





POLICY BRIEF


The Jerusalem security summit: what are the implications for the European Union?

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Introduction

The European Union has often played a primary role in founding the modern Middle East¹ and, over time, it has emphasized the growing importance of this region in tackling international issues such as security, terrorism, migration and energy supply.²

Some analysts assert that the U.S. and Europe share many common vital interests in the Middle East, leading Brussels to be so dependent on Washington that it is no longer able to develop an own regional policy without the support of the U.S.³ As a consequence, it could appear that the Europeans have lost their political influence either in rescuing the nuclear deal or in stabilizing the region alone;⁴ also alarming their regional partners.

In light of this, both the states and civil society organizations in the Middle East⁵ started asking Brussels to be more engaged in the region, returning to be an influential actor. According to the European External Action Service, however, in January 2019, the European Union was still in search of a strategy in the Middle East.⁶ Maybe what has been defined in the last Jerusalem Security Summit, a trilateral meeting between Israel, Russia and the U.S. has been held in Jerusalem in June 2019, can be finally the long-awaited turning point.

1. The European Union involvement in the Middle East in the last twenty years

Since the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in Barcelona⁷ in 1995, the European Union has been developing solid cooperation with twelve both Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Partners (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey)⁸, providing local institutions, in 2003, roughly €1 billion grants and another €2 billion in soft loans within the framework of non-military aid.⁹ This initiative was to enhance the possibility for cultural exchanges between different regional civil societies and to reestablish apolitical and security dialogue among the state actors in the region.¹⁰

However, the EU involvement in the Middle East has never been limited only to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In the Persian Gulf, in fact, the EU relations with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have been and are governed by a Cooperation Agreement signed between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1989, with the aim to stabilize the region and to improve the standard of living.

¹ Dalay, G. (2019) Europe must develop a Middle East policy independent of the US. *Middle East Eye*. January.

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/europe-must-develop-middle-east-policy-independent-us>

² [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635562/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)635562_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635562/EPRS_BRI(2019)635562_EN.pdf)

³ See Dalay

⁴ Dempsey, J. (2019) Europe's Absence in the Middle East. *Carnegie Europe*. January.

<https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/79382>

⁵ See Dalay

⁶ Osiewicz, P. (2019) The EU and the Middle East: In search of a strategy. *Middle East Institute*. January.

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/eu-and-middle-east-search-strategy>

⁷ https://www.barcelona.com/barcelona_news/the_barcelona_process_or_euro_mediterranean_partnership

⁸ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-04-294_en.htm

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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In terms of Human Rights, the EU has been and is working with local partners to promote democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights; but it is also involved in fighting against terrorism and intensifying the international trade. In light of these dimensions, Brussels has already promoted and supported a strong regional economic integration thanks to the Bilateral Association Agreements between the European Union and the partner countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.¹¹

At first sight and considering what has been already achieved in the region, the EU involvement in the Middle East seems to be already incisive and well-rooted. Nonetheless, due to the most recent and worrying developments in the region, such as Iran Nuclear Deal, the crisis in Yemen, Syrian Civil War and the spread of Terrorism, Brussels is still facing the necessity to develop a more defined and permanent line of action in the region.¹²

2. The Jerusalem Security Summit

During the Jerusalem Security Conference held in September 2018, Heads of State, security experts and business leaders discussed about the most recent challenges in the Middle East, particularly focusing on Israel, its perception of national, regional and international security. This Conference has been an essential opportunity to exchange ideas on the future of the region and its population and to set an Israel's national security agenda concerning Terrorism, cyber threats, economic growth and financial war, especially in reference to the Iran Nuclear Deal.¹³

Almost one year later, in June 2019, a trilateral meeting between Israel, Russia and the U.S. has been held in Jerusalem; the three nations were represented by Russia's Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton and Israeli Chairman of the Security Council Meir Ben-Shabbat.

According to the Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, the Jerusalem Security Summit represented the chance to bring together security chiefs from the U.S. and Russia "in a bid to align their Middle East policies, specifically as regards to Iran's military expansion and potential nuclearization, as well as the conflict in Syria".¹⁴ Similarly, the former Israeli ambassador to Moscow Zvi Magen has affirmed that "the meeting is the result of a [rapprochement] between the U.S. and Russia, and the main purpose is to kick off a direct dialogue despite Western opposition to various Russian actions".¹⁵

In light of this, the U.S. has already tried to contain Moscow's strategy to become a supreme "balancing" force in Afro-Eurasia region thanks to its partnership with Iran.¹⁶ Moscow and Teheran

¹¹ Ibid

¹² See Osiewicz

¹³ <https://jerusalem-sc.com/>

¹⁴ <https://unitedwithisrael.org/israeli-first-historic-security-summit-held-in-jerusalem/>

¹⁵ Bybelezer, C. (2019) What tripartite Jerusalem Security Summit may or may not achieve. *The Jerusalem Post*. June. <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/What-Tripartite-Jerusalem-Security-Summit-May-or-May-Not-Achieve-591952>

¹⁶ Korybko, A. (2019) Secret US-Russia-Israel National Security Summit in Jerusalem: What is the Hidden Agenda?. *Global Research*. June. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/juicy-national-security-advisor-summit-jerusalem/5681560>

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are close allies and this strong political cooperation was evident during the Jerusalem Summit, where expectedly Russia supported Iranian counterparts by defending rights of Iranian military to remain in Syria despite Israeli opposition.¹⁷ However, in Jerusalem, Moscow also seemed to be open to the cooperation and dialogue, affirming that, although Iran will remain its ally and partner, the Kremlin is aware of Israel's concerns regarding Iran's military presence in Syria and it is working to address the issue with Tehran.¹⁸

According to several pundits, there is also the possibility that, after the Jerusalem Summit, Moscow is very likely to take the role of intermediary between Tehran and its adversaries such as the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia.¹⁹ In addition, both Israel and the U.S. believe that Russia can convince Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to limit Iran's presence in Syria. If this is to happen, it would represent a key goal for both Israel and the U.S., since Iran has a significant military presence in Syria to fight opponents of Assad's regime, including Islamic State.

Certainly, if Moscow accepts the responsibility to mediate between the two sides of the above-mentioned regional tensions, the situation in the region could seriously produce a different course of action and the consequences would be significant not only for the actors directly involved, but also for the European Union.

3. A new strategy for the EU?

According to the EU's diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini, after the Jerusalem Security Summit in June 2019, the European growing presence in the region has been guided by two main goals: the necessity to de-escalate the tension between the United States and Iran and the desire to stabilize the Gulf region²⁰; two of the most urgent challenges discussed during the previous Summit in Jerusalem.

As expected, the events following the withdrawal of the US from the Iran Nuclear Deal can be considered one of the most destabilizing developments in the last year. In this regard, the French President Emmanuel Macron has strongly tried to find a solution to the latest crisis between Tehran and Washington, also proposing France as mediator.²¹

This is coherent also with the several European efforts made in the past to convince Iran to stop enriching the level of uranium and to encourage US President Trump to suspend new economic sanctions he has imposed on Tehran.²² However, although President Macron's efforts to persuade both sides to come back to the negotiation table are admirable, it could be extremely challenging for the French President convincing them alone. This is why, the possibility to figure Moscow as one of the mediators could represent a significant support for France to bring this fight to an end.

¹⁷Gross, J. A. (2019) In trilateral Jerusalem summit, Russia sides with Iran, against Israel and US. *The Times in Israel*. June.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-trilateral-summit-russia-sides-with-iran-against-israel-and-us/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-israel-look-to-coax-russia-away-from-iran-alliance-11561382544>

²⁰ <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/423817-european-union-increasing-its-presence-engagement-in-the-middle-east-says-mogherini>

²¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20190709-macron-seeks-lead-eu-role-iran-crisis>

²² Ibid.

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In reference to the crisis that is undermining the entire Middle East, moreover, EU High Representative Mogherini highlighted the relevance of both Kuwait and Iraq as two of the most crucial allies.

On one side, in fact, the EU has recently opened a new representation office in Kuwait.²³ Mogherini firmly supports the idea that "in a moment of regional and global tensions, Kuwait is a voice of wisdom and force of peace and this is what made us natural partners".²⁴ Kuwait in fact, is a very strategic partner for the European Union, since it has strong diplomatic relations with Brussels and Washington and, unlike Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, it maintains good ties also with Tehran.

On the other side, in July 2019, Federica Mogherini decided to attend a conference with the Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Hakim, discussing about the most "dangerous adventures" in the region.²⁵ Mohammed al-Hakim, in fact, is concerned about the increasing tensions around Iraq and he relies on the European Union as a determinant ally in order to avoid negative consequences. What appears, therefore, is that the governments in the region look for an urgent European involvement in the region, realizing that, maybe, not only European action, but also European inaction, will have remarkable impacts on both shores of the Mediterranean.²⁶

4. Conclusion

In the last year, the Middle East has been a region full of changes. The contest over the nature and future of the regional order is far from over, and Europe shouldn't be only a spectator.

The outcome of a renewed European presence in the Middle East will have a significant impact not only on Europe-Middle East relations, but also on the stability of the region and, as a consequence, on the security of the EU member states. After the Jerusalem Security Summit, the EU seems to be willing to invest in the transformation of the Middle East again, especially in countering radicalism, refugees, terrorism, xenophobia or populism.

However, although the European Union should never overpass the influence that super powers such as China, the US and Russia are exerting on the region, it should also be able to define with precision a strategy that would allow it to act as an independent player.

²³ See 20.

²⁴ See 20.

²⁵ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190714-eu-cautions-against-us-dangerous-adventures-in-the-middle-east/>

²⁶ See Dalay.

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