely supported by the level of US military deployment in the Mediterranean and its near lands; disbursements of military aid to almost all Mediterranean countries (see Figure 1 and Table 1 in the Annex); as well as its historically demonstrated readiness to engage both politically and militarily in the area's affairs.

*2.1.1 American Approaches to Mediterranean Sea Security: Different Priorities but Complementary Roles vis-à-vis the EU and NATO*

While there has been a convergence between US and European perceptions on the types of threats and problems posed in the Mediterranean, there has been a clear divergence in US and European priorities there. This is because Europeans have mostly focused on the entire Mediterranean area as Europe's own "neighbourhood", attributing high importance to security, political, economic, social, demographic and even environmental concerns. By contrast, the US focus has been overwhelmingly on the Eastern part of the Mediterranean for the concentration of geopolitical concerns and hard security threats touching on Washington's "vital" and "strategic" interests. This American perception was further expressed by former US Ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns (2003), who stated that "NATO's future, we believe, is east, and is south. It's in the Greater Middle East".

Nonetheless, the relative degree of convergence in US and European perceptions of Mediterranean security, along with the constantly enhanced US military presence in the Mediterranean, has actually contributed to complementarity in US and European security roles. This complementarity has been evident since 2001 in three practical policy examples:

*First, American and European military cooperation in Mediterranean maritime security*. US military presence in the Mediterranean was key in aiding Operation Active Endeavour (OAE), since the operation capitalized on the already-stationed US Sixth Fleet to perform its tasks (Germond 2008: 181). OAE's initial mandate, as a response to the terrorist attacks against the USA, was only the "Eastern Mediterranean" (NATO 2008: 2). Yet by March 2004, the mandate had been expanded to encompass the entire Mediterranean and the Operation became an "information and intelligence-based operation", also helping European members in checking suspected ships (NATO 2008: 3-4). Further, with the launch of the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in 2003, OAE was considered "highly relevant" in checking WMD-related cargos due to its accumulated role in "patrolling" the Mediterranean (NATO 2008: 6). With the termination of OAE in October 2016, NATO members agreed in the 2016 Warsaw Summit to create Operation Sea Guardian, which is supposed "to perform the full range of maritime security tasks" (NATO 2016).

*Second, Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011* is another important example of how US material power in the Mediterranean has been of critical assistance to European allies in an area of their direct concern: "the Southern Neighbourhood". It is no secret that after a few weeks of the Operation, leading European powers faced several technical problems, which necessitated US assistance. In this respect, Washington provided 75 percent of intelligence data necessary for imposing the arms embargo; 75 percent of on-air refuelling and reconnaissance flights throughout the NATO operation; 97 percent of the tomahawk missiles used to hit Libya's air defences at the start of the operation; and 100 military personnel and key targeting assets to assist European countries with aircraft targeting data (Daalder and Stavridis 2012, Westervelt 2011, Isaac 2012). This was why the then NATO Secretary General Rasmussen (2011) declared that "the Libya operation also made visible that some European allies lack critical capabilities, in particular within intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and air-to-air refueling". Indeed, as Ian Lesser commented on European performance in the NATO intervention in Libya, "without critical American assets this would not have been possible" (Westervelt 2011).

*Third, confronting the threat of ISIS and providing a military counterbalance to Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean*. This is another example showing how US material power complements European roles in the provision of hard security necessary to confront the expansion of ISIS as well as the increased Russian military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. In September 2014 Washington initiated and led the international coalition against ISIS (Obama 2014b). Apart from the military effort, it was also the USA which emphasized in December of that year the importance of defeating "the ideology, the funding, the recruitment" of ISIS (Kerry 2014a). These efforts came to coincide with those of the EU, especially when the EU issued in February 2015 its "Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh Threat" (European Commission and High Representative 2015a, Council of the European Union 2015a), even if such strategy ultimately focused on non-military efforts in encountering the threat. Besides, Washington adopted additional military measures entailing the deployment of further US troops in Iraq and the projection of its USS carriers Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Such measures were also to complement certain European efforts, such as the French decision, for instance, to deploy its aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle three times during 2015–2016. These complementary US and European measures were largely interpreted not only in their function to fight ISIS, but also as counterbalancing measures in view of projected Russian warships in both the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean (Shalal 2016). In addition, close diplomatic coordination and compatible voting behaviour in the UN are important signs of complementarity in the US–European roles vis-à-vis the stance of other international actors in the Syrian crisis.

Yet, since September 2014, the US focus in fighting ISIS has been to a great extent directed to the areas it has traditionally considered of geostrategic importance in the Mediterranean (i.e., the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levant and to a certain degree Libya) (Chivvis and Fishman 2017). European attention to counterterrorism efforts, by contrast, has extended to encompass nearly the entire southern Mediterranean area. It is worth mentioning here how conflict in West Africa and the Sahel as well as the establishment of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have constituted crucial concerns for European countries (EEAS 2011, European Commission and High Representative 2015b, Lesser 2015: 2). This is because in Europe, the threat of instability and terrorism was seen as more imminent, since fighting terrorism and organized crime was increasingly linked to uncontrolled influxes of refugees and migrants to Europe's soil. Such image was further strengthened following terrorist attacks in France and Belgium, which worked to further securitize the phenomena of "returnees" and "foreign fighters" as main security challenges enhanced by geographical proximity to conflict areas (Council of the European Union 2014a and 2015b, Council of the European Union CTC 2014a and 2014b).

*2.1.2 Convergence and Divergence in US and European Approaches to WMD Proliferation*

Since 2001, increased transatlantic attention has been dedicated to the threat of nuclear proliferation in the Mediterranean, particularly in the Middle East. While there is a transatlantic consensus on the threat of WMD proliferation and the need for collaborative efforts to encounter it, there have been some elements of divergence in American and European approaches to the threat. The American approach has revolved mainly around the use of military force and US unilateralism, while in the case of the EU there is a greater inclination to multilateralism and political dialogue (Penksa 2005: 23). This is not to negate the fact that practical collaboration between the US and Europe, such as the already mentioned PSI, has been occurring since 2001. Yet, several incidents have marked a divergence in American and European approaches:

*The case of Iraq* provoked a deep disagreement between the USA and the EU over the suitability of the use of military force for preemption, especially given the lack of proof for WMD. This incident demonstrated that the transatlantic partners diverged on prioritizing Middle East threats and on the suitable tools to approach them. In fact, Europeans stressed the priority of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and noted that in Iraq there was no justifiable cause for war (Archick 2005: 6, Penksa 2005:

26-27). The USA however perceived disarming Iraq and the question of WMD as a priority that would help check nuclear ambitions of other countries (such as Libya and Iran) and control the spread of terrorism (Archick 2005: 6-7).

*The case of Syria* also demonstrates the difference in US and European approaches in dealing with the proliferation threat. Washington was loud in condemning Syria's possession of WMD and demonstrated willingness to apply military force in punishing that country. Further, in September 2007, the USA did not object to (or even approved) Israeli airstrikes against Syria's suspected nuclear reactors in Deir el-Zor. In fact, both the White House and the CIA were rapid to confirm that targeted sites were nuclear facilities with a military purpose (White House 2008, Henry 2008). Later, in September 2013, Obama secured a Congress resolution authorizing the use of military force against Syria in response to an alleged use of chemical weapons by the al-Assad regime against the opposition (US Congress 2013). By contrast, the EU overall policy before 2011 was inclined to construct a political and security dialogue with Syria and to offer economic and political incentives that could incrementally stimulate the Syrian regime to abandon its WMD ambitions (Elleman et al. 2012).

*Dealing with Iran*. While the G. W. Bush administration strongly rebuked Iran's nuclear ambitions and labelled Iran a "rogue state" and part of the "axis of evil" (Bush 2002 and 2004, White House 2006), the EU has largely dealt with Iran as a "partner" of a problematic nature, recognizing it as the "most pluralistic system" in the Gulf area (Perthes 2004: 87). The EU was thus inclined towards "engagement" in dealing with Iran, for instance through initiating the Trade and Cooperation Agreement in 2002, rather than isolating it (Archick 2005: 16, Bergenäs 2010).

Therefore, the US strategy in dealing with Iran has long focused on coercion, sanctions and threats of a military strike. Under Obama, a convergence in American and European approaches to Iran appeared in combining both pressure and engagement. Yet, Iran's behaviour has not been altered by Western policies of confrontation, threatening in 2011 that any military strike against its nuclear sites would be met with "iron fists" (Spillius 2011). US opening to Iran, up to the conclusion of the JCPOA in July 2015, indicates therefore that other factors – along with the preference of world powers to cooperate and compromise – intervened in the process that led to such a deal. Importantly, the election of the Iranian moderate Hassan Rouhani in 2013, Iran's increasing engagement in the Syrian conflict, and renewed conflict between Europe and Russia over the Ukrainian crisis, added to the growing Russian–Iranian rapprochement were all important factors that pushed for a Western opening to Iran (Isaac 2016).

*Ignoring Israel's possession of nuclear capabilities*. Ever since the 1995 UN review conference of the NPT, Israel has ignored the international community's calls to join the NPT as well as regional calls for the Middle East as a nuclear free zone. In 2010, a similar call from the UN was described by Israel as "flawed and hypocritical" without any notable international reproach (Nasr 2010). Even more, Obama (2010) stressed that the US would "strongly oppose efforts to single out Israel, and will oppose actions that jeopardize Israel's national security". In May 2015, it was the USA, Canada and Britain which blocked another UN resolution calling for the Middle East as a nuclear free zone. The following September, the USA, Britain, France and many other IAEA members rejected a draft resolution presented by some Arab states which called upon Israel to bring its nuclear programme under IAEA supervision (DePetris 2015). This means that while the Americans and Europeans securitized the issue of WMD proliferation in several MENA countries, the same issue was de-securitized in relations with Israel.

*2.1.3 The Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: Necessitated Transatlantic Coordination*

Since 2002, and unlike the case in previous decades, shared venues for coordinating US and European stances on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict have been established. These are mainly "the Quartet" and "the Road Map for the Middle East". The Road Map in particular, which was never

implemented, was designed in Germany and other European states then adopted by the USA as an "American Road Map". In fact, these shared venues promised close coordination between US and European roles in the conflict, helping to integrate the various stances of key international and regional actors in forging "a peaceful and just settlement" for the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Such confluence was particularly promising in that the USA has traditionally had a high influence over Israel while the Europeans have enjoyed greater credibility among the Palestinians (Perthes 2004: 90). In fact, since the launch of the Euro-Arab Dialogue in the mid-1970s, the Arabs have constantly looked for the Europeans to counterbalance the US bias towards Israel and its quasi-monopoly of Middle East diplomacy.

Nonetheless, after more than a decade of these initiatives, the Quartet came under heavy criticism for its failure to achieve what it was intended to do, and its failure to at least monitor the implementation of its decisions (Elgindy 2012). According to Tocci (2011a), the Quartet has demonstrated European inability to influence US initiatives within an international multilateral forum and it was the USA which benefited from the Quartet to promote its unilateral actions. It thus became a reality that since 2002 the EU role in the conflict has been diluted, as the process of seeking consensus and coordination within the Quartet mechanism became ironically "an end in itself" (Hollis 2011: 43). Besides, while the EU continued to be high on rhetoric (such as its bold Council Conclusions of 2009 on the Middle East Peace), Hollis (2011: 43) notes that "the EU has essentially deferred to the United States when it comes to policy implementation". One key element in the relationship was the Hamas victory in Gaza in 2006 and its seizure of the Strip in 2007, which made EU coordination with the USA a must. Meanwhile US bias towards Israel continued, as especially highlighted in Israel's frequent attacks on Gaza, which were repeatedly justified by Washington as Israel's "right to defend itself" (White House 2010, Obama 2012 and 2014c).

US and European coordination thus continues, as EU engagement with the Palestinians in the West Bank has been generally in line with US policy. In fact, after 15 years of the Quartet, the EU now is largely seen as an "ineffectual actor" (Bouris and Brown 2016). The EU continues however to rhetorically condemn the Israeli blockade on Gaza, but in fact through its generous aid to Fatah and its suspension of the EUBAM-Rafah it has indirectly allowed the Israelis to impose a blockade on the Strip. Further, continued Quartet calls for the Israelis and Palestinians to return to the negotiation table (see Middle East Quartet 2016) ignore the power imbalance between these parties, and the advances Israel has been steadily making into the occupied Palestinian territories (Bouris and Brown 2016). EU actions against Israel remain symbolic rather than practically influential, such as its "Interpretative Notice" in November 2015 to label goods imported from Israeli settlements (European Commission 2015). Such decision was met by Israeli suspension of contacts with EU bodies involved with peace efforts with the Palestinians, tempered by confirmation that Israeli ties with almost all European members remain strong (Euractiv 2016). On its side, the Obama administration's rhetorical reference to the Israeli settlements as "counterproductive" and its stress on "the two-states solution" have not been reflected in any practical policy terms.

*2.1.4 Energy Security: Coordination among Allies*

As indicated earlier, securing access to oil and its "steady flow" (Haass 2002) has been historically regarded as one key element shaping US policy in the Mediterranean. As G. W. Bush (2006a) noted, "America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world".

Yet, US policy during the past two decades has concentrated on lessening American dependence on Middle Eastern oil. G. W. Bush (2006a) described this as "another great goal: to replace more than 75 percent of our oil imports from the Middle East by 2025". Indeed, statistics show that in 2015, 43.1 percent of US imports came from Canada, which replaced Saudi Arabia as the first oil supplier to the USA (Rapier 2016). Saudi Arabia moved to the second position, accounting for only 14.3 percent of US oil imports in 2015. Then came, in descending percentages, Venezuela, Mexico,

Columbia, Iraq, Ecuador, Kuwait, Brazil and Angola (Rapier 2016). This implies that US attention to energy issues in the Mediterranean has been triggered by other motives. These include:

First, securing investment contracts for American oil companies and boosting trade volumes. It is notable here how the G. W. Bush administration signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with Algeria in July 2001, whereby US companies emerged as the largest investor in the Algerian oil sector and bilateral trade volume was doubled in one decade (Zoubir 2010: 12). Also, US company Noble Energy is a main investor in East Mediterranean gas discoveries in both Israel and Cyprus (Ratner 2016), while "new opportunities for United States investment in Greece" have been created (Kerry 2015).

Second, securing European access to energy and promoting regional stability. US practices in the Mediterranean during the last decade have been converging with European energy security, since the EU remains largely dependent on energy sources from the Middle East, North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. This is demonstrated for instance by US support for the implementation of the Greece–Azerbaijan memorandum of understanding on energy in 2009, through which "Azerbaijan has plenty of gas to realize the Turkey, Greece, Italy pipeline" (Bryza 2008b). Further, the transatlantic Energy Council, established in 2009, introduced a joint forum for coordinating US and European energy policies (Boening 2011: 5). Later, with the boom in East Mediterranean gas discoveries, the Obama administration saw an opportunity to lessen European dependence on Russian energy sources. Besides, such discoveries have important implications for US policy in maintaining regional stability in both the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean (Henderson 2012). This is due to the several forms of both rivalry and cooperation which these discoveries have provoked (Karagiannis 2016).

## 2.2 Democracy

### 2.2.1 The Priority of Democratization

Both the US and Europe elaborated on democracy promotion initiatives and programmes in MENA, but the EU had started these programmes even before 2001. American democratization initiatives between 2002 and 2006 (MEPI and BMENA) were stimulated by the context of the US war on terrorism and the upsurge in Islamic fundamentalism. As G. W. Bush (2003a) noted in his introduction of America's "new policy" and "forward strategy for freedom" in the Middle East, "as long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export". Therefore, and as many scholars have correctly argued, the G. W. Bush administration dealt with democratization as a mere "counter-terrorism" strategy (Windsor 2003, Youngs and Wittes 2009). Besides, the objective of democracy promotion in MENA appeared to serve Washington's prime goal in the Middle East, which is the security of Israel. G. W. Bush (2005) bluntly noted, "If you're a supporter of Israel, I would strongly urge you to help other countries become democracies. Israel's long-term survival depends upon the spread of democracy in the Middle East". Middle Eastern democratization has thus been regarded as a security issue, and handled as a precondition for US safety and Israeli survival, as "the advance of freedom and peace in the Middle East would […] increase our own security" (Bush 2003b). This conception omits the fact that many autocratic regimes in the Middle East, such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, have pursued peaceful relations with Israel and have been frequently praised by Washington for their role in regional stability. This was also clear in various US administrations' reference to these three states before 2011 as "moderate".

While the issue of democracy promotion in MENA has been the subject of some discord between Americans and Europeans as a result of G. W. Bush's experience in Iraq, the US perspective converges to a certain degree with Europe's neo-functional approaches to democratization in the Southern Mediterranean, which have had a security function in providing for a more stable and prosperous "neighbourhood" (Youngs 2003, Youngs and Wittes 2009: 94). This convergence served

to trigger transatlantic cooperation in formulation of the 2004 BMENA initiative. Notably, a key similarity in American and European handling of the democratization priority has been "inconsistency" (Dalacoura 2005: 972, Youngs and Wittes 2009: 94). This is because, for the EU as for the USA, democratization has often been in conflict with the priority to secure short-term interests, which were better served through cooperation with undemocratic regimes. The scope of the area in which democracy promotion should be pursued has been a main source of divergence, with the USA attempting to broaden MENA to include countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, reflecting the fact that the Middle East and its eastern flank have been the main target for US democratization efforts.

With the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, the priority to respond positively to political reforms was an equal urgency in both the USA and Europe. This was apparent in both actors' discourses on how the uprisings represented an "opportunity", a special "moment in history", and accordingly the reference to the "legitimate aspirations" of the peoples (Obama 2011a, Ashton 2011a and 2011b). This however did not last long, since the uprisings' security ramifications necessitated a reprioritization of stabilization and security concerns. This was evident in the case of the USA with the increased concern over the ISIS threat and the spread of terrorist organizations and armed conflicts in the Mediterranean. The US role as a security actor, whether through diplomatic or military responses, was thus most evident in cases of traditional strategic importance, primarily the Levant and the Gulf.

The same applies to the Europeans, who suffered from the growing influx of migrants and refugees, especially with the increasing complication of the Syrian conflict. The spread of terrorism activities in European cities and the emergence of many fragile states in the Neighbourhood enhanced Europeans' perception of being surrounded by "a ring of fire" rather than a "ring of friends", as described by former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt (2015). Such spill-over in security concerns presented serious challenges to US democracy assistance programmes in MENA considering the short-term need to coordinate policies with friend regimes in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and others in counter-terrorism efforts (Chivvis and Fishman 2017). Therefore, the repeated stress on the priority of "stabilization" was again in the forefront in relations with the Southern partners, as demonstrated in the latest version of the ENP (European Commission and High Representative 2015c).

*2.2.2 Selective Democratization*

Selective democratization has been a main feature of US democratization efforts in the Mediterranean. In Arab MENA, as Perthes (2004: 87) correctly notes, Washington "tends to cite the democratic deficits of governments that oppose Western interests in the region and threaten them with punitive measures". Such was the case with Iraq, where the goal of democratization was brought into the US discourse to legitimize the invasion (Perlini 2015: 16-17). This tendency to overlook democratization with friend regimes and stress it against hostile ones is in fact confirmed by the director of policy planning at the US Department of State 2001–2003, Richard Haass (2002), who notes that Washington "has avoided scrutinizing the internal workings of countries in the interest of ensuring a steady flow of oil; containing Soviet, Iraqi, and Iranian expansionism; addressing issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict; resisting communism in East Asia; or securing basing rights for [the US] military."

This explains why America's Middle Eastern friend autocracies were repeatedly praised. For instance, G. W. Bush (2006a) referred to Egypt's presidential elections in 2006 by saying that "the great people of Egypt have voted in a multi-party presidential election"; he mentioned that "Saudi Arabia has taken the first steps of reform"; and even in the case of fragmented Iraq he noted that "brutality has not stopped the dramatic progress of a new democracy". Also, the G. W. Bush administration rebuked only hostile regimes for their lack of freedom or democratization. On top of the list Syria was criticized for its "authoritarian rule", and Iran and Hezbollah as "committed

enemies" to freedom (Cheney 2005). While the EU was not practicing an exclusionist policy towards problematic partners, such as Syria and Iran, it too failed to criticize its Southern partners for their limited democratization record. Many scholars note for instance how the EU has expanded its ENP agreements, economic partnerships or even aid to autocratic partners in MENA (such as Egypt, Algeria and Morocco) despite their notable repressive practices (Youngs and Wittes 2009: 99-102). Also, how the EU endorsed the more technically framed initiative of the UfM to escape democratization after Islamists have made political gains in democratic processes in Egypt, Gaza and Lebanon, which according to Tocci and Cassarino (2011: 6) indicated an embrace of the "comfortable notion of cooperation with authoritarian (but pro-Western) regimes".

With respect to other Mediterranean sub-areas, the USA has not been giving high attention to democratization in the Adriatic/Western Balkans, Turkey or Israel. Table 2 (see Annex) shows that US allocations for democracy and governance (DG) to these countries during 2001–2015 are significantly modest (or non-existent) compared to those of the EU. While both Washington and Brussels injected assistance funds into the Western Balkans, the EU was more involved, which seems logical due to European expansion dynamics and geographical proximity (Pinna 2013: 187, Bugajski 2013: 113). Apart from funding, Washington was additionally criticized for overlooking undemocratic practices and human rights violations in friend regimes in the Balkans (Western 2004: 237). The same goes for both Turkey and Israel, since no criticism has been expressed with regard to how Kurdish or Arab minorities were treated in these two countries (Perthes 2004). Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that the USA has allocated minor DG funds for both Turkey and Israel, while huge funds were allocated to Israel specifically as military aid. At the same time, Table 1 shows that while the USA allocated more funds to Turkey as economic aid, these funds were quite modest compared to the allocations of the EU in the same period.

This selective democratization did not change much after the Arab uprisings in 2011. To start with, the USA did not immediately side with the uprisings' call for regime change, especially in strategically important countries. For instance, in the first few days of the Egyptian uprising, the then Secretary of State Clinton (Clinton 2011c and 2014: 283) stressed that "the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people". Later, Washington repeatedly stressed the importance of an "orderly transition" (Obama 2011b, Clinton 2011b), which after Mubarak stepped down was in the hands of the military institution. This is because Washington was mostly concerned with the future of the peace treaty with Israel in the aftermath of Mubarak. As Secretary Clinton (2011a) clarified, "we care deeply that what comes next in Egypt respects international agreements, including the peace treaty with Israel". As for the response of the EU, it is interesting to see how the EU was in favour of introducing "reforms" and did not utterly turn to support the Egyptian transition until Obama made his bold announcement that Egypt's transition "must begin now" (Obama 2011b, European Commission 2011).

Another aspect of selective democratization regards how some uprisings (such as those in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria) received high attention in Western discourses on transformation, while other countries (such as Morocco and Algeria) were rapidly commended for the minor reforms they introduced. The US Department of State (2011) praised the "significant achievements" introduced by King Mohamed VI in all "economic, social and political realms". Similar reactions were produced in Europe, especially from France (Mikail 2011), noting also the increasing importance of Algeria and Morocco in terms of energy security after the disruption in gas transfers from Libya in 2011 (Lochner and Dieckhöner 2011). Apart from the Mediterranean, the case of Bahrain in the Gulf provides another notable example of how both the USA and Europe maintained a bizarre silence, which could be explained only by strategic and security apprehensions. This was clear when Obama (2011a) noted that Bahrain is a "longstanding partner, and we are committed to its security", and stressed that Washington "recognize[s] that Iran has tried to take advantage of the turmoil there".

*2.2.3 Approaches to Democratization*

Regarding US and European approaches to democratization, many similarities can be mentioned. A notable first one is the deepening gap between strong rhetoric and timid policy practices. This can be seen in both US and EU democracy promotion efforts. Both actors have stressed the principle of "conditionality", for instance, though it has almost never been applied.

A second similarity is that both actors have allocated funds to similar activities under the sectors of democracy, rule of law, and governance (Dalacoura 2005: 966). In such sectors, there is a notable similarity in the type of projects funded by both actors (such as decentralization projects and legal/judicial programmes). Perhaps in the case of the USA, an additional sector was believed important for democratization. This was the International Military Education and Training (IMET), which is listed under "military aid". According to the State Department (2008), IMET not only serves bilateral security cooperation, it has also "proven to provide U.S. access and influence in a critical sector of society that often plays a pivotal role in supporting, or transitioning to, democratic governments".

A third similarity is the modest funding that both the USA and the EU have allocated to DG projects, especially when these allocations are compared to total allocations of economic assistance funds both pre- and post-2011 (see Table 2 in the Annex). It is striking to see for instance that before 2011, the MEPI budget for all political, economic, education and women empowerment activities from 2002–2004 was only 264 million dollars, of which it spent only 103 million dollars (Perlini 2015: 16). This figure appears ridiculously low when compared with the over 806 billion dollars the USA spent in invading Iraq (Perlini 2015: 16-17).

This pattern of aid allocation poses many questions regarding the consistency of both actors' discourses on democratization and transformation, especially post-2011. Table 2 shows that American DG allocations post-2011 experienced a marginal increase compared to DG allocations pre-2011.[2] This marginal increase appears in almost all Arab MENA countries, with Tunisia being the exception. This tendency resembles that of the EU, whose DG allocations post-2011 increased only marginally compared to pre-2011 in almost all Arab MENA countries.[3] However, there is a divergence between US and EU aid when the percentage (rather than absolute figures) of DG is calculated from total economic aid. Table 2 shows that DG percentage of total aid has declined in the case of EU funding to Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and even Turkey. By contrast, DG percentage of total aid has increased slightly in the case of USA funding to Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine and Turkey; while it has decreased in Algeria, Jordan and Lebanon. This implies that greater emphasis was placed on economic projects, and hence stabilization, than on democratic transformation.

A fourth similarity is the top-down approach to democratization that both actors have embraced. Before 2011, Huber (2008: 48-49) notes that the bulk of MEPI funds went to Arab governments. Similarly, the bulk of EU funding, channelled through the ENP Instrument (ENPI) used to go to governments; and funding channelled through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has been repeatedly criticized for its modest amounts (Ziadeh 2009: 4-5, Van Hüllen 2012: 122-124). As for civil society support, beyond criticism of Western actors' poor conception of what civil society is composed of in Arab countries, several scholars have highlighted how US and EU funding has generally been allocated to quasi-governmental civil society organizations (CSOs) or to political parties of a non-Islamist orientation (Durac 2015, Tocci and Cassarino 2011: 5, Teti 2012: 274, Youngs 2003: 423, Hamid 2010). After 2011, both the USA and the EU elaborated on initiatives to fund and reach various kinds of CSOs. In 2013, Obama stressed making "outreach to civil society a cornerstone of [US] foreign policy", and declared that Washington would invest 500 million dollars "to strengthen the work of CSOs across development sectors and defend CSOs under threat" (White House 2013). In 2014, a presidential memorandum was issued to direct US agencies worldwide to

take additional steps to engage CSOs, such as "community groups, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations" (White House 2014). Yet it is still noted that the bulk of US CSO funding goes to professional and registered NGOs (Stephan et al. 2015: 5). This is justified in part by the numerous technical and political problems US agencies, as the USAID, have had to grapple with (Stephan et al. 2015: 7). With all the rhetoric on the need to revisit this top-down approach to democratization, Figure 2 (see Annex) shows that the bulk of US DG aid allocation in the Mediterranean still goes to governmental institutions.

As for the EU, two mechanisms were introduced to provide for a "deeper" civil society engagement. One is the Civil Society Facility (CSF), which was established in 2008 to sustain both national and multi-beneficiary initiatives, and the second was the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). According to the European Commission (2016), for the period 2011-2012, the CSF has a budget of 40 million euros for both Eastern and Southern partners. The EED, meanwhile, started functioning only in September 2013, while earlier it existed solely as a legal entity (Dennison 2013: 124). The EED is largely dependent on Member State funding, as it received 6 million euros in 2012 as kick-off funding from the European Commission and then secured small donations from some Member States (such as Germany and Spain) (Youngs 2015). Also, the focus of the EED seems to be in the East, as its activities have been directed to Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Tunisia, Egypt and Moldova in descending order (Youngs 2015).

Finally, a notable similarity between US and European approaches to democratization in MENA post-2011 appears in the remarkable opening-up to political Islamist forces, or what is called the "religious turn" by Wolff (2015: 1). On the US side, this tendency was initially introduced a decade earlier by prominent think-tanks (such as the RAND corporation), which emphasized the future necessity for Washington to open channels of communications with what it labelled "moderate Muslims" or "civil democratic Islam" (Benard 2003, Rabasa et al. 2007). This was mainly out of the conviction that Islamists are the "most popular and organized" among all opposition groups in the region (Stacher and Shehata 2007). Thus, the US turn to support and encourage the wide acceptance of Islamists in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings could be best explained from the logic of bandwagoning, whereby the West was conceivably inspired towards possible replications of the "Turkish example" (Bush 2004, Tocci 2011b, Kirişci 2013). This endorsement of "moderate" Islamists was apparent in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, where also the EU crafted two special "task forces" to support the governments formed by the (ruling) Muslim Brotherhood and the (rising) Ennahdha Party (European Council 2012). This was ironically at the same time as the European Parliament (2013) challenged the Commission by approving a resolution that threatened to withhold direct financial support to Egypt if the Brotherhood government failed to demonstrate progress in democratization and human rights. The point here is that in backing the rise of political Islamists post-2011 (although such forces were not the protagonists for change during the uprisings nor the committed agents for democratization after assuming power), both the US and the EU exhibited a rather narrow pragmatic pursuit of stabilization.

### 2.3 Economic Development

Since 2001, the USA has been rhetorically emphasizing the importance of economic development in the Mediterranean. The G. W. Bush administration perceived such development as necessary to the region's peace and stability, which is also similar to European approaches to economic development in the Mediterranean. As highlighted by Powell (2003), "We want peace in the region, but with peace you need economic development or the people will not benefit from that peace".

Notwithstanding this rhetorical attention to economic development, US economic aid to Mediterranean countries is modest compared to its own military aid in the region or to EU economic assistance funds[4] (see Table 1 in the Annex). Besides, Washington's strategic interests have been

clearly reflected in its allocation of economic aid. Table 2 demonstrates that 77.4 percent of total US economic aid in the entire Mediterranean has been allocated to countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, in descending order: Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Turkey. The EU has thus a comparative advantage as the number one donor in the Mediterranean's economic development, noting also that EU funds target all parts of the Mediterranean, from the Maghreb to the Mashreq to the Western Balkans. Table 2 shows that top recipients of EU funds are Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey and Serbia.

A further inquiry has to do with the type of economic sectors/projects that the US and EU have funded in the Mediterranean. In the G. W. Bush administration's conception, economic development was perceived possible through boosting trade and investing in human capital through education. This was emphasized in the administration's elaboration on the MEPI, in which Bush expressed that "progress will require increased trade, the engine of economic development", specifying that he expected "the establishment of a U.S.-Middle East free trade area within a decade, to bring the Middle East into an expanding circle of opportunity" (Bush 2003b). As for education, Powell (2003) asserted that "to get economic development you also need investment in the human capital". Such investment was meant to ensure that "young people are getting the kind of education that gives them the skills they need in a twenty-first century economy" (Powell 2003). This tendency of concentrating on trade and education continued under Obama, who emphasized in Cairo that "education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century, and in too many Muslim communities, there remains underinvestment in these areas" (Obama 2009c). This explains why the sector of "education" has been allocated considerable US funds in the entire Mediterranean area, reaching a total of 1,110.5 million dollars from 2001–2010 and 741.9 million dollars from 2011–2015. The bulk of these education funds (72.4 percent) went only to Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, in descending order (USAID 2017).

As for trade, there is a considerable similarity between EU and US views on how boosting trade could contribute to the economic welfare of the region as well as sustaining its political reform efforts (Al Khouri 2008: 3). Yet, it could be also argued that the US goal to boost its trade in the Mediterranean implies a rather competitive role with the EU, since the Barcelona Process elaborated on an FTA project in the Mediterranean to be realized by 2010, even if later stagnating. However, trade statistics in 2010–2015 do not show an advancement of the USA as a trade partner compared to the EU. In 2010, the EU was the first trade partner to Mediterranean countries, accounting for approximately 40 percent of the region's total trade, while the USA came in the second position with 9.5 percent (Tankosić et al. 2013: 224). In 2012 and 2015, trade statistics continue to exhibit almost the same pattern, as shown in Table 3 (see Annex). This means that US trade leverage in the Mediterranean is far less than that of the EU, even losing in 2015 the second position in Mediterranean trade to China.

Besides trade and education, Washington also stressed the importance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the economic development of the Mediterranean. According to Kerry (2016), "In the Mediterranean […] if our goal is to reduce poverty, expand the middle class, and help families live a better life for themselves, then the answer is pretty simple: You've got to innovate. And that means doing more to help small businesses get started."

This statement does not reflect a solid US tendency in funding SMEs in the Mediterranean, since the total sum of US funding for SMEs in the entire Mediterranean basin was only 108 million dollars in 2001–2010, and 57.24 million dollars in 2011–2015. This contrasts significantly with the attention EU institutions have been giving to this same area in the Mediterranean's economic development, since the EU allocated around 387.36 million dollars to SMEs in the Mediterranean basin in 2001–2010, and increased its allocations to this sector to reach 484.31 million dollars in 2011–2015 (OECD 2017).

Finally, it is interesting to see how the percentage of US funds allocated to the four sectors of agriculture, water, energy and industry in the Mediterranean do not represent a significant share in the total economic aid figure.[5] This applies to all parts of the Mediterranean. Table 4 (see Annex) shows that agricultural projects have received considerable US funds only in Morocco, and even there mostly in 2001–2010. This is not the case in other basically agricultural countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia. Likewise, water projects have received considerable US funds in the two cases of Palestine and Jordan only, while the energy sector has received considerable US funds in the case of Egypt, but only before 2011. When comparing US and EU contributions to these four sectors (see Figure 3 in the Annex), it becomes also clear that such sectors combined represent only 8 percent and 21 percent of total US and EU economic aid in 2001–2015 in the Mediterranean, respectively. This poses further questions on the targeted economic development sectors for US and EU aid allocation. An examination of US economic aid allocations in the Mediterranean shows that the USA has been allocating funds to a wide variety of sectors, with no single sector receiving the bulk of aid. These sectors include: trade policy and regulations, banking and financial services, business services, infrastructure projects (such as transportation, storage and communications), humanitarian assistance (particularly in cases of emergency response to refugees and emigrants), disaster prevention and preparedness, heath and population, and commodity assistance. Besides, more than 2 percent of US economic assistance funds were spent in administrative costs of donor agencies themselves, which is higher than what the USA has been spending on industry and energy in the Mediterranean as a whole.

**Conclusions**

The preceding analysis shows that US geopolitical construction of the Mediterranean since 2001 has continued to emphasize the importance of the Sea itself for military pre-positioning and as a crucial line of communication with near areas. These not only include Mediterranean sub-regions, be it North Africa, the Middle East, the Aegean, the Adriatic or even European allies, but also as a step to strategically important areas such as the Gulf, the greater Middle East and the Black Sea. In line with such emphasis, the USA has continued to represent itself as the chief military power, security actor and political stockbroker in the Mediterranean, engaging principally in high politics and hard security issues. These roles have been largely supported by the level of US military deployment in the Mediterranean and its near lands; disbursements of military aid to almost all Mediterranean countries; as well as its demonstrated readiness to engage both politically and militarily in the area's affairs. Such level of deployment, engagement, preparedness and leverage is not matched by any indigenous or external power. In this respect, American conception of the Mediterranean is broader than that of the EU, which principally considers its near neighbourhood and emphasizes its economic and non-military leverage there.

With profound transatlantic bonds in mind, such diverse representations suggest complementarity in US and EU roles in the Mediterranean, especially when transatlantic venues of coordination in the Mediterranean are taken into consideration and cast against the material and ideational representations of other protagonists from rising world and regional powers. Such profound bonds and general tendency of coordination are expected to continue under the Trump administration, notwithstanding the initial tension that ensued during his first few months in office. Take for instance the examples of the Proliferation Security Initiative and Operation Active Endeavour in 2003; the creation of the Transatlantic Energy Council in 2009; US crucial contribution to Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011; the participation of the US Sixth Fleet in the EU-NAV-FOR Mediterranean in 2015–2016; and complementary American and European roles in confronting the threat of ISIS as well as the military counterbalancing of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean.

From an American perspective, the EU's neo-functional approaches to the Mediterranean are favourable as they represent the non-military tools necessary for tackling the numerous soft security threats. European economic assistance funds in the Mediterranean therefore complement the

reliance of the USA on material power. In the same vein, the heavy US military presence and political leverage in the region generally compensates for European military deficiencies and lack of strong political leverage. This prevailing complementarity is evident notwithstanding US unilateralism and inclination to use military power or coercive actions, which contrasts with European inclination to multilateralism and political dialogue with problematic partners in the Mediterranean and beyond.

Nevertheless, and in terms of policy practices, the analysis demonstrates an obvious divergence in the priorities that the US and the EU assign to various Mediterranean sub-regions and affairs. US interests and practices have targeted the Eastern Mediterranean in specific for its conventional link to strategic and hard security affairs. Even US efforts in democracy promotion and economic development are politicized, since they are concentrated in the Eastern rim and beyond. In contrast with this US swing to the east is the EU's concentration on all the Mediterranean sub-regions, which together constitute its "neighbourhood". Part of this neighbourhood, the Western Balkans, is further dealt with in light of its accession prospects, while other parts are considered in light of their progressively growing political, economic, social, demographic and security interdependence with Europe itself.

Apart from such divergence in priorities, the analysis finds a remarkable similarity and complementarity in US and EU approaches and policy to rising security threats, democracy and governance efforts, and economic development projects in the Mediterranean. Still, such complementarity in policy practices suggests a traditional comparative advantage for the USA in security issues against a growing advantage for the EU in economic development and governance issues, even if both actors have dealt with democratization and political reform from a security lens. Hence, both actors' policies do not appear conflictive or ineffective in their separate but consistent pursuit of what both have perceived as essentially "shared interests". This is demonstrated in all policy areas, ranging from ensuring security and promoting democracy to sustaining economic development. Such consistency is even evident in the inconsistency shown by both actors: in their securitization of WMD (as while Americans and Europeans securitized the issue of WMD proliferation in several MENA countries, the same issue was de-securitized in relations with Israel); in their securitization of energy issues, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean; in their politicization of democracy promotion (which has been highly selective since 2001 and until present times for political and security concerns; and characterized by high rhetoric more than policy practices, modest funding as well as marginal increase in funding post-2011, and an overwhelmingly top-down approach); and finally, both actors appear to have politicized economic development in the Mediterranean for the sake of stabilization.

It is essential to note that both the US and EU have neglected other key policy priorities for the region, notably energy, industry, water, agriculture, and other vital areas for sustainable economic development. Such tendency is expected to strengthen in the years to come, especially under the Trump administration which came to powerfully prioritize the region's security and stabilization in hard/traditional security terms.

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**Notes**

1. The authors examined over 1,200 US (and EU) public documents. Most of the US documents examined are accessible in the George W. Bush White House archive, the Barack Obama White House Archive, the Department of State documents from 2001 to 2016, and other official data sets from the USAID, the USAID Greenbook and the OECD.

2. The period covered before 2011 is 10 years, while the period after 2011 is only 5 years.

3. The EU had already allocated funds for the Southern Mediterranean earlier, as the first ENP plan covered the years from 2007 to end of 2013. Yet, the figures in Table 2 include also additional funding provided under the 2011-introduced SPRING programme.

4. Not including economic assistance funds of Member States, which are even higher than total aid allocated collectively under EU institutions.

5. Support funds to SMEs is included under the industry sector.

**Annex**

Figure 1 | US and EU aid percentages to the Mediterranean and Western Balkans (2001-2015)
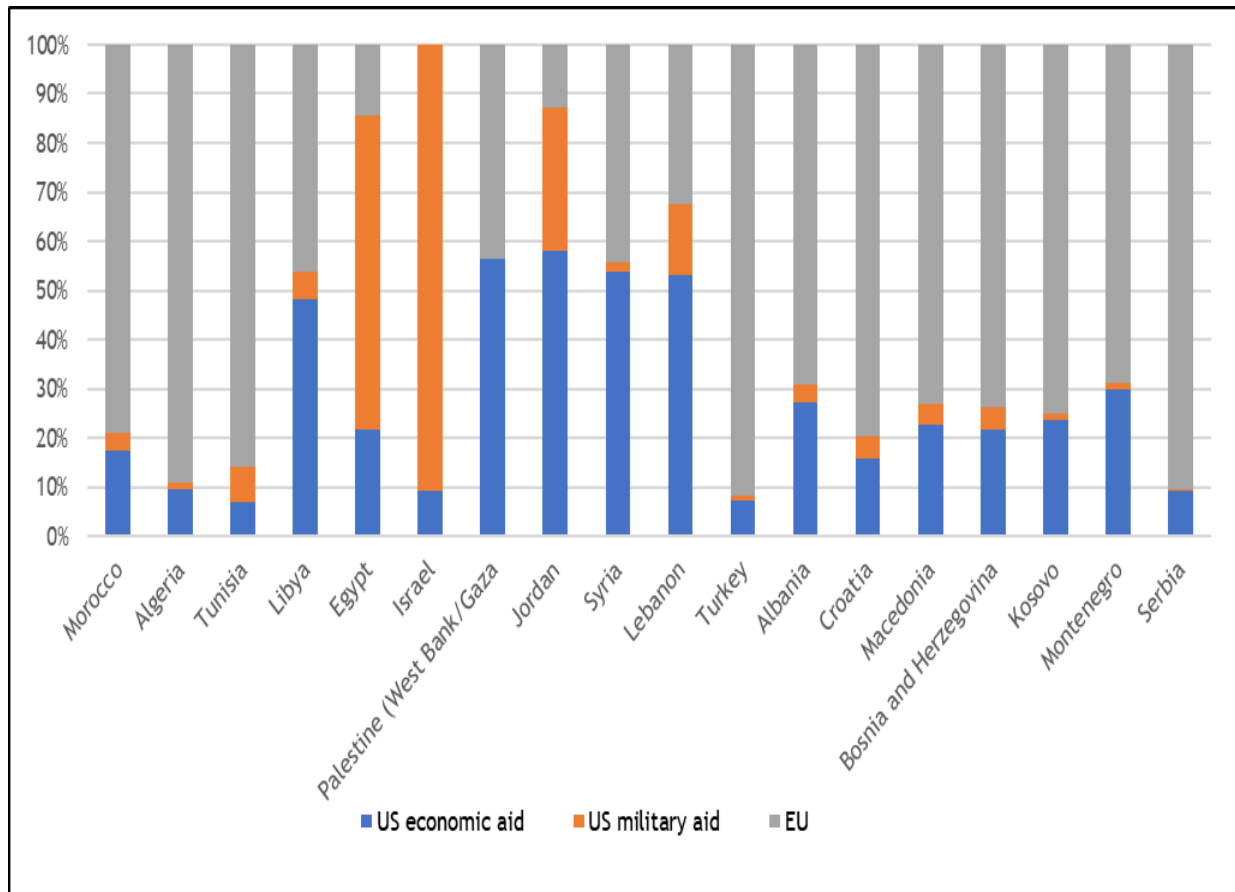


*Sources:* USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants* (Greenbook), 2005, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2016; OECD, *Query Wizard for International Development Statistics*.

**Figure 2** | US democracy and governance (DG) aid according to receiving institutions (2011–2015)

**Mediterranean**
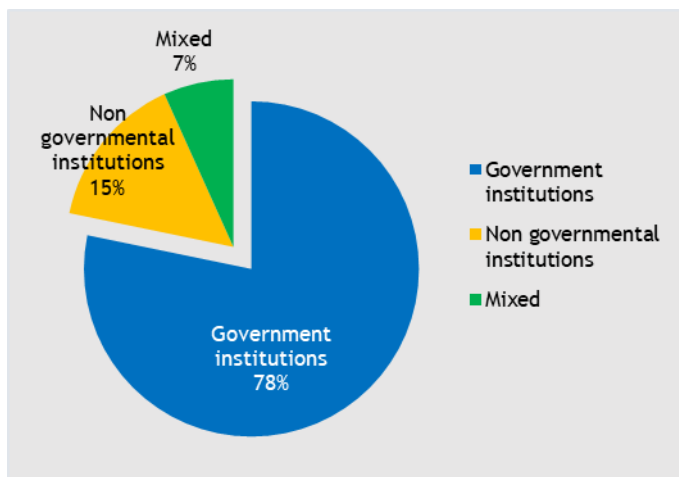


**Western Balkans**
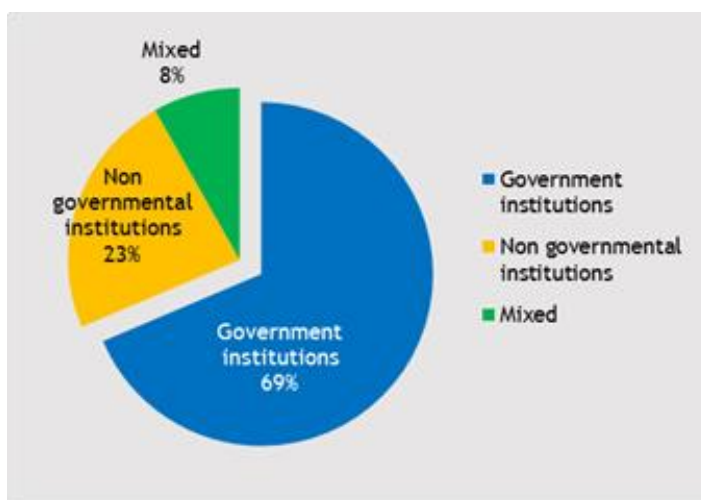


Source: USAID, *Foreign Aid Explorer*.

Figure 3 | US and EU agriculture, water, energy and industry aid commitment to the Mediterranean and Western Balkans (2001–2015)

**United States**



Source: USAID, *Foreign Aid Explorer*.

**European Union**
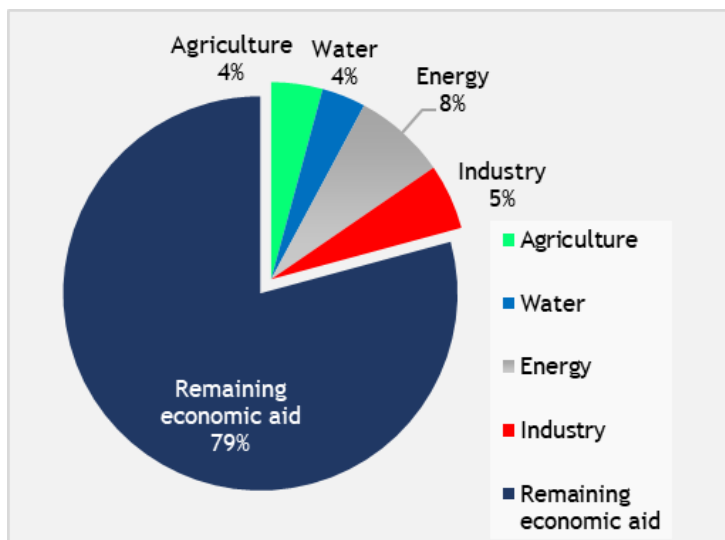


Source: OECD, *Query Wizard for International Development Statistics*.

Note: Figures do not include EU aid to Israel and Croatia (after 2011).

**Table 1** | US and EU aid commitments to the Mediterranean and Western Balkans (2001–2015), in million dollars

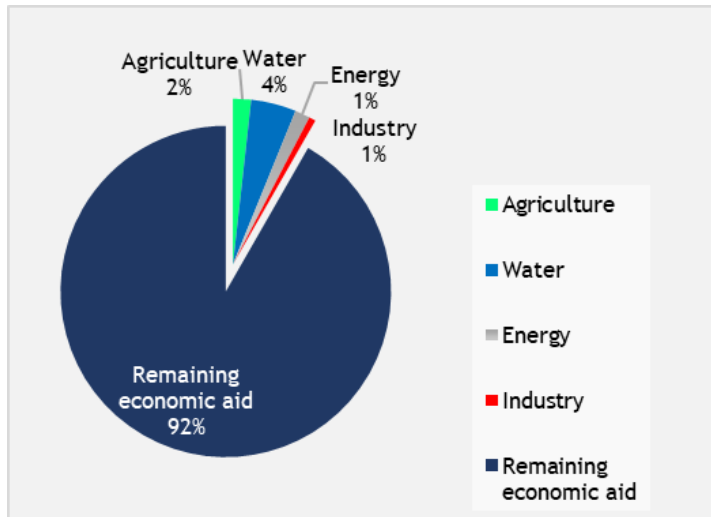| | United States | | | | European Union | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Economic aid | | Military aid | | | |
| | 2001-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2001-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2001-2010 | 2011-2015 |
| **Mediterranean** | | | | | | |
| Morocco | 1,010.7 | 202.6 | 129.2 | 129.8 | 1,979.24 | 3,532.92 |
| Algeria | 60.4 | 60.1 | 6.6 | 8.1 | 737.4 | 385.41 |
| Tunisia | 4.3 | 294.9 | 117.2 | 200.9 | 963.88 | 2,787.28 |
| Libya | 73.6 | 237.8 | 0.5 | 35.9 | 33.58 | 264.51 |
| Egypt | 5,053.6 | 1,064.6 | 12,961 | 5,144.7 | 1,597.53 | 2,477.06 |
| Israel | 3,768.7 | 1,10.1 | 21,686.3 | 15,356.1 | N/A | N/A |
| Palestine | 3,867 | 2,997.1 | --- | 0.6 | 3,280.8 | 2,032.49 |
| Jordan | 4,531.3 | 4,107.3 | 2,572.9 | 1,788.2 | 780.64 | 1,114.46 |
| Syria | 96.9 | 2,541.2 | --- | 93.7 | 406.32 | 1,773.89 |
| Lebanon | 1,043.5 | 1,244 | 115.6 | 508.7 | 669.72 | 728.15 |
| Turkey | 1,312.9 | 320 | 204.9 | 33.3 | 4,845.51 | 1,6107.69 |
| **Western Balkans** | | | | | | |
| Albania | 428.7 | 131.8 | 55.2 | 21.8 | 740.58 | 680.32 |
| Croatia | 257 | 10.5 | 30.7 | 46 | 1,348.74 | N/A |
| Macedonia | 431.4 | 129.9 | 78.5 | 26.8 | 774.17 | 1,018.88 |
| Bosnia-Herzeg. | 598.7 | 231.1 | 136.4 | 27.1 | 1,121.6 | 1,684 |
| Kosovo | 266.2 | 294.8 | 5.51 | 23.4 | 533.1 | 1,254.13 |
| Montenegro | 283.3 | 22.5 | 2.5 | 9.2 | 191.51 | 508.76 |
| Serbia | 726.68 | 166.2 | 3.3 | 14.1 | 4,265.82 | 4,420.38 |

Sources: US aid data: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants* (Greenbook), 2005, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2016. EU aid data (in current prices): OECD, *Query Wizard for International Development Statistics*.

**Table 2** | US and EU democracy and governance (DG) aid commitments to the Mediterranean and Western Balkans (2001–2015), in million dollars

| | United States | | | | European Union | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DG aid | DG % of total aid | DG aid | DG % of total aid | DG aid | DG % of tota aid | DG aid | DG % of total aid |
| | 2001-2010 | | 2011-2015 | | 2001-2010 | | 2011-2015 | |
| **Mediterranean** | | | | | | | | |
| Morocco | 58.34 | 5.77 | 60.864 | 30.04 | 456.38 | 23.05 | 306.92 | 8.69 |
| Algeria | 9.34 | 15.47 | 7.934 | 13.2 | 177.83 | 24.11 | 94.03 | 24.4 |
| Tunisia | 2.38 | 55.33 | 185.341 | 62.85 | 115.4 | 11.97 | 152.11 | 5.46 |
| Libya | 1.3 | 1.76 | 21.254 | 8.94 | --- | 0 | 46.65 | 17.64 |
| Egypt | 294.81 | 5.83 | 146.609 | 13.77 | 130.76 | 8.18 | 130.9 | 5.28 |
| Israel | 5.92 | 0.16 | 0.142 | 0.13 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Palestine | 532.63 | 13.77 | 619.332 | 20.66 | 216.63 | 6.6 | 164.17 | 8.08 |
| Jordan | 187.92 | 4.15 | 148.709 | 3.62 | 196.97 | 25.23 | 217.26 | 19.5 |
| Syria | 8.62 | 8.9 | 17.51 | 0.69 | 91.81 | 22.59 | 0 | 0 |
| Lebanon | 333.76 | 31.98 | 151.418 | 12.17 | 122.16 | 18.24 | 111.86 | 15.36 |
| Turkey | 19.05 | 1.45 | 12.663 | 3.96 | 1,610.33 | 33.23 | 1404.49 | 8.72 |
| **Western Balkans** | | | | | | | | |
| Albania | 98.44 | 22.96 | 60.55 | 45.94 | 292.69 | 39.52 | 268.75 | 39.5 |
| Croatia | 53.1 | 20.66 | -0.044 | -0.42 | 345.25 | 25.59 | N/A | N/A |
| Macedonia | 113.09 | 26.22 | 45.026 | 34.66 | 222.3 | 28.71 | 171.17 | 16.8 |
| Bosnia-Herzeg. | 174.99 | 29.23 | 114.247 | 49.44 | 474.76 | 42.32 | 264.82 | 15.73 |
| Kosovo | 94.53 | 35.51 | 134.461 | 45.61 | 350.02 | 65.65 | 909.08 | 72.49 |
| Montenegro | 111.26 | 39.27 | 15.779 | 70.13 | 59.57 | 31.1 | 82.98 | 16.31 |
| Serbia | 375.57 | 51.68 | 81.946 | 49.31 | 1,385.82 | 32.48 | 412.94 | 9.34 |

**Table 3** | Top trade partners of Mediterranean countries, 2012–2015, in million euros

|  | Imports | | | | Exports | | | | Total trade | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Rank | Partner | Value | % World | Rank | Partner | Value | % World | Rank | Partner | Value | % World |
| **2012** | 1st | EU-28 | 182,468 | 41 | 1st | EU-28 | 116,702 | 42.3 | 1st | EU-28 | 299,169 | 41.5 |
|  | 3rd | USA | 30,588 | 6.9 | 2nd | USA | 30,053 | 10.9 | 2nd | USA | 60,641 | 8.4 |
| **2015** | 1st | EU-28 | 182,881 | 41 | 1st | EU-28 | 124,182 | 45.4 | 1st | EU-28 | 307,063 | 42.7 |
|  | 3rd | USA | 28,352 | 6.4 | 2nd | USA | 27,758 | 10.2 | 3rd | USA | 56,11 | 7.8 |

Source: European Commission DG Trade (2013: 10, 2016).

Note: Mediterranean countries includes Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Montenegro, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey

**Table 4** | US agriculture, water, energy and industry aid obligations to the Mediterranean and Western Balkans (2001–2015), in millions dollars

| | Agriculture | | Water | | Energy | | Industry | | Total economic aid | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2001-10 | 2011-15 | 2001-10 | 2011-15 | 2001-10 | 2011-15 | 2001-10 | 2011-15 | 2001-10 | 2011-15 |
| **Mediterranean** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Morocco | **427.15** | 20.478 | 9.84 | 0.47 | 4.005 | 10.499 | 80.54 | -26.69 | 1,010.7 | 202.6 |
| Algeria | --- | --- | 0.46 | 0.03 | 0.88 | 0.867 | 0.65 | --- | 60.4 | 60.1 |
| Tunisia | 0.22 | 0.55 | --- | --- | 0.074 | 2.353 | --- | --- | 4.3 | 294.9 |
| Libya | --- | --- | --- | --- | 38.267 | 2.4 | --- | --- | 73.6 | 237.8 |
| Egypt | 67.4 | 20.28 | 56.15 | 36.45 | **310.43** | 5.621 | 20.70 | 19.729 | 5,053.6 | 1,064.6 |
| Israel | 3.75 | --- | ---- | --- | 0.52 | 1.5 | 11.69 | -0.65 | 3,768.7 | 1,10.1 |
| Palestine | 19 | 9.55 | **331.05** | **211.411** | 0.488 | 0.009 | 55.03 | 3.6 | 3,867 | 2,997.1 |
| Jordan | 2.28 | 0.62 | **531.13** | **410.77** | 5.311 | 76.915 | 0.33 | 1.62 | 4,531.3 | 4,107.3 |
| Syria | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 0.006 | --- | --- | 96.9 | 2,541.2 |
| Lebanon | 11.35 | 29.39 | 20.85 | 60.87 | 0.805 | 5.465 | 13.55 | 22.52 | 1,043.5 | 1,244 |
| Turkey | 0.49 | 0.023 | 0.45 | --- | 12.422 | 18.537 | 0.84 | 0.057 | 1,312.9 | 320 |
| **Western Balkans** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Albania | 7.59 | -0.002 | --- | --- | 11.358 | 2.076 | 1.15 | --- | 428.70 | 131.8 |
| Croatia | 1.36 | 0.005 | 0.11 | --- | 4.116 | 3.604 | 0.49 | --- | 257.00 | 10.5 |
| Macedonia | 1.36 | --- | 0.04 | --- | 2.9 | 3.448 | 2.12 | 6.01 | 431.40 | 129.9 |
| Bosnia-Herzeg. | 5.48 | 8.46 | --- | --- | 1.919 | 0.353 | 8.54 | 4.09 | 598.70 | 231.1 |
| Kosovo | 0.068 | 1.5 | --- | 2.35 | --- | 8.356 | 1.9 | --- | 266.20 | 294.8 |
| Montenegro | 0.4 | --- | 0.49 | --- | 0.278 | 0.768 | 1.423 | --- | 283.30 | 22.5 |
| Serbia | 23.13 | 4.77 | --- | --- | 16.697 | 2.94 | 18.924 | -0.4 | 726.68 | 166.2 |

Sources: US agriculture, water, energy and industry aid data: USAID, *Foreign Aid Explorer*; US total economic aid data: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants* (Greenbook), 2005, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2016.


**Notes**

(1) Agriculture sector consists of: agriculture, fishing and forestry sector includes various subsectors such as agricultural policy & administrative management, agricultural development, agricultural land resources, agricultural water resources, agricultural extension, agricultural education/training, agricultural research, agricultural financial services, agricultural co-operatives, fishery development, fishery education/training, and fishery research.

(2) Water sector consists of: water supply and sanitation.

(3) Energy sector consists of 5 subsectors: distribution and efficiency, renewable, non-renewable, nuclear energy electric power plants and heating, cooling and energy distribution.

(4) Industry sector includes for example small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) development, cottage industries and handicraft, textiles – leather and substitutes, basic metal industries, and technological research and development.

**2 RUSSIA**

**How Does Russia Conceive of the Mediterranean Space in Its Official Discourse and Narratives? A Critical Discourse Analysis**

*Nicolás de Pedro*

**Introduction**

The Mediterranean does not constitute the basis for defining and conceptualizing a region in the strategic thinking of the Russian Federation. In fact, throughout all the official documents adopted since President Putin's accession to power on the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term "Mediterranean" as such is used only once, in the Foreign Policy concept adopted in June 2000. "*Blizhnem vostoke i sebernoii Afrike*", which can be translated literally as "Middle East and North Africa" (MENA), is the prevalent term in these official documents. The formula privileges either a geopolitical or ethno-religious (Arab-Islamic) angle.

In stark contrast to the EU, particularly the Member States located in the South, Russia does not conceive of the region as "neighbouring". Neither it is perceived as part of a common past or shared heritage. It is worth noting that – unlike the Baltic, Azov, Black or Caspian seas whose names in Russian are quite similar to the main European versions – the Russian name for the Mediterranean Sea (*Sredizemnomorskoye more*) differs completely.

Furthermore, while the Middle East is not among the priorities of the Russian foreign policy agenda, the region plays both now and historically a central role in Moscow's calculus. The relation of the Middle East with Russia's identity building and self-perception as a Great Power partly explains this central role, as the region is mainly seen as a key playground in Great Powers competition. Since the arrival of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, Russia's role and activities have steadily grown, building to – mostly as a result of Russia's intervention in Syria – a central position in the geopolitics of the Middle East.

**1. The Paradoxical Central Role Played by a Region Officially of Secondary Relevance**

Russia is the largest country in the world. The "Wider Europe" idea is at the heart of Russia's identity, national interests and foreign policy priorities. But its huge Eurasian landmass is, to different degrees, part of the Caucasus, Inner Asia and Asia-Pacific regions as well. Furthermore, South Asia, the Near and Middle East are part of its traditional area of projection. And on top of that, Russia's permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council confers global outreach.

This unique situation implies that arguably Russia has multiple and diverse national priorities, not all of which can be considered as strategic imperatives for the Kremlin. The former Soviet republics (and particularly the European ones), the relationship with the European Union, the United States (US) and China are the main priorities of Russia's current foreign agenda. The Middle East is not among them, but the region plays both now and historically a central role in Moscow's calculus. Middle East's link with Russia's identity building and self-perception as a Great Power partly explains this central role. Furthermore, Moscow attaches huge relevance to being acknowledged as such by other Great Powers, particularly the US and to a lesser degree the EU. Self and Others' perception as a Great Power is a key feature of the Russian mainstream strategic mindset across time, and has far reaching implications.

The realist State-centred approach is persistently dominant among the Russian strategic community. In line with its authoritarian tradition, the decision-making process in Russia today is highly centralized in the hands of the President, who has extensive powers and capacity both in domestic and foreign policies. According to the current Constitution adopted in 1993, the President determines "the guidelines of the internal and foreign policies of the State" (Art. 80 para 3), "represent[s the country] in international relations" (Art. 80 para 4); "appoint[s] diplomatic representatives" (Art. 83 para l); "govern[s] the foreign policy" (Art. 86 para a); "sign[s] international treaties" (Art. 86 para b); and "shall be the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (Art. 87 para 1). Despite these Constitutional provisions, the level of coordination among different Russian actors and State bodies (President, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Duma and Security Council) is an open and recurrent debate.

Since President Putin came to office in 2000, Russia has adopted three Foreign Policy concepts (June 2000, February 2013, December 2016); three National Security strategies (January 2000, May 2009, December 2015); and two Military doctrines (April 2000, December 2014). These documents represent successive attempts to conceptualize, organize and guide the Russian foreign policy, and will be the primary sources analysed in this section of the paper.

As has been pointed out, the Mediterranean is not the basis for defining and conceptualizing a region in the strategic thinking of the Russian Federation. "*Blizhnem vostoke i sebernoii Afrike*", which can be translated literally as "Middle East and North Africa" (MENA), is the prevalent term in these official documents. Therefore, Moscow adopts a formula coinciding with the preferred Euro-Atlantic approach to the region. The formula privileges either a geopolitical or ethno-religious (Arab-Islamic) angle. Depending on the issue, the region can extend from Morocco to Iran, but normally the term Middle East is used as a single entity including Iran and occasionally Turkey. When "and North Africa" is added, the formula attempts to encompass Libya and Algeria, i.e., the traditional allies of Russia in the area. The marginal role played by the Mediterranean as a signifier to conceptualize a region is in stark contrast with the Caspian and the Black Seas, which are both central to articulating their respective regions.

Both the Tsarist and the Soviet Empires had direct borders with the Middle East and, at different periods, intense rivalry over the region with other Great Powers. The 19th century witnessed the expansion of the Russian Empire in all directions. A guaranteed access to warm seas, mostly through the Black Sea–Mediterranean axis, was among the headline goals of the Tsarist policy. That implied ports – mainly Sevastopol – and access through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. This brought Moscow into direct confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, France and the United Kingdom. The alliance of these three powers inflicted on Russia a serious defeat in the Crimean War of 1853–56. Russia's position in the Black Sea was severely weakened and Moscow reoriented its efforts towards Central Asia, with the Indian British Raj on the horizon. The 1907 Anglo–Russian Agreement put an end to the so-called British–Russian Great Game and established exclusive spheres of influence in Iran and Afghanistan for them.

The Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war altered Moscow's agenda, at least initially. In the famous international congress held in Baku in September 1920 the new Soviet authority made it clear its support for the revolutionary forces in the Islamic world under "Western imperialist rule". This policy included the failed attempt to synthetize Islam and Marxist doctrine by Mirza Sultan-Galiev. Gradually the Soviet Union adopted a less revolutionary and more conventional geopolitical approach towards the Middle East and the Arab world in general. However, the success of revolutionary nationalist movements in the 1950s and 60s in Arab countries like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Libya gave new impetus to the ideological dimension of the Soviet foreign policy. Soviet Central Asia – Tashkent in particular – was used as mirror to demonstrate the compatibility between Islam and the Marxist–Leninist ideology and practice. While not entirely for ideological reasons, throughout the Cold War period the Soviet Union backed all Arab countries that confronted the US

and to lesser degree Israel, which occupied and still occupies a particularly complex place in the Russian strategic mindset. Therefore, during the Soviet period the Arab conservative monarchies in the Gulf, Near East and North Africa were at odds with Moscow.

The collapse of the Soviet Union entailed the independence of the South Caucasus and Central Asian republics and left Russia with no borders with the Middle East. Moscow's diminished capacities and ambitions during the 90s reduced its interests and presence in the region. Boris Yeltsin, distancing from the traditional Soviet line, tried to make inroads into the Gulf countries, seeing them as a potential source of financial support at a time when Russia was facing dire straits. The region was no longer an area in which to spread the geopolitical clout of Russia, but mainly a potential source of risks and threats for Russia herself. Therefore, to prevent tensions and conflicts in the Middle East that could spread intro the Caucasus and Central Asia and from there to Russia was among the top priorities of Moscow's foreign policy in the early 90s. The significant debts with the Soviet Union incurred by its traditional Arab partners – particularly Iraq, Syria and Libya – burdened the bilateral relationship during this period.

Since the arrival of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, Russia's role and activities have steadily grown, now holding – mostly as a result of its intervention in Syria – a central place in the geopolitics of the Middle East. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Putin attempted to align Russia with the "War on Terror" campaign launched by the Bush Jr. Administration. However, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the wave of colour revolutions in the former Soviet space – Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan – deeply irritated Moscow. Since then, the Kremlin has been convinced that the West is pursuing a regime-change agenda in the Eurasian space that aims to overthrow the Russian regime as well.

Strategic distrust was exacerbated with the Arab Spring in 2011. The initial sympathy showed by the then President Medvedev triggered a crisis within the Kremlin and, according to some unofficial sources, pushed Putin's anticipated return to the Presidency. In the mind of the so-called *siloviki* (those surrounding Putin with security services background), the Arab Spring was connected to the wave of protest in Moscow after the parliamentary election of December 2011. From their perspective, both were masterminded by the West. Furthermore, the Kremlin felt betrayed by the West in Libya. Russia abstained in the Security Council vote for Resolution 1973 which, in accordance with the principle of the "responsibility to protect", allowed for the establishment of no-fly zone in Western Libya. France and the UK went far beyond the mandate and ended up contributing decisively to the overthrow of Gaddafi.

Partly as a reaction to Libya, the Kremlin decided to reinforce its diplomatic backing of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, fearing that any Western initiative to protect the Syrian civilians was simply a covert attempt to overthrow the regime at the expense of Russian interests – the Tartus resupply naval base, Soviet debts and weaponry supply contracts. In September 2015 President Putin addressed the UN General Assembly and blamed the West for the chaos in the Middle East and Libya in particular. A few days later, Russia deployed jet fighters and anti-aircraft missile systems in Syria, altering dramatically the balance of power of the war and the diplomatic context for its resolution.

## 2. The Foreign Policy Concepts

### 2.1 The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (June 2000)

The Foreign Policy Concept of June 2000 was the first adopted under the presidency of Vladimir Putin. The document is a good reflection of the prevalent mood and views in Russia at the beginning of Putin's presidency. The 90s were traumatic for many in Russia, and on the threshold of the 21st century ambitions were rather modest. The main concerns expressed in its General Principles are related to protecting Russia while retaining its relevant international role and ensuring the (much needed at the time) domestic economic development. The insistence on cooperation with partners and friendly relations with neighbours stands out.

In the first section, entitled "General Principles", the document says that "the uppermost priority of the foreign policy course of Russia is to protect the interests of the individual and the society [aiming to establish] new, equitable and mutually advantageous partnership relations of Russia with the rest of the world". Thus, the main priority is

> to ensure reliable security of the country, to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community, most fully consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, as one of the most influential centers of the modem world, and which are necessary for the growth of its political, economic, intellectual and spiritual potential.

The economic aspects are emphasized several times as the document aims to

> create favorable external conditions for steady development of Russia, for improving its economy, enhancing the standards of living of the population, successfully carrying out democratic transformations, strengthening the basis of the constitutional system and observing individual rights and freedoms.

Section II elaborates on how Russia sees the modern world and the place of its foreign policy within it. The concept is built upon the premise that the world "is going through fundamental and dynamic changes that profoundly affect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens". And what Russia fears most is "the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with the economic and power domination of the United States"; which implies "weakening the role of the U.N. Security Council". Therefore "Russia shall seek to achieve a multi-polar system of international relations that really reflects the diversity of the mode[rn] world with its great variety of interests".

Section III outlines the main priorities which, in line with the views mentioned in the previous section, are: 1) "Forming a new world order [based on] strict observance of the fundamental principles in the U.N. Charter, including the preservation of the status of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council"; 2) "Strengthening international security"; and 3) "to promote the development of the national economy, which, in conditions of globalization, is unthinkable without broad integration of Russia in the system of world economic ties". It is worth mentioning that the document retains some sort of Marxist–Leninist rhetoric when it talks about the "international division of labor".

Regional priorities are outlined in Section IV. In line with what has been explained before, "the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)" are ranked in first place and the emphasis is put "on the development of good neighbourly relations and strategic partnership". Among them, the union of Belarus and Russia is singled out as the "priority task".

The document goes on to say that "relations with European states is Russia's traditional foreign policy priority". On Europe, the Concept of 2000 insists on "the further balanced development of the multi-functional character of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)" which means that "Russia will strongly oppose the narrowing down of the OSCE functions, specifically the attempts to redirect its specialized activities to the post-Soviet space and the Balkans".

Reflecting both the strained relations after NATO's operation in Kosovo in April 1999 and the attempt of President Putin to align with the US-led "War on Terror", the document mildly says that

> NATO's present-day political and military guidelines do not coincide with security interests of the Russian Federation and occasionally directly contradict them. This primarily concerns the provisions of NATO's new strategic concept, which do not exclude the conduct of use-of-force operations outside of the zone of

application of the Washington Treaty without the sanction of the UN Security Council.

As a good indicator of the completely different views and context of 2000 compared to the current day, the document indicates that "There are good prospects for the development of the Russian Federation's relations with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Russia stands for putting these relation[s] onto the track of good neighborliness and mutual cooperation".

Asia, specifically China and India, but also regional organizations like ASEAN and fora like the Shanghai Five are mentioned as the next regional priorities for the Russian foreign policy.

When it comes to MENA, the document states that "Russia will work to stabilize the situation in the Middle East, including the Persian Gulf zone and Northern Africa, taking into account the impact which the situation in the region has on the situation the world over". It points out that "It is important to develop further relations with Iran".

And reflecting the bid for a cooperative approach emphasizing economic and development issues, the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 says that

> Viewing the Greater Mediterranean as a hub of such regions as the Middle East, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea basin, Russia intends to steer a purposeful course toward for turning it into a zone of peace, stability and good neighborliness, something that will help advance Russian economic interests, including in the matter of the choice of routes for important energy flows.

As has been noted, this is the only mention of the Mediterranean throughout these documents. This is unfortunate considering that the approach adopted for the region in 2000 was very much in line with the goals outlined in the EU's neighbourhood policy.

*2.2 The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (February 2013)*

*The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* of February 2013 brings in a new vision of the country's priorities "taking into account Russia's increased responsibility for setting the international agenda and shaping the system of international relations". Thus, a main focus is "securing [Russia's] high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles of the modern world". Its paragraph 25 claims that "Russia's foreign policy is transparent, predictable and pragmatic" and paragraph 26 makes plain that "Russia is fully aware of its special responsibility for maintaining security in the world both on the global and regional levels".

The document builds on the premise that "the ability of the West to dominate world economy and politics continues to diminish" and thus, says paragraph 6, "the emergence of new global economic and political actors with Western countries trying to preserve their traditional positions enhances global competition, which is manifested in growing instability in international relations".

For the first time, the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept introduces the civilizational dimension in its reasoning – something which was absent in the 2000 text. This new identified factor is presented as grounds for world competition and confrontation whereby "various values and models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete against each other". As a reverse side to this globalized process of diversity, the document stresses the dangers of a "desire to go back to one's civilizational roots" that "can be clearly seen in recent events in the Middle East and North Africa where political and socioeconomic renewal of society has been frequently carried out under the banner of asserting Islamic values" (para 14).

Among the "Priorities for Addressing Global Problems", another novelty comparing with the 2000 Concept is the specification of the importance of the maritime dimension, resuming Russia's

traditional interest in being (and being recognized as) a naval power. The document states that indeed another priority is "an effective use of sea and ocean spaces in view of their growing importance in terms of ensuring both economic development and security" (para 38). Therefore – and more so because of the current troubles – the Mediterranean appears logically in the focus of Russian interest as a world power. Against this backdrop, Moscow "will work to promote relevant regimes in the areas of safe navigation, including maritime piracy control, responsible fisheries and ocean-related scientific research, in combination with measures to protect maritime environment and combat international terrorism".

This is in line with the statement made by Mikhail Nenashev, Chairman of the All-Russia Fleet Support Movement, in January 2017, when he told RIA Novosti that Russia had to "finalize the issue of infrastructure development with regard to a full-scale base of the Russian Navy in Tartus and work on the possibility of deploying our ships to Latakia, the key port of the Syrian Arab Navy".[1]

This concern for security is developed in paragraph 15 which claims that "some concepts that are being implemented are aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian population". This approach sheds a clarifying light on Russia's strong negative reaction, from the very beginning, to the events of the Arab Spring.

The civilizational criteria appear again in the chapter dealing with regional priorities, where priority is given to the Euro-Atlantic states "which, besides geography, economy and history, have common deep-rooted civilizational ties with Russia" (para 54).

When it comes to the MENA region, paragraph 88 claims that

> Russia will be making a meaningful contribution to the stabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa and will consistently promote peace and concord among the peoples of all the Middle East and North Africa countries on the basis of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of states and non-interference in their internal affairs.

The same paragraph elaborates more specifically on Russia's policy towards the Arab Israeli conflict:

> Using its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of the Quartet of international mediators, Russia will further mobilize collective efforts to achieve, on an internationally acceptable basis, a comprehensive and long-term settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in all its aspects, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State living in peace and security side by side with Israel. The settlement should be reached through negotiation with the assistance of the international community, involving the potential of the League of Arab States and other parties concerned. Russia will promote the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means in the Middle East.

The only other country specified in the MENA region is, not surprisingly, Iran, where "Russia will continue its balanced policy in favor of a comprehensive political and diplomatic settlement of the situation with Iranian nuclear program". To that end, Moscow will operate "through dialogue based on a step-by-step and mutual interest approach and in strict compliance with nuclear non-proliferation requirements" (para 89).

Finally, paragraph 90 states that in its striving

> To further enhance its interaction with the Islamic states, Russia will take advantage of its participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of

Islamic Cooperation and its contacts with the League of Arab States and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

And in accordance with a much-preferred strategy when it comes to regional politics, the same paragraph concludes recalling that "Russia is willing to further develop its bilateral relations with the states in the Middle East and North Africa".

*2.3 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (November 2016)*

The Foreign Policy Concept adopted in November 2016 contains continuity but clear ruptures as well. In stark contrast to the Concept adopted in June 2000, confidence, assertiveness and, mainly, confrontation with the West are the backbone of the document. The document reflects the views and policies of Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of its military intervention in Syria.

This document also builds upon the idea that the "world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system", and it assumes that "global power and development potential is becoming decentralized, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers" (para 4).

Now Russia sees a more dangerous world and indicates that "Tensions are rising due to disparities in global development" (para 5) and

> Force is becoming an increasingly important factor in international relations amid escalating political, social and economic contradictions and growing uncertainty in the global political system and economy. Efforts to expand and upgrade military capabilities and to create and deploy new types of weapons undermine strategic stability and pose a threat to global security [...]. Although a large-scale war, including nuclear war, between major powers remains unlikely, they face increased risks of being drawn into regional conflicts and escalating crises. (para 6).

International terrorism is identified as "one of the most dangerous realities in today's world" and MENA as the most affected region in terms of "spread of extremist ideology and the activity of terrorist groups". Without mentioning it explicitly, the document clearly blames the West for destabilizing the region, stating that "[e]xternal interference has also played a major role" and has "led to the destruction of traditional governance and security mechanisms [...] The ideological values and prescriptions imposed from outside these countries in an attempt to modernize their political systems have exacerbated the negative response of their societies to current challenges. (para 14)

As in previous documents, Russia insists on the idea that "the UN should maintain its central role in regulating international relations and coordinating world politics in the 21st century" (para 24) and in line with this "advocates strengthening the legal foundation of international relations [...] Maintaining and strengthening international rule of law is among its priorities in the international arena" (para 26). At that point, the document again implicitly blames the West as Russia intends

> to counter attempts by some States or groups of States to revise the generally accepted principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter [aiming] to interfere in the domestic affairs of States with the aim of unconstitutional change of regime, including by supporting non-State actors, such as terrorist and extremist groups. (para 26b)

Likewise and in the light of the Libyan precedent and Russian deployment in Syria, Moscow intends "to prevent military interventions or other forms of outside interference contrary to international law, specifically the principle of sovereign equality of States, under the pretext of implementing the 'responsibility to protect' concept" (para 26c). The second explicit mention of the Middle East is related to Russia's support for "the creation of zones free from nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction" (para 27i).

It is remarkable and quite telling that when it comes to international humanitarian cooperation and human rights issues, the document again puts the focus on the West and its alleged regime-change strategy. Thus, Russia aims "to counter attempts to use human rights theories to exert political pressure and interfere in internal affairs of States, including with a view to destabilizing them and overthrowing legitimate governments" (para 45b).

The fourth section of the document outlines the regional foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation. As in previous documents the member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are singled out as the main priority for Russia (para 49). In the subsequent paragraphs (50–60), the document insists on the critical relevance of this region for Russia mentioning Belarus, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Ukraine, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Afterwards, the document elaborates on the tensions and problems triggered by "the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU)" (para 61–68). Canada and the Arctic are mentioned, before moving on to Asia-Pacific and referring to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, India, Mongolia, Japan, the two Koreas, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand (para 78–91).

Only then does the document jump to MENA, emphasizing that

> Russia will continue making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing threats that emanate from international terrorist groups, consistently promotes political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in regional States while respecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination without outside interference. (para 92)

The West is again implicitly mentioned and characterized as an "outside interference". Unsurprisingly, Syria and Iran are singled out as the two main partners in the region.

Finally, Russia intends "to further expand bilateral relations with the States in the Middle East and North Africa, including by relying on the ministerial meeting of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum, and continuing strategic dialogue with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf" and "will take advantage of its participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with a view to further expanding relations with countries of the Islamic world, and promoting partnerships with them in various areas" (para 95–96).

**3. The National Security Strategies**

*3.1 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation (January 2000)*

The *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation* of 2000 is the main document related to foreign affairs of the Russian Federation at the beginning of the new century. It frames the basis on which to conceptualize the foreign policy of the Kremlin for the following years.

As is stated in the second paragraph – and as implied in the title – by "national security is meant the security of its multinational people as the bearer of sovereignty and as the only source of power in

the Russian Federation". The concept of security is thus the central issue of the renewed policy strategy, and is employed as a means to address upcoming international threats.

The first part of the document is built on the idea of positioning Russia in the new global community. After the end of the "bipolar confrontation era" (para 3), Russia has to adapt itself to – and even counteract – the forthcoming tendencies of the Western World, especially those related to "weaken[ing] Russia politically, economically, militarily and in other ways" (para 9) or even "ignor[ing] Russia's interests when resolving major issues in international relations" ( para 9).

The second part focuses on Russia's national interests. These are divided into three spheres: individual, social and state interests. Even though they have different scopes, there is a common trend among them vis-à-vis the international dimension. The leading aim is to "strengthening its positions as a great power and as one of the influential centers of a multipolar world" (para 18). This status as leading international actor is integrated with the national interest of "preservation and strengthening of society's moral values, traditions of patriotism and humanism" (para 17), thereby demonstrating Russia's interest in preserving its "core values" while expanding its influence after a long and tedious absence.

When addressing the threats to and safeguards of Russia's national security, terrorism appears as one of the issues on the agenda, notably as it is seen to be used to destabilize Russia.

In this Concept Paper, the Middle East appears only as a region of Russian influence. Attempts by other states to reduce this influence are seen as creating a threat for Russia's own interests. The MENA region or just North Africa are not mentioned. This indicates that the region as a whole was not yet a priority for Moscow. Other areas such as Europe, Asia-Pacific and Central Asia were acknowledged as well. This also reveals a shifting interest from Russia and an expanding area of influence in the years to come. The rhetoric at the beginning of the century was concentrated on counterbalancing other states' actions and repositioning Russia as a main influencer in the new multipolar world that was being shaped from the convergence and integration of some of its neighbours – Europe and NATO – as well as the rise of different multidimensional hazards throughout the globe.

*3.2 Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020 (May 2009)*

The *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*, approved in May 2009, is clearly a "Medvedev-time" document, building on the underlying idea of "human security". Thus "investing in human capital", as stated in paragraph 24, is viewed as a priority for national security. This approach, related to the notion of a social development model, was very much in vogue during Medvedev's presidency. The same is true for the repeated reference to "civil society", a phrase that appears only in very specifically chosen moments in Putin-era documents.

The first appealing difference of the 2009 National Security Strategy compared to the National Security Concept approved in January 2000 is that it is much more focused on the domestic dimension of the State's challenges. Whereas the 2000 document starts with "Russia in the world community", in 2009 this dimension occurs only in the otherwise very short chapter II. The document states from the beginning that

> the preconditions for reinforcing the system of national security have been created, and the relevant legal space has been consolidated. Priority issues in the economic sphere have been resolved, and the attractiveness of the economy for investment has grown. Authentically Russian ideals and spirituality are being born, alongside a dignified attitude to historical memory.

This quite triumphalist view is developed in detail all through the document.

In the international arena, priority is giving to the relations with the US, the West and NATO in general, underlining that "values and models of development have become the subject of global competition" (para 8). The MENA region is largely absent from this strategy document and is acknowledged mainly in relation to the energy resources issue. It does appear cited among other regions in paragraph 11, which states that "in the long term, the attention of international politics will be focused on ownership of energy resources, including in the Near East, the Barents Sea shelf and other parts of the Arctic, in the Caspian basin, and in Central Asia", while the conflict dimension appears in the medium-term prospect where "the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as conflicts in the Near and Middle East, in a number of South Asian and African countries, and on the Korean peninsula, will continue to exert a negative influence on the international situation".

The dominant trend of the document in the international framework tries quite clearly to avoid confrontational approaches, as specified in paragraph 89:

> The achievement of the Russian Federation's priorities for stable development is supported by an active foreign policy, whose efforts are focused on seeking agreement and common interests with other states, on the basis of a system of bilateral and multilateral mutually beneficial partnership relations.

**4. The Military Doctrines**

After developing the *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation* in January 2000, the Kremlin continued its new security and foreign affairs reconceptualization through its military doctrine. The doctrine is built on the precepts of the Basic Guidelines for the Russian Federation's Military Doctrine of 1993. The 2000 military doctrine, as well as the version presented in 2014, envisages terrorism as one of the major menaces, mentioned throughout both documents. However, neither the MENA region nor the Middle East are present in these two papers. The exclusion of the area demonstrates the intention of Moscow to generalize the concept of "terrorism" in order to avoid relating it to a particular narrative, thus being able to exploit it in different circumstances when necessary. Terrorism is clearly an important issue in Russia's agenda, but it is not seen as limited to the area of the Middle East, thus opening the door to potential military interventions in other areas – even locally.

**Conclusions**

Russia's policies towards the Mediterranean collide with those of the EU. While Moscow regards supporting authoritarian regimes as a means of preserving regional order, the EU's discourse in the past years has focused on drawing attention to social unrest and democratic will. However, the situation since the Arab revolutions and their ultimate failure to attain their initially stated goals and objectives, have affected the EU's vision towards the region and its subsequent approach. The EU's vision does not intend to impose any particular agenda in the region; its main goal is to maintain peace and continue the development efforts in these countries, as it conceives of its neighbours as key to improvement of the wider region – including the EU itself. The Mediterranean is pivotal to the EU's foreign policy objectives. And as such, plenty of resources, both human and capital, are pouring to the area. The EU has been following an agenda of non-political intervention but it is the main source of development aid, thereby increasing its soft power. However, the EU's foreign policy has been constantly struggling to deal with non-state actors as well as to understand the dynamics and power blocks of the Mediterranean.

Moscow has a different conceptualization of the state of affairs in the Mediterranean; it has pushed forward an agenda of preserving its alliances and further enhancing some of them while actively enrolling in certain regional disputes. This has consequently stimulated some animosity among the states and instrumental forces in the region, but it has as well shifted the country towards a more central position such that it is almost essential in some of today's conflicts. Through military

cooperation, Moscow has become an ally for some and an enemy for others, but the underpinning idea is that the Kremlin does play a role in the region.

As we have seen, the policies of the EU and Russia in the Mediterranean are based on completely opposite premises and in some cases even conflicting ones. While the EU promotes open societies and accommodates minorities and repressed groups, Moscow fosters its view on traditional values as the fundamental channel to its foreign policy; there is no narrative in respect to empowerment of women and minorities in Russia's foreign political discourse. Moreover, fundamental concepts in the EU's agenda such as climate change, agricultural development or migration and mobility are completely absent from Russia's scheme for the Mediterranean. There is no evident engagement in any of these issues on the part of the Kremlin and no prospects of such in the near future. It is clearly a very policy-specific region for Moscow and this policy differs quite substantially from the intent of the EU.

These two opposite visions are competing for space in the same region, which is struggling with sectarianism and political turmoil. The strategies diverge in their implementation – soft power vs. military intervention – and have had different outcomes. Moscow's active enrolment in the Mediterranean has substantially improved its negotiation power and strengthened its international image as an essential speaker. Conversely, the EU's soft power has not procured the expected outcome and has even left the union as a secondary actor in the shadow of international bigger players.

In sum, Russia's conception of the Mediterranean in its official discourse does not coincide with that of the EU. This is the main conclusion that can be extracted from reviewing the major official position documents of Moscow. There are some potential *complementarities* when it comes to security and stability, but strategic distrust will prevail in the foreseeable future. The rift between the European Union and Russia runs deep and Moscow is positioning itself in the MENA region as a counterbalance to the West. In the Kremlin's view, as a follow-up of the Arab Spring, the West – which means mainly the US but also the EU – is pursuing a destabilizing agenda aiming to overthrow some regional authoritarian regimes. Moscow thus presents itself as a stability-provider *confronting* the West. Hence there is a limited ground for effective and meaningful cooperation despite apparent shared goals of fighting terrorism or preventing further destabilization.

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**Notes**

1) See "Always on Guard: Russia 'Can Reinforce Its Task Force in the Med at Any Time'", in *Sputnik News*, 7 January 2017, https://sptnkne.ws/dkkM.

3 CHINA

# Chinese Official Geopolitical Cartographies and Discursive Constructions of the Mediterranean: Discourse Analysis of Official Narratives and Comparison with the EU

*Jordi Quero*

## Introduction

In recent years, a proliferation of foreign policy analysis scholarship on decision-makers' mental maps and similar notions has reintroduced the topic into the core of the broader IR research agenda (Battersby and Montello 2009, Bialasiewicz et al. 2007, Casey and Wright 2011, Criekemans and Duran 2011, O'Loughlin and Grant 1990, Thomas 2011). This literature has generally focused on broader theoretical advancements in how *mental maps* are constructed and consolidated, and it generally uses Western countries as bottom-line case studies. This paper aims at contributing to this academic discussion by examining the mental maps of the major Chinese foreign policy decision-makers in relation to the Mediterranean region, also alternatively referred as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Through critical discourse analysis techniques, it analyses 54 different primary sources by the Chinese government (official policy documents, public speeches and interviews by the Presidency of the People's Republic of China and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs) dealing with the reality labelled by the European Union as the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries – or simply, the Mediterranean. All documents correspond to the period of Xi Jinping's presidency (2013 onwards) and therefore the conclusions reached should be valid for current Chinese foreign policy. The intention is to incorporate the analysis of non-Western realities into the debate on mental maps as a necessary step to nuance theoretical endeavours.[1]

This paper argues that the People's Republic of China uses a polysemy of labels to refer to the Mediterranean region as categorized by the European Union.[2] There is no single mental map or geopolitical cartography used by Chinese officials to refer to the focus region. Rather, the paper identifies at least four major geopolitical maps used by the Chinese officials to approach the MENA region, namely the "Arab countries/states", the "Middle East", the "Eurasian continent" and the broader category of "developing countries". None of these mental maps is constrained by topographical concerns and some of them include different states not linked by geographical elements. It additionally claims that each of these mental maps has a specific narrative associated with it, with concrete repeated signifiers and interdiscursive as well as intertextual elements. While the geopolitical cartographies "Arab countries/states" and the "Eurasian continent" are generally associated with cooperation, development and a common future, notions like "the Middle East" have been securitized by stressing conflictual elements in associated speech acts.

## Approaching Mental Maps through Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Starting Point

The study of mental maps in the IR discipline is not new. The most significant initial effort in defining and grasping the importance of the concept in foreign policy, still greatly influencing contemporary research, was Harold and Margaret Sprout's notion of psycho milieu. Defined as a "human individual's perceived image of a situation, an image that may or may not correspond to reality" (Sprout and Sprout 1968: 33), the notion includes policy-makers' perceived images on geography.

It was in the 1980s, amid the cognitive behaviouralism revolution in IR[3] and as a response to some related ideas raised by Jervis (1976), that the notion gained some centrality in foreign policy analysis

and major efforts to "operationalize" were carried out (da Vinha 2012: 5, Criekemans 2009). In this context, the publication of Alan Henrikson's (1980) "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers", still echoing in contemporary research endeavours, represented a key step forward. Henrikson concluded that mental maps should be defined as:

> an ordered but continually adapting structure of the mind – alternatively conceivable as a process – by reference to which a person acquires, codes, stores, recalls, reorganizes, and applies, in thought or action, information about his or her large-scale geographical environment, in part or in its entirety. (Henrikson 1980: 498)[4]

However, up until today there is no agreement on how to term this reality. As outlined by da Vinha (2012: 13), the polysemy of labels includes notions like geopolitical images (O'Loughlin and Grant 1990), metageographies (Lewis and Wigen 1997), geopolitical codes (Dijkink 1998), geopolitical imaginary (Latham 2001), geopolitical imagination (Agnew 2003), imaginative geographies (Bialasiewicz et al. 2007) or cognitive geopolitics (Crickemans 2009). Some of these definitions are associated with subconscious structures in place in the minds of human beings while others emphasize conscious construction resulting from societal interactions or instrumentalized narratives. Still, despite the fact that the terminological and definitional debate cannot be considered closed, scholarship incorporating these notions into foreign policy analysis has recently mushroomed (Battersby and Montello 2009, Casey and Wright 2011, Criekemans and Duran 2011, O'Loughlin and Grant 1990, Thomas 2011).

This paper, drawing on the scholarship outlined above, conceives mental maps – also referred here as geopolitical cartographies – as socially constructed spatial imaginaries, which are generally associated with specific sets of codes and ideas. Beyond the individual cognitive process, the creation of the mental maps, their consolidation and their association with some concrete repeated codes occur through social representational practices like public discourses and other speech acts.

To grasp the mental maps of Chinese leadership this paper draws on some techniques associated with critical discourse analysis, mainly some of the contributions by Milliken (1999), Wodak (2015) and Hansen (2006). Discourses might be understood as "structures of signification which construct social realities" and they are "productive (or reproductive) of things defined by the discourse" (Milliken 1999: 229), in our case, geographical imaginaries. This paper makes use of *nominalization techniques* to understand how the topographical and social realities are referred to (Wodak 2015: 12). It incorporates elements of *predicative analysis* – i.e., focusing on adjectives and adverbs attached to nouns and notions[5] – as this is key to understanding how "[p]redications of a noun construct the thing(s) named as a particular sort of thing, with particular features and capacities" (Milliken 1999: 232). Finally, it also highlights *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* elements to arrive at a more precise definition of the *mental maps* thus constructed.

*Mental Maps of the Leadership of the People's Republic of China towards the Middle East and North Africa: Overlapping Geopolitical Cartographies*

This paper claims that there is no single mental map or geopolitical cartography used by Chinese officials[6] to refer to the focus region. Rather, it identifies at least four major geopolitical maps used by the Chinese officials to approach the MENA region, namely the "Arab countries/states", the "Middle East", the "Eurasian continent" and the broader category of "developing countries" (see Figure 1). As can be observed through the labels alone, these mental maps are not necessarily constrained by topographical concerns as some of them encompass units not linked by geographical elements. Rather, the paper demonstrates that Chinese official mental maps are far more based on an encounter-of-peoples approach than on pure Cartesian delimitations of geographical spaces. Each of these mental maps has a specific narrative associated with it, with concrete repeated signifiers and interdiscursive as well as intertextual elements. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are

quite strong in the cases examined. Chinese officials repeatedly use the same formulas, producing what might be labelled as an "intertextuality cascade". Top-level decision-makers (the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs) fix the nominative and predicative elements of the speech (its main signifiers) and the lower levels of the Chinese Government receive and repeat these formulas.[7] All this enables the paper to described the main features associated with each one of these geopolitical mental categories (see Table 1).

**Figure 1** | Countries associated with each of the Chinese geopolitical cartographies towards the MENA region
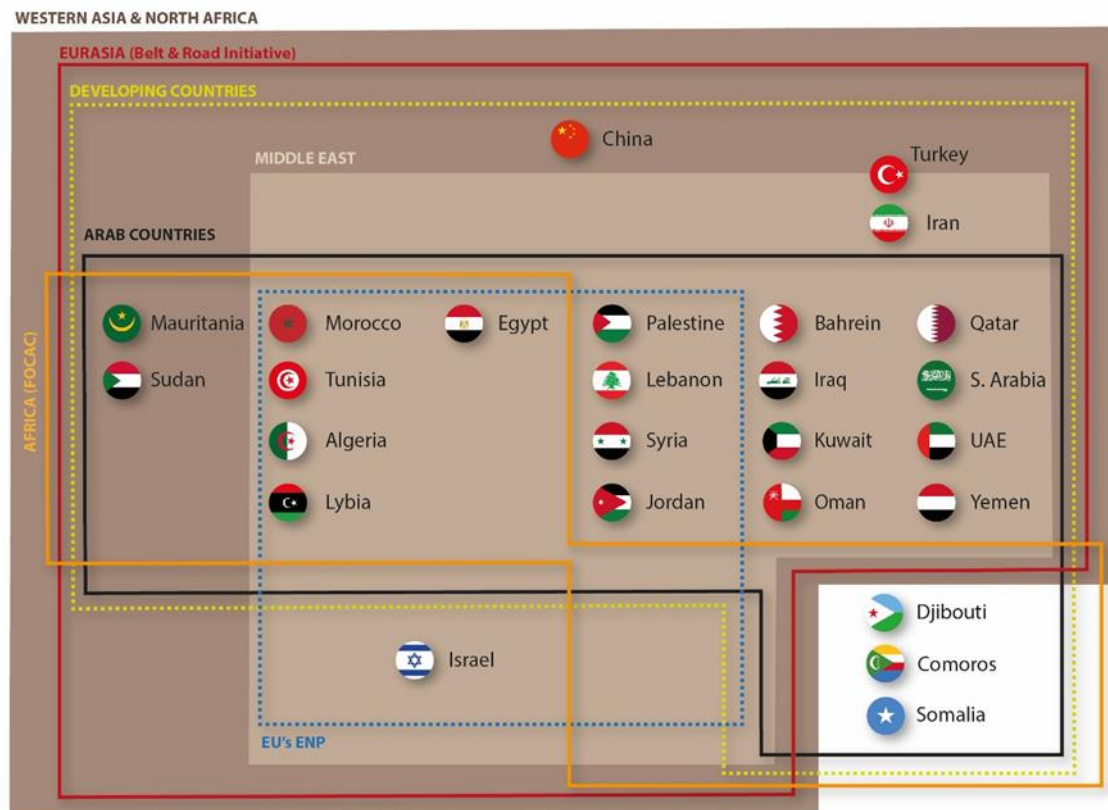


**Table 1** | Chinese discursive construction around the "Arab countries/states" (Substrate Matrix)
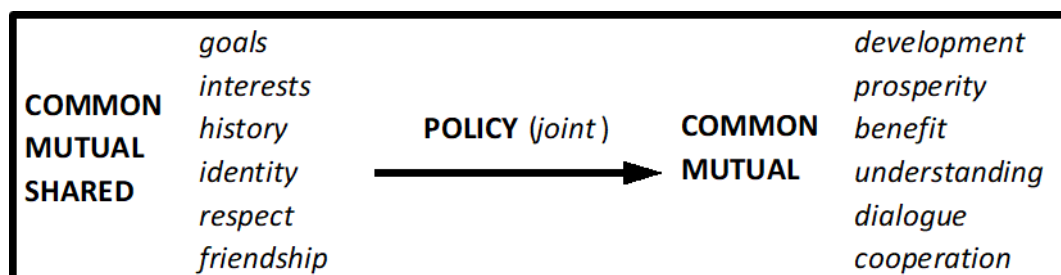
**1. The "Arab Countries/States": Historical Friendship, Shared Interests and Common Prosperity**

The primordial geopolitical cartography used by Chinese officials to refer to the reality labelled by the EU as the "Mediterranean" or "South and East Mediterranean Countries" is related to the notions of "Arab countries" or "Arab states". On some few occasions expressions like "the Arab people(s)" or "the Arab World" are alternatively used as synonyms (for instance, see Documents 4, 35 and 52).

The primary sources analysed demonstrate how all these concepts encompass "all 22 Arab countries" (Document 29), equating them with the list of member-states of the League of Arab States.[8] Additionally, the list of who is in and who is out of this imaginary is confirmed by the fact that the notions of "Arab countries" and "Arab states" are commonly used in public speeches and official documents taking shape in the framework the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASF) and its parallel initiatives[9] whose membership/participation is restricted to China plus the Arab League members.

By focusing on *Arabness*, or the condition of being Arab, the boundaries of these imagined cartographies are not geographical in essence. Rather, the "Arab countries/states" construction revolves around two different cognitive processes: firstly, a manufacture of the counterpart in identity base lines ("the Arab people"); and secondly, a characterization of international political subjects (i.e., the states) according to the demographic majority and the self-defined nature of the ruling institutions ("the Arab countries" as the states where the majority of the population considers itself Arab and where the government labels the state as such). Consequently, this mental map is not made up of contiguous territories nor is it founded on Cartesian considerations, unlike the EU's "Mediterranean" or "South and East Mediterranean Countries". From a Chinese perspective this is instead concomitant with mental human geographies that put at the centre the encounter of two different peoples/civilizations notwithstanding physical–terrestrial concerns (see below Section 4).

It is also worth noting that, despite recognizing the plurality of the 22 different realities, "the Arab countries/states" construction is treated as one single, mainly uniform, unit with its own all-embracing common features such as one "culture" or "people" (Document 29). The space for inner differences within the countries composing the imaginary is narrowed down and a single characterization of the totality is indiscriminately applied to all the units. China's discourse presents the relation of China with the "Arab countries" in bilateral terms, using expressions as "*bilateral* friendship between China and Arab and Middle East countries" (Document 35) or "*both* sides" (see for instance the repetition of this formula in Document 29), denoting an understanding of the others as one entity. Albeit not continuously, the discourses occasionally show some essentialist approaches towards the "Arab countries/states" as a whole. The Chinese imaginary presents them as "characterized by *religious* and *cultural diversities*, *time-honored culture* and *history*, *unique* resource endowment and great potentials for development" (Document 29) and "the Arabs" as "industrious and resourceful people, who created brilliant *civilizations* and contributed greatly to the advancement of mankind" (Document 35).

A critical discourse analysis reveals three major ideas which are generally linked with the notion. The first feature to underline in relation with this unitary discursive construction of the "Arab countries/states" mental map is the importance of history, and more precisely, of a common friendly history with China, as a justification for current cooperative relations. Generally, the idea that China is "a friend of the Arab people" (Document 35)[10] is repeated and stressed a great deal, even reaching the use of labels like "brothers, friends and partners no matter what happens on the world arena" (Document 29). From a predicate analysis perspective, it is interesting to see how discourses make constant use of phrases like "*close* friends", "*strong*" and "*ideal* partners" (Document 35) or "*traditional* friendship" (Documents 29 and 35). In their imaginary, this is presented as "time-honored ties of friendship, forged by the two-thousand-year old Silk Road" (Document 4) which:

"dates back to ancient times […].In the long stretches of history, peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, learning from each other, mutual benefit and win-win results have always been the main theme of exchanges between China and Arab countries" (Document 29).

Obviously, as with any other policy reasoning based in historical records, this presentation only spotlights positive, cooperative and peaceful historical encounters between China and the focus region while neglecting past controversies, conflict and violence.

A second idea recurrently associated with the "Arab countries" is that they occupy a special place in Chinese foreign policy, as a consequence not only of their traditional friendly relations but also of their current converging interests and approaches towards the world. For China, the "Arab countries/states" enjoy a "unique", "important", "strategic place" and "rising status" in Chinese foreign policy (Document 35) after "cooperation in all fields has been *constantly* deepened" in the last 60 years (Document 29). At its core, the discourse situates the existence of "*common* interests" (Documents 29 and 35), "*common* aspiration[s]", (Document 35) "*mutual* understanding" (Documents 29 and 35), "*mutual* respect" (Document 29) and "*mutual* need for cooperation" (Document 35). Understanding and respect are associated with parallel conceptualizations of sovereign equality and the principle of non-interference. The discourse stresses not only how "both sides have *broad consensus* on safeguarding state sovereignty and territorial integrity [and] defending *national dignity*" (Document 29)[11] but also how they have "always *respected* each other's social system and development path no matter what differences exist in ideology", how "*both* sides *respect* each other's core interests and major concerns, support each other's *justifiable* demand[s] and *reasonable* propositions" and ultimately how they share an aspiration of "building a *new* type of international relations" based on state sovereign independence and territorial integrity (Document 29). All these ideas can be resumed in how Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi justified in an interview in Al Jazeera the "very promising future" of China–Arab relations:

> first, we enjoy traditional friendship; second, we are all developing countries with broad common interests; and third, we do not have any geopolitical conflict. As one of my Arab friends once said, China is the only major country that has never interfered in the Arab world. This is exactly our policy and our diplomatic philosophy, which we take pride in. (Document 35)

Thirdly, the ideas of non-interference and respect for internal issues shape the Chinese representation on the ongoing changes in the focus region. Even if few sources dealing with the "Arab countries/states" actually address the issue,[12] the ones that do are clearly willing to underline China's non-interference position. Chinese officials start by acknowledging that "Arab states know this region the best" (Document 35) before advancing any examination of the events taking place since 2011. They express their confidence that "the *people* of Arab states will surmount the *current difficulties* and usher in a new future for the region" (Document 35), thus directly mentioning the existence of "difficulties" (without providing any further detail of what they precisely mean) and strangely enough distancing from a purely state-centric approach. Any solution requires "Arab states [to] come together and help and support each other to *jointly revitalize* the Arab world" where China "will be your best friend and most reliable partner" (Document 35). The idea of revitalization seems to appeal to superficial cosmetic transformations to be implemented while neglecting any space in the discourse for profound political, economic and social changes or indeed for justice. Following a Derridian approach, in this case absences in the discourse might be more important than presences.

All in all, the Chinese discursive construction around the "Arab countries/states" emphasizes the convergence of "goals", "interests", "history", "identity",[13] "respect" and "friendship" as a base to justify joint policies aiming at "common development and prosperity" (Documents 4, 29 and 35) and "mutually beneficial cooperation for win-win results" (Document 29) (see Table 1). From a

predicative analysis standpoint, the stress and constant repetition of the adjectives "common", "mutual" and "shared" might signal an intention to silence divergences and disputes and reinforce a highly positive narrative towards the region.[14] This characterization represents a sort of broad and common substrate for any official Chinese approximation towards the EU's so-called "Mediterranean". Hence, many of its predicative elements and signifiers permeate into the alternative and largely overlapping Chinese geopolitical imagination notions analysed below. In other words, there is a high level of interdiscursivity of this group of signifiers among the discourses of different geopolitical maps.

**2. The "Middle East" and Its "Hotspots": The Centrality of Security, Peace and Stability**

The notion "Middle East" is also used by Chinese authorities, yet this geopolitical cartography is importantly characterized in a different manner than the former "Arab countries/states". As a starting point it is important to underline how the geographical/ membership boundaries of this notion are far more blurred. While on some occasions different primary sources used this notion as synonym of "Arab countries" (see, for instance, Documents 35 and 52), generally any discursive analysis would demonstrate how the concept seems to go beyond these limits. It clearly encompasses novel countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel. Some primary sources include Morocco and Algeria in this notion (Document 4), forcing us to think that there is room to include Tunisia and Libya as well. It is difficult to fully clarify whether this geopolitical imaginary includes countries like Mauritania, Sudan or even Turkey, while it seems out of order to consider Djibouti, Somalia and Comoros. Hence, the Chinese "Middle East" construction might get closer in terms of membership to what mainly American scholars and policy-makers call the Middle East and North Africa region.

There are two clear features associated with this geopolitical imaginary. Firstly, the notion of the "Middle East" is permanently linked with peace, security and stability considerations.[15] The precise notion has gone under a severe *securitization* process in the Chinese imaginary.[16] Expressions like the "conflicts in the Middle East" (Documents 13 and 22), "regional instability" (see, for instance, Document 22), "the turmoils of the Middle East", "the gunsmoke in the Middle East" (Document 22), "the Middle East is mired in aggravating tension" (Document 49) or "the *vicious* cycle of *incessant* turbulence[s] in the Middle East" (predicatively stressing the continuity of violence) (Document 22) are just some of the clearest examples in that respect. The notion is also the one preferred when talking about nuclearization (specially the "Iranian nuclear issue"[17]) and the need for creating a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (Documents 12 and 29), international and regional terrorism (Documents 13 and 22), or the negotiations between Israel and Palestine categorized as the "Middle East peace process" (see, for instance, Documents 14, 22 and 29).

This is coupled with the second element integrating the Chinese "Middle East" imaginary: a strong essentialist discursive construction that situates in the centre of the notion ethnic, religious, sectarian and cultural groups/identities. These notions are repeatedly used in the Chinese analysis of violence in the region. In doing so such discourses reduce all political and socioeconomic problems at the core of some of the historical and contemporary conflicts unfolding in the Middle East, as well as terrorism, to mere primary identities-related disputes. Their discursive construction emphasizes that "Regional instability and development gap[s] breed terrorism, while *ethnic disunity* and *religious conflicts* allow radical ideologies to *resurface*"("resurface" appeals to inherent conditions that have always been there) (Document 22), hence providing an essentialist explanation for violence. Furthermore, such differences are categorized as the "root causes" of the conflicts and distinguished from alternative, purportedly more superficial (political) explanations (Document 22 and 47).[18] Here, the ever-present state-centric approach is abandoned in favour of analysis integrating subnational identities of the individuals. A good example of how these elements are brought together is the following:

> The situation in the Middle East region is serious and disturbing. Differences among nations, religious sects and ethnic groups aggravate one another. Wars and conflicts, humanitarian disasters and terrorist threats are interwoven. […] The Middle East region, once a cradle of human civilization, boasts a glorious history with major contribution[s] to human progress. Its flourishing civilization and cultural confidence has made this region an important platform for exchanges and integration of Eastern and Western civilizations. In the 21st century, co-existence of civilizations requires the spirit of harmony without uniformity more than before and progress of the society calls for inclusiveness and broad-mindedness. Different religions should tolerate and learn from each other and various ethnicities should live in harmony. (Document 22)

This analysis cannot be untangled from a different but highly connected discursive construction around the notion of hotspots. *Hotspot* is the label used to characterize international conflictual junctures including Ukraine, Sudan, the South China Sea, Syria, Yemen, Libya or the nuclear issues of Iran and the Korean Peninsula. A common narrative, with repeated signifiers, is used by the Chinese officials in all these cases, with limited space for nuances depending on the conflict discussed. The initial element to highlight is the fact that conflictual circumstances are dealt with under a separated independent discursive construction. The rest of the constructions analysed in this paper stress to a greater extent cooperative and friendly elements of inter-state relations (see Table 1) and, in general, there is an important absence of room for recognizing the potentiality of conflict as this would go against the largely affirmative and constructive Chinese macro-narrative. Articulating a separate discursive construction makes it possible to tackle conflictive issues in an ad hoc manner without fully making obvious any paradox this might represent for its generally positive macro-narrative.From a Chinese perspective, hotspot circumstances are regional in nature, emanating fundamentally from domestic conflicts which harm potential development. By stressing this regional scope, without negating international impact, the speakers might want to differentiate from the geopolitical controversies of "major countries".[19] The hotspots discursive construction includes, and it is focused on, repeated formulas about how to come to a solution to these situations. This is the self-defined "*uniquely* Chinese approach [for] settling hot-spot issues […] drawing wisdom and inspiration from China's traditional culture" (Document 17), the "Chinese wisdom" (Document 48) or the "Chinese Way" (based on "*sustainable*, *incremental* and *fundamental*" solutions) (Document 8). On some occasions the construction is also linked with the "*profound* traditional Chinese medicine" and its focus on a "multi-pronged approach", analysis, impartiality and stressing "root cause[s]" (Documents 17). Fundamentally, the discourse revolves around three principles for settling hotspot issues:

> no country should interfere in other countries' internal affairs or impose its own will on others; countries concerned should act in an impartial and objective manner and refrain from seeking selfish interests; and political solutions, not the use of force, should be sought in addressing hotspot issues. (Document 18)[20]

Thus, firstly, we observe a reiteration of the principle of non-interference. The discourse construction always includes formulas accentuating that China "respect[s] the views and aspirations of the people in the countries concerned" (Document 8) as hotspot issues are "their [own] problems" (Document 35). Secondly, conflictive issues can be only solved by "*political* solutions"[21] and "*political* dialogue process" (Document 20), as any "military solution […], even if it may appear to work at one point, […] cannot fundamentally resolve the problem" (Document 26). Additionally, the discursive construction emphasizes the need to "go beyond the *selfish* interests of their own party or group" (Document 35)[22] and have "*serious* talks [as] there will be no grievance that cannot be resolved" (Document 35).[23] The accent on the political nature of any solution, based on sincere and concrete actions (Document 7), contrasts with the generally depoliticized nature of the Chinese macro-narrative presented above.

A central element in the hotspots discursive construction is the self-representation of China as a responsible global actor. Repeatedly, the primary sources underline, with different formulations, the idea stated by President Xi Jinping that "the international community wants to hear China's voice and see China's solutions" (Document 27) – we can see here an example of strong intertextuality. China, together with other "major countries" like the United States and the rest of the members of the United Nations Security Council (Documents 38, 39 and 41), needs to collaborate in solving regional hotspot issues as it is a responsible and constructive member of the international community, actively involved in its well-functioning.[24] Besides accepting that "the resolution of hot-spot issues can create a more enabling environment for China's development" (Document 31), in this case Chinese framing practice is highly related to its self-perceived identity as responsible superpower and its self-representation as a constructive and just global actor, showing a clear connection between foreign policy and identity construction (Hansen 2006).

A quick review of the Syrian, Iranian and Palestinian–Israeli examples will further clarify some of the points made. On Syria, the Chinese narrative fulfils most of the elements pointed out for hotspot and the "Middle East". The "Syrian issue" or the "Syrian crisis"[25] is presented as a "highly complex issue" (Documents 2 and 26) or an issue of "*intricate* complexity" (Document 8) dividing "the Syrian *people*" (Documents 7, 35 and 46) or the "*local* people" (Document 35) between the government and the opposition. Essentialist elements are present as on occasion the discourse appeals to the need for "a balance […] between the interests of various *ethnicities*, *religions* and *sects*" (hence clouding political demands into primary identity clashes),[26] as they "are brothers and sisters in the first place" (Document 7). Any solution must necessarily be achieved through a Syrian-led political transition process,[27] which is *"inclusive* […] and involves all parties to the conflict" (Document 22) including "all those that do not engage in violent extremist and terrorist activities […] and are willing to lay down their arms" (Document 26). In this political process, "all parties [must] act in the *overall* interests of the *future* and *destiny* of their country and of their people" (Document 14),[28] "go[ing] beyond the *selfish* interests of their own party or group" (Document 35),[29] skipping "*intransigence*" (Document 26), with no "preconditions or pre-determined results" (Document 22) but acknowledging the Syrian people's "aspiration for *change* and at the same time ensur[ing] stability and order […] as well as [the] relative continuity and effectiveness of Syria's governmental institutions" (Document 7). The international community "should not stand by and do nothing, nor should it intervene arbitrarily" (Document 22).[30] Meanwhile, China will continue to "play a constructive role in facilitating peace talks" (Document 26) resulting in "*objective* and *balanced*" solutions (an example of self-representation of their own global responsible identity) (Document 25) that could render Syria a "*stable*, prosperous and *dignified* member of the international community" (Document 7).

As for the "Iranian nuclear issue" hotspot, the problem is conceptualized as an "issue of political security [whose] primary cause is the lack of *mutual trust* between parties concerned" (Document 30). With this representation, the logical solution is a diplomatic and political one[31] based on "*perseverance*", "*reciprocity*", "*fairness*" and "*balance*" (Documents 14 and 30).[32] China, emphasizing this time its long-lasting "state-to-state relations" with Tehran based on the Five Principles of peaceful coexistence (Document 35), is willing to act as a responsible international actor in brokering peace between the parties.[33]

Finally, the "conflict between Israel and Palestine" (Document 22 and 46) (also repeatedly labelled as "the Middle East peace process"[34] or the "Palestinian issue"[35]) is treated like any other hotspot. The problem and the solution are accepted to be political in nature. For China, the "root cause of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is the prolonged absence of a *just* and *reasonable* settlement of the Palestinian issue" (Document 46). It is true, however, that unlike what we saw in the previous examples, China discourse towards the issue integrates a strong focus on the unbalanced situation of one of the parties in conflict. The Palestinians are occasionally mentioned as "our brothers and sisters" (Document 35) whose suffering is a "wound [in] human conscience" (Document 14). This

becomes clearer when conducting a predicative analysis of the primary sources and realizing the constant appeal to notions like "*legitimate* demand" (Document 14), "*unfair* and *unreasonable* phenomenon", "*just* cause" or "*just* propositions and national aspirations" (Document 35). China's responsibility is to "exert positive influence" (Document 11) over the political negotiations while giving "support and help [for] the local people who are suffering" (Document 35).

### 3. The "Belt and Road" Initiative: Signifiers around the Eurasian Mental Map

The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives, jointly known as the Belt and Road Initiative (B&R), is the major policy framework put forward in September 2013 through which China encounters many of the countries analysed in this paper. Even if officially the Initiative will be open to all nations and not limited by geography (Mu 2015), at this stage it includes among our targeted countries Iran, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

This policy is based on the mental geopolitical cartography labelled by the Chinese authorities as the "Eurasian continent". This cartography is approached by using the same substrate matrix as the one in the case of the "Arab countries/states" (see Table 1). Hence, ideas like "*joint* endeavor" (Documents 29 and 35), "*win-win* cooperation",[36] "*mutual* understanding" (Document 35), "*mutual* learning and *mutual* respect" (Document 35),[37] "*common* development and prosperity",[38] "*common* interests" (Document 35) and "*mutual* beneficial projects" (Documents 30 and 40)[39] are highly present. Chinese officials' preferred – and extensively repeated – formula defines the B&R after three axioms, namely "*extensive* consultation, *joint* contribution and *shared* benefits".[40] Relations among the states involved are recurrently described as friendly,[41] to the point that Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed that "the Belt and Road has seen an *ever-expanding 'circle of friends'*" (Document 53) in light of President Xi Jinping's policy approach on "let our *circle of friends* grow bigger and bigger" (note the intertextuality here) (Document 27).

Besides these elements which are also used in relation to alternative geopolitical cartographies, the B&R has four distinctive narrative elements. The first of these continuously stresses the historical elements underpinning the B&R, and draws connections between the contemporary scenario and the traditional Silk Road, whose spirit needs to be renewed and brought up to date: "it embodies the spirit of the ancient Silk Road, which has a history of over 2,000 years and was used by the *peoples of many countries* for *friendly* exchange and commerce" (Document 17).[42] According to this narrative, the Silk Road historically "brought *peace*, *tranquil[l]ity* and *prosperity* to *both* sides" (Document 35) and this is the reason why it must be updated (Document 9). Ultimately, it will contribute to "building a *community* of *common* destiny" (Document 20), as the B&R "will surely bring *new*, *historic* development opportunities to countries in the region" (Document 35).

The second innovative narrative is associated with the need to *revitalize* the "Eurasian continent". The B&R-related speeches frequently refer to the need for "revitalization of countries along the routes" (Document 28) and "rejuvenation of Asia as a whole" (Document 9). A critical discourse analysis might point out that it seems the Chinese officials perceive the "Eurasian continent" to be suffering from certain problems which ultimately affect its development. Even if there is no clear verbalization on what those problems are (silenced element in the narrative),[43] the solution to any such problem is the B&R which will "catalyze the *revitalization* of the Eurasian continent as a whole" (Documents 17) by "[bringing] *new* hope, *new* prospects and *new impetus* to the economic development of the region and beyond" (Document 34).

Thirdly, the B&R narrative draws on the idea of sovereign equality among the members included in the project. The narrative associated with this public policy initiative cites the co-ownership of the project by all the countries along the route. Thus, "[t]he Initiative was put forward by China, but its benefits will flow across the world" (Document 53); China "does not intend to seek dominance over regional affairs [with the B&R], but to offer more development opportunities to other countries"

(Document 21). In light of this reasoning the B&R is presented as a "public good China provides to the world" (Documents 18)[44] and "not [as] a tool of geopolitics [which] must not be viewed with the outdated Cold War mentality" (Document 17)[45] nor as China's construction of its "sphere of influence" or its "backyard garden" (Document 45), as stated by the President Xi Jinping. The importance accorded to sovereign equality is also tangible in the Chinese emphasis on how the Initiative intends in no way to impose any specific economic (or political) model on the participants, but is instead based on "*equal-footed* and *friendly* exchanges on governance issues" (Document 35) and "self-development capacity" (see most notably Document 34).

Finally, the idea of *connectivity* is constantly repeated.[46] According to the official narrative, there are three key areas in which the B&R Initiative will have an impact: connectivity, production capacity cooperation and people-to-people exchanges (Documents 9, 30 and 40). The B&R is presented as a peaceful initiative which will increase *synergies* among the country members[47] in general, but in particular between China's development strategy and that of countries along the route (Document 25) which might become more "*complementary*" (see for instance Documents 34, 49 and 53).

Associated with the "Belt and Road" Initiative, China also boosts the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) based on a parallel geopolitical category, namely the "Asian countries" – similar to the "Eurasian continent" category just described. The CICA integrates 26 different countries,[48] including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. The League of Arab States is an observer.

The "Asian countries" imaginary, and its associated discursive construction, draws even more clearly on history. The official narrative states that the "tradition of *mutual* learning and *mutual* respect between different *civilizations*" (Document 35) within Asia needs to be the starting point to prevent conflict from arising. Along these lines, the narrative also stresses that: "The peoples of the Asian countries should never become enem[ies], and should enhance mutual trust to create good conditions for the development of all countries and people's living in *peace* and *contentment*" (Document 23). In order to achieve this, China presents itself as a responsible actor that is in the position to "make [an] indelible contribution to the *historical* process of maintaining peace and security and advancing cooperation and development" (Document 15) by "work[ing] together to build a new Asia of *peace*, *stability* and *cooperation*" (Document 9). The formula is coherent with the broader Chinese foreign policy: revolving always around "*cultural and people-to-people exchange[s]*",[49] the narrative states that: "we should […] stick to settling *contradictions* and *differences* through *friendly* consultations in *peaceful* ways, and *jointly* seek a mode of getting along with neighbors featuring *mutual* respect, *mutual* trust, aggregating common ground while defusing *differences* and *win-win cooperation*" (Document 23).[50]

## 4. Alternative Geopolitical Cartographies: Developing Countries, African Countries and Civilizations

Besides the three major geopolitical cartographies used by the Chinese officials to refer to the reality alternatively known as the Mediterranean/ MENA region, there are at least three others that need to be analysed: "developing countries", "African countries" and "civilizations". For the sake of this paper's objective, these alternative mental maps suffer from either being so broad that they extend beyond our focus countries (i.e., "developing countries" narratives are used not only when talking about the targeted region) or include part of our focus region in larger geopolitical cartographies (i.e., when the Southern Mediterranean countries are approached as "African countries").

All the countries – with the sole exception of Israel – covered in this paper are considered as "developing countries" in light of Chinese official narrative. China's primary sources consistently present China as part of the developing world: "China remains a member of the developing world" (Document 53), "the *rest* of the developing world" (Documents 44 and 53)[51] or "*other* developing countries" (Document 43). Additionally, the "developing countries" are presented as the core of Chinese foreign policy: for instance, with claims like "the developing world is the foundation of

China's diplomacy" (Document 53)[52] or "developing countries constitute the basis of China's overall diplomacy" (Document 24). Besides such nuances in terms of self-presentation of a shared identity, China's narrative towards these countries follows the dialectical pattern presented in the substrate matrix (see Table 1), stressing *common/shared/mutual* history, respect, goals and interests, and the aim of achieving *common/mutual* self-path development, prosperity, understanding and cooperation.

Far more interesting is the narrative associated with geopolitical mental cartography labelled as "Africa/African countries". Obviously, this geopolitical imaginary only encompasses those focus countries in the African continent, thus overlapping with alternative imaginaries presented above. Broadly speaking, the narrative and its signifiers associated with this imaginary are quite similar to the ones used for the "developing countries", including the use of the substrate matrix.[53] A "long-standing *traditional* friendship" (Document 24)[54] allows China to talk about its "African brothers" (Documents 24). Through cooperation – "win-win cooperation", "people-to-people and cultural exchanges" (Documents 16 and 44) and "equal-footed" cooperation (Document 24) – China cooperates with the development of "African countries". Accordingly, "The Chinese Dream and the African Dream very well synergize with each other" (Document 24) and they have a "shared destiny" (Document 17).[55]

The most significant distinctive element has to do with how China, through different speech acts, differentiates itself from Western powers and historical Western attitudes and policies in the African continent. China stresses its historical commitment to African countries in their "just struggle to oppose hegemonism, colonialism and to gain national independence and liberation" (Document 24). Alternatively, they claim that "China will never follow the same path traveled by traditional powers in its cooperation with Africa" (Document 24), but:

> We should uphold *justice* in politics for Africa and help it speed up development and *rejuvenation*. We will neither follow the old path of Western *colonists* nor sacrifice the ecological environment and long-term interests of African countries, but rather to seek for *mutual* benefits, *reciprocity* and *win-win cooperation*. (Document 16)

In this way, again, there is a clear connection between self-representation narratives and the construction of the identity of an actor through foreign policy (Hansen 2006).

Finally, on some occasions the official Chinese discourse appeals to ideas associated with a civilizational approach in dealing with the focus countries. Other times the notion of Arab countries is presented as a civilization in and of itself (rather than the Middle East as a whole), especially in those cases where the issue under discussion has a cultural and/or religious dimension. The clearest example can be found in *China's Arab Policy Paper* where a whole section is entitled "Exchanges among Civilizations and Religions" (Document 29). The starting point of the narratives associated with this geopolitical cartography is presenting China itself as a "rich civilization of 5,000 years" (Document 32). This leads to a promotion of "inter-civilization exchanges" approach (Document 37)[56] based on "mutual learning among civilizations" (Documents 20, 29 and 40) to "jointly contribute to the progress of human civilization" (Document 29).[57] In summary, the aim is dialogue among civilizations to achieve harmonious coexistence:

> Diverse civilizations, through *harmonious* coexistence and *mutual* learning, may become a bridge of friendship among peoples, a driving force for social progress and a bond for world peace. Only with such attitude toward civilization can different civilizations flourish together and *jointly* promote harmony and progress of human society. (Document 37)

**Table 2** | Main Chinese geopolitical cartographies towards the MENA region and their associated narratives

| Geopolitical Cartography | Associated Policy | Centre of the Discursive Construction | Key Signifiers |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. "Arab countries/states" | CASF and parallel framework | Cooperation, Development | Substrate Matrix |
| 2. "Middle East" | *Hotspots* Policy | Peace, Security and Stability | a. Securitization-like signifiers<br>b. Essentialist elements<br>c. *Hotspots* discourse<br>d. International Responsibility |
| 3. "Eurasian Continent" | "Belt and Road" Initiative and CICA | Cooperation, Prosperity, Stability | a. Common history, identity<br>b. Connectiviy<br>c. Revitalization<br>d. Equality (Sovereign) |
| 4. "Developing Countries" | FOCAC ["Belt and Road" Initiative (?)] | Cooperation, Development | a. Shared Identity<br>b. Self-path development<br>c. Non-colonial identity self-construction |

[Alternative minority cartographies: "civilizational" approach; "Western Asia and North Africa"]

## 5. Final Remarks: Confronting China's and the European Union's Geopolitical Cartographies and Discursive Constructions of the Mediterranean

In this final section this paper aims at helping to answer the broader MEDRESET research questions by comparing the findings detailed above on Chinese imaginary cartographies with the European Union's constructions of the Mediterranean space. According to previous scholarship produced in the framework of the MEDRESET project (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017, Isaac and Kares 2017, Morillas and Soler 2017), the Mediterranean is generally constructed by the European Union through three different discursive practices: "the Mediterranean as a diverse geopolitical space", "the Mediterranean as a dangerous space" and "the Mediterranean as a space crucial for EU interests". These visions have triggered a range of policies that are in essence technocratic, depoliticized and securitized.

There are five central elements to pay specific attention to. The first and central difference between Brussels' and Beijing's geopolitical mental maps has to do with the absence of any consideration of the Mediterranean as such by Chinese officials. Chinese mental maps on the focus region are dissociated from any notion of the *Mediterranean*, and the maritime dimension is not central in any of its multiple mental imaginaries about the region. The Mediterranean region as such does not exist according to the discourse analysis exposed above. Consequently, in light of the Chinese experience, it might be difficult to sustain the notion that the European Union has any normative power in the conceptualization of the focus region at a global level.

A second element of contrast is the level of precision concerning the boundaries of the region, as well as the rest of the idiosyncratic elements associated with the construction of the Mediterranean. While it seems clear that the EU's construction is well-structured and mostly clearly defined, the analysis carried out shows how different mental maps live side by side in the case of China, each one with its own constructions and verbal signifiers. An ongoing lively construction of the Mediterranean space is taking shape, which is by no means finalized. This plurality encapsulates a more nebulous, imprecise approach towards the Mediterranean than that of the EU, yet it might consequently provide China with a broader range of policy options. The interesting element to pay attention to at this point is whether any of the main mental maps described above is likely to gain pre-eminence over the others in the upcoming years and decades.

Thirdly, vis-à-vis the depoliticizing and technocratic approach of the EU, the Chinese approach seems quite similar. Political issues, and especially sensitive ones, are generally silenced in the discourses. The stress on commonalities as well as the focus on cooperation among actors neglects potentially conflictual political elements (not only between China and the Mediterranean countries but also among the latter). The only significant exception might be what this paper has labelled the *hotspots* discourse, associated with the *Middle East* mental map. This highly securitized narrative, applied selectively to some realities in the broader Mediterranean region, encompasses an acceptance of the political nature of many of the conflicts at stake. On the technocratic dimension, the "intertextuality cascade" might be a good example of parallelism between the EU and China.

The fourth element to discuss concerns the four focus policy areas identified by the MEDRESET project as central to the EU's construction of the Mediterranean: political ideas, water and agriculture, energy and industry, and migration and mobility. On the whole, these four policy areas are treated only occasionally in the Chinese official primary sources. When they are addressed, they seem to be associated with general goodwill statements of intent that might, however, be in the process of gaining more substance. The major document to pay attention to in this respect is *China's Arab Policy Paper* (Document 29) which, in January 2016, established the range of fields in which China was willing to cooperate with the "Arab countries". The underlying principle of the Chinese cooperation – especially under the Belt and Road Initiative – vis-à-vis the region is encapsulated in what China has labelled as the "1+2+3" cooperation pattern: to "tak[e] energy cooperation as the core, infrastructure construction and trade and investment facilitation as the two wings, and high and new technologies in the fields of nuclear energy, space satellite and new energy as the three breakthroughs".[58] Besides this general statement with energy at its core, the document identifies five major fields of potential cooperation (i.e., political cooperation, investment and trade cooperation, social development, culture and people-to-people exchanges and cooperation in the field of peace and security) which, in turn, includes 29 minor concrete areas for cooperation. Among these minor areas of cooperation, energy cooperation, agriculture cooperation and cooperation on production capacity are listed. On energy, China accepts the centrality of this issue in its bilateral relations with the Arab countries, as clearly stated by the 1+2+3 formula, especially in the fields of oil prospecting, extraction, transportation and refining as well as solar and wind energy and hydropower. Moreover, any cooperation in this field must respect "reciprocity and mutual benefit" (Document 29). On agriculture cooperation, the statements are even more imprecise: they set broader priorities like "arid zone agriculture, water-saving irrigation, Muslim food, food security, animal husbandry and veterinary medicine" (Document 29) as well as some minor comments on information sharing on environmental protection on water-related issues. On production capacity, China merely commits to support "Arab states in their efforts to realize industrialization", combining China's "advantage of production capacity" with the concrete demands of the states of the region (Document 29). All in all, as stated above, all these formulations are rather vague especially if compared with the EU's treatment of these policy areas in its relation with the Southern Mediterranean countries. In the last year and a half, China and the countries of the region seem to

be conducting efforts towards finding and deciding on concrete cooperation formulas to bridge the gap between narrative and actual policies, yet this is still an ongoing process.

Fifth and finally, this paper has shown a big gap between China and the EU in those circumstances when Brussels incorporates in its construction a presentation of the region as weak, imperfect, backwards or poorly governed. As it has been stressed above, the principle of non-interference is central in the Chinese discourse, leaving room for no such assessments. Alternatively, China's geopolitical cartographies emphasize the potential of the region (especially in terms of development) which can be only achieved by *self-path* development. They also stress the commonalities between the focus region's societies and China itself (common colonial past, common history of Western interventionism, etc.) to provide reassurance that Beijing will at no point base its policies in the region on any of these misconceptions.

Additionally, and to sum up, it might be reasonable to trace some commonalities between current Chinese comprehension of the Mediterranean space and the European situation in the transitional period between the 1970–1989 and the 1990–2002 phases described by the MEDRESET project. According to Isaac and Fares (2017), in the former period the European Community's mental map was rather incoherent and compartmentalized – the Mediterranean was not a coherent region – and its economic interests in the region were at the centre of any conceptualization of the Mediterranean. Concerning the latter phase between 1990–2002, Morillas and Soler (2017) argue that the post-Maastricht European Union included in its cognitive geography of the region a more securitized conceptualization of the Mediterranean which was clearly linked with a strong feeling of self-imposed responsibility vis-à-vis the reality of the southern shore of the Mediterranean. It might be argued, according to the elements analysed in previous sections, that the People's Republic of China's mental map of the Mediterranean space is somehow in a transitional period where both these elements of the EU's stance can be observed. Currently, we can see that China does not conceive of the region as a coherent unit, hence the multiple geopolitical cartographies existing side by side. Most of them seem triggered by Beijing's economic interest in the region and are used alternatively only depending on finalist considerations. However, it is also true that China's constructions might be starting to move towards something comparable to the EU's 1990–1992 approach. The increasing popularity of the *Middle East* mental map, which includes China's self-representation as a responsible global power vis-à-vis this convulsed region, shares some commonalities with the EU's transformation in the 1990s. At this point it is still difficult to assert that this geopolitical cartography will replace the alternative ones in the near future. Yet, some sort of socialization process whereby China is increasingly distancing itself from its traditional constructions of the Mediterranean and embracing the highly securitized conceptions repeatedly used by global actors – not only the EU but most significantly the US – might be in the process of materializing.

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**Notes**

1. As far as the author is aware, the only scholarship published in English covering the case of China does not analyse the Chinese leadership's mental maps but rather the American leadership's mental map on China (Latham 2001).

2. This paper uses the notion of Middle East and North Africa as it has generally been used by the Anglo-Saxon and French scholarship, while acknowledging its condition of socially constructed "geopolitical invention" as well (Bilgin 2004).

3. According to da Vinha (2012: 11), "the cognitive dimension of [Foreign Policy Analysis] opened up space for analysing geographic representations, namely foreign policy decision-makers['] cognition of geographic space".

4. Henrikson's definition seems to echo Downs and Stea (1973: 9) who defined cognitive mapping as "a process composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, codes, stores, recalls and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in his everyday spatial environment".

5. Throughout the paper italics have been used to stress the predicative dimension of the analysis carried out.

6. It is out of the scope of this paper to examine how different Chinese political actors are socialized in these cognitive geopolitical imaginaries, and how different mental maps gain prevalence in front of other alternatives in multi-actor decision-making processes as suggested by da Vinha (2011).

7. As some of the examples demonstrate below, this cascade effect can even be observed between the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, where the latter constantly includes intertextual elements from speech acts of the former.

8. Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Djibouti, Comoros and Somalia.

9. Namely, the China-Arab City Forum, the China-Arab Joint Chamber of Commerce, the China-Arab States Expo, and the China-Arab States Economic and Trade Forum among others.

10. Similar phrases are used in Documents 4 and 12.

11. Similar formulas are used in Document 4.

12. The only major exception to this general principle has to do with the narrative put forward to analyse the so-called "*hotspot issues*", many of them having their origins in the post-2011 context (see Section 2).

13. This precise point is complemented by the description below of parallelisms and analogies in the Chinese discourse towards the *developing countries*, which include the "Arab countries/states".

14. There might be room to explore to what extent this is common in the Chinese approaches towards other states, especially those characterized as *developing countries*. We can perhaps see emerging a global narrative of China towards the international system whereby they claim their "hope that all countries are our partners" (Document 35).

15. See, for instance, Documents 14, 17, 22, 25 and 29.

16. This is not to say that the discursive practices used by the Chinese authorities are necessarily originated by themselves. There might be room to argue that China replicates in many ways a discursive construction put forward by many alternative international actors when dealing with the focus region. It is difficult to reach any conclusion on whether *securitization* is a fully endogenous process or if it responds to many exogenous conditioners and the existence of preeminent signifiers used for instance in multilateral organizations that China might have been socialized into.

17. Documents 3, 9, 15, 17, 25, 30, 31, 39, 41, 46, 48 and 49.

18. See also the discussion on the "hotspot narrative" below.

19. See, for instance, Documents 3, 8, 9, 17, 29 and 52.

20. Similar formulations can be found in Documents 2, 6, 7, 8, 22, 25, 26, 40, 46 and 48.

21. Documents 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 17, 22, 25, 26, 29, 46, 48 and 52.

22. Similar formulations can be found in Documents 2 and 7.

23. A similar formulation can be found in Documents 7 and 46.

24. See, for instance, Documents 1, 3, 4, 5 and 47.

25. Documents 6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 22, 25, 26, 31 and 35.

26. See also Document 6.

27. Documents 2, 6, 7, 8, 22, 25, 26, 35, 46 and 48.

28. A similar formulation is used in Document 7.

29. Similar formulations are used in Documents 2 and 7.

30. Similar formulations are used in Documents 7 and 8.

31. Documents 3, 9, 14, 15, 17, 25, 30, 31, 39, 41, 46, 48 and 49.

32. A similar formulation is used in Document 48. Similar notions are used when discussing the Syrian peace negotiations in Document 7.

33. Documents 3, 9, 14, 15, 17, 25, 30, 31, 39, 41, 46, 48 and 49.

34. Documents 1, 10, 46 and 48. Document 46 states that "The Palestinian issue is at the crux of the Middle East issue".

35. See, for instance, Documents 14, 15, 22, 29 and 46.

36. Documents 17, 20, 21, 25, 35 and 53.

37. Similar formulas are used in Documents 15 and 34.

38. Documents 7, 34, 35, 36, 42 and 53. Similar formulas are used in Documents 29 and 45.

39. Similarly, see Documents 25, 29 and 34.

40. Documents 15, 17, 20, 25, 30, 34, 40, 49 and 53.

41. See, for instance, Documents 9, 34 and 35.

42. A similar construction is used in Document 9.

43. One conjecture might be the lack of stability in the region, which could be seen to pose a risk to potential development.

44. A similar formulation is used in Document 34.

45. Curiously enough, the B&R is also presented "not [as] China's solo, but a symphony performed by all relevant countries" (Document 17).

46. Documents 9, 17, 25, 30, 31, 34, 40, 49, 51, 52, 53 and 54.

47. Documents 17, 25, 34, 35, 49 and 52.

48. Namely, China, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Korea Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

49. Documents 9, 17, 29, 31, 34, 35, 40, 51 and 52.

50. Partially similar formulations might be found in Documents 25, 29 and 33.

51. Similarly see for instance Documents 40 and 50.

52. A similar formulation is used in Document 49.

53. This is even clearly stated: "Africa, being home to the biggest number of developing countries" (Document 24).

54. Similarly, see Documents 25 and 44.

55. Similarly, see Document 16.

56. Similarly see Document 20.

57. Hence, humanity is presented as a civilization made up of different civilizations.

58. This formula is repeated over most of the documents analyzed in this paper, but Document 29 seems to be the point of origin for this formula that was later replicated in the others (intertextuality cascade).

**4 IRAN**

**Iran's Discourses and Practices in the Mediterranean Since 2001**

*Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Ariabarzan Mohammadi*

This paper examines the discourse and practices of Iran in the areas of water and agriculture, economy, migration and political ideas, to test Iran's approach and also its influence in various fields. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis approach, it engages with published documents, elite discourses, and public narratives of Iranian leaders and intellectual elites to better understand the country's changing role and influence as well as policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Examining its alternative discourses, the paper aims at highlighting the conflicting, competing, as well as converging, policies and visions of these actors regarding the EU's policies and engagements.

**Introduction**

For decades, the countries and communities of the Persian Gulf have displayed a keen interest in the communities and the countries on the shores of the Mediterranean. Since the end of the Second World War, Iran and its Arab neighbours have interacted with peoples of the Mediterranean in dialogue and cooperation, as well as through conflict and competition. The relationship has been dialectical and interactive, in that the political crisis in the Levant in the 1940s not only gave birth to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan but also provided the context for the establishment of a short-lived monarchy in Iraq. Iran has, since the 1950s at least, been interacting with the Shia communities of Lebanon and those of Syria. Before the 1970s, moreover, it had close links with the so-called "moderate" Arab republics (Lebanon and Tunisia) and monarchies (Jordan, and Morocco) of the Levant and North Africa. By the 1960s the Pahlavi monarchy had already cultivated security and political ties with the non-Arab Mediterranean countries of Israel and Turkey, and had established a regional security partnership with the latter under the auspices of the West. By the early 1970s, following the death of President Nasser in Egypt, Iran was further empowered to develop links with the "frontline" states of the Arab–Israeli conflict and played an instrumental role in the Camp David peace process between Egypt and Israel, having supported the Arab side in the 1973 Arab–Israeli war. Iran's relationship with the Arab countries of the Mediterranean has always been complex, as evidenced by the tensions between the Iranian monarchy and the republican Arab nationalists promoting a radical brand of pan-Arabism under President Nasser's leadership. But of equal interest is Iran's relationship with the post-monarchy regime in Libya following the coup in 1969, which on the one hand increased Iran's hostility to the regime in Libya, while at the same time facilitating Iran's leadership of the OPEC cartel's pricing policy and the hardening of the cartel's position on oil prices. Iran and Libya, ironically, not only managed to push OPEC to harden its negotiating stance with the oil majors, but also extracted concessions on output and control of the members' hydrocarbons deposits in these historic negotiations.

Since the revolution, Iran's links with parts of the Levant and the wider Mediterranean have intensified, but these have been coloured by ideology and the embryonic "Axis of Resistance" which has brought Iran closer to Lebanon's Hezbollah, Palestine's Hamas and of course the champion of the Arab rejectionist front, namely Syria. Iran's (Shia) Islamist revolutionism acknowledges its debt to the political maturity and influence of the Lebanese Shia community, as well to the Palestinians' national liberation struggle and Algeria's anti-colonial war of independence. Moreover, the term and

concept of the Mediterranean as a region is absent in Iran's discourse. Rather, the emphasis rests on the Axis of Resistance and a set of Muslim countries which are part of the Islamic Ummah.

As a neighbour of the EU neighbours, Iran has always had an interest in the EU countries, recognizing that the EU's priorities can have a major influence on the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean and therefore may impact Iranian interests in these regions. In addition, Iran's support of Hezbollah and various Palestinian groups including Hamas has been at odds with the EU's efforts to advance the Middle East Peace Process. With the agreement between Iran and the P5+1+EU on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA),[1] there seems to be a promising outlook for Iran's interactions with Europe and broader integration with the international community. This has given rise to optimism, in some quarters, that Iran will play a positive role in implementing peace and security from the Middle East to the Mediterranean. This paper examines the discourse and practices of Iran in the areas of water and agriculture, economy, migration and political ideas, to test Iran's approach and also its influence in various fields. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis approach, it engages with published documents, elite discourses and public narratives of Iranian leaders and intellectual elites to better understand the country's changing role and influence as well as its policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Examining its alternative discourses, the paper aims at highlighting the conflicting, competing, as well as converging, policies and visions of these actors regarding the EU's policies and engagements (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016: 4). The documents analysed in this paper are prime examples of Iran's discourse as they reflect reverberating concerns of its Leader, officials, influential media and intellectuals in the construction of their worldview and the framing of the Mediterranean area and construction of alternative discourses.

## 1. Political Ideas: Critical Geopolitics

According to Homeira Moshirzadeh (2015), the Islamic Republic of Iran's international relations can be understood in terms of plurality and complexity of discourses, namely realism, Islamism, anti-imperialism, international society and critical dialogism. Because the political structure of the Islamic Republic is complex – just as the concepts of republic and Islamic seem paradoxical and complex – any of these discourses is a product of this intricate structure. However, the dominant discourse has arguably been that of realism (Moshirzadeh 2015: 10-18). Realism in the discourse of Iran's international relations is constructed via a binary opposition of inside/outside, where inside is the self that implies power and control, and outside is the other against which the self is defined. The articulation of nationalism as part of the multiple discourse of Iran marks the privilege of the inside (Moshirzadeh 2015).

The first five years after Iran's revolution are best described as anti-realist due to their emphasis on Islamic solidarity (Moshirzadeh 2015: 16). Yet, the realist dimension has come to dominate Iran's role perception and outlook since that time. Moshirzadeh suggests two factors in explanation of this shift. The first is the reliance of Iranian scholars and academia on Western theories of international relations. This is still the trend in Iran's universities, where undergraduates are exposed to realist theories as the principles undergirding international relations. The second significant factor in making realism the principle of Iran's discourse in international relations is the institutionalization of international relations and particularly the role that the Institute for Political and International Studies (established in 1983 under the supervision of the ministry of foreign affairs) has come to play. Its major journal *Foreign Policy*, put into circulation in 1986, promoted the largely Western-produced major realist texts in the field (Moshirzadeh 2015: 16-17). As Moshirzadeh (2015: 17-18) argues, "[e]ven in the more ideologically-driven publications [in Iran], realism is still somehow present".

Nonetheless, realism is not the only discourse associated with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Secondary to realism in this context is Islamism. During the first years after the revolution (in the

1980s), courses with Islamic titles and content were introduced in university curricula in political science. Such materials aimed at a universal Muslim solidarity rather than a nationalist or patriotic tendency. As Moshirzadeh (2015: 23) has it, "[t]hat is why the ideas of 'supporting liberationist movements' and 'the export of the Islamic revolution' have had a prominent position in the foreign policy agenda based on this discourse". Another significant discourse of Iran is the critical dialogism that gained momentum during Mohammad Khatami's presidency. This was manifest in his suggestion of a dialogue of civilizations. Being influenced by thinkers like Gadamer and Habermas, Khatami articulated a similar criticism of international relations and the embodiments of domination as its core (Moshirzadeh 2015: 32). Alternatively, he called for a peaceful world to be achieved through dialogue. The implication of Khatami's position was the upgrading of a mutual dialogic relationship, rather than one based on domination/subordination in the world. Having said that, it could be argued that Khatami's idea of dialogue with civilizations was a normative cover for his realist approach. This is because, in terms of realism, his policy of *détente* resulted in economic development and was therefore in harmony with the principles of realism that had informed the ministry of foreign affairs. This could explain why Moshirzadeh believes that the policy of realism "gained momentum" during Khatami's presidency (Moshirzadeh 2015: 17).

Nevertheless, what Moshirzadeh does not address in her paper is the post-structuralist reading strategy of international relations in Iran. Post-structuralist thinking was introduced to political science by Hossein Bashiriyeh (1997) in his *History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* and Mohammad Reza Tajik in a run of books and articles on postmodernism and post-structuralism (see Tajik 2007, 2008), which began appearing on the fringes of the dominant discourses of realism. Later, after a strategic shift at the global level (and especially the American shift towards the Pacific and East Asia) that coincided with many important incidents such as the Arab Spring, post-structuralism became almost a discursive trend in Iran's academia, media and foreign policy. In view of this, what follows is a discourse analysis of writings that have used a post-structuralist reading strategy in Iran's international relations.

Prominent in the context of political ideas exploited by the Islamic Republic of Iran in its framing of the world (including, but not exclusively about, the Mediterranean) is critical geopolitics. In line with Jennifer Milliken's (1999) contention that discourse is a system of signification that gives meaning to the world, Paul Routledge's (2003) neologism of "anti-geopolitics" or "geopolitics from the bottom" designates a critical reading (or a problematization) of the dominant traditional geopolitical discourse. This critical geopolitics, which emerged in the 1970s as part of the postmodernist logic, aims at deconstructing the grounding assumptions of the traditional geopolitics. Part of Iran's discourse is influenced by this same approach in critical geopolitics, or alternatively "terrains of resistance" in Routledge's (1996) terms. To delineate part of Iran's anti-geopolitical discourse, we will first compare and contrast the traditional geopolitics and anti-geopolitics.

The traditional Western geopolitics, as opposed to anti-geopolitics or the critical geopolitics, assumes a top-to-bottom power relationship. The traditional view regards geopolitics (state power) as an organism (Toal 1998: 4); thus, being like a tree as the analogy implies, power grows but its growth is at the cost of killing weaker organisms around it, because it is in a state of constant struggle to achieve crucial resources to survive. Drawing on Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory of the survival of the fittest in the mechanism of natural selection, this implies a sort of geographical empiricism in the field of geopolitics since the most important of these crucial resources is land. This empiricist view is best manifest in Halford John Mackinder's Heartland Theory, as elaborated in *The Geographical Pivot of History* (1904), which regards, via extension of geopolitical analysis, the world as a globe that is divisible into three components: the World-Island which contains Europe, Asia and Africa; the offshore islands such as the British Isles and Japan; and the outlying islands. According to this theory, the heartland is located at the centre of the World-Island (Mackinder 1904: 433). Due to its position the heartland is the key controlling factor in ruling the globe; any power that can control the World-Island will also control the crucial resources of the world.[2] In other words, Mackinder's

view was towards the hegemonic domination of the world, with the heartland being the Russian Empire and Europe.

Drawing on Mackinder's view, Nicholas J. Spykman in 1944 developed his theory of the "rimland" as an intermediate region between the heartland and the sea. Spykman (1944: 43) famously held that "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world". An adaptation of Mackinder's Heartland Theory and Spyksman's rimland was later adopted by the US during the Cold War for containing the Soviet Union.

By contrast, Iran's geopolitics could be part of the postmodern "anti-geopolitics" (see Pishgahifard and Ghodsi 2010) as a resistance against the geopolitics of the West which pervades political ideas, while simultaneously resting on a reading of the concept of the heartland. Based on this discourse, people's will and resistance plays a significant role in dismantling traditional equations of power. In this anti-geopolitical discourse, the political sovereignty of the dominant power is challenged. Anti-geopolitics involves cultural, political and spiritual forces in society that challenge the interest of the dominant power (Routledge 2003). Extending the idea into a broader scope of the globe, anti-politics could be read as forces of certain people who challenge the political sovereignty embodied in superpowers. Also, Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) brought the new concept of "spiritual geopolitics" into the literature (Toal 2000), and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) introduced "geo-culture" to postmodern geopolitical discourse – concepts to which many Iranian policy makers have been attracted.

By the same token, Iran is a new heartland who influences the rimland of Shia Islam. In this context, the all-important rimland would contain mainly Muslim countries in the region that is called the Mediterranean. The Eastern Mediterranean is a bridge that links Asia, Africa and Europe and therefore has a central geopolitical role. As it has a considerable population of Shia Muslims and is a neighbour to Israel, Iran is a key power to unbalance geopolitics and geo-strategic equilibrium in the region. Given that, the control and influence in the periphery (Eastern Mediterranean) are necessary to exerting power. According to some Iranian scholars (Pishgahifard et al. 2015), Iran takes a universalist mission upon itself and thus internalizes a sense of expansionism and exerting influence both in the region and the world. A significant means of this expansionism is Iran's potential religious (Shia) influence in the region (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 9). The Shia expansionism that Iran is seeking extends to countries like Lebanon. Lebanon, having a border with Israel, is a good example of Iran's influence in shaping the power relations in the region. This influence is such that "anytime when it comes to the Islamic Republic outside the borders and in the Islamic world, attention is drawn to Lebanon and Hezbollah at its centre" (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 18).

The view of Shia expansionism shared by some high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Saudi discourse of sectarian rivalry with Iran supplement each other – each justifies the existence of the other. However, whereas Iran's discourse of Shiism is a view shared only by part, not all, of the political system, the emphasis on sectarian rivalry with Iran is more prevalent among Saudi leaders. The reason is due to the threat perception of each side (see Hadian 2015). Saudi Arabia perceives Shia Iran to be its nemesis against which it should mobilize the GCC, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (all three consist mainly of countries with a Sunni majority), whereas Iran does not perceive Saudi Arabia to be a large threat. Moreover Iran is aware that by overplaying the sectarian card it will further alienate the Sunni governments and entities (such as the Palestinian Hamas and the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood) in its surrounding regions.

The idea of Iran as the heartland of Shia Islam is common among many Iranian scholars in the Iranian Association of Geopolitics. Thus, Ghalibaf and Ghodsi (2012) start with the same premise, however they end up with a different policy recommendation. They hold that although Iran's role as the heartland of Shia should be brought into consideration and be utilized as a policy instrument, an emphasis on its destructive role is neither realistic nor true. They build their argument upon the fact

that about 70 percent of Shia communities live in West Asia, which support's Iran's centrality in Shia Islam. Yet, they propose that Iran's policy, whilst benefiting from Shia geopolitical potentials in the region, should be formed mainly based upon realistic geopolitics. They also explain and analyse Iran's present policy:

> Iran's goals in making close connections with the Shia population in the region is more a defensive and realistic policy rather than expansionist. To become the power in the region, Iran does not solely attempt to boost her friendly Shia factions in the region. Iran's goals are on the one hand to create a secure and stabilized region around her borders and creating economic opportunities to have a strategic progress and development, on the other. As a powerful nation-state, Iran has a strategic interest in the region, whereas the main discussion in the discourse of Shia Crescent focuses on Iran's destructive power in the region. (Ghalibaf and Ghodsi 2012: 18)

As the authors remind us, it was in 2004 that King Abdullah of Jordan critically warned against the emergence of an ideological Shia crescent running from Lebanon through to the Persian Gulf – a conception which was perceived as an act of projection from Jordan's own political problems and also aimed at geopolitically isolating Iran (Ghalibaf and Ghodsi 2012: 5-6). Given that, the writers believe, the emergence of a violent and destructive ideological Shia Crescent should not be exaggerated. It should be noted that the idea of a Shia Crescent is a non-Iranian concept and identity (Ghalibaf and Ghodsi 2012: 18).

More significantly, this view can also be detected in Ayatollah Khamenei's speeches. In a meeting with foreign poets (mainly from Islamic countries), Ayatollah Khamenei stressed unity among all Muslims. In this regard, as he said, poets should pay special attention to Islamic unity (Khamenei 2012a). He considered the conflicts between Shia and Sunni communities as an act of sabotage by the West and a response to "Islamic Awakening". As he continued, "[w]idespread efforts are being made in order to stop this great wave of Islamic Awakening by fomenting discord among Muslims, but the Islamic Ummah must overcome the religious, ethnic and political causes of discord" (Khamenei 2012a). His diction implies a set of assumptions, starting with his use of the term "Islamic Awakening": the recent events in some Arab countries are a clear sign of Islamic awakening against the sovereignty of the West; for that reason, the West tries to sabotage it. Consequently, "the name 'Arab Spring' is inadequate for this great movement" (Khamenei 2012a). Second, by using the term "the Islamic Ummah", rather than using the notion of 'the people' in the countries involved in drastic political changes, he tacitly postulates a unity among all Muslims, avoiding making a distinction between Sunni and Shia, which in turn is an indication of his emphasis on Islamic unity.

On the other hand, Pishgahifard et al. (2015) argue that Iran's policy of exporting Shia revolution and creating a Shia crescent in the region is key to its geopolitical and geo-strategic triumph. According to them, the East Mediterranean is the front line of the Axis of Resistance and the Shia orbit; it is the embodiment of the clash between Islam and Israel, and because of its geopolitical and geo-strategic significance in the region it becomes strategic territory for Iran. Therefore, creating security loops in the periphery is essential to Iran's influence in the region (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 26). Attempts to increase Iran's zone of influence have been a strategic priority in Iran's policy. As Pishgahifard et al. (2015: 26) contend, "the most efficient of these attempts is the element of religion". Since Iran is at the centre of Shia geography, it "can and should lead this zone [of influence] to unbalance geo-strategic and geopolitical equilibrium in the Middle East" (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 26). Islamic movements in the Eastern Mediterranean are a very significant element of this influence and Iran is in a position to lead and benefit from such movements by turning them into a strategic means of territoriality. Iran would be well advised to have a long-term plan for the Eastern Mediterranean to achieve this territorial goal, in the view of Pishgahifard et al. (2015: 18).

In line with this argument and part of the discourse of Axis of Resistance is Jahanbakhsh Izadi and Hamidreza Akbari's (2011) contention. They argue that the strong pressure on Iran regarding its nuclear programme (leading to a United Nations Security Council resolution to apply sanctions), the isolation of Syria after the death of Rafiq Hariri, and wars against Hezbollah and Hamas in 2006 and 2008 respectively were all measures taken by the US after the 9/11 attacks, to destroy the Axis of Resistance.

A similar, but not identical, view of the world as having already undergone a drastic change regarding the centrality of actors involved in the formation of geopolitics can be found in the speeches of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. While following a realist approach in his foreign policy that resulted in the "Iran Deal", Zarif has also upheld a post-structuralist analysis of international relations in numerous speeches, including at the Tehran Security Conference (2016) and the Munich Security Conference (2017), and in his recent co-authored book *Transition in International Relations of Post-Western World* (Zarif et al. 2017). Exemplary of his perspectives is his address at the Tehran Security Conference in December 2016 in which he emphasized the realization that power has shifted from the West in shaping West Asia, to the countries and non-state actors of the region. In this formulation, he dismantled the approach whereby the West is active and the East is passive. As he said,

> In the bipolar world, there were only two main actors. However, following the collapse of that system, these two main actors were marginalized as exclusive actors in international relations. Perhaps, late Imam Khomeini could be considered among the first people who understood this reality. The fact that the time for exclusive political action was over was pointed out by the Imam. (Zarif 2016)

Zarif postulates that the world is not polarized anymore, which implies that the Western hegemony of West Asia is undermined. As the concept of polarization implies, only two powers were regarded as actors in fashioning the world, a situation that has changed since the Cold War. As he continues, "[t]his period of transition has so far taken more than 26 years and is still far from reaching a point of stability. However, we must note that the current period of transition has differences with previous periods of transition, including the fact that it is no longer West-centered" (Zarif 2016). The term "transition" here as a significant predicate implies both a shift of power from the West and the creation of a void to be filled by new powers (geopolitical actors), which in turn means the decentralization of power (as opposed to the traditional geopolitical view of the West as the centre). In Zarif's words, "We must be well aware of this reality that today, developments in international system do not start and end in the West" (Zarif 2016).

In this scenario, room exists for new actors to arise. Accordingly, Zarif (2016) continues, "On the other hand, if you wanted to talk about the global order, you would not be able to talk about configuration of the new international order without attention to West Asia region, and these realities signify a very fundamental development in international relations". Here the West as active and the East as passive is overturned, as the latter is now portrayed as playing a decisive active role in shaping the world, a position previously denied to the East in traditional geopolitical discourse. Also, the solidity of Western hegemony and dominant power in West Asia is shifted to a new, fluid shape in which centrality is neither solid nor coming from outside the region. A consequence of this fluidity of international conditions is the emergence of new players in shaping the geopolitics of the world. Zarif (2016) emphasizes that "At the present time, even smaller powers can play a role through media and their sphere of influence. Today, the power and clout, which the Islamic Republic of Iran has, would not be possible under a bipolar world system and this is due to current fluid conditions in the world". The stability and security of West Asia, consequently, depends not on the West but on internal powers of the region, which today include non-state actors like Hezbollah and

the so-called Islamic State (Daesh), whose existence is independent of, not limited to, a certain geography. As Zarif observes,

> As you see, non-state and nongovernmental actors have entered the arena of political action, including in the field of security. On the other hand, such positive non-state and nongovernmental actors as the Lebanese Hezbollah as well as negative actors such as al-Qaeda and Daesh, are present in this arena and, for example, can both create security and undermine security. They do not need geographical expanse in order to take their action and all these changes are telltale signs of a fundamental development. (Zarif 2016)

This is indicative of fluidity of international conditions and undermines the traditional geopolitical assumptions that regard the West as the only (or the most important) player in shaping the world. He continues,

> The important point is that within framework of these developments, West Asia region is no more a mere subject of action, but it is an actor. Therefore, when the future international system is in the offing, it is not like that other countries would make decisions about how to divide the resources that exist in this strategic region among themselves, but West Asia is now an actor in the arena of developments related to future international system without being a mere subject of other countries' actions. (Zarif 2016)

As the terms "subject", "actor" and "action" indicate, new roles have been assigned to new players. The binary opposition of active/passive, traditionally attributed to West and East respectively, has been reversed by the new indigenous players of the region.

Iran's political practice and consequently discourse are complex and multifarious. Iran's foreign policy is a complex blend of realism and ideological conceptualization (Ehteshami 2017: 250). Despite the emphasis by the Leader on self-sufficiency, Rouhani seems to be eager to trade more with the EU Member States so that they will be unwilling to re-impose sanctions if there is any disagreement over Iran's implementation of the JCPOA. After the Iran Deal, relations between Iran and the EU, especially with Germany, France and Italy, have been expanding as part of the country's pragmatic approach. Iran's economic ties with these major economies are attempts to re-enter the international market (Ehteshami 2017: 256). This pragmatism is manifested in Iran's commercial contract to purchase 100 Airbus aircraft as well as at least 20 ATR aircraft in 2016, in addition to signing an MoU with Shell in the same year to develop Iran's offshore gas fields. On the other hand, Iran's support of Assad, as a case in point, is interpreted in terms of the country's revolutionary policies. Thus, Iran's international relations have swung along the pendulum of revolutionary idealism and political realism (Ehteshami 2017: 256-57).

## 2. Energy and Industry

In a speech to Iranian government officials in 2006, Ayatollah Khamenei put the notion of independence, as opposed to the domination of the West, at the centre of the Islamic Republic's strategy, calling for an emancipation of Iran and other Muslim countries from the grip of the West. In this speech he is quite concerned with the notion of political, economic and cultural independence from the West which, as he believes, has always tried to kerb Iran and other developing countries. As he puts it:

> The third principle is safeguarding political independence. This is very important. This is among the essential principles of the Islamic Republic. This independence is political and economic as well as cultural. We need to free ourselves from the shackles of the culture that the West has imposed on us. And this is another

> principle. The kind of movement, the kind of slogan, the kind of planning that ignores national independence is not principlist. (Khamenei 2006)

This emphasis on independence, by implication, supports the premise that the West has always had a plan which aims at domination and exploitation of the Muslim (developing) world. Indeed, to use Khamenei's words:

> The West has had plans for the Middle East since the 19th century because the Middle East region connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. The Mediterranean Sea was where colonial governments used to deploy their forces and the Indian Ocean was where their colonies were located. And the Middle East was the region that connected these two locations to one another and they could not afford to ignore it. England used its influence in the 19th century and pressured Iran in order to protect India, which used to be Britain's colony at that time. We were sacrificed for India and the same was true of the entire Middle East region. This was how the foundations of Israel were laid. Different other factors emerged as well: the issue of oil, the issue of carving up the Ottoman territories after the First World War, the emergence of the Soviet Union. And the emergence of these factors made things worse. The West and its heir, America, have plans for the Middle East. In this sensitive region – which is oil-rich and is strategically and politically important – suddenly a government called "the Islamic Republic" emerges with its own principles and opposes the oppressive principles and aggressive policies of America. (Khamenei 2006)

Central to this notion of independence is a decrease in reliance on oil, as Khamenei specifies. And as the West, especially the United States, has "plans for the Middle East", Iran would be better off freeing itself from dependence on oil. The hostility of America, according to him, is precisely because it can no longer shackle Iran since the revolution. As he has it,

The most important divine blessing for our country, nation and government officials is that there is national dignity and independence. Today no power in the world can claim that it is dominant over our political system and that its statements, announcements or threats can affect the decisions we make. (Khamenei 2006)

Making the best use of oil resources and decreasing oil exports rather than using these resources for energy and meeting day-to-day expenses is, therefore, a way towards independence. As he says,

> It is necessary to pay attention to regional cooperation - the ongoing work related to ECO, Shanghai and other organizations. We need to follow up these things in a serious way. We need to focus our efforts on them. We need to make optimal use of our oil resources. According to experts, it would take 900 billion dollars' worth of non-oil exports and trade to earn the 50, 60 billion we earn by selling oil. This is a very important point. We earn that much money by selling oil and we use it to take care of daily matters. This does not make sense. This money should be spent in a more careful way. We are wasting our oil. Of course, this is not a recent development. Our economy and development has been based on oil for decades and it is not possible to change this situation overnight. Ten, twelve years ago, I told our government officials that as far as oil is concerned, the situation will be satisfactory the day we are able to announce that we will increase and decrease our output on the basis of our national interests, the day we are able to announce that we want to decrease our oil exports and use our oil for purposes other than producing energy. Using oil to produce energy is the worst way of using oil. This is while the world is discovering better ways of using

oil and it is moving forward. When that day comes, we can feel happy that we have these oil reserves. (Khamenei 2006)

Along the same lines, In a meeting with Algeria's minister of mines and energy in 2016, Hamid Chitchian, Iran's energy minister, holds that "gone are the days when oil-rich states relied on petrodollars, as the global energy dynamics necessitate the development of domestic capabilities to build the future". He added "We are willing to transfer our energy experiences to all Muslim states, including Algeria" (Financial Tribune 2016). Typically, Iran's relation with Algeria is treated as a relationship between two Muslim states, rather than between countries in different geographical areas. Algeria is not seen as a Mediterranean country by Iran, and thus relations between the two are promoted as being of mutual interest, leading to both countries' economic independence from Western enterprises. Here, Tehran asserts the end of the long-held hegemony of petrodollars in establishing economic relations with the outside world, calling for the use of natural resources solely for the benefit of Muslim countries and peoples. Resources are to be used for development of links amongst Muslim countries. As Chitchian notes, "[s]uch collaboration can help them [Algeria] reduce their dependency on western enterprises" (Financial Tribune 2016). Accordingly, Iran has consistently promoted its domestic policy of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency in energy and water, for example, is said to be due to "reliance on domestic expertise", expertise which is said to have helped Iran export more energy (Financial Tribune 2016).

This emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency shows itself much earlier in the form of a plan, an agenda. In November 2003, a plan titled the "20-Year Vision Plan", which was prepared by the Expediency Council, was ratified by the Supreme Leader. The plan is referred to as the country's "horizon document" (Atashbar 2012). The aim of the plan is for Iran to be "the leading country in economy, science, and technology in the region by 2025, inspiring the region and the world with its constructive and effective interactions in international relationships" (Atashbar 2012). According to the plan, Iran will have secured 31.5 billion dollars in non-oil exports by the end of the horizon period. Having said that, a recent report by the World Bank provides a more realistic view of Iran's practical measures, regrading increase in non-oil exports. As the reports indicates, "[d]espite the dominance of the oil sector–driven by the positive impact of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action implementation on oil production and exports, there are some signs of dynamism in the non-oil sectors as well" (World Bank 2017). By the same token, both the concept of independence from the domination of the West, especially the US, and the idea of Iran as a source of inspiration for the Islamic world, including many countries in the Mediterranean, can be traced back to this document.

Similarly, on 17 August 2015, Khamenei gave a speech on the events which came to be known as the "Arab Spring", although Iranian officialdom rarely uses this term, preferring to refer to these uprisings as a divine "Islamic awakening". Of course, the adjective "Islamic" is also used for the Iranian revolution of 1979. Therefore, associations are made between what happened in Iran and the uprisings in several Arab countries. This implies, taking the time span between Iran's revolution and the "Islamic awakening" into account, the people in these countries are following the example of Iran; thus, the credit for the uprisings in the countries must go to Iran, and to the Supreme Leader accordingly, as he is the leader of the Islamic world/countries or what he calls the "Islamic region" (Khamenei 2015). Moreover, as the argument goes, the term "awakening" implies that all these countries had been in slumber and just then woke up to realize their true identities and the divine Islamic principles as enshrined in Iran's constitution and outlook. In other words, from Tehran's perspective, the reality of Islam has now opened their eyes, and they have come to challenge their Western-supported authoritarian regimes. Khamenei's diction rests heavily upon religious terms and shapes new concepts or diverts concepts through attaching religious terminology as predicates to events and places:

This began with the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. However, after the emergence of Islamic Awakening – that began four, five years ago in North

> African countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and other African countries – the enemies increased their pressures. That is to say, the enemy became anxious and uneasy in the real sense of the word. They adopted many measures that are continuing in the present time. Of course, they think that they have suppressed Islamic Awakening, but this humble person [Khamenei himself] believes that Islamic Awakening is not suppressible. (Khamenei 2015)

Given the binary opposition of "the oppressor" and "the oppressed", the West or what he calls "global arrogance" is taken, by implication, as an enemy of this "Islamic awakening" and consequently to Islam itself. As he says repeatedly, the United States "is the epitome of global arrogance" (Khamenei 2015). Therefore, Iran equates, and takes as predicate, all the unrest and socio-political movements against the ruling dictators in these countries to "Islamic awakening". These uprisings have Islamic motivations rather than a yearning for democracy. In this, the West is consequently regarded as the enemy of Islam and the supporter of those dictators – a concept quite contrary to the democratic principles that the West claims to stand for.

In contesting the Western discourse, Khamenei uses the terms "West Asia" to refer to what the West calls "the Middle East" and criticizes the latter usage:

> The Europeans insist on referring to this region as the Middle East region. In other words, they locate east on the basis of Europe. To them, a region is Far East, another is Middle East and another region is Near East. Because of the Europeans' arrogance, this region has been called, "the Middle East" from the beginning. "The Middle East" is a wrong name. This is West Asia. This is Asia – a large continent – and we are in West Asia. (Khamenei 2015)

Resorting to a kind of postcolonial discourse, Khamenei not only criticizes Western terminology and concepts but he creates alternative concepts that discredit Western assumptions of centrality, and emphasizes self-sufficiency of the developing countries.

### 3. Water and Agriculture

When it comes to discussing the region known as the Mediterranean, Iran's official discourse rarely mentions agriculture and water, which is an indication that these issues, at least in the Mediterranean context, are not among Iran's mid- to high-level priorities and interests. However, discussions over agriculture and water are of course raised with regard to individual countries of the region. These countries are treated as part of the Muslim world and North Africa rather than in the context of the Mediterranean. Thus, the fact that they are in the Mediterranean is sidelined in the discourse; in other words, the concept of the Mediterranean and its associations are accordingly silenced in the discourse in question.

Under Khatami, Iran's publically announced policy and discourse mainly emphasized *détente*,[3] mutual respect and cooperation with the international community. This policy was put to the test in the context of relations with Tunisia in the 2000s, as seen in the explanation by then Iranian foreign minister Kharrazi that "mutual trust" drives the Islamic Republic's new outlook. He expressed Iran's policy towards Tunisia in a joint meeting with his counterpart in that country, as reported in *Ettela'at International*, one of the official newspapers of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The foreign minister is quoted as saying: "We believe that the policy of detente and *mutual* respect will guarantee our interests as well as those of the entire world" (Ettela'at 2004; emphasis added). Kharrazi's emphasis, which presents Iran's policy, rests upon mutual cooperation since the term "mutual" is repeated during his talk. However, Iran's interest in expanding relations with Tunisia is motivated more by the country's position in the Muslim and Arab world as well as on the African continent, rather than because of its economic opportunities. As the newspaper quotes from Kharrazi, "Iran attaches importance to expansion of ties with Islamic, Arab and North African countries particularly Tunisia

due to their deeply rooted cultural, historical and religious commonalties" (Ettela'at 2004). Moreover, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist tendencies of the West were emphasized in the Iranian discourse when the relations with Tunisia were discussed towards the end of Khatami's second term in office – and we should note that Iran was raising these issues with Tunisia's secular and West-leaning political regime under Ben Ali. As Kharrazi has it, "Iran opposes all types of hegemony and seek[s] unity among Islamic states, call[s] for respect for international rights and respecting each other's interests" (Ettela'at 2004). Kharrazi's emphasis on having a mutual relationship and the terms "hegemony", as well as "respect", imply Iran's policy of rejecting of any type of subordination as far as its relationship with the individual countries of the region is concerned.

This tendency towards independence has been a trademark of the Islamic Republic but has acquired a sharper policy focus in the context of Iran's "Axis of Resistance", constantly promoted and underlined by Iran's Supreme Leader in his discussions of Iran's regional and international relations. The following statements are interpreted and explained in the light of this doctrine, which emphasizes a resistance to US hegemony and an anti-Zionist and anti-Israel position – a policy according to which Iran supports the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and Assad's regime in Eastern Mediterranean. While referring to military advancements by Assad's forces, Eshaq Jahangiri, Iranian vice president, in a meeting with Imad Khamis, the prime minister of Syria, stated: "these advances owe to the courage and resistance of Syrian army and people" (IRIB 2017).[4] These military successes are celebrated in the context of Iran's continuing support for the Syrian regime and Iran's decision to stand by Damascus since the beginning of the crisis, and in what Iran refers to as the "war against terrorism". Iran believes that it has spared no effort, in line with its doctrine of "Axis of Resistance", to support its partner (IRIB 2017). To reinforce the resistance front, the two countries also promote economic links, as part of which they have signed contracts for the promotion of trade and investment across the fields of transport, energy, agriculture and industry. In this regard, Iran has undertaken to invest in developing five thousand hectares of agricultural land in Syria (IRIB 2017).

Earlier, we noted the importance of self-sufficiency as a driver of Iran's development strategy and promotion of relations with Muslim countries, but since the 2010s this policy has been refined into what Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, proclaimed as the policy of Resistance Economy (*Eqtesād-e-moqavemati*). Officially declared in 2012, this new economy strategy is to be implemented by all three branches of the state as well as the Expediency Discernment Council of the System, to increase reliance on domestic capacities and reduce dependence on oil exports as a way of resisting the pressure of US-led sanctions on the country. Point number 12 of the proclamation requires an increase in the resistance economy and a decrease in economic vulnerability, via: a) developing strategic ties and cooperation with other countries, especially the neighbours; b) having a diplomacy of supporting economic goals; and c) making the best use of international and regional organizations (Khamenei 2012b).

In line with Iran's anti-imperialist discourse is its concern with the water security of the Muslim Middle East. Ali Mamouri and Asef Kazemi (2011) have, for example, highlighted "Israel's role in water crisis in the Middle East". The article identified Israel as a threat to the water security of countries of the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, with an emphasis on Syria and Lebanon. It reads, "[t]he Zionist regime has always had a greedy eye on the water resources of the countries of the region including Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and has tried to fulfil its aggressive domination through war, occupation and the so-called peace talks" as well as "strategies of aggressive dominance and expansionism", with the dream of establishing a country that would stretch from "Nile to Euphrates" (Mamouri and Kazemi 2011: 137). Iran, arguably, sees itself as a champion of this precious resource.

**4. Mobility and Migration**

For Iran, it is the security dimension which overrides other matters, and other important issues such as migration and mobility play a secondary role in its conception of the Mediterranean and its people-to-people contacts within it. Nevertheless, while Iranians do travel for religious "site seeing" in Syria and for communal interaction with Lebanon's Shia population, they have tended to use Turkey (which Iranian nationals do not require a visa to visit) as the destination of choice for migration. After the revolution, Iran's relations with most Arab Mediterranean countries deteriorated, and only Algeria and Syria were counted as friendly countries by Tehran, with Libya being seen as a tactical partner. Relations with such key Arab countries as Egypt and Morocco underwent rapid decline and a long period of tension ensued, which lasted until 2011. It was only following the 2011 uprising in Egypt that Iran sent its first ambassador to the country. As for Morocco, Iran cut its diplomatic ties in 1981 over King Hassan II's hosting the exiled Iranian monarch. Similarly, Tunisia's embassy in Iran was closed during Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s and tensions remain while Tunis supported Iraq against Iran. Indeed, it was in the 1990s that the two countries started to establish diplomatic relations.

Inversely, Iran has begun to pay particular attention to the promotion of tourism as a source of hard currency and for the strengthening of people-to-people relations. In Rouhani's administration, significant attention is being paid to tourism to boost the economy and decrease its reliance on oil. This is a feature of Iran's so-called resistance economy. However, while the EU is being targeted for the promotion of tourism, the Mediterranean does not seem to rank highly in terms of tourism, in Iran's discourse. As already noted in the context of migration and mobility, Iran's view towards the Mediterranean is more concerned with security issues.

Iran is sensitive to the issue of refugees as a major humanitarian and security concern. President Rouhani, thus, in a meeting with the visiting Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders in Iran in September 2015 remarked that "[t]he solution to this problem [flood of refugees to Europe] is to seriously fight and counter terrorism" (PressTV 2015). He warned that "[t]errorism should not be viewed as a problem limited to our region; rather it [should be considered as] a global scourge and fighting it requires global determination" (PressTV 2015). Thus, by calling the refugee crisis a "problem" and using the term "terrorism" which follows it immediately, President Rouhani is arguably making a link between terrorism and the recent crisis of refugees from the Mediterranean region to Europe.

Along the same lines, in a meeting with EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini in October 2016, President Rouhani warned against the spread of terrorism from the Levant to North African countries. In his exchanges, he called for strong action to stop the spread of violence by "a serious battle against terrorism" and warned that without decisive action the world "will see several terrorist governments and entities emerge in the North African region" (AFP 2016). The spread of terrorism, according to Rouhani, is due to the migration of so-called ISIL members from Syria and Iraq to North Africa, the result of which is manifest in attacks that have been carried out in Algeria and Egypt. Accordingly, as a solution to the crisis, he urged the European Union to put pressure on regional powers to stop supporting rebel groups in Syria. This correlation between mobility and terrorism in the Mediterranean implied in Rouhani's words stems from his security-oriented discourse towards the migration issue in the region. In other words, he views the Mediterranean as a penetrated region and, therefore, a vulnerable one when it comes to the unregulated movement of populations.

However, as already mentioned, Rouhani has paid significant attention to tourism in general to boost Iran's economy post-JCPOA. In fact, if it were not for the tensions between Iran and some Arab countries and the security issues in the Mediterranean, tourism between Iran and the region could have been subject to Iran's general policy of opening up the country to tourism. In the

following, we will analyse Iran's discourse regarding tourism in general, which is given specific attention after the 2016 nuclear agreement.

Iran has emphasised tourism since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran Deal. One of the most important consequences of the deal, as President Rouhani remarked in September 2016, is that Iran's economy could benefit significantly if tourism is given priority. To him, at this juncture in history, taking full advantage of the deal requires an improvement in Iran's tourism industry as one of the ways to increase people's welfare, create more job opportunities as well as self-sufficiency in products, and at the same time improve Iran's position and dignity in the region and the world. It has been pointed out that Iran is among the five countries in the world with the highest number of tourist attractions and is also amongst the cheapest to visit (EghtesadOnline 2016). To recap, Rouhani aims at boosting the economy by attracting more tourists to the country as a rigorous strategy to decreasing reliance on oil income. To reach this goal, he is aware that economic stability, especially low inflation, is a prerequisite to attracting tourism. He points to the fact that Iran has managed to decrease its inflation from 40 percent to 8 percent in just four years. Therefore, "when a tourist calculates the expenses", as Rouhani puts it, "s/he does not worry and can plan easily" (EghtesadOnline 2016). As part of this pro-tourism policy, Iran's foreign ministry has announced that based on a government decision in 2016 citizens of all but nine countries are enabled to obtain a visa upon arrival at the country's airports (Tasnim 2016). In line with this policy, Iran's plan is "to facilitate the entrance of tourists given the extensive tourism capacities of Iran" (Tasnim 2016). In the same vein, the head of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), Masoud Soltanifarhad, stated that "Iran has formulated plans to increase revenue from the tourism industry within the next ten years to an amount equal to the income generated by oil sales" (Tasnim 2016). This is indeed an ambitious plan. Therefore, Iran's recent policy regarding tourism supports its stated aim of finding alternative revenues that would decrease dependence on oil; and at the same time requires the country's decision makers to open up to the world.

**Conclusion**

Having looked at Iran's discourse in the four areas of agriculture and water, energy and industry, immigration and mobility, and political ideas, it can be concluded that an alternative worldview is evident in the discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This discourse is grounded in an alternative narrative and distinct use of terms and terminologies which have embedded within them different conceptualizations and concepts. So, Iranian elite have begun using terms such as "West Asia" instead of the "Middle East" in reference to their geopolitical neighbourhood, and "Islamic Awakening" instead of "Arab Spring" when discussing the post-2010 Arab uprisings. This could be read as an attempt at creating an alternative world order which challenges the dominant Western discourse. Along the same lines is Iran's use of the phrase "Axis of Resistance" which refers to its own Arab-based regional alliance structure and the ideological driver of its regional security approach. The phrase "Axis of Resistance" not only negates the "Axis of Evil" but also defines Iran's approach to the East Mediterranean/Levant countries. However, this phrase is at the same time indicative of Iran's worldview. Another aspect of Iran's discourse deals with the policy of "resistance economy" that primarily aims at reducing the economy's vulnerability (to international pressures) and reliance on oil income. But the term also has been used to justify acceleration of economic growth, cultivation of strategic relations with other countries, use of diplomacy in support of economic goals, and finally the best use of international and regional organizations. With regard to political ideas, anti-hegemonic perspectives and critical geopolitics (as opposed to the geography-oriented and state-centred traditional geopolitics of the West) form another feature of Iran's discourse in framing the world. Some significance is accordingly given to Shiism as an influential factor in the geopolitics of the region, and one that features heavily in Iran's discussions of, and involvement in, the Eastern Mediterranean.

Iran's post-revolution doctrine of "neither West, nor East", as well as its emphasis on resistance both in the form of economy of resistance and Axis of Resistance, and its posture of always taking the side of the revolutionaries and the oppressed, all serve to indicate that Iran's self-image positions the country as a victim: it is a country against which the world powers are always conspiring. To justify this suspicious attitude, Iranian leaders always refer to a series of recent incidents of oppression and interference in the country. The events cited vary from the coup in 1953 organized and run by the US and the UK against the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh, to Iraq's war on Iran where the West and Arab countries supported Saddam Hussain, to the imposed sanctions that Iran regards as absolutely unfair over its (peaceful) nuclear programme. Therefore, Iran's self-image is that of victimhood: a righteous man with few friends and many enemies. Its view of many other countries mainly follows a dichotomy derived from this self-representation. Others are either with the oppressed or are with the oppressors. The oppressors include states such the US, Israel, sometimes the UK and those that Iran considers as being under the influence, and promoting the agenda of these countries. Following this categorization, the type of states and even non-state actors with which Iran aims to develop relations are those which are friendly (or at least not hostile towards Iran) and either challenge America openly or show some sort of independence from the United States, at least in some areas. This categorization includes states and entities such as Syria, Iraq, the Hezbollah of Lebanon, the Palestinian Hamas and the Houthis of Yemen in the MENA region; and Cuba, Venezuela, Russia and China in other parts of the world. But Iran is also keen on developing links with what it regards as neutral actors and those that possess and enjoy strategic autonomy. In this category fit the European Union as well as India and South Africa. Iran's interest in the EU is commercial but also strategic, in that the Islamic Republic regards the EU and many of its members as credible partners who have an interest in Iran's development and progress and are therefore not interested in isolating or stigmatizing the country. The pragmatism which Iran assigns to these powers also drives its own approach to them. The EU's recognition of Iran's legitimate interests, and Iran's acceptance of this, can help in driving a broader security dialogue which the EU can extend from a bilateral platform to a (regional) multilateral one. In arguing this, we are directly reflecting on the EU3's discussions with Tehran in the period 2003–05 which led to the signing of the November 2004 Paris agreement (Ehteshami 2010: 106). This agreement not only led to the suspension of Iran's nuclear enrichment programme (for a confidence-building period) but went so far as to consider confidence building, nuclear cooperation and assistance with Iran's membership application to join the World Trade Organization.

As noted earlier, the term and concept of the Mediterranean as a region is absent in Iran's discourse. Rather, the emphasis as indicated in its discourse rests on a set of Muslim countries which are part of the Islamic Ummah. This is in line with Iran's claim to leadership in the Muslim world. What is important in the region for Iran is its counter-hegemonic Axis of Resistance, with supporting the Palestinian cause and upholding an anti-Israeli position as one of the main principles of its foreign policy. This contrasts hugely with the EU's position which regards Israel as an associate member of the European Union. The EU states themselves have normal economic and political relationships with Israel. The EU is also committed to the two-state solution and formally recognizes the right of a Palestinian state to exist side by side with the state of Israel. Iran's hostility to Israel is one the main reasons for preventing the normalization of its relations with America and consequently has created a situation in which Iran is not able to fully integrate itself into the international community. Moreover, due to the continuing hostility between Iran and the United States and Iran's aggressive posture towards Israel, countries in the region (such as Saudi Arabia and Israel) have been able to form tacit agreements, secure indirect and direct US support, and directly target Iran's resistance front in order to undo Iran's relations with Arab Mediterranean countries. However, with Hezbollah's heavy military involvement in Syria and Hamas's strategic distance since 2012 from the Axis of Resistance and its acceptance of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, Iran's capacity to pose a threat to Israel has drastically decreased. In addition, with the re-election of moderate Hassan Rouhani as president in Iran in May 2017 and his election promise that all the sanctions

against Iran including the ones not related to the nuclear issue would be removed (in order to achieve this Rouhani has indicated that his government will use the 5+1 negotiation example as a model for resolving Iran's longstanding issues with the West), it seems that there is an opportunity for negotiations between the EU and Iran aimed at finding ways of de-escalating tensions between Iran and Israel.

With regard to the multi-actor part of the analytical framework, it is noteworthy that Iran has tried to exert its influence in Lebanon and Palestine via such non-state actors as Hamas and Hezbollah rather than through the Lebanese government or the Palestinian national authority, to achieve its goals in line with the Axis of Resistance doctrine. With regard to Syria, before the Arab Spring, Iran's main point of reference in Syria was President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian government. Iran did not pay much attention to the non-state organizations in Syria mainly because they were either under the control of the government or too weak to be considered as important actors in the country. Yet, after the civil war in addition to Assad's regime Iran has established relations with some groups that fight alongside Iran and the Syrian army against the armed Syrian opposition groups. In contrast, although the EU has tried to channel its relations through official lines in Lebanon and Palestine, it has also established relations with the civil societies in these countries and has worked with them in different areas such as humanitarian and cultural issues. We recognize that following the Syrian civil war, the EU also had little option but to try and influence the course of events in that country through establishing relations with non-state actors – albeit those that were fighting Assad's regime. Given the relative success of Iran, Russia and Turkey in securing a partial ceasefire in Syria and creating some "de-escalation zones" in the country, Syria is one of the arenas in which the EU, through negotiations with Iran, Russia and Turkey, can play a positive role towards finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict. Both sides can influence the key actors in Syria to guarantee the success of such a resolution.

Regarding energy, the EU's approach differs from that of Iran. As the EU places more emphasis on imports from North Africa, it seems to place less on Iran's oil and exports. However as Iran increases investments in new gas and oil projects to raise its output it naturally views the EU as a large and prosperous market for its oil and future LNG gas output. Iran is competing with the major oil- and gas-producing Mediterranean countries in this regard and will face stiff competition as the EU prioritizes access to Algeria, Libya and the emerging gas giants of the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus and Palestine).

With regard to the policy area of migration and mobility, both Iran and the EU view the Mediterranean as a penetrated and vulnerable region due to the unregulated movement of populations. Iran's discourse here is security-oriented, as it is concerned that the migration of radical jihadists from North Africa to the Levant might pose a threat to its allies in the Levant and Iraq. Similarly, the European Union members are part of the international alliance in the war against terror to combat terrorist groups such as ISIL in the region. Moreover, the EU countries are worried that the flood of migration from Syria to their territory will endanger their social fabric and destabilize their security. They are also concerned that with the wave of migration, some terrorists might infiltrate into the refugee flows and could potentially serve as operatives for attacks in the EU countries. In contrast, since Iran is not a destination for Syrian refugees, it is not as concerned as Europe. Nonetheless, recognizing that the refugee crisis is a serious challenge for the EU, and comes with huge burdens and costs for its members, Iran is trying to convince the EU that a solution to the crisis is obtainable through defeating Assad's opponents, many of which Iran considers as terrorist organizations. This strategy, Iran contends, will eventually lead to the end of the Syrian civil war, bring about stability in the region and resolve the migration crisis.

Two fundamental documents discussed in this study are exemplary of the Islamic Republic of Iran's discourse, indicating the view of the Leader and officials of Iran and its position in the world. These are the 20-year vision plan and resistance economy policy documents. The quotations analysed in

this paper are taken from the statements of the Leader and political figures who are influential in framing the concept of the world and the Mediterranean, and also those who follow, describe and delineate the dominant discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although in many of these citations there are direct references to the countries of the Mediterranean, Iran's discourse is almost silent when it comes to the EMP/UfM or the ENP. However, the discourse analysed here contain thoughts and policies about the position of Iran in the international system and Iran's view towards the world. Indirectly certainly, the claim can be made that Iran's discourse encompasses the Mediterranean and all its associated systems.

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**Notes**

1. Reached in 2015, implemented in 2016.

2. Mackinder (1944: 150) puts his theory in verse very succinctly: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world".

3. The notion of *détente* first appeared in Iran's discourse in the early 1990s (under the presidency of Rafsanjani) but become state discourse during President Khatami's tenure (1997–2005).

4. All the translations are the authors' own.

**5 GULF**

**Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's Discourses and Practices in the Mediterranean**

*Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Ariabarzan Mohammadi*

**Introduction**

The fragmentation of the Arab regional order and the corrosion of an Arab pivot for these states to gather around has since the 1980s opened the way for some of the non-Mediterranean Arab states to use their considerable financial and growing soft power to exercise influence in the wider region, including the Mediterranean. Such relatively small Arab countries as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, all based in the Gulf Cooperation Council group of Arab monarchies, are the case in point. Weakness of the Arab core since the Camp David accords – that is to say the demise of Egypt as the champion of the Arab order – and fragmentation and polarization of the Arab order following the Kuwait crisis (1990–91), coupled with dramatic global changes in the 2000s which have led to some uncertainty about the long-term commitment of the United States to the security and safety of its Gulf Arab allies, are all factors which have further propelled the GCC states to act – and to act independently. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have emerged as the pioneers of action, of "intervention" to be more precise, and have as such emerged as important players in reshaping the geopolitics of the Mediterranean. Being important members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), they stand out as among the richest countries in the region and their vast gas (in the case of Qatar) and oil resources (in the case of Saudi Arabia) have given them the privilege to accumulate an enormous amount of wealth domestically as well as internationally, particularly through their sovereign wealth funds. Moreover, they are important states because of their regional influence, which is partly derived from their membership in the Arab region's only viable (sub)regional organization, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and partly through their power as members of the Arab League. Additionally, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with its administrative centre in Jeddah grants Saudi Arabia a significantly privileged position to exert power in the Arab and Islamic worlds. What is more, Saudi Arabia gained increased leverage from its election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for a three-year term in 2016. Moreover, being a member of the G20 (the only member from this region), which consists of the 20 major economies of the world playing a leading role in the management of international economic and financial order, has given the Kingdom an unrivalled global edge as well. Further, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are arguably the locus of conception as well as incubation of Sunni Islamic doctrines which have spread to fertile ground across the Arab region. Petrodollars in the hands of both governments and private sector have facilitated the proliferation and propagation of variations of Islamist thought and doctrine, and have been used in support of followers in and beyond the Mediterranean.

Furthermore, as GCC members, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have a significant position with regard to the European Union (EU), particularly in relation to commerce and alignment of security policies. In terms of economic relations, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have accumulated substantial assets in EU countries and play a pivotal role in the ongoing negotiations over enactment of an FTA between the GCC and the EU. For security, the interaction is even closer. Thus, while being on the periphery of the Mediterranean, Qatar has joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with the aim of safeguarding security in its own (sub)region as well as in Europe; and in the wake of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have both played an active role in the (re)construction of the geopolitics of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, which of course is the EU's critical neighbourhood.

The Mediterranean as conceived by the EU does not really figure much in the Saudi and Qatari discourse, which instead tends to concentrate on the Arabic and Islamic world. At times their alternative discourses construct the Mediterranean in the form of resistance to the dominant knowledge produced by the EU. The GCC countries in general use alternative terms to describe different groups of countries situated in the Mediterranean space. For example, Maghreb – which usually means the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Sometimes Mauritania is also included in the definition of Maghreb since it is a member of the Arab Maghreb Union established in 1988. Saudi Arabia and Qatar see the Mediterranean either as part of Islamic/Arab world or as a space between two significant regions, the EU and the Middle East. Meanwhile the EU, at least until the 2000s, has tried to encourage the Mediterranean countries to act as a region. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), as a case in point, addresses the causes of the current regional and socio-economic security and challenges, as viewed by the EU, to enhance sustainable regional integration and development. The aim and objectives are to be achieved through a set of projects and initiatives. These projects are carried out in the framework of strategic priority areas which include business development, social and civil affairs, higher education and research, transport and urban development, water and environment, and energy and climate action. As will be demonstrated, Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's priorities vis-à-vis the Mediterranean are geopolitical and security-oriented. Their interferences in the region, in particular following the Arab Spring, which will be discussed in detail, illuminate this point. However, in some areas such as business development, which brings high profit return, the priorities of Saudi Arabia and Qatar overlap with EU policies. Yet in social and civil affairs, whereas the EU's policy is to support civil society in the Mediterranean, the two countries' activities in the Arab Mediterranean are more towards securing their own geopolitical interests and safeguarding their security. Consequently, these policies at times come at the expense of civil society in the Mediterranean. In the case of Egypt, for example, while Saudi Arabia supported Sisi's seizure of power in 2013, the EU states had a critical approach towards this action and expressed their concern about civil society under Sisi's government. In contrast, in Syria the EU, Qatar and Saudi Arabia came closer.

The discourse and practices of Saudi Arabia and Qatar show that when it comes to the Mediterranean, the two countries put their geopolitical considerations over other concerns, including agriculture, energy and migration. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the Mediterranean is not the main trading partner of these countries, as the statistics provided in this paper clearly demonstrate; second, the Arab Spring has created a situation in which GCC countries in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, have felt their security and identity being threatened and challenged. Therefore, the concerns of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are first and foremost safeguarding security, and their identity, against these new challenges and threats, rather than prioritizing issues of agriculture, energy and migration vis-à-vis the Mediterranean. Hence, geopolitical considerations trump all others for the two countries. This paper contends that geopolitical considerations, especially safeguarding the security of the state against perceived threats from Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, are the most decisive factors that could explain Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's framing of the Mediterranean. Yet, this by no means suggests that all of their foreign policy decisions can be explained from this perspective. In fact, these decisions are usually multicausal. What this paper focuses on is the most significant cause: geopolitical considerations.

This paper will examine the discourse and practices of the two most active GCC countries in the Mediterranean and will conduct its analysis through a discussion of such highlighted issues as economy, agriculture/water, energy, migration and political ideas. Adopting a qualitative content analysis, this paper studies documents of Saudi Arabia and Qatar[1] to help better understand these countries' changing role and influence, as well as their policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Investigating their alternative discourses, the paper will highlight the conflicting, competing and also converging policies and visions of these actors regarding EU policies (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016). This specific issue will be discussed in the conclusion. The

documents analysed in this paper are prime specimens of Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's discourses, in that they reflect reverberating concerns of the countries' leaders, officials, influential media and intellectuals in their framing of the Mediterranean area and construction of alternative discourses.

## 1. Political Ideas

The Arab Spring has caused many security challenges for the GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. For instance, the rise of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was viewed by Saudi Arabia as a challenge to its state identity and claim to the leadership of the Muslim Ummah (see May Darwich's 2016 analysis). Qatar, on the other hand, saw the rise of the Brotherhood as an opportunity, especially since its state identity, manifest in the discourse of its leaders and in the coverage of its media, notably Al Jazeera, is different from Saudi Arabia's, in that Doha puts more emphasis on pan-Arabism, rather than pan-Islamism. Qatar has accordingly promoted the Muslim Brotherhood and its political doctrine of Islam. In addition, sectarianism, although not a result of the Arab Spring, was significantly intensified following the Arab uprisings, especially the civil war in Syria and Saudi–Iranian rivalry in this regard. These security and geopolitical concerns of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in the context of the Mediterranean, to a large extent influence their framing of the Mediterranean. Thus, as shown in the previous sections, despite their rhetoric of Islamic and Arab brotherhood, the two countries' economic relations with the Mediterranean are highly affected by geopolitical considerations. To better understand these issues, in the following section we will analyse the political discourse of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, especially with regard to Iran, which is the other important Persian Gulf actor in the Mediterranean.

In order to better understand Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's worldviews that could extend to the Mediterranean, we will first investigate the political discourses of the two countries. These discourses, as already noted, rest on pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism. Second, we will explore the impact that the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring and Iran's increasing influence in the region have had on the political discourse of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In its discourse, Saudi Arabia assumes a leading role in the Muslim world as the birthplace of Islam and home to two cities which are holy for all Muslims. Since King Fahad bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, the monarchs of the kingdom have added Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to their other titles. King Abdullah's speech at the 2005 extraordinary OIC summit is noteworthy in that it manifestly predicates Saudi Arabia's position as leader of the Muslim world and its aim of acting an Islamic model. He begins by addressing the leaders of Muslim countries as "[m]y brothers, the Leaders of the Muslim Ummah" and concludes by stating that "I look forward to a united Muslim Ummah and good governance that eliminate injustice and oppression for the sake of the comprehensive Muslim development that eradicates destitution and poverty" (Saudi MOFA 2005). As the set of predicates indicate, first and foremost he sees all the Muslim countries and people as Ummah, unified under, and identified by, the religion of Islam, and perceives the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the leader of this Ummah.

Similarly, Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Defence, in a speech that empasizes Saudi's claim of leadership in the Muslim world, states that:

We in Saudi Arabia are at the front line in facing these challenges. Any terrorist organization, their primary target to recruit and spread their ideology is to start with Saudi Arabia, the house of – the holy city of Mecca. Once they put their hands on Saudi Arabia, they will get access to the entire Islamic world. That's why we are the primary target. (US Department of Defense 2017)

As implied, the concept of conquering Saudi Arabia as equivalent to conquering the entire Islamic world is based on the view that Saudi Arabia represents, and is the leader of, the Muslim world. Moreover, the former Saudi minister of foreign affairs, Saud bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in one of his last speeches, during the 26th Ordinary Session of Majlis al-Shura, enumerates what he calls

"[t]he constant pillars of the Saudi foreign policy, in harmony with Sharia principles" as first and foremost "defending Arab and Islamic causes" (Saudi MOFA 2015). This Islamocentric discourse is an indispensable and fundamental component of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy.

Furthermore, Iran occupies an important place in Saudi Arabia's discourse, especially since the Arab Spring. In Saud bin Faisal's words, Iran is a target of attack since it functions as the "other" against which Saudi Arabia's own identity is constructed (see Darwich 2016). Saudi's construction of identity as one of Muslim leadership and its concern with a danger that threatens this identity is manifest in Faisal's words:

> We were pleased when the Iranian revolution called it the Islamic Revolution, for we were expecting it will be a champion of Arab and Islamic causes, and helpful for us in the Islamic nation's service, and the consolidation of security and stability in the region, but we were surprised by the policy of exporting the revolution and destabilizing security and peace as well as the blatant interference in the affairs of the region's countries and stirring up discord among peoples of the same faith. (Saudi MOFA 2015)

The Islamic Republic of Iran's claim of leadership in the Muslim world has tended to undermine, arguably, the role that Saudi Arabia had always reserved for itself. Faisal resorts to a discourse of good versus evil, where the good is Saudi Arabia and the bad is Iran. Iran is dangerous, to him, because it divides "the Arab and Muslim world" and consequently the unity of Ummah, whose pillar is Saudi Arabia, is under attack. Iran, because of its assumed leading role in the Muslim world, is now destabilizing the narrative of Saudi Arabia. This destabilization and Saudi Arabia's "call for Islamic solidarity" are based on the premise that the Islamic Republic of Iran is promoting Shiism by exporting its revolution and therefore dismantling the solidarity among Muslims.

The present Saudi minister of foreign affairs, Adel bin Ahmad al-Jubeir, takes a more hostile stance towards Iran. As al-Jubeir puts it, "Iran believes in exporting its revolution, it is enshrined in its constitution. Guess to whom it wants to export its revolution? To us" (Saudi MOFA 2016). As implied, he presumes the Islamic Republic to be inherently dangerous to Saudi Arabia, as exporting its revolution is an indispensable part of the country's constitution, ideology and foreign policy. Moreover, he claims that Iran is destabilizing the solidarity among Muslims by taking a Shia leadership, as "they [the Islamic Republic of Iran] believe that every person who is a Shia belongs to Iran and not to his or her country. And this is unacceptable". He continues that "Iran is a country that supports terrorism" (Saudi MOFA 2016). But then he goes further to attach this destabilizing Shia Iran to terrorism, the implication of which is that Iran's revolutionary Shiism is the source of terrorism.

In an interview with Spiegel in 2016, al-Jubeir once again considered Iran as a destabilizing agent in the region. As for the conflict in Syria, al-Jubeir argued that "Iran sent its Revolutionary Guards into Syria, they brought in Shia militias, Hezbollah from Lebanon, militias from Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, all Shia, and they couldn't help" (Shafy and Zand 2016). By the same token, an association is made between Iran, Shiism, dictatorship and terrorism. In line with his argument that Iran is a threat to the Muslim solidarity, al-Jubeir adds:

> Iran has been a neighbor for millennia, and will continue to be a neighbor for millennia. We have no issue with seeking to develop the best terms we can with Iran. But after the revolution of 1979, Iran embarked on a policy of sectarianism. Iran began a policy of expanding its revolution, of interfering with the affairs of its neighbors, a policy of assassinating diplomats and of attacking embassies. Iran is responsible for a number of terrorist attacks in the Kingdom, it is responsible for smuggling explosives and drugs into Saudi Arabia. And Iran is responsible for

setting up sectarian militias in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen, whose objective is to destabilize those countries. (Shafy and Zand 2016)

Al-Jubeir views the influence and expansion of Shiism, an interpretation of Islam which is different from that of Saudi Arabia, as threatening and destabilizing.

It is worth mentioning that Saudi–Iranian rivalry that is marked by its sectarian discourse does not reflect the majority of the Arab world public opinion. A survey conducted by Doha Institute shows that 67 percent of the aggregate Arab population named either the United States or Israel as the biggest threats to collective Arab security, while only 10 percent of the respondents cited Iran as the greatest danger. However when asked to name the country which posed the single largest threat to their home country's national security, over 50 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia, and nearly a third of respondents in Iraq and Kuwait, named Iran (ACRPS 2016: 5).

After a turbulent sequence of events in the Arab Spring and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi Arabia's discourse of Sunni Islamic leadership faced a competing narrative, that of the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine of political Islam. As it is generally known, the country we today know as Saudi Arabia is a result of the al-Saud attempt to found an Islamic kingdom whose unity was brought about as an outcome of a union between Muhammed Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and the al-Saud clan. Salman bin Abdul Aziz, when he was the governor of the Saudi capital Riyadh, confirmed and defended the religious teachings of Wahhabism by calling it "pure Islam" (Mahdi 2010). As May Darwich (2016) argues, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has challenged the identity distinctions that Saudi Arabia needs for its own existential security, and thus Saudi Arabia resorts to a stronger emphasis on Wahhabism to create this distinction once again.[2] The reason for this "ontological (in)security", as Darwich (2016) argues, is the rise of a new rival who attempted to assume the leading role in the Sunni Muslim world. Supporting her argument, she refers to Mohamed Morsi, the former Egyptian President, to demonstrate how the Muslim Brotherhood expressed an adherence to Salafism.[3] "The Salafi–Brotherhood intermarriage", as she puts it, "manifested in the group's intolerance toward other Islamic and non-Islamic groups" (Darwich 2016: 481).

Thus, Saudi Arabia's claim as the leader of the Sunni/Salafi Muslims was challenged with the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, which adopted a similar ideology (Salafism). What Saudi Arabia, as a consequence, tried to do was to reshape its sense of identity in a way that made it distinctive, and very different from the Muslim Brotherhood. Darwich argues that:

> The kingdom [Saudi Arabia] sought to discredit the MB's [Muslim Brotherhood] identity as a "true" Salafi group. The Saudi religious establishment denied the Salafi nature of the group, especially in the regime-influenced media outlets. In a local newspaper, Al-Madina, leading Saudi sheikhs pronounced fatwas claiming that the MB had "no Salafi roots". (Darwich 2016: 482).

Similarly, Asharq al-Awsat began to attack the Muslim Brotherhood in a run of essays (Asharq Al-Awsat 2014, Darwich 2016). In all of this we see Saudi's renewed emphasis on its Salafi/Wahhabi identity.

Unlike Saudi Arabia which has defined itself as the Muslim leadership in terms of pan-Islamism (Sunni Islam), Qatar's discourse promotes a sense of pan-Arabism and support of the Muslim Brotherhood. Historically, Qatar has had an open foreign policy and therefore good relations with Arab countries, and has tried to be a mediator in times of conflict – the exception being Al Jazeera's coverage of the domestic issues of some Arab countries by hosting members of the opposition in those countries. This obviously created some temporary tensions between Qatar and the countries concerned. However, the Arab Spring affected this opening diplomatic strategy. With the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, for instance, Qatar became involved in the coalition against him and

took more direct measures, and in the case of Syria, Qatar turned against Assad and tried to convince the Arab League to intervene. The Arab Spring caused a fracture in the relationship between Qatar and Saudi Arabia; it opened new spaces for competition between them. In addition, after an attack on the Saudi embassy and consulate buildings in Iran which followed the execution of a Shia cleric in Saudi Arabia resulting in Riyadh cutting its diplomatic relations with Tehran, Qatar recalled its ambassador to Tehran. Yet, the reaction did not match Saudi expectations. This made Saudi Arabia feel that Qatar was only seeking its own interest rather the security of the GCC states by not taking more serious measures against Iran. The climax of the tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, together with some other GCC members, eventually led to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE taking the unprecedented step of recalling their ambassadors from Doha in 2014. Saudi Arabia's officials also spoke of the possibility of a blockade of Qatar. However, due to Kuwait's mediation, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates agreed to return their ambassadors to Doha. After that Qatar has modified its foreign policy by returning to soft power and diplomatic approaches and therefore has temporarily recovered its relationship with Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. For example, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have cooperated more closely over conflicts in Yemen and Syria. Also, Saudi Arabia has softened its approach towards the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in Yemen. However, incidents such as the Qatar hacking crisis in late April 2017 are a reminder that suspicions are still running deep between Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Despite all these ups and downs in Qatar's foreign policy, pan-Arabism has remained a key theme in its political discourse. A speech made by Qatar's minister of foreign affairs at the World Economic Forum special meeting held in Jordan in 2011 is replete with references to the concept of the Arab world, which is an indication of his construction of pan-Arabism. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim used the terms "Arab world", "Arab people", "Arab countries", "Arab states", "the Arab region", the "Arab market", "Arab cooperation", "Arab economies", "Arab developments" and "Arab intellectuals" (World Economic Forum 2011), among others, numerous times. All these phrases shape Qatar's framing of countries not in terms of the Middle East or the Mediterranean, but as part of what it calls "the Arab region" (World Economic Forum 2011). Emphasizing fair distribution of wealth in Arab countries, the foreign minister called for "a sound democratic life that in turn will avail Arab people to live in free and dignified life" (World Economic Forum 2011). There is almost no direct reference to Islam and Muslim people in his speech. Although references to Islam and the Muslim world do appear many times in the discourse of Qatar's leaders, a pattern can be detected in which references to the Arab world are significantly more frequent than references to the Muslim world or Ummah. This indicates a special care and awareness towards Arabness.

Moreover, Jassim assumed an assertive powerful tone as the leader of Arab countries, as if lecturing the world. Speaking of the necessity and possibility of "economic growth" in Arab countries, he emphasized the need to "ensure the sustainability of this growth through confirming to the citizens they are the objectives and means of the development process" (World Economic Forum 2011). Similarly and more recently, the rhetoric of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar's Emir, rests upon the same pan-Arab tendencies. As he stated in the 45th ordinary session of the Advisory Council in 2016:

> With regard to our foreign policy, the support of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf, the strengthening and development of the relations between our brotherly countries occupy the forefront of our priorities, especially against the backdrop of the very serious developments gripping the world, and which have undermined the stability and security of many countries in our Arab region. (Qatar MOFA 2016)

And he continued, "Qatar has never lingered to assume the role dictated on us by our Arab and Islamic sense of belonging, in defending the causes of both our Arab and Islamic Ummas, first and

foremost is the Palestinian cause, and we, God willing, will not be inactive in the future". (Qatar MOFA 2016)

The adjective "Arab" is used to back up Qatar's implied framing of the countries in the region. In addition, and by implication, what is given priority for Qatar is Arab countries, rather than other non-Arab countries in the region. Also, of high significance is the fact that the pan-Arab discourse of Qatar's officials and their support of Palestine's cause has been in harmony with Al Jazeera TV and website coverage.[4]

## 2. Geopolitics of the GCC and the Mediterranean

Looking at Qatar and Saudi framing of the Mediterranean, and paying attention to the discourse of their leaders, politicians and media, we understand that for example emphasis on brotherhood among Arab and Muslim countries is a reiterated theme in their rhetoric. However, this does not match the realities of economic relations among these countries. And, whereas the discourse of the leaders is more idealistic in support of unity in the Arab and (Sunni) Islamic world, there can be found a sub-discourse among academics and research centres, who work for academic and research institutions in the GCC countries, that rests on economic and cost/benefit logic. The reason for the leaders' idealistic view that does not reflect the real economic relations can be traced back to the Arab Spring and its aftermath; these countries encountered a political shock that coincided with the presidency of Barak Obama and his significant shift in American foreign policy from a Middle Eastern/European focus to an East/South Asian one. This shift in foreign policy was accompanied by an approach to Middle East conflicts, and especially the Libya intervention, that was termed "leading from behind". In other words, for Obama and his administration, the Middle East and Mediterranean did not enjoy the strategic significance they used to have. By the same token, the GCC in general and Saudi leaders in particular felt that they were facing an existential and security crisis, fearing that that the domino effect of the Arab Spring might reach them. Thus, they sought to find a solution, part of which was embodied in indulging their native population with financial gifts to decrease the threat of dissatisfaction and protest in their countries, with the other part being to actively participate in the making of a post-Arab Spring Arab world order.

Saudi Arabia felt an ontological insecurity with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. As a result, an antagonism towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt could be detected in the discourses espoused by Saudi clerics, which emphasized that the real representative of Salafi Islam is Saudi Arabia and not Morsi's Egypt. In addition, following election successes of Muslim Brotherhood-linked parties in Egypt and Tunisia, some of the GCC countries' local Muslim Brotherhoods were inspired and rejuvenated. This caused fear that the local Muslim Brotherhoods might become a viable opposition that some day would oust the monarchies of the GCC. This explains Saudi Arabia's immediate support of Sisi after the overthrow of Morsi's government, and the announcement of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia in March 2014.

However, the GCC countries' reaction to the Arab Spring and its aftermath was not unanimous; this in turn indicates a degree of incoherent regionality in the GCC. Considering that Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt were strong and long-standing strategic allies of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom viewed their removal from power as a political vacuum that would endanger its security. By contrast, the new condition was grasped by Qatar as an opportunity to expand its political influence in the region through making alliances with the new actors, especially the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political parties and their associate civil society organizations in Tunisia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia also did its best to fill the vacuum and extend its influence in the post-Arab Spring MENA region, through building and strengthening relations with the post-Arab Spring governments, utilizing the linkage with non-state actors such as Salafi groups in Egypt, and supporting various Syrian opposition groups.

Historically, Qatar enjoyed warm relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, and its media Al Jazeera has been a tribune for high ranking Muslim Brotherhood members such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi; therefore, its reaction to the Arab Spring was at times in contradiction to that of Saudi Arabia. Whereas the latter considered the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in post-Arab Spring countries a threat, for Qatar it was an opportunity in that it felt it could play the major role in the new Arab world order. In addition, the GCC countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE had competed with each other in the Southern Mediterranean. These rivalries extended to the members' conception of the GCC's function and role. For example, in 2013 Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, following the concerns arising from the Arab Spring, called for the GCC to turn into a Union. Other GCC members opposed this initiative, arguably fearing that Saudi Arabia might use the to-be Union as a means to dominate them.

Other cases further illustrate these conflicts among the GCC members after the Arab Spring – for example, Saudi Arabia's overnight announcement that Morocco and Jordan were going to join the GCC, a declaration that was never implemented. The Arab Spring had dismantled the previous Mediterranean equilibrium, and this explains the confusion and inconsistency of the GCC countries' decision making vis-à-vis the Arab Mediterranean countries. However, since 2014 there has been more harmony and cooperation among them as far as relations with the Southern Mediterranean are concerned. For example, while under Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, Saudi Arabia and Qatar at times competed with each other on Syria, the new Qatari administration has preferred to take a back seat and has allowed Saudi Arabia to take initiatives on matters related to Syria. Yet, this by no means indicates that all the disputes among the GCC members have been resolved. As far as the Arab Mediterranean is concerned, disagreement among the GCC members still exists. As a case in point, relations between Qatar and the Sisi government are still far from normal. Also, to add more uncertainty to the already complicated situation, after Saudi Arabia's Muhammad bin Salman formed a coalition of Muslim countries to fight the Houthis in Yemen, Sisi, who faced a persistent request from Saudi Arabia to enter actively into the war, made only a small contribution and did his best to keep involvement in Yemen to a minimum. Lastly, following the Arab–Muslim–American Summit in Riyadh in May 2017, relations between Qatar and three of its GCC partners deteriorated again, with allegations on the part of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE being made concerning Doha's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and what these three countries referred to as extremism. Diplomatic relations with Qatar were severed on 5 June 2017, in an attempt to isolate Qatar and pressure it to fall in line with the GCC's broader security and political agenda. Some would interpret the crisis as further evidence of structural tensions within the GCC, and forces beyond the Gulf itself impacting intra-GCC relations.

Sectarianism and the Saudi–Iran rivalry is yet another area which has affected GCC–Mediterranean relations. The Southern Mediterranean population is predominantly Sunni Muslim and therefore does not have the same problem of sectarianism that exists elsewhere in the Arab world. Yet, it cannot avoid the consequences of the discourse of sectarianism that has haunted the Arab world especially in the shadow of the Saudi–Iran proxy struggle. For example, Egypt's priority as far as Syria is concerned is making sure that Salafi and Jihadi forces will not take the upper hand in Syria because the overflow of these forces to North Africa would destabilize Egypt and its neighbours. By the same token, Egypt's policy towards Syria stands in sharp contrast to those of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Nonetheless, Egypt understands the magnitude of rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Syria. Thus, any action that would be interpreted as sympathy with the Syria–Iran–Russia coalition could be considered as a betrayal by the Saudis. This could explain Egypt's inconsistent behaviour towards the UN resolutions regarding Syria. Thus, in October 2016 Egypt voted in favour of two rival United Nations Security Council resolutions on Syria, one drafted by Russia and the other by France. Also, this sectarian rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has prevented the latter from forming closer ties with Southern Mediterranean countries apart from Algeria, which historically has tended to enjoy normal diplomatic relations with Iran.

As mentioned before, Saudi–Iranian rivalry is not representative of the majority of the Arab world public opinion. The majority of the Arab population still consider the United States and Israel to be the biggest threats to the security the Arab world, whereas only 10 percent regard Iran as the greatest danger. Yet, for over one half of Saudi respondents, Iran is the largest threat to the national security of their homeland (ACRPS 2016: 5). This is an indication that the Saudi stance towards Iran could be said to have the support of domestic public opinion but not necessarily that of the whole Arab world. However, such views of Iran have prevented the normalization of relations between Iran and some Arab Mediterranean countries.

**3. Water and Agriculture**

As part of our discourse analysis, we will look at the discourse and rhetoric of Saudi Arabia and Qatar regarding water and agriculture in general, and then will examine how this reflects in the context of the Mediterranean. The National Vision Plans of both countries (announced by Saudi Arabia in 2016 and Qatar in 2008) together with other relevant documents, indicative of the countries' policies, are studied with regard to their discourse and rhetoric, starting with Qatar.

Water and food security are serious challenges and issues for the GCC countries. Al-Farra (2015) reports that "[f]our of the GCC's six member states – including Qatar – are among the world's top ten countries in terms of vulnerability to severe water scarcity". As a case in point, Qatar is in the "highly stressed" category as indicated in the Maplecroft report (Maplecroft 2013, Al-Farra 2015). An awareness of the criticality of the food situation is also reflected in the vision plans of both Saudi and Qatar. As the Saudi Vision Plan reads under "Protecting Our Vital Resources":

> We will continue to build safe and sufficient strategic food reserves, to better guard against emergencies. Aquaculture will be promoted, as will strategic partnerships with countries blessed with natural resources such as fertile soil and water reserves. In Saudi Arabia, the use of water in agriculture will be prioritized for those areas with natural and renewable water sources. We will also continue to collaborate with consumers, food manufacturers and distributors to reduce any resource wastage. (Saudi Government 2016: 65)

Qatar shares the same concern as Saudi Arabia and expresses its care about environmental issues in the same vein, and therefore has adopted a similar policy of securing water in its own vision plan:

> The environmental pillar will be increasingly important as Qatar is forced to deal with local environmental issues, such as the impact of diminishing water and hydrocarbon resources, and the effects of pollution and environmental degradation, as well as international environmental issues such as the potential impact of global warming on water levels in Qatar and thereby on coastal urban development. Assessing the severity of risks and dealing with anticipated changes will require mobilising capacities and coordinating efforts to tackle problems that arise. (Qatar GSDP 2008: 30)

Accordingly, both countries have taken strategic measures to secure their respective water and food supplies. For example, Saudi Arabia adopted a strategy in the 1980s known as "greening the desert". However, due to the scarcity of its water resources Saudi Arabia has decided to guarantee food security by externalizing food production and has almost abandoned "the idea of food self-sufficiency", investing instead in lands outside the country (Ferragina and Canitano 2015: 49). Saudi Arabia's vision plan thus emphasizes land purchase or lease in other countries for agricultural purposes, as an efficient strategy.

Regarding Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as part of GCC, Eugenia Ferragina and Giovanni Canitano state that some members of the GCC have adopted a set of long-term food security strategies by

encouraging their people to undertake overseas investments in food production. The policy includes an exclusive focus on food projects, investment subsidies and investments in agriculture in other countries. These states with the help of their sovereign wealth funds either buy or lease farm land overseas (Ferragina and Canitano 2015: 47-48). In the following, we will explore the political and geopolitical implications of such strategies in the context of the Southern Mediterranean.

Since 2011, the GCC countries and the Arab Mediterranean countries have shown a strategic interest in each other, and the unrest and turmoil in the post-Arab Spring countries has propelled this partnership. Since that time, the GCC countries have sought greater influence in the administration of these countries by providing them with financial and political aid. Although the Arab Mediterranean countries are looking into new economic ties to help overcome their financial hardship, they are wary of possible political agendas behind the GCC's intentions and enthusiasm for investment. Whereas the GCC's investment in the region has been on the rise, it is much lower in total when compared to their investments in other developing regions. Moreover, agriculture and water constitute a smaller part of this integration, as will be discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, fear of rising GCC influence remains. According to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA),

> The Arab region is one of the least integrated regions of the world in terms of trade. Intraregional exports did not exceed 5.2 per cent of the total exports of the Arab region in 2010, or 18 per cent if oil and its derivatives are excluded from calculations of Arab exports. In both cases, it is a very modest ratio compared to exports between the European Union countries, which amounted to 65 per cent of the Union's total exports, or exports within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) zone, which amounted to 49 per cent of the total. The Arab ratio is also low compared to other developing regions, such as ASEAN, within which intraregional exports accounted for 24.8 per cent of the total, or Africa, where the figure was 12.4 per cent. (ESCWA 2014: 50)

Also, numbers in inter-Arab trade for 2010–2012 show a steady decline from 21.9 to 18.9 percent respectively in exports, and from 20.9 to 15.7 percent in the import of agricultural products (El-Khoury 2015: 292).

As the statistics above show, the Arab region is one of the least integrated regions of the world in terms of trade. This stands at odds with the Saudi Arabian and Qatari national visions which emphasize safeguarding Arab and Islamic ties; the emphasis in their vision plans does not correspond with the hard data, which reflect the countries' real practices considering inter-Arab trade. In Qatar's vision plan, the term "Mediterranean" is never mentioned; rather, the terms "Arab" and "Islamic" are frequently used in the text. This implies an inclination, or hierarchy to put it differently. Qatar's vision plan reads that the strategy should aim at "[c]oordination with Gulf Cooperation Council states and with Arab and regional economic organizations to establish trade, investment and financial ties" (Qatar GSDP 2008: 27).

Similar to the EU that has a hierarchy of significance in its discourse descending from the EU countries to neighbourhood and rest of the world, for Saudi Arabia and Qatar the pyramid starts with GCC countries to Arab and Islamic countries and then the rest of world. Moreover, although many of the Mediterranean countries are included in the Arab and/or Islamic categories, Qatar's vision plan gives almost no credit to Western naming of the Mediterranean. As for Saudi Arabia's vision plan, significant attention is given to Islamic and Arab values, terms that are practically used as a collocation pair. The plan reads: "[w]ith a GDP of SAR 2.4 trillion, our economy is already the largest in the Middle East. We enjoy close economic ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Arab countries, as well as constructive relations with Islamic and foreign countries" (Saudi

Government 2016: 58). Nonetheless, the statistics are proof of the discrepancy between the proposed focus on cooperation with Arab and Islamic countries and their practices.

To further explore the relation and discrepancy between the practice and discourse of GCC members with regard to food and agriculture in the Southern Mediterranean, a case in point is a study carried out by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies that explains the contributing factors to an increase in the GCC investments in Morocco:

> GCC balance between investment in tourism or agriculture is a policy of wagering on the strengths of any economy. But although agriculture contributes about 17% of the GDP and provides about 44% of jobs in Morocco, dealing with such issues is not just about helping Morocco but also about Morocco's competitiveness and thus revenues. The Moroccan economy enjoys many competitive advantages in the hospitality sector such as tourist compounds, hotels, restaurants and other supplementary facilities like entertainment facilities. GCC countries are famous, of course, for investing in agriculture in countries like Egypt, Sudan and Pakistan – which is why all these issues have been mentioned. The pumping of money by the Moroccan government into the agricultural sector is thus understood, as it is the first source for job opportunities. However, this is not the case for GCC investments which, in turn, loo[k] for the best use of limited wealth. Surely, those investments are not grants to be given away, but are financial surpluses that seek best returns. (Hussein 2012: 4)

The text emphasizes the existence of a purely profit-seeking perspective. The GCC countries would expect to gain the highest interest in return for investing their "limited wealth"; which arguably demonstrates a strong interest-seeking logic. The rhetoric gives little significance to Morocco's aspirations for investing more in the agricultural sector in the hope of creating more jobs. This view stands in contrast to the spirit of Qatar's Vision Plan that promotes cooperation with, and investment in, Arab and/or Islamic countries for the sake of kin and religious unity. Qatar's national interest takes precedence over the needs of Arab and Islamic Southern Mediterranean countries. Moreover, it is at odds with Qatar's and Saudi's discourses of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. This profit-seeking rhetoric is also expressed in Sharif Shaba'an Mabrouk's report published in a monthly journal on GCC affairs, based in Saudi Arabia:

> Gulf investments go to strong places in Moroccan economy, those relating to the sectors of tourism, such as the creation and development of tourist resorts, hotels and apartments; on the other hand we cannot talk about the existence of a huge Gulf investment in the agriculture sector in Morocco in spite of the existence of the need to bridge the food gap, according to the British Economist Foundation the food import bill of the six Gulf states was estimated at 27 billion dollars in 2011. (Mabrouk 2016)

When talking about strong sectors of the economy, it is important to note that the GCC and the Mediterranean views are not necessarily the same. Mabrouk's article indicates that agriculture is not considered a strong sector of Morocco's economy. This, despite agriculture's accounting for about 13 percent of Morocco's GDP in 2016 (CIA 2017a).

However, profit-seeking tendencies among the GCC countries does not solely account for their inter-Arab relations. At times investments in Southern Mediterranean countries are regarded as a geopolitical imperative, rather than exclusively seeking economic agendas in the region. A case in point is the GCC's relations with Egypt. As far as agriculture and food are concerned, the GCC's relations with Egypt have been subject to more frequent ebbs and flows, resulting from Egypt's particular experience with the Arab Spring. Therefore, in the case of some GCC states, attention has

shifted from Egypt to other countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia regarding agriculture (Young 2016). After Sisi's ascendance to power, Egypt received generous financial aid from Saudi Arabia, but Egypt's actions in return, to the disappointment of the Saudis, fell short of their expectations. The reason for this, according to Mahmoud A. El-Gamal, is that for Egypt, geopolitical considerations take precedence over regional integration. Egypt's limited military support in the Yemen war and its unwillingness to send ground troops to the country in support of the Saudi-led military campaign there has decreased Saudi eagerness for huge investments in Egypt – a further indication that Saudi Arabia considers regional investments as a geopolitical phenomenon, rather than seeking purely economic agendas in the region (El-Gamal 2016: 7).

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has adopted an economic policy that encourages its investors to put more money into Sudan, aimed at exploitation of the Nile water to expand its agricultural projects. Egypt has found this investment disastrous and threatening to its water security because it affects its share of the Nile water resource. Apparently, what Saudi Arabia is seeking to achieve by expanding its presence, and investment, in countries like Sudan, Ethiopia and Mauritania is to multiply its ties in order to secure food by expanding agricultural production in countries that have a significant amount of water and land in the Nile Basin region. The more Saudi Arabia invests in the Nile Basin, the more Egypt's share from the Nile is subject to reduction. Whether this is a measure aimed at retaliation against Egypt is unclear, yet these developments in the context of agriculture and water suggest that political considerations due to rivalry in the Mediterranean exceed economic logic.

It is worth noting, however, that after a one-to-one meeting between King Salman and Sisi at the Arab League Summit, relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia envisaged improvement that could include more investments in agriculture and water in Egypt. Even before this rapprochement meeting, some influential voices in the GCC had suggested that overall, Egypt occupies a significant position among Arab countries and therefore cannot be neglected. Abdulrahman al-Rashed, a prominent Saudi columnist at Al Arabiya, states with regard to the GCC's grievances against Egypt that:

> As for allegations that Egypt is supplying rebels in Yemen with arms, I rule that out as Egypt is aware that this is a dangerous act as Houthis have killed Saudi civilians after they intentionally used their missiles to target cities and towns inside Saudi Arabia. All these narratives about relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia are being promoted by figures affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Some Iraqi parties' announcement that the government intends to supply Egypt with oil products to replace suspended Saudi oil shipments is not possible. It is difficult for Iraq to supply this because it does not have enough for its own use and it cannot continue to provide them for free. (Al-Rashed 2016)

As he continues:

> Saudi-Egyptian disputes are over bilateral issues and will end in agreement after a month or a year or they may not be resolved. Relations must not be left for compromise because they are strategic. It is wrong to believe that Egypt's position is out of solidarity when it supports Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries against Iran. Egypt's position against Iran serves Egypt's larger interests by preventing Iran from expanding and dominating in Syria, Iraq or the Gulf. (Al-Rashed 2016)

The tone is kind, intimate and brotherly. The text takes it for granted that Egypt "is aware of" the dangerous consequences and therefore should change its policy in this regard. Al-Rashed presumes Saudi Arabia as the big brother who can advise on what Egypt needs to do. Egypt is viewed as a brother who has made a mistake but can be forgiven out of the generosity of Saudi Arabia. However, the main implication in the text is that Egypt should be viewed through the lens of sectarian rivalry

between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood is blamed for the spreading of false accusations against Egypt, to tarnish its relation to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, once again geopolitical considerations, especially safeguarding security and identity, come to play a decisive role in framing the relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are in desperate need of investment in agriculture in different parts of the world (via land lease or ownership), especially in countries which are close enough to minimize the transportation costs. Although this sounds like a rational strategy, it causes suspicions of "land grabbing" as the terms and conditions of the land leases are unclear (Mahmoud 2016: 13). Besides, the investment is also subject to climate change in the overseas farmlands. Accordingly, as local criticism of these investments increases, like the 2012 attack on the Saudi Star farm in Ethiopia, focus has started to move away from the neighbouring countries and towards developed countries in order to expand agricultural connections while keeping the risk as low as possible. A case in point is the Saudi food company Almarai, which purchased ten thousand acres of farmland in the USA (Mahmoud 2016: 14). Therefore, relatively low agriculture and water investments by Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the Southern Mediterranean countries could also be attributed to the minimization of risk in the food industry (risk of both local attacks and climate change) in favour of investment in developed countries, a strategy that is boosted by the low cost of trade with Europe.

**4. Energy**

According to ESCWA, Arab funding bodies have made enormous contributions to the development of Arab regional integration, such as projects focusing on energy and modernization of communication systems, and the linking of water and road networks (ESCWA 2014: 43-44). Also, natural gas from Arab countries is mainly exported via three major pipelines: the Dolphin project, the Arab Gas Pipeline and the al-Ain-Fujairah gas pipeline. The Arab Gas Pipeline exports Egyptian natural gas to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. The other pipelines are designed for gas export among the GCC members. However, according to the Arab Monetary Fund, in 2015 only 2.7 percent of the MENA region's oil export destinations were other countries in Africa. Also, natural gas exports from Arab countries to Africa and the Middle East combined total 31.6 bcm while their export to Europe is 68.2, and to Asia and Pacific is 90.9 (Arab Monetary Fund 2016: 162-164). Thus, oil and gas exports of Arab countries to the GCC members and the Southern Mediterranean do not constitute a significant part of their total energy trade.

To further investigate the discourse and practices of the GCC states, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular, with regard to energy in Southern Mediterranean, we will examine the course of events following the Arab Spring and its generated narratives. In an interview with Al Arabiya in April 2016, Prince Mohammed bin Salman clarified Saudi Arabia's vision plan by stating that the country aims at putting an end to its dependence on oil by 2020 and turning the country into a global economy, by for example selling 5 percent of Aramco, the Saudi national gas and natural petroleum company, to investors. As he put it, "[w]e have a case of addiction to oil in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the part of everyone. That issue is serious. It disrupted the development of many sectors in the past years" (Al Arabiya 2016). As the predicate "addiction" implies, Saudi leaders regard the dependency on oil as a symptom that needs to be remedied – which, as an aside, is not dissimilar to Iran's current approach. This is read in line with the country's policy of self-reliance. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia is also interested in the use of renewable energy and plans to invest in this field, and to do so by attracting foreign investors. As the Vision Plan reads, the country "will work towards localizing renewable energy and industrial equipment sectors", and also towards "the gradual liberalization of the fuels market" (Saudi Government 2016: 44 and 49).

In a similar vein, as the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani recapitulates the country's plan:

> Our pursuit for economic diversification and reducing the dependence on oil and gas does not mean that we will not pay adequate attention to maintain and develop this sector, because this sector has enabled us to achieve growth rates during a period of fifteen years, which are among the highest growth rates in the world, and this growth is the one that helped to achieve qualitative leaps in all economic, human and social fields, and it will remain for a long time a major component of the GDP and a source of wealth used to expand the production base for future generations. (Qatar News Agency 2015)

As the term "dependence" indicates, Qatar's goal is to decrease reliance on oil while still developing the country's industrial base. He also emphasizes Qatar's cooperation in the GCC framework as well as with other Arab countries:

> I emphasize here on continuing our efforts with our brothers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to strengthen our collaboration at all political, economic, social, and security levels, and on developing the Council's action mechanisms, so as to be able to face the regional and global challenges and changes, and to achieve the interests of our peoples. We are also most keen to strengthen the fraternal relations with all brotherly Arab countries; which are desperately in need of unifying their ranks and positions and to deepen cooperation to cope with the risks and challenges they encounter. (Qatar News Agency 2015)

Once again, Qatar's discourse gives precedence to "Arab countries", which is also an indication of a tendency, at least in the discourse, towards collaboration among the countries based on Arab ties. This once again shows the hierarchy in Qatar's discourse, which is favourable towards the GCC and Arab countries.

As Qatar's and Saudi Arabia's vision plans show, a focus is placed on a decrease in reliance on oil and diversification of their economies. Nevertheless, the statistics indicate that oil and gas trade of the two countries with the Southern Mediterranean do not constitute a significant part of their total energy trade. With regard to renewable energy, reports show that Saudi Arabia plans to invest hugely in solar energy in countries such as Morocco and Egypt. Although these are promising propositions, what should be kept in mind is that historically economic cooperation between Saudi Arabia and countries of the Southern Mediterranean, such as Egypt, has been subject to geopolitical considerations. Such geopolitical realities as the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and later, during the Sisi presidency, the wars in Syria and Yemen, continue to dominate policy considerations. An example of how political considerations override economic logic is the case of Saudi oil exports to Egypt. Aramco, which suspended its export to Egypt in 2016 apparently as a consequence of Saudi Arabia's reaction against Egypt's vote in favour of a Russian resolution in Syria, has recently resumed its exports. Abdul Menhem Said, the director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, considered the resumption of Saudi petroleum shipments to Egypt as "a good sign for renewed Saudi-Egyptian understanding, after months of open disputes, especially on the Syrian issue. This delayed the transfer of ownership of the islands to the kingdom, angering Saudi Arabia and prompting it to suspend the shipments" (Gomaa 2017). This shows the vulnerability of energy relations among the GCC countries and the Southern Mediterranean, which could be subject to severe turbulence after a political dispute.

## 5. Migration

The GCC countries have over 17 million international workers who send home more than 80 billion dollars in remittances every year (Daily Sabah 2016). As such, the GCC countries were ranked third globally in terms of migration flows in 2013. Migrants accounted for more than 45 percent of their population in 2013, which is an increase from over 38 percent of their population in the 1990s. Of

the total number of migrants in the GCC countries in 2013, 22.5 percent (5,026,479) were from other Arab countries, most of them from Egypt (2,443,556). However, the majority of Southern Mediterranean migrants head to Europe (ESCWA and IOM 2015: 31). This is while, according to statistics, the rates of unemployment among youth are twice as high as overall unemployment rates in the GCC countries (World Economic Forum 2014: 6).

In such conditions, the GCC countries have taken resourceful measures, especially Saudi Arabia which has the largest population of all the countries of the GCC, with 30.4 percent youth (aged 15 to 24) unemployment in 2014 (CIA 2017b). One of the solutions adopted by Saudi Arabia is the replacement of foreign workers with Saudi nationals in the private sector, a policy known as the Saudization of the workforce. However, in reality the policy has failed to achieve its aim because many Saudis are either unwilling to do manual jobs or unable to do skilled technical jobs for which they are not qualified (Hertog 2010). Moreover, whereas the policy of Saudization aims at creating more job opportunities for native Saudis, it might backfire by inspiring a climate of instability where foreign investors who are settled in the country decide to leave. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is keen to point to a strategy in which the country encourages entrepreneurs to remain and invest further in the country. So far, this policy has mainly affected expats from Asian countries. However, considering the high number of Egyptians who work in Saudi Arabia, it is possible that the policy will apply to them also, especially since the Saudi vision plan aims at economic reforms including reduction of reliance on foreign expats and the assignment of these jobs to Saudi nationals, designed to curb the unemployment rate to 7 percent.

Moreover, another important issue in the context of migration is the Syrian refugee crisis. Despite the high incomes of the oil-rich Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and a common language and culture with Syrians, they have taken an insignificant number of Syrian refugees (Winter 2016). This stands at odds with Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's emphasis on brotherly relations between Arab and Muslim countries and their claim to support Syrian people as manifested in their discourse, which will be discussed further in the next section. In fact non-Muslim countries like Germany have been more welcoming and accepted far more Syrian asylum seekers than the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia.

Regarding the gender dimension of migration, Dr. Aicha El-Tayeb, a professor of sociology at the University of Dammam (Saudi Arabia), presented a paper at a conference Sixth Annual Conference on the Social Sciences and Humanities held in Doha in March 2017, titled "Migration of Arab Youth: Especially Young Arab Women". Noting the issue of young women joining terrorist groups such as ISIL, Dr. El-Tayeb pointed out that migration of Arab young women is a new phenomenon that is due to gender discrimination against women and economic conditions in their home countries. She also emphasized that the solution to the problem is through understanding the marginalization and the economic situation of women in these countries. Also, Marise Younes, a professor at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Lebanese University, in her paper "The Migration of Lebanese Women Workers to the Gulf States" mentioned that "[t]he economic situation and the deteriorating living conditions in Lebanon are among the most important reasons for the migration of Lebanese girls to the Gulf states". She added that the desire for self-reliance or achieving "self-stability" is another factor for the migration of Lebanese girls. She spoke about the difficulties faced by Lebanese immigrant women, notably the "difficulty of integration in the Gulf society" as well as "discrimination against women in the workplace", which leads to unequal opportunities for career development.

## 6. European Union

The EU and the GCC countries had a total trade in goods that amounted to 138.6 billion euros in 2016, helping the GCC rise to the fifth biggest trading partner of the EU and fourth most important export market, with exports of 100.8 billion euros (European Commission 2017). However, for about

20 years the negotiations between the EU and the GCC failed to bring about significant fruition with regard to a Free Trade Agreement. Yet, since the new millennium, economic and political earthquakes, such as the global financial crisis and the Arab Spring, have created new arenas of cooperation between the two sides. Thanks to their huge sovereign wealth funds, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been very attractive for EU members seeking a revival of their economy. Moreover, in the context of the Mediterranean, the Arab Spring, with its backlash in Syria, Libya and Egypt (Southern and Eastern Mediterranean), has created spaces for cooperation between the GCC and the EU, especially in matters related to security. One such arena of cooperation is the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative launched in 2004, which will be explored below.

Looking at the GCC Mediterranean relations from the perspective of Europe, it could be argued that most approaches and initiatives by the EU incline towards safeguarding the security and interests of European Union members, as in the case of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, whether on war against terrorism or immigration waves from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. The Mediterranean Dialogue which consists of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia was formed in 1994 with the aim of a mutual cooperation between the members of the Dialogue and NATO on regional security and stability. A decade later, in 2004, NATO leaders decided to expand this agreement to a broader scope to include some countries in the region that is called the "Middle East". The decision led to the formation of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which consists of Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia and Oman decided not to join but did not reject the invitation. The main goal and concerns of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative are to "contribute to regional security and stability" (NATO 2004). The enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue, as the Initiative is also known, requires bilateral cooperation and activities including:

1 tailored advice on defence transformation, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations;

2 military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance; and through participation in selected NATO and PfP exercises and in NATO-led operation on a case-by-case basis;

3 cooperation in the fight against terrorism, including through intelligence-sharing;

4 cooperation in the Alliance's work on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery;

5 cooperation regarding border security in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons and the fight against illegal trafficking;

6 civil emergency planning, including participating in training courses and exercises on disaster assistance. (NATO 2011)

As all six items indicate, the focus on the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue is on security issues: defence, fight against terrorism and weapons. The emphasis on security issues as the main concern of Qatar in its cooperation with the GCC is a reiterative theme that can also be highlighted in occasion of the "NATO Workshop on Cooperation in the Framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative" held in 2010 in Qatar: "Qatar and other GCC countries have a leading role to play, along with NATO, in dealing with burning issues like Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran's nuclear programme, a top official of the military alliance said in Doha" (Mathew 2010, see also Bisogniero 2010).

**7. How Do the GCC Countries See the EU's Role in the Mediterranean?**

In a conference held in 2013 in Sudan's capital Khartoum, Mohammad Jamal Al-Deen Mazloum from Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia delivered a paper entitled "The

Future Visions and International Partnerships: Towards a Future Arab Strategy Within the Framework of International Partnerships (Neighbouring Countries)". In his paper, Dr. Mazloum provided a summary analysis of the EU's role in the Mediterranean:

- *European interests with the Arab states*: (1) that the achievement of stability in the Arab region embodies an important element in attaining security on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and preventing threats such as smuggling and illegal migration; (2) that political relations between the two sides should be based on the element of consensus; (3) in the economic field [Arab world] is a wide market for various European products, especially industrial ones; (4) A supplier of raw and primary materials, especially petroleum and other raw materials.

- *European motives for partnership with Arab countries*: (1) geographical proximity to the Arab countries; (2) shared interests with Arab countries (economic and political); (3) guaranteeing the import of raw materials, especially oil and gas; (4) large [Arab world] market which is close to 400 million people.

- *European aspirations in the Arab region*: (1) that the entire Arab region become an area of influence for the European Union; (2) making use of the strategic location of the Arab states and controlling the channels and waterways; (3) to strengthen political and economic ties between the Arab countries and the EU; (4) procurement of energy and raw materials; (5) use the Arab region as a region and a jumping off point to other regions.

- *What Arab States gained from partnership with Europe*: (1) support Arab positions towards the crises experienced in the region, in the international forums; (2) opening European markets to Arab products; (3) supplying Arab countries with advanced technology; (4) an opportunity for the export of skilled and specialized labour to European countries, which has special returns for those states [European states], especially since the Arab states on the Mediterranean coast are labour-exporting countries.

As Mazloum indicates, Europe operates with an instrumental view of the Arab Mediterranean, which it regards as a "jumping off point" for other parts of the world. As mentioned in the text above, ensuring the supply of raw materials and energy holds particular importance for European countries. Moreover, their interest in keeping the Arab Mediterranean secure lies in their concern with trafficking and illegal immigration resulting from insecurity and instability in the region. On the other hand, a prevalent perspective is held by the Arab states that proximity to the European Union ought to improve their position in their respective regions, as well as on the international stage. In addition, partnership with Europe grants them access to European markets and modern technology. Also, this proximity opens the doors to the European labour market for their workforce.

The EU and GCC have similar views in many cross-regional issues. They cooperated in Afghanistan, have a similar stance regarding Iran's nuclear programme and share common concerns in Syria. However, cooperation with regard to the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean mainly concerns different security aspects, such as war against terrorist organizations or tackling the issue of migration from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. Indeed, there are hurdles in the way of expanding the cooperation to include important issues such as promotion of good governance and economic growth in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. These obstacles include the EU raising human rights concerns, which is usually faced with rejection by the states (Colombo 2014: 133-134), authoritarian political systems of the GCC states which tend to resist pressures for reform, and falling oil prices with their backlash on the Gulf states. All these decrease the possibility of constructive tripartite cooperation between the EU, the GCC and the Mediterranean.

**Conclusion**

It is important to keep in mind that Saudi Arabia and Qatar are hereditary monarchies in which political power and decision making are in the hands of groups of individuals and institutions firmly controlled by members of the ruling families and their associates. However, both states have created consultative bodies with some supervisory powers. The councils are appointed by the rulers and have limited advisory role. Therefore, when considering the multi-actor lever of analysis it is noteworthy that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have insignificant civil society participation in governance. Moreover, the rulers, King Salman of KSA and Emir Tamim of Qatar, have the ultimate say in the determination of national policy. In Saudi Arabia the monarch has vested enormous power in his son, the Vice Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who not only oversees the operations of the country's state oil company, but has also initiated the most radical economic reform programme of the Kingdom, known as the Vision Plan 2030. The implementation of V2030 is not under the jurisdiction of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who might have been expected to manage the programme. In Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, the former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs who was once perceived as the country's second most powerful individual, lost his posts of prime minister, foreign minister and head of the Qatar Investment Authority after Emir Hamad bin Khalifa abdicated in favour of his son the crown prince. The absence of institutional clarity and ambiguity in the division of responsibility in many instances means that one is never clear how much influence each actor (apart from the monarchs) has in the process of decision making. This consolidation of power into the hands of a few, together with the dynamics of an oil- and gas-based rentier economy that encourages a rent-seeking behaviour among the ranks of the political system, gives Saudi and Qatari leaders a self-image of the providing father – a self-perception which is compatible with a system of patrimonial, modernizing autocracies. Also, this self-representation is accompanied with a sense of purpose and mission towards the Arab and Muslim worlds, which is evident in the leaders' discourse. This perspective then presumes the other Arab states and nations as "younger brothers" which need to be provided for and guided by the "wise fathers". Thus, although they are similar in terms of religion, culture and political system, Saudi Arabia and Qatar compete hard for geopolitical advantage in the Arab and Muslim worlds including the Arab Mediterranean region, as both assume a father figure role.

The EU as a normative power would like to export its model to the Mediterranean. In terms of economic organization this model takes the form of liberalization, while in the socio-political sphere it signals democratization and in the socio-political area it involves respect for human rights and the upholding of such values as equality for ethnic/religious minorities and gender equality. Likewise, Saudi Arabia tends to spread its norms not only to the Mediterranean but also to the Muslim world. These norms are those of Wahhabism and Salafism that emphasize implementation of Sharia. Saudi Arabia does not give credit to the EU's version of human rights. Issues such as gender equality are not given any significance in Saudi discourse, and democratization is not part of its value system. However, the GCC countries including Saudi Arabia do not stand against economic liberalization in the Mediterranean, because they also can benefit from the results of a free market economy. Saudi Arabia recognizes that investment opportunities can be better exploited in the Mediterranean countries in the context of a deregulated market framework.

The EU's rhetoric and discourse towards the Mediterranean has undergone a shift from the use of the term "the Mediterranean" following the Barcelona Process to "the southern neighbourhood" in the 2000s, and then towards the "surrounding regions" (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 4-5). After the rise of new threats in the neighbours of the Mediterranean, i.e., war and civil crisis in Syrian and Libya and the flow of refugees to Europe, the EU's priority changed and it began to regard its southern neighbourhood as its "surrounding region", technically consisting of vulnerable countries that could not deal with their own problems and would need the EU's direct help and intervention. Consequently, the Israel–Palestine conflict, which was once the most important security concern for the EU vis-à-vis the Arab Mediterranean space, was replaced by the new threats from the area that

is now referred to as the surrounding region. This in turn has underlined the previous EU approach towards treating the Mediterranean as a region. In a similar vein, engaged countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar have also played their part in changing the political and social environment in the Mediterranean. Their interventions have been piecemeal and localized, driven by their strategic interests which have required deep involvement in the Arab countries of the Mediterranean. Their involvement therefore has checked any efforts to create region-building efforts in the Mediterranean space, thus contributing to the fragmentation of the Mediterranean space and its "regionality". The near absence of the Palestine question from Mediterranean discourses and Arab concerns about national security following 9/11, the rise of al-Qaeda, war in Iraq and finally the Arab Spring have meant that the historical and emotional glue for regional Arab action has been weakened to such as extent that neither the GCC nor the EU is putting its energies behind the resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict. In fact, both regional organizations are more concerned with Syria. For the EU it about the flow of refugees and related violence, while for Saudi Arabia the most urgent security matter in the context of the Mediterranean is its rivalry with Iran. This is why as the rhetoric of Saudi Arabia towards Iran is getting tougher and stronger, references to Palestine and the Palestinian–Israeli issue in its discourse are fading. This sense of insecurity is generated due to the possible future return of the Muslim Brotherhood in countries such as Egypt.

Not dissimilar to the EU, which has a hierarchy of priorities, descending from the EU countries to its "near abroad" and then the rest of the world, Saudi Arabia and Qatar too have developed a strong order of priorities in their international engagements. For them the GCC countries are the closest circle, followed by the Arab region, the wider Muslim world, and then the rest of world. The discourse and practices of Saudi Arabia and Qatar show that these countries see the Mediterranean region as fragmented and contested, which is in fact a view shared by the EU. The discourses and practices of these countries do not help boost regionalization in the Mediterranean. Consequently, such attempts at regionalization as the UfM or the Maghreb Union have not been successful. From a layered multi-level perspective, the conduct of these countries in post-Arab Spring situations in Yemen, Libya and Syria demonstrates that Saudi Arabia and Qatar would like the GCC to take the lead role in managing and addressing the regional problems in MENA. With regard to other regional organizations in the Arab and Islamic world (the Arab League, OIC, Organization of Arab Exporting Petroleum Countries-OAPEC, and others), Qatar and Saudi Arabia would prefer such multilateral bodies to work closely with the GCC sub-regional organization and thus bring their own influence to bear on these major bodies. They prefer the GCC to complement these entities and influence their workings and thus avoid tensions and competitive pressures. The behaviour of the two countries within the framework of the GCC regarding the Arab League, OIC, OPEC and OAPEC are examples of their attempts to keep the leading role for the GCC.

Going forward, there is considerable overlap in perspectives on the Mediterranean. Both the EU and the GCC want political stability to be returned to the Arab region and would like to see the implementation of the Abdullah Plan (land for peace) and of the two-state solution. Both have similar concerns about Syria, violence in the Levant, the stability of Libya and erosion of central control at the heart of the Maghreb.

With regard to the policy area of water and agriculture, food security is a major concern of the GCC countries as agricultural land is limited and water resources are under pressure. In order to guarantee their food supply, they need to import agricultural products from around the world. Therefore, as a measure to overcome their concern, they have invested mainly in agriculture (by leasing or buying farmland) in other countries. However, the GCC's investments in food production in such Mediterranean countries as Egypt and Morocco are considerably less than their investments in the Red Sea countries of Ethiopia and Sudan. Moreover, the GCC states are acutely aware of their food investments in the Mediterranean being affected by political disputes, as shown in the tensions between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over Syria, Yemen, and the Tiran and Sanafir islands. On the policy area of energy and migration, the integration between the GCC and the Arab Mediterranean is not

very significant. For example the major oil and gas customers of the GCC are outside the region, and the population of migrants in the GCC are mainly from South and East Asia – the exception being Egypt whose nationals constitute a considerable number of immigrants in the GCC. Migrants from other Southern Mediterranean countries, apart from Egypt, tend to head for Europe rather than the GCC.

The EU does not share Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's priorities in terms of access to agricultural land in the Mediterranean, and in fact competes with the Southern Mediterranean countries in key agricultural products. With regard to energy, the EU's path diverges from that of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The more emphasis the EU places on imports from North Africa, the less market space is likely to remain for Qatar's natural gas exports and Saudi Arabia's oil exports. With the GCC countries very keen to develop their downstream presence in Europe for greater market access, they will be motivated to use such investments to safeguard their long-term market presence in the EU. For the EU, however, access to the rich deposits of Algeria, Libya, and of course the emerging gas giants of the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus and Palestine) is a priority, which turns the focus of its energy providers to the Southern Mediterranean.

Both sides show concern for the humanitarian crisis unfolding across the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, but their approaches are rather different, as indeed are the consequences of the flow of migrants. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are keen to invest in refugee centres in the Levant and have resisted mass migration to their countries. The EU, on the other hand, has been confronted with massive refugee inflows that have to be accommodated on its territory. There does not seem to be a coordinated approach to handing this humanitarian crisis.

A recognition of their shared interest in the stability of the Mediterranean region, common interest in combating terrorism and the defeat of ISIS, as well as realization of the two-state solution should provide sufficient basis on which to build a broader mutually beneficial relationship, but this can only happen if the two GCC countries under discussion show willingness to change their current priorities in the Mediterranean in search of a collective approach to regional security. That could happen with EU encouragement, and progress being made on the EU–GCC dialogue.

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**Notes**

1. The documents include key speeches by leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the countries' vision plans, newspaper articles, research papers, journal papers and other documents in line with the concept paper of the Work Package 2 (WP2) of MEDRESET project (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016).

2. The first instance of redefinition came after the 1979 revolution in Iran, when the Kingdom defined its identity as "Sunni" vis-à-vis "Shiite" Iran.

3. During his electoral campaign, Mohamed Morsi stated that "The Koran is our constitution, the Prophet Muhammad is our leader, jihad is our path, and death for the sake of Allah is our most lofty aspiration" (as quoted in Darwich 2016: 481).

4. For more on Al Jazeera and its coverage orientation, see Zweiri and Murphy (2011).

**6 TURKEY**

**Turkey, the EU and the Mediterranean: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects**

*Aybars Görgülü and Gülşah Dark*

**Introduction**

Regions are constructed as entities to organize place and people. This construction can emerge on and evolve around common interests or simply be dictated by political powers. The Mediterranean region is one of the oldest constructions of humankind. The first river valley areas of civilization grew towards one another and fused into a larger civilized block which eventually reached the Mediterranean Sea and thereby gave the rise to an early and extraordinary development of commerce and urbanization. The rise of Ancient Greece and Rome is usually depicted as a slight jump from the main agrarian threshold to a somewhat more elevated supra-threshold of the "precocious maritime civilizations" of Mediterranean Antiquity. This jump in the livelihood of humanity is exceptional, not only because of its forward momentum, but because of its impact on the creation of world civilization. The major role played by the Mediterranean Basin in the rise of philosophy, art and science was directly linked the region's success in creating a mosaic of mutually influencing societies and cultures. Thus, the Mediterranean has existed as a region during most of the human journey and has hosted numerous kingdoms, empires, city-states, nation-states and other forms of statehood. One of them was the Ottoman Empire, centred in the present-day Turkey, which controlled vast lands around the Mediterranean Basin under its sovereignty and served as a junction point between the East and the West for about six centuries.

In our day, the multifaceted interaction triggered by the Mediterranean region continues to reverberate within world politics as the region represents a cultural, economic and religious bridge between the Middle East and North Africa and the European Union (EU). The EU, being by far the most complex and advanced form of political union at the supra-national level, has a direct and transformative impact on the Mediterranean region. The critical question that begs an answer is to what extent the EU's policies still match the changing geopolitical configuration of the Mediterranean. To answer this question, it is crucial to examine the role, influence and impact on the Mediterranean of the rising powers and stakeholders, in particular regional powers such as Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and global powers like China, Russia and the United States (US).

To contribute to this larger effort, this paper will focus on the changing role and influence of Turkey in the Mediterranean region and analyse to what extent the Mediterranean exists as a region in Turkey's foreign policy.

By the same token, the paper will also examine whether Turkey's policies are conflicting, competing or overlapping with the EU's policies, and review geopolitically relevant and contentious policy areas under four categories: energy, migration and mobility, agriculture and water, and political ideas.

To provide answers, the article systematically follows the debates on the Mediterranean from Turkey's perspective through a methodological approach built on the discourse analysis approach put forward by Jennifer Milliken (1999). The methodology employed in this paper will allow us to identify "dominating or hegemonic discourses" as well as the "subjugated knowledges" and "resistance to dominating discourses" (Milliken 1999: 230, 244).

To this end, we have assembled a collection of relevant sources as a base from which to investigate Turkey's discourse on the Mediterranean, including official and policy documents, key speeches by governmental leaders as well as a review of the existing literature available in scholarly books and articles on Mediterranean geopolitics in both Turkish and English.[1]

The overall structure of the article takes the form of four sections, starting with the current introduction section followed by the second part focusing on how Turkey's discourse on the region has evolved since the early 2000s. This section will also introduce the oppositions, exclusions and silences in Turkey's policies, while comparing them with those of the EU. The paper will continue with the key policy ideas mentioned above to define Turkey's priority areas and end with a conclusion section.

**1. Turkey and the Mediterranean at a Glance**

Turkey borders the Mediterranean Sea with over 4,000 km of coastline and is historically linked to this area.[2] Although Turkey is one of the key Mediterranean countries, it has never been fully involved in the Mediterranean politics as constructed by the EU and has thus kept a low profile in Euro-Mediterranean affairs. Similarly, relations with the Mediterranean region have never been a topic of priority in Turkey's foreign policy, however the region has strongly existed in the political rhetoric due not only to its Ottoman past but also to its current strategic importance.

Being geographically close to the EU, Turkey has been under the influence of several Mediterranean policies of the Union including the Global Mediterranean Policy (1972), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), the Southeast Europe Stability Pact (1999), the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (2004) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004). Turkey has been involved in these initiatives with different levels of interest. However, its participation in the abovementioned forums has never guaranteed a high degree of convergence between Turkey's foreign policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the Union, especially when the political and security dimensions of the initiatives were weakly developed. However, a habit of dialogue has been established between these two sides and this has created a favourable ground for rapprochement.

Before proceeding to introduce a more detailed look at Turkey–EU relations with a specific focus on the Mediterranean Basin, it is important to understand Turkey's official policy discourse on the region in the recent decades, which is discussed in the following section.

*1.1 Framing Turkey's Discourse on the Mediterranean under the AKP Administration*

Compared to the limited efforts in the post-Cold War period, Turkey's foreign policy on the Mediterranean region has gone through a re-orientation with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002, which offered it a new dimension in its official political discourse. The AKP's perspective on the Mediterranean Basin has been largely shaped during the term in office of former Foreign Minister (and later Prime Minister) Ahmet Davutoğlu, an important name in conceptualizing Turkey's foreign policy as one of "zero problems with neighbours."

In his address at the meeting of the Political Committee of the Euro–Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in Istanbul, Davutoğlu articulated Turkey's strategy towards the region with following words: "Turkey wants the resolution of all conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Cyprus' and it wants the region to reemerge as the center of trade, politics, and culture as it used to be in the past" (cited in Altunışık 2011:16). In this conceptualization, the Eastern Mediterranean appears to have a central role, with an emphasis on contributing to peace, cooperation and stability in this specific territory and also the wider region.

Turkey's political engagement of the Mediterranean Basin was earlier addressed by then Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Gül, who put forward a relevant point for Turkey's role identity. In one of his speeches in 2004, he stated that Turkey cannot be defined in terms of a single geographic region,

and instead it has a geostrategic location, which constitutes an intersection point of continents and basins (Gül 2007: 68).

It could be argued that Turkey began to show much clearer foreign policy interests in the region starting from this period, and took the European integration project "as an example for encouraging greater economic, political and social integration as a vehicle to achieve greater stability" in its neighbourhood (Kirişçi 2013: 23).

On this point, Turkey's inclusion in platforms such as the US-backed Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative, which was set up in 2008 by the G-8 countries, is relevant to our discussion of Turkey's efforts in contributing to reform and transformation in the region. It might also support the argument that aside from the EU, Turkey's response to the region was also under the influence of the US-led initiatives.

This initiative was launched as a multilateral development and reform plan, which aims to foster economic and political liberalization in a wide geographic area of Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries. Introducing itself not as a model but as a possible "inspiration" for the region (Sever 2007: 77), Turkey initially put forward four stages, which define its discourse on the BMENA, as follows: "proactive involvement in securing BMENA as a soft power", "Turkey as 'de-securitizer', and [having] 'zero problems with the neighbors'", "Turkey as a 'regional protector' of BMENA" and "Turkey as […] an 'integrative power'" (Erşen 2014: 100).

Turkey's emphasis on improving regional cooperation and dialogue in the Mediterranean has also continued in the post-Arab Spring period, as will be further analysed in the following sections. In an article in the *Turkish Policy Quarterly* magazine, Turkey's incumbent Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu draws attention to the High-Level Cooperation Councils, which have been formed with nine countries from the MENA region:

> The time has come for the people of the region to rise above ethnic, religious, and ideological differences and to find a way to invest in the common good. […] The High Level Cooperation Councils […] were designed to serve specifically this purpose. So far, we have had 14 joint cabinet meetings and signed 181 agreements with the countries of the region to facilitate the free flow of goods, services, and people. (Çavuşoğlu 2015: 25)

Although Turkey's efforts on the Mediterranean Basin have not resulted in establishing a policy framework similar to the EU's, which is examined in the next section, it would not be wrong to claim that it has adopted several "political, diplomatic, and economic means to transform Turkey's relations with the countries in the region and to increase Turkish influence in this major geostrategic area" (Altunışık 2011: 19).

*1.2 A Comparative Look at Turkey's Mediterranean Policies*

Despite the abovementioned efforts, Turkey's lack of a comprehensive vision on the Mediterranean region introduces certain challenges when comparing its approach with that of the EU, which has also its deficiencies. From a practical perspective, Turkey has maintained its stance of "view[ing] the Mediterranean at the periphery of different regions" (Altunışık 2011: 19), while ruling out conceptualizing it as a political entity, as the EU does.

The chronic problems of Turkey's foreign policy, like the Cyprus question and the relations with Greece over the Aegean Sea, are also Mediterranean issues. However, Turkey has treated them as distinct foreign policy hurdles rather than a part of its regional Mediterranean policy. In other words, Turkey's foreign policy has preferred to deal with the issues on the Mediterranean separately instead of constructing a single and unified Mediterranean policy. Turkey's foreign policy decisions towards the Mediterranean have been generally influenced by the EU membership process, the Cyprus question, the relations with Greece and the conflicts of the Middle East. The lack of a broad

definition of the Mediterranean region in Turkey's strategic thinking paved the way for its perception that the region has separate dynamics including the Middle East, Greece and Cyprus, the Balkans, and Europe. This picture also confirms that the notion of the Mediterranean is primarily considered, in Turkey's geopolitical thinking, in relation to the Eastern Mediterranean which hosts numerous security concerns as well as economic opportunities vital to Turkey's national interest.

Furthermore, Turkey's relations with the Euro-Mediterranean initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) introduce another dimension on why its Mediterranean policies are not entirely on the same page with the EU's. Among these initiatives, one of the most important, the Euro-Mediterranean process (EUROMED or the Barcelona Process), was created in 1995 in order to establish a framework for sustainable and institutional cooperation between the EU and the non-member Mediterranean countries. This process has been replaced by the UfM with the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Paris in 2008. The Union for the Mediterranean aims to strengthen the Barcelona Process and envisages cooperation in a wide range of fields including de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, cooperation in maritime and land transport, civil protection, alternative energies and the strengthening of employment opportunities.

Following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, where Turkey assumed candidate status, it supported the ENP and the EMP, implementing the ENP instruments for its domestic political and economic reforms. However, Turkey has had a cautious approach toward the UfM among other Mediterranean-centred foreign policy initiatives. Since the creation of the European Economic Community, Turkey has targeted full integration to Europe and has thus had reservations about alternative political unions that could damage its full accession. Indeed, Nicolas Sarkozy, then French presidential candidate and the mastermind behind the UfM, stated his opposition to Turkey's entrance into the EU in his 2007 speech in Toulon, and pointed that the UfM can be an alternative to Turkey's accession to the EU (Sarkozy 2007). From the EU's side, this could be described as "an identity-construction exercise identifying/fixing the EU's borders and underlining who is to be left out because of non-European characteristics" (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 6).

In response, Egemen Bağış, the former chief foreign policy adviser to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was serving as Turkey's Prime Minister at that time, said in a telephone interview, "This [UfM] cannot be an alternative to Turkish membership in the EU" (Bennhold 2007). Turkey's reflection on this issue also lies beneath the country's indifferent position vis-à-vis EUROMED. Despite Turkey's low interest in EUROMED and similar initiatives, there exist strong collaboration opportunities between Turkey and the EU on Mediterranean issues.

As for other points of divergence between Turkey's perception of the Mediterranean region and that of the EU, mobility and economic interests appear to have a particular role. As the European Stability Initiative (ESI) reports, the negotiations for visa-free travel between the EU and Turkey began in late 2013, when Turkey accepted the EU's roadmap for a visa-free travel regime and signed a readmission agreement with the EU.[3] However, as the ESI further indicates, the fact that Turkey still remains the only EU candidate whose citizens are obliged to obtain a visa before being allowed to enter an EU country, has become a major source of frustration for Turkey. In a statement given in 2011 by Egemen Bağış, Turkey's Minister of EU Affairs, he noted, "The time when Turkish people feel least European is when they wait in line for a visa" (Turkish Forum 2011).

The lengthy debate on visa-free travel between the EU and Turkey has led Turkey's government to revise its visa policies for the Middle Eastern and North Africa countries. "In contrast to the EU's failure to adopt policies encouraging such 'contacts', Turkey's visa policies have encouraged an explosion in the number of people entering Turkey from its neighbourhood" (Kirişçi 2013: 211-212). Following the visa lift for Morocco and Tunisia, Turkey signed agreements with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria in 2009 and 2010 for visa-free travel. At the Fifth Arab-Turkish Forum in June 2010, Davutoğlu, who was then serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that Syria, Turkey and Lebanon

will be declared free-trade areas and underlined the significance of free movement of people (Milliyet 2010, Kirişçi 2013: 212).

Another area where Turkey's policies differ conspicuously from EU policies is with respect to democracy promotion. Turkey's foreign policy has refrained from adopting the rhetoric of "democracy promotion", employing instead a noninterventionist approach due to its close relations with authoritarian regimes in its larger neighbourhood and its concerns about the internal stability within its own borders (Aydın-Düzgit and Keyman 2014).

Therefore, Turkey has not introduced an "institutionalized democracy assistance policy" like that of the EU, yet is increasingly involved in activities that promote democracy at both governmental and civil society level (Kirişçi 2010: 14). In this respect, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) could be given as a relevant example. Established in 1992, TİKA has carried out projects in numerous areas such as education, health, infrastructure and women's empowerment, aimed at disadvantaged communities in a wide geographic scope including the Middle East and Africa. According to the 2014 TİKA annual report, Yemen was among TİKA's top beneficiaries with around 6 million dollars, mostly directed towards the health and education sector. In Tunisia, by contrast, TİKA has largely invested in administrative and civil infrastructure followed by social and economic infrastructure services, as the report further demonstrates. With respect to the Syrian crisis, Turkey has also spent around 25 billion dollars to assist and shelter refugees since the onset of the civil war (Sarıoğlu 2016).

Turkey's deployment of "soft power" is a consistent part of its foreign policy discourse, being frequently mentioned by the government itself. "In this understanding, Turkey, home to over 3 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees, is currently carrying out humanitarian and development aid activities and undertaking thousands of projects in more than 140 countries", stated President Erdoğan in his speech at the 2016 Humanitarian World Summit held in Istanbul (Turkish Presidency 2016).

Overall, it would be difficult to deny the overlap between the declared objectives of the EU and Turkey with respect to the neighbourhood policy, which is to "achieve greater integration with their geographic neighbors in order to foster a friendly, peaceful, stable and prosperous neighborhood" (Kirişçi 2011: 33).

**2. The Role of Key Policy Areas in Turkey's Discourse on the Mediterranean**

Having discussed the major themes of Turkey's official discourse on the Mediterranean and how it differs from that of the EU, we now turn to the four key policy areas: migration, energy and industry, agriculture and water, and political ideas with regard to the Mediterranean. This section sets out to ascertain Turkey's priorities in these areas and how it correspondingly constructs the EU's role in the region.

*2.1 The Refugee and Migration Crisis*

The escalating migration crisis since 2015 and the influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries as well as Europe continue to cause tensions, as the world is facing one of the most serious humanitarian tragedies of its recent past. The massive number of refugees poses major challenges that cannot be underestimated.

This year alone, more than a million people crossed the Mediterranean to Europe as migrants or refugees in search of a safe and better life. In addition to thousands of deaths on the way, this massive influx of people sparked a crisis in Europe by creating serious divisions in the EU. This humanitarian tragedy required a rapid response but the resettlement of the migrants has become a topic of discord among the Member States. Greece has been the most affected Member State and Turkey, a candidate country, has acted as the guardian of the Union's borders and forms a natural buffer zone between the migrants and the EU.

Since the onset of the migrant crisis, refugees have travelled towards Europe using both overland and maritime routes, making several stopovers on their way. The EU Network on International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion (IMISCOE) identifies six categories of countries (Düvell and Pastore 2008) that are involved in transit migration:

- country of origin;

- countries that are stage posts along the road (e.g. Russia, Yemen, Mauretania, Senegal, Mali);

- stepping stone to the EU (e.g. Ukraine, Serbia, Turkey, Libya, Morocco);

- first EU country (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Spain);

- EU countries that are passed en route (e.g. Austria, Germany, France); and

- final country of destination in the EU, North America or elsewhere.

In Europe's typology, Turkey holds a very special place as being by far the biggest steppingstone country to the EU. As of February 2017, Turkey is hosting 2,910,281 registered Syrian refugees.[4] In addition to the registered refugees, Turkey also hosts more than a million unregistered refugees mostly coming from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, Turkey is hosting the largest refugee population in the world, ahead of both Lebanon and Pakistan (European Commission 2017c). In some border cities like Kilis, the refugee population even exceeds the local population.

As a transit country, Turkey describes wars, conflicts, human rights violations and economic deprivation as "push factors" of irregular migration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that economic and political instabilities in its neighbouring regions pose a significant challenge for Turkey's migration policy, which has been clearly seen in the Syrian crisis.[5] With the rising number of people fleeing the conflict, Turkey's policymakers have "re-evaluated migration systems [to] create a more comprehensive migration and asylum policy" (Kilberg 2014) and in 2013 adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which is a crucial step in managing legal and irregular migration to Turkey.

Here it is also important to note Turkey's criticism of the EU at an official level, urging it to adopt a more coordinated strategy against the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. In another article in the *Turkish Policy Quarterly* magazine in 2016, Foreign Affairs Minister Çavuşoğlu said: "The global response to this humanitarian catastrophe has not been quick enough or comprehensive enough to help alleviate the suffering. The EU countries are deeply divided on the refugee crisis and lack a concerted and coordinated approach to their migration and asylum policies" (Çavuşoğlu 2016: 18).

In an attempt to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU, an agreement was put into force between Turkey and the EU on 20 March 2016. According to the deal, Turkey would accept one refugee from the Greek Islands who used Turkey as the route to Europe; in exchange, a Syrian asylum seeker in Turkey would find a home in Europe. From the EU side, the selection criteria for the asylum seekers were quite vague. As for Turkey, visa-free travel for Turkish citizens was the big prize for taking back refugees and economic migrants from Europe. Besides being problematic from the human rights perspective, the deal had many shortcomings and it soon became clear that its full-scale implementation would never be possible. Therefore, the Turkey–EU migration deal did not ultimately succeed and only 6,907 Syrian refugees were relocated from Turkey to the EU within its mandate (European Commission 2017a and 2017b). Despite this, improving cooperation with Turkey on the refugee crisis remains a priority for the EU.

The EU–Turkey refugee deal was critical to stop the ongoing tragic human loss at sea. On the other hand, the moment the deal came into force, all refugees were already held in detention centres in Greece. The ones in the camps were unable to leave the Greek islands or forced to live under very difficult conditions. The islands were not designed as refugee camps and lacked basic needs including medical care, hygiene and nutrition (Dimitriadi 2016). In other words, the humanitarian

tragedy of the refugees did not end but took another form. The Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Europe describes the situation as follows: "The EU-Turkey deal has been a disaster for the thousands who have been left stranded in a dangerous, desperate and seemingly endless limbo on the Greek islands" (Amnesty International 2017).

A year later, the deal between the EU and Turkey has decreased the flow of migrants into Europe. However, this is definitely not a final solution and tens of thousands of refugees are currently stuck in camps and suffering from trauma and depression due to the harsh conditions. In addition to the existing asylum seekers stuck in Europe, the failure of the EU–Turkey refugee deal can generate new phases of migrant influx to Europe. Moreover, the lack of similar agreements between the EU and the countries of Northern Africa complicates the situation even more and Europe may face a new wave of migrant crises in the months to come.

A recently published report on the migration routes suggests that migration flows change their routes primarily in relation to the policies implemented by the EU (Alexandridis and Dalkıran 2017). The changing of routes pushes migrants to use alternative routes which might increase the number of causalities. It should be also noted that Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, shows unwillingness to conduct search and rescue operations. This is another reason for the increased number of casualties in the Mediterranean. It is quite clear that Turkey–EU collaboration on the Mediterranean/Aegean migration crisis is a must. However, the lack of policy as well as the determination on the EU side to find a sustainable solution to the refugee influx creates more complications as the problem requires immediate solutions. It seems that externalizing the problem is so far the best option found by the European leaders after several inadequate attempts on the part of Brussels to resettle refugees among the Member States. The EU–Turkey refugee deal, despite its shortcomings, is an example of the sort of good opportunity that could save the lives of thousands who will try to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, and end the miseries of thousands more who are stuck in detention centres in Greece as well as in the Balkans.

*2.2 Energy Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean*

Leaving aside the growing migration crisis, energy security and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean is another agenda item where Turkey and the EU interact to create collaboration and trade opportunities. Despite certain challenges, the natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have created a new regional status quo where the Mediterranean countries have been somehow forced to engage in more communication and collaboration to create beneficial trade ties.

International energy politics is a tough field where producing and consumer countries, neighbouring states and multinational companies compete to get the deal that will best promote their interests. Regional energy cooperation on the other hand entails a process of balance formed by the interaction and behaviour of these agents. Significant natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean affect the economic, political and security dynamics in the region. As the fastest growing source of energy in the world, natural gas has an increasing role in Mediterranean politics, and energy development and transportation issues determine the nature of interstate relations in the region.

The discoveries in the Levant Basin, especially in Leviathan, Tamar and Cyprus-A, have introduced a new game of energy politics. This basin spans offshore territories that include the Gaza Strip, Israel, Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria.[6] The proven offshore gas deposits in Israel and Cyprus have the potential to end both countries' dependence on energy import (Sartori et al. 2016). In addition, these new resources have the capacity to supply the natural gas needs of the Mediterranean region and Eastern Europe, which is still highly dependent on gas imports.

Turkey's increasing appetite for more energy resources puts the country in a precarious situation. Securing energy is essential for Turkey's sustained economic growth which in turn underpins the

country's political stability. Despite the fact that Turkey's dependence on energy is mostly derived from fossil fuel, Turkey is a hydrocarbon-resource-poor country and thus a net importer of oil and natural gas. Turkey has been making efforts to overcome this deficiency by trying to evolve into a major transit hub for hydrocarbon energy sources, connecting big consumer markets in Europe to supplier regions surrounding Turkey, including the Middle East, the Caspian Region and Central Asia. Similarly, Turkey's aspiration to become an energy hub has been voiced more strongly than ever as a governmental objective in the past couple of years. Despite this ambitious objective, Turkey lacks necessary infrastructure to become an energy hub.

Ukraine, which is very well suited to serve as both an energy hub and transit country, has an average gas storage capacity of 36.1 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas whereas Turkey's capacity is only 2.7 bcm. It should be noted that the storage capacity of a country is directly related to its natural gas reserves because the gas is best stored in the already consumed natural gas reservoirs. Since Turkey lacks significant gas reserves, its storage capacity is limited. In the past, Russian Gazprom was eager to invest in Turkey to build large storage reservoirs to regulate the gas to be exported to Europe; however, the discoveries made so far have not created such an opportunity. In addition, not all of the recently discovered natural gas fields in Turkey can be utilized for gas storage.

Under these circumstances, it could be argued that Turkey does not possess the necessary characteristics to become a hub for natural gas exports. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) project that Azerbaijan and Turkey agreed to realize together also confirms this situation by assigning to Turkey the role of transit state. TANAP will be mainly financed by SOFAZ and is planned to be operational in 2017 with a capacity of 16 bcm. Ten bcm of this gas will be sold to Europe whereas 6 bcm will be bought by Turkey to decrease dependence on Russian gas. The project is designed to be expandable to 30 bcm and ultimately 60 bcm per year.

As a hydrocarbon-poor country, Turkey's current energy policy is based on efforts to diversify its resources and import markets. Moreover, Turkey is largely dependent on Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan for its energy supply. By the same token, it is estimated that Europe's oil imports will increase by up to 95 percent and gas imports from 63 to 80 percent by 2030; and Europe is already the second largest market for Gazprom (Görgülü and Senyücel Gündoğar 2016: 4). The latest discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean offer both Europe and Turkey opportunities to diversify and enhance their energy security. Despite various obstacles, the idea of making the Eastern Mediterranean a potential gas supplier to consumer markets sounds appealing.

The proved natural gas reserves are in the seabed between Israel and Cyprus. Following the recent normalization in Israel–Turkey relations, there have been discussions on the possible construction of a sub-sea pipeline project that would connect Israel's Leviathan gas field to Ceyhan in southern Turkey. Indeed, energy cooperation has been one of the motivations behind Israel–Turkey rapprochement.

So far, the biggest challenge lying ahead of the sub-sea gas pipeline project is the decades-old conflict between Cyprus and Turkey. There are two possible routes for the pipeline and the more cost-effective option is constructing it through Lebanon and Syria. Due to obvious security risks, the other option that would go through the territorial waters of Cyprus seems a better solution. If such a pipeline is to be constructed, the approval of the Cyprus Republic is a must. However, Turkey does not officially recognize this country due to the ongoing disputes since Turkey's military intervention in the island in 1974. Therefore, it is not possible to construct a sub-sea gas pipeline operating in the Mediterranean if the Cyprus conflict is not resolved.

In 2017, Turkey declared its intention to start more exploration studies in the Mediterranean. A statement issued by Turkey's Energy and Natural Resources Minister Berat Albayrak announced the exploration activities to be carried out: "This will be an important year for sea exploration, oil and gas exploration. We will continue with two different vessels, one will explore the Black Sea and the other will explore the Mediterranean Sea. This year will be a more active year for us" (Erkul 2017).

The resolution of the border issue, however, is crucial for the continuation of exploration activities. Following the Greek Cypriot call for the second international tender for offshore hydrocarbon exploration in 2012, Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an official statement describing the step as "unilateral" (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). The second round of concessions was met with objections from Turkey, which stated that unauthorized oil and natural gas exploration and exploitation activities in the overlapping areas will not be allowed under any circumstances.

Another mission was interrupted in March 2015 when tensions rose between the Turkish Cypriot government and the Greek administration over the ownership of the resources. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus argues that the resources of the island belong to both communities. However, as the Cyprus problem remains unresolved, it seems quite improbable that the Turkish side of the island would benefit from the oil and gas revenues. Therefore, the resolution of the Cyprus conflict seems like a sine qua non in order to ensure energy security in the Mediterranean.

*2.3 Turkey's Agriculture and Water Policy in the Mediterranean*

Trade is an important manifestation of Turkey's integration with its neighbourhood. Because the trade between the EU and the southern Mediterranean has been dominated by energy, Turkey's strategy toward a more diversified trade opportunity comes to the fore (Kirişçi 2013: 209-210). Turkey's trade with the Maghreb and Mashreq countries increased on average by 59 percent from 2008 to 2011, while it has continued to enhance its relations through free-trade agreements with Middle Eastern and North African countries like Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt (Kirişçi 2013: 210). These initiatives were accompanied by the establishment of the Close Neighbours Economic and Trade Association Council with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan in 2010.

With respect to trade relations between Turkey and the southern Mediterranean, agriculture appears to hold a significant place. Agricultural production is a major part of Turkey's economy, accounting for around 20 percent of the country's employment. The gross value of Turkey's agricultural production reached 62 billion dollars in 2013, according to data from the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (cited in ISPAT 2014). Turkey is also the world's seventh largest agricultural producer and ranks first in Europe in this category. As part of its targets for the agriculture sector, it aims to be among the top five overall producers globally within five to ten years.

In the early 2000s, Turkey embarked on structural reforms in agriculture due to ineffective policies and the related burden on government expenditures (Çakmak 2003: 11-13). Several initiatives such as deficiency payments, agricultural insurance support schemes, rural development programmes, compensatory payments and investment incentives were put into force notably following the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture, and in line with the developments in the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (Sarıca 2014: 31).

Turkey has also participated in a number of EU programmes like the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for which the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock prepared and implemented the Rural Development Operational Programme from 2007 to 2013. Besides, Turkey has joined Agricultural Research for Development (ARD), which addresses the agricultural and development challenges faced by developing and emerging countries as well as countries in transition (Compés López et al. 2013). From both the EU and Turkey perspectives, agriculture is a "strategic sector to insure food security" (Compés López et al. 2013: 8).

For many Middle Eastern and North African countries, exports of agricultural products are an important source of foreign currency. Among these countries, Turkey is a leading agricultural producer and stands out in terms of the total value of its agricultural exports. In 2015, the exports of agricultural commodities and food products accounted to 16.3 billion dollars and 11.7 percent of Turkey's total export earnings, as reported by the Ministry of Economy. In addition to this, based on the 2013 FAO data, Turkey is the biggest agricultural commodity exporter among the Mediterranean

Partner Countries (MPCs) and it also provides almost half of the MPCs' exports of agricultural products to the EU followed by Morocco and Israel (Sarıca 2014: 58). As stated by Turkey's Minister of Food, Agriculture and Livestock Mehdi Eker, Turkey's potential in agriculture should be noted as an exemplary model for the Arab Spring countries (Anadolu Agency 2012).

Moving on to consider another policy area, water is seen as the key for geopolitical stability in the Mediterranean. Indeed, water is described "a source of conflict, specifically as it is crucial for food security, environmental sustainability, and the everyday existence of people in the region" (Huber and Paciello 2016: 6). The Mediterranean region is characterized by not only limited but also irregular availability of water resources. As shown by data from the WaterWorld Policy Support System, 15 out of 18 Middle East and North African countries are suffering from water scarcity, while Turkey is among the three most water-abundant countries along with Iran and Iraq (Keulertz 2016: 14-15).

As a candidate country, Turkey is required to conform with the EU Water Framework Directive and adopt water policies in line with this. Therefore, several new adjustments have taken place on water resource management since 2003.

In its official discourse, Turkey views water "as a catalyst for cooperation rather than a source of conflict".[7] For transboundary waters, it prioritizes "equitable," "reasonable" and "optimum" use. Therefore, the Euphrates and the Tigris, the two rivers crossing Turkey's southeastern Anatolia region, are of significance. The Euphrates and the Tigris account for around one third of the country's water potential. While Turkey contributes around 89 percent of the 35 bcm annual flow of the Euphrates, the remaining 11 percent comes from Syria. By contrast, no Syrian waters flow into the Tigris. More than 50 percent of the total average flow of the Tigris comes from Turkey and the rest comes from Iraq.

The lack of an agreement between Turkey, Syria and Iraq on the use of these two rivers based on identical criteria has caused problems between the riparian states. Besides, the construction of the Southeast Anatolia Development Project (GAP, which covers six cities in Turkey's southeastern region) on the Euphrates and the Tigris has also become a major source of tension between the co-riparians. As a more recent attempt to resolve the dispute, Turkey, Syria and Iraq "agreed to establish joint stations to measure water volume, monitor and exchange information about climate and drought, and create joint water education programs" in connection with the Tigris and Euphrates in 2009 (Blua 2009).

Because the three states have sought to securitize their rights over these waters, a basin-wide management scheme addressing water security should be implemented in order to avoid both conflict and irreversible water and land degradation (Açma 2011: 115).

*2.4 Turkey's Stance on the Arab Uprisings*

For the southern Mediterranean countries, the Arab uprisings, which broke out with a series of anti-government protests and armed rebellions in late 2010, were a turning point in the proliferation of new political ideas that challenge domestic and regional structures, while conflicting, competing or converging with the EU understanding of issues like democracy or human rights (Huber and Paciello 2016: 6).

Before looking at the changes in perceptions from Turkey's perspective, it will be helpful to briefly discuss the EU's position on the Arab Spring. The eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions posed an unprecedented challenge to the EU in dealing with both national and regional crises simultaneously. Similarly, it effectively highlighted the several key imbalances in the Union's foreign policy. In addressing each country using a tactical approach – to maximize potential profits and minimize the losses – the EU adopted a multitude of positions, causing its Member States to often act in contradiction. For example, while the EU acknowledged the Arab populations' calls for democracy and political reform, it maintained its relations with the Gulf countries and turned a blind eye to the

uprisings in Yemen and Bahrain (Abo Hamed 2014). By the same token, EU countries were unsure how to react to President Mohamed Morsi's removal from power by the Egyptian army. The Member States wanted to send a message to the coup plotters that they had gone too far, but at the same time they did not want to look as if they were backing Morsi (Rettman 2013). The EU's awkward reaction and its inability to name an obvious military coup were clearly in contradiction to the values that the Union argues promoting worldwide.

Without any shadow of doubt, the uprisings have brought major changes in Turkey's position towards the region, as the EU has also experienced. In this respect, one of the most striking examples would be the upside-down relations with Syria, where the ongoing crisis has caused a threat to Turkey's internal stability. Although Turkey initially tried to encourage the Syrian government to reform through diplomatic means, President Bashar al-Assad's ignorance and the accompanying refugee influx into Turkey have led the government to cut its relations with Syria and later back the Syrian opposition against the regime.

As for Libya, Turkey first adopted a cautious approach, refraining from taking an official position due its strong economic ties with the country. Although showing opposition to NATO's intervention in Libya by describing the no-fly zone as "unhelpful and fraught with risk" (Jean Yackley 2011), Turkey later changed its stance and called for former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to step down "for the sake of the country's future" (BBC 2011). On this point, it is also important to mention Turkey's position towards democracy promotion in the Middle East, highlighted in Erdoğan's electoral victory speech in July 2011, during which he "saluted the democratic aspirations of peoples across the Middle East" (Tocci 2012). Similarly, Erdoğan indicated Turkey's recognition of the regional shifts in his remarks at the Cairo Opera House in 2011 with following words: "The freedom message spreading from Tahrir Square has become a light of hope for all the oppressed through Tripoli, Damascus, and Sanaa" (Karadeniz and Saleh 2011, Yılmaz and Üstün 2011: 85). His remarks are also an indication of Turkey's role during the uprisings: standing by the people demanding political and economic change. In this regard, it could be put forward that Turkish policymakers have "sided with the forces of change" and "continued to adjust policies on a case-to-case basis", while maintaining political and economic relations with the countries that "have undergone regime changes" including Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen (Özcan 2013: 3).

**Conclusion**

Employing discourse analysis, the report set out to review the official discourse of Turkey vis-à-vis the Mediterranean while investigating how this discourse has evolved on key policy areas. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the Mediterranean does not exist as an individual region in Turkey's foreign policy, although the country has implemented several initiatives to widen its sphere of influence. The report further looks into Turkey's stance during the Arab uprisings, which appears to be a more pragmatic yet cooperative approach.

As mentioned earlier, the adoption of a proactive foreign policy towards the region indicates that Turkey tries to leverage its strategic role there while addressing the global challenges at the same time. It is important here to note that Turkey's self-image vis-à-vis the Mediterranean is not dependent on a nation-building role or imposing itself as a model, but having an impact in the region through better economic and political relations as well as its soft power instruments, which have been discussed in the previous sections. In this context, Turkey's potential for assistance appears to be crucial for its cooperation with the EU.

Given the fact that the region hosts several crucial foreign policy obstacles including the Cyprus question, conflicts in the Middle East, energy security and the Mediterranean migration crisis, all these hurdles deserve close bilateral as well as regional collaboration.

So far, it is difficult to argue that such cooperation has materialized. From the EU side, the Union's decision-making process has resulted in a slower policy response to the developments in the MENA

region. In addition, Brexit has created many legal uncertainties and raised several questions about the future of the EU itself. On the other side, Turkey is exhausted with several foreign policy challenges including the crisis in Syria, the war against ISIS, the latest disagreements with Europe and finally the turbulent relations with Russia. Despite these loaded agendas in both sides, the paper argues that foreign policies of Turkey and the EU converge in principle, at least from the perspective of migration and energy, as examined in previous sections. The refugee deal between Turkey and the EU, discussed in detail in this paper, is a good example of this convergence.

However, mutual agreement does not always create harmonious and functional solutions. Energy security for example is a serious risk for both the EU and Turkey, but challenges on grounds such as the Cyprus conflict prevent the construction of mega-energy projects. Today, energy relations of the EU and Turkey are framed in terms of excessive dependence on Russia, qualifying the latter as a security threat. Energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean is a valuable opportunity to deal with this risk.

The future of EU–Turkey relations appears gloomy and there exists a growing risk that Turkey's EU accession process will break down. If Turkey's membership process is suspended, it is quite probable that we will witness less cooperation between the two, in the context of the Mediterranean. The EU would lose its already diminished leverage on Turkey, and regional crises that need immediate solutions such as the refugee crisis would be even more complicated in the absence of cooperative Turkey–EU relations. Therefore, EU–Turkey dialogue is quite valuable and should not be left at the mercy of daily politics and populism on both sides, if we are to achieve a more secure and balanced regional order.

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**Notes**

1. Quotes from non-English sources have been translated by the authors.

2. Turkey occupies the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean.

3. See the ESI website: Why a EU Visa Liberalisation Process for Turkey is in both the EU's and Turkey's Interest, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=446.

4. UNHCR data on Syrian refugees in Turkey available at http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224.

5. See the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: Turkey on Irregular Migration, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-on-irregular-migration.en.mfa.

6. For a map of the Levant Basin, see Vella (2015).

7. See the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: Turkey's Policy on Water Issues, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-policy-on-water-issues.en.mfa.

**7 ISRAEL**

**Israel's Discourses and Practices in the Mediterranean**

*ASI-REM*

**Introduction**

It is an old adage that there is no foreign policy, only domestic policy. In the Israeli case, planners construct both domestic and foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis the Mediterranean region which Israel daily constructs and re-constructs as a region of threat and possibility, including the domestic/foreign Palestinian question, through the lens of security. Israel has historically constructed its understanding of its security as tightly tied to good relationships with the United States and Europe. Indeed, it has viewed itself as a part of Europe from the outset of its settlement project – in the words of Theodor Herzl, Israel was to be "a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism" (Herzl 1917: 12). On the domestic front, it has imagined security in a non-conventional sense: Israel having full freedom of manoeuvre and dispensation in terms of the Palestinian population, with geopolitics not impinging on its doing whatever necessary in order to maintain the status quo. Israel's construction of its regional security in the Eastern Mediterranean has historically hinged on an amplification of that modus operandi to encompass all the states on the southern, far-eastern and northeastern segments of the Mediterranean littoral. As part of this, Israel's vision of security is based on preserving it military, territorial and diplomatic freedom of action vis-à-vis the captive Palestinian population. Thus it constructs the countries immediately surrounding it, as well as those further afield such as Turkey and Tunisia, as targets or allies, who must be constituted as incapable of providing support to those elements of the Palestinian polity and society that might call for aid, particularly those unwilling to be co-opted. Furthermore, in its securitized discourse, it sees such countries – especially Egypt, Syria and Lebanon – as having directly warred with Israel, or as harbouring deeply-rooted militia groups that have contested Israeli dominance and territorial aggrandizement. Some of these conflicts have been linked to the Palestinian cause. Thus Israel constructs its Mediterranean freedom of action and its vision of the Mediterranean region in terms of security, a vision which means that such states must be (1) unwilling or (2) unable to muster a military challenge to Israel. In order to make them unable or unwilling, Israel has historically constructed them as targets of either (1) destabilization or (2) "cold peace" sufficient to ensure that their state elites do not assume a confrontational role vis-à-vis Israeli policy, both at the military–physical and cultural–symbolic level.

On its northern and western flanks, Israeli elites construct the Mediterranean as an arena of securitized trade and security flows, thus seeking to ensure that the states of those regions – Europe – enter security compacts with Israel, and partake in commerce with it. Furthermore, such commerce is increasingly of a military nature. Israel views security as ensuring that such states continue on their present policy path, or pursue it in an even more pronounced manner. It also means that Israel constructs the Mediterranean as a space vulnerable to transformations or popular movements within its constituent states, capable of changing their governments' orientation to Israel and the Palestinian case. In this sense, Israeli security doctrine vis-à-vis Europe also means that it views global popular campaigns to shift Israeli policy – and particularly the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement – as part of its broader securitized imaginary.

This paper first outlines Israeli construction of the Palestinian question, understanding it as the keystone of Israeli security policy in its construction of the Mediterranean. It then considers how Israel imagines its security policy vis-à-vis its immediate neighbours: Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. It then goes further afield to Turkey. Finally, it concludes by considering Israel's recent relations with Greece, and then with Europe as a whole.

In terms of methodology, it relies primarily on primary sources from Israeli security planners and states people, suggesting that their discourse offers a window into how the country constructs the region's constituent states and thus how it imagines the Mediterranean itself.

## 1. Palestine

Israel constructs Palestine as the ultimate Mediterranean security threat, since it touches on the core physical basis of the state itself: the land. Current Israeli security understandings of this issue are based on a belief of permanent threat. Israel constructs a discourse within which there is no short-term solution to the Palestine question, in the sense of a permanent status agreement. Thus Israeli understandings envisage political postponement and political containment. Israel's overall vision is to kick the can down the road until a permanent agreement on Israeli terms is possible. Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon's 2008 strategic treatise, *Derekh aruka ktzara* (A Longer Shorter Way), clarifies that this belief also means that Israeli elites ought to firmly reject "solutionism" or "nowism", whether such demands emanate from Israeli society itself, Palestinians, the United States or elsewhere (Sachs 2015: 75). Such an immediatist framework for dealing with the conflict runs roughshod over a security horizon oriented to the containment of "chronic problems or open-ended conflicts", a form of low-level continual counter-insurgency. Furthermore, such solutionism miscasts the fundamental principle animating Israeli "security" thinking vis-à-vis the Palestinian population. Namely, state elites recognize that there is "a Palestinian refusal to accept the essence of Zionism, which is that Jews have a right to a state of their own in the land of Israel" (Sachs 2015: 75). Within this overall framework, Israel imagines it must take smaller steps to ensure that Palestinians are unable to shift the terms of negotiation in a more pro-Palestine direction – which is to say, also one more in accord with the relevant international covenants. Thus on the one hand, Israel, where and when possible, has sought to withdraw its military forces from places that it has not made strategic sense to secure through boots-on-the-ground occupation: namely, the Gaza Strip, where Israel nevertheless remains in effective control and thus the occupation endures. Meanwhile, there has emerged a new and politically loud if not yet influential current which imagines the Mediterranean as a place that can only be secured through a "solution" of the Palestine question through annexation of the West Bank.

Alongside the construction of the Palestinian question in securitarian terms, Israeli planners construct the question of Palestinian labour and overall human mobility with reference to security. We may see this through two distinct arenas: through the changing security regime in the territories Israel occupied after the 1967 war, and in its relation to security in the Sinai. In the former, since 1993 it has relied on a policy of what it terms "closure" vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, which used to supply large portions of Israeli labour needs. Since that point – even more so since 2000 and close to hermetically since 2006 – Israel has constructed the Gaza Strip as a security threat, to which the 2005 disengagement, accompanied by an absolute cut-off of labour flows, was a "solution", tamping down the security threat while not eliminating it altogether (Sharvit 2005). In the West Bank, meanwhile, discourses of security construct a vision of a Palestinian population which must be walled off and can only gain access to territorial Israel through securitized passageways. Here questions of Palestinian physical labour and Israeli policy towards it war with Israeli construction of the Palestinian population as a security threat.

As for the Sinai, Israel has since the election of Mohamed Morsi (since deposed) constructed it as a zone of threat, where mobility is limited and where the question of migrant labour is thereby minimized. The question of human entry along the Sinai-territorial Israel frontier is constructed by the Israeli leadership as a question of "infiltration": in the words of Netanyahu in January 2013, "There hasn't been one infiltrator who has reached an Israeli city in seven months" (Mitnick 2015). "Infiltrators", or refugees, have also been a source of labour to replace Palestinians who remain in the Gaza Strip, a traditional source of manual labour in certain key industries, and thus again in the case of the Sinai we see how Israeli securitarian discourse creates the policy areas of labour, migration and mobility as subordinate to questions of security, which is in turn understood as a perpetual and structuring element of the Israeli worldview. And this, in turn, is based on a view of the world which sees threat as itself fundamental and constitutive rather than something than can be successfully eliminated through new policies.

Another aspect of how Israeli policy-makers construct the Mediterranean, and that construction's attendant impacts on the construction of policy in specific arenas, is the question of agriculture and water. Once again, the construction of the West Bank as a securitized arena informs an approach to water based on accumulation and expropriation of Palestinian water resources. Israeli settlements are often built in regions which have been constructed as crucial to security concerns; such regions are also often atop crucial aquifers. This then allows for the Israeli settler population in the West Bank to use water at a rate massively disproportionate to that of the Palestinian population.

Secondarily, the West Bank is a zone in which Israeli agriculture and Palestinian agriculture become embroiled in a zero-sum contest whereby additional land under Israeli cultivation is then a diminished amount of land under Palestinian cultivation. The construction of the West Bank as a place of danger justifies the routing of the "security" wall which cuts over the Green Line and into the West Bank, and also cuts into, cuts off, and thus absorbs some of the West Bank's most arable land. The Golan Heights in the Israeli conception is also a securitized zone, offering strategic high ground and a buffer against kinetic warfare from outside the Israeli boundary lines. Furthermore, "the Golan Heights also provides security for a strategic commodity – water", in the words of Israeli security analyst Efraim Inbar, and indeed a large percentage of Israel's water supply comes from this crucial securitized region (Inbar 2011: 12). Thus once again we see how security is an encompassing framework for Israeli's understanding of and construction of the region.

Thus overall the Mediterranean is constructed through a security-based local discourse based on putting in place the scaffolding that can assist in the future construction of a "permanent settlement", since fundamentally, argue Assaf Orion and Udi Dekel (2016a) in the *Strategic Survey for Israel*, negotiations are not currently possible. A crucial political-institutional component of this scaffolding is the Palestinians themselves, who are both part of the structure that will be used to build the permanent settlement, and, Israel hopes, the guarantors of that settlement. As Orion and Dekel continue, "Throughout this process, Israel has an interest in the survival of the PA leadership, which favors political processes and security cooperation over terrorism and violence" (Orion and Dekel 2016a: 167). Security is the dominant lens for Israeli planners to understand this policy, as well as to construct this keystone of the region. Thus, as they understand and imagine it, in this sense, longer term security through a form of permanent-status arrangement rests on the immediate-term security of tamping down threats, whether political or kinetic, to Israel from the Palestinians. As the authors continue,

> Threats of Palestinian terrorism will likely continue in the foreseeable future, whether on the part of those who continue to oppose Israel's right to exist and refuse to come to an agreement with Israel, or whether as a means for

Palestinian authorities to exert pressure for political purposes or for internal Palestinian considerations. (Orion and Dekel 2016a: 167)

The rhetoric of "terrorism" is part-and-parcel of the overall "security" discourse within which Israel frames the Palestinian question and the Mediterranean more broadly. Israeli planners use the term to refer to all forms of Palestinian violence, including that from militia or other forces targeting Israeli armed forces. For that reason "security" and securitized visions are oriented to preventing Palestinian violence through deterrence, or constraining it through the work of compliant sectors of the native population. For that reason, Israeli planners conceptualize security as a process of containment, or heading off such violence to the extent possible. This also means making sure that it does not involve any substantial portion of the Palestinian population, keeping "the number of people involved" at a minimum. Israel imagines this as necessary through military means when needed, and when not, through "civil and economic efforts and infrastructure development" (Orion and Dekel 2016: 167). This reflects the understanding that Palestinians' national claims inherently imperil the unequal arrangements Israeli elites understand as "security".

Such a line of thinking has been constitutive of Zionist security thinking from the days of Vladimir Jabotinsky's *The Iron Wall*. As the author insisted,

Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of "Palestine" into the "Land of Israel". (Jabotinsky 1937)

Essentially, continued Palestinian contestation of the Jewish nature of the 1948 territories continues this practice of resistance, and Israeli security understandings continue to see this rejection of a Jewish state in the here-and-now as a threat to Israeli security. Based on this fact, a real solution can only come when it is "no longer in question" that the Jewish state may continue to be a Jewish state. This basic insight is the keystone in the arch of broader Israeli securitized understandings and constructions of the Mediterranean, and indeed of the rest of the world. However, Israeli security visions also recognize the problems that accompany the Israeli decision to conceptualize security in irredentist terms. Namely, "Israel's control over many aspects of Palestinian affairs has created widespread anger and disgust toward Israel abroad, with increasingly harsh consequences for its international standing and its relations with the United States" (Sachs 2015: 79) – and of course the European Union, and the surrounding Arab and Muslim states. The latter states have historic economic, cultural and popular links with the Palestinian population, as to a lesser measure do some of the EU states, for example Italy, which used to be far less aligned with German–US foreign policy in general and towards Israel in particular (Abu Samra 2014).

Furthermore, in the words of Michael Hudson, there are several "all Arab" issues that can legitimize or delegitimize any given social or political order. The "legitimacy of given leaders in a given state is determined to an important extent by their fidelity to these core concerns", and "Palestine is the foremost all-Arab concern, although not the only one" (cited in Takriti 2013: 234). Thus security issues in the Palestinian sphere are never restricted to Palestine or Palestinians alone. They reverberate far beyond the geographical span of historic Palestine. For that reason Israeli "security" concerns in the Mediterranean region, as Israeli planners understand them and as Israel constructs the Mediterranean based on them, are deeply imbricated in the question of Palestine itself. We now turn to those questions, by considering the current Israeli incarnation of security understandings of the portions of the Mediterranean just north of Palestine: Syria and Lebanon, especially Hezbollah. We also consider the manner in which Israeli conceptions of its policy have evolved since 2006,

alongside Israeli conceptualizations of what it considers a threat, latent or imminent, emanating from social and political forces either within or governing those two neighbouring sites in the Eastern Mediterranean.

## 2. Syria and Lebanon

Current Israeli strategic construction of the Levant, as a constitutive element of how it constructs the Mediterranean, is an extension of the conclusions in the annex of the Reut's Report to the Winograd Committee, convened in the aftermath of the Hezbollah movement's victory over the IDF in the 2006 war. That victory – reflecting a massive increase in the asymmetric power of the Lebanese guerrilla resistance movement, and behind it, its supply line in Syria – represented trends which undermined what Israel understood as its national security strategy (Reut 2007: 1). The 2006 war challenged the dominant Israeli security doctrine of the "Wall of Legitimacy", based on the slow evaporation of "internal Arab legitimacy for continued fighting against Israel", as well as the contrapuntal global legitimacy needed for Israel to carry out reprisals – or "aggressive Israeli military response[s] in case Israel [was] attacked across the newly established [2000] border" (Reut 2007: 4), again with the addenda that Israel has no borders, merely armistice lines. One of the most significant of these trends was the emergence and consolidation of a "Resistance Network" led by Iran, Hezbollah and the Palestinian armed resistance networks, which in the perception of the planners of Israeli security, "effectively undermines any sustainable political or military achievement that would secure Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state" (Reut 2007: 1). Combined with what planners (not necessarily correctly, and arguably quite prematurely) perceived as the decline of US power in the region, the rise of Iran, and the "the erosion in the ability or will of the Arab side to fulfill its part in ending Israeli control over the Palestinian population in the West Bank", the result was a sense of mounting Israeli "strategic inferiority on the level of its national security" in its regional vision (Reut 2007: 1). All of these discursive frameworks merit more precise explication.

The first point to consider is how Israeli security doctrine understood and viewed the inability of the Arab side to "fulfill its part" in meeting Israeli constructions of the Arab role in the Mediterranean. This is a euphemism for the broader role of the Arab states in either undermining or securing what Israeli planners understand as security vis-à-vis the Palestinian question. Their apprehension of the shifting regional conjuncture is in line with what used to be called the Steadfastness or Rejection Front. That front historically took the position of the Palestinian national movement as an important point of reference. The post-2006 "Resistance Network" is an evolution of that logic, continuing to reject a full normalization of relations with Israel – for example, the continued official enmity of Syria and Lebanon to Israel.

Israel has framed the threat to its vision and conceptualization of the Mediterranean, a notion which is based purely in terms of security, only partially in military terms. As the Report continued, using language that the Reut Institute further refined over time,

> The organizing logic of the Resistance Network is political: Israel's implosion – The present organizing logic of the Resistance Network is to cause the implosion of Israel. This would happen through a combination of internal political and social unrest, de-legitimization and international economic and political pressure similar to the processes that brought about the collapse of White South Africa or the USSR. (Reut 2007: 7)

Of course, White South Africa democratized, it did not collapse, which offers a certain perspective on how Israeli planners construct their securitized discourse of the eastern Mediterranean. Still, in contrast to this, Israel in 2006 still viewed (and for that matter, still does view) the two-state

settlement as the foundation of the political settlement with the Palestinians. However, such a foundation was made of material broadly unacceptable to the Palestinian populace: the "Clinton Peace Plan," an array of land-swaps, demilitarization, minimal refugee return, and non-contiguous territory, not based on international law governing either refugees or occupied lands, that the Palestinian leadership has historically been unable to convince its constituent population to accept. It is in this sense that in 2006 Israel began to be correctly apprehensive that there was no longer an "Arab side" that was able to do its part in "in ending Israeli control over the Palestinian population in the West Bank" (Reut 2007: 1). Of course, this was an exaggeration and partially a misreading, given trends in the wealthier regions of the Gulf, for example, towards increased normalization with Israel. But what Israel thought that such an Arab side had to do, to ensure what Israel understood as its security, was to accede to the terms of the Clinton Plan, which were fundamentally reproduced in the Arab Peace Initiative. Those terms themselves reflected Israeli security interests, but they did not reflect the legitimate concerns of the Palestinian national movement. More significantly, when the planners refer to the diminishing "ability […] of the Arab side" to oversee an "ending [of] Israeli control over the Palestinian population in the West Bank," they specifically mean an Arab side willing to push through and legitimize Israeli-imposed terms of defeat (Reut 2007: 1). The mounting political and military strength and credibility of the "Axis of Resistance" were correctly understood as undermining the ability of the more "moderate" Arab states to push through such terms.

Furthermore, in Israel's securitized understanding of the region, the legitimate concerns of the Palestinian movement require political vehicles in order to acquire meaning as material facts. It is in this sense that the Reut document understands that the "military logic of the Resistance Network is secondary" (Reut 2007: 7). The Network, they correctly apprehend, is not oriented to direct military assault on Israel. Rather, it is oriented to giving political institutions and movements such as the Palestinian resistance movements in the Gaza Strip, and behind them Hezbollah and Lebanon more broadly, and Syria, a sufficiently strong shield to advance legitimate political claims in the political and international arena. Such claims, founded minimally on international law and the 1967 line, if not entirely against Zionism, threaten Israel since it premises its safety on having uncontested access to land and resources over the Green line. Give the existence of these forces, Israel is unable to create "military or political achievements […] that could guarantee its existence as a Jewish and democratic state" (Reut 2007: 7). Here in the Israeli imaginary, the question of the non-Palestinian Mediterranean component of the Resistance Network and that of the Palestinian component of the Network are actually one question, since Israel's ability to inflict a sharp enough defeat on the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip – or to simply impose a fait accompli on the West Bank – is limited by the support the Network is capable of offering to resistance movements in the West Bank, as well as the ratchet effect that support has on the Palestinian Authority and the terms it is able to sell to the population. The PA finds it more difficult to accept Israeli impositions, and certainly to convince the Palestinian population in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Diaspora that such impositions are in fact necessary concessions, when the Hamas movement and the remainder of the Palestinian national movement steadfastly reject the negotiation strategy of the Palestinian Authority and Fateh, as well as its capitulation to Israeli rejection of even minimal Palestinian national demands.

Furthermore, continuing with the Israeli understanding of such forces and their constituent role in constructing the Israeli vision of the Mediterranean, these actors, at the verbal and discursive level, have partially promoted the "One-State Solution of establishing a Palestinian/Arab/Islamic state in place of Israel" (Reut 2007: 7). For Iran this is certainly the case. Hezbollah's position has a degree of strategic fluidity. Its 2009 strategy document, for example, does not advocate a one-state solution. In practice, Hezbollah has historically stated that it accepts the guidance of the Palestinian national movement vis-à-vis a long-term settlement. More recently, the movement has announced the death of the two-state settlement and called for continued resistance. In the current context, such a stance

certainly has the effect of staking out a bargaining position, and makes it more difficult for the PA to accept Israeli negotiating terms. Finally, given that Israeli security visions, based on Israeli irredentism and Israel's right to dispose of its internal Palestinian population in the manner it sees fit and along ethnocratic lines, are threatened by any challenge to such a political vision or the principles upon which it stands, Israeli security is constantly threatened by what the Reut document refers to as "fundamental de-legitimization". This is the argument that the "The Resistance Network denies Israel's right to exist by rejecting the Jewish right to self-determination and challenging the moral foundations of Israel" (Reut 2007: 7). Given that the Israeli security establishment in its construction of the arena correctly understands the regional and pan-Arab implications and entanglements of the Palestinian cause, such delegitimization again provokes a security challenge to the extent, certainly real, that such ideologies find an audience amongst other regional populations.

Thus both Hezbollah and behind it, Syria and Iran, are fundamental challenges to Israel's securitized vision of the Mediterranean. For this reason, Israel constructs these actors as fundamental antagonists, while at the same time understanding that public intervention in Arab conflicts stands the risk of unifying Arab public opinion *against* Israel – as was clear amidst nearly universal regional acclaim for Hezbollah's military victory over Israel. As Israeli security analysts note,

> Israel has an interest in preventing the consolidation and strengthening of Iran's posture through its proxies in areas close to Israel. Israel is also eager to prevent the transfer of advanced Russian weapons – especially air defense systems – to Syrian forces commanded by Assad and the pro-Assad coalition, Iran and Hezbollah. (Orion and Dekel 2016b: 4)

"Proxy" strongly understates the degree of operational and ideological independence the Hezbollah movement, especially, has, vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nevertheless, the statement makes clear that Israel views a stronger and militarily more capable Syrian Arab Army and Hezbollah as antithetical to an ideal conception of its interests as they constitute the larger securitized Mediterranean. Indeed, despite Israel's avowed decision to not openly intervene in internal Arab conflicts after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, it still reserves the right to intervene when military capacities become overweening, capable of nullifying Israeli martial capacities and thereby imperilling Israel's ability to dictate the political agenda in the region. For that reason, the analysts continue, "the supply of advanced air defense systems to the Assad forces or Hezbollah might drag Israel into the campaign, should it decide to prevent this by means of a preemptive strike" (Orion and Dekel 2016b: 4). Here Israeli security is explicitly conditioned on and understood as based on socio-political arrangements outside historic Palestine, and is understood as ranging beyond Israel's armistice lines – swelling out into freedom of military action in abutting sovereign states.

This orientation and understanding of the Mediterranean as a space of threats-to-be-neutralized is also visible in Israel's approach to Syria. As Amos Yadlin (2016: 248) notes, "From Israel's perspective, the best scenario is the disappearance of the Assad regime, along with the removal of Iran and Hezbollah from Syria on the one hand, and the defeat of the Islamic State and the establishment of a moderate Sunni regime in Syria on the other".

As the son of Ariel Sharon has explained,

> The fall of Assad's regime would bring Islamic State to our borders – and that's a problem. But it would also be a fatal blow for Hezbollah. Without the Assad regime and the Hezbollah-Syria-Iran axis, the threat from Lebanon would fade significantly. It won't happen overnight, but it will happen for sure. […] This is not to say that we would welcome the presence of the Islamic State lunatics on our

border; but it's certainly no worse, and may even be better, than the presence there of Hezbollah, which is the Lebanese proxy of the Iranian regime. (Sharon 2015)

Or in the words of Michael Oren, "If we have to choose the lesser of evils here, the lesser evil is the Sunnis over the Shiites […] who are they fighting against? They fighting against the proxy with Iran […] So from Israel's perspective […] if there has got be an evil that's going to prevail, […] let the Sunni evil prevail (Aspen 2014).

As he continues, "Israel has got to guard its borders […] we are going to have to hunker down for a while," thus echoing the anti-solutionism framework which other Israeli security officials and analysts likewise embrace. Thus although some insist that Israel prefers the "cold peace" manned by the sentinel of the Syrian government, Moshe Yaalon clarifies that Israeli security understandings are tied to keeping a disjuncture between internal strategic aspirations and the type of public rhetoric that expresses, however partially, such aspirations. As he writes, "Today, the Israeli government has deliberately adopted a neutral stance by not taking a public position on whether Bashar al-Assad should remain in power in Syria" (Yaalon 2016). Silence in the Syrian arena is thus a decision meant to prevent any perception that Israel in fact is full-bore against the Syrian government. Given the legitimating role of opposition to Israel in Arab politics, open Israeli mobilization against Syria would counter-intuitively *menace* Israeli security by mobilizing even sectarian Arab populations against it, particularly in so-called "moderate" states such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, where there are extant disjunctures between official policy and popular opinion, in spite of insistent anti-Palestinian propaganda.

This is in line with the Israeli conception of the Mediterranean as a securitized space which in turn requires it to imagine its allies as the "moderate" Sunni bloc. Such a bloc is "moderate" to the extent that it does not challenge Israeli unilateral management of the Palestinian question, and indeed moves openly toward peace – or normalization of relations – with Israel, before Israel has settled the question of Palestine on terms acceptable to the Palestinian population. This strategic orientation – of replacing unfriendly governments with friendly ones, through direct violence if necessary – has occurred, according to Yadlin (2016: 248), in some arenas of the Syrian territory, although he notes that it is "unlikely" for this model to spread across the breadth of Syria. "This model has materialized in limited form in the Golan Heights, where moderate Sunni rebels are successfully combating both the Assad regime and the Islamic State". This establishment of an Israeli security buffer in the area is now part of Israeli regional planning. To that end, Israel requires coordination with Russia, through the United States, to "continue to enforce its security red lines – most notably, preventing both the establishment of Hezbollah forces in the region adjacent to the border in the Golan Heights and the penetration of Iranian influence in the region" (Dekel and Winter 2016: 4). Such coordination is required in order to prevent any accidental crossing of trip-wires that might incite an escalation.

Israel's securitization of the eastern Mediterranean is commonly counterpoised to the growth or power of "radical" Islamists. How Israel views the Syrian arena clarifies that this is not the case, and allows for a broader depth of insight into the Israeli conceptualization of "moderate" within its security discourse. In this case, Israel has carried out a mostly covert policy of providing medical aid to fighters in Syria that are certainly not "moderate" in terms of ideological colouration (Winstanley 2015). Furthermore, Israeli conception of its security has led to its continuously interdicting weapons supplies traversing Syrian soil to Lebanon, and there are numerous incidents of bombing of installations of the Syrian Arab Army that remain unaccounted for, but are widely perceived to have been the work of Israel. Thus at the very least Israel's security vision and construction of the region, as articulated in major broadsheets and by numerous government officials, has been "let them bleed", under the assumption that a severely weakened Syrian state is a less effective member of

the Resistance Network than one at the full height of its military capacities. And a less effective, economically debilitated Syria (SCPR 2013) is less likely to be able to muster the diplomatic heft to ratchet up delegitimization strategies against Israel. In this way, Israeli orientation to and construction of both Hezbollah and Syria reflect tactics of weakening, the default option when the degree of ideological cohesion within an enemy state is too high for Israel to move such a state from the enemy to the friend camp. That Israeli security visions of the Mediterranean have led it to carry out policies which have resulted in the partial hardening of the armed forces, providing massive accounts of combat training, and inciting Hezbollah to reportedly set up a branch in Syria, has not meant that Israeli security has been oriented towards a weakening of the armed threat on its northeast frontier – so long as one keeps in mind that Israel does not always get what it wants. An example of Israel successfully moving a state from the "enemy" to the "ally" camp, and a crucial set-piece for Israeli Mediterranean security conceptualizations, is Egypt, the country to which we now turn.

**3. Egypt**

Egypt is the major Arab population centre, the crèche of Nasserism, and historically what Israel has considered its major security concern within the Mediterranean region, and thus a major constituent element of Israel's broader construction of the region itself. After the 1967 military defeat of the Arab armies by Israel, Nasserism and to a lesser extent pan-Arabism were no longer unifying and progressive regional ideologies. With the Camp David accords, Israeli planners constructed Egypt as having undergone a transition from the "enemy" camp to the "friend" camp, while at the same time undergoing economic changes which rendered it internally weaker and less able to confront Israel. And without Egypt the Arab states had no credible military option against Israel.

The fall of Mubarak and the ascendancy of the Morsi government initially provoked disquiet in stable Israeli geopolitical renderings of this massive state on the southern Mediterranean littoral, as Israel saw its security situation deteriorating. Thus the subsequent move from Morsi, with his need to palliate the interests of the Hamas movement, linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, to the renewed dictatorship under Sisi, has, in the words of Ephraim Kam (2016: 127), "been a good period in Egypt-Israel relations, with the nations' respective interests converging more than ever before. Israeli sources say that relations with Egypt have never been better". Israeli securitized conceptions of the Mediterranean, vis-à-vis Egypt, call for micro-level security coordination (macro-level coordination is ensured by the peace treaty) alongside support for the Egyptian security apparatus, the guarantor of the Camp David Treaty. Such local security coordination involves Israeli support for Egyptian counterinsurgency efforts within the Egyptian Sinai, as well as the intelligence sharing needed to shore up such efforts. Israel's acceding to an Egyptian military presence in excess of that allowed under the treaty is also part of this effort. Even more central in this context is Egypt's orientation to Hamas, part of the Resistance Network as a military force that can bodyguard political demands. In this respect, Israeli's construction of its regional interests and of the Mediterranean writ large means that it views it as a massive boon to its security that the Sisi government understands Hamas, and especially its military branch, "as a terrorist organization and an enemy, representing the link connecting the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamas's parent organization) to tribal and Islamist groups in northern Sinai and cooperating with them" (Kam 2016: 128). In fact, the Egyptian courts decided to declare Hamas a terrorist organization in February 2015. The decision was later reversed with improvements in Sisi–Hamas relations, a response to deteriorating Hamas–Iran relations. That deterioration resulted from what Iran felt to be Hamas's deleterious neutralism vis-à-vis the Resistance Network in the Syrian conflict – as well as Hamas's decision to decamp from Damascus near the beginning of the conflict. Such moves have strained the bonds tying Hamas to the Resistance Network, and have been counterpoised against increasing flows of funds from Iran to the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine as well as Islamic Jihad, although the latter too has come under strain (Balousha 2013).

Nevertheless, as Kam (2016: 128) notes, "the regime's fundamental stance toward the organization still stands". This has been reflected in the continued Egyptian decision to maintain the state of siege and economic and material isolation which the Egyptian governments have imposed on the Hamas movement for a decade now. Most concretely, this has meant that Egypt has destroyed the commercial and military supply tunnels traversing the Gaza Strip–Egypt boundary line, and cut down on transit between the Egyptian Sinai and the Gaza Strip (Kam 2016: 128). According to Egyptian reports, the Egyptian forces destroyed nearly 1,900 tunnels between 2011 and 2015, with a noticeable upswing occurring during the period since the Sisi regime took power. Egypt justifies this destruction of the tunnels as part of its security coordination, and crackdown "against Islamist militants" in the Sinai Peninsula more broadly – which is also part-and-parcel of Israeli security strategy in the peninsula, a direct result of how Israeli constructs the Mediterranean and its interests therein (Shay 2016). Egypt, as the sovereign of the Sinai, has more capacity to shut down the tunnels, which are one of the lifelines for the military resistance in the Gaza Strip, than does Israel. This point exemplifies the limits of military force in counterinsurgency and population control as it contributes to Israeli security planning, and shows how tools like supply constriction – akin to the techniques of blockade and sanctions that the US imposes on Iran – can be even more effective means of containment.

Finally, the Israeli securitized construction of the Mediterranean is also based on its perceived need to remove Egypt from the front lines. Thus the Sisi regime's strong commitment to the peace treaty, given Egypt's economic, political and demographic weight, is viewed as a crucial structuring element of Israel's broader regional vision. Adherence to the treaty is a line of continuity from the Mubarak regime to the Sisi regime, as a strategic asset for both. But in the discourse of Israeli security analysts, "Sisi shows a more positive attitude to normalization and stresses its inherent benefits to Egypt, not only in terms of security but also in the political and economic spheres" (Kam 2016: 128). Sisi returned the Egyptian ambassador to Israel in early 2016 (withdrawn during Operation Pillar of Cloud in 2012), and in July of that year the Egyptian foreign minister made a visit to Israel – the first visit of this kind in nine years. Furthermore, the minister refused to cast Israeli actions towards the Palestinians as terrorism, in a meeting with high school students. Finally, there are economic–material relationships between the two states, which are constitutive of and subservient to the securitized Israeli construction of the Mediterranean. The Egyptian oil minister has emphasized the acceptability and legitimacy of importing gas from Israel, and has continued to push for a final settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, not as a form of pressure, but rather as a move towards permanent normalization of Israel's regional presence in its current form (Kam 2016: 129). Such actions from Egypt also have a ratchet effect on Israeli security, promoting, against the Resistance Network strategy of "delegitimization", a different moderate strategy of normalization. Thus Egypt's consistent adherence to the normalization framework encourages other Arab states to pursue a similar path, given Egypt's historic and current geopolitical, social and symbolic weight amongst Arab politics: "The fact that at present there is a quiet process of messages being exchanged between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and there are closer relations between Israel and other Gulf states, is certainly seen as positive by the Sisi regime" (Kam 2016: 129). This process is also about building a common front not merely with Israel, but also against Iran, amongst the Sunni states of the region.

However, Israel's broader conceptualization of the Mediterranean in general and Egypt in particular is also constituted by an understanding that the Mediterranean is a place of mercurial attitudes. Thus in the Israeli construction of the region, the Egyptians government's expressed interest in strengthening cooperation with Israel does not reflect the interests of substantial segments of the

Egyptian public: "Elements such as the Islamic establishment, the trade unions, groups of leftists and Nasserites, and some of the intellectual and student groups still show hostility to Israel" (Kam 2016: 129). The peace treaty is not popular nor is it broadly accepted as a legitimizing instrument, and there is lingering frustration with Israel's technological and military power and its serial defeats of the Arab armies. This disjuncture, between regime action and popular sentiment, as a core element of how Israel understands and constructs its regional conjuncture, in fact adds to the strength and utility of the Sisi regime – by controlling the polity it is able to prevent the transformation of sentiment into political positioning. However, there is a longer game at play: the regime furthermore continues to attempt to showcase the benefits to Egypt of accepting Israel's regional presence and normalization with Israel, thereby hoping to carry out a slow transition of the mindset amongst the Egyptian people, and shift them into seeing Israel as less of a regional blight than they currently do. Nevertheless, Egypt is a crucial part of the "the new strategic arc [which] spans [from] Egypt in the south to Greece in the northwest" (Eran 2015: 1). This arc is linked organically to Israel's security planning vis-à-vis Cyprus and Turkey, two other neighbouring countries. The post-2010 slight deterioration of Israel's relationship with Turkey is tied tightly to Israel's decision to retrench with the other two eastern Mediterranean countries. It is to Israel's relationship with Turkey that we now turn.

**4. Turkey, Cyprus and Greece**

Turkey has long been a part of the broader NATO–Israeli eastern Mediterranean strategic arc, an arc that is a crucial component of Israel's construction of the Mediterranean region as a securitized space. It has also been a key component of Israel's "Periphery Doctrine", an understanding of the region based on Israel securing regional non-Arab allies to counterbalance the enmity of the Arab arc against it. Turkey and Iran were the only regional states to initially recognize Israel. The Iranian relationship shattered with the revolution overthrowing the Shah in 1979. It was only in the 2000s with the rise of the Erdogan government that Turkey's orientation to Israel – almost entirely at the discursive level – began to shift. The flotilla affair, when Israel attacked a humanitarian flotilla on its way to the Gaza Strip, which included Turkish citizens and ships, strongly soured links between Turkey and Israel.

However, Israeli–Turkish security coordination improved (trade coordination had never ceased) on 28 June 2016 with a normalization agreement between the two countries, thus partially reworking Turkey's role in Israel's construction and understanding of the Mediterranean, and shifting the geographies of that conception by moving Turkey from slight foe to friend. The subsequent coup delayed the vote in the Turkish parliament, but nevertheless, the removal of Turkey from any sort of overt antagonism to Israel has been crucial (Lindenstrauss 2017). As a senior military officer stated,

> The main matter in the agreement is providing immunity to Israel Defense Force soldiers from claims filed in the International Court of Justice. The other things in the agreement are connected to relations between ourselves and Turkey. They wanted us to lift the blockade on Gaza, and we rejected that. But we agreed to assist the population in Gaza. (cited in Alsaftawi 2016: 12)

Thus through this agreement, Turkey essentially acceded to Israel's conflict-management approach to the occupation of Palestine. It also accepted the reduction of the horizons of even Palestinian "rights" to what researcher Darryl Li (2008) has called "essential humanitarianism", or in other words the reduction of the Gaza Strip-dwelling subsection of the Palestinian population to a population needing help, development, but certainly none of the means needed for independent social development – and above all no control of its own relationships to the outside world (Li 2008). Nevertheless, at least until recently, Turkey and Israel have also been relatively aligned in their

approach to geostrategic matters, although still in some sense below the pre-Erdogan levels of coordination. Such alignment sees Turkey maintaining an open border for the passage of rightwing mercenaries into the Syrian arena, agitating and warring for the disintegration of the Syrian state, and Israel carrying out policies of low-key humanitarian assistance oriented towards, at the minimum, a goal of keeping the conflict inflamed as long as possible, and thus eradicating what economist Linda Matar (2016: ix) calls Syria's "social defense" structures, or its schools, universities, infrastructure and healthcare system. In this manner, once again Palestine emerges as a keystone of how Israel constructs the broader eastern Mediterranean, as regional rightwing rulers such as Erdogan and, decreasingly, the Gulf States, delicately merge gestures of concern for Palestine towards a broader orientation of integration into regional security networks and arcs of which Israel is inevitably a crucial component.

Nevertheless, Turkey's slightly declining position in Israel's securitized conception of the Mediterranean has found its counterweight in the ascendance of Cyprus and Greece, the latter under the nominally social-democratic aegis of the SYRIZA government. As Eran (2016: 2) notes, "The differences in the relative importance of Turkey versus Greece and Cyprus notwithstanding, Israel clearly sees Greece and Cyprus as greatly balancing the damage caused by the ongoing depreciation of its relations with Ankara". Indeed, in a move that Israel certainly interpreted as lending credence to its construction of the Mediterranean as a region in need of securitization and which can only be understood, contained, and constituted in Israeli interests through a discourse of securitization, in late 2015 Greek Prime Minister and SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras visited Israel. The visit came amidst increasing civil society opposition to Israel that is increasingly taking the form of campaigns to cut off cultural and economic links under the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) banner. It is notable that Greek congress with Israel has not been restricted to the symbolic realm. In 2015, Israel's air force carried out two large exercises in the airspace of Greece, and in concert with the Greek air force, involving transport planes, helicopters, an intelligence plane and fighter jets. There are reports that joint exercises between Israel, Greece and Cyprus will occur in the near future, with the visit of Tsipras to Israel leading to decisions for ever-closer cooperation (Eran 2016: 2). Needless to say, the same orientations that affect Israeli security internal to the Arab world are also, albeit in a less linear way, reflected in the social composition and political leadership of Israel vis-à-vis states in the European periphery. Greece, for example, under a KKE leadership would be far less amenable to security coordination with Israel than under the social-democratic management of SYRIZA.

Cyprus is also part of Israel's new security orientation in the region, and part of how it constructs the region through maritime economic and security infrastructure. This is in accord with Israeli construction of the Mediterranean not merely as a securitized space, but also one where economic and infrastructural exchange is constitutive of that broader securitized vision. Netanyahu visited Cyprus (the first time an Israeli Prime Minister did so) in 2012. There was another one-day visit in July 2015. Natural gas is a key arena for coordination. Israel holds drilling concessions in Cypriot waters, and since economic exploitation of gas requires an associated infrastructure, Cyprus, situated at the crossroads of the region's potential gas grid, is an inevitable actor. Furthermore, research is currently occurring concerning shared electricity grids between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, fostering material links in the most literal way.

In all of this we see how Israel's regional securitization and securitized constructions of the Mediterranean go hand-in-hand with a construction of the EU as a marginal or border space, where economic flows are understood as components of a broader vision of Israel resting on elite economic links. Such links are crucial in creating "facts on the ground" which assure Israeli security, given the unease that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian population is provoking amongst Member State populations. The EU need for consensus in terms of security and foreign affairs votes enables

both Cyprus and Greece to punch well above their weight politically, particularly in the event that increasing portions of their infrastructure or defence links are with Israel. The relevance of Cyprus and Greece in assuring what Israeli elites conceptualize as the role of the Mediterranean in the nation's security, and the role of security in turn in constituting the Mediterranean, comes clear when they are viewed as the gateway to the EU as well as political–territorial threads weaving Israel ever more tightly into the trading, commercial, defence and cultural fabric of the EU. While many of the dominant states of the EU, such as Germany, are not Mediterranean, economic powers such as Italy and France are. So it is to overall Israeli security orientation to the EU, and vice-versa, that we now turn.

## 5. The European Union

Four departure points are crucial here for appreciating how Israeli construction of the EU mediates Israeli construction of the Mediterranean as a securitized space – as well as a space whose substance and stability rest on an EU friendly to Israel. The first is to keep clear that Israel's orientation to the question of Palestine is that "Israel should manage the conflict rather than trying to solve it" (Yaalon 2016). The second is that this position is out of step with the official EU position on the conflict, which is formal although not substantive commitment to the resolution of the Palestine question. The third is that the EU has both formal and substantive commitments to Israel in the realms of political relations, defence and commerce – especially the arms trade – and what are often identified as shared values between the European nation states and Israel. The fourth is that there are sharp and mounting disjunctures between popular opinion in the EU states and elite activity, which call into question the endurance of the first three points, and perhaps threaten to reverse their polarity in the long run.

It is against this background that Israeli planners construct their understanding of what they call the "extensive" European engagement with the Palestine question. Indeed, the EU governments, in the opinion of Israeli analysts, "have become ever more vocal and harsh in their criticism of the Israeli government concerning the peace process" (Steiner 2015). A few pension funds and cities have begun to seriously implement planks of the BDS call against Israel.

Israeli security planners view this with apprehension as they insist that the EU–Israeli relationship "rests on a solid foundations – values, shared history, solid interests, and common threats" (Steiner 2015). Security planners see the EU and by extension its southern Mediterranean states as sharing a plethora of strategic interests with Israel, including curtailing, "and if possible destroy[ing], both the production and the world export of violence and instability through terror, WMD and missile proliferation, and radical Islamism", maintaining "energy security", already the focus of infrastructure planning with Greece and Cyprus, and providing "maritime security along the main global shipping routes crossing, and adjacent to, the Middle East" (Steiner 2015). Furthermore, Israeli security, in the discourse, imaginary and vision of planners, hinges geopolitically on its alliance and alignment with the EU goals and visions. Planners, at the level of politics and strategic interests as they construct them, see no difference between Israel and the EU. Both, for example, share a similar interest in promoting both the war in Syria as well as the isolation of Hezbollah.

Such links are concrete in other ways as well. Defence and military coordination has long been essential between the EU, its Member States and Israel. The latter used to lean heavily on France for the supply of its armaments. Now, to some extent, the direction has reversed. Israeli defence conglomerates not only market their wares to EU markets, expansively understanding security as economic security, and thus profit, for the Israeli arms-industrial base, but also engage in joint projects with the EU enterprises. Rafael, an Israeli defence manufacturer, for example, in concert with EU counterparts, reworked the anti-tank missile system "Spike" for European militaries. The

armed forces of an array of Mediterranean rim states such as Italy and Spain purchased and used the device. Similarly, half of the Israeli exports of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (drones) go to the EU, part of what has catapulted Israel to world leadership in the drone-export market. Finally, Israeli growth more broadly hinges heavily on its commercial flows with Europe.

This is not merely one of the crucial ties which bind. It also shows a weak point from the perspective of Israeli security planners, part of how they understand EU–Israel ties as one of the constitutive elements of the Mediterranean as an arena to be securitized, and one of the primary reasons they consider EU BDS campaigns such a threat. They understand the EU relation to Israel as resting on unsteady trade flows, and thus a source, also, of potential insecurity. Trade flows are contingent on the population acquiescing to them, or at least not actively opposing them or demanding their reorientation. Thus boon can easily turn to burden if popular sentiment in the EU states, which is strongly against the occupation, and in some sectors in favour of a broader range of Palestinian rights, is able to have an effect on the policies of states as well as the commercial and investment decisions of EU conglomerates. Businesses' investment decisions are based on expected profit, and if popular pressure might compel them to end an investment in which considerable capital has been invested, they simply will not make such investment in the first place. Furthermore, higher-level EU state decisions such as military coordination and training, as in Greece, again rely on the population not rejecting such measures. To return to the language of the Reut document, in its revised version, they see the BDS campaigns as a tool for achieving a one-state settlement in Israel/Palestine or at a minimum for putting sufficient economic and political pressure on Israel to force it to revise drastically its current "security" arrangements vis-à-vis the Palestinian population. Such pressure is understood as capable of working in concert (although not communication) with the political– military pressures emanating from the regional groups which oppose Israel and rely on military force to put teeth and backing in political programmes. With increased pressure from the EU populations – for example, in Spain, where dozens of municipalities have declared themselves "apartheid-free" zones – the northern and western Mediterranean coasts are becoming less and less friendly to Israeli interests and the attitude to Palestine its planners and elites associate with "security". At least at the popular level. At the elite level it is quite the opposite, with the EU states embracing Israel ever more closely amidst increasing polarization between the EU and the countries its governments have consistently opposed – among them Israel's antagonists.

## Conclusion

This briefing has assessed the securitized manner in which Israel constructs its economic, military and diplomatic relationships with discrete states and geopolitical and political unions in the Mediterranean arena, as constitutive elements of how Israel constructs the Mediterranean more broadly.

It has also shown the braided effects of how Israel constitutes the Mediterranean writ large and the very local regional arena, viewing and constructing both as deeply securitized arenas. This overarching framework and vision both informs and justifies policy in crucial areas, ranging from trade and economic ties and flows with the northern Mediterranean littoral, to the intermingled understanding of the Golan as both a space that can only be understood as a securitized zone, as well as a source of water – itself a material resource integral to Israeli security.

Finally, it has shown that Israeli elites conceptualize their vision of a securitized Mediterranean by grouping states into "foe" camps against which to war and "friend" camps with whom to trade. Furthermore, as the 1967 experience shows, war can be a mechanism for moving states from the foe camp to the friend camp, at least provisionally.

Israeli securitized conceptualizations of the Mediterranean turn on a precise articulation between how it relates to foes, and how it relates to friends. It aims to damage or delegitimize any social force, political movement or popular militia capable of forwarding or defending political demands which threaten the keystone of Israeli security policy, its existence as a "Jewish state", and as a complement to that, its refusal to accept even the minimalist standards of international law as a non-negotiable demand for a sustainable resolution to the Palestine question. When faced with such groups, Israel has sought their military defeat and aspires, especially in the case of Hamas, to their extirpation from the society from which they hail. Failing that, it has opted for a long-term strategy of containment, seeking to repress, disorganize, disarm and throttle the armed forces capable of defending political demands which Israel regards as untenable. Finally, it has sought the destruction through endless warfare of any full state structure which offers logistical, diplomatic or materiel support to the non-state armed groups which forward these demands – Syria most notably in the present moment, while Israeli belligerence towards Iran is longstanding. Israel further seeks to "turn" such forces, even amongst the Arab populations most resistant to accepting Israel's claim to be a "Jewish state". Thus it has sought to cultivate and ally with moderate Arab forces capable of containing or repressing popular pro-Palestinian sentiment.

In the EU and northern Mediterranean arenas, the areas Israel has long constructed as its natural allies, Israel continues to understand the region as constructed through a notion of security, leaning on uninterrupted if not strengthening and widening commercial, defence, arms and treaty arrangement between it and the EU states which are the Mediterranean's major economic and military centres. Israeli "security" in this sense rests on those states' ability to continue with business as usual, and thus furthermore to ignore or oppose any popular initiative towards breaking the flows which constitute Israel's lifeline in the region.

All of this finally turns on a nested set of arrangements whereby Israeli construction of the Mediterranean as a securitized space is intermingled with Palestinian insecurity; and the formal and symbolic commitment of EU states to at least minimal Palestinian national demands, is tensely coupled with a more substantive and historic decision to avoid using coercion, whether diplomatic, economic, or otherwise, to force Israel into even the slightest compliance with those demands. Such framing and discursive construction of the Mediterranean is a crucial part of Israel's identity and self-representation, and guides Israeli policy narratives and practices by constructing the region in terms of threats to be neutralized. Such findings also indicate that EU policies must be changed if they are to create the Mediterranean as a less securitized space as well as one where EU policies more closely match the perspectives and outlooks of the EU populations. Such is the tableau of Israel's construction of the Mediterranean for the foreseeable future.

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## Conclusion

*Anouhiravan Ehteshami and Ariabarzan Mohammadi*

The present research conducted within MEDRESET Work Package 2 has aimed to answer a series of questions relating to the role of major global and regional powers in reshaping the geopolitics of the Mediterranean in the twenty first century. The work began in search of answers for the following: How the eight key states in this region – namely the United States, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey – have been constructing, or at least have attempted to construct, different geopolitical imaginations of what has become known as the Mediterranean region? How do these constructions relate to the identity, role perception and self-representations of these powers, and inform and guide their foreign policy narratives? We explored these questions with a specific focus on the policies these states promote in terms of actors, policy instruments and priority policy areas. Through this process, WP2 partners (Cairo University, Durham University, CIDOB, PODEM and ASI-REM) aimed at highlighting the conflicting, competing and converging policies and visions of these states with regard to EU policies and priorities. In so doing, this project has prepared the ground for developing a new regional perspective for the EU.

The key findings of this research are these. **First, security drives policy of all key powers. Second, their definitions of security are incompatible. Thirdly, these powers do not conceive the Mediterranean as a single space, let alone a shared space. Which, fourthly, leads to dramatic divergences in their approaches and priority areas.**

### Evidence and Analysis

### Convergence with the EU: Securitization of the Mediterranean

Similar to the EU's the securitized construction of the Mediterranean, the practices and discourses of almost all the eight key powers in question indicate their securitized views of the region. But each power has developed its own unique perspective. So, **Russia**, having strategic distrust of the West, interprets the transformational changes in the region (like the conflicts in Syria and Libya) as the West's attempt to undermine Russia's influence. This securitized view has made the rift between the European Union and Russia deeper. In its view, the West, mainly represented by the US, is pursuing an agenda of destabilization in the region. From this starting point Russia has characterized its growing presence in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries as a guarantor of stability in these uncertain situations. Based on its worldview, Moscow sees its presence in the Mediterranean space as part of its endeavour to secure a greater role for Russia in international affairs.

**China** is concerned with the expansion of radical Islam in the MENA region and its destabilizing consequences for the many countries and regions in which it has economic presence and interest. Since China has Muslim communities of its own on its western borders, it fears that these populations could be radicalized in the course of growing radicalism in the MENA/Mediterranean regions. In addition, it is highly dependent on energy supplies from the Middle East and consequently fears that instability in West Asia and the Mediterranean could jeopardize its strategic interests in the field of energy. Having adopted a securitized view of the Middle East, China fears that the future of its multinational programme to boost its economy, namely the Belt and Road Initiative, might be endangered by inter-state tensions and domestic strife in the Mediterranean.

**Israel** constructs the Mediterranean as an arena of security and trade, both forces going hand in hand. Thus, Israel seeks to use commerce to enter security compacts especially with the European

part of the Mediterranean. Moreover, Israel pictures the Mediterranean as a vulnerable space open to political pressure and instability (such as the Arab uprisings). Such conditions increase regime vulnerability and in extreme cases can bring about regime change, which could give rise to political forces coming to power more hostile to Israel and more assertive in their support of the Palestinian cause. Further, Israel's securitized conception of the Mediterranean also extends to Europe. So, European policies towards the Levant, in terms of support for Palestinian agriculture and boycotting of exports from Israeli settlements, has meant that any action against its policies is perceived as a direct assault, in the context of its broader securitized conception of the Mediterranean and the geopolitical conditions which dominate Israel's strategic objectives.

**Saudi Arabia**'s view towards political instability in the Arab region from 2010, a series of events which came to be known as the Arab Spring, became an ontological concern. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood as a legitimately-elected government in Egypt was of particular concern. From Saudi Arabia's perspective, the MB's electoral success in 2012 not only gave it a voice in pan-Islamic circles but also legitimacy to address Sunni Muslims, particularly Sunni Arab Muslims, across the region, presumably challenging the narrative of Saudi Arabia and its ulama. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's concern was to present itself as the only and true representative of (Sunni) Islam, in contradistinction to Morsi's Egypt. Saudi Arabia interpreted these post-Arab Spring developments as potential sources of threat to the national security of the Kingdom itself, as well as challenges to the stability of some of its other GCC neighbours. The view that local Muslim Brotherhood affiliates could one day oust the monarchies of the GCC had acquired traction. This perception and sense of vulnerability can contribute to an explanation of Saudi Arabia's support for the new president, General Sisi after Morsi's government was removed, as well as its support for Salafi groups in Syria.

For **Qatar**, the Arab Spring provided a historic opportunity to create a condition of balance of power against Saudi Arabia. Yet, unexpected regional developments have created new tensions between Qatar and many of its Arab neighbours. In contrast to Saudi Arabia's largely defensive posture after the Arab Spring, Qatar's approach to the Mediterranean was fuelled by activism and presentation of markedly different approach to that of Saudi Arabia. Doha viewed the situation as an opportunity for extending its influence in the Southern Mediterranean and thus using weakening state structures as an opportunity to create new alliances and for enhancing its role in the region. This strategy was primarily focused on getting closer to the Muslim Brotherhood parties, especially those forming the new post-uprising governing elites in Egypt and Tunisia. It also endeavoured to use Al-Jazeera as a medium through which revolutionary ideas could be circulated across the region. Post-Arab Spring developments subsequently triggered a competition between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the Mediterranean. Heightened tensions resulted in a major diplomatic split in 2014 between and a much deeper and broader crisis in 2017 between Qatar and several GCC countries (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) as well as Egypt. The 2017 crisis has led to a boycott of Qatar and attempts by the Arab region's 'quartet' to isolate Doha and punish it for its regional policies, bringing perilously close the disintegration of the GCC, the Arab region's only successful regional organization.

The **United States**' approach and view towards the Mediterranean is similar to that of the EU. It has an unrivalled affinity with the EU countries in terms of culture, political institutions, and identity. The US's attitude was arguably further securitized following 9/11 and the growth of such radical groups as al-Qaeda in a region hitherto dominated by the US. In addition, following the formation of the US-led coalition against ISIS in September 2014, and the intensification of the war against the group in Iraq and Syria, has deepened Washington's securitized perspective of the region. Also, the link between terror networks and uncontrolled migration was further strengthened following a number of terrorist attacks in the EU countries and the possible infiltration of radical jihadist terrorists to the US. President Trump's 'Muslim ban' policy arguably stems from the same securitized attitude towards the region. Focus on counter-terrorism and migration has come at the expense of collaboration in the economic development of the Mediterranean countries, where the United States has even mooted the idea of cutting back on its aid package to Tunisia.

It can be argued that an alternative worldview is evident in the discourse of the **Islamic Republic of Iran**. This discourse is grounded in an alternative narrative and distinct use of terms and terminologies which have embedded within them different conceptualizations and concepts. So, Iranian elite have begun using terms such as 'West Asia' instead of the 'Middle East' in reference to their geopolitical neighbourhood, and 'Islamic Awakening' instead of 'Arab Spring' when discussing the post-2010 Arab uprisings. This could be read as an attempt at creating an alternative world order which challenges the dominant Western discourse. Along the same lines, Iran's use of the phrase 'Axis of Resistance' which refers to Tehran's own Arab-based regional alliance structure and the ideological driver of its regional security approach. In this ideological Axis, which is deployed to counter Western presence in Iran's perceived areas of influence one also finds the kernel of Iran's securitized approach. With regard to political ideas, anti-hegemonic perspectives and critical geopolitics form another feature of Iran's discourse in framing the world, in contradistinction to the geography-oriented and state-centred traditional geopolitical approach of the West. Some significance is accordingly given to Shiism as an influential factor in the geopolitics and geo-identity of the region, and one that features heavily in Iran's discussions of, and involvement in, the Eastern Mediterranean.

**Turkey**'s foreign policy has arguably gone through a process of change in the post-Cold War period, moving from close cooperation and alignment with its Western allies and the EU in particular towards a more independent and Muslim world-focus foreign policy. The shift is discernible in Turkey's policies the Mediterranean region. The re-orientation is a direct product of the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002. Initially the AKP government viewed the EU's regional integration initiatives as drive towards building a greater economic, political and social community in order to create greater stability in its neighbourhood. Foreign Minister Davutoglu's policy of 'zero problem with neighbours', which mainly aimed at de-securitizing relations with Turkey's neighbours including Syria was the key idea in this new approach. However such dramatic events as the Arab Spring, state weakness (in Iraq and Syria) on its doorstep, civil strife in the Middle East, and massive migration flows, have contributed towards rising tensions between Turkey and its neighbours and has led to Turkey adopting a security-driven approach to the new environment in the Mediterranean. Finally, issues such as the Turkey's stalled EU membership bid, the Cyprus question, and Turkey's projects of dam construction on the two rivers the Tigris and Euphrates, are serious challenges that can affect Turkey's relationships with its neighbours in the Mediterranean and further complicate Ankara's already strained relations with the Union.

**While all powers observed securitize the area, the divergence is to be found in the policy measures applied which are justified through this securitization process. There is no common approach to address what these powers perceive as security problems. And with everyone going it alone, they are all bound to clash.**

### Areas of Divergence with the EU

The EU has to deal with actors whose influence and presence is arguably on the rise, and thus needs to develop a fuller appreciation of the areas of divergence between its own priorities and those of these omnipresent powers.

The term and concept of the Mediterranean as a region is almost absent in each of **Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar's** discourses. Rather, their emphasis as indicated in their discourses respectively, rests on interactions with a set of Muslim and/or Arab countries. What is important in the region for Iran is its counter-hegemonic Axis of Resistance bloc, with supporting the Palestinian cause and upholding an anti-Zionist/Israeli position as one of the main principles of its foreign policy. This contrasts greatly with the EU's position, which regards Israel as a country associated to the European Union, conditioned on its commitment to the two-state solution. Saudi Arabia, has defined itself as the leader of the Muslim world (majority Sunni Islam), in contrast with Qatar's discourse which promotes a sense of pan-Arabism and support of the Muslim Brotherhood.

China is distant from the EU priorities in the Mediterranean due to its different mindmaps of the region. China positions itself as a developing country afflicted by colonialism and excesses of colonial powers. This narrative plays strongly in its policy discourses with North and sub-Saharan African states. The principle of non-interference gives China credit and credibility in its interactions with the Mediterranean countries. **Russia**, in contrast, displays a very different self-representation and it cuts its role in terms of its place in a fast-evolving international order in which it anticipates acting as a global power. Moscow displays this role perception in its actions in Syria, in which it is the dominant external military power who has a clear security presence on the ground. Moscow is positioning itself in the MENA region as a counterbalance to the West. Hence there is a limited ground for effective and meaningful cooperation with the EU, despite apparent shared goals of fighting terrorism or preventing further destabilization in the region.

Clearly there is great deal of convergence in **Israel**'s policies with EU, reinforced by their cultural and social affinity and the presence of democratic political institutions in Israel. But different strategic interests and the EU's unwavering support for a two-state solution has imposed pressures of divergence, especially in such fields as migration, water usage and agricultural development. Furthermore, Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories undermines its democratic credentials and stands at variance with the EU's self-conception as a liberal democracy and its unwavering belief in the right of Palestinians for self-determination.

Since the onset of the Arab uprisings, **Turkey**'s lack of a comprehensive vision for the Mediterranean and the role it sees for itself in this region is quite striking. Ankara's policy priorities do not always tally with the EU's and as Turkey tries to forge its own sphere of influence in the Mediterranean following the post-Arab Spring it inevitably clashes with some of EU's priorities. Its ad hoc approach to the region has arguably deepened its differences with the EU.

Finally, while the analysis demonstrates a remarkable similarity and complementarity between the **United States**' and EU's approaches to Mediterranean there has been a clear divergence in American and European priorities. Thus, whereas Europeans have mostly focused on the entire Mediterranean area as their 'neighbourhood', the US' focus has been overwhelmingly on the Eastern part of the Mediterranean; itself because of the concentration of geopolitical concerns and hard security threats touching on Washington's 'vital' and 'strategic' interests.

**Policy Implications and Recommendations**

In sum, our analysis shows that the Mediterranean is a changing geopolitical space in which the number, type and role of actors are in flux. Interaction with many of these actors remains difficult and complicated. With all actors securitizing the region, but under different parameters, it is difficult for the EU to develop a single comprehensive approach towards them. Furthermore, while Israel and Turkey are relatively well known quantities to the EU, Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia bring with them new and less clear cut policies to the Mediterranean, complicating the EU's assessment and calculations regarding the behaviour of these actors. Further, the intense competition amongst the Persian Gulf's states themselves in the Mediterranean poses the danger of spill over of these countries' disputes and quarrels to the Mediterranean. In the light of this assessment, the key policy recommendation WP2 puts forward is to review the nature and type of EU's interactions with the regional and major powers being present in this area. **A way forward would be to widen the Euro-Med contact group to include non-Mediterranean states which are key powers in the Mediterranean, namely China, US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia to discuss some initially very limited issues of common concern – terrorism, migration, water security, environmental protection, energy cooperation, employment enhancement – are areas for further multilateral dialogue.** By desecuritizing its approach the EU could contain the other parties' securitized approach as well and identify pathways towards a more cooperative interaction with the emerging actors. However, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are likely to resist involvement in any EU-led forum for dialogue, but this will leave the door open for bilateral European engagement with one or more of these countries.

**Selective engagement could allow for both bilateral and multilateral interaction. With Russia**, a dialogue which goes beyond Syria could facilitate a conversation over the reconstruction of Libya and thus help diffuse the overly securitized approach of Moscow in the region. **With regard to China**, the EU has a definite opportunity to capitalize on the OBOR (BRI) to enter into a constructive dialogue with Beijing about a more collective approach to development in the Mediterranean (West Asia). Development drives China's discourse and in this the parties share an interest in the stabilization of the Arab and West Asian economies, but also their growth and diversification. Both China and the EU share the intervening space for the success of the OBOR which aims to link Europe with East Asia. **The United States** and EU have arguably neglected other key policy priorities for the region, notably energy, industry, water, agriculture, and other vital areas for sustainable economic development. Such tendency is expected to strengthen in the years to come, especially under the Trump administration which came to powerfully prioritize the region's security and stabilization in hard/traditional security terms.

A change in the security discourses used to define the societies and states in the Mediterranean can help diffuse some of the tensions which now characterize the EU's interactions with the Mediterranean actors, and facilitate a dialogue about the social and individual rights of citizens, gender equality and the importance of good governance and rule of law. Such an approach could help nurture the conditions for closer EU cooperation with some of the other actors in the Mediterranean**.** As was suggested elsewhere in this project, such an approach does not imply downplaying, or even ignoring, existing security dynamics in the Mediterranean; rather the adoption of, and adherence to, a more holistic, diversified understanding of the multifaceted developments in a geopolitical space that is ever evolving.

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