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Centro Italiano  
per la Pace in  
Medio Oriente



ebook

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# The changing Middle East

The restructuring of international relations  
The foci of crisis

*Summary of the papers*

Edited by CIPMO

**Sergio Romano**

**Olivier Roy**

**Heliodoro Temprano Arroyo**

**Alberto Negri**

**Riccardo Redaelli**

**Valeria Giannotta**

**Janiki Cingoli**



*Ministero degli Affari Esteri  
e della Cooperazione Internazionale*

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# Foreword

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This E-Book aims at developing a complex reflection on Great Middle East, which is in a process of transformation. The conflict within Islam between Sunni e Shiites is acquiring new dimensions, including military one. Old and new regional powers have to compete, from Iran to Saudi Arab, from Egypt to Turkey, while United States are hardly withdrawing from the area and Russia marks a new stronger presence.

Europe may find a news pace of intervention but it seems uncertain and full of contradictions, and its capacity of intervention still vague.

**In this English version, you can find a summary of all the texts, while you can access at full text of Olivier Roy contribution by [clicking here](#) and at full text of Heliodoro Temprano Arroyo contribution by [clicking here](#).**

**[Click here](#) to access to full E-book in Italian.**

The articles collected in this book have a regional approach, using a geopolitical and economical perspective, and focusing on specific areas of crisis, from Turkey to Gulf Countries, from the new emergence of ISIS which - with its ambitions of creating a modern Caliphate - overlap to the bloody Syrian crisis and the ancient Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is gaining in this phase new force.

The project has been complex and many scholars have participated by presenting their contributions during an **International Conference** on “**The changing Middle East. The restructuring of international relations. The foci of crisis**”, that took place in Milan on 30 October 2014.

The Project has been promoted by CIPMO – Italian Center for the Peace in the Middle East - in collaboration with European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – Unit for Analysis, Planning and Historic Diplomatic Documentation, Milan Municipality, Milan Chamber of Commerce, Fondazione Cariplo, under the Patronage of Lombardy Region and the Province of Milan.

# Introductory presentation

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## **Sergio Romano**

Columnist for the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper

The Arab Revolts took us by surprise: we had not foreseen them and did not know any of the main player. Initially we thought they might be an important signal of democracy which might lead to a different future for the region.

We were wrong because we hadn't realised that those revolts were anything but revolutions, they had no leadership, were unable to express a comprehensive project; as a result we witnessed the crisis of the largest of the Muslim Brotherhoods, the one in Egypt. Although we were not in a position to publicly support General Al-Sisi's strategy (a *coup*) we could not reproach him for what he was doing as we had understood that the Muslim Brotherhood did not bode well. This is the reason for the great embarrassment in Europe but even more so in the US.

We had experienced the same puzzling feelings in the case of Libya, but no one on the Western democratic side thought it necessary to help them: in fact two European countries thought it a good idea to take the opportunity and make a show of their importance to regain the historical prerogatives: the two allies from a previous (failed) expedition, the 1956 Suez one. Nicolas Sarkozy, in particular had built his Mediterranean policy on an ill-advised investment in Mubarak and Ben Ali, and thought he could regain the centre scene with a punitive action against Gaddafi. It turned out to be the most useless and short sighted punitive actions: France and the UK dragged Obama with them and the result was another ungovernable country which only further complicated the region's situation.

Syria was the next one: we thought that Bashar Al-Assad was a statesman backed by Russia and Iran he had to be a dictator as if Al Sisi had the right to be judged otherwise. The US also considered it necessary to intervene in Syria although they backed up somewhat at last moment accepting Russian cooperation. A wise decision given the situation but also proof of how this dithering was not going to lead anywhere. In spite of its cooperation we did not wish for Russia to become an ally in the resolution of the Middle eastern crisis. Specifically, we, the Europeans failed to understand that few countries had more cause of concern for what was happening in the Islamic world than Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The Islamic Caliphate has taken us by surprise although it had been in the air for a time. We made an unforgivable slip and forgot the responsibility of W. B. Bush's wretched wars had in leading to it. The Iraqi battle fields created the conditions for the development of a movement such as ISIS. We forgot that wars, especially the one you lose – and the US lost both the Afghan and the Iraqi wars – are an incredible opportunity for movements to recruit followers and proselytes.

If we wish to learn a lesson from what happened and would say that we are experiencing a “Non State” time, consisting in non territorial – or partially territorial entities which lack the traditional features of a Nation State. They lack a territory which they govern in a permanent, stable manner, they have no infrastructure, buildings for the powerful, railway networks, large companies. They have nothing that could be a target. We are dealing with an enemy who escapes us, especially those who are unable to put boots on the ground and fight as one did in the olden times. Western government's only strategy against the Non-States but to arm locals so that they may do what the West can't do.

Furthermore, the area has suffered from the lack of cooperation between two countries of the region that have an interest in the outcome of the events: Turkey and Israel. In recent years Turkey's foreign policy of friendly neighbourhood friendliness but this has failed: it is therefore no longer an ally in the drive to stabilize the Middle East.

Israel is trapped in a vicious circle: Netanyahu's government main – albeit unavowed – aim seems to be that of preventing a two state solution. All Israeli governments in the past 40 years have increased settlements: the thousand new dwellings in East Jerusalem are intended to separate the Arab city from the Palestinian Territories. When they are completed the prospect of Jerusalem East as capital of the Palestinian state will become even more remote. Negotiations require Israel to have stopped modifying the object of the negotiations, that is to say the land and the borders.

If the United States do not know what to do and above all if they don't wish to be involved on the ground, if the EU has a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who does anything but developing a foreign policy, if we do not want to ally with Russia, if we don't stop treating Syria as an enemy and if we continue to be weary of Iran, than Europe and the United States will be unable to contribute to the solution of the crisis of the Middle East.

# The regional context

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## Olivier Roy

Joint Chair in Mediterranean Studies - RSCAS/Social and Political Sciences Department, Scientific Director of the Mediterranean Programme at the *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies* at the European University Institute in Fiesole (Florence).

In the Middle Eastern landscape, the Palestinian- Israeli conflict can no longer be defined the conflict *par excellence*: Israel's latest action in Gaza failed to mobilize civil society in Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia as it had in the past. Syria and Iraq are the new battle fields and the new actor the one that calls itself the Caliphate and we call ISIS, the Islamic State.

One could say ISIS is bin Laden and Saddam Hussein's child. Al-Baghdadi, the founder of ISIS was a member of Al Qaeda but the separation between Al Qaeda and ISIS is not due to the mere rivalry between the two leaders: it is a change in strategy. Al Qaeda has never tried to establish itself in a single territory and to create an Islamic State. It had sought power and found space in countries where others were in power, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, or the various local forces in Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Mali, and Algeria. Furthermore, Al Qaeda has always focussed its struggle on the or against the West, seeking objectives in New York, London and Madrid. Its strength was precisely that it was not based in a given land, which is why the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan were such a great mistake on the part of the US. However the limits of the strategy can be best described as the inability to do something 'more' than September 9th and find a role for the thousands of young volunteers who had come from Europe. Now, the new strategy has different objectives: no longer the West, but local enemies, be they Muslim or Christians.

One wonders how ISIS managed to gain such a foothold in Iraq and Syria: not because the local population wanted an Islamic State or the adoption of Shar'ia but because between Damascus and Baghdad there is an immense expanse of land populated by Sunnis who had lost their power. When the US intervened in Iraq in 2003 they destroyed the State system, handing power over to the Sh'ia: it was not an American strategic decision, but their military intervention changed the balance in the region opening the doors of the Middle East to Iran and effectively destroying Iraq as a nation State.

Of the three countries which rose from the fall of the Ottoman Empire – Syria, Lebanon and Iraq – are now in non-Sunni hands: this has led to a sense of frustration and revenge and ISIS is an effective tool in this sense. In this sense one cannot speak of a war of religion, but of the result of Middle East geopolitics leading to a polarization between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

ISIS is a large international organization which attracts volunteers from the world over: interestingly Belgium is the country that sends the largest contingent of volunteers as a proportion of its Muslim population. There are also large numbers of Chechen volunteers, from the Caucasus, Europe and America, a fourth of which being converts. This is why it would be a great mistake to consider ISIS as the vanguard of the Muslim Ummah fighting the West. In fact it is the global nature of the fight which is attracting the young western fighters who feel the attraction of violence and an answer to their quest for a cause to fight for. This violence is the child of contemporary nihilism, mirrored in videogames, movies such as Scarface, or the violent Mexican drug trafficker videos with beheadings. It is not part of Muslim history, it is the result of a contemporary and global ‘culture of violence’, as the radicalization of youth is not a monopoly of the Islamic world. There is a cliché whereby marginalized second and third generation youth go to Syria and Iraq, but in fact they are well established members of their local communities, often not linked local Muslims do not attend mosques nor are recruited by fundamentalist Imams.

Forecasts are never easy, but I believe ISIS, will be defeated because it is fighting against everybody, killing Kurds, Sh’ia, Alawites, Christians and Yazidi. There will be a reaction and the Turks will have to re-learn how to fight, which is also true for the Sh’ia in Iraq. Lastly, Teheran will never let Baghdad fall in the hands of ISIS.

This is why I consider Obama’s policy appropriate: there is no reason to maintain in life a political order which no longer corresponds to a balance of power. There should not be troops on the ground but local actors fighting ISIS such as Iraqi or Syrian Kurds or Sh’ia should be supported. A moderate Sunni movement is the missing actor on the present scene but I do believe it will emerge in the medium term and that eventually it will be party to the negotiations.

Regional powers are in the hands of Saudi Arabia and Iran: there will be no solution unless the two countries negotiate at a regional conference able to redefine and stabilize a new Middle East, marking the end of the Ghost of the Ottoman Empire.

**Access at full text of Olivier Roy contribution by [clicking here](#)**

# The economic context:

## macroeconomic performance and equity

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### **di Heliodoro Temprano Arroyo**

Head of the Neighbourhood Countries and Macro-Financial Assistance Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs.

Four years after the Arab Spring, the economic situation in the MENA Area is still weak and vulnerable. The hoped-for recovery of economic growth, after the instability that accompanied the first stages of the political transition, has hardly happened. Fiscal deficits have increased markedly, due to a combination of slower economic growth, surges in food and energy subsidies and increases in public sector wages and social expenditure. As a result, public debt ratios have risen markedly in most countries. Also, balance of payments remains very fragile, characterised by large current account deficits and historically low foreign investment flows and foreign exchange reserve levels.

The recent heightening of the civil tensions and military clashes is making the economic situation even worse. The war in Syria, the emergence of the ISIS and the recent confrontation in Gaza have not only affected the economies of the countries in question but have had a fall-out effect on the surrounding countries, including through the flow of refugees.

Over the 30 years that preceded the 2011 Arab Spring, the MENA region exhibited very weak economic growth rates when compared to other emerging market and developing regions. It grew on average by only 2.8% per annum, compared to 4.5% for the emerging and developing countries as a whole. The growth performance was particularly disappointing when measured in per capita terms, reflecting the region's exceptionally rapid rates of demographic growth. This rapid demographic growth also results in a very young demographic profile (with 65% of the population being less than 30 years old) and exacerbates pressures in the labour market. This feeds both high unemployment rates and large migration flows.

At the same time, the region's growth model is not conducive to equitable and inclusive societies, which has contributed to generate social frustration and political stability.

A number of longstanding structural factors underlie the afore-mentioned disappointing economic and social results:

- Fiscal policy deficiencies, in particular the existence of inefficient price subsidy systems, the lack of modern social safety nets, tax systems that yield meagre revenues and are socially regressive, and states that are oversized and discourage private sector development. Between two thirds and three fourths of public expenditure is often devoted to food and energy subsidies, civil servant wages, defence expenditure and interest payments on the public debt, leaving few resources for targeted social expenditure and public investment.
- Inadequate labour market and education systems, which generate high levels of unemployment and skills that are not in tune with industry's needs, pushing people into the public sector. The low female employment rate is an especially bad problem, generating major losses to the economy
- A low degree of international as well as intra-regional trade integration. .
- Financial sector deficiencies: underdeveloped capital markets and financial systems dominated by bank that devote a significant part of their assets to refinancing the government, contributing to the crowding out of the private sector. Also, there tends to be a limited access of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises to finance (with negative implications for employment creation) and a lack of financial inclusiveness among the poor and rural population.
- Many countries also suffer from an insufficient degree of economic diversification. This is true in particular for the net energy exporters such as Algeria and Libya, but also for others such as Lebanon, whose economy is disproportionately based on the financial, real estate and tourism sectors.
- The informal or underground economy tends to be sizeable, which not only undermines fiscal revenues but leaves large swathes of the population with no social security.
- Many countries suffer from serious weaknesses in public finance management and lack an independent and credible statistical system, contributing to the perception of poor economic governance and transparency.

In the past few years the complex and hesitant transition has not created favourable conditions for implementing appropriate economic reforms. It is however essential that the countries in the region press ahead with their economic stabilisation and reform agendas even if the political environment and preconditions are far from optimal.

A key area of reform is the dismantlement of food and energy price subsidies. These subsidies (particularly energy subsidies) are very costly, more than accounting for the observed deficits. Moreover, since they are generalised they are very badly targeted, with only 8% of them benefit the poorest 20% of the

population while 60% of all subsidies benefit the top 30-40% income brackets. They also distort the allocation of resources, encouraging waste and discouraging energy efficiency.

However, reforming price subsidies is not easy as they are a key component of the existing social welfare system. Also, they provide a competitive advantage for some types of enterprises, helping them stay afloat in the market. A gradual reform is therefore called for, carefully replacing price subsidies with transfers in cash transfers to the poorer people and also to part of the middle class, so as to buffer the impact. Countries such as Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen and more recently Egypt have taken the first (at times hesitant) steps in this direction.

Other key reform areas are tax reforms aimed at widening the tax base while improving progressivity and education and labour market reforms aimed at reducing skill mismatches, encouraging labour market participation and reducing unemployment, notably among young people and women.

It is clear that implementation these reforms will not be politically easy, especially in the current context of political instability and armed conflict. But, if carefully designed and sequenced, these reforms can, over time, make the economies of the MENA region stronger and fairer, providing an essential building block in their efforts to address their daunting political challenges.

**Access at full text of Heliodoro Temprano Arroyo contribution by [clicking here](#)**

# ISIL: a story that started a long time ago

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**Alberto Negri**

Special correspondent for the *Il Sole 24-Ore* newspaper

The Caliphate is a sort of timely Leviathan which can change the borders of the Middle East, a bit like Al Qaeda after September the 11<sup>th</sup>, followed by intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2011 the first Jihadi fighters started pouring into Syria from Turkey who stopped over in the ancient city of Antakya, the former Antioch. ISIL had yet to come but national and international conditionals were already in place for it to happen: it was June the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 when the black flag of ISIL was first raised on the route back from Damascus from Maloula. A few days later word came that negotiations with the Islamist rebels of Deir ez-Zhor for the maintenance of oil wells has shifted under ISIL control. The Jihadis had become oil magnates and were exporting to the Turkish and Iraqi markets.

A lot has been said about ISIL's wealth and not all of it true: How does the Caliphate support itself and what are the chances of its consolidating? Unlike other rival Islamic groups, the Caliphate does not depend on foreign help or aid. Money is flowing in from the outside but it is not essential: it has a self financing mechanisms based on pillage, revolutionary taxation, extortion, kidnappings (especially of non Muslim minorities), which means that the Caliphate has set up a collection system which is comparable to taxation.

ISIL is known for its brutality but also for an unprecedented level of sophistication: from a military point of view ISIL has transformed Syria and Iraq in a single battle field.

As well as religious propaganda its priority is to establish Islamic Courts in all occupied territories, to reassure the local population and to bring order back to areas which had slipped into chaos, without forgetting to accompany any sentence with the application of *hudud*, that is to say the amputation of limbs and flogging.

This speaks of ISIL's long term plan to govern the once Syrian territory. Recruitment takes place in dedicated offices in Aleppo, Raqqa and at the Turkish border where new would be fighters are welcomed from abroad.

The journalist Mohammed Salih says that 'Between June and July the Caliphate has opened five fronts: against the Iraqi army, the Kurdish Peshmerga,

the Assad Regime, the rival Iraqi opposition and the Lebanese army. That is an excessively large area for a few thousand Jihadis. It did not achieve this on its own, but formed alliances with the Sunni armies and Ba'ath of the former Saddam Hussein followers who shared an aim, that is to remove Nouri al Maliki from power. They were successful and achieved their aim by putting pressure on the Government of Baghdad and its allies, from the US to Iran'.

Al Qaeda, which in Iraq had already become a state on the state with extortions and kidnappings, delved deep into the Sunni's wish for come back, as a minority that previously held power in the Armed Forces and Intelligence. Following the US invasion from one day to the next they became pariahs and ISIL used this deep Sunni discontent to its advantage.

Nothing can justify the massacres and executions of ISIL but the problem has to be acknowledged: in Syria Sunnis have been a majority ruled by Assad's minority Alawite clan for forty years, while in Iraq they were a minority which under Saddam Hussein held power in the armed forces and administration. Currently both Syria and Iraq are former states which are virtual – on the map – but except for ISIL, nobody in the West, nor in the Middle East – has a plan other and beyond the international diplomacy mantra of national unity.

We have reached a cross roads: either they reclaim some National unity which is called for at every pleonastic conference on the Middle East, or the Middle East will undergo a process of Balcanization. To maintain the state alive in Syria, negotiations have to begin with the Alawite regime. Just saying that Bashar Assad must go is not going to do any good. A sudden collapse of the regime, as happened in Libya or Iraq would lead the country even deeper into chaos and this would play into the Caliphate's hands. In Iraq the only way out is to bring the Sunnis back into power: rebuild the army with Sunni officers in positions of command to avoid entire divisions disappearing at the advance of a few hundred militia men. Arming the Peshmerga is but a temporary stopgap: the Kurds can defend their land but they cannot bring order back to the rest of Sunni Iraq.

A political solution which has to underpin a military response requires all foreign powers to join in: they have been fighting a proxy war for years in Syria and Iraq. One wonders whether al Bagdhadis' Islamic State is but the first act. In Act two they will have to decide who will govern this new entity. And that is when the fight really begins.

# Confused geopolitical scenarios of the Gulf Region

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## **di Riccardo Redaelli**

Director of the Center for Research on the South and Wider Mediterranean System (CRiSSMA) of the Catholic University of the S. Heart, Milano (Italy), where he teaches “Geopolitics”, “History of Asia”, “Post Conflict and Emergency Management” and “Strategic Studies”.

For decades the Gulf Region has suffered from an unstable political situation, amplified by the long ‘quarantine’ of Iraq throughout the Saddam Hussein period, by the catastrophic effects of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion and by the increasing sectarian polarization between Sunnis and Shi’as , ensuing from the fight between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran for regional supremacy. Over the years the perception of a declining US involvement or at least interest added to the Arab Springs and the political and state fragmentation have increased its weakness. The result is that the region appears divided and fragmented with a number of crisis points which undermine its state structure and favour the disbandment of the old political order. Islam is divided within as never before as it is not only suffering the division between the Sunni and Shi’a worlds but the Sunni worlds are torn between secular currents, the Muslim Brotherhood’s political Islam and the rise of Salafi dogmatism.

The negative roles of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the most prominent in this respect: for years it was underestimated because the sovereign Arab Gulf States were and are key allies of the West, a bastion against the geopolitical aims of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The economic crisis came on top of it and as a result the Western states have become more cautious and more accommodating with countries that have a good cash flow.

As for the Islamic Republic of Iran, in two years its regional scenario has improved and done so quickly. In the early part of 2013 it was a politically isolated country after the many years of the ultra radical President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with its nuclear power plants under threat of an attack: suddenly it has managed to return to the international centre stage, thanks to the dynamic approach of the new moderate president, Hassan Rohani who re-launched the so called P5+1

negotiations on nuclear power. He managed to close a preliminary agreement in November 2013 exceeding all expectations although the final agreement hasn't been reached yet. In the mean time the explosion of ISIL and the disastrous fall of the Iraqi front with the implosion of Baghdad's regular army and the setbacks of the Peshmergas, have been unexpectedly advantageous for Iran. The self proclaimed al Baghdadi Caliph has mean both the Arab states of the Gulf and the Western powers have had to review their priorities in a hurry changing direction to their security policies for the Levant. The regime of Damascus and Teheran have become de facto allies, however embarrassing they are, while the anti-Assad Sunnis which had been backed or blandished have become the targets of a US bombing campaign.

All this has turned into an advantage for Iran although it leaves unanswered questions where the fragmented élite in power seems unable to give any answers: an agreement has to sought at all costs with the West on the nuclear issue, which both the Pasdaran and the conservatives see as a dangerous retreat: will it lead to lifting the economic and financial sanctions which are crippling the country's economy and open it up to a solid compromise with the Gulf monarchies? Alternatively should one take advantage of the difficulties and strategic mistakes of one's opponent, to negotiate from a position of strength? President Rohani and the Reformists and moderate front clearly believe so; the conservative, ultra-radical front with all its differences, the security agencies and all the members of the regime who benefit from Iran's isolation, clearly prefer the latter. The risk is that Teheran will adopt a contradictory and imprecise policy wasting this favourable juncture. Since 2012 Iraq has witnessed a rise of sectarian violence with a polarization of the Iraqi ethnic and religious communities, which were the basis for the military and political crisis experienced in the summer of 2014. The military defeat and the formalization of the hostility of the Shi'a religious leadership lead to the end of the al Maliki government and to the creation of a new government led by the moderate Shi'a al Abadi.

It remains to be proved that this strengthened the state and reduced violence: in fact the actual position of the Kurd leadership will have to be put to the test as they tend to use the crisis to promote the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan *de jure* and not just *de facto*. Furthermore the ability of the Sunni Arab political and tribal leaders to reform consensus within their communities in favour of a new National government. Clearly international action against ISIL, Salfism and Jihadi-Salafisms will be decisive and has been underestimated, pandered and allowed to grow for years in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Sinai without forgetting Libya.

# Turkey. What foreign policy in the changing Middle East

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**di Valeria Giannotta**

*Assistant Professor Türk Hava Kurumu Üniversitesi/ University of Turkish Aeronautical Association, Ankara*

Turkey's Middle eastern policy and its role in the region have changed drastically over the past twelve years following the rise to power of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP). "zero problem policy towards neighbours" is the slogan which inspired Turkish diplomacy under the leadership of the then Foreign Minister, currently the PM Ahmet Davutoğlu, whose aim is to turn Turkey into a global player maximising the advantages of its geopolitical position, its cultural tradition and its economic potential thanks to the special relations inherited from the Ottoman Empire. At the same time the developments in Turkish politics has been strongly conditioned by the US policy in the Middle East and by the changes in the international system. Following the end of the Soviet threat the strong interests which forged the bond between Ankara and Washington during the Cold War have weakened, a fact which became apparently in 2003 when the Turkish Parliament refused to back the US invasion of Iraq proving that domestic politics, public opinion and good neighbourly relations and the principles of regional stability prevailed over transatlantic relations. Seen in this light, the concern on domestic stability for the region proves that Ankara has developed a strategy of its own and develop a new identity in the International arena: it strongly stresses the notion of geographic imagination, which was the basis of a new geopolitical culture. In the past Turkey's context and geographical position were seen as dangerous and chaotic for the stability of the country, favouring the voluntary isolation of Ankara in the region: in the past decade the image has been turned on its head by the current policy-makers supporting a new regional perception.

Increasingly closer contacts with neighbours via a number of political and social mechanisms have progressively demolish some of the traditional prejudices to the point that regional stability is considered an issue of national security. In this framework the Middle East has become one of the focal points of Ankara's new foreign policy, which aims to play a key role thanks to the political, economic and social changes introduced by the current democratic-conservative AKP

administration. However, the unexpected Arab awakening and the impending new threats have major implications on the effectiveness of the Turkish leadership in the region, questioning some of Ankara's hegemonic ambitions, to the point it is quite isolated in the region.

# Israelis and Palestinians: Europe's time has come

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**Janiki Cingoli**

Director of CIPMO

## At the root of the crisis

This summer's conflict in Gaza followed the failure of Kerry's peace initiative and the absence of a diplomatic process on either side: it resulted in major losses and problems for the Palestinians. In the end Hamas had to accept a truce which closely resembled the proposal Egypt had made a week after the conflict had begun, and bears the very heavy responsibility for it. In spite of this opinion polls indicate it is increasingly popular especially in the West Bank.

The conflict turned out to be much worse than expected for Israel too, highlighting unexpected military shortcomings: Israel focussed on the destruction of the tunnels and missile ramps and on the decimation of Hamas's military leadership, but came short of causing the end of the Gaza regime fearing higher losses, not wishing to be held responsible for the local population and not wishing to open the door to ISIS.

Negotiations were due to begin in late September, then in October, and now Egypt has postponed them indefinitely after the blood shedding attacks in Sinai.

Palestinian demands include: the reopening of the borders, the building of a port and an airport, the release of the Palestinian prisoners, while the Israelis included checking contraband weapons and tunnel construction, disarming militias.

That said, each and every request raises a more complex issue, that is to say the role of the PA in Gaza and the prospect of an inter-Palestinian unity agreement. The Fatah-Hamas conflict has been reignited although Hamas is aware it needs Fatah and the PA if it wants to reopen border points and convince donors to fund the reconstruction, while Fatah knows it cannot disregard Hamas if it wishes to set foot in Gaza again.

Netanyahu's government seems set on consolidating the truce while strengthening its control on the West Bank to contrast Hamas's growing power in the area and does not appear ready to resume the negotiating process.

## Conflict management is not enough

There had been some positive news: the two September parallel agreements between Israel, the PA, and the UN and between the PA, Hamas and Egypt to reopen border points with the presence of the PA representatives. The meeting of the Palestinian Unity Government and the agreement if Israel made it possible to cross at Erez. Lastly the donors' conference which was held in Cairo on October the 12th ended with a promise of 5.4 billion dollars, compared to the 4 billion which the PA had asked for.

However, conflict management per se is not enough if there is no solution in view; hopes were soon shattered faced with the continuous escalation of the clashes and riots, the Old City of Jerusalem being at the centre. Israel's ongoing announcements of new construction on Jerusalem East didn't help nor did the provocative actions of the Jewish extreme right, including some of the members of the Government, aimed at changing the *status quo* on the Temple Mount.

The Israeli government reiterated they wanted to maintain the *status quo* as it was but that generated alarm in the Arab population at home and internationally so much so that Jordan announced it was recalling its ambassador as a form of protest.

Some of these episodes led to acts of aggression against Jewish citizens, as was the case of an attempted murder of an extreme right wing politician, or killings of citizens with kamikaze cars (*car intifada*) or knifings. And lastly the deadly attack against the Jerusalem Synagogue.

All this is stem from frustration and exasperation: the instigation of the more radical Islamic organizations, such as Islamic Jihad or even Hamas, or the example set by ISIS. Lastly it should be noted that attacks progressively extended to the West Bank, especially to Hebron and North Israel where the Arab population is concentrated.

In spite of the declaration of solidarity following the worse attacks, Israel is increasingly isolated internationally, mostly because of its policy leading to the new settlement construction.

Relationships with the US are at an all-time low, Sweden has recognised the Palestinian State followed by the British, Irish and Spanish parliaments and probably soon by the EU Parliament.

On his part, Abbas, the PA Chairman has tabled a draft resolution at the UN Safety Council setting 2016 as the final date for Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. In the event of a US veto, the Palestinians could join several UN international bodies including the International Hague Tribunal.

## What role for Europe?

The current US disengagement leaves room for a stronger role for Europe and Italy which in is the Presidency of the EU for CFSP.

Furthermore the increasing involvement of the moderate Arab states who recently re-launched the Arab peace Initiative is acquiring importance.

The cease fire and the initiative to repair the Gaza damage are needed to resume the negotiation process.

It would be appropriate to send an International Monitoring and Assessment Force to Gaza resuming and analysing projects developed with the MFO, UNIFIL, TIP and (at a different level) with EUBAM.

The development and discussion of possible intermediate proposals (Stepping stones) aimed at establishing the conditions to favour the resumption of negotiations and discourage negative initiatives is necessary. The possibility of adopting specific pressure instrument, such as the labelling of products from the settlements, using more stringent measures, such as 'Country of origin' standards for Israel should also be considered. On the Palestinian side, a more stringent management of international aid might be called for.

Lastly, points and guidelines for a new UN Security Council resolution should be considered, as a foundation to stabilize the current truce and also using as a starting point the *acquis* of the Kerry attempt, such as referring to the 1967 border with possible agreed land swaps and using the proposals for security made by General Allen completing the unfinished parts. An approach such as this is paramount so as to involve the US Administration avoid preconceived closures hoping to get them at least to abstain at the vote.

Several draft resolutions have been circling: one was Jordanian, the other one prepared by France, Germany and the UK although they both need fine-tuning and completion. This means there is space for European initiative piecing together the draft by the three European countries, the Jordanian proposal and the previous US commitment. Europa and Italy could greatly contribute to this initiative.