CHAPTER 10

International and Gulf State Influence in the Southern Mediterranean

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INTRODUCTION

European powers and the EU as a whole are no longer the only dominant actors in the Southern Mediterranean region, so the EU must consider broader influences in the region, including from the USA, Russia, and China (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2018). The chapter on Russia in this volume outlined its interests in the Mediterranean and the broader region, including reference to its activities in Syria and Libya. This chapter extends the analytical focus to other major actors such as the USA, China, the Gulf states, including reference to some of the non-state actors they support in their proxy conflicts against adversaries. The chapter also considers largely nonmilitary actors such as Japan, intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union (AU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as international financial institutions such as the World Bank in the dynamics of the Mediterranean (see Nye and Keohane 1977). The growth and geographical spread of violent Islamist groups has served to

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further contest the notion of sovereignty post-Arab uprisings. But while the security challenges in the Mediterranean region remain numerous, they are also diffuse in their intensity and socioeconomic impact, and remain mainly a function of domestic politics and insecurity particularly in North Africa, the Levant and Sahel.

The Southern Neighborhood has been convulsed in violent uprisings from the Levant to Africa, giving opportunity to forces outside the region to shape the security landscape in theaters of conflict. Foreign fighters have traveled from Europe via Turkey to states such as Syria, putting pressure on Turkey to respond to a domestic and neighboring security threat. Meanwhile, terror attacks supported by groups such as ISIS have taken place in Belgium, France, Denmark, and Germany. While these threats have dominated an overly EU securitized approach to the Southern Neighborhood, other organizations such as UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Médecins Sans Frontières, and Doctors of the World continue to undertake humanitarian work. Other NGOs are taking a more legalistic approach by challenging states on their closed border policies, and aim to foster cooperation on migration management and resettlement. When considering the extent of the inequality between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean and the extent of displacement due to conflict, international aid and external development assistance looks to be completely inadequate at addressing the human security need.

**US Policies Toward the Mediterranean**

The USA has been active in the Mediterranean in the spheres of maritime security, diplomacy, economics, and security for more than 200 years. Throughout the nineteenth and for the first half of the twentieth century, US foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean supported its objectives on anti-colonialism, open and democratic societies, and oppression when in line with US interests (Litsas 2020). These have been evident during episodes such as First Barbary War (1801–1805), by the Truman Doctrine (initially designed to limit Soviet expansion and developed to contain Soviet threats in Greece and Turkey), during the Suez Crisis, and up to the Imia Crisis in 1996 (ibid.). The US Sixth Fleet, founded in 1950, has an explicitly Mediterranean mandate and is operated out of Naples, Italy. The USA continues to play a role in securitizing the Southern Neighborhood since a large portion of its global interests remain Europe-centric,
but it will also play a securitizing role by extension and as a consequence of its Greater Middle East policies. The USA has never engaged substantively on European initiatives such as the Barcelona Process. US policy toward the Mediterranean, even during the Trump administration remains generally in line with previous administrations. US support for NATO continues despite ongoing tensions over European expenditure on defense, raised notably toward the end of the Obama administration (Goldberg 2016). The Mediterranean links two important regions for the conduct of US policy: Europe and the Middle East, and increasingly between the Middle East and Asia. For the USA to remain a global power, it must remain engaged in the Mediterranean as a security guarantor. This has been evident since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 through the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), increased bilateral defense planning and exercises and forward basing US forces in Central Europe and US naval activity in the Black Sea (Carafano 2019: 228). These activities are primarily targeting Russian activities alongside spillover from conflict, terrorism and other tensions in the Middle East. Should President Putin remain in situ as is expected, the policies of the Kremlin are likely to remain undeviating. Should crises become more numerous and intense in the Southern Neighborhood, it is possible that US and EU threat perception and policy responses will converge more often. The most logical institution for coordination and response is NATO, especially since it should include Turkey as a member of NATO but with generally favourable relations with Russia. As noted in this book’s introduction, the Instanbul Cooperation Initiative launched in 2004 could bring together more stakeholders from the Gulf, but until Turkish–Saudi relations improve, and indeed until US/European–Turkish relations improve, this NATO framework is unlikely to leverage Gulf–Mediterranean relations in any meaningful way.

US policy toward Turkey is therefore important in driving forward peaceful relations in the Mediterranean and to contain Russia through its control of the Bosphorous which connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. Poor US relations with Turkey have been apparent in the lead up to the 2003 US intervention in Iraq when Turkey prevented US forces an approach. But tensions have increased during Erdogan’s presidency, notably after the attempted military coup against him in 2016. After this President Erdogan’s suspected that the USA may have been complicit in the coup attempt. Western responses to increasing repression in Turkey following the coup attempt were also rather negative. Turkey
has moved from European accession talks to pivot back to the Middle East, with emphasis on relations with Qatar, Iran, and Russia as a major actor in Syria.

On Syria, President Trump first relied on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) which Turkey, the EU and USA have designated as a terrorist organization, to counter ISIS. This was originally part of President Obama’s “offshore balancing” project to defeat ISIS in three years and limit US troop deployments into Syria from 2014. Turkey was unwilling to allow YPG grow stronger by defeating ISIS and so allowed some ISIS victories early on in cities such as Kobane (Gurcay). Turkey conducted Operation Euphrates Shield against ISIS from 2016 to 2017 but then turned on the YPG. Operation Olive Branch in 2018 specifically targetted the PKK and YPG in Afrin. In October 2019, another Turkish intervention was performed to create a “safe zone” in northern Syria to limit the ambitions of the YPG after the USA pulled out its forces from northern Syria. This time President Trump reneged on the tacit alliance. It has effectively allowed Turkey to degrade and destroy the Kurdish fighting force the USA had relied on in the Middle East since World War I.

US policy toward Turkey is likely to center on the possibility of expanding free trade, but Turkey’s deal to buy the S-400 missile defense system from Russia in June 2019 effectively meant losing the preferential trade status it already had, covering $1.7 billion of goods, even though it was justified in strictly economic development terms (Koc). Turkey was also excluded from participation in the F-35 fighter program, although it remains to be seen whether the USA will enact further sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CATSA). Turkey will remain problematic to US and EU interests as its visions and interests diverge significantly.

States such as Russia and China (but also inclusive of “rogue regimes” such as North Korea and Iran) were deemed to be the preeminent security threats being faced by the USA as outlined in the US National Security Strategy 2017 (White House 2017) and in the National Defense Strategy 2018, over and above terrorism (US Department of Defense 2018: 2). While Russia is resurgent on its borders and in the MENA region, China is ambitious in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. The combination of these trends with a weakening postwar order, partly facilitated by President Trump’s unilateral policies on major foreign policy issues such as
Iran, makes for a stark challenge for future US and European policy-makers to contend with. President Trump has used a “trade war” with China as a pretext for the containment of China as the USA seeks to reduce or eliminate the significance of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Many academics and analysts continue to view China as a challenge to the USA (Christensen 2015; Goldstein 2015) and openly discuss “Thucydides’s trap” in managing the growing competition between the USA and China in a way which avoids war (Allison 2017).

EU policies toward the Southern Neighborhood are often influenced by the transatlantic relationship. President Obama temporarily suspended arms sales to Egypt in the wake of the military overthrow of President Morsi in 2013 and requested that Egypt make “credible progress towards democracy” (Baker 2015). But even this symbolic gesture was quickly lifted in 2015, possibly in recognition that the USA needed Egyptian support for policies on Yemen, Libya, against ISIS in Iraq and the nuclear deal with Iran (ibid.). The causality here looks dubious, but perhaps was aimed at the USA feeling isolated in the MENA region following Arab Gulf state dissatisfaction with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This had an important foundational quality to it in terms of building more cooperative relations between the permanent five UN Security Council members, especially with Russia and China, which continues to affect EU perceptions about China globally.

President Trump has maintained close relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE based on economic and security calculations. Within this context the USA and EU are often accused of double standards and hypocrisy when it comes to pushing for reforms. US policy after 2011 has generally led to support for registered NGOs and a top-down approach, like the EU.

The Trump administration’s withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 marked a low point in transatlantic relations and the E3 (UK, France and Germany) have been active in trying to say it ever since. Escalating tensions with Iran have been apparent, especially the “maximum pressure” policy against Iran, including extensive sanctions and the assassination of Major General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020. Within this heightened threat environment, Iran targeted US troops in Iraq and the IRGC accidentally shot down a Ukrainian International Airlines flight after takeoff in Iran.

The Trump administration has also allowed conflict in Yemen to continue with its tacit support. It allowed and perhaps even encouraged
Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE to isolate Qatar creating a crisis since 2017. The hollowing out of the State Department certainly did not help the administration respond to changing facts on the ground, including unfilled ambassadorial roles in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Libya (Miles and Gramer 2018).

Like the EU, the USA is concerned about illegal migration from Libya across the Mediterranean. Some deals, such as the Memorandum of Understanding on Migration between Italy and Libya was extended for three more years from October 2019, may be effective at stemming the number of refugees entering the EU in the short term but Amnesty (2020) says Italy is complicit in the abuse (including rape and torture) of returning refugees and migrants in a war-zone. The USA could work more closely with Libya to extract more oil which would support its divestment away from Iranian oil and put pressure on Turkey which has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya on energy in the Mediterranean. By stabilizing Libya, it would address a number of challenges: it would give the 2011 NATO intervention more credibility, it could encourage states such as France into more coherent policies by picking a side to support, and greater stability would enhance prospects for post-conflict reconstruction and push back against traffickers. It would also help turn a page of US policy in Libya after US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed in Benghazi by members of Ansar al-Sharia on 11–12 September 2012.

The Trump administration has made explicit what many suspected for years, in its overt support for Israel over Palestine in the peace process. Although it launched a “peace to prosperity” vision in 2019 (Mason 2019) and a political peace plan in 2020 (Vox 2020), both have fallen well short from the accepted parameters of the two-state solution. Greater disappointment has been registered in the international community following President Trump’s decision to relocate the US embassy to Jerusalem before a final peace deal had been signed, to withdraw US funding from the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which supports Palestinian refugees, and in unilaterally recognizing Israeli sovereignty of the Golan Heights.

In summary, US policies in the Mediterranean over the last decade have been unable to significantly shape the outcomes in many theatres of conflict and in key bilateral relations. More resources, more targeted policies, and leadership along with European allies are needed to encourage better containment of illegal trafficking, more constructive engagement
with regional partners and enhanced prospects for longer-term solutions. Since Turkey should be central in all US policies regarding Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Caucasus, one way to reengage with the only Muslim majority democracy in the Middle East (the US template for the entire region and a major factor for the 2003 Iraq War) might be to resolve the Cyprus issue. Addressing major Turkish and Greek contention there would consolidate Greek and Turkish NATO membership. It will also benefit Turkish accession negotiations with the EU and enhance prospects for more stable relations going forward, including sustaining common refugee and energy policies in the Eastern Mediterranean. It could also involve greater Turkish buy-in into US and European foreign and security policies, such as the European intervention initiative or E12, which Turkey vetoed in 2002 after EU assurances to Greece that it would not be used in the Aegean or on Cyprus (Black 2002).

**China’s Engagement in the Mediterranean**

China’s engagement in the Southern Mediterranean and other parts of the world has been longstanding. It’s economic rise internally and externally took off during Deng Xiaping’s “Open Door” policy from 1978. This was followed by a policy of “Zou Chu Qu” (“Going Out”) in the 1990s to encourage international expansion of Chinese companies. Economic engagement took off after the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was launched in 2013 and is widely regarded to be the most ambitious geopolitical initiative of the early part of the twenty-first century (it is planned for completion in 2049). BRI links China to Europe overland via Moscow along the lines of the ancient Silk Route, and across the Indian Ocean via Africa in a contemporary maritime Silk Road. Beijing will be at the heart of a network of approximately seventy countries connected by Chinese-led projects in industries such as infrastructure, shipping, agriculture, tourism and the digital economy (Macaes 2019). While China’s core interests will continue to be located in the East China Sea and South China Sea, it’s global orientation has begun. In 2015, China and the EU celebrated 40 years of diplomatic relations with an “EU - China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.”

China’s foreign policy conception is far more joined up than either EU focus on the Southern Neighborhood or US policy in the Near East. Projects have been led by the state banks: China Development Bank and
the Export-Import Bank of China, as well as the China Bank of Construction and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) with 12 European branches in 2016 (Le Corre and Sepulchre 2016: 3). These banks link State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and investors throughout Europe.

China’s engagement in the Mediterranean, particularly its 51% stake in the Greek port of Piraeus secured in 2016, is a gateway for Chinese goods into Europe and includes a land-sea express link including modern railway lines through the Balkans and into Hungary. Coupled with its takeover of Belgium’s second biggest port and other investments such as two terminals in Vado, Italy, and its leasing of a terminal at Algeciras port, Spain, China controls ten percent of all of Europe’s total port capacity (Johnson 2018). This could be further extended to the Adriatic–Baltic–Black Sea Port Cooperation (‘Three Seas Port Cooperation’), although the ports are smaller and the risks are higher (Zhen 2016). However, this could be a collaborative project which includes Chinese equipment, European technology and eastern European markets. Chinese investment extends beyond ports to include the Marseille International Trade City (MITC) as a wholesale trade center for SMEs from Europe, North Africa, and China (Pavlicevic 2017).

Chinese firms are most successful when they use their own workers on their own terms, so there are natural limits to China’s BRI in the EU where this is not possible. Joint ventures might be the way to go. China’s top-down policies such as BRI can also be compromised in Europe by crises (Covid-19, refugees) and frequent changes in government (such as Italy). But in light of Covid-19 with reference to slower economic growth and in the context of greater Chinese–European partnership, there may mileage in linking up with the EU’s Juncker Plan which is an investment plan to encourage more sustainable investment in Europe (European Commission 2019a). China has already sent medical teams to Italy, Serbia and Iran which have been most affected by Covid-19. Beijing has outlined how China is more of a global player in contrast to the very limited international response of the US Campbell and Doshi (2020) call this the United State’s “Suez moment” if it continues to do little and allow its soft power and world power status to continue to be eroded.

It is in the Maghreb and in southern Europe that Chinese activities hold the greatest promise, in sectoral cooperation forums, investments in transport, energy and telecoms, and through military exercises and
maritime presence (Ekman 2018). Economic investments have been facilitated by the Euro crisis and subregional forums have been evidence since 2013 when China organized a conference emphasizing agricultural cooperation with southern European countries in Rome, and in 2016 in Xiamen on maritime cooperation as entry points to expanding cooperation (ibid.). Chinese investments are likely to be stepped up following the Covid-19 virus too. China’s significant engagement gives friends and enemies of the USA and core European states an alternative to these states and organizations such as the IMF and World Bank with significant implications for dependency theory and postwar alliances, and yet not necessary to the degree that might be expected (Mason 2017). Still, any changing calculation on economic model could have serious repercussions for political models, alliances, and geostrategic calculations.

In diplomatic terms, Chinese investments, particularly in struggling economies, can yield significant diplomatic dividends. For example, Greece, which has received at least $10 billion from China, blocked an EU statement on China about its human rights record in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva (Emmott and Koutantou 2017). In a 2017 public opinion survey in Greece, the EU was listed as the most important foreign power, followed by China, not the USA (Le Corre 2018). But influence in the Mediterranean requires the cohesion of states in the region and a detailed understanding of Chinese economic engagement (Schadlow 2020). The push back has already begun. The EU accuses China of neglecting socioeconomic and financial stability in its business and investment activity in third countries (European Commission 2019b). In response China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which is especially attractive to developing states, the EU has attempted to counter through an emphasis on people’s benefits and rights as well as sustainability and innovation (European Commission 2018: 2) instead of what has been described as China’s “debt-trap diplomacy“ (Green 2019).

In MENA there are opportunities on offer such as infrastructure and energy, but the threat is different—governance and geopolitical issues. Algeria and Morocco have traditionally fallen under greater EU influence. Egypt is more isolated but functions mostly according to its own large internal market. The focus looks to be more Gulf centric, since China derives around 40% of its energy imports from this subregion (CNBC 2020), although by 2030 20% of China’s electricity consumption is forecast to come from nonfossil fuel sources (Hernandez 2017). Energy dependence has led China to balance relations Iran with the Arab Gulf
states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Gulf relations are important: Chinese–Saudi trade was in excess of $70 billion in 2017, Chinese–UAE trade $53 billion, and Chinese–Iranian trade at $37 billion. Iran and Turkey remain important in the possible expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). If Saudi Arabia and the UAE can come to a common understanding with Turkey and Qatar, that would help spur more regional interactions which would facilitate BRI investments. In Israel, Chinese investment in the Haifa port will see it running port operations from 2021, but has caused considerable anxiety in the Israeli security establishment that the port deal will involve more spying into Israel’s sensitive high tech sectors such as artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomies, and semiconductors (Bob 2019).

There are also questions as to whether the US Sixth Fleet will continue to dock in Haifa after China begins operating the port (ibid.). China Harbour Pan Mediterranean Engineering Company (PMEX) is scheduled to construct a new port at Ashdod.

Chinese engagement has become more evident in states such as Algeria where it has been involved in various sectors including the energy industry. It was in Algeria’s gas installations in the south of the country that Chinese workers were killed during ISIS attacks in March 2016 (Lesser 2015: 3). Chinese influence was particularly noticeable during the NATO intervention in Libya when Beijing was forced to evacuate 30,000 workers (ibid.). In June 2017, Cyprus signed a $650 million deal with a Macau firm for the construction of a casino resort (Roell 2018: 3). Beijing is reported to be injecting $3.8 billion into the Turkish economy during its economic crisis in 2018 (ibid.). In Egypt, China is the biggest investor in the Suez Canal Economic Zone. A Chinese company is also working on plans to participate in the new Egyptian monorail connection between Cairo and the new capital. China began a joint naval exercise with Russia in 2015 but relations between Beijing and Moscow remain relatively low key. In 2017, en route to another joint exercise with Russia in the Baltic Sea, China conducted small scale live firing drills in the Mediterranean Sea (Hille 2017). In 2019, China conducted joint maritime training drills with Egypt (Ahram Online 2019), assisting in Egypt’s focus on becoming a regional maritime power since 2017 to secure its offshore gas fields and compete with other countries in the neighborhood (Springborg and Williams 2019).
For the EU itself, the BRI is undermining internal cohesion, shifting the global balance of power and could yet impact on European security. Chinese companies are also making headway into major markets in northern Europe, such as Huawei into the telecoms market in the UK which has created tensions with the Trump administration (Kynge and Fildes 2020). A Chinese–French consortium is building the Hinkley point nuclear power station. But China has been wary of infrastructure projects in the EU after China Overseas Engineering Group (COVEC) had to retreat from highway construction linking Warsaw to Berlin failed after the Polish government cancelled the project in 2011, ostensibly due to misunderstandings over environmental law concerning threatened species on the route (Le Corre and Sepulchre 2016: 3). In 2019, a Chinese former Huawei executive was arrested in Poland on spying allegations and yet the foreign minister stated that Poland remains open for business with China in the areas of greenfield development, in the manufacturing and innovative sectors (Plucinska 2019). Dealing with China will increasingly be a topic of dialogue between European capitals and Washington, DC. Chinese interests in the Mediterranean remain mainly a commercial concern, apart from Uzbek and Uyghur militants possibly returning from the MENA region through Asia. In contrast, US and Russian policy in the Mediterranean is bound to be tied more closely to local sources of instability and conflict and containing Iran. However, Chinese policies remain tied to these changing situations. There has also been speculation that China’s Global War on Coronavirus might help tip the international balance of power, but at the time of writing there is little evidence that such an approach has worked (Green 2020).

**INDIA’S ENGAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

India has similar energy-based and high-tech calculations as China in the Middle East. Until May 2019 when the US sanctions waiver expired, it was the second biggest buyer of crude oil from Iran, after China (Pant 2020). India’s foreign policy generally balances three major poles of Middle East policy: the Arab Gulf states, Iran and Israel (ibid.). New Delhi has managed to maintain gas imports from Qatar during the “Qatar Crisis” while maintaining strong security cooperation and broadening economic ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. India’s relations with Iran are social and resonate with the north India heartland in places such as Uttar Pradesh. They are also security-related by being able to project...
influence into Central Asia to help contain Pakistan and address a rising China. India and Iran cooperate on a port project at Chabahar and in 2016 Afghanistan agreed to participate in an economic corridor linking to it. In contrast, New Delhi’s relations with Israel are more techni-
cally minded, with emphasis on intelligence and military benefits (Cohen 2005). India is now the largest customer for Israeli arms and defense, as well as other high-tech equipment. Between 2000 and 2015 India–Israel arms sales were worth $2.2 billion (Burton 2019). India made history in 2018 when it secured rights for Air India flights to fly direct to Israel using Saudi airspace. Yet the public face of interactions is managed for the large domestic Muslim audience to show a greater focus on agriculture and water management while at the same time toning down rhetoric in support of East Jerusalem as the capital for a future Palestinian state (Kumaraswamy 2019).

India’s relations with other states of the Mediterranean, with states such as Turkey, can be seen through the prism of India–Pakistan relations, particularly on the sensitive issue of Kashmir. After India abrogated article 370 on the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, India received support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. But Pakistan has received support from Turkish President Erdogan. In response Prime Minister Modi met with the leaders of Cyprus and Greece which have territorial disputes with Turkey, and with Armenia which still considers Turkey responsible for a genocide of millions of Armenians in 1915. He further called on Turkey to exercise restraint against the Kurds on October 9, 2019, and canceled his trip to Turkey later the same month. Defense ties have also been affected, including a reduction in arms sold to Turkey.

While Indian ties to the Southern Neighborhood states remain domi-
nated by expanding ties to Israel, the rest of the ties remain dominated by domestic economic and political calculations, none more relevant at this time than deteriorating relations with Turkey. It’s growing economic engagement in the Middle East will include the Mediterranean but there is still scope for China to undermine or undo advances through the BRI. The aim to turn India into a $5 trillion economy by 2025 can only be secured through advancing mainly hydrocarbon-rich infrastructure projects utilizing Indian labor and remittances over the coming years.
JAPAN’S ENGAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Japan is very active in the Southern Neighborhood, especially in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco and regularly engages in dialogue on major policy issues such as Syria and the situation in North Korea. Yet it plays an understated role and mainly in the economic and education spheres. There are dozens of scientific, academic, and cultural projects in Egypt, including schools and the Egypt Japan University of Science and Technology (EJUST) in Alexandria. From 2016, the Egypt–Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) has been focusing on early childhood education initiatives such as “learning through playing,” technical education such as soft and practical skills and a work transition pilot program for graduates, and higher education joint research projects and scholarships to Japan to enhance Egypt’s economic and social development (Japan International Cooperation Agency). There is also Japanese technical and financial assistance to the Grand Egyptian Museum worth $392 million as a soft loan to cover part of the building construction, exhibition design, landscape and IT component (Japan International Cooperation Agency—Grand Egyptian Museum). Japan also attached importance to President Sisi’s Chair of the AU 2019–2020.

The Rades-La Goulette Bridge in Tunis was built by Japanese and Tunisian engineering firms and financed by Japanese banks. The North African and Mediterranean Centre for Research and Education was established in Tunis in 2006 by the University of Tsukuba to promote exchanges and research collaborations between Japan and North African countries (University of Tsukuba). In Morocco, Japan is important for job creation and as the Kingdom’s largest foreign employer. Japanese aid and development programs, know-how concerning water management and other programs are of great importance. Since 2014, the number of Japanese companies in Morocco has almost doubled and 40% of investment is directed at Morocco’s auto industry (The Japan Times 2019). Yoichiro Ishibashi, managing director of the Japanese External Trade Organization (JETRO) said that Morocco does particularly well due to market size and growth potential. He added “Tax incentives, free trade zones, a concentration of ‘partner companies’, effective government programs, strong infrastructure and the country’s favorable geographical location make Morocco a preferred investment destination” (ibid.).

Japan also works through multilateral mechanisms such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), established
in 1993 and is cosponsored by the United Nations, the UN Development Program, the African Union Commission and World Bank to contribute to economic development in Africa. In other parts of the region, such as Israel, Japan is increasingly engaged on technology and to collaborate on new business projects. In 2019, Hiroshige Seko, the Japanese Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry led Tokyo’s biggest business delegation to Israel, including 150 representatives from 90 companies (Ynet News 2019).

Japan’s greatest contribution to the Mediterranean region is possibly through the EU-Japan infrastructure deal, signed in 2019, as a response to China’s BRI. It follows the EU–Japan free trade deal which was sealed in 2018. In the new deal worth $65 billion, the EU and Japan agree to build infrastructure in areas such as transport, energy and digital services to improve connectivity (Die Welt 2019). The push is designed to leverage EU economic volume in trade, aid and investment to achieve more foreign policy goals. Japan is part of a trilateral forum with the EU and USA which aims to foster democratic values, economic stability and a rules-based international system. Tokyo is developing its narrative of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) which would include closer cooperation with states such as the USA, India, Australia, ASEAN, European, and Middle Eastern countries. The focus of which is to: (1) maintain the international order including peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific; (2) pursue economic prosperity through: improving connectivity (infrastructure development such as ports and railways, people to people connections and institutional connectivity); (3) committing to peace and stability through capacity building (maritime law enforcement, HR development) and humanitarian assistance, anti-piracy and peacekeeping operations, many of which are already in effect (Japanese MOFA 2019).

Like many states in Asia, Japan places great emphasis on safeguarding its supply of oil, 80% of which came from the Middle East in 2018 (International Institute for Asian Studies 2018). Therefore energy security, particularly relevant in relations with the Gulf states is of special concern. The Middle East is also an important market for autos and machinery exports, as well as infrastructure development for Japanese companies. Direct flights from the Gulf to Japan has also raised their people to people connections. Dubai has thus joined Cairo and Istanbul as an important Japanese tourist destination in the region.
Japan’s “Proactive Contribution to Peace” policy tends to involve Self-Defense Force (SDF) contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. The SDF has been deployed to, among other regions, the Gulf (1991), Goland Heights (1996–2013), Iraq (2004–2008), Sudan (2008–2011), and South Sudan (2011–2017) (ibid.). Japan has been involved in a dialogue with NATO since the 1990s, and have aimed to strengthen cooperation since 2013 in areas such as cyber defense, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief nonproliferation, defense science and technology, and women, peace and security (NATO 2018). The Maritime SDF has trained with NATO off the coast of Spain and in the Baltic Sea (ibid.). During heightened tensions between Iran and the USA in early 2020, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attempted to engage both sides in dialogue. There are plans to send a destroyer off the coast of Yemen and Oman in February 2020 to monitor the situations in the Gulf of Oman, the northern part of the Arabian Sea and the eastern side of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to strengthen intelligence and secure the safety of Japanese related ships for one year (renewable) (Yoshida 2019). Peace and stability remain key to this large-scale energy importer.

**Gulf State Policies in the Southern Mediterranean**

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and other small Gulf states have an established pattern of aid, investments, trade, tourism and remittances in the Mediterranean region and the UAE. The Arab uprisings swept away some of the established alliance patterns between the Gulf and North Africa or opened new opportunities for foreign interventionism after the removal or forced displacement of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Gaddafi in Libya and Mubarak in Egypt. The UAE and Qatar have been particularly active in their support for the NATO intervention in Libya, then the large-scale economic assistance Qatar provided to the Muslim Brotherhood’s President Morsi in Egypt, followed by the multiplied impact of economic assistance (about $30 billion in total) provided by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait to President Sisi from 2013–2016.

Egypt has been at the center of Gulf state economic and diplomatic interventionism in the Middle East (Young 2017). Yet the volume of aid from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, including grants and loans (Khan and LeBaron 2013), while useful in supporting the central bank and Egyptian energy security, is not enough to continue to support a...
large population of close to 100 million. In a possible leak in 2015, Abbas Kamel, President Sisi’s Chief of Staff, appeared to be intent on limiting conditionality from the Gulf states, while President Sisi is alleged to have said that the Gulf states have “money like rice” (Daragahi 2015). In November 2016 Egypt turned to the IMF for a $12 billion loan which led to a program of austerity being implemented and reviewed finally in July 2019 (IMF 2019). Egypt has also been active in courting other states for inward investment such as China which will become more important to help manage the impact economic shocks brought about by events such as Covid-19. Egypt (mainly diplomatically) and the UAE (mainly militarily) remain important external supporters of the Libyan National Army led by Field Marshal Haftar, in contrast to the growing security ties established between the governments of Qatar, Turkey and Libya (Government of National Accord).

Qatar was relatively immune from the contagious uprisings sweeping the Arab world due to its small population and high GDP per capita built on hydrocarbon income. This gave it a rare opportunity to carve out and capitalize on foreign policy opportunities elsewhere in the region. Saudi Arabia had to be much more cautious in addressing domestic discontent, securing the vulnerable leadership in Bahrain along with the UAE, and operating within the parameters set by King Abdullah. That changed in 2015 when King Salman assumed the throne, and quickly his son, Mohammed bin Salman, became a dominant political force. He moved quickly to consolidate his political position and launched a military intervention in Yemen against the Houthi rebels. The ideological and geostrategic divisions in the GCC culminated in a diplomatic crisis in 2014 when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt withdrew their ambassadors from Doha. This was followed by the “Qatar Crisis” in 2017 in which the same states began a trade and diplomatic embargo against Qatar, issuing a list of 13 sweeping demands to Doha for change (Wintour 2017). The crisis has been exacerbated by Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatari cooperation with Iran, contentious Al Jazeera broadcasts across the Middle East, and the political rivalry between the UAE and Qatar (Mason 2020). In 2018, a Saudi hit squad assassinated Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi national and vocal critic of the Saudi leadership, in its consulate in Istanbul. Calls for liberalization and reform, including allowing women to drive have been met with a combination of acceptance but also the imprisonment of the same individuals who have been most vocal in such calls.
Arab Gulf state and Iranian zero-sum calculations have continued to create further instability and a lack of resolution in conflicts such as Syria and Libya. In Syria, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia all sought regime change in 2011 and devoted significant resources to achieving it. But as the USA took a step back from regional engagement following the 2008 financial crisis, legacy of war in Iraq and lower dependence on oil and regional instability, Turkey and Qatar sought to expand their influence in Syria. Qatar, like Turkey, relied on personal contacts with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Saudi Arabia took the opposite view that any group was better than the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (Phillips 2017: 39). All the states involved, apart from Russia, have had little leverage in the conflict and remained reliant on US intervention to shape the security landscape.

In Lebanon, Iran’s strategic depth established through deep rooted and ideologically compatible relations with the Assad regime in Syria and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, has created a multifarious challenge to the delicate sectarian balance. First, Hezbollah, a member of which has been officially found complicit in the assassination of prime minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, remains embedded in the governance of the country. It’s importance was highlighted by President Macron’s September 2020 meeting with Hezbollah officials. Second, members of its governance structures appear unable or unwilling to manage the socioeconomic capital of the country, ranging from port operations which resulted in the August 2020 explosion which killed more than 180 people and wounded scores of others, to the economy. The EU, and notably France as the former colonial power, remains limited in the leverage it has to effect positive and lasting change. Absent an IMF deal, establishing the basis for enhanced EU cooperation and investment could be vital in engineering Lebanon’s recovery and stability.

On Israel and Palestine, the Trump administration has leveraged its working relationship and transactional diplomacy with states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain in attempts to support its economic and political solutions on the conflict. There has also been a growing tacit alliance between Qatar, the UAE, and even Saudi Arabia with Israel in addressing the Iranian threat as a major national security issue (Black 2019). While Jared Kushner’s economic plan for Mideast peace was broadly rejected by most Arab states, Adel Jubeir, then Saudi foreign minister said that anything which improves the Palestinians’ situation is”extremely important” (Kalin et al. 2019). Bahrain hosted the “Peace
to Prosperity conference for reasons related to its historic commitment to the Palestinian cause, its status as signatory to the 2002 Arab initiative which includes Arab recognition of Israel for peace, and rolling back Iranian influence across the region which is an area of important policy convergence with Saudi Arabia and the USA. Still it wasn’t enough to include participation from Israel (which would have been contentious) and avoid a boycott and immediate rejection from the Palestinian Authority. Closer UAE-Israel relations, originally premised on the notion of halting Israel annexation in the West Bank when a peace deal was announced on August 14, 2020, could yet draw other Arab Gulf States closer to Israel over time. Bahrain was quick to allow flights from Israel to the UAE to cross its airspace for example. A further thawing of relations, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Israel is likely to require more time given its association with the Arab peace initiative, but given the pace of change in the Kingdom, further changes which could not be contemplated just a few years ago are now possible to envisage under a different King.

Whilst geo-sectarian tensions have effectively brought Israel into alignment with Saudi Arabia against Iran, they have also fueled instability in Bahrain, heightened tensions in Iraq, and conflict in Yemen. Escalations can easily occur in this environment which could spillover into other southern Mediterranean states. Already, refugees from the Syria conflict have proved to be a divisive issue in neighboring Lebanon and Jordan, and have fed through to securitized responses from the EU itself in the wider context of refugees attempting to enter the EU. Worsening tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, supported by the US “maximum pressure” policy, could lead to further instabilities in the Mediterranean. In this case, Iranian forces and/or proxies in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Gaza become all the more significant in the Eastern Mediterranean. By addressing the twin issues of political Islam and a common security architecture in the Gulf, these active and ambitious states could begin to address some of the root causes of conflict which has come to dominate the entire region.

**Economic Actors**

Economic actors such as the World Bank and IMF, in a coalition with the then G8 countries, launched the Deauville Partnership with Arab Countries in Transition in 2011. This was a pre-packaged economic
reform-orientated offer made to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Jordan. The IMF in particular remains important to the recovery and future trajectory of the economic and political transitions taking place in the Southern Neighborhood.

In 2019, unemployment in Tunisia was 15%, but among youth (younger than 35 years old), it is a staggering 85% which is attributed to labor supply pressures, weakness in demand for skilled labor and inefficient and rigid regulations of institutions that govern the functioning of the labor market (Boughzala 2019). Like many states in transition, the Tunisian economy remains fragile. In 2010 pubic debt was 41% of GDP, but by 2018 it was 71% (Chandoul 2018). In July 2019, the IMF approved the last installment of the $12 billion agreed with Egypt in 2016 (Magdy 2019). It has been successful in allowing Egypt to overcome the economic crisis but the future economic outlooks remain unclear as Egypt tackles a number of themes, including continued austerity and lower tourism visits due to Covid-19.

Since it is not realistic for Libya or Syria to be able to implement a standard IMF program in a conflict situation, the IMF is largely absent from these states. But an argument is made by Manuel (2017) that fragile states should receive some IMF funding that “…would allow the authorities to identify a set of macroeconomic and financial management targets that the country wants to make progress on.” Benchmarking would be against countries that they wish to emulate (ibid.). Again, in the economic downturn from Covid-19 it is hard to see how funds under pressure would be made available to support such a high risk, albeit, potentially high impact venture. Just because it is not operative, doesn’t mean the IMF doesn’t have a strategy. The short-term objectives in Libya include: restoring security, bringing hydrocarbon production fully online, the exercise of fiscal discipline, resuscitating the banking system, and maintaining macroeconomic stability (IMF 2012). The challenge in Syria is more stark where the country’s economic development has been set back decades, and where reconstruction of the physical and human infrastructure will be a monumental task.

While the banking sector is strong in Morocco, unemployment was high at 10% in 2019, rising to 25% for youth (Eljechtimi 2019). Lower international oil prices were expected to strengthen the economy’s resilience (ibid.). In 2018, the IMF approved a $2.97 billion Precautionary and Liquidity Line (PLL) to ensure against risks and promote more inclusive growth (IMF 2018d). Algeria requested an
IMF assessment for 2020. Algeria faced a fall in the oil price in 2014, and undertook some fiscal consolidation in 2017 but fiscal and current account deficits remain large (IMF 2018b). Unemployment remains around 10%, again affecting women and youth more. Inflation is slowing but its strategy appears geared to import restrictions and belt-tightening rather than increasing borrowing and boosting trade to enhance medium-term growth (El-Tablawy 2018). In 2020, Jordan agreed a $1.3 billion IMF deal over a four-year period to lower $42 billion in public debt due mainly to the spillover effects of conflict (Reuters 2020). Lebanon, which is going through a political and economic crisis, is yet to reach a deal with the IMF, which is seen as the only possible solution to the current situation. The former economy minister and ex-vice central bank governor Nasser Saidi estimates that the requirement will be $30 billion for the economy and $25 to recapitalize the banking system (Nakhoul and Perry 2020). It is unlikely to receive anything like this sum.

The IMF has been warning of an impending economic crisis in the Palestinian economy since September 2018 due to surging violence in Gaza, the Israeli blockade against Gaza, Palestinian mistrust of Israel and the USA, large aid cuts and revenues losses such as tax revenues blocked in a dispute with Israel (IMF 2018c). This was repeated by Christine Lagarde, then Managing Director of the IMF in mid-2019 (France24 2019b). Although the “Peace to Prosperity” plan calls for $50 billion of investment in the Palestinian territories within a decade, little if any of it looks to be forthcoming. In contrast to the Palestinian GDP of $14 billion, Israel’s GDP of $350 billion economy looks set to grow, with unemployment below 4% (IMF 2018a).

The 2010 €110 billion Greek bailout by the troika (the European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF) although exceptionally large, illustrates that sovereign debt crises and social exclusion are not preserved of the Southern Neighborhood. The way states deal with the tax burden, including VAT increases and consumption taxes, tax fraud and employment will be key over the coming years. Whether there will be further assistance due to a slow down following the Covid-19 virus will also be a concern. Further protests cannot be discounted. Certainly economic reform will not progress without pain in the short term, especially as liquidity dries up in the international bond markets. Whether the combination of social, economic, political, and security challenges will be manageable for the states of the Southern Neighborhood remains to be
seen. It could be a case of when, not if, there will be more socioeconomic and political upheaval.

**Non-state Actors**

Since the Arab uprisings, non-state actors operating in the Southern Neighborhood have represented some of the more pluralistic aspirations of Arab societies. Yet weak states which have been unable or unwilling to provide a social security net and a general lack of governance have been undermined by a reversion back to traditional forms of local governance as well as violent non-state actors (VNSAs). These latter groups are direct threats, and indirectly hand states further justification for repression of political and social grassroots movements, are putting nations under pressure, compromising their long-term prosperity and security.

Non-state actors, along with the Mediterranean refugee crisis, represents another node of insecurity which NATO, and by extension the EU, are less suited to dealing with at the institutional and doctrinal level. Terrorists and refugees do not abide by a traditional deterrence rationale. Terrorists and some state adversaries can represent the kind of threat, through tactics such as cyberattacks, which can create to the same kind of damage previously reserved for arms used by states (Valasek 2019). Furthermore, they use asymmetrical methods of warfare which challenge alliance unity such as disinformation and hybrid campaigns, financing extremist parties and propaganda through constant campaigns which require vigilance between a state of war and peace (ibid.).

In areas where state governance has come under question, including in Lebanon, Syria, Libya, and the Sahel, non-state groups have been viewed as both a threat (VNSAs) but also potential opportunity to contribute to the reduction of social and economic disparity through sustainable local development (nonviolent groups). In Syria, non-state actors such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra were for a time strengthened by sectarian tones. In Libya, tribes have become more dominant at the societal and political levels due to their ability to provide social security nets to local populations. The same is true for Hamas in Gaza, especially until Hamas and Fatah sign a unity agreement, and for Hezbollah in Lebanon. Tribes are particularly entrenched due to their established traditions and legal processes which deliver some form of social justice. Ethnic and kinship orientated networks are also far harder for authoritarian states to suppress or dismantle than other types of civil society, such as foreign-funded
NGOs. In Libya in particular, there is a growing awareness that tribes and decentralized governance will form the backbone in any future political system that emerges from the fall of the Gaddafi regime. Libya has remained central to European and US counterterrorism policymaking, including: the persistent violent Islamist groups with divergent political and economic interests, Libya continuing to be a security vacuum, the divisiveness of Haftar’s rhetoric in mobilizing jihadi fighters, and the lack of a unified state with limited institutional functionality (Sizer 2017).

In 2019, the picture was also complicated by militants opposed to Chad’s President Idriss Deby which were pushed out of southern Libya by the LNA. Deby is a key ally of France’s anti-Islamist Operation Barkhane in the Sahel region (France24 2019a). This incident illustrates how connected Libya and the rest of the Sahel region are in terms of European counterterrorism policy and interests. As already identified in this volume, ISIS and Al Qaeda continue to be major threats to human security in the Sahel. Indeed, land migration in Africa is deemed to be twice as deadly as that across the Mediterranean due to reasons such as accidents, dehydration, starvation and illness, besides state and non-state violence. Matisek et al. (2019) show how VNSAs and climate change interact in the Sahel and inform us about how civil defense forces might be created to address the twin issues across the region.

Non-state actors continue to play an increasing role in the governance and security of the Southern Neighborhood and wider MENA region. They are active in humanitarian crises, including the work of the White Helmets, Syrian Expatriate Medical Association and Syrian NGO Alliance in Syria. Due to cleavages and corruption in governance, they can also be effective at the local levels in service delivery and shadow governance structures. How to limit VSNAs and enhance the operability and integration of local governance structures with national frameworks will be the question for many donor states into the twenty-first century.

**The African Union (AU)**

Egypt had been expelled by the AU in 2013 but President Sisi has been intent on reengaging with Africa for a variety of reasons, including economic and geostrategic (especially issues with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam). President Sisi was able to mark the return of Egypt to Africa in 2019 when he took over a one-year rotating presidency of the AU. During this time he oversaw the completion of the African
Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2019 which includes Egypt and could enhance what has been relatively low-level trade between Egypt and other African states. The AU has been less effective on the issue of Libya and has been plagued by systemic issues which continue to compromises its notion of “African solutions to African problems.” These include a lack of single voice that the AU speaks with, half-hearted measures taken at the beginning of the Libyan crisis, and a growing awareness that the AU lacks the hard power to make a difference before being superseded by western powers through the UN Security Council (Kasaija 2013). In March 2020, the President of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy released a new EU strategy with Africa. The progress towards the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), a pan-African trade deal (ratified by 30 AU countries in February 2020), and how the EU might support it, will be important issues in the discussions leading to the EU-AU Summit due to be held in autumn 2020.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the nature of interregional politics, trends, and impacts which necessitates that the EU takes a much broader view of the Southern Neighborhood and the complexities, interrelationships, and multiplier effects of policymaking across MENA region and also sub-Saharan Africa. Focusing on a more holistic approach, especially concentrating EU–Southern Neighborhood policy within NATO, could lead to more successful outcomes by attempting to work more closely and coherently with the USA, Turkey, Greece, and the Gulf states, in aligning energy policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, resolving Cypriot status, and supporting conflict resolution in Syria and Libya in a more joined up narrative. This has been shown to be especially important for NATO in the context of growing competition from Russia in Baltic and Middle East (including Turkey) and from Chinese investments and political impact in Greece. There is likely to be further concern as China extends its infrastructure projects into sensitive industries as has already been shown in Israel concerning ports and the UK concerning Huawei.

A series of conflicts in the region continue to undermine confidence in the US Mideast policy and have exacerbated tensions with Iran. For this reason, and due to intense energy interests highlighted by the Asian cases, any consideration of emerging power engagement in the states...
of the southern Mediterranean cannot be isolated from deeper interests in the Gulf. The Gulf states have also become major players, particularly in conflict zones for multiple reasons including aid, foreign policy assertiveness and VNSA proxy group engagement. While many Arab Gulf states have played an important and constructive role in conflicts such as the Israel–Palestine conflict, the EU should work in closer partnership with these in order to advance common interests. Economic actors such as the IMF will continue to play a key role in vulnerable economies, including Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. While these economies look set to suffer further due to instability and conflict spillover the international community should do more to bolster the sustainability and governance structures will longer-term approaches that focus on self-sufficiency and resilience.

Further chaos in Europe and the USA from the Covid-19 virus could bolster supranational regulatory bodies in a similar vein to the effect that the Great Depression and Second World War had on setting them up in the first place. Indeed, the €750 billion Covid-19 response concluded in July 2020 is precisely the affirmative action which keeps the EU unified and maintains it as a normative power. On the other hand, a prolonged period of political uncertainty and economic recession could continue to undermine the concepts of sovereignty, democracy and the rule of law following the Arab uprisings, Mediterranean refugee crisis, austerity and Brexit. Given the mixed successes of EU policy in the southern Mediterranean so far and in the face of other past and current crises such as rising tensions between Greece and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean and a growing economic and political crisis in Lebanon, the EU should adapt its policy planning to focus on trends which are most detrimental to human and regional security. Shifts in the assertiveness of other actors in the Southern Neighborhood also requires a recalibrated response which better defines and protects such interests over the longer term.

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