

Volume 2 • Fall 2016

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN GEOPOLITICAL REVIEW

Shifting Un-balances in the Middle East



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ISSN print: ISSN 2421-8057

ISSN online: ISSN 2421-8065

URL: <http://www.emgr.unic.ac.cy/>

The *Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitical Review* is an annual peer-reviewed journal published by the Center for European and International Affairs of the University of Nicosia, that seeks to encourage scholarship on contemporary issues which affect and influence the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East as well as European and global affairs. It intends to facilitate the publication of high-quality, original research contributions that analyse perspectives and questions which pertain to a wide range of disciplines such as geopolitics, economics, political science, history, diplomacy, international law, security, defence, intelligence, political geography, and other related fields.

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The publication of the second volume of the journal was made possible
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Editor's Note

Shifting Un-balances in the Middle East

While human reasoning and societal perception usually tend towards logic and order, and political science analysis tries to interpret international relations and conflict through theoretical models of actors' behaviour in the international system, the evolving condition of global affairs, in the second decade of the 21st Century, is characterised by unpredictability, political ambiguity and unexpected geostrategic rebalances. The gradual disappearance of post-Cold War unipolarity, and the pressure exerted on the international system by unpredicted factors and underestimated variables – such as global overpopulation, unbalanced globalization, economic overexpansion, regional inequality and strategic antagonism – severely decreased the level of predictability, and consequently of strategic certainty and global stability, in the emerging *asymmetrical multipolarity*.

The Middle East could not remain unaffected by the evolving system of complex and contradictory dynamics. The 9/11 landmark, that signalled – under Geogre W. Bush's doctrine of War on Terror – the retaliatory direct engagement of US land forces in high-casualty campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, and a consequent “no boots on the ground” indirect engagement in Libya, eventually led – after realizing the failure of stabilizing the internal situation – into an American strategic retreat from the Middle East. The regional security vacuum that emerged, further burdened by the unpredictable character of the Arab Spring, encouraged Islamic sectarianism and intra-state violence that caused internal chaos, state failures, border challenges, and the realignment of regional balance of power.

The massive spread of radical Islamic terrorism and civil war in the Middle East, as well as the savage inhumanity accompanying the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria, were not confined within the traditional space of the region. Soon, foreign engagement in the air campaign of the US-led coalition against the IS, challenged European security with irregular migration, after the humanitarian crisis, and the spill of Islamic-inspired terrorism in major cities of the European heartland. At the same time, the hesitant US engagement in Iraq and Syria through local proxies, the American alienation with major regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the US-inspired nuclear deal with Iran, offered the opportunity for *strategic rebalancing* in the region.

Under the evolving *neo-Cold War strategic antagonism* between the West and Russia, the latter – seeking a respectable and equal role, with the West, in global security affairs – grabbed the opportunity of the security vacuum to emerge in the region, through its surprise deployment of air assets in Syria and massive air bombardments on the ground, as well as the establishment of a long range S-400 SAM, Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) over the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, directly challenging the US/NATO Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) in the region, founded on USN *Arleigh Burke* - Class destroyers (Aegis/SM-3). Moscow's Middle East re-emergence was also accompanied by power projection demonstrations with ship-launched *Kalibr-NK* cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea, submarine-launched *Kalibr-PL* cruise missiles from the Eastern Mediterranean, and long-range strategic air strikes with Tu-160 *Blackjack* bombers from Russian air bases.

In the complex Middle East situation, the pro-Assad alignment of Moscow with Shia Iran and Shia Lebanese Hezbollah in Syria, the active anti-IS/Sunni engagement of Tehran in Iraq and its indirect support of Shia anti-Saudi forces in Yemen, the alignment of Washington with anti-Asad Sunni opposition proxies and anti-IS Kurdish YPG forces in Syria, the engagement of Ankara in northern Syria with the support of Turkmen/Arab proxies, the anti-IS PYD/YPG Kurdish effort in northern Iraq, Turkish uneasiness for PKK presence in north-western Iraq, the Saudi-led anti-Shia engagement in Yemen, the fragile situation in Egypt and Lebanon, and the sectarian civil war in Libya, project a regional entanglement with severe regional, European and global implications.

Asian recalibration of strategic relations between Russia, China and India, as well as Chinese assertiveness in geostrategic disputes in the South and East China Seas, and nuclear challenges in the Korean peninsula, have redirected Washington's attention towards Eastern Asia, encouraging British strategic re-emergence *East of the Suez*. Whitehall's decision of extra-EU global influence – irrelevant with Brexit – became more obvious in September 2014 with British anti-IS engagement under *Operation Shader*, that was accompanied by the extensive refurbishment of the Royal Air Force base at Akrotiri Cyprus and the construction of a new Royal Navy base in Mina Salman Bahrain.

Although it is difficult to predict the future of the Middle East, there is no doubt that, under the unpredictable policies of conservative leaders, the third decade of the 21st Century will be characterised by unexpected strategic challenges, new forms of asymmetrical threats, cyber insecurity, and a revised vision of international security.

Dr Petros Savvides
Editor

The Role of the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean

Ambassador Kathleen Doherty

These are troubling times. Since the end of World Wars I and II, we have not seen so many conflicts splitting apart countries and leaving in their wake millions killed and displaced. Today the broader Middle East is facing staggering challenges. Together, Europe, the United States and our partners need to address the suffering of millions of people displaced from their homes, their livelihoods. Together we need to create the conditions for a stable, peaceful future.

The Middle East has figured prominently in the U.S. foreign policy agenda for decades, but that agenda is broad, covering every corner of the globe. As President Obama made clear in his 2016 State of the Union address, the demand for United States leadership is as high as it has ever been. We understand that and we accept that responsibility willingly. That is why the United States remains more engaged in more places around the world than at any other time in history.

Cyprus' interest in the Middle East is arguably even greater, given its geography. It is clear that we share many of the same priorities there – combatting violent extremism, ensuring the safety of refugees, and promoting good governance and opportunity to prevent future conflicts. The United States also cares deeply about mitigating Iran's destabilizing activities in the region and Israel's security. As President Obama has said, economic prosperity, security, democracy, and peace represent the values of our nation and our foreign policy reflects those values in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Combatting violent extremism

Today, our most overarching policy goal in the broader Middle East is combating violent extremism, which threatens everyone, both in the region and across the world. There are many groups espousing violent ideologies, but the

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most violent, most destructive, and most dangerous is Daesh, also known as ISIL. Our efforts to fight and defeat this group will continue, as it represents the greatest threat to the stability and future of this vital region.

President Obama has defined a three-pronged strategy for the fight against Daesh: to mobilize partners to broaden the fight, end the civil war in Syria, and prevent the spread of Syrian instability to its neighbors.

For the first, the mobilization of partners to broaden the campaign against Daesh has been very successful. There are currently 66 countries in the coalition, each playing a vital role, from providing military and humanitarian support, to stopping Daesh's financing and funding, and impeding the flow of foreign fighters. The United States has put more American Special Forces into the efforts in Syria itself, and expanded training efforts for groups that were effective in fighting Daesh. Operationally, coalition members have launched thousands of airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, worked with Iraqi forces to liberate important cities, cut terrorists' supply lines, and removed terrorist commanders from the battlefield. In the past months, Daesh has lost ground but also shown they have the capacity to strike far from the territory they hold. However, every tragic attack, whether in Beirut, Egypt, Paris, California, Turkey, Brussels, or Baghdad, makes the international community more resolute.

The second prong of the strategy is to work diplomatically to bring an end to the Syrian civil war, which we know cannot be ended through military intervention: it requires a political solution. Secretary Kerry has invested himself in the broad-based diplomatic initiative launched by the United Nations with the goal of reducing violence, isolating terrorist groups, and creating the basis for an inclusive, peaceful and pluralistic Syria. However these efforts face immense difficulties. A cessation of hostilities in the spring to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid remains fragile, and each day brings new stories of how the various parties on the ground are exacerbating tensions. The stakes are high, and Secretary Kerry has said that this conflict could easily engulf the region if left to spiral completely out of control. That statement has particular importance for neighbors like Cyprus.

The third prong of the fight against Daesh, ensuring that instability in Syria does not spill over into Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the region, including Cyprus. To help alleviate the burden that the chaos and violence in Syria has thrust upon its neighbors, the international community is also providing important military and humanitarian assistance to these neighbors. The fight against Daesh is a defining challenge for our time, and we are not naïve in thinking it will be easy.

Refugees

The refugee crisis facing Europe and the rest of the world is a humanitarian manifestation of the violent extremism in the Middle East and civil war in Syria. How Europeans address the flow of migrants could well determine the future of Europe – whether it stays unified or whether it fragments into more nationalistic concerns and policies. In the late spring, we saw an unprecedented agreement with Turkey, whereby the EU would send migrants back to Turkey and, in return, the EU would settle refugees sent by Turkey. As of this writing, many details of the agreement’s implementation remain to be worked out, but there is no doubt the monumental problems and challenges raised by the flow of refugees will continue.

The issue of refugees, however, is not just for Europeans to address. The United States intends to accept 85,000 of the world’s most vulnerable refugees in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017. Last year alone, the United States resettled nearly 70,000 refugees and granted asylum status to 25,000 people. Beyond accepting refugees, the United States is also doing what it can to help countries in crisis through policy, advocacy, and assistance. Inside Syria, as of early summer 2016, more than 6.5 million people have been displaced, a catastrophe unseen since World War II. Despite the evident difficulties, we have increased access to water, provided food, and renovated health facilities for these internally displaced peoples. Within Iraq, where 2.8 million are displaced, the United States is working with the Iraqi government and civil society to improve the delivery of basic essential services and to increase the protection of vulnerable populations. Likewise, for the almost 3 million refugees in Turkey, U.S. assistance has supported food, basic assistance, shelter, and protection services among other things, totaling nearly \$379 million since 2012. In February, Secretary Kerry announced \$601 million in additional life-saving humanitarian assistance for those affected by the war in Syria. Working both with governments and/or humanitarian organizations, funds are helping support such needs as food assistance, medical care, shelter, water, and sanitation in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. The United States also announced more than \$290 million in U.S. development assistance to Jordan and Lebanon for increased access to high-quality education. This educational assistance will reach around 230,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, and 62,000 in Lebanon. We also have programs to support refugee integration in Europe – including one in Cyprus. My embassy has initiated a project to teach English to refugees living in the camp at Kofinou, in order to help them integrate and become productive members of society, wherever their new homes might be.

Opportunity and good governance

Beyond helping to stem the instability caused by violent extremism and address the issues of refugees and migrants, the United States seeks to address the problems that led to such hopelessness in the region. Poverty, sectarian division and conflict are driving people to take enormous risks as they seek safety and economic security. About one-quarter of the populations in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen are under the age of 25. These young people, including the men, have limited prospects for work. As U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in February at the Brookings Institute, “We know that extremism thrives in the shadows of personal, social, political, and economic marginalization – capitalizing on the grievances of those who feel cast aside, left behind, ignored, or repressed. We look to counter that influence with the bright light of education, inclusion, tolerance, good governance, and opportunity.”

Access to opportunity means people hope for the future. Through assistance funds, the United States is improving basic and higher education, providing job training, and offering help to small businesses. In Egypt, for example, as a result of U.S. assistance funds, nearly 1.5 million girls improved their reading and comprehension skills through an early-grade reading program. Through USAID projects, Palestinian farmers increased exports by \$23 million after improving standards, and in Lebanon, U.S. education experts are working to develop further vocational training programs for job skills.

For the wider Middle East to be truly stable and prosperous, however, citizens’ demands for inclusive, responsive governance must be addressed. The United States is committed to helping build resilient, democratic societies by working with local partners to improve transparency and accountability of governments, foster pluralism, respect for human rights, and support expanding participation by civil society, youth, minorities and women. Taken together, all our assistance programs are designed to improve the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, to create jobs, to promote greater accountability of officials, to provide a sense of security, and to build a strong foundation for democracy and the free market conditions that promote inclusive growth. These are long term investments in people.

In addition to development assistance tools, we also use traditional diplomatic tools to bring warring parties together in Libya and create a safe environment for a government to begin to operate. In Tunisia, the United States is supporting groups that are working hard to strengthen democracy there. We work to enhance respect for human rights, both through programs and through policy driven reports like our Human Rights Report – holding governments accountable for their track record. The United States supports opportunity and

good governance because these policies reflect our values as Americans, but also because, as we have tragically seen in the past years, their absence leads to violence and to extremism.

Iran

In addition to broader Middle East initiatives, Iran has remained high on the U.S. foreign policy agenda due to its formerly illicit nuclear program, support for terrorism, and destabilizing activities in the region. One of the Obama administration's most important diplomatic achievements is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which constrains any Iranian attempt to build a nuclear bomb. The Plan of Action is complex but essentially provides for unprecedented monitoring and verification as well as dramatic reductions in Iran's enriched uranium and centrifuges. Some specific limitations in the plan apply for 10 years; others apply for 20 or 25 years. However, the basic monitoring and verification provisions are in effect for the lifetime of Iran's nuclear program and, as a result, Iran will be prohibited permanently from pursuing a nuclear weapon. Our sincere hope is that Iran, by re-joining the international community, will play a more responsible role in regional security writ large.

Israel

Israel's security remains a critical component of U.S. foreign policy. The historically strong and deep U.S.-Israeli friendship is well known and, like the Cypriot relationship with Israel, is based on one of shared values. We work closely with the Israeli government on many regional issues, while seeking to resolve the long-running dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. It is long-standing U.S. policy that we support a negotiated settlement and a two-state solution that allows for Israelis and Palestinians to live together in peace and security. As Secretary Kerry said in regard to Israel, "now is the time to see beyond the politics and the pressures of the moment and to look to the future. Both sides need to act in the long-term best interests of their people..."

Cyprus

The United States sees Cyprus as a valued friend and partner, not least because of our largely shared perspectives on the region. As an EU member firmly oriented toward European and American values of democracy, market economics, and respect for human rights, Cyprus is an important bridge. We are all stronger when we stand together. The United States firmly supports a reunited Cyprus because we believe it will better able to withstand future economic troubles and regional instability by capitalizing on the island's diversity and securing its borders. Therefore, we continue our unwavering support for the

island and our long-standing policy of supporting a bizonal, bicomunal federal solution for Cyprus. But Cyprus' future must be decided by Cypriots, for Cypriots. The United States applauds the commitment, vision, and leadership shown by Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci, and we hope they are able to reach an agreement the Cypriot people can endorse. We look to Cyprus to lead the region as a model of peace and stability and as an engine of growth.

The United States of America is committed to supporting the people of the broader Middle East as they strive for peace and prosperity, and to help build the foundations for inclusive and responsive governments. American initiatives to lead the coalition fighting Daesh, mitigate the refugee crisis, encourage good governance and opportunity, while containing Iran's nuclear program and defending Israel are our holistic approach to the region's many difficulties. We are proud to partner with Cyprus in pursuing these goals. As Secretary Kerry has said, "...If we remain engaged – if we will believe in diplomacy and in the effort to dialogue and to work to try to avoid conflict – if we will continue to mobilize to help and support allies and friends across the globe – if we will make the most of every single foreign policy tool at our disposal – if we think, not just about getting through the next year but about building new foundations for generations to come, then [we] will live up to the magnificent legacy that we have inherited and we will enable those who follow us to do the same."

The Position of the Russian Federation on the Volatile Middle Eastern Situation

Ambassador Stanislav Osadchiy

Russia believes that the countries of the region of the Middle East and Northern Africa must become stable, free from wars and conflicts of any kind. Our historic ties with many of them is a clear example of how a relationship is based on mutual trust, strong economic, political and cultural cooperation. We expect this interaction to develop and to grow, forming a new picture of the modern world – peaceful, friendly and free from prejudice when it comes to the global context of modern events.

Several empires aspired to conquer this region. It never brought peace, more often it left things in a chaotic state. Clash of religion and territorial disputes in one of the cradles of civilization contributed substantially to the history of the world. The story of the Middle East illustrates how controversial a region can be. As we all know, history has a trend to repeat itself. What we see nowadays is a vivid sign of a lesson not well learned.

Like in ancient times the region still has a tangle of geopolitics, economic and energy ambitions of different players, ethnical and religious heterogeneity of the population, a huge gap between rich and poor. All these and other factors lead to the total division and continuous struggle within Middle Eastern countries and between them.

The modern picture of the region is unfortunately affected by insurmountable collisions between Arabs and Jews, Sunnites and Shiites, Turks and Kurds. And there are a lot more conflicts of smaller scale, negatively influencing the peaceful coexistence in the vast Middle East. One of the deadlock situations is the relations between Israel and Palestine. It is well-known that for decades now no perfect solution could be introduced on how to untie this very complicated and contradictory knot. The Israeli-Palestine dialogue has been frozen since 2014 after

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another failure of the international community to address it. The Russian Federation is an active supporter of the resumption of the negotiations and stands for the enhancement of the role of the Quartet (international mediators, including Russia, the U.S., the EU and the UN) in the peace-process. Our view is that all four participants need to pay more attention to the interaction with important regional players as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others. Our common task is to prevent the deterioration of this conflict. Cessation of violence escalation and creation of the favorable conditions for restarting the settlement process are of crucial importance as well. Reconciliation between Israel and Palestine would open up the door for various improvements in the whole region and become a strong foundation for addressing other problems in the Middle East.

Another very important factor is a differentiation within Islam. Disintegration of the governmental bodies and uncontrolled fragmentation of the Middle Eastern space on the basis of ethnic, religious, national and other criteria resulted in the creation of a huge vacuum, which has been filled in by terrorists of every stripe. The first groups of terrorists appeared in the territory of Afghanistan, spreading further even to the Northern African region and now being most active in Iraq and Syria, where ISIS and Jabhat-al-Nusra (Al Qaeda's branch in Syria) gunmen succeeded in conquering vast territories. And now they are trying to extend their influence on the other countries of the region, committing terrorist acts all over the world.

One of the crucial periods, which definitely had the most negative impact on the countries in the vast Middle East and Northern Africa, in the modern history, was so called "Arab spring." More than five years passed since the wave of "revolutions" flew over this region. The natural desire of Arab people to be freed from tyranny and poverty were cynically used by some Western countries for the implementation of their geopolitical aspirations. The false pretext of fighting the evil was used to achieve their geopolitical goals.

People of Arab countries were promised to have prosperity, democracy and security of their rights and freedoms. In reality the countries of the region were imposed with standards contradictory to their beliefs, lifestyle, traditions and culture. Instead of democracy and freedom these nations faced interference in their domestic affairs, chaos, violence, civil wars. A lot of Middle Eastern and Northern African countries plunged into darkness and nowadays see no bright prospects. Moreover, events in Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and some other countries proved the danger of euphoria that reigned during the "Arab spring."

These examples indicate a clear rule – the more active external interference is, in internal affairs, the more bloody and unpredictable can the situation become within and around a country. One of the clearest lessons is Libya. Five years passed since the overthrow of Muammar Kaddafi, who had been

proclaimed the root of all evil. Unlawful NATO bombings of the country, contradicting a no-fly zone UN resolution, brought no peace. Moreover, the situation has been deteriorating further. Libyan authorities are not able to take over the control not only in the country, but even in the capital. Former “revolutionary brigades” occupy vast territories of the state and tensions arise from time to time with tribal and regional armed groups. A separate issue is that uncontrolled weapons leak out of Libya to guerillas in other countries, especially neighboring ones.

A more evident case are the events of September 2014 in Iraq, where ISIS extremists occupied key provinces within several days. As a result of the U.S. invasion in 2003, when the Iraqi army and the state machinery was destroyed, causing a sharpest interreligious and interethnic crisis, which the country since then is not able to overcome. It is obvious, Iraq was chosen by terrorists as a base mostly due to the continued chaos in this divided country.

Most vivid example is Syria nowadays. This country became an arena of aggressive offensive of the Islamist radicals against the lawful authorities, which caused a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe in its territory and beyond. It is widely acknowledged that such state of affairs became a reality mostly due to the support of Syrian opposition by some Western countries and their regional allies, who categorized terrorists into “bad” and “good” groups.

The direct consequence of the recent events in the Middle East and Northern Africa is the migration crisis in Europe. The attempts to build a fence and hide from the refugees behind it have led to the situation when desperate people fleeing from the wars and conflicts in their countries instead of promised comfortable life get into new trouble, undergo inhumane and sometimes violent treatment.

In such a catastrophic situation the lawful Syrian government was in desperate need of international support to stop propagation of extremists of ISIS and other affiliated Islamist groups. It is clear that if these terrorists succeeded in conquering Syria, they would certainly spread their activity to other neighboring territories coming very close to the south of Europe.

The Russian Federation as a permanent member of the UN Security Council took up the call of the Syrian authorities and in full conformity with international law started on 30 September 2015 a military operation against ISIS. For less than half a year our air strikes destroyed infrastructure and huge groups of terrorists. Our military actions helped the lawful Syrian forces to take control over most part of the territory of the country forcing the remaining extremists to retreat. In the middle of March 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin announced completion of the full-scale air operation and most part of Russian military contingent was withdrawn leaving only some units for maintaining cease-fire.

In February 2016 Russia and the U.S. as the co-chairs of the international group supporting Syria, made a joint statement on the termination of combat operations. The cease-fire regime entered into force on 27 February 2016. These developments allowed facilitating a political settlement in Syria, creating prerequisites for launching a comprehensive inter-Syria dialogue with the broad participation of different social and political groups of this country. Nowadays the crucial target is to secure a constant cease-fire and to ease the humanitarian situation there. Simultaneously the international community ought to play most effective role as intermediaries between Syrians under the UN umbrella, first of all, at the Geneva platform. After all, the people of Syria themselves must define the future of their country, its political system and balance between various movements.

We all understand that these are just the first cautious steps towards truce. We need to save the current fragile situation and gradually return Syria to peaceful life. Stability in this state will definitely add to the security of the region as a whole and lessen the threat of terrorism to other countries. To make these aspirations come true it is also necessary to continue with the elimination of the terrorist threat. It would be possible only when the radicals are cut off from financial and arms supplies. We hope that common sense will prevail and all regional players will understand the counterproductiveness of their games with terrorists, whose target they would become sooner or later.

The Russian Federation has always called for the settlement of domestic-policy conflicts in each specific country by means of dialogue, taking into account the interests of all strata of society, excluding external intervention. The firm principle is that interested members of international community must rigorously respect fundamental principles of the UN Charter and the rules of international law. The tragic developments in the region and even the whole world show the necessity of search for non-violent solutions for any crisis, respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states. This is the main lesson everybody must learn from the continuing transformation processes in the Middle East, which are far from ending.

There is no doubt that solutions of any conflicts in the region must be achieved peacefully under the umbrella of the United Nations and its representatives with the active participation of the most important regional and global powers and multilateral organizations, such as the Group of Twenty, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, etc. Balanced and not-biased involvement of the international community must serve the purpose of bringing warring parties together and creating conditions for their peaceful and effective interaction. Strong partnership of the regional countries with the successful cooperation between sovereign states will open up new opportunities for common action against global challenges, starting from terrorism and any other forms of radical ideology.

Hegemony and Balance of Power in the Middle East

Michalis Kontos

This article analyses the geopolitical developments in the greater Middle East, by using concepts and analytical tools deriving from the International Relations (IR) theory, and examines the diverging perspectives in the region, with special reference to the distribution of power as well as the agendas of regional actors and extra-regional great powers. In this context, it explains how the agendas and relations between players are being influenced by power redistributions (or perceptions of them). Furthermore, it examines the applicability of the theoretical models of regional hegemony and balance of power in relation to the greater Middle East and discusses the emerging configuration of regional relations.

Theoretical aspects: power distribution, hegemony and balance of power

International systems, including regional ones, undergo internal transformations whenever their structure changes. According to Waltz's definition, a structure is

defined by the arrangement of its parts. Only changes of arrangement are structural changes. A system is composed of a structure and of interacting parts. [...] Since structure is an abstraction, it cannot be defined by enumerating material characteristics of the system. It must instead be defined by the arrangement of the system's parts and by the principle of that arrangement.¹

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¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 80. On Realism's overall contribution to understanding changes in international politics see Robert Jervis, "Realism in the Study of World Politics," *International Organization*, 52:4 (Autumn 1998), 971-991 (1984-1987).

A structure can be perceived as a static situation that, according to Waltz, mirrors the arrangement of its parts. However, when seen in historical perspective, it is a rather dynamic concept. The main defining factor of a system's structure is the distribution of capabilities across the major units. When this changes, the units' behaviour is adjusted accordingly.² Structural changes are fed by the fact that the capabilities of a system's units tend to grow unevenly. Uneven growth affects not only the distribution of power at the systemic level, but also state expectations and behaviour at the units' level. As Gilpin puts it:

The most important factor for the process of international political change is not the static distribution of power in the system (bipolar or multipolar) but the dynamics of power relationships over time. It is the differential or uneven growth of power among states in a system that encourages efforts by certain states to change the system in order to enhance their own interests or to make more secure those interests threatened by their oligopolistic rivals.³

Similarly, Kennedy points that the uneven rate of growth among different societies, along with "technological and organizational breakthroughs which bring a greater advantage to one society than to another," are the drivers of change in the relative strengths of leading nations in world affairs.⁴ As an independent variable that brings about systemic change through the changing distribution of capabilities, uneven growth could vary in intensity and systemic impact.

A perception of a power distribution – based on a "snapshot" of a distribution of capabilities that characterizes relations in a system at a given time – that is subject to the dynamics of uneven growth could be underpinned, or undermined, by another related factor, prestige. According to Gilpin:

Prestige is the reputation for power, and military power in particular. Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state's capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power. In the language of contemporary strategic theory, prestige involves the credibility of a state's power and its willingness to deter or compel other states in order to achieve its objectives. [...] Prestige, rather than power, is the everyday currency of international relations, much as authority is the central ordering feature of domestic society.⁵

² Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 97-98.

³ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 93.

⁴ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage, 1987), xv.

⁵ Gilpin, *War and Change*, 30-31.

So, prestige speaks to the sphere of perceptions.⁶ It is related to what the others believe of one power's capacity and will. Prestige generates legitimacy, namely "acceptance of authority, the right of a rule or a ruler to be obeyed, as distinguished from the power to coerce."⁷ A unit that has persuaded its rivals of its superior capacity by showing its muscles (not just having them without making use of them) is more likely to capitalize on its strength. The more a power is persuasive of its will to act towards imposing its interests or its favourable version of an international order, the more its rule will be accepted and respected. Conversely, when a unit's prestige is waning, either due to a real devaluation of its power indicators or a perceived one, or when its decisiveness to impose its will is disputed, its legitimacy is proportionately undermined.⁸

In any case though, despite their indisputable methodological value, uneven growth and prestige alone cannot explain regional power distributions. Some of the characteristics of a given regional structure may not be subject to the dynamics of uneven growth, although they could still be highly influential. Geography, for example, is one of them; a well-organized and functioning sovereign state with massive land area may probably enjoy several advantages over a significantly smaller one, unless other variables neutralize them. Likewise, a big country that does not have any neighbours of equal or like size, or is naturally protected by surrounding seas, could be much safer than a country that neighbors with peers. Or natural capital; a country that has significant sub-soil energy resources could achieve energy self-sufficiency and economic benefits in case it manages to unearth its natural wealth, contrary to a country that was not blessed with this fortune.

Usually both dynamic and static factors can jointly define regional distribution of power, while their study could help an analyst to foresee future tendencies. It can be argued that the joint effect of dynamic and static factors could produce various outcomes in terms of regional configuration, the most typical of them being hegemony and balance of power.

In systems that can be described as hegemonic the main feature is the existence of hegemony; a type of regional order that is defined by the presence of "a state so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system."⁹

⁶ For a comprehensive approach in relation with the functioning of perceptions (and misperceptions) in international politics see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁷ Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17.

⁸ On misperception of intentions and aggressiveness as a cause of war see Robert Jervis, "War and Misperception," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18:4 (Spring 1988), 675-700.

⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 40.

From a different point of view, it can be described as “some power or authority in a system [that] is able to ‘lay down the law’ about the operation of the system.”¹⁰ In relation with the possible limits of a hegemonic order, Mearsheimer thoroughly observes that global hegemony is virtually impossible for any state due to “the difficulty of projecting power across the world’s oceans onto the territory of a rival great power.” Therefore, “the best outcome a great power can hope for is to be a regional hegemon and possibly control another region that is nearby and accessible over land.”¹¹ The United States is a typical case of a regional hegemon in the context of the Western Hemisphere – as Mearsheimer argues, the only regional hegemon in modern history.

In the contemporary international system at least two more states are broadly considered to be in pursuit, and capable of achieving a sort, of regional hegemony, as they seem to persistently try to increase their influence in their backyards driven by broader security concerns. The first one is the People’s Republic of China, which seems to be in a course of significantly increasing its influence in East Asia, both in economic and, increasingly, military terms.¹² The other is the Russian Federation: disturbed by what it perceives as Western expansion in its neighbourhood – especially after the accession of former Soviet satellites to NATO and Ukraine’s recent turn towards the European Union – Moscow is trying to deter Western influence from being established in a “buffer zone” ranging from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and Caucasus, through the projection of its own muscle.¹³ Both of these great powers enjoy respective comparative advantages in terms of regional power distribution (especially the former), their prestige is on the rising, but they still haven’t achieved legitimacy as regional hegemon due to the fact that their “regional rule” is disputed by neighbours or by extra-regional peers; in the case of Russia by NATO and of China by the United States.

¹⁰ Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, 15.

¹¹ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 41.

¹² Richard D. Fisher, *China’s Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Michael Green et al., “Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2016, 10-13; John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3:4 (Winter 2010), 382-385.

¹³ Roger E. Kanet, ed., *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Stephen Kotkin, “Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/russias-perpetual-geopolitics>; Henry Kissinger, “How the Ukraine Crisis Ends,” *The Washington Post*, 6 March 2014. <http://www.henryakissinger.com/articles/wp030614.html>; Stefan Fröhlich, Luke Coffey and Sigurd Neubauer, “NATO’s Northern Alliance: How Berlin, London, and Oslo Can Strengthen Ties,” *Foreign Affairs*, 15 March 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/northern-europe/2017-03-15/natos-northern-alliance>.

On the other hand, the absence of a “legitimate” hegemon in a given regional system, where several peers try to safeguard or improve their own share in power distribution and to prevent the rise of a hegemon, is the main point of interest in the balance of power theory.¹⁴ The process of balancing – internal, namely through the increase of a unit’s own capabilities, and external through the creation of alliances¹⁵ – is the cornerstone of this theory. In that sense, oscillation between hegemony and balance of power, due to the ongoing process of regional balancing, is evident in the examples of the Chinese and the Russian quests to increase their regional influence.

It is essential to note that the balance of power theory suggests that a possible outcome of such a process – other than hegemony – is the creation of a stable situation. Contrary to hegemony, stability that is achieved through a balance of power entails a situation in which several powers acknowledge each other’s equal standing in their systemic environment. Bull refers to Vattel’s classic definition of balance of power: “a state of affairs where no one power is in a position where it is preponderant and can lay down the law to others.” Furthermore, Bull distinguishes, what he calls, “simple balance of power” which is “made up of two powers, from one consisting of three or more,” which he calls “complex balance of power.” Among other examples, Bull refers to the Cold War bipolarity as a case of simple balance of power – but he notes that it became a complex one after China entered the great power competition in the 1970s, thus underlying the dynamic and ever-changing nature of systemic structures – and the mid-19th Century Europe as a case of complex balance of power. He urges to note though, that “no historical balance of power has ever been perfectly simple or perfectly complex.” Bull also distinguishes between general and local balance of power. The former refers to a situation of absence of a “preponderant power in the international system as a whole,” while the latter refers to specific regional configurations.¹⁶

Watson extends Bull’s analysis of balance of power by taking an evolutionary approach, providing several case studies that outline the evolutionary character of the “international society.”¹⁷ Europe is a good example of a regional system that is subject to the relentless dynamics of balancing, with historical periods of instability, when aspirant hegemons tried to breach the regional order, and prolonged periods of stability, through achieving a balance

¹⁴ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 22.

¹⁵ Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 24-25.

¹⁶ Hedley Bull, *Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan Education, 1977), 97-98.

of power. For example, he calls the 18th Century “an age of reason and of balance” in Europe:

An international society of states, or princes, functioned well, with rules and institutions and underlying assumptions, which its members accepted. Wars, in the sense of conflicts between states involving military operations, were certainly there. But they were not wars for great religious causes, or about how hegemonical the states system should be.¹⁸

This course was disturbed by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. These turbulent developments, especially Napoleon’s surge for empire in Europe, shook the foundations of European politics and provoked the creation of a “collective hegemony” in the 19th Century. After 1815 and the Congress of Vienna, which defined the post-Napoleonic balance of power in Europe, Austria, Britain, Russia, Prussia and restored Bourbon France considered that international stability could be achieved only if their dynasties were safeguarded and revolutionary attempts were repressed. The regional order was managed by a collective mechanism of “diffused hegemony,” called the “concert of the great powers.”¹⁹ According to Watson, 19th Century order in Europe was “a synthesis between two opposing ways of organizing Europe;” 18th Century’s balance and Napoleon’s moment of imperial rule.²⁰

As for contemporary Europe, Watson observes that it has reached a highly advanced stage of evolution, which has been achieved partly as a result of the existence of a widely accepted dominant culture. Moreover, he refers to the impressive trend “toward regional associations” and the “gradual tightening and geographical enlargement of the European Community.”²¹ In a sense, contemporary Europe has achieved a state of stability through the balance of power that has been in place for 70 years. The Trans-Atlantic partnership and

¹⁷ Watson adopts the definition of international society provided by Bull, namely a situation where a group of states, “conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.” In a way, international society could be perceived as an advanced form of an international system, since, in the absence of these rules and institutions, the international system remains a mere context of inter-state contact and interaction, which is only “sufficient to make the behavior of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other.” See Adam Watson, “Hedley Bull, States Systems and International Societies,” *Review of International Studies*, 13:2 (April 1987), 147-153 (147).

¹⁸ Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, 198.

¹⁹ Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, 240.

²⁰ Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, 238.

²¹ Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, 308.

Europe's reliance on the United States as the continent's "pacifier" after the two catastrophic World Wars, in line with the US Cold War strategy of containing communism, has been of paramount importance to this development.²² By all means, long-lasting stability is not unprecedented in European history. What makes the contemporary European system different from past ages is the outstanding degree of institutional maturity Europe has achieved, based on the revolutionary idea of supranational integration, with the creation of common institutions, rules and processes of the European Communities and the European Union. Contemporary Europe's institutional maturity could be seen both as an outcome as well as a safeguard to regional stability, assuming of course that the common rules are respected and hegemonic aspirations are not expressed outside of the EU institutional framework, neither do they lead to attempts of eliminating the Union's consociational character.

Regional order in the greater Middle East

In the second part of the article, the previously explained theoretical assumptions will be interpreted for the region of the Middle East. Contrary to the case of Europe, the contemporary balancing game in the Middle East is characterized by conflict and widespread instability. Thus, explaining power relations within the framework of the balance of power theory, by taking into account the factors that define the regional distribution of power, is essential in order to arrive at conclusions over the present and future regional configuration. Two main hypotheses will be tested: whether the strategic retreat of the United States from the Middle East created perceptions, of a redistribution of power, that accordingly influenced the agendas of other regional and extra-regional powers; whether the emerging distribution of power in the greater Middle East, which is characterized by the existence of several peers and consequently by the absence of an undisputed potential hegemon, will eventually lead to the emergence of a "legitimate" regional balance of power.

The Middle East as a regional states system: determining developments

The Middle East²³ can be perceived as a regional states system only after World War II. Before that, in the interwar period, the predominantly Arab region,

²² John J. Mearsheimer, "Why is Europe Peaceful Today? ECPR Keynote Lecture," *European Political Science*, 9 (2010), 387-397.

²³ What is described as "the Middle East" is a subject of a discussion that includes geographical, historical and cultural elements. In the Western literature there is also a distinction between the "Middle East" and the "Near East." An interesting approach is held by the US State

which was formerly an Ottoman dominion, was divided by the British and the French into spheres of influence that fell under respective mandates.²⁴ The eventual retreat of the European powers and the independence of several Arab states, as well as the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the outburst of the first Arab-Israeli war, created a new regional order that was characterized by tensions and violence. The rise of pan-Arabism under the predominant figure of the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, as well as the initiation of the Palestinian liberation struggle under the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) intensified the tag-of-war between the Arabs and the Israelis.

Actually, Nasser's efforts to embrace the Arab world and create a pan-Arab movement could be seen as a pursuit of regional leadership,²⁵ setting forth an ambitious vision of Arab-led regional hegemony that would decrease foreign influence in the Middle East, illustrated by the warmth in US-Israeli relations that became evident in the 1960s. However, this was not made possible due to several factors, such as the lack of unity among the Arab states, but also the decisive military defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan by Israel in the Six Day War in 1967.²⁶ From a historical perspective, the three Arab-Israeli wars that followed the 1948 conflict – the Suez campaign in 1956, the Six Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 – could be perceived as a sequence of surges to “end unfinished business.” From a different point of view, under the perspective of the theoretical assumptions offered above, they could be seen as a violent pursuit of peace terms in the turbulent region; a process of balancing between the Arab states and Israel.

Two broader, mutually reinforcing, developments should be approached as independent variables influencing regional geopolitics in the Middle East of the 20th Century: the discovery of vast oil reserves in the first half of the Century,

Department and is outlined in some of its post-World War II documents, where the “Middle East” encompasses the “Near East.” In the conclusions of a Near Eastern Chiefs of Missions conference held in Istanbul, in February 1951, it is clarified that “Middle East” refers to a region that includes Greece, Turkey, Iran, Israel and the Arab states, while “Near East” refers only to the Arab States and Israel. In this article, greater “Middle East” refers to the whole regional bow, which ranges from southeastern Mediterranean to North Africa including Iran, Israel, the Arab states and the Arabian Peninsula; in this context, the region is approached as a regional system with a significant degree of internal interaction.

²⁴ Paul Salem, “The Middle East: Evolution of a Broken Regional Order,” *Carnegie Papers*, 9 (June 2008), 3-4.

²⁵ Salem, “The Middle East,” 7.

²⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 22-23.

especially in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran, and the Cold War in its second half.²⁷ Early in the Cold War era, which was characterized by the bi-polar structure of the international system, the two Superpowers understood the importance of consolidating their influence in the oil-rich Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East. This was intensified by their mutual need to balance each other in the context of their emerging global antagonism. In a top secret document of the American State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, dated October 1946, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that, in case of a war with the Soviet Union, the control of Iran and Saudi Arabia's oil reserves by the United States would be of paramount importance. At the same time, the Soviet "[l]oss of the Iraq and Saudi Arabia sources to the United States and her allies would mean that in case of war they would fight an oil-starved war;" therefore, "it is to the strategic interests of the United States to keep Soviet influence and Soviet armed forces removed as far as possible from oil resources in Iran, Iraq and the Near and Middle East."²⁸

US involvement in the Middle East: from indirect to direct engagement

The energy and security considerations amidst the looming Cold War drew the United States into the Middle East balancing game, with some particularly successful results. For example, through the CIA-orchestrated overthrow of the Iranian Prime Minister Mohamed Mossadeq in 1953, which rendered the pro-Western Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi the master of the game in Tehran, Washington achieved a major shift of the regional balance of power in favor of US interests.²⁹ Another example of a US-guided success in the Middle East is the 1978 breakthrough that brought about the first Arab-Israeli peace agreement through the Camp David Accords, which was, to a large degree, made possible due to US mediation. At the time, both friends and foes had recognized that a US diplomatic initiative would be absolutely necessary to manage the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁰

²⁷ For further analysis see Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim, ed., *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Toby Craig Jones, "America, Oil and War in the Middle East," *The Journal of American History*, 99:1 (June 2012), 208-218.

²⁸ 711.91/10-1246 "Memorandum by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee to Major General John H. Hilldring", Washington, 12 October 1946. *Foreign Relations of the United States* 7 (1946): 529-532.

²⁹ Mehran Kamrava, *The Political History of Modern Iran: From Tribalism to Theocracy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 66.

³⁰ Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Touchstone, 2002), 180.

Of course there were failures as well, such as the 1973-1974 oil embargo imposed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on the countries that supported Israel, that tremendously raised oil prices and convulsed Western economies.³¹ Or the Islamic revolution in Iran, in 1978-79, which totally reversed the gains of Mossadeq's overthrow and transformed the US strategic priorities in the region. In any case though, throughout the Cold War the United States – as the most powerful state in the world, both in hard power and soft power terms³² – contributed to the preservation of a manageable regional balance of power, in favour of its strategic interests. From a strategic point of view, this was made possible because Washington avoided direct military intervention and preferred an offshore balancing strategy that was designed to support regional allies against soviet expansionism, or hostile aspiring regional hegemons. The United States would deploy its power abroad only when direct threats to vital US interests emerged and local allies failed to check them.³³

In terms of serving Washington's main strategic objectives in the region, US involvement in the greater Middle East during the Cold War era was successful. For example, Soviet expansionism was effectively contained, even in times of escalation as in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Furthermore, US involvement, or perceptions of it, defined the regional relations and alignments. It can be said that, during the Cold War era, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the Middle East was a regional system characterized by a fragile balance of power where US involvement was among the definitive balancing factors. This is indicated in several cases, such as the US involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as the support of Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war or the Mujahideen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Eventually though, US meddling in the greater Middle East took a different form; that of direct interventionism. The offshore balancing strategy was reversed in favor of strategic options that urged for more physical presence of the United States in the region. The turning point was the Persian Gulf War, in 1991. As Walt observes:

³¹ Friedman, *Choice of Enemies*, 27-28.

³² Joseph S. Nye Jr, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4-12.

³³ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case of Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, 95 (July / August 2016), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>; Stephen M. Walt, "US Middle East Strategy: Back to Balancing," *Foreign Policy*, 21 November 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/21/usmiddleeaststrategybacktobalancing/>.

[...] after 1991, the United States departed from this strategy [offshore balancing] in two steps. First, it adopted the odd strategy of ‘dual containment’: Instead of using Iraq and Iran to check each other, Washington took on the task of containing both. This strategy required the United States to keep large military contingents in Saudi Arabia, thereby reinforcing Osama bin Laden’s animus and helping produce the 9/11 attacks. Second, George W. Bush administration adopted the even more foolish strategy of ‘regional transformation,’ which led directly to the disastrous debacle in Iraq.³⁴

At a descriptive level, an escalating approach of US engagement in the greater Middle East is observed. While during the Cold War, American involvement aimed at establishing and/or safeguarding a convenient regional balance of power by supporting regional allies, in the early post-Cold War period it became more self-reliant. This escalation grew further after the 9/11 attacks, with the initiation of the long-lasting war in Afghanistan and, especially, the shift toward unilateralism through the 2003 illegitimate invasion of Iraq that “reinforced global concerns about the unchecked nature of US power.”³⁵ Therefore, US engagement in the Middle East escalated from an indirect form to a direct one. Walt thoroughly ascribes the third, and most detrimental, level of this escalation to false strategic estimations made in Washington, in the context of an attempt to revise the strategic framework of US global engagement from one of selective engagement, since the early 1990s, to one of global hegemony, under G. W. Bush’s doctrine of preventive war and the goal of regional transformation of the greater Middle East.³⁶

At the systemic level of analysis, this shift from indirect to direct engagement could also be seen as a bi-product of the global shift of power distribution that took place after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a unipolar global system, deciding to “go it alone” was much easier for the only remaining Superpower than under the Cold War security dilemmas. However, such decisions tend to expose great powers to the danger of overextension that weakens national power over the longer term.³⁷

³⁴ Walt, “US Middle East Strategy.”

³⁵ Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York: Norton, 2005), 59.

³⁶ Walt, *Taming American Power*, 219-222.

³⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism After Cold War,” *International Security*, 25:1 (Summer 2001), 5-41 (13); see also Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*.



Figure 1: Walt's view of the evolution of US global strategy.³⁸

... and back again: US strategic retreat and its consequences

There were vital reasons for the United States to retain its role in the Middle East after the end of the Cold War; the main long-term US interests in the region were to secure the flow of oil and gas to the western markets, to deal with the emerging threat of Islamic terrorism, as well as to inhibit the spread of weapons of mass destruction.³⁹ Furthermore, retaining influence in regions with high geostrategic value such as the Middle East, serves the goal of safeguarding the US-led global order, a long-term strategic interest with both security and economic parameters.

However, the overstretch of US capabilities proved to be challenging and fatal: the decision to start two costly and long-lasting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which were made in the broader context of a hegemonic strategy, became the turning-point of a two-decades course of strategic expansion. As Gilpin would argue, "marginal costs of further expansion" proved to be "greater than marginal benefits."⁴⁰ Keeping a fragile offshore balance in a region that is prone to violence and power competitions can only be achieved through prudent management of military options and moderate diplomacy. And despite the fact that the United States was the most powerful player in the region, with a decades-long record of military presence and penetrating regional influence, it had always, to a large degree, relied on others in order to safeguard its interests. Stephen Walt had prophetically underlined in 2005 that the shift toward unilateral and hegemonic strategic options, evident during the G. W. Bush presidency, would jeopardize US international position and prestige in the long term:

[S]tates that seek to challenge US primacy will look for windows of opportunity. The temptation to exploit these windows will increase even further when they enable other states to alter the balance of power in some tangible and enduring way. Defying the United States is inherently risky,

³⁸ Walt, *Taming American Power*, 218-223.

³⁹ Walt, "U.S. Middle East Strategy."

⁴⁰ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 106-107.

⁴¹ Walt, *Taming American Power*, 118.

but it makes more sense to run these risks if the act of defiance itself may place the state in question in a fundamentally stronger strategic position.⁴¹

Apparently, US Middle East strategy changed during Barack Obama's presidency. By shifting toward less "hawkish" policies, coupled with a partial retreat from US commitments in the region that dated back to the Cold War period, Washington made clear that it had realized the need to reverse the unfavorable results of the preceding hubris.⁴² The main direct outcome of this change was the full withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq, as well as the partial withdrawal from Afghanistan. These developments signified a broader strategic retreat, as it soon became obvious that the strategic option of direct engagement was abandoned. The attempt to impose a hegemonic pattern of relations in the greater Middle East came to an inglorious end, as Washington was not willing, any more, to pay the price of regional dominance; as a result, less effort and resources were to be devoted to this turbulent region. But since its long-term interests remained unchanged, the United States could not abandon the region; therefore, the choice for the day-after was not full retreat from US commitments, but the return to a more prudent strategic approach of indirect engagement.



Figure 2: The evolution of US engagement in the Middle East

Soon a new wave of US interventionism in the greater Middle East emerged, with NATO's engagement in Libya in 2011 and the launch of air strike operations by a US-led coalition in Iraq and Syria against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014 (both under a UN mandate). However, this did not reverse the course of indirect engagement; in Libya, Washington's participation was described as a "leading from behind" intervention.⁴³ In Syria

⁴² Henry A. Kissinger, "A Path out of the Middle East Collapse," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 October 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/apathoutofthemiddleeastcollapse1445037513>; Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson, "The End of Pax Americana: Why Washington's Middle East Pullback Makes Sense," *Foreign Affairs*, 94 (November/December 2015), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/1115571>.

⁴³ Ryan Lizza, "Leading from behind," *The New Yorker*, 26 April 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/leading-from-behind>.

and Iraq, apart from the air operations, small training groups are cooperating with friendly armies and local forces while the US government is committed to a limited (and careful) engagement. Unlike his predecessor's unilateralism, US military interventionism under Barack Obama has been strictly multilateral and characterized by "no boots on the ground."⁴⁴ Expectedly, this renewed wave of US interventionism in the Middle East is characterized by low intensity.

However, this change in US strategic priorities in the Middle East brought about several complications at the regional level. The strategic retreat of the United States – especially the scope of US military withdrawal from Iraq – suggested a major regional redistribution of capabilities and, as noted above, changes in the distribution of capabilities in a given region tend to transform the regional units' behavior. American disengagement created perceptions of a power vacuum in the greater region; real or imagined, the power vacuum transformed, or contributed to the transformation of, the behavior of several actors and triggered some interesting, albeit violent, regional developments. Clearly, some actors came to the conclusion that they could afford defying the United States, as Walt had thoroughly predicted:

Firstly, the Iranian and Turkish surge for increased regional influence. Iran's pursuit of hegemonism was expressed through the fostering of Shia proxy groups in the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Syria (Lebanese Hezbollah) and Yemen, as well as in the Gulf states during the initial stages of the "Arab Spring" convulsion.⁴⁵ This dynamic coincided with the intensification of the US-led multilateral talks on the Iranian nuclear program, which ended with the agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in July 2015. The deal signified a long-awaited détente in Tehran's relations with the West; however, the termination of American uneasiness over Iran's nuclear program alarmed traditional US allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, who raised concerns about Iran's unexpressed ambition to act as a "nuclear free rider," thus triggering a nuclear domino in the region.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Robin Simcox, "ISIS Worst Nightmare: Why the Group Is not Trying to Provoke a US Attack," *Foreign Affairs*, 15 September 2014. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2014-09-15/isis-worst-nightmare>; Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>.

⁴⁵ Reva Bhalla, "The US-Saudi Dilemma: Iran's Reshaping of Persian Gulf Politics," *Stratfor*, 19 July 2011, <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110718-us-saudi-dilemma-irans-reshaping-persian-gulf-politics>; Jonathan Spyer, "Is it Iran's Middle East Now?" *Fathom*, Autumn 2015, <http://fathomjournal.org/is-it-irans-middle-east-now/>.

⁴⁶ Efraim Inbar, "Implications of US Disengagement from the Middle East," BESA, Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 122, 14. For alternative approaches on a potential nuclear domino and nuclear balance, see Rizwan Ladha, "A Regional Arms Race? Testing the Nuclear

In the case of Turkey, the country's partial disengagement from its commitments toward its Western allies and its quest for an independent (Neo-Ottoman style) foreign policy agenda, could be better explained at the individual and state levels of analysis, due to the catalytic role of the Justice and Development Party's policies and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Islamist revisionism.⁴⁷ This reversal is mirrored on several Turkish foreign policy breakthroughs that took place in the last few years, such as disturbed relations with Israel⁴⁸ and strategic flirt with Moscow and Beijing,⁴⁹ as well as on Ankara's military engagement in Syria and Iraq in ways that do not necessarily converge with the US strategy for the region.⁵⁰ However, systemic factors cannot be omitted when trying to explain this shift; it would be rather erroneous to assume that the Turkish Middle Eastern agenda would have taken such a revisionist form had the United States retained its direct engagement strategy, especially in relation with Iraq.⁵¹

Secondly, the increase of Russian influence and interventionism in the region. Just like Iran and Turkey, Russia also seems to have perceived US strategic retreat as a "carte blanche" for proceeding with deeper involvement in the Middle East. This tendency became visible after President Mohamed Morsi's overthrow and General Abdel Fatah el-Sisi's takeover in Egypt. As the Obama administration failed to come into terms with the new order of things in Cairo, Sisi turned to Moscow to replace Washington as Egypt's new privileged

Domino Theory in the Middle East," al Nakhlah, Spring 2012, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/~media/43f8f8ef81014262ab2a119709e495e3.pdf>; Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability," *Foreign Affairs*, 91:4 (July/August 2012), 1-5.

⁴⁷ Ilias I. Kouskouvelis, "The Problem with Turkey's 'Zero Problems:' Turkey, Past and Future," *Middle East Quarterly*, 20:1 (Winter 2013), 47-56. <http://www.meforum.org/3455/turkey-zero-problems>; Burak Begdil, "Turkey: What Ally?" *Gatestone*, 22 September 2014, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4715/turkey-ally>; Normal Stone, "Erdogan's dreams of empire are perilous to Turkey," *The Guardian*, 6 December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/06/erdogan-turkey-russia-syria-foreign-policy>; Steven A. Cook and Michael J. Kopolow, "Turkey is no longer a reliable ally," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 August 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/turkey-is-no-longer-a-reliable-ally-1470869047>.

⁴⁸ Seth Cropsey, "US Policy and the Strategic Relationship of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel: Power Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean," Hudson Institute, 2015, 4-6. http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1459/2015_03_us_policyandthe_strategic_relationshipof_greece_cyprusand_israel_power_shiftsinthe_eastern_mediterranean.pdf.

⁴⁹ Begdil, "Turkey."

⁵⁰ Jonathan Spyer, "Behind the lines: Iran and Turkey jostling for power in Iraq," *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 November 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Behind-the-lines-Jostling-for-power-471654>; "Turkey v. Syria's Kurds v. Islamic State," *BBC News*, 23 August 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33690060>.

partner.⁵² Moreover, Moscow's recent moves in the Eastern Mediterranean shaped a new regional naval equilibrium.⁵³ Finally, Russia's new role in the region was sealed by Moscow's military intervention in the Syrian crisis, in support of President Bashar al-Assad.⁵⁴ Moscow came to believe that a military engagement in Syria became a rational choice, due to the initial US disorientation regarding the Syrian civil war and Washington's decision not to proceed with a military strike against the al-Assad regime in September 2013, despite its prior use of chemical weapons, which was considered as a "red line" by the Obama administration.⁵⁵

Thirdly, the emergence of ISIS. Although it is not clear whether the United States could have done something to deter ISIS from taking over the vast landmass it controlled by 2015, the timing of the jihadi organization's emergence is not irrelevant to the US strategic retreat. Actually, the beginning of ISIS expansion coincided with the US military withdrawal from Iraq and many analysts believe that a different decision, than complete withdrawal, may have prevented the jihadists from expanding and seizing parts of Iraqi and Syrian territory.⁵⁶

The past, the present and the future of the Middle Eastern order

The preceding analysis attempts to offer a framework of understanding in relation to the evolution of regional order in the Middle East. It can be said that,

⁵¹ Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq: Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 237, May 2010, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/USIP_SR_Turkey_Iraq.pdf.

⁵² Col. (ret.) Jacques Neria, "Egypt's Turn to Russia," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 30 October 2013, <http://jcpa.org/egypts-turn-to-russia/>; Vitaly Naumkin, "Russia and Egypt's 'new partnership'," Al Monitor, 11 February 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/moscow-cairo-relations-sisi-putin-egypt-visit.html>.

⁵³ Captain (ret.) Thomas R. Fedyszyn, "The Russian Navy 'Rebalances' to the Mediterranean," *U.S. Naval Institute*, 139 (December 2013), <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2013-12/russian-navy-rebalances-mediterranean>.

⁵⁴ Evan Barrett, "Letting Putin Get Away with it," *Foreign Policy*, 19 January 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/19/syria-kurds-russia-sunni-arab/>; Kissinger, "Middle East collapse."

⁵⁵ Jeffrey, "The Obama Doctrine."

⁵⁶ James F. Jeffrey, "Behind the US Withdrawal from Iraq," The Washington Institute, 2 November 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/behind-the-u.s.-withdrawal-from-iraq>; Rowan Scarborough, "US troop withdrawal let Islamic State enter Iraq, military leaders say," *The Washington Times*, 26 July 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/26/us-troop-withdrawal-let-islamic-state-enter-iraq-m/>.

since the end of World War II, power configuration in the Middle East has been oscillating between hegemony and balance of power. Moreover, it can be claimed that the history of the greater Middle East, as a regional system, is closely intertwined with the evolution of US security strategy. During the greater part of this period the US engagement was playing a decisive role in keeping a regional balance of power.

Moreover, hegemonic attempts proved to be stillborn. The main reason, is that these attempts emerged in the absence of the necessary structural prerequisites: neither Nasser or Erdogan's ideological revisionism, nor contemporary Iran's "hegemonism by proxies" were/are based on a distribution of capabilities, characterized by clear-cut power superiority of the potential hegemon over the rest of the system's units. And of course, since the right distribution of power is absent, hegemonic aspirations could not enjoy legitimacy at the regional level. On the other hand, the US quest for hegemony in the Middle East, during George W. Bush's presidency, exposed the United States to the perils of overextension, thus forcing Washington to a strategic retreat. Consequently, the waning prestige of the once undisputed balancer and security provider triggered a course of regional instability and the pursuit of a new regional order.

Having these developments in mind, it could be argued that, among the factors that usually define the distribution of power in a given regional system, either dynamic or static ones, two of them are of utmost relevance to the Middle East: prestige and geography. The later defines the existence of at least three regional peers with hegemonic aspirations and balancing potential (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia), as well as the existence of several other pivotal players of considerable size and/or capabilities (i.e. Israel and Egypt). This configuration makes the emergence of a regional hegemon extremely difficult. Moreover, the balancing role of extra-regional great powers – such as the United States, which is apparently returning to an indirect engagement strategy, and Russia, which has recently gained significant regional influence – suggests another factor that decisively limits the possibility of a future hegemonic order.

Therefore, as stability through hegemony cannot be the case in the foreseeable future – except for the unlikely scenario of an unexpectedly rapid course of uneven growth that would favor one regional power over the rest – stability through balance is the most possible future form of regional order.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Ross Harrison, "Defying Gravity: Working Toward a Regional Strategy for a Stable Middle East," Middle East Institute, Policy Papers Series, May 2015; George Friedman, "The Middle Eastern balance of power matures," Stratfor, 31 March 2015. <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/middle-eastern-balance-power-matures>.

The ongoing regional instability which is characterized by multiple conflicts and state failure in the cases of Iraq, Syria and Yemen, could drive regional and interested extra-regional powers towards a *modus vivendi* similar to 19th Century Europe's "concert of powers" and an analogous form of a "complex balance" which would also function as a "collective hegemony." In that context, the main pillars of the emerging balance of power will agree to the terms of stability and express their readiness for balancing action (either diplomatic, through negotiations, or military, through the formation of alliances or through the actual use of military force),⁵⁸ whenever these terms are disputed. Such balancing mechanisms are already in place, as the P5+1 model of negotiations for the nuclear program of Iran, the Geneva and Astana processes for the Syrian crisis, and the formation of a Saudi-led alliance to intervene in Yemen indicate. What is lacking is a new "Congress of Vienna" that will seal this new regional order and legitimize the new balance of power. For the time being though, while cruel battles in Iraq and Syria continue, the interested parties are still in pursuit of comparative advantages that will enhance their power to negotiate the peace terms, as the strategies of the belligerents and the battlefield scenery in Aleppo, Raqqa and Mosul indicate.

⁵⁸ President Donald Trump's recent order for a US strike, with 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles, against the Syrian Air Force base at Sharyat, on 7 April 2017, although it suggests a partial departure from the great power *modus vivendi* achieved with Russia, it still seems to remain in the context of balancing, thus indirect engagement; Dan Lamothe et al., *Washington Post*, 7 April 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-weighing-military-options-following-chemical-weapons-attack-insyria/2017/04/06/0c59603a-1ae8-11e7-9887-1a5314b56a08_story.html?utm_term=.dd2b061e9062.

The Bear Learns to Swim: Russia's Re-emergence in the Mediterranean

Vassilis Kappis

The article explores the recent surge of Russian military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and evaluates the implications of Moscow's decision to challenge the regional status quo. In November 2015, the downing of a Russian fighter jet over Syrian airspace turned analysts' attention to the increasing involvement of Russia in the Syrian battlefield. Moscow's entanglement in the Syrian civil war was only the latest episode in its historically persistent effort to establish a permanent presence in Mediterranean waters. Developments in recent years, however, point to a more ambitious agenda. This article argues that Moscow's unfolding strategy entails the gradual assertion of Russian air superiority over critical parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, a Russian aspiration that has been elusive even during the peak of the Cold War rivalry. Moscow's grand strategy, in this regard, signals a renewed effort to disrupt NATO's south-eastern flank. Under this prism, the deployment of long-range S-400 and S-300 Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs), S-300 equipped ships and advanced fighter jets across regional flashpoints may prove to be a game changing approach. The implications of Russia's contemporary strategy could be important for the future of the Eastern Mediterranean, as Moscow's approach appears to be upsetting the regional balance of power. Israel's unchallenged dominance of the skies over Syria and Lebanon is compromised for the first time since 1970, when Russian air-defence forces were deployed in Egypt. The Turkish armed forces, moreover, will struggle to compensate for the Russian game plan, which complicates Ankara's ability to project power over Syria, Iraq and the Aegean Sea. These dispersed airpower "webs" could, finally, restrict NATO's capacity to deploy assets in the region and nullify the credibility of the alliance's anti-ballistic shield. Overall, contemporary developments may enable Russia to challenge American control of a geopolitically vital area that has been in essence uncontested since the end of World War II.

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The author gratefully acknowledges financial support in connection with this article from the Israel Institute in Washington DC, USA.

Russia and the Mediterranean after the Cold War

Ever since the times of the Ottoman expansion and the conquest of Constantinople, Russian leaders felt compelled to retain a strong presence in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, primarily as a means to protect the country's frontiers. After the Second World War, US naval forces in the region were essentially converted to the American 6th Fleet and assumed the mission of protecting Western interests in the oil-rich Middle East. The prospect of "locking" the Soviet fleet in the Black Sea prompted the USSR to establish its first permanent naval force in the Eastern Mediterranean. The 5th Mediterranean Squadron of warships managed to become an appreciable counterweight to NATO only in the following decade, however, with the US maintaining a tactical advantage through the deployment of aircraft carriers.¹

During the Cold War, Turkey was a critical component of the Western containment policy against the Soviet Union and its allies. Because of its privileged geopolitical position at the crossroads of three continents and lying at the borders of the Eastern bloc countries, Turkey's armed forces were accorded a prominent role in securing the region by both NATO and the United States. The robust American-Turkish relationship, moreover, bolstered after the 1960s through the cordial partnership between Turkey and Israel, was instrumental in promoting Western interests in this sensitive area.² Despite the few instances of discord, such as the tensions between Turkey and its historical rival Greece, Washington viewed Ankara as a major stabilising force in the region and a reliable partner that could contribute to regional stability and safeguard the interests of the alliance.

The end of the Cold War unleashed both NATO's and Turkey's latent geopolitical dynamic in the previously inaccessible Eurasian heartland. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the corresponding power vacuum in its former periphery created a window of opportunity for Turkey to improve its relative standing in Central Asia and the Caucasus, thereby reclaiming an important

¹ A. Korolkov, "Why Russia's naval capacity in the Mediterranean is overstated," *Russia Direct*, 5 March 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/why-russias-naval-capacity-mediterranean-overstated>.

² "US-Turkish relations: A review at the beginning of the third decade of the post-Cold War era," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, November 2012, <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/26174/uploads>; N. Schonmann, "Back-Door Diplomacy: The Mistress Syndrome in Israel's Relations with Turkey, 1957-60," in C. Jones and T. Petersen (eds), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85-101.

role in Eurasia for the first time since the Ottoman era.³ NATO enlargement, already underway in the mid and late 1990s, was regarded as a complementary tool to Ankara's grand strategy.⁴ Despite Turkish concerns that NATO expansion might render the alliance's southern flank comparatively irrelevant, the reach of Euro-Atlantic institutions in a region of prime Turkish concern (the Black Sea) was expected to create a "cushion" against Russian resurgence and hence compensate for any loss of status within the alliance.

Turkish analysts anticipated, however, that the exclusion of Russia from Central and Eastern Europe could potentially fuel a more assertive stance in South-Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵ That was soon to be realized, as Russians viewed Turkey's rapidly evolving cultural and security ties with states such as Azerbaijan and Georgia, respectively, with apprehension. Exacerbating Russian concerns, Turkey's role in the Abkhazian conflict raised the prospect of a destabilizing Turkish involvement in the separatist Republics of Dagestan and Chechnya.⁶ Moscow's response was to develop or bolster its existing security ties to Syria, Iran, Greece and Cyprus, as a countermeasure to what was perceived to be an expanding Turkish influence across Russia's "near abroad."⁷

To this end, the supply of advanced weaponry (and missile systems in particular) became a prominent policy tool. At the time, Russia had already deployed Scud-B missiles in Armenia⁸ and reportedly assisted Iran in developing 2,000 km range missiles, while the S-300 SAM missile system was exported to Syria in 1998.⁹ Developed in the 1980s, an S-300 unit has the capacity to engage six targets simultaneously, flying as low as ten meters above the ground or as high as maximum aircraft ceilings. The system has a maximum operational range of 150 km for fighter jets and 40 km for ballistic missiles, with tests indicating a very high probability of destroying acquired targets.¹⁰ Such

³ N. Criss and S. Güner, "Geopolitical Configurations: The Russia-Turkey-Iran Triangle," *Security Dialogue*, 30:2 (1999), 365-376.

⁴ A. L. Karaosmanoglu, "NATO Enlargement and the South: A Turkish Perspective," *Security Dialogue*, 30:2 (1999), 213.

⁵ Karaosmanoglu, "NATO Enlargement," 217.

⁶ Criss and Güner, "Geopolitical Configurations," 367.

⁷ M. Ergün Olgun, "Turkey's Tough Neighbourhood," in C. H. Dodd (ed.), *Cyprus: the Need for New Perspectives* (Huntingdon: Eothen Press, 1999), 231-260.

⁸ G. Howard, "Scuds Threaten Shaky Stability," *Jane's intelligence Review Pointer*, 9:6 (1997), 1.

⁹ Criss and Güner, "Geopolitical Configurations," 368.

¹⁰ "Characteristics of the Russian S-300 air defence missiles," Agence France-Presse, 15 January 1997.

specifications imply that the S-300 can be classified as a strategic, as opposed to a tactical, weapon. Thus, besides the need to seek new markets for the Russian armaments industry, Russian weaponry entailed a grand strategic logic that was hard to ignore. In late 1997, the Turkish General Staff prepared a report which accorded the S-300 system a central role in what was viewed as an “offensive ring” engulfing Turkey’s coastline, which included sensitive military as well as civilian assets, such as major ports and oil pipelines.¹¹

Russian retrenchment and its aftermath

However ambitious, Russia’s attempt to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean during the 1990s was largely unsuccessful. Syria, probably the most committed Russian ally in the region, engaged in discussions with Israel over the future status of the Golan Heights (under Israeli control since the Six Day War of 1967) while its influence in Lebanon was gradually eroded, leading to the eventual withdrawal of the Syrian army.¹² Greece and Cyprus, meanwhile, chose to undertake a major foreign policy adjustment vis-à-vis Turkey in the late 1990s, after major crises in the Aegean Sea (1996) and Cyprus (1998), with the latter directly related to the procurement of S-300 SAMs by the Cypriot government.¹³ The moderate government in Athens, led by the Europeanist Costas Simitis, prioritized de-escalation and cooperation with the Turkish leadership, in an effort to diffuse tensions in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus.

The Greek foreign policy shift was reflected in the country’s 1996 defence procurement program, drafted shortly after the tense 1996 Aegean Sea crisis. While a number of Russian weapons were selected by the Greek government, the purchase of such systems, as long range missiles or Russian fighter jets, was disfavoured, as Athens prioritized the “Europeanization” of bilateral issues with Turkey.¹⁴ Initially, Cyprus appeared eager to sustain its close security relationship with Moscow, continuing its unfolding armament program which included T-80 MBTs, BMP-3 AIFVs and BUK M1-2 SAM systems, among others. The change of attitude in Athens, however, would soon impact on Cypriot

¹¹ “Missiles and the Eastern Mediterranean,” *Strategic Comments*, 4:5 (1998), 1.

¹² I. Rabinowich, “Damascus, Jerusalem, and Washington: The Syrian Israeli Relationship as a U.S. Policy Issue,” Analysis Paper No. 19 (2009), The Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2009/3/syria-israel-rabinovich/03_syria_israel_rabinovich.pdf.

¹³ S. Blavoukos and D. Bourantonis, “Policy Entrepreneurs and Foreign Policy Change: The Greek-Turkish Rapprochement in the 1990s,” *Government and Opposition*, 47:4 (2012), 597–617.

¹⁴ S. Makris, “Democratic Peace and Greek Foreign Policy: The Case of Helsinki” (in Greek), *The Society for Social and Economic Studies*, 2000, <http://www.ekome.gr/english/default.asp>.

security policy. While the highly publicized S-300 purchase by the Cypriot government in 1997 could not be averted, Athens and Nicosia decided to transfer and quietly “store” the touted missile system in the Greek island of Crete, with the first test fire occurring in 2013.¹⁵ While the S-300 cold storage in Crete was then viewed as a tactical retreat by Athens and Nicosia in the face of Turkish escalation, it became evident in subsequent years that Cyprus had decided to substantially scale back its military procurement program so as to avoid similar crises in the future. As a result, Russia’s ability to influence these historically friendly states, both strategically located within NATO’s southern flank, was severely curtailed.

Russia, at the same time had its own issues to attend to, closer to home. The economic crisis of 1998 dealt a major blow to the Russian economy, which was still recovering from the shock of the Communist collapse. Moscow defaulted on its debt and the national currency was devalued at a time when the upheaval in Chechnya threatened the integrity of the Russian Federation.¹⁶ If there was any doubt about Russia’s incapacity to restore its Cold War era geopolitical reach, NATO’s Serbia bombing campaign ensured that Moscow would receive the message in a loud and clear manner. At one point during the Kosovo crisis, Russian and NATO troops operated in the same area for the first time after the end of the Cold War, raising concerns that the two sides would actually confront one another.¹⁷ The Russian acknowledgment of NATO primacy, however, showcased in a dramatic way the conventional capability gap between the two former rivals. While Moscow maintained a nuclear deterrent, the state of the country’s air and naval fleets indicated that any plans for power projection activities would have to be put on hold, at least temporarily. In the following years, Moscow prioritized internal stability and then focused on deflecting NATO’s attempts to expand in the Russian “near abroad.” The Georgian and Ukrainian cases took precedence for Vladimir Putin, who perceived NATO expansion as detrimental to Russian security.¹⁸

¹⁵ D. Cenciotti, “Hellenic Air Force Fires S-300 Air Defense System for the first time,” *The Aviationist*, 12 January 2014, <https://theaviationist.com/2014/01/12/greece-fires-s300/>.

¹⁶ M. Gilman, *No Precedent, No Plan: Inside Russia’s 1998 Default* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010).

¹⁷ V. Gobarev, “Russia-NATO relations after the Kosovo crisis: Strategic implications,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 12:3 (1999), 1-17.

¹⁸ S. Mydans, “Putin Doubts Expanded NATO Meets New Threats,” *The New York Times*, 9 April 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/09/world/putin-doubts-expanded-nato-meets-new-threats.html?_r=0.

Moscow returns to the Mediterranean

The Arab Spring movement, a revolutionary wave of protests and civil wars in the Arab world, captured Moscow's attention, as it entailed an element of threat to Russian interests. Russian diplomatic support of the secular, though oppressive, regimes in the Eastern Mediterranean did not prevent the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi from Libya after the NATO-backed military strikes in 2011. The civil war in Syria transferred the "battlefield" to an area of prime concern to Moscow, threatening Russia's closest ally in the region, the Assad regime. In the run up to, and during, the Syrian civil war, Russia provided a friendly voice for the Assad regime in the United Nations and other fora, deflecting decisions and policies deemed harmful to Damascus.¹⁹ Initially, however, Moscow stopped short of committing troops in support of the Syrian government. The Syrian turmoil swiftly deteriorated into chaos, rendering Russia wary of the potential repercussions, with Vladimir Putin asserting that "the collapse of Syria's official authorities will only mobilize terrorists."²⁰ The prevailing view in Moscow considered Western interventions in Iraq and North Africa responsible for the rise and expansion of the so-called Islamic State (IS).²¹

The West paid little attention to Russian concerns, partly due to the weak military presence of the Russian fleet in the region. The chronic underinvestment in Russia's decaying Black Sea fleet, based in Crimea, had taken its toll on the country's power projection capabilities.²² This was about to change. On February 2013, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu emphasised that "the Mediterranean is at the core of all essential dangers to Russian national interests."²³ That year was a turning point for Russian security thinking, as a decision was reached to create a permanent Mediterranean Squadron comprised

¹⁹ A. Tilghman and O. Pawlyk, "U.S. vs. Russia: What a War Would Look like between the World's Most Fearsome Militaries," *Military Times*, 5 October 2015, www.militarytimes.com/.

²⁰ A. Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to Respond to Russia's Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, 95:1 (January-February 2016), 109.

²¹ "Russian Envoy to UN: American occupation should be blamed for the rise of ISIS," RT Network, 16 September 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/315586-us-occupation-isis-origin/>; "Putin Blames Foreign Interference for Rise of ISIS in Middle East," *International Business Times*, 26 May 2015, www.ibtimes.com/putin-blames-foreign-interference-rise-isis-middle-east-1938421.

²² Korolkov, "Russia's naval capacity."

²³ E. Inbar, "The New Strategic Equation in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, 109 (September 2014), Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 19.

of ships from the Black Sea fleet.²⁴ The country's mid-term planning envisaged that by 2020, 132 billion USD (almost a quarter of total projected defence outlays for the period) would be devoted towards upgrading its naval capabilities. By 2014, the Black Sea fleet featured 6 Kilo class submarines, 11,000 marines, and a surface contingent of 42 ships.²⁵ This Mediterranean armada, integrated in the Black Sea fleet, quickly became visible through its activities in the Aegean Sea and adjacent areas. In addition to hosting Russia's sole aircraft carrier at times, the task force has grown to include more than 10 ships (including warships and support vessels) on a permanent basis.²⁶

Besides Russia's major naval investment program, the assertion of full control over the Crimean peninsula consolidated a balance of power in the Black Sea that seems particularly favourable for Moscow, taking into consideration that Sevastopol remains the "only naval base in the Black Sea capable of outfitting and dispatching new vessels and military hardware at a strategically significant level."²⁷ In force projection terms, however, this means little if Russian access to the Mediterranean is "filtered" by the Bosphorus Straits. The Straits "bottleneck," a historically divisive issue among great powers, remains strategically relevant, as disagreements between Russia and Turkey over the Montreux Treaty, which regulates passage through the Straits, have recently resurfaced. Control of the Straits has been a Russian strategic challenge for quite some time. During the Crimean War (1853-1856), Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty, considered the Straits to be crucial towards thwarting Russian military power, as they could conceivably be used to "stifle" the Russian navy by restraining it from accessing Mediterranean waters.²⁸

The potential for a future standoff across the Straits, therefore, implies that Russia needs to maintain a robust naval force at all times in Mediterranean waters. Forward basing enables a navy, moreover, to sustain a larger force without increasing fleet size, thereby acting as a force multiplier. The logistical and operational support, however, of the Russian fleet would necessitate

²⁴ P. Felgenhauer, "Moscow Attempts to Extend Its Strategic Influence from the Black Sea to Mediterranean," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 10:43 (2013), www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40556&no_cache=1#.V2Mj5yh96M8.

²⁵ M. Bodner, "Russia's Black Sea Fleet Will Get 80 New Warships to Repel NATO," *The Moscow Times*, 23 September 2014.

²⁶ Bodner, "Russia's Black Sea Fleet."

²⁷ R. Gramer, "Changing Tides: Russia's Growing Stronghold in the Black Sea," *Foreign Affairs*, 8 February 2016, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2016-02-08/changing-tides.

²⁸ C. Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War: (1853 - 1856)*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 46-98.

berthing agreements with littoral states. This has been a challenging task, admittedly, considering the geopolitical orientation of regional actors. In 2013, the Montenegrin government appears to have quietly deflected Moscow's approach, aimed at either establishing a naval base at the Adriatic port of Bar or increasing the scope of support provided to Russian fleet units at the country's ports.²⁹ Rumours that Cyprus could host a Russian naval base are regularly making the rounds, only to be denied by the Cypriot government.³⁰ After relevant bilateral agreements, Russian ships make use, without special privileges, of the port of Limassol on a frequent basis, while Russian military aircraft may be hosted in Cypriot airports during emergencies and missions of humanitarian nature.³¹ For both Montenegro and Cyprus, alignment with Euro-Atlantic institutions is a core policy pillar, with the former acceding to NATO in 2016 despite domestic divisions on the issue.³²

The procurement of large, power-projecting vessels could partly compensate for Russia's inability to secure bases and logistical support. In this regard, the sole Russian aircraft carrier, the Soviet-era *Admiral Kuznetsov*, has been frequently navigating the Mediterranean, but the high cost of its maintenance and obsolete technology limit its primary function to show the flag.³³ Moscow acknowledged and tried to rectify this shortcoming by acquiring two new helicopter carriers from France. The procurement of the Mistral-class carriers, amphibious assault ships that can accommodate a load of 16 attack helicopters and up to 900 combat soldiers,³⁴ became swiftly a polarizing issue. The purchase was met with strong resistance from NATO, culminating in the

²⁹ "Government refuses Russia's request to set up a military base in Montenegro," Independent Balkan News Agency, 20 December 2013, <http://www.balkan.eu.com/government-refuses-russiasrequest-set-military-base-montenegro>.

³⁰ "Cyprus port deal gives Russian navy alternative to Tartus," *Al-Monitor*, 3 March 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/russia-sanctions-europe-nato-economy-cyprus-mediterranean.html>.

³¹ "Russia keen to use military bases in Cyprus," *Cyprus Mail*, 21 January 2015, cyprus-mail.com/2015/01/21/russia-keen-to-use-military-bases-in-cyprus/.

³² "NATO to Sign Accession Protocol with Montenegro," Balkan Insight, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/nato-to-sign-accession-protocol-with-montenegro-05-18-2016>.

³³ "Troubled Russian Aircraft Carrier Kuznetsov Returns to Sea," *The Moscow Times*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/troubled-russian-aircraft-carrier-kuznetsov-returns-to-sea/508027.html>.

³⁴ "Turkey vulnerable to rising Russian power in the Black Sea," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 April 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Turkey-vulnerable-to-rising-Russian-power-in-the-Black-Sea-349928>.

capitulation of the French government and a bitter diplomatic standoff between France and Russia. France finally cancelled the order and the ships were eventually acquired by Egypt.³⁵

Overall, Russia's drive to reassert its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean was qualified by the country's geographic, economic and technological limitations, exacerbated by a well-established NATO presence in the region. The advent of the Arab Spring, moreover, fuelled the belief among analysts that Russia's capacity to influence developments in the area would be further curtailed. Indeed, the 2011 NATO-supported operation in Libya indicated that Moscow's role in regional affairs was marginal, with the international community ignoring its objections to the ousting of Gaddafi. When Syria became engulfed in civil strife, the Russian naval base in the Syrian port city of Tartus faced the danger of being dismantled as rebels gradually asserted control over the country's coastline. Overall, Russia's position in the Eastern Mediterranean appeared precarious, if not irreversibly compromised.

A novel Mediterranean strategy?

The advent of the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil strife in particular, bestowed Russia with a renewed momentum towards increasing its impact on the Mediterranean. Conditions did not appear particularly favourable. NATO's "tightening of the screws" around the Black Sea and Russia's chronic military underperformance in the region after the Cold War resulted in Moscow taking a backseat during developments in Egypt and Libya. After consolidating its position in the Black Sea, however, through the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, Russia sought to project power in the Mediterranean in a credible manner. Somewhat contradicting its long-held maritime strategy, Russia moved to deploy long range SAMs and forwarded advanced fighter aircraft to Syrian air bases. From its Tartus naval base and the Khmeimim air base in Latakia, Russia initiated joint operations with the Syrian army in addition to its own ground and air strikes targeting Syrian rebel groups and IS militants.³⁶ Moscow's Syrian foray, a surprising move for many analysts,³⁷ came at a time of diplomatic isolation and economic crisis, due to the Western-backed sanctions and collapsing oil prices which had a profound effect on the Russian economy.

³⁵ "Egypt Buys Mistral; Kitting Out With KA-52 & KA-52K," *Defence Industry Daily*, 21 September 2016, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/russia-to-order-french-mistral-lhds-05749/>.

³⁶ R. McDermott, "Russia Initiates 'Out-of- Area Operation' in Syria," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12:180 (2015), <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-initiates-out-of-area-operation-in-syria/>.

³⁷ Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria."

The Russian intervention in Syria on September 2015 necessitated a commitment of military resources and diplomatic capital without a precedent for post-Cold War Russia. Moscow's military surge included ground attack aircraft and helicopters, naval vessels and marine infantry. At the end of 2016, Vladimir Putin's gamble appeared to have paid off, with the Assad regime recapturing territory from both the IS and Syrian rebel forces, including the major city of Aleppo. While the stabilization of Syria remains elusive, the greatest reward for Russia is the acknowledgement of its role in world affairs. At the same time, Moscow signalled its intention to back its allies with boots on the ground, if necessary, contrasting perceptions regarding the credibility of American commitments in the wider region. Russia's much publicised withdrawal from Syria in 2016 was only partial and primarily aimed at signalling Moscow's desire to re-initiate the diplomatic effort towards a favourable settlement of the Syrian conflict. Analysts quickly pointed out, however, that Moscow's military footprint was meant to be sustained, if not augmented, by the deployment of additional assets in the Syrian bases under Russian administration.³⁸

Irrespective of diplomatic gains and political signals dispatched through this military endeavour, the conflict in Syria revealed Moscow's unfolding strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean, in essence a fusion of ground and maritime lessons learned from past wars and crises. Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict disclosed the country's evolved security thinking which features two complementary elements: firstly, a permanent naval presence that has an adverse effect on NATO's freedom of manoeuvre in the Mediterranean and power projection in the Middle East through the Suez Canal (though U.S. power projection in the Middle East is also ensured through the presence of the 5th Fleet in the Gulf); and secondly, the gradual assertion of Russian air superiority over critical parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, which aims to create "pockets of disruption" within, or in proximity of, NATO allies. The latter characteristic appears to be a defining differentiation from Moscow's post-Cold War approaches. Concrete results of this strategy can be seen in Syria, though Kaliningrad and Crimea were the initial testing grounds of this doctrine. The deployment, in this regard, of S-300 equipped ships and the establishment of Russian bases hosting advanced aircraft and S-400 systems in Syrian territory may prove to be a game changer. This is because the Russian strategy creates an anti-access, area denial problem, with the prospect of a no-fly zone over critical locations.

³⁸ N. Kozhanov, "Russia's 'Withdrawal' from Syria is Nothing of the Kind," Chatham House, 21 March 2016, www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russia-s-withdrawal-syria-nothing-kind#sthash.4GeYbE1p.dpuf.

Anti-access and area denial refer to war fighting strategies aimed at “preventing an opponent from operating military forces near, into or within a contested region.”³⁹ Usually combined as Anti-Access/Area Denial or abbreviated as A2/AD, similar tactics have been enacted in such historical instances, as the Greco-Persian wars in antiquity or the Falklands after they were briefly captured by Argentina.⁴⁰ While denying access to enemy forces may be a common goal among combatants, A2/AD strategies are primarily used to denote a more specific approach involving asymmetrical power relationships. In other words, a weaker party adopts A2/AD strategies in order to avoid a confrontation with a more powerful opponent, who may be the defender or the attacker. In this manner, the more powerful actor will be unable to bring its full force in the operational theatre, or maximise its power by moving freely in the contested area. A2/AD strategies have recently come to the spotlight due to their potential applicability in East Asia and specifically in a hypothetical situation where China attempts to forcibly annex Taiwan. China would, under this scenario, keep American forces outside the operational theatre through attrition tactics, instead of directly confronting US air and naval assets (the Chinese term for the doctrine is, in approximation, “active strategic counterattacks on exterior lines”).⁴¹

The Russian intervention in Syria could be understood as a first step in the manifestation of an evolving A2/AD strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean (Figure 1). During the initial stages of the Russian operation in Syria, for instance, the majority of fighter aircrafts deployed did not pose a threat to Turkey’s modern F-16 fleet, as the force consisted of Su-25 and Su-24M, both of which possess a limited air to air capability.⁴² Moscow also avoided initially the deployment of long-range missiles, preferring to protect the newly activated Khmeimim air base in Latakia by Short Range Air Defence (SHORAD) systems such as the Pantsir S-1.⁴³ After the Su-24 downing however, Russia deployed

³⁹ S. Tangredi, “A2/AD and Wars of Necessity,” *The National Interest*, 8 December 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/a2-ad-wars-necessity-9524>.

⁴⁰ D. Shunk, “Area Denial & Falklands War Lessons Learned - Implications for Land Warfare 2030- 2040: After the Army’s Theater Arrival - The Coming Complex Fight,” *Small Wars Journal*, 12 December 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/area-denial-falklands-war-lessons-learned-implications-for-land-warfare-2030-2040-after-the>.

⁴¹ Si-Fu Ou, “China’s A2AD and Its Geographic Perspective,” Academia Sinica, 2014, www.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/files/.../1239_4394902e.pdf.

⁴² C. Kasapoglu, “The Turkish-Russian Military Balance,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch*, 2537, 18 December 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-turkish-russian-military-balance>.

⁴³ A. Mercouris, “How Russia’s Syria Deployment is Changing the Military Balance in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *Russia Insider News*, <http://russiainsider.com/en/military/howrussiassyriandeploymentchangingmilitarybalance-easternmediterranean/ri11053>.

Su-34s, which carry Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missiles. A key pillar of an A2/AD envelope, advanced tactical aircraft can perform air interdiction and undertake land and anti-ship attacks against any forces attempting to breach the A2/AD zone.⁴⁴

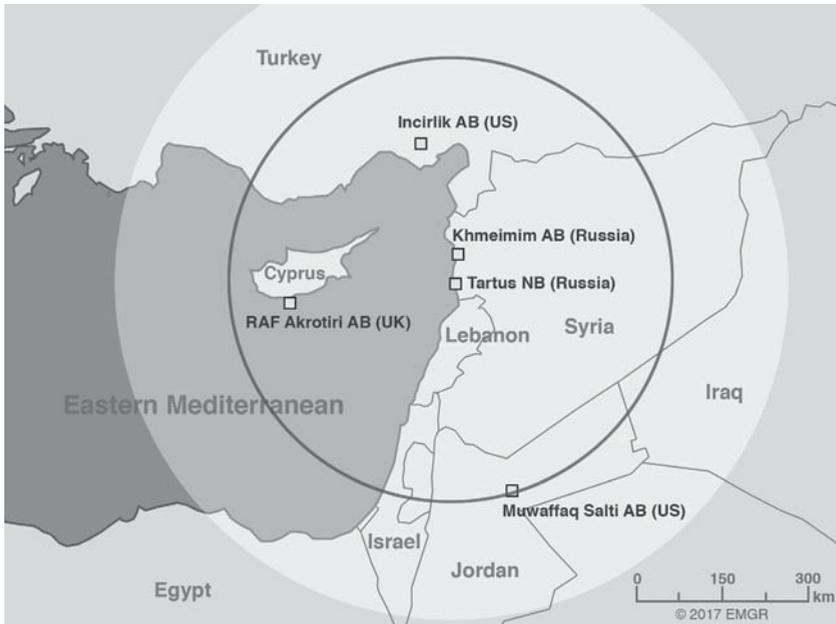


Figure 1: The maximum range of the S-400 SAM system deployed at Khmeimim AB near Latakia Syria.

Moreover, Russia dispatched a missile cruiser off the Eastern Mediterranean coast and transferred the S-400 very long-range air and missile defence system to its Latakia air base.⁴⁵ As a result, Russia was in a position to detect, lock and destroy targets deep (200-300 km) into Turkish airspace, thereby establishing superiority within the Syrian air-to-air operational theatre. While the number of Russian fighter jets deployed may vary, the existence of such advanced missile systems reduces the need for Combat Air Patrol (CAP) missions by Russian aircraft. An electronic jamming system capable of jamming airborne radars and even low orbit satellites completed the tactical picture.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ J. Altman, "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Growing Risk," *Naval War College Review*, 69:1 (2016), 75.

⁴⁵ Kasapoglu, "Turkish-Russian Military Balance."

⁴⁶ Mercouris, "Russia's Syria Deployment."

Finally, a number of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) were deployed over Syria with a mission to provide targeting information. In the future, these systems could undertake Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations, as part of an ISR pillar against Over-The-Horizon (OTH) NATO forces, complementing what appears to constitute a robust A2/AD strategy.⁴⁷

Technological advancements by the Russian defence industry could also offset some of the geographical and logistical challenges related to the Straits and Russian power projection. Russia's naval doctrine can now ensure that targets are acquired from the safety of the Black Sea or even Russia's extensive riverine system. The use of Sea Launched Cruise Missiles (SLCM) in the Syrian conflict, launched from the Caspian Sea, was aimed at sending a clear signal regarding the capacity of the Russian navy to target hostile ships and land targets at a great distance, thus projecting power in the Eastern Mediterranean without the danger of engaging with hostile forces.⁴⁸ The value of conventional precision-guided, long-range weapons has been demonstrated after 1990 in numerous wars, as unlike nuclear weapons, their use is not limited to the extreme escalation levels associated with nuclear warfare. Their development is also indicative of possible Russian countermeasures against NATO's anti-ballistic missile system that is gradually being established in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

In the near future, the Buyan corvettes, which have a displacement of less than 1,000 tons at full load, could sail and launch their cruise missiles from Russian rivers such as the Volga or the Don. They could therefore access the Russian riverine system from the Black Sea and deploy their cruise missiles from locations west of Moscow. The supersonic sea-launched Kalibr missiles, with a range of approximately 1,500 km, pose, for this reason, a substantial challenge to NATO assets in the region, threatening most notably the NATO deployments at Incirlik air base in Turkey. The impact of this development indicates that Moscow is in a position to challenge the American primacy on long-range, precision-guided strike capabilities. Admiral Aleksandr Vitko, the commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, has already stated that cruise missile-equipped ships will be permanently sailing in the Mediterranean.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Altman, "Russian A2/AD," 75.

⁴⁸ D. Fielding, "Russia's Cruise Missiles Have Changed Strategic Military Balance," *Russia Insider*, 26 October 2015, <http://russia-insider.com/en/military/how-russias-cruise-missiles-change-strategic-military-balance/ri10730>.

⁴⁹ S. Blank, "The Meaning of Russia's Naval Deployments in the Mediterranean," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 13:44 (2016), www.jamestown.org/regions/middleeast/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=104&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45169&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=49&cHash=9e74a9148ae27cd202ec93ae68fcc5f9#.V2MicCh96M8.

Before the Russian surge in Syria, Moscow had maintained a rather low-key presence in the country, with the exception of the Tartus docking facility. The latter was mainly staffed by civilian contractors and could only host a small number of ships. The recent long-term lease agreement with the Syrian government enabled Russia to initiate an expansion of the Tartus facilities, which will transform it to a major naval base comparable in scale to similar NATO facilities in the Mediterranean.⁵⁰ Moreover, the Latakia Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) station was set up during the Cold War but was not designed to host a force of Russian aircraft. Russia's air power projection across the Mediterranean had thus remained a complicated issue, as its fighter jets would have to either cross Southern European, and thus NATO member countries, or fly through the Caspian Sea, Iran and Iraq, states whose geopolitical orientation has been far from consistent. To complicate matters further, some of the Russian fighter jets, such as the Su-25s do not possess an air-refuelling capability.⁵¹ The tactical situation appears very different now. By means of a permanently stationed force consisting of attack helicopters and fighter jets, Russia is able to deter other actors from taking unilateral action and mobilize swiftly when necessary, in order to provide, for example, air cover to allied ground forces in the region. Therefore, Russian deterrence is not solely aimed at Syrian opposition forces or even Turkey for that matter. The S-300 missiles operated by the Russian missile cruiser *Moskva* in the Mediterranean, the Su-30 aircraft and the missiles launched from the Caspian Sea against the IS, point to a strong deterrent signal against US and NATO unilateral initiatives in the area.⁵²

Overall, Russia's posture complicates the once unrestrained capacity of NATO and the American 6th Fleet to ensure freedom of manoeuvre in the Eastern Mediterranean and power projection through the Suez Canal in the Middle East. The Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean, moreover, ensures that Moscow's deterrence against the Europeans is bolstered, as all EU and NATO countries now find themselves within striking distance of Russia's ship-launched cruise and ballistic missiles. Finally, Russian surveillance and electronic warfare assets can now be legally and regularly deployed close to NATO listening stations in Turkey and the British Royal Air Force (RAF) base in Akrotiri Cyprus, further compromising NATO's long-held advantage in intelligence collection and electronic warfare. The Alliance thus finds itself in a vulnerable position during a time of upheaval in the Eastern Mediterranean.

⁵⁰ A. Mercouris, "Russia's military bases in Syria," *The Duran*, 9 February 2017, <http://theduran.com/russias-bases-syria/>.

⁵¹ Mercouris, "Russia's Syria Deployment."

⁵² Mercouris, "Russia's Syria Deployment."

NATO's potential response

NATO planning had to adjust to Russia's posture in the Mediterranean. In October 2015, the alliance carried out its most ambitious manoeuvres in the Mediterranean with approximately 36,000 troops, 140 aircraft and 60 ships pooled from over 30 countries, some of which, like Australia, are not even NATO members.⁵³ The *TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2015* exercise, hosted by Italy, Spain and Portugal, was officially testing the alliance's response mechanisms under a hypothetical scenario of instability in the Horn of Africa. The actual recipient of the message, however, was intended to be Moscow. On 20 October 2015, the American Navy announced that a NATO vessel stationed in the Spanish naval base of Rota had successfully intercepted a ballistic missile (for the first time in the European theatre) as part of a missile defence demonstration. The announcement, which came two weeks after the surprise launch of 26 cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea by Russian warships against Syrian targets, was clearly aimed at signalling NATO's intention to defend the alliance's standing in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 2016, Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO, announced that the alliance is planning to expand its presence in the Mediterranean by transforming the *ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR* operation" into a broader security operation."⁵⁴ The credibility of a US long-term commitment in the region should be questioned, however. In multiple occasions after the end of the Cold War, American policymakers emphasized Europe's capacity and responsibility to guarantee its own security and also ensure the stability of its neighbourhood. In the absence, however, of a strong and reliable EU security/defence apparatus, NATO has been the cornerstone of the European security architecture. Moreover, the continent's financial stalemate has rendered EU leaders reluctant to increase defence spending and assume additional security-related tasks.

The so-called US "pivot to Asia," initiated by the Obama administration, sent a strong signal regarding the future of American grand strategy, corresponding to changing priorities. A first step in this direction was taken through the transfer of US naval assets in the Asia Pacific, aiming at deterring China from adopting policies that could prove detrimental to American interests.⁵⁵ The nature of threats

⁵³ E. Villarejo, "Trident Juncture: Toward a Mediterranean Cold War?" *Defense News*, 28 October 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2015/10/25/trident-juncture-toward-mediterranean-cold-war/74412878/>.

⁵⁴ Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at joint press point with incoming SACEUR General Curtis Scaparrotti, 4 May 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_130535.htm.

⁵⁵ C. Le Mière, "America's Pivot to East Asia: The Naval Dimension," *Survival*, 54:3 (2012), pp. 81-94.

in the Asia Pacific (flashpoints in the South China Sea, Taiwan and the Malacca Straits) places the maritime and air components at the heart of Washington's strategy in the region, casting into doubt the capacity of the already stretched US military to sustain a deterrent against both Russia and China within an area from the Suez to the Malacca Straits. The ascendance of Donald Trump in US presidency may add further fuel to this change of priorities. Washington's rudimentary participation in the diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian conflict in recent months appears consistent with a gradual US disengagement from the Eastern Mediterranean.

The aforementioned US strategic shift could be part of the historical "ebb and flow" of American involvement in Europe, though it hardly seems like a short-term caprice. From the First Gulf War in 1990-91 to the "War on Terror" a decade later, the US has been steadily adjusting its perception of the Mediterranean; from a confrontation stage against the Soviet Union, the region became a forward launch pad or even a transit point towards the Gulf states and the Indian Ocean, where significant American interests lie. The waning of American dependence on Gulf energy resources can only accelerate the US decoupling from the region. As of 2016, the 6th Fleet has a single command ship and four destroyers permanently assigned to the force, all based at Rota Spain, with only rotational presence in the Eastern Mediterranean from ships passing through the area on the way to, or back from, the Middle East.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, there is always at least one *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer in the area as part of NATO's anti-ballistic defence umbrella.

The inconvenient reality is that the rest of the NATO allies have been doing little to compensate for the US realignment; the drastic reduction of European defence spending and the commitment of NATO assets away from the Mediterranean (NATO ships take part in the *OCEAN SHIELD* operation in the Indian Ocean for instance) have created a hard to ignore security vacuum. In the short term, the United States will most likely transfer combat ships and perhaps aircraft from other operational theatres, though this strategic "band aid" should only partially alleviate the alliance's credibility problem. In the long term, European littoral states would need to take the helm, both politically and militarily, in a hypothetical regional confrontation with Russia. Even if a political decision is reached by the Europeans to rise to the occasion, their capability shortcomings will be hard to overcome. The lack of ASW capabilities of regional navies for instance, with the exception of the Italian FREMM frigates, puts regional players at a disadvantage, considering the strengths of the Russian navy.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Altman, "Russian A2/AD," 73.

⁵⁷ Altman, "Russian A2/AD," 81.

Russia, in this respect, appears to have taken the initiative in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Syrian conflict showcases that the security order in the region is now contested. This is a major turn of events, as until recently, most analysts regarded Russian military capabilities with disdain.⁵⁸ The *Financial Times* admitted that “Russia has not had any sizeable presence in the Mediterranean since the end of the cold war. And a lack of investment until recently in its decaying Black Sea fleet, based in Crimea, had led many strategic military planners to overlook the entire theatre as a possible source of concern when it came to Moscow.”⁵⁹ Alexander Vershbow, NATO’s Deputy Secretary General, clearly articulates the alliance’s adjusted perception of Russia when he characterizes Russia’s presence south of the Bosphorus as “disruptive,” adding that NATO needs to “think about the broader consequences of this build up in the Eastern Mediterranean and the capacity of these airbases.”⁶⁰

Implications for the Eastern Mediterranean

It is worth noting that NATO allies have recently devoted considerable resources in their effort to understand Russian intentions and predict Moscow’s future behavior.⁶¹ The comprehensive reform of NATO’s doctrine and structure were primarily aimed at monitoring and anticipating potential challenges to Central and Eastern European countries.⁶² Following the escalation of the Ukrainian conflict in 2014, the American political establishment intensified this effort, committing substantial assets to the scrutiny of Moscow’s motivations and capabilities.⁶³ Tensions over Ukraine rekindled threat perceptions in the

⁵⁸ F. S. Gady, “How the West Underestimated Russia’s Military Power,” *The Diplomat*, 17 October 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/how-the-west-underestimated-russiamilitary-power>.

⁵⁹ “Russia’s Syria strategy poses challenge to NATO in Mediterranean,” *The Financial Times*, 21 October 2015.

⁶⁰ “Russia’s Syria strategy.”

⁶¹ “NATO Members Up Defense Spending In Face Of New Threats,” Aviation Week Network, 16 June 2015, <http://aviationweek.com/paris-air-show-2015/nato-members-defense-spending-face-new-threats>.

⁶² “Wales Summit Declaration,” NATO, 5 September 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm; “European Defense in the Spotlight,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 26 June 2015, <http://csis.org/publication/european-defense-spotlight>.

⁶³ “NATO’s military response to Russia: November 2016 update,” House of Commons Library, Briefing Paper 07276, 3 November 2016, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7276#fullreport>.

highest echelons of power within the Atlantic Community, eliciting the expectation that Russia would imminently target the Baltic States and perhaps Poland.⁶⁴ Moscow, however, chose to promote a “frozen” conflict scenario in 2015, in which Eastern Ukrainian provinces would avoid severing ties with Kiev. In a surprising turn of events, Odessa, a Black Sea port of great strategic and symbolic value to Russia, did not become a flashpoint for separatist forces.⁶⁵

This does not necessarily imply that the competition between NATO and Russia in Eastern Europe is over. It may be indicative, however, of the “transfer” of the East-West rivalry into a more contested theatre, that of the Eastern Mediterranean. Russia’s direct involvement in the quagmire of the Syrian conflict entailed a robust commitment of political and military capital during a year of financial stress and diplomatic isolation for Moscow.⁶⁶ A critical question is whether Russia aims to take the next step and upgrade its missile defence strategy. An airpower web consisting of advanced fighter jets and ballistic missiles may, in the mid-term, restrict NATO’s capacity to deploy assets in the Mediterranean, with Russia essentially challenging American control of a vital area that has been uncontested since the end of the Second World War. This would be a major development for the entire region as a Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system, while defensive in nature, has the capacity to overturn an existing balance of power by undercutting other states’ deterrent capabilities, or by providing coverage for offensive forces. During a crisis between Russia and NATO, Moscow could take advantage of deployed SAMs and declare a no-fly zone or, alternatively, an air-defence identification zone in order to prevent hostile forces from reaching Syria for example. Under this scenario, the credibility of NATO and its members would be put to the test.

Russia’s Mediterranean buildup may equally alter the posture of regional actors, whose conduct may be critical in times of crisis. The role of Turkey and Egypt, both in control of choke point access in the Black and Red Seas

⁶⁴ “Russia a threat to Baltic states after Ukraine conflict,” *The Guardian*, 19 February 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/feb/19/russia-a-threat-to-baltic-states-after-ukraine-conflict-warns-michael-fallon>; “Russia’s game in the Baltic Sea region: A Polish perspective,” European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) Wider Europe Forum, www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russias_game_in_the_baltic_sea_region_a_polish_perspective381.

⁶⁵ “In Odessa, anxiety over Russia’s next move,” *USA Today*, 5 March 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/03/05/odessa-ukraine-anxiety-over-russia-next-move/24363957>.

⁶⁶ U. Dekel and Z. Magen, “Russian Involvement in Syria: What has Changed, and the Significance for Israel,” *INSS Insight*, 752 (2015), <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=10699>.

respectively, is far from certain under a hypothetical crisis scenario, even though the former is a full NATO member. Bulgaria's refusal to take part in the establishment of a permanent NATO-led force in the Black Sea signifies the reluctance of regional actors to antagonize Moscow in an area of historical importance for Russian interests.⁶⁷ Problematic access to the Black and Red Seas, or even a delay of reinforcements in the course of a security crisis could have detrimental effects on NATO's deterrence credibility, leading other states in the region, such as Greece and Italy, to further question their commitment to NATO goals and priorities.

Israel's unchallenged dominance of the skies over Syria and Lebanon, moreover, could be compromised for the first time since the 1970s; throughout the Syrian crisis, Moscow and Jerusalem maintained an intensive dialogue over developments in Syria. The goal was to ensure that Israeli and Russian fighter jets would not collide, as the Israeli Air-Force undertook operations in Syria, striking targets associated with Hezbollah, the Lebanon-based militant group which dispatched forces in support of the Assad regime. While Israelis are historically reluctant to provide information over their military operations, the maintenance of an open line between Putin and Netanyahu indicates that Israel may be willing to accept a Russian presence in the region.⁶⁸ It remains to be seen whether this will still be the case if Russia upgrades its capabilities in areas of Israeli concern. There is also a question regarding a potential collaboration between Russian forces in Syria and irregular groups such as the Hezbollah, which could assume the role of a Russian proxy in the region, creating a rift between Russia and Israel.

A Russian air defence umbrella in the Eastern Mediterranean brings back memories of the S-300 crisis in Cyprus. In 1997, the Cypriot effort to upgrade the island's anti-aircraft capabilities through the purchase of the S-300 SAM system led to a tense crisis that was resolved when the missiles were stored in the Greek island of Crete. The Cypriot rationale for procuring the missiles was tactical, as well as political. Since the establishment of Cyprus as a sovereign state in 1960, and particularly after the 1974 Turkish invasion and partition of the island, successive Cypriot governments have exerted a consistent effort to ensure the survivability of the Republic through military acquisitions. A pervasive sense of

⁶⁷ "Bulgaria refuses to join NATO Black Sea fleet against Russia," EurActiv, 16 June 2016, www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/bulgaria-refuses-to-join-nato-black-sea-fleetagainst-russia/.

⁶⁸ S. Ramani, "Why Russia and Israel are Cooperating in Syria," Huffington Post, 23 June 2016, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-russia-and-israel-are-cooperating-in-syria_us_576bdb68e4b083e0c0235e15.

insecurity, combined with a deadlock in bi-communal negotiations, led to a more assertive security policy, which lasted for approximately a decade (1989-1998), epitomised by the Integrated Defence Space pact with Greece. Overall, Cyprus aimed at challenging the local balance of capabilities by establishing a credible deterrent force, which featured a robust air defence component.⁶⁹ The S-300 “fiasco,” as it is remembered among political circles, led to a drastic Cypriot security policy adjustment⁷⁰ that, to this day, emphasizes a minimum deterrence capability and the avoidance of escalation. It is thus highly unlikely that Cyprus will consider another arms build-up anytime soon, even though the Republic finds itself amidst a tense geopolitical environment.

Turkey’s long-term response to Russia’s conduct in the Eastern Mediterranean, however, remains enigmatic. While Russia and Turkey appear to have established an uneasy understanding regarding the Syrian conflict, the Russian A2/AD strategy may well lead to further antagonisms between the two neighbours. In the coming years, Russia could expand its network of missile systems in the area, through establishing bases armed with S-300/400 SAMs or even more advanced systems in Syria or Egypt, for example. Another possibility is a long-term presence of S-300 equipped Russian naval assets in the vicinity. Moscow has indeed announced that its *Kirov*-class battle cruisers will be equipped with a naval variant of the S-400 by 2022.⁷¹ These developments would imply that Cyprus, or at least parts of the Cypriot airspace, could be covered by a Russian air defence umbrella.

Considering Turkey’s undisputed air superiority over the island, this development could affect the regional security outlook in a dramatic way. The Turkish reaction to the Cyprus S-300 crisis between 1997 and 1998 was indicative of the potential impact of such developments. Throughout the crisis, the Turkish Ministry of Defence compared its obligation to prevent the S-300 deployment with that of Washington to stop the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962.⁷² Nevertheless, it was extremely difficult for Ankara to antagonize Russia’s attempt to install its missiles. In August 1997, Turkish

⁶⁹ E. Goldstein, “Greece: The Imperatives of Geopolitics,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 22: (1998), 168.

⁷⁰ “Cypriot government announces moratorium on weapons purchases,” *Agence France Presse*, 14 January 1999.

⁷¹ D. Majumdar, “Russia’s Monster Battlecruisers Are Getting Hypersonic Anti-Ship Missiles,” *The National Interest*, 19 February 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/russias-monster-battlecruisers-are-getting-hypersonic-anti-15263>.

⁷² M. Demetriou, “On the long road to Europe and the short path to war: Issue-linkage politics and the arms build-up on Cyprus,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 3:3 (1998), 44.

authorities stopped and searched the Egyptian vessel *Al-Qusair*, after allegedly receiving information that the ship was carrying (S-300) missile parts.⁷³ In this manner, Turkey indicated its opposition to the deal, but chose to avoid a direct provocation to Moscow by selecting a ship that did not carry the Russian flag. It is highly unlikely that Russian assets, whether located in a base or on board a vessel, would be targeted by the Turkish armed forces.

On a final note, Russia's capacity to challenge and surprise the West in recent years should lead both NATO and the EU to reassess the way strategic assessments are conducted. Despite its relative military and financial weakness, Moscow has proven capable of drawing accurate inferences about Western intentions and capabilities. This enables its policy planners to engage in brinkmanship, strategic surprise and the gradual erosion of NATO deterrence in Europe. Even if one uses the label of opportunism to characterize Russian behaviour, opportunity is a function of capability, to an extent. This apparent failure of the West could potentially be attributed to a rather simplistic image of Russia as an unpredictable and disruptive actor in international politics. While Russia cannot be classified as a liberal democracy, it possesses the requisite institutional depth and memory which enable the country to rationally internalize lessons learned from past conflicts, adapting its strategy to changing conditions. In that sense, Moscow behaves as a reactive, not a disruptive force and the evolution of Russia's Mediterranean strategy is a case in point. In order to account for Russia's behaviour, therefore, a refined, more nuanced narrative is necessary, one that captures its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and at the same time surprise its antagonists when its interests are not taken into consideration.

⁷³ "Tension escalates over transfer of S-300 missiles," *Hurriet Daily News*, 9 March 1997, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/tension-escalates-over-transfer-of-s-300-missiles.aspx?pageID=438&n=tension-escalates-over-transfer-of-s-300-missiles-1997-09-03.

Cyprus at the Center: Global Grand Strategy and the Conflict in Syria

Anthony D. Lott

Discourse on grand strategy has traditionally emphasized the state and its role in constructing long-term policy planning mechanisms for its security. Using a modified version of Hedley Bull's notion of international society, a version of global grand strategy is developed. This approach to strategic thought emphasizes the importance of securing the society of states through a broad security lens in order to defend against new and emerging threats. Three aspects of global grand strategy are discussed: a societal, security, and identity parameter. Having constructed a theoretical framework for understanding the global aspect of grand strategy, I examine how Cyprus plays an important role as a node of institutional flexibility for members of international society in resolving the humanitarian and security problems in the greater Levant.

Introduction

Discourse on grand strategy has been and continues to be constrained by a focus on the state. This should surprise neither the scholar nor the casual reader of international relations. The sovereign state system gave rise to a material emphasis on territoriality and physical borders that provided the lens through which grand geopolitical interests could be understood. Strategizing in this manner led to concern with force structures, alliances, the technology of warfare, and access to natural resources. Reliance on these philosophical roots of grand strategy has led some scholars to equate grand strategy with the state and limit strategic modeling to a national security lens.¹

This traditional emphasis on national security and the state exists despite fissures in the modern state system. These fissures challenge how and in what

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¹ See for instance, B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 336; and Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press, 1987), 179-181.

form strategy is envisioned. Forces of integration and disintegration increasingly complicate attempts to articulate strategy based on a bounded physical territory. Patterns of global trade, migration flows, development trends, and emerging and existing communication technologies confront state policy makers with an altered geographic landscape of the *national* interest.²

While challenges to the international order complicate strategic thinking, they do little to undermine its necessity. Grand strategy has become more, rather than less, important. The difference, however, is that in order to account for the more complicated strategic environment in which states exist, grand strategy must be approached from a global perspective rather than that of the state and a narrowly defined national interest. Little has been written on separating the concept of 'grand strategy' from that of the state. Traditionally, strategy has been a state-level concept, and academic attempts to understand its policy relevance were constructed around distinct *national* grand strategies. With advancements in European integration, some scholars have begun to expand the concept beyond singular states and recognize the necessity of such an endeavor. Barrinha, for instance, argues that the future of the EU necessitates an explicit understanding of its grand strategy.³ And, Kornprobst writes even more specifically of a European grand strategy developed around his notion that strategies are 'composite commonplaces' emerging out of interpretive communities engaged in distinct dialogues. His work builds on a constructivist emphasis of an emerging European *self* that engages in a particular understanding of its place in world politics.⁴ For Kornprobst, EU strategy is based on the diffusion of values and identities that make for a more coordinated and coherent sense of what needs to be secured and what identity emerges from that securitization.⁵ Similarly, Mitzen

² Michael Mann, *Power in the 21st Century: Conversations with John Hall* (London: Polity Books, 2011). See, generally, Rana Eijaz Ahmad and Abida Eijaz, "Modern Sovereign State System is Under Cloud in the Age of Globalization," *South Asia Studies*, 26:2 (July 2011), 285-297; Margit Bussmann and Gerald Schneider, "When Globalization Discontent Turns Violent: Foreign Economic Liberalization and Internal War," *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:1 (March 2007), 79-97; David Held, "At the Global Crossroads: The End of the Washington Consensus and the Rise of Global Social Democracy?" *Globalizations*, 2:1 (May 2005), 95-113; John Gerard Ruggie, "Global Governance and 'New Governance Theory': Lessons from Business and Human Rights," *Global Governance*, 20:1 (Jan-Mar 2014), 5-17.

³ André Barrinha, "Progressive Realism and the EU's International Actorness: Towards a Grand Strategy," *Journal of European Integration*, 38:4 (2016), 441-454 (441).

⁴ Markus Kornprobst, "Building Agreements Upon Agreements: The European Union and Grand Strategy," *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:2 (June 2015), 267-292 (272).

⁵ In this regard, his work follows a similar ontological foundation to that of Ole Wæver, "The Theory Act: Responsibility and Exactitude as seen from Securitization," *International Relations*, 29:1 (March 2015), 121-127.

writes historically of an international forum that makes state strategies more coherent and recognizable. Employing the Concert of Europe as a forum that develops consistent behavior among states and renders legitimate their policies, she establishes grand strategy as a useful concept in understanding states in their regional communities.⁶

Yet, while these nascent works in multilateral (European) grand strategy expand our understanding of the concept, strategy is still tied to a specific, coherent geographical region. The revised concept functions in a similar way to that of traditional (state) grand strategy. The EU becomes a substitute for individual European state strategies, and what emerges is a more coherent multilateral policy of the least common denominator. However, security challenges in global politics today require rethinking what needs to be secured and what strategy best overcomes those challenges. What Ian Clark describes as the pressures of globalisation and fragmentation on the state, now require an ontological shift in the strategic formula.⁷ Global grand strategy necessitates a definition of security unbound from the state. Popular attempts to articulate a 'war on terrorism,' a 'war on drugs,' a 'crackdown on tax evasion' and a 'global campaign to end sex trafficking' are attempts to resolve the new dynamics of insecurity promulgated by non-state entities. And, just as important, attempts by state policymakers to articulate grand strategy through institutional, organizational, and regional commitments underscore the increasingly non-territorial and non-national aspects of strategy. Removed from an ontological adherence to a defined, territorial self (the physical state) and a potentially threatening other (in the form of other states), this adapted form of strategic thought encompasses institutional, legal, and societal aspects of a broader and more complex society in which states find themselves existing.⁸

⁶ Jennifer Mitzen, "Illusion or Intention?: Talking Grand Strategy into Existence," *Security Studies*, 24:1 (Jan-March 2015), 61-94 (67).

⁷ Ian Clark, *Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸ Hedley Bull explores the idea of an international society of states, diplomats, and international organizations brought together by common interests and shared values. The literature in the field, since his seminal approach, has sought to either build on this definition or move past it. In this article, I modify Bull's state-centric approach only slightly to allow other non-state actors to participate in his narrow version of international society. This modest modification is necessary for the argument that follows because it re-identifies actors in international relations. Some actors, previously marginalized or excluded from membership in international society, are now admitted because of their role in supporting and proliferating the common interests and shared values of the traditional members of the society. This issue is explored further below. See, Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) 13-15.

However, reimagining grand strategy cannot simply be an ontological activity. Long-term policy making has a fundamental role to play in the simple, moral arrangement between state and citizen/subject.⁹ While the ontological foundations of the state and its existential threats no longer match the traditional state system envisioned in realist thought (if they ever did), it remains necessary to construct practical security policies. In this respect, thinking about grand strategy must be adapted to the realities of this more complex world.

Here, I outline the philosophical foundations and political necessity of global grand strategy. The argument advanced below is that strategy must be decoupled from its traditional state-centric focus and re-centered in a revised understanding of international society whose members are confronted by problems that can no longer be managed by even the most powerful states and their hegemonic institutional mechanisms. The argument is guided by a series of assumptions. First, individual states no longer command the central role in strategic solutions to geopolitical problems. States now share the role in solving transnational threats with other states, IGOs, and non-state actors who often challenge, confound, and reshape strategic solutions.¹⁰ This assumption, it could be argued, has always been a reality in international affairs.¹¹ The argument below, however, demonstrates that what counts for security has fundamentally changed because of the distribution of power in the system. What counts as a causally important actor in that system has been expanded to include non-state actors. Second, military solutions to the complex problems faced by social stratification, marginalization, and inequality are ineffective and counterproductive. While these strategies could work during the colonial and early post-colonial world, transportation and communication flows no longer limit violent externalities to the periphery. In fact, their use often produces moments of greater insecurity. Third, global strategy focusing on the actors and identities in a transnational society challenges both the policy maker and the academic to include histories and subjects that have been marginalized by traditional

⁹ Gary L. Scott and Craig L. Carr, "Are States Moral Agents?," *Social Theory and Practice*, 12:1 (Spring 1986), 75-102 (83).

¹⁰ These threats include, but are not limited to, terrorist groups, pandemics, economic contagions, and the effects of some natural disasters.

¹¹ Keohane and Nye articulated similar concerns in their exploration of "complex interdependence." The difference, in terms of the present discussion, is that the outcome is not a world with minimal to no conflict but one in which conflict and threat are re-imagined as occurring between those wishing to uphold the interests and values of the society and those seeking to undermine it. For a comprehensive discussion of complex interdependence and its implications for war, see, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston MA: Little Brown, 1977).

discourses on grand strategy. These three assumptions, when taken together, create an image of global order defined by:

- A bounded understanding of power in international affairs that serves to constrain the military actions of individual states and ties those actions to the shared interests and common values of international society.¹²
- A broad understanding of security that requires human security and welfare be at the core of long-term policy goals of states and other members of international society.¹³
- A set of overlapping identities that complicates simple attempts to define a self and other and draw clear lines between friends and enemies within a greater society.¹⁴

A number of current conflicts, and their externalities, demonstrate a need to revisit the value of grand strategy as a policy tool to improve security and welfare, to arrest that tool from its historic connection with the state, and to develop key attributes of what might best be understood as *global* grand strategy in order to more accurately improve security in this complex and interconnected world. The advances of ISIL and the growth of related terrorist groups in Libya and west Africa, the crisis in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, criminal influence in Central America and Mexico, and increasing confrontations in the South China Sea should provide sufficient evidence for renewed interest in theorizing about grand strategy through a web of multilateral, institutional mechanisms situated within a complex international society. While it is beyond the scope of this article to explore each of these conflict zones, the argument below outlines how a globally oriented grand strategy might correct current deficiencies in the conflict with ISIL by establishing institutional cooperation among a nexus of actors: states, regional IGOs, the UN, and non-governmental organizations. Specifically, the discussion below takes seriously the challenge to make grand strategy 'policy-relevant' by exploring how the unique history of Cyprus, the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) on the island, as well as the Republic of Cyprus' (RoC) overlapping economic and

¹² An interesting discussion of changes to our understanding of power occurs in Vivien Collingwood, "Non-governmental Organizations, Power, and Legitimacy in International Society," *Review of International Studies*, 32:3 (July 2006), 439-454.

¹³ See Paul Kennedy, "Global Issues and the New Security Agenda," in *From War to Peace: Altered Strategic Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Paul Kennedy and William I. Hitchcock (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 231-245 (242).

¹⁴ These overlapping identities, many of which extend beyond state borders, challenge domestic and foreign policy making. To some degree, state security policy becomes both a subject of *global* grand strategy and a structural limitation on the extent of that grand strategy. This is discussed in greater detail below.

legal commitments to regional actors, might be employed to establish a global grand strategy for the fight against ISIL and reconstruct the political, economic, and societal infrastructure of the greater Levant.

In the following section, I lay out a philosophical rationale for rethinking grand strategy. This section introduces a transformed vision of international society for the 21st Century. In the subsequent section, I apply that form of grand strategic thinking to the case of Cyprus and its strategic future. From a traditional security perspective it may appear counterintuitive to establish a global grand strategy around the policies and interests of the smallest state in the region. However, Cyprus is an example of a *node of institutional flexibility* that illustrates how even the smallest state can play a pivotal role in a complex web of policymaking attached to a global strategy to resolve a long-term public goods problem.

Globalising Grand Strategy

With few exceptions, definitions of grand strategy involve a broad cross-section of policy sectors in an inclusive understanding of how a state or group of states might achieve major policy initiatives (interests) in peacetime or war.¹⁵ Debates in the literature on the relationship between strategy and policy, strategy and security, the extent to which strategy is a means or an end, and the *grandness* of grand strategy itself, emerge out of a desire to understand how and when it makes sense to understand state behavior through a strategic lens.¹⁶ Common to all these discussions is recognition that grand strategy must incorporate multiple tools of statecraft in order to be effective.

With still fewer exceptions, these definitions and discussions focus on the state as the principal subject of security, and military power as the key factor necessary for the attainment of that security.¹⁷ This is neither surprising nor inappropriate. The presence of the state as a form of political and social organization has been one of the most enduring human institutions in the world for the past 500 years. Moreover, the order established by the state system pervades all aspects of human life and limits alternative forms of governance from emerging and proliferating. The state, as a mechanism of control, an engine for social welfare, and a defender of rights remains, for most, the quintessential

¹⁵ Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, 240.

¹⁶ For a recent and particularly cogent exploration of these debates see Paul D. Miller, "On Strategy, Grand and Mundane," *Orbis* 60:2 (Spring 2016), 237-247.

¹⁷ For a comprehensive critique of this limitation see Barry Buzan, *People, States, & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd edition (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991).

actor in international relations. Its importance is rooted in its primary obligation to protect the citizens/subjects within its defined borders by commanding the legitimate use of force. For most scholars and policymakers, force, or the potential to use force, allows states access to the levers of grand strategy.¹⁸

These ubiquitous components of grand strategy (the broad policy menu and reliance on the state) have been useful and even necessary in attempts to add explanatory power to studies of state behavior. However, adherence to a state-centric model also constrains philosophical inquiry and limits new ideas from emerging when pressures on the current order necessitate re-thinking the fundamentals of the system and its important actors. And, while attempts to reimagine international order are fraught with conceptual confusion and historical inaccuracy, a careful review of the current global order suggests that re-conceptualizing grand strategy may provide states, organizations, and members of civil society better policy options for solving global public goods problems than reliance on traditional strategic thought. The discussion below outlines how the process of globalising grand strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean theatre might better account for fundamental changes in the strategic and normative environment in which actors (including states) find themselves operating.

To begin, it is necessary to more accurately outline the parameters of global grand strategy and distinguish it from the traditional approach outlined above. There are three important attributes, introduced above and explained below, that need to be unpacked in order to distinguish a global grand strategy from the traditional approach and demonstrate its policy-relevance. First, globalising grand strategy involves a conceptual move from the primary referent of the state to that of the broader international society in which the state operates. This conceptual shift is necessary because firstly, it more accurately incorporates the varied actors that participate in strategic options, and secondly, it allows for a space in which these varied actors can coordinate policies in order to achieve long-term policy objectives. This attribute might be considered the *societal parameter*. Globalising grand strategy requires the utilization of overlapping institutional arrangements in international society. In order to solve strategic problems in international affairs, it is necessary to identify nodes of institutional flexibility in which key actors, often with conflicting interests, coordinate the smaller set of common interests they share as members in a society. These nodes of institutional flexibility function as public spaces where international discourse emerges and broader societal interests can be championed through coordinated, transparent policy.

¹⁸ For a cogent discussion on the frustrations with, but the necessity for, a definition of grand strategy see Miller, "On Strategy," 238.

The list of societal interests is not much different from that envisioned by Hedley Bull when he sought to articulate the ‘common values and interests’ in nascent international society forty years ago.¹⁹ It involves being conscious of and acting to uphold the institution of sovereignty and the practice of international law. It involves the promotion of global commerce and human welfare upon which that sovereignty is reinforced. These values and interests, thoughtfully and narrowly articulated, spell out the rights and responsibilities of actors in international affairs. They also reflect the long-term policies that underlie *global* grand strategy. They inform states and other actors of these values and interests and provide regularized patterns of appropriate behavior for participation in the society.

What has changed since Hedley Bull defined international society is the addition of actors and responsibilities required to support the state in the protection of values and interests in international society. More telling perhaps than the mere addition of these actors, is the authority they now possess and the resulting shift that has re-distributed institutional power in the society. Who and what counts as a legitimate actor with the ability to set the public agenda, employ resources to solve problems, and intervene in the protection of the global public good continues to change; involving different actors at key moments in the strategic process. Civilians, NGOs, transnational networks, and other groups play a central role in upholding the values and interests of the society as well as participating in spontaneous and planned policy implementation.²⁰

Similarly, this society acts as a discursive space and begins to perform as an actor in its own right. Nodes of institutional flexibility within international society allow for the introduction of new avenues of problem solving, the inclusion of marginalized voices, and the construction of institutionalized solutions to strategic problems. Analogous to a Habermasian discursive space, international society begins to play a causal role in the development of strategic solutions to transnational problems, shaping the identity of actors as they interact to resolve global public goods issues.²¹

Second, because the locus of importance has moved from the state to international society, globalising grand strategy requires that we rethink what needs to be secured, through what means, and against what threats. This attribute

¹⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 13.

²⁰ One recent example of spontaneous civilian policy making was witnessed throughout Europe (and especially in Germany) as citizens created convoys of migrant chauffeurs in response to the growing migrant crisis.

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991) 27-42.

might be considered the *security parameter*. States and international society still matter in world affairs, but so do elements of civil society that grew out of that international society and provide public goods that states have been unwilling or unable to provide. The ICRC, Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam International, CARE International, citizen coalitions, and the network of human rights organizations participating in advocacy and information dissemination play necessary roles in advancing both the state and international society.²² These organizations, networks, and advocacy groups continue to advance an understanding of security centered in human beings rather than nationhood. Their involvement in crisis zones, and the advocacy they undertake concerning those in zones, challenges states to accept responsibility for upholding the common interests and values of the society. The security implications of this subtle transformation in the composition of society should not be underestimated. Their work is neither secondary to the actions of states nor in opposition to them, but central to the way in which the values and interests of the society are disseminated, reinforced, and revised. Global inequalities, poverty, underdevelopment, resource allocation, and basic rights to economic and social opportunities become (human) security issues that challenge states to reassess policy options. The traditional lens of national security no longer functions to resolve these issues or manage their externalities. And, individual states can no longer expect to manage the 'security dilemma' in an anarchical environment. Paul Kennedy, exploring new security threats expresses this new thinking:

[...] these broad-based, non-military changes that may undermine whole societies are not something that can be easily dealt with through our existing state structures and by our traditional ways of thinking of what constitutes a 'security threat.' Most reasonable people would agree that today's policymakers, officials, and thinkers, like the statesmen of 1917-23 and 1943-48, are also obligated to come up with proposals to deal with the challenges that worry humankind. They would also probably agree that the solutions will be only partial ones, complicated by life's frictions, the messiness of local situations, human intransigence, and general ineptitude.²³

²² In this way, transnational advocacy networks, NGOs, the global press corps, and other non-state actors add to the sovereign state system rather than undermine it. Including these actors as part of international society reinforces its importance as a conceptual tool. The values of the society are questioned, contested, and reinforced by the actors interacting with the state. For an introduction to this more complex set of social relations see Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²³ Kennedy, "Global Issues and the New Security Agenda," 242.

This assessment, written shortly after the end of the Cold War, was a prescient reminder of the impending unraveling of the traditional order that would occur in the ensuing decades and the transformation that would be required to preserve the sovereign state system and resolve emerging human security concerns. The obligation to find solutions to new threats occurs in a transformed institutional environment where it makes more sense to speak of *global* grand strategy rather than grand strategies implemented by individual states.

International law, as a discursive practice upholding sovereignty and rights and promoting global commerce and human welfare, becomes a lens through which policymakers and scholars understand threats to both states and international society. Adherence to law alters the range of policymaking options and shapes state behavior in ways that reinforce the state and its common values and interests. It becomes incumbent on policymakers to make the most of this discursive practice; finding nodes of institutional flexibility, through which coordination of global grand strategy occurs.

If past approaches to understanding security required that states be secured against external threats in order to protect citizen/subjects, then current discussions require that international society be secured against agents and actors wishing to undermine it. Only when the philosophical shift from nation-state to international society is made does this become clear. Once clear, this reflexive shift in thinking about security allows for the concomitant shift to global grand strategy. It becomes possible to distinguish non-state actors who support states and promote the values and interests of international society and those who actively seek to undermine those values and interests. In the process of globalising grand strategy, there is no longer a distinction between a defence of sovereignty and the promotion of human security. The important distinction is between the plurality of actors involved in defending this transformed international society and those who seek to undermine its philosophical, moral, and empirical foundations.

Third, this conceptual challenge to the primacy of the state and an emphasis on human security results in a reassessment of identity within the state and international society. More traditional understandings of threat emerged out of an identity calculation based on a *national* self and (territorially) *external* other. While this identity construction probably never functioned to create a coherent security strategy, it no longer makes conceptual sense in a world defined more by emerging and established relationships in international society. Reimagining the identity performances that exist in international society today functions as the *identity* parameter of a globalized grand strategy.

Existential threats do not exist without a corresponding identity that allows actors to make sense of them. “Material capabilities alone do not make the threat; it is the political imagination that constructs a scenario whereby a threat is said to exist.”²⁴ The basis of threats to international society come from sobering recognition of and reflection on the presence of actors seeking to undermine the ideational foundations of that society. In international relations today, this group is small but significant. The various anti-society alternatives to the current world order seek not membership in the society but a radical rejection of the society itself, its institutions, norms, practices and values.

At present, what is required of both IR scholars and state policymakers is a re-imagining of the security problematique. This re-imagining requires recognition of the threats posed by actors seeking to undermine the very foundations of an order that has supported and advanced the interests of state and citizen and institutionalized the patterns of appropriate behavior in which members operate. One way to understand insecurity is to recognize that it is a “result of self/other dynamics that play out at the boundaries of identities.”²⁵ In the transformed international society in which members operate today, societal boundaries can be understood as *membership* boundaries. Which actors seek ultimately to uphold the values and interests of an international society dedicated to sovereignty, human welfare, commerce, and the rule of law? For policymakers and traditional IR scholars, answers to this question require reflection and a willingness to be intellectually nimble. Subjects and histories that have been left out of the dominant strategic discourse re-emerge as necessary components of global grand strategy.

An example of this fundamental change in identity might be useful. In what they call a “radical reassessment of the possibilities for UK grand strategy,” Barkawi and Brighton explore how the policymaking elite in the UK is undermining the long-term security of the state through a failure of political and strategic vision.²⁶ Their approach is broadly constructivist and their goal is that of re-identifying the core imagery of what counts in the security calculation of Britain. “Grand strategies can generate new realities, and they do so through the critique of illusion, hard-headed assessment of the present, and a vision of the future.”²⁷ This is similar to that of Huysmans, who argues for a ‘thick

²⁴ Anthony D. Lott, *Creating Insecurity: Realism, Constructivism, and US Security Policy* (Aldershot [UK]: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 55.

²⁵ Lott, *Creating Insecurity*, 61.

²⁶ Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, “Brown Britain: Post-Colonial Politics and Grand Strategy,” *International Affairs*, 89:5 (2013), 1109-1123 (1109).

²⁷ Barkawi and Brighton, “Brown Britain,” 1111.

signifier' approach to security that requires we "lay bare the political work of the signifier security."²⁸ Such an approach to security and identity is important to the present endeavor. It is recognition of how strategic studies necessarily requires an ideational critique as well as a material analysis. Ideas, including identity, matter. In the words of Barkawi and Brighton:

[...] strategic thought concerns understanding, managing and applying given instruments of power. The socio-political order for which strategy operates is held constant. *But under conditions of crisis, strategic innovation [...] is required to react to a transformation in 'the material basis of an intellectual field' rather than presuming its continuity. Responding to such a fundamental crisis of an order of power requires the production and application of new concepts that may well contradict extant understandings of power.*²⁹

This production and application of new concepts is a discursive and reflexive process. It requires recognition of the identities that matter for membership in society and, therefore, need to be secured. It is a revision of the meaning of *threat* and a challenge to stale interpretations of the *other*. Opportunities to re-envision these identities are few and it is rare to be able to recognize them before the policy moment is at hand.

In the next section, this approach to global grand strategy is applied to the case of Cyprus and its potential role in resolving the conflict in the greater Levant. It seems counterintuitive to consider Cyprus a central actor in a global conflict involving major powers. Traditional grand strategy focused attention on those states with power and the ability to extend that power and influence outward. The history of Cyprus provides recurrent examples of how the island has been an object in the grand strategy of other states rather than a state able to secure itself through a grand strategy of its making. As Panayiotis Hadjipavlis notes, it "occupies a predominant geostrategic position able to serve any regional or world power that has aspirations for controlling the area."³⁰ However,

²⁸ Jef Huysmans, "Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier," *European Journal of International Relations*, 4:2 (1998), 226-255 (233).

²⁹ Barkawi and Brighton, "Brown Britain," 1111, emphasis added.

³⁰ Panayiotis Hadjipavlis, "The geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean airspace," *Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitical Review*, 1 (Fall 2015), 44-60 (45). Further on page 49, Hadjipavlis goes on to write that, "the island of Cyprus has repeatedly been the apple of discord between opposing regional or even world powers. Its history is fraught with invasions, occupations, conquests and battles of control and domination." This history is detailed in William Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012) 2-6. In addition, a thorough review of how Cold War politics influenced the politics of Cyprus is explored in Joseph S. Joseph, *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

through the *societal*, *security*, and *identity* parameters outlined above, I argue that Cyprus sits at the center of a global solution to the regional insecurity and humanitarian disaster occurring in the greater Levant. Moreover, its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean is not simply an object for the use of others. Its significance as a member of international society is that of a *node of institutional flexibility*. Cyprus sits in a unique position among the overlapping institutions of Europe. Further, it has cultivated pragmatic relationships with both Russia and the United States. And, the potential to resolve the division on the island provides members of international society with an opportunity to re-imagine security threats in the region and recognize innovative solutions to those threats.

Cyprus, global grand strategy, and the conflict in the Levant

Nodes of institutional flexibility in the international system are difficult to locate. Geopolitical locations where overlapping institutional arrangements make for possibilities of dynamic coordination are fortuitous but require nimble diplomatic maneuvering and long-term foresight among foreign ministers, international agencies, and policy advisers. Cyprus occupies such a location in the construction of global grand strategy in the Levant. It does so because of its unique geopolitical and institutional place in international society. It is a divided frontier at the edge of the European Union. It exists at the confluence of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as well as Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. It is in the EU but out of NATO. It is a sovereign member of international society, yet burdened by (mis)use of its territory by regional and global powers.³¹ It is one of few states in the region with a pragmatic and non-aligned approach to both the United States and Russia. A solution to its divided status offers an uncommon opportunity to unite not only the two communities on the island, but also regional actors, in a coordinated strategy for the greater Levant.³² Additionally, it is a member of the Commonwealth, enjoys a complicated, but cordial, relationship with a post-Brexit Britain, and its territory will, no doubt, feature in future British strategy in the region. In the discussion that follows, I briefly explore four key relationships in the foreign policy of Cyprus. Then, I

³¹ While the most obvious ‘mis-use’ of Cypriot sovereign territory is the occupation by Turkey, equally problematic is the use of the island by the UK through its complex of the SBAs and Retained Sites. See Petros Savvides, “The Geostrategic Position of Cyprus: Israel’s Prospect for Strategic Depth in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitical Review*, 1 (Fall 2015), 6-20 (8-12).

³² Any discussion of Cyprus as a node of institutional flexibility would necessarily exist on the understanding that a solution to the division of the island is at hand. Independent of that prospect, Cyprus serves as an agent of cooperation in the region.

explain how re-imagining these relationships makes Cyprus a node of institutional flexibility in the construction of a global grand strategy for the greater Levant.

First, Cypriot membership in the EU affords it an institutional shield that other states in the region cannot claim. As a member of the EU, it has an opportunity to act as a forum for a more robust and coordinated common foreign and security policy. To date, EU policy has been a reaction to UNSC policy and the individual actions of EU member states. It remains broadly traditional in its orientation around the isolation of the recalcitrant Assad regime and the destruction of ISIL. The complex of Council decisions and regulations, as well as subsequent revisions and amendments, are meant to restrict interactions across all sectors of state policymaking, isolate key individuals from participation in international society, and signal to regional and international actors who and what counts as members of international society.³³ To argue, however, that implementation of these actions has led to a common foreign and security policy with respect to Syria, or to make the more substantive claim that such directives and regulations provide evidence of EU grand strategy is misleading. At best, these policies represent patterns of behavior meant to discipline EU actors in their interactions with others deemed beyond the boundaries of international society. Still, the EU, as an actor in international society, has an important institutional role to play. And, its most southeastern member state has the capacity to act as a centre of coordination for that role. Because of the current occupation of much of its territory by Turkey, the foreign ministry of the Government of Cyprus (GoC) is highly skilled in international negotiation. It regularly engages in complex negotiations with global powers, international organizations, and regional states. Perhaps more than any other state in the EU, the only member-state of the union that is occupied by a foreign power is also the most capable of acting as a host and forum for coordinated global efforts to resolve the humanitarian and security crisis in the Levant.

Second, few states in the Eastern Mediterranean have strong, positive bilateral relationships with both the United States and Russia. Given the Russian bond with the Assad regime in Syria and US hegemonic influence and interest in the region, Cyprus plays an important role in coordinating the common interests of these two states. Russia has tied its foreign policy goals to a crumbling regime whose legitimacy, authority, and control of the state are tenuous at best. Few analysts believe that Russia has the long-term stamina

³³ EU Council Directive 2013/255/CFSP Concerning Restrictive Measures Against Syria, *Official Journal of the European Union* 147/14 (1.6.2013).

(military and financial) to support Assad's Syria and Russian overtures to Cyprus suggest that even Russia recognizes that new options are necessary.³⁴ Moreover, once other important actors in international society accepted the necessity of regime change, Russia became the only actor available to rebuild the infrastructure in a post-conflict Syria headed by Assad. Given its internal economic woes, it seems unlikely that Russia will be able to function as a primary donor for such a highly unlikely reconstruction. Cyprus, however, provides an alternative vehicle for Russian interests in the region. The island is outside of NATO and (institutionally) separate from the US security alliance. Britain, seeking a somewhat independent post-WWII grand strategy and wishing to retain some freedom of action in the Middle East, declared Cyprus (and after independence, the SBAs) to be outside of NATO.³⁵ Because the island is beyond the NATO umbrella, Cyprus has unique standing in the region.

With careful agreement and a clear understanding of limitations, Cyprus might serve its own interests by acting to coordinate the common interests of the United States and Russia. The foundations of this complex relationship are already in place. Cypriot negotiations with Russia for use of the Andreas Papandreou Airbase in Paphos for humanitarian purposes are a beginning.³⁶ So too, was the decision by the GoC to limit that agreement to non-military purposes.³⁷ As I discuss below, a global grand strategy promoting the interests of Cyprus would bring the US, Russia, and other actors together with respect to coordinated military and humanitarian interests in the region. The opportunity to invite Russia and the United States to the negotiating table is rare in a world where states have been divided among official alliances, historical friendships, and pragmatic conveniences. Cyprus, however, has the intellectual resources and diplomatic freedom to act both as a neutral forum and a loose mediator of common interests.

Third, one of the most complex bilateral relationships that Cyprus must navigate is its relationship with the United Kingdom. Cyprus must deal with the complex of SBA installations maintained by its former colonizer because of the treaty commitments upon which its sovereignty is based. The manner in which

³⁴ Masis Der Parthogh, "Russia keen to use military bases in Cyprus," *Cyprus Mail*, 21 January 2015, <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/01/21/russia-keen-to-use-military-bases-in-cyprus>.

³⁵ Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, "Cold War Pressures, Regional Strategies, and Relative Decline: British Military and Strategic Planning for Cyprus, 1950-1960," *The Journal of Military History*, 73 (October 2009), 1143-1166 (1160).

³⁶ Der Parthogh, "Russia keen to use military bases in Cyprus."

³⁷ Jean Christou, "No question of Russian bases on Cyprus," *Cyprus Mail*, 9 February 2015, <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/02/09/no-question-of-russian-bases-on-cyprus/>.

this legal restriction infringes upon the full sovereignty and foreign policy maneuvering of Cyprus should not be dismissed. Consistently, these installations complicate its own foreign and security policies, its bilateral relationships, and its institutional commitments. Use of RAF Akrotiri to launch bombing sorties over Syrian airspace and the more clandestine use of the SBA to support surveillance activity for more states than just the UK undermine perceptions of Cypriot sovereignty and invoke images of neo-colonial influence on a full-fledged member of international society.³⁸ Given the current need of Britain to re-imagine its own security commitments in a post-Brexit world, Cyprus might use this opportunity, as a member of the EU, the British Commonwealth, and the United Nations, to re-negotiate the legal status of the SBA. Ironically, Brexit makes the SBA more valuable as an international tool of grand strategy rather than less. Cyprus, as a node of institutional flexibility, functions to offer Britain a mechanism to reconnect with EU security policy in a manner that could benefit the sovereign status of Cyprus. The GoC might use a revised SBA arrangement to both strengthen its sovereign status over the island and establish a coordinated link among British and EU security strategies.

Fourth, perhaps the most important relationship with Cyprus is that which exists among the various communities that make up its collective *self*. This is not the place to examine the origins of the Cyprus problem or the associated identity constructs that grew and reified as a result of that problem.³⁹ Nor is it the place to explore how those identities continue to limit the diplomatic and societal imagination. However, the potential that the current negotiations provide an opening to re-imagine what counts as Cypriot, what it means to be part of Cyprus, and what such a common narrative would mean for international society should not be underestimated. No solution to the division of the island is possible without a re-imagined identity. To assume such is to misunderstand the concept of security and its necessary role in the formation and maintenance of the state.⁴⁰

As important as a common narrative is to the future of a unified Cyprus, it is just as important to international society. The conflicting identities in Cyprus are not unique to the island but representative of a larger conflict between and

³⁸ Gareth Jennings, "UK debuts 'bunker buster' bombs against the Islamic State," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 26 April 2016, <http://www.janes.com/article/59799/uk-debuts-bunker-buster-bombs-against-the-islamic-state>.

³⁹ Stella Soulioti, *Fettered Independence: Cyprus, 1878-1964* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Rebecca Bryant and Yiannis Papadakis, eds, *Cyprus and the Politics of Memory: History, Community and Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

⁴⁰ See Lott, *Creating Insecurity*, 56-64.

among regional and global actors. Few locations around the world offer opportunities to re-envision the relationship between Christianity and Islam, the west and the east, and Europe and its Moslem neighbors. Identities are stable constructions in which actors operate and make sense of the world.⁴¹ They cannot be re-imagined quickly and made to work as tools for ordering choices and making decisions. Yet, civil society in Cyprus has had decades to build stable identity constructs inclusive of otherness.⁴²

What do these four Cypriot relationships mean for the construction of a global grand strategy in the Levant? And, what role could Cyprus play in the development of that strategy? Using the parameters outlined above, the following is a preliminary draft of such a strategy. My goal is not to construct a grand strategy (strategies are never constructed but perform as patterns of behavior in the policy arena). Rather, I seek to explore the societal, security, and identity parameters through which such a strategy would operate.

Cyprus and International Society: The responsibility that Cyprus has toward a solution in the Levant should not be that of a supportive state through piecemeal agreements created in response to traditional security arrangements. Through the diligent diplomatic work of bringing its key relationships together in a proactive strategy, Cyprus can improve its own security and that of international society. Transitioning from a state-centric model of security to an international society model does not mean undermining the state, national security, and sovereignty; it means expanding the ontological horizons of what counts as an improvement to the security of the state and recognizing that securing the society in which the state operates is equally as important. Common interests in Syria and the greater Levant do exist among the EU, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and Cyprus acts as an important location through which those common interests could be brought together in a more coordinated and effective way. For Cyprus, this means negotiating (limited) multilateral agreements that uphold Cypriot sovereignty while also developing a forum for global coordination. Previous examples exist for such an agreement; the 'Berlin Plus' arrangement between the EU and NATO offers a template for international society.⁴³ Such an arrangement allows for a clear understanding of responsibilities between EU-led Crisis

⁴¹ Badredine Arfi, "Ethnic Fear: The Social Construction of Insecurity," *Security Studies*, 8 (Autumn 1998), 151-203, (152).

⁴² See, for instance Marios Epaminondas et al., "Home for Cooperation (H4C)," The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (Nicosia: K & L Lithofit, 2011).

⁴³ The associated agreements and operational measures can be found at 'About CSDP - The Berlin Plus Agreement,' http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/about-csdp/berlin/index_en.htm.

Management Operations and NATO assets and infrastructure.⁴⁴ In this particular case, securing international society also means developing transparent rules for the use of the SBAs and other facilities on the island. The relationship between Cyprus and the international community should be based on mutual respect and sovereign equality. In the current moment, the SBAs is a fortunate accident of history, but it should not be the tool of an old, backward colonial order. The role that Cyprus plays in bringing international actors together for the common purpose of coordinating mutual interests does not require the use of the SBAs. A revised, transparent relationship between Cyprus and the UK, however, would strengthen the societal aspect of a global grand strategy. With careful consideration for other state interests in the region, the amended use of the SBAs through an MOU among the UK, GoC, Greece, and Turkey would allow for an intentional *de jure* policy to develop out of current *de facto* practice.⁴⁵

Cyprus and Security: There can be no greater example of the importance of human security than the exodus of humanity from the greater Levant. Because of its location, Cyprus has been largely removed from this humanitarian disaster. However, Cyprus can play a central role in redefining how international society understands the security issues in the greater Levant. Military responses are neither sufficient nor appropriate for all aspects of the crisis and Cyprus has, thus far, been careful to avoid become 'battleship Cyprus' in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, because states remain wedded to an antiquated understanding of international society, separating them from actors in civil society who uphold their own values and interests, important opportunities to further coordinate strategy have been missed. Today, humanitarian relief in conflict zones involves NGOs. This reality was not the intention of states but it is, nonetheless, how aspects of international society are now managed. There has been a need to re-think how traditional members of international society interact with broader civil society who support their ultimate ends. A node of institutional flexibility is not charged with structuring a new international order, but it can function as a location to re-imagine that interaction. As recent events have demonstrated, there is an urgent need to

⁴⁴ Although there are complexities when expanding operations to member states involved in one, but not both of the organizations. See, for instance, Petros Vamvakas, "NATO and Turkey in Afghanistan and Central Asia: Possibilities and Blind Spots," *Turkish Studies*, 10:1 (March 2009), 57-74 (59).

⁴⁵ For further discussion of the need to develop a long-term national security strategy built on diplomatic nimbleness see Petros Savvides, "The Geostrategic Position of Cyprus," 13.

improve communication between states and NGOs in conflict zones.⁴⁶ Cyprus offers a transformed international society the opportunity to implement policies in support of human security. Creating a mechanism for the regularized exchange of information for states and relevant NGOs has become a necessary policy response to the complicated problems in the greater Levant. Again, with some imagination, the creation of a new Operational Headquarters (OHQ) for the EU Military Staff (EUMS) could coordinate EU, UK, US, and Russian interests and work through outreach offices to UN agencies and the NGO community.⁴⁷ Here, Cyprus may find a great deal of overlap among its own security interests and the interests of the international community. Standing in international society is a calculation of material resources and moral suasion.⁴⁸ The use of Cypriot resources in medicine and health care, search and rescue relief, and conflict resolution would make Cyprus a regional hub for community needs and enhance economic growth.⁴⁹

Cyprus and Identity: A solution to the Cyprus Problem is not simply beneficial to the people of the island. Cyprus offers international society the possibility of a new and stable bi-communal identity in the region. The creation of a modern, secular, democratic state populated by two communities who recognize their responsibility to each other would reverse the trend of the psychological and political fragmentation of peoples throughout the region. In the Balkans, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, the recent past has been one of violent division rather than bi-communal convergence. The thoughts of Barkawi and Brighton are useful in this regard. Their insurgent strategy requires an “assessment of actually existing social conditions and a reworking of them in pursuit of a new social and political order.”⁵⁰ A unified Cyprus provides two

⁴⁶ Farnaz Fassihi, “UN, Condemning Hospital Attacks, Asks for Adherence to International Law; Resolution Comes in Response to Recent String of Airstrikes in Syria, Yemen,” *Wall Street Journal*, 4 May 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1786301477?accountid=351>.

⁴⁷ Recent work envisioning EU defence in the coming decades begins this discussion. See Jan Joel Anderson et al., “Envisioning European Defence: Five Futures,” *Challiot Papers*, 137 (March 2016), European Institute for Security Studies, 5-38.

⁴⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs Books, 2005) 5-9.

⁴⁹ On 2 March 2017, the Cypriot president inaugurated the ZENON Coordination Centre (ZENON CC) in Larnaca, which is the latest operational addition to the Republic of Cyprus Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC); the formation of ZENON CC was funded by the Internal Security European Funds and is envisaged to play a pivotal role as a regional coordination center of international cooperation over humanitarian crises, search and rescue operations, regional negotiations, etc.

⁵⁰ Barkawi and Brighton, “Brown Britain,” 1113.

levels upon which that assessment can take place. First, it is possible to rethink what it is to be Cypriot. Transforming that identity becomes inclusive of otherness; accepting its Greek, Turkish, Mediterranean, and European identities within, alongside, and complementary to a Cypriot identity that accepts its place in international society. Second, it provides members of international society with a site of positive cognitive dissonance where an antagonistic self/other dynamic no longer holds and a new identity, built on a transformed understanding of the society itself, now functions to undermine the reified borders of Christian/Moslem, west/east, and Europe/Middle East. The new identity becomes part of an insurgent global grand strategy that requires we rethink what is secured, against whom, and for whom and what.

Cyprus is one of the few places where there has (probably) been too much reflection on identity performances. Civil society across the island has been involved in an iterative process of historical construction and reconstruction.⁵¹ This process has worked to build bi-communal education material, to network among historians, politicians, social scientists, and activists.⁵² Its links to broader international society are as deep or deeper than any state. This long tradition is important because with a solution to the division of the island comes a need to build on the ideational changes necessary for new identities to take hold. Key individuals perform important roles in defining appropriate identities and encouraging non-threatening behaviors. But these emergent identities can only be sustained if there is a foundation of common thought in the broader community.

Conclusion

The transformation of international society has occurred sporadically in the decades since Hedley Bull identified its narrow parameters. Today, additional actors beyond the state assist in the maintenance of the common interests and shared values of that society. They do so through a lens that complements rather than undermines the very foundations of the international order. Grand strategy, once the domain of individual states with the ability to project their interests abroad, requires reconceptualization in order that it can be utilized for the defence of international society. Incorporating a definition of human security that more fully recognizes the nature of current and future threats, members of

⁵¹ Costas Carras, "Who will stand up for the future Cyprus federation," *Friends of Cyprus*, 56 (2014), 48-49.

⁵² Charis Psaltis, Eleni Lytras and Stefania Costache, "History Educators in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Community of Cyprus: Perceptions, Beliefs and Practices," *The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research* (Nicosia, Cyprus: K & L Lithofit, 2011).

international society can strategize at the global level through innovative coordination of their shared interests. This coordination is aided by the presence of nodes of institutional flexibility in international relations. Cyprus is such an actor and careful use of its diplomatic assets, bilateral relationships, institutional connections, and its own unified identity could assist in resolving the humanitarian disaster and security threats posed in the greater Levant.

The Law on the Use of Force and Non-State Actors: The Case of Da'esh

Nicholas A. Ioannides

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, it became evident that the ambit of the law on the use of force would drastically change, as it was the first time a non-state actor, namely Al Qaeda, had staged such a large-scale operation. As a response, the United States of America declared the infamous “war on terror” and invaded Afghanistan on the grounds of self-defence.¹ Since 9/11, and over the years, we have been witnessing a soaring trend in the creation of armed groups having the capacity to control portions of territory and establishing state-like structures, the most prominent being Da’esh (also called “ISIS,” “ISIL,” or “Islamic State”), which occupies segments of Iraq and Syria, and has been a source of instability and friction. This article aims to address the legal status of Da’esh under international law as well as the legality of the aerial bombardments carried out by a coalition of states invoking the right of self-defence. In order to be able to assess the ongoing situation in connection with Da’esh and the ensuing activities, a scrutiny of the legal framework governing the law on the use of force both in general and in relation to non-state entities in international law, will be undertaken with particular focus on terrorism. What should be borne in mind from the outset is that the United Nations Charter system faces an unprecedented challenge, having to regulate the conduct of non-state actors, as its apparatus was built on the prevailing, at the time, perception that the sole actor on the international plane is the state; certainly, this view has now clearly become obsolete.

The law on the use of force

Achieving prohibition of war has been a long-standing aspiration of the international community, which therefore has been engaged in a spate of actions

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¹ US President George Bush’s speech in Congress on 20 September 2001. Text reproduced in *The Guardian*, 21 September 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13>.

to this end throughout the 20th Century. After World War I, the League of Nations, the precursor of the UN, had enshrined provisions in the League of Nations Covenant aiming at restricting war, but not seeking absolute prohibition.² However, those clauses were not adequate to prevent certain states from augmenting their military power and to hinder the outbreak of World War II, since, had the procedures envisaged in Articles 11 and 17 of the Covenant been exhausted, recourse to war was deemed legitimate.³ In the meantime, another pertinent initiative was undertaken culminating in the conclusion of the General Treaty on the Renunciation of War (the “Kellogg-Briand Pact”), signed by the USA and France in 1928, with a view to filling the gaps left by the Covenant; notably, the Pact has never been terminated and remains in force to date.⁴

In the wake of the devastating World War II, the international community established the UN governed by the UN Charter. Undoubtedly, the “cornerstone of the United Nations Charter”⁵ is Article 2(4) on the prohibition of the use of force, which reads as follows:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

This provision intends to prohibit not only the actual use of force, but also the threat of force, in an effort to achieve higher levels of peace protection. Furthermore, the prohibition of the use of force is part of customary international law and a *ius cogens* rule to the effect that no derogation is permitted.⁶ Moreover,

² Covenant of the League of Nations Covenant (signed 28 April 1919) <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3dd8b9854.html>; Malcolm N Shaw, *International Law* (7th edn, Cambridge University Press 2014) 813-814.

³ Ian Brownlie, *Brownlie’s Principles of Public International Law* (James Crawford ed, 8th edn Oxford University Press 2012) 744-745.

⁴ General Treaty on the Renunciation of War (signed on 27 August 1928) 94 League of Nations Treaty Series 57.

⁵ *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v Uganda)* (Judgment) [2005] ICJ Rep 168, para 148.

⁶ “[...] (A) peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character.” Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (signed in 23 May 1969, entered into force 27 January 1980) 1155 United Nations Treaty Series 331, Article 53; on the customary and peremptory character of Article 2(4) UN Charter see *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v United States of America)* (Judgment)

the prohibition of the threat or use of force is also stipulated in the 1970 Declaration on Friendly Relations⁷ and the 1974 Definition of Aggression.⁸

Despite the peremptory character of the prohibition stipulated in Article 2(4) UN Charter, the rule has two exceptions, namely self-defence (Article 51 UN Charter) and authorisation of use of force by the Security Council under Chapter VII UN Charter. As regards the inherent right of every state to self-defence,⁹ Article 51 UN Charter states:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

Therefore, in order for a state to use force in self-defence there must be an armed attack under way. In addition, a state may seek assistance by other states in exercising the right of collective self-defence. In any case, to be in compliance with international law, the military force used in self-defence by a state or states should be necessary (no other choice left) and proportionate (the response should correspond to the gravity of the attack).¹⁰

[1986] ICJ Rep 14, para 190; *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (Advisory Opinion) [2004] ICJ Rep 136, para 87.

⁷ Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, UNGA Res 2625 (XXV) (24 October 1970).

⁸ Definition of Aggression, UNGA Res 3314 (XXIX) (14 December 1974).

⁹ The right of every state to self-defence is deemed part of customary international law. *Nicaragua case* (n 6) para 176.

¹⁰ The criteria of “necessity” and “proportionality” were outlined by the US Secretary of State, Webster, in a letter of protest after British troops attacked the *Caroline* (a ship assisting Canadian rebels against the British) while anchored in the US port of Fort Schlosser in 1837. According to Webster, in order for a state to resort to armed force it must demonstrate a “necessity of self-defence, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment for deliberation.” *Nicaragua case* (n 6) para 194; *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Advisory Opinion) [1996] ICJ Rep 266, para 141; *Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran v United States of America)* (Judgment) [2003] ICJ Rep 161; *Congo v Uganda* (n 5); *Brownlie* (n 3) 749; *Shaw* (n 2) 827-829.

Nonetheless, several other forms of self-defence have been put forward in academic discourse and have been pursued by state practice.¹¹ The “anticipatory” or “pre-emptive” self-defence doctrine supports that it is legitimate to use force so as to prevent an imminent armed attack, which has, nevertheless, yet to take place. Such an interpretation disregards Article 51 UN Charter requiring the occurrence of an actual armed attack before armed force is employed and, thus, cannot be accepted.¹² Another controversial concept is that of “humanitarian intervention,” namely the undertaking of forceful measures by a state in order to avert violations of human rights in another state. Again, this notion does not seem to be in conformity with the UN Charter, as unilateral intervention in another state infringes its territorial integrity and political independence.¹³ Certain states have from time to time invoked a claim to intervene in other states’ territory with a view to rescuing their nationals. This practice, as well as unilateral intervention purportedly aiming at “restoring democracy” in a foreign state, are, also, at odds with Articles 2(4) and 51 UN Charter.¹⁴

Over the last few years, a new broader concept succeeding “humanitarian intervention” has cropped up: responsibility to protect (R2P).¹⁵ In light of grave human rights violations, the international community has attempted to establish a mechanism so as to stave off flagrant human rights abuses.¹⁶ At any rate, R2P does not entail unilateral recourse to force, but foresees collective measures authorised by the UN Security Council.¹⁷ What is more, several states and

¹¹ *Brownlie* (n 3) 750-757; Gray C, “The Use of Force and the International Legal Order” in Malcolm D Evans (ed) *International Law* (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014) 623-631; *Shaw* (n 2) 832-841; Deeks A S, “Taming the Doctrine of Pre-emption” in Marc Weller (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Use of Force in International Law* (Oxford University Press 2015) 661-678.

¹² Peter Malanczuk, *Akehurst’s Modern Introduction to International Law* (7th rev edn, Routledge 1997) 311-313; *Congo v Uganda* (n 5) para 148; Tams C J, “The Use of Force against Terrorists” (2009) 20(2) *European Journal of International Law* 359, 390.

¹³ *Brownlie* (n 3) 752-754; *Shaw* (n 2) 838.

¹⁴ *Brownlie* (n 3) 754-755; *Malanczuk* (n 12) 315-316.

¹⁵ Zifcak S, “The Responsibility to Protect” in *Evans* (n 11) 510.

¹⁶ International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, “The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty” (Ottawa International Development Research Center 2001); Outcome Document of the 2005 United Nations World Summit (16 September 2005) UN Doc A/RES/60/1, paras 138-140; UN Secretary-General Report on Implementing the Responsibility to Protect (2009) UN Doc A/63/677.

¹⁷ “We endorse the emerging norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect, exercisable by the Security Council authorizing military intervention as a last resort” (emphasis added). Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, “A

scholars have elaborated the notion of “intervention upon invitation.” Arguably, when a foreign state employs force with the consent of the inviting state, there is no violation of the territorial integrity and political independence of the latter, hence no breach of Article 2(4) UN Charter materialises. However, the consent should be freely and validly provided by a lawful government exercising effective control over the territory and the people of the state, asking for assistance in collective self-defence while being under attack.¹⁸

The second exception to the prohibition on the use of force is authorisation by the Security Council under Chapter VII UN Charter. The granting of permission for the use of force is one of the measures the Security Council, the central organ of the UN may order. In particular, Article 39 UN Charter sets forth that:

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

Accordingly, when the Security Council resolves that a situation amounts to threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression it may take provisional measures requiring a ceasefire (Article 40 UN Charter) or non-forcible measures/sanctions, which are, mainly, of an economic nature (i.e. arms embargo) by virtue of Article 41 UN Charter. On the authority of Article 42 UN Charter, the Security Council has the power to authorise forcible measures so as to “maintain or restore international peace and security.” It should not escape notice that the adoption of a Security Council resolution requires a unanimous decision of the five permanent members, each one of them having the right to block the procedure (veto).¹⁹ Interestingly, against the backdrop of the Cold

More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility” UN Doc A/59/565 (2004); “[w]e are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, *through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII*, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” (emphasis added). *Outcome Document of the 2005 United Nations World Summit* (n 16) para 139; *Zifcak* (n 15) 520; *Shaw* (n 2) 841.

¹⁸ *Nicaragua case* (n 6) para 246; *Congo v Uganda* (n 5) paras 52-54; International Law Commission, “Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts” (53rd Session, 2001) UN Doc A/56/10, art 20; Antonio Cassese, *International Law* (2nd edn, Oxford University Press 2005) 369-371; the Roman axiom *volenti non fit injuria* (to a willing person – in this case, a state – no wrong is done) applies here; *Shaw* (n 2) 834-835.

¹⁹ Charter of the United Nations (signed 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945) 1 United Nations Treaty Series 16, art 27(3).

War, Article 42 UN Charter had not been applied. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, the Security Council has authorised forcible measures in a range of cases (i.e. Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Haiti, Libya, and Côte d'Ivoire).²⁰

Terrorism in international law

Having very briefly examined the basic principles with respect to the law on the use of force, what follows is a scrutiny of state practice regarding forcible measures against non-state actors, particularly, terrorist organisations. It should be borne in mind from the onset that acts of violence committed by fighters struggling for self-determination are not being considered as terrorist actions.²¹ Be that as it may, terrorist activities taking place during an international armed conflict constitute war crimes and perpetrators should be held responsible under international criminal law.²²

Recognising the fatal consequences of the scourge of terrorism, the UN sought to address the matter in a comprehensive manner by establishing an *ad hoc* Committee on Terrorism in 1972.²³ The UN has also adopted a range of international conventions in order to deal with various forms of terrorism by means of criminal law.²⁴ In 1994, the UN General Assembly issued a Declaration defining terrorism as:

Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them.²⁵

²⁰ SC Resolution 794/1992 (Somalia); SC Resolution 770/1992 (Bosnia); SC Resolution 929/1994 (Rwanda); SC Resolution 1529/2004 (Haiti); SC Resolution 1973/2011 (Libya); SC Resolution 1975/2011 (Côte d'Ivoire).

²¹ *Cassese* (n 18) 449.

²² First Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, art 51(2).

²³ UNGA Res 3034 (XXVII) (18 December 1972).

²⁴ United Nations Action to Counter Terrorism, <http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/legal-instruments.shtml>; an attempt to eliminate terrorism, even though it failed, was also undertaken by the League of Nations with the adoption of the 1937 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism; *Tams* (n 12) 363.

²⁵ UNGA Res 49/60 (09 December 1994) UN Doc A/RES/49/60, Annex, para 3; Ben Saul, *Defining Terrorism in International Law* (Oxford University Press 2006); Special Issue: Criminal Law Responses to Terrorism after September 11 (2006) 4 *International Criminal Justice* 894 ff; in 2006 the UN General Assembly adopted "The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy." UNGA Res 60/288 (08 September 2006).

According to this definition, in order for an act to be deemed terrorist, it is necessary to constitute a crime under domestic criminal law; to aim at spreading terror among the public; and to be perpetrated for political reasons. As it is aptly illustrated in the Declaration, the General Assembly took the position that terrorism is an unlawful act, which should be addressed within the purview of domestic legal order in conformity with each state's criminal law. As Tams notes, "international law as at 1989 effectively ruled out the possibility that states could lawfully resort to forcible measures against terrorists based in another country."²⁶ For instance, if a terrorist act has an international character (i.e. committed by Belgian citizens against British citizens in Morocco), the most appropriate way to deal with it is to apply the criminal legislation of either state involved (Belgium, UK, Morocco) or implement a pertinent international treaty, while every action should be in compliance with human rights.

Nevertheless, the 9/11 attacks prodded cataclysmic changes in the landscape of international law and prompted the UN Security Council to adopt a gamut of resolutions on terrorism dictating, among others, the enactment of criminal measures in domestic legal orders.²⁷ The most hotly debated issue ever since has been the capacity of states to employ armed force against non-state actors – mainly terrorist organisations – as a means of self-defence,²⁸ since the UN Charter does not explicitly regulate the matter, while the International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisprudence does not provide sufficient guidance; as a matter of fact, the international community rejected any claims to self-defence against terrorists during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁹ Furthermore, the exercise of the right of self-defence against terrorist attacks is restricted by the "functional criterion," namely that forcible measures should be taken only in order to repel

²⁶ Tams (n 12) 364; Schachter O, "The Lawful Use of Force by a State against Terrorists in another Country" (1989) 19 *Israel Yearbook of International Law* 209, 213-214.

²⁷ 1368 (2001), 1373 (2001), 1377 (2001), 1438 (2002), 1440 (2002), 1450 (2002), 1452 (2002), 1455 (2003), 1456 (2003), 1465 (2003), 1516 (2003), 1526 (2004), 1530 (2004), 1535 (2004), 1566 (2004), 1611 (2005), 1617 (2005), 1618 (2005), 1624 (2005), 1735 (2006), 1787 (2007), 1805 (2008), 1822 (2008), 1904 (2009), 1963 (2010), 1988 (2011), 1989 (2011), 2082 (2012), 2083 (2012), 2129 (2013), 2133 (2014), 2160 (2014), 2161 (2014), 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2195 (2014), 2199 (2015), 2214 (2015), 2249 (2015), 2253 (2015), 2255 (2015).

²⁸ Murphy S D, "Terrorism and the Concept of "Armed Attack" in Article 51 of the UN Charter (2002) 43 *Harvard Journal of International Law*, 41; Greenwood C, "War, Terrorism and International Law" (2003) 56 *Current Legal Problems* 505; Stahn C, "Terrorist Acts as "Armed Attack: The Right to Self-Defence, Article 51(1/2) of the UN Charter, and International Terrorism" (2003) 27 *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 35.

²⁹ Tams (n 12) 367.

armed attacks; this is hardly applicable to terrorist attacks, which are usually of an instant character.³⁰

In the *Nicaragua* case, the ICJ resolved that a state is entitled to defend itself against a non-state actor only as long as the actions of the latter can be imputed to another state.³¹ In the *Construction of a Wall* advisory opinion, the Court did not shed any light on the controversy, as it merely stressed that the UN Charter recognises the right of self-defence in the case of armed attack by one state against another state without mentioning non-state actors.³² Additionally, the Definition of Aggression sets attribution of the acts of non-state actors to a state as a precondition in order for another state to exercise the right of self-defence. In particular, the Definition states:

Aggression is the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State [...]. Any of the following acts, regardless of a declaration of war, shall, subject to and in accordance with the provisions of Article 2, qualify as an act of aggression: [...] g) The sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another State of such gravity as to amount to the acts listed above, or its substantial involvement therein.³³

Notwithstanding the above, Judge Higgins in her Separate Opinion in the *Construction of a Wall* case argued that the language of Article 51 does not limit “armed attacks” to attacks carried out only by or on behalf of states, although

³⁰ Cannizaro E, “Contextualizing Proportionality: Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello in the Lebanese War” (2006) 88/864 *International Review of the Red Cross* 782; Bowett D, “Reprisals Involving Recourse to Armed Force” (1972) 66 *American Journal of International Law* 1.

³¹ *Nicaragua case* (n 6) para 115; in the *Congo v Uganda* case the ICJ upheld the “effective control” criterion elaborated in *Nicaragua* case but avoided to expand on whether an armed attack initiated by irregular forces provides a state with the right of self-defence. *Congo v Uganda* (n 5) paras 146-147; the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia set a lower threshold by expounding the “overall control” criterion, namely that a state might be held liable for the actions of an armed group even if it does not give any specific instructions to that group. *The Prosecutor v Dusko Tadic*, ICTY, Appeals Chamber, IT-94-A (15 July 1999) para 137; nevertheless, in its subsequent case law the ICJ rejected the “overall control” and insisted on the “effective control” criterion. *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v Serbia)* (Judgment) [2007] ICJ Rep 43, paras 400, 406.

³² *Construction of a Wall* (n 6) para 139.

³³ *Definition of Aggression* (n 8) Annex, Articles 1 and 3(g).

she admitted that this position reflected international law at the moment.³⁴ Trapp mentions that there is no indication requiring attribution to a state in the preparatory works of the UN Charter.³⁵ Several authors, also, support that the right of self-defence may be exercised by a state when it is under attack, irrespective of whether the perpetrator is a state or a non-state actor.³⁶

In respect of state practice, the concept of the use of force against non-state actors in self-defence found ample support among western states in the aftermath of 9/11, even though it had been advocated for years by certain states.³⁷ Following Security Council Resolutions 1373/2001 (calling on states to take the necessary measures, including criminal legislation, to prevent terrorist acts) and 1368/2001 (identifying terrorism as a threat to the peace), the USA, which had argued that Afghanistan under the Taliban rule was harbouring Al Qaeda, launched Operation *Enduring Freedom*. Consequently, along with other states, invaded Afghanistan applying the *Nicaragua case* criterion, purportedly exercising the right of self-defence against a state providing a safe haven to terrorists.³⁸ However, it should be pointed out that the Security Council had not characterised the 9/11 terrorist attack as an “armed attack” triggering the right of self-defence, although it did recognise that the USA could exercise such a right, while it was the first time NATO invoked Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.³⁹

³⁴ *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (Advisory Opinion) [2004] ICJ Rep 136, Separate Opinion of Judge Higgins, para 33.

³⁵ Trapp K N, “Can Non-State Actors Mount an Armed Attack?” in *Weller* (n 11) 684-685.

³⁶ Franck T, “Terrorism and the right of Self-Defense” (2001) 95 *American Journal of International Law* 840; Cassese (n 18) 355; Yoram Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-Defence* (4th edn, Cambridge University Press 2005) 204; Vaughan Lowe, *International Law* (Oxford University Press 2007) 278; Bethlehem D, “Self-Defence Against an Imminent or Actual Armed Attack by Nonstate Actors” (2012) 106 (4) *American Journal of International Law* 770, 774.

³⁷ Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force* (3rd edn, Oxford University Press 2008) 195-198; Moir L, “Action against Host States of Terrorist Groups” in *Weller* (n 11) 731.

³⁸ US Public Law 107-40, “Authorization for Use of Military Force” (18 September 2001); in the *Corfu Channel* case, the ICJ set forth that a state shall not allow knowingly the use of its territory for the perpetration of acts contrary to the rights of other states. *Corfu Channel Case (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland v Albania)* (Judgment) [1949] ICJ Rep 4, p. 22; Brownlie I, “International Law and the Activities of Armed Bands” (1958) 7 *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 712, 734; Dinstein (n 36) 207-208.

³⁹ “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

Despite the fact that Operation *Enduring Freedom* had gained massive support by the international community, it, nonetheless, was pre-emptive self-defence, thus not in conformity with the UN Charter.⁴⁰

This conduct was to become the norm followed by the Bush administration, which declared the so-called “war on terror” so as to avert rogue states and terrorists from attacking the USA.⁴¹ In light of the above, it is argued that waging a war against terrorism resembles “witch-hunt,” since terrorists can hit anywhere and anytime (that is why it is called an “asymmetric threat”); hence, it is inconceivable how tactical armed forces would be capable of dealing with such a threat. As the International Committee of the Red Cross has rightly put it:

Terrorism is a phenomenon. Both practically and legally, war cannot be waged against a phenomenon, but only against an identifiable party to an armed conflict. For these reasons, it would be more appropriate to speak of a multifaceted ‘fight against terrorism’ rather than a ‘war on terrorism.’⁴²

The “war on terror” concept has served as a pretext for certain states in order to carry out and justify targeted killings, without giving the victim the right of a fair trial, and for the subjection of suspects of terrorism to torture in secret detention sites in breach of peremptory rules of international law.⁴³ At this juncture, it is necessary to mention that an assassination (usually by a drone) taking place in a foreign country without the consent of the local government infringes the territorial sovereignty of that state.⁴⁴

On any account, the view that a non-state actor is capable of executing an armed attack, triggering the right of self-defence seems, *de lege lata*, not to be in conformity with the UN Charter in the sense that it overlooks the pivotal role of the Security Council.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the growing capacity of non-state actors, such as Da’esh, to occupy significant portions of land of more than one country, to have thousands of people under their administration and to create armed forces capable of staging armed attacks, signals the establishment of a

⁴⁰ Gray (n 11) 632; Trapp (n 35) 693.

⁴¹ National Security Strategy (2002) 41 International Legal Materials 1478; see also footnote 1.

⁴² ICRC, “Position on terrorism” (01 January 2011), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/faq/terrorism-faq-050504.htm>.

⁴³ Cassese (n 18) 420-423.

⁴⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (28 May 2010) UN Doc A/HRC/14/24/Add.6, paras 46 ff; von Bernstorff J, “Drone Strikes, Terrorism and the Zombie: On the Construction of an Administrative Law of Transnational Executions” (11 July 2016) 5(7) ESIL Reflections.

⁴⁵ Brownlie (n 3) 774.

new state of affairs to which international law needs to adapt so as to be able to regulate it.

Use of force against Da'esh

In June 2014, the USA and an international coalition launched an airstrike campaign, without authorisation by the Security Council, bombing areas in Iraq and Syria under the control of Da'esh.⁴⁶ However, no armed attack had been staged by Da'esh against any of those states in order to either exercise the right of self-defence or secure authorisation to use force under Chapter VII UN Charter.⁴⁷ Security Council Resolution 2178 was by no means an authorisation to use armed force, as it merely condemned terrorism and called on states to cooperate by employing police measures in order to suppress terrorist activities.⁴⁸ Operations on Iraqi soil, according to what has been examined earlier in respect of intervention upon invitation, can be deemed lawful given that the government of Iraq requested other states to fight against Da'esh, as the latter occupies parts of the Iraqi territory with the armed forces of Iraq being unable to confront it.⁴⁹ Be that as it may, no such consent has been given by the government of Syria and the "unwilling or unable" argument, namely that Syria is not able to fight Da'esh (because it is definitely not unwilling), is not legally sound and does not seem to render any intervention in Syria's territory legitimate.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Syria has asked Russia to intervene,⁵¹ thus the

⁴⁶ Operation "Inherent Resolve," <http://www.inherentresolve.mil/>.

⁴⁷ Gonzalez O, "The Pen and the Sword: Legal Justifications for the United States' Engagement against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)" (2015) 39(1) *Fordham International Law Journal* 137-140, 171.

⁴⁸ SC Resolution 2178/2014 (24 September 2014) para 5.

⁴⁹ Letter dated 20 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc S/2014/691; the Iraqi government had previously asked the international community to provide it with military training, advanced technology and weapons in order to fight Da'esh. Letter dated 20 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, UN Doc S/2014/440.

⁵⁰ Kevin Jon Heller, "The Absence of Practice Supporting the 'Unwilling or Unable' Test" (Opinio Juris, 17 February 2015), <http://opiniojuris.org/2015/02/17/unable-unwilling-test-unstoppable-scholarly-imagination/>; Deborah Pearlstein, "Syria Dissents" (Opinio Juris, 22 June 2016), <http://opiniojuris.org/2016/06/22/syria-dissents/>; however, in the *Tehran* case the ICJ propounded that the inactive state has international responsibility. *United States Diplomatic and Consular Staff in Tehran (United States of America v Iran)* (Judgment) [1980] ICJ Rep 3.

⁵¹ "Russia joins war in Syria: Five key points" (BBC, 01 October 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34416519>.

undertaking of forcible measures on the part of the latter in Syrian territory is legitimate.

This case is completely distinct from Operation Enduring *Freedom*, the 2006 Israel/Hezbollah conflict and others (i.e. Colombia's operation against FARC in Ecuador and the Russian intervention in Georgia to confront Chechen rebels), where use of force was employed against non-state actors associated with or merely based in the territory of a particular state. Conversely, Da'esh occupies part of the territory and controls a segment of the population of two states, having established a "sophisticated, quasi-bureaucratic revenue-generating structure."⁵² What is more, Da'esh has committed a range of atrocities, which amount to crimes against humanity, including mass executions, torture, rape, the destruction of cultural heritage or even genocide against the Yazidis, Christians and Shia Muslims in Iraq.⁵³ Hence, as a result of the multiple legal challenges posed to the international community by the activities undertaken by Da'esh, compared to those of other non-state entities, a different approach might be necessary.

What changed the course of events was the perpetration of terrorist attacks plotted by Da'esh that took place in several locations in Paris, on 13 November 2015, leaving 130 dead and dozens of wounded. Even so, it is difficult to reconcile with the idea that a terrorist attack of a limited scope carried out by certain individuals can amount to an "armed attack" triggering the right of self-defence, as there must be a distinction between "the most grave forms of the use of force (those constituting armed attack) from other less grave forms."⁵⁴ According to Dinstein:

[...] when non-State actors attack a State from within – and no other State is involved – this is a case of either an internal armed conflict or domestic terrorism. In neither instance does Article 51 [UN Charter] come into play at all. An armed attack against a State, in the meaning of Article 51, posits some element external to the victim State.⁵⁵

⁵² Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, UN Doc S/2016/92 (29 January 2016) para 4.

⁵³ Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (13 March 2015) UN Doc A/HRC/28/18.

⁵⁴ *Nicaragua case* (n 6) para 191; *Oil Platforms* (n 10) paras 51, 64, 72; nevertheless, it has been recognised that large-scale attacks by non-state actors might be considered as armed attacks. *Shaw* (n 2) 824.

⁵⁵ *Dinstein* (n 36) 204-205.

As discussed earlier, terrorism should be dealt with as a matter of domestic criminal law; the suspects of the Paris attacks should be arrested, stand trial and, if found guilty, be convicted. Nonetheless, it was clear from the beginning that France had not had the intent to address the matter within the context of criminal law. This is evident from the fact that instead of invoking the “solidarity clause,” found in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which explicitly provides for cooperation among EU member states should one of them suffers a terrorist attack,⁵⁶ France sought the application of Article 42(7) of the Treaty on the European Union, which applies when a member state is the victim of an armed attack. This clause envisages the capacity of the attacked state to ask for assistance in exercising the right of collective self-defence under Article 51 UN Charter.⁵⁷ On any account, it should not escape notice that the purpose of acts of self-defence, are deemed legitimate only when they are undertaken for the abatement of the attack and not for retribution.⁵⁸

Despite the above, on 20 November 2015 the Security Council adopted Resolution 2249 which, *inter alia*:

Calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law, in particular with the United Nations Charter, as well as international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, on the territory under the control of ISIL also known as Da’esh, in Syria and Iraq, to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL also known as Da’esh as well as ANF, and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the United Nations Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and endorsed by the UN Security Council, pursuant to the Statement of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) of 14 November, and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria [...].⁵⁹

First of all, the resolution does not state that it is adopted under Chapter VII UN Charter; however, the lack of such an explicit reference does not entail that

⁵⁶ Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [2008] OJ C 115/47, art 222.

⁵⁷ Treaty on the European Union [2002] OJ C 325/5, art 47(2).

⁵⁸ Green J A and Waters C P M, “Military Targeting in the Context of Self-Defence Actions” (2015) 84 Nordic Journal of International Law 3, 12.

⁵⁹ SC Resolution 2249/2015 (20 November 2015) para 5.

the resolution is not binding according to Article 25 UN Charter.⁶⁰ The Security Council clearly identifies the terrorist actions of Da'esh as "threat to the peace and security," but it does not authorise "all necessary means" – a phrase usually included in resolutions giving permission for the use of force;⁶¹ it, merely, "calls upon" states to "take" measures in line with international law to prevent terrorism. In fact, the Security Council has characterised international terrorism as a threat to international peace and security in several instances.⁶² Although 2249 does not explicitly authorise the use of force, its wording has been carefully crafted in a way signifying endorsement for the continuance of the bombings performed since August 2014.⁶³ Therefore, even though the resolution does not authorise the use of force, it renders forcible measures "legitimate."⁶⁴ The acquiescence and participation in the operations of the majority of the great powers, especially the USA and Russia, demonstrates a widespread consensus in support of the undertaking of forcible measures against Da'esh.

Owing to the unique character of Da'esh, which controls territory, people and maintains armed forces, it could be accepted that a coalition of states is entitled to use force against it by virtue of Resolution 2249, as long as the criteria of necessity and proportionality are fulfilled. As a matter of fact, state practice over the last years reveals that the international community is keen on tolerating use of force in self-defence against terrorists even if such actions are not attributable to a state, in spite of the fact this approach does not fit into the Charter regime and certain self-defence claims are being used as a pretext for the pursuit of broader goals.⁶⁵ At any rate, this should not be the norm, as it is the

⁶⁰ It is not necessary for a Security Council resolution to be adopted under Chapter VII UN Charter in order to be binding; *Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970)* (Advisory Opinion) [1971] ICJ Rep 16, paras 113-114; *Questions of Interpretation and Application of the 1971 Montreal Convention Arising from the Aerial Incident at Lockerbie (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya v United Kingdom)* (Provisional Measures) [1992] ICJ Rep 3, para 39.

⁶¹ *Gray* (n 11) 638.

⁶² Martinez H, "The Legislative Role of the Security Council in its Fighting Against Terrorism: Legal, Political and Practical Limits" (2008) 57 *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 333; *Shaw* (n 2) 843-844.

⁶³ Dapo Akande and Marco Milanovic, "The Constructive Ambiguity of the Security Council's ISIS Resolution" (EJIL: Talk!, 21 November 2015), <http://www.ejiltalk.org/the-constructive-ambiguity-of-the-security-councils-isis-resolution/>.

⁶⁴ Paulina Starski, "Legitimized Self-Defense-Quo Vadis Security Council?" (EJIL: Talk!, 10 December 2015), <http://www.ejiltalk.org/legitimized-self-defense-quo-vadis-security-council/>.

⁶⁵ *Tams* (n 12) 381-382, 391.

response of the international community to an exceptional situation creating special rules within the context of what has been called "ex-ISIL."⁶⁶ Besides, resort to forcible measures should be the last option, following efforts to confront the threat utilising other means (i.e. police measures, referral to the Security Council), should always be authorised by the Security Council and should respect the necessity and proportionality criteria.⁶⁷

Apart from the implementation of forcible measures, certain scholars have also discussed the possibility of institution of proceedings before the International Criminal Court (ICC) against members of Da'esh. As Syria and Iraq are not parties to the Rome Statute, jurisdiction cannot be predicated on this basis. What can be done is either referral of the case to the ICC by the Security Council⁶⁸ or prosecutions of individual fighters who are nationals of states parties to the Rome Statute subject to the principle of complementarity, which entails that the ICC may seize jurisdiction over a case only if national courts have not been involved (Article 17 Rome Statute). Nonetheless, terrorism is not among the international crimes prohibited under the Statute, hence the unlawful actions committed by Da'esh could be examined within the ambit of Articles 7-8 Rome Statute (crimes against humanity and war crimes).⁶⁹

What should not be overlooked is that, even if Da'esh is destroyed and Syria and Iraq regain control over the territories held by the particular entity, it is far from certain that the plague of terrorism worldwide will be eradicated, since scores of individuals embracing the ideas of Da'esh remain scattered throughout the globe seeking to continue the "holy war" against the "unfaithful." Therefore, the international community is burdened with the task to come up with a serious action plan on how to track down and prosecute individual terrorists residing in European cities and elsewhere, posing a serious

⁶⁶ von Bernstorff (n 44).

⁶⁷ Olivier Corten, "A Plea against the Abusive Invocation of Self-Defence as a Response to Terrorism" (EJIL:Talk!, 14 July 2016), <http://www.ejiltalk.org/a-plea-against-the-abusive-invocation-of-self-defence-as-a-response-to-terrorism/>.

⁶⁸ This is what happened in the case of Darfur. SC Resolution 1593/2005 (31 March 2005).

⁶⁹ United Nations General Assembly, "Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court" (17 July 1998); Carsten Stahn, "Why the ICC should be Cautious to Use the Islamic State to get out of Africa: Parts 1 and 2" (EJIL:Talk!, 3-4 December 2014), <http://www.ejiltalk.org/why-the-icc-should-be-cautious-to-use-the-islamic-state-to-get-out-of-africa-part-1/>, <http://www.ejiltalk.org/why-the-icc-should-be-cautious-to-use-the-islamic-state-to-get-out-of-africa-part-2/>; Alexandre Skander Galand, "The Situation concerning Islamic State: Carte Blanche for the ICC if the Security Council Refers?" (EJIL:Talk!, 27 May 2015), <http://www.ejiltalk.org/the-situation-concerning-isis-carte-blanche-for-the-icc-if-the-security-council-refers/>.

threat to the public, instead of indiscriminately employing armed force, given the fact that in most cases the use of force sows the seeds of future terrorist acts.

Conclusion

Having experienced the disastrous World War II, the international community sought to impose restrictions on the use of force with a view to limiting the fatal repercussions of war. As a result, use of force was explicitly prohibited by virtue of Article 2(4) UN Charter, which has been considered as the “cornerstone” of the international legal order and constitutes a *ius cogens* (non-derogable) rule. Despite the fact that only two exceptions to the rule are permitted (self-defence and Security Council authorization) states and scholars have been attempting to justify unilateral recourse to armed force on several other grounds. Following the 9/11 attacks, the fight against terrorism has been one of the most controversial matters, as certain states have asserted the right to employ armed force unilaterally against non-state actors, particularly terrorists. Nonetheless, such practice does not find support in the UN Charter and customary international law. Against the background of the emergence of Da’esh, a terrorist organisation occupying land territory, exercising control over population and maintaining armed forces, it seems that international law faces a serious challenge. Even though Resolution 2249 neither expressly provides for the use of force against Da’esh nor it prohibits it, it should be accepted that armed force can be used against this entity owing to the unique situation created by its presence. At any rate, this is a “grey area” in international law, which needs to address a very special case while at the same time maintaining its integrity. Notwithstanding the above, it is argued that terrorism cannot be adequately confronted by the use of force, as terrorists can strike anywhere and anytime. The international community should contemplate targeted criminal law measures against individual terrorists, especially the masterminds of terrorist attacks, should it wish to fight effectively the scourge of terrorism.

The second thematic volume of the peer-reviewed journal *EMGR* presents the positions of the United States and the Russian Federation for the Middle East and analyses some of the shifting un-balances in the volatile region. The essays of the American and Russian Ambassadors identify with clarity the respective concerns and priorities of the two great powers for the region. The scholarly articles examine contemporary questions of the Middle Eastern situation and analyse some of its intriguing perspectives; such as the strategic engagement of the United States in the region and its influence on the regional balance of power, the strategic re-emergence of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, the potential use of Cyprus as a note of institutional flexibility under a global grand strategy for the region, as well as the legal status of *Da'esh* in international law and the legality of aerial strikes by the international coalition under the right of self-defence.



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ISSN 2421-8057



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