Emerging European Security Challenges

BACKGROUND

The Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University (LISd) convened a special Liechtenstein Colloquium, “Emerging European Security Challenges,” in Triesenberg, Principality of Liechtenstein, from November 12-15, 2015. The colloquium brought together senior diplomats, academics, policy-makers, experts and representatives of European civil society and NGOs, including Crown Prince Alois of Liechtenstein, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Valentin Inzko, and Ambassador Christian Strohal. José Manuel Barroso, former President of the European Commission and Visiting Professor at Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and LISd, delivered a keynote address. The terrorist attacks in Paris, France, on Friday, November 13, 2015 shaped discussions and debate during the second half of the conference, rendering the notions of security, transnational terrorism, and joint crisis management ever more pressing for EU policy. The colloquium was off-the-record according to Liechtenstein Colloquium rules, and was financially supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and SIBIL Foundation, Vaduz. The colloquium was chaired by Wolfgang Danspezckgruber, Director of LISd.1

The objective of the colloquium was to examine the interactions between and the various effects of three key crises—the Ukraine war, the war in Syria, and the European refugee crisis—for broader regional, EU, and international security. Cluster One considered “Russia, Ukraine, the West, and the future of collective security,” including the role of the Baltic states in security issues, the relationship between Russia and the European Union, and the role of media, information and hybrid warfare.2 Cluster Two, “The Syrian War and ISIS/Da’esh” focused on several issues related to the ongoing civil war and conflict in the Middle East, including alliances of the Assad government, rebel and other opposition groups, ISIS/Da’esh, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and, especially, the Kurds. Emphasis was put on the plight of Christians and other religious groups in the region. Cluster Three, “The refugee crisis and the challenge of European collective action,” connected the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II to the situation in the MENA region. It focused on refugees and migrants within Europe’s borders and along the Balkan route, the role of Turkey, Greece and Germany, terrorism concerns, and EU actions and emerging differences between member states. The protection of religious minorities and the longer-term question of integration and assimilation of refugees and asylum-seekers offered another focus. This report reflects the substance of these discussions and includes an updated Chair’s Addendum.

RUSSIA, UKRAINE, THE WEST, AND THE FUTURE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The war in Ukraine brings back traditional notions of sovereignty, borders, and geopolitics into contemporary European security, and contravenes the 1975 Helsinki Final Accords and the 1990 Charter of Paris. Conversations centered on an “us versus them” mentality, with Russia consistently occupying the role of the “other,” but the notion of who constitutes “us” remaining undefined. Is “us” NATO, the European Union—in total or certain members only—the EU plus the United States, or “the West” and some former Soviet States? Russia is adept at exploiting and intensifying these divisions, exacerbating pre-existing tensions among its perceived adversaries. Moscow employs offensive operations such as propaganda, hybrid warfare, disinformation, cyber operations, monetary contributions to select political

1. Julia M. TréHu, LISd Research Specialist and Special Assistant to the Director, served as lead rapporteur for the seminar.

parties and friendly actors, corruption, while stoking a re-
newed “fifth column,” including trolls. Yet Russia seems sur-
prised and stymied when the West discovers and attempts to
resist such efforts, by either publicly announcing them or coun-
tering them with the unanimous implementation of
economic sanctions (as after the annexation of Crimea and
the downing of the airliner MH17). The unforeseen disas-
ter of the shooting down of the MH17 flight incidentally
internationalized the Ukrainian War.

Nevertheless, according to some, Russia should be under-
stood as a rational actor with rational interests and realistic
goals—even if these differ from those seen from or pre-
dicted by the West. Participants agreed that these primary
interests and goals center on regime survival, maintenance
of a sphere of influence, ability to renegotiate rules to their
advantage, and recognition of Russia’s great power status in
the world with the entitlements and privileges this entails.

Some argue that contemporary Russia, however, finds itself
today in a challenging and contradictory domestic situa-
tion, which results in diverging evaluations of its ability
and/or intent to challenge the stability or divide the unity
between EU, other Western states, and the transatlantic alli-
ance. Russia is declining industrially and economically, rid-
dled by corruption, and many long-term trends bode ill for
its underdeveloped socio-economic system, especially with
its critical sensitivity to oil prices. In addition, current EU
economic sanctions are biting. Russia is losing the longer
battle for “intellectual power.” Yet in the short term, Russia
has invested heavily in its military assets and moderniza-
tion, which heighten perceptions of its hard power capabili-
ties and might. Russia’s forceful international actions can
be seen as a reaction to its decreasing power relative to the
West and its internal instability. The more the Kremlin sees
its future challenged, the greater its incentive towards as-
sertive international operations—not the least to unify and
mobilize Russian domestic opinion—might become.

At the same time, Europe is plagued by multiple crises and
regional economic stagnation, crisis fatigue, and competi-
tion. West European defense capabilities are often inade-
quate and outdated, creating the tendency to either try to
ignore emerging security crises or to exaggerate compara-
tive strengths and objectives. On the one hand, there exists
some anti-Americanism, on the other, many see that Rus-
sian military capacity and potential aggressiveness can only
be countered in the near term by significant US investment
in NATO and a revitalized nuclear capability in Europe.
These paradoxes contribute to the divergent national opin-
ions and concomitant reactions regarding the power trends
in Russia, in both the short and long term, how to deal with
the “Putin Factor,” and the search for a working modus
vivendi.

Russia has set a dangerous precedent by suggesting the use
of (miniature) tactical nuclear weapons as a de-escalatory
strategy. These challenges arise alongside the waning pres-
ence of experts with Western technical, tactical, and strate-
gic expertise in contemporary nuclear thinking. There thus
exists an urgent need for the creation of a new generation
of strategic thinkers with the ability to thoughtfully address
these emerging challenges.

Russian tactics and strategy should be analyzed beyond
the hard military domain. Russian cyber, propaganda,
and information manipulation is oriented towards three
audiences: the domestic population, (Russian-speaking),
residents of the “near abroad,” and international audiences
(sympathizers, political parties, specially selected groups).
Particular attention should also be paid to the differences
between Europe’s regions (North/Baltic, Central/East, Bal-
kan/Southeast), with narratives tailored to specific regional
differences, cultural affinities, and historic legacies. The pro-
liferation of alternative narratives results in disillusionment
doubt, with the very notion of truth called into question.
Participants also noted that the notion of a “fifth column”
in Europe remains salient. Given the special effects of mil-
ions of refugees from Syria and elsewhere this connotation
obtains more relevance.

While differences endured throughout the discussions in
analyses of Russian power trends and geopolitical motiva-
tions, overall views remained negative regarding the pos-
sibility of resolving the various conflicts in Donbass, Trans-
nistria, South Ossetia, etc. The polemic exploitation of the
various EU crises—especially refugees and migrants and the
accompanying nationalist reactions, the dissatisfaction with
leadership and mistrust and discontent among EU mem-
bers, the capability of trolls, cyber operations, and hybrid
warfare—are important elements of concern. Further nu-
anced analysis is needed to understand these evolving tac-
tics and techniques. The role and interests of President Putin must also be accounted for.

In analyzing and attempting to predict potential developments in Ukraine, the Minsk Process and the country’s economic and political situation will be a significant factor in its relationship to Russia. Ukraine’s success—or failure—in consolidating government control, carrying out meaningful reforms, combatting corruption, and re-establishing the confidence and trust of its citizens will be crucial tests for Europe’s future. Ukraine’s loss of part of its defense industries and many of its exports to Russia, as well as the destruction of Donbass, are costly. Remedying these challenges amid the new flare-up of fighting in eastern Ukraine demands good politics and leadership. Combating corruption and the influence of the oligarchs is another challenge. Ukraine as a failure would fulfill the wishes of some, whereas Ukraine as a democratic and economic success story would deal the strongest blow to its adversaries and those whose interests lie in maintaining the status quo.

Unanswered questions set the tone for the future in this era of tense regional and continental relations: How to find a balance between containment and engagement with Russia—through “congagement,” or merely “agreeing to disagree?” Is there a Russian grand strategy playing between diverse issues—from the Arctic to the Ukraine, to challenging the sovereignty of the Baltics and others with self-determination for Russian speaking minorities, to a re-emergent role in the Middle East, to support for Syrian sovereignty and Bashar al-Assad, and the polemic assistance to Belgrade, Bratislava, and Budapest? Is there a negative agenda regarding refugees and migrants and related security challenges (building onto old KGB links in Syria and Iraq), to undermine Chancellor Merkel’s leadership and to exacerbate the refugee crisis, hence exploiting EU quarrels and transatlantic disagreements—“divide et imperare?”

How should EU and Western governments best react, communicate, and inform their own citizensry about this? What is the best way to react in an anticipatory and peaceful fashion to the direct and indirect threats posed by Russia, its trolls, hybrid operations, and support of extreme right- and left-wing parties in Western Europe? How will the Kremlin’s operations in Syria, against Turkey, and in the larger MENA region and elsewhere, including the Arctic, affect these calculations? How will a change in the transatlantic relationship with new American leadership shape European responses or reactivate the “reset button” with Moscow?

THE SYRIAN WAR AND ISIS/DA’ESH

Discussions of the situation in the Middle East centered on the question of whether conflict resolution efforts should emphasize solutions in the short term versus the medium/long term. There exist several broad possible approaches: a short-term focus on locally selective cease-fires in limited areas, on a medium/long-term solution, a combination of the two, or one versus the other. There was debate between investing efforts to end the bloodshed immediately or simply accepting that there are no actual possible (or at least immediate) avenues toward a lasting cease-fire. A key unresolved argument was that the strategic balance on the ground may not yet reflect circumstances necessary for a sustainable cease-fire, particularly mutual exhaustion among all actors. For many, the crucial issue remained the status of Bashar al-Assad’s government, for others it is the situation of the Kurds.

Debate in this working group centered on the likely outcomes 6 to 18 months ahead, based on the best collective understanding of the facts on the ground. Russian intervention may buy enough time for the Syrian government to stave off state collapse and expand the area under its control, pushing back ISIS and al-Qaeda groups. An umbrella of Kurdish forces could confront ISIS forces, squeezing them from the northeast of Syria. In debates about responsible or viable partners on the ground, those identified as potential partners ranged from the Assad government, to various Kurdish groups, to Christian militias. While it might be possible to pursue a negotiation and/or containment strategy with the al-Qaeda inspired groups, this could only secure a temporary, tactical advantage and is not a solution itself. Many argued that even the notion of communication with such groups should be completely off the table, while it was also suggested that an effective peace process has to have all involved.
From the long-term perspective, participants discussed different models for a postwar Syrian state, including the Lebanese confessional, Swiss cantonal, Iraqi (de facto) sectarian, and Bosnian style (indefinite) freeze. Persistent tension remained in discussions over the appropriateness of each (short- versus medium/long-term solutions). Similarly, disagreement existed over whether the postwar solution should reflect present geopolitical divisions and borders, or if an opportunity or obligation has emerged for a redrawning of borders, 100 years after Sykes-Picot. Is this the end of the Westphalian state system in the Middle East such as it has existed for the last century? Should regional self-governance instead become the desired outcome?

Participants also discussed the varied roles of regional and great power players, beginning with Russia. The consequences of Russian intervention in Syria pivot on contentions over whether Russia’s actions are in its strategic interests or amount to a miscalculated overreach. Will Russia’s strategy in Syria reflect the late Soviet strategy in Afghanistan of relying on shoring up local actors (“Vietnamization” of the conflict) or will it invest more directly in the conflict? The influence of Russia over Assad should not necessarily be presumed to be strong as many believe, with one participant quoting a Soviet ambassador to Damascus in the 1980s who lamented, “the Syrians will take everything from us … except advice.” In the regional context, Russian-Turkish tensions also seem to be expanding and escalating, comprising diplomatic, economic and maritime issues, and it remains to be seen how this will play out. Clearly, due to domestic constraints, Putin cannot afford to lose this struggle and is willing to do what it takes to succeed, including potential (nuclear) weapons use. American Special Forces operations are also increasing.

Turkey’s role is a major factor, not the least as it concerns the Kurds. Participants noted the unsavory ties between Turkey and ISIS, especially in oil smuggling and border control. The policies and role of Prime Minister Erdoğan are of central concern, especially his approach to censorship and his view of the Kurds as a threat to Turkish sovereignty. There was disagreement over the specific and appropriate role for Turkey and the extent to which Turkey can be induced to act, especially in ways perceived to be against Turkish interests. Consensus nevertheless existed over the need to have Turkey either actively participate against ISIS or actively sit out the conflict. If Turkey is unwilling to directly confront ISIS or turns a blind eye, outside backing should shift to other (perhaps Kurdish) actors who are confronting ISIS. Yet in the discussion it was emphasized that it is necessary to account for intra-Kurdish factional struggles and that the Kurdish Islamist movement should not be discounted.

The role of the Gulf States remains salient and consequential, especially when attempting to analyze financial flows to armed non-state-actors, including but not only to ISIS. Significant sources of revenue are currently hidden in free trade zones in Gulf countries beyond international authority or oversight. Saudi Arabia is now attempting to unify the positions of the majority of the opposition parties, but not necessarily the most important ones on the ground in Syria. Saudi cooperation with Turkey and Israel has increased, including the deployment of fighter planes.

ISIS remains active in Iraq, Syria, Libya, on the Sinai, and may, in the near future, become active in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. In analyzing the potential of ISIS it is important to look far beyond the areas currently under its control and include ISIS’s potential ability to recruit a substantial part of the frustrated younger generation in these areas (residing there and immigrants), as well as among Europe’s Muslim population.

No agreement could be found over the most effective approach to combatting ISIS. Some participants posed the question: Is it possible to negotiate with ISIS, or accommodate it in some way, or must it be destroyed? Significant differences existed regarding the role of creating effective counter-narratives in response to successful ISIS recruitment efforts, especially in light of the November 13, 2015, attacks in Paris. The North Korea model may offer foreign fighters a way out. One participant succinctly analyzed three potential approaches: First, kill them—but “boots on the ground” remains politically unpalatable and unlikely, and the costs of peacemaking and peacekeeping are daunting. Second, let them kill themselves—but do we have the time? Does the West have the resilience for this kind of containment? Third, kill them with words—a battle of hearts and minds will depend on an ability to know others, know ourselves, and present a meaningful counter-narrative.
Debates surfaced over the role of religion, particularly the various interpretations of Islam as they relate to conflict in the Middle East and the rise of Da’esh. One participant explained the ongoing importance of the 14th-century thought of Syrian theologian Ibn Taymiyya, rehabilitated by Ibn ’Abd al-Wahhab, spiritual advisor to the Saudi emirs and founder of Wahhabism in the 18th century Saudi Kingdom. While Saudi religious authorities consider Ibn Taymiyya to be their “founding spiritual father,” al-Qaeda and Da’esh believe in turn that they implement his ideas more literally and thoroughly, thus rendering the House of Saud corrupt and religiously illegitimate. Another participant stressed the ongoing ideological battle between combative (jihadi) and reformist (ijtihadi) Islamist clusters in the Islamic world, with consequences for Western policy to help the reformist forces in this struggle.

Finally, attendant to the discussion over how to contend with ISIS is the future of Christians in the Middle East. Christians and other minority groups, in addition to other refugees, face significant violence and terror, especially from ISIS. While some Christians appear to have been able to navigate life under ISIS control, prospects appear dim for the future of Christians in the region more broadly.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS AND THE CHALLENGE OF EUROPEAN COLLECTIVE ACTION

While the issue of illegal migration and border security is not a new problem for Europe, thousands of refugees and migrants fleeing conflict or seeking greater economic opportunity outside the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa are currently coming into Europe at the highest rate ever. Germany alone admitted over one million new arrivals in 2015, Austria some 100,000. Refugees have often exhausted their personal financial resources and are making the difficult choice to leave their homes and refugee camps for Europe. In addition to concerns about the logistics of managing increased migration flows, considerable unease exists regarding the impact of migration on the future of “Europe” as a collective political, social, and moral identity. Discussions oscillated between the practical and the theoretical: alongside technological and pragmatic solutions to the immediate challenges posed by large-scale migration, the broader issues of secularization versus religious identity, and the role of “European values” and legal obligations versus political resentment and objectives continually reappeared.

The states receiving the initial refugees and economic migrants, especially the EU border states of Greece and Italy, are facing challenges in registering and processing new arrivals in a timely, efficient manner. The EU urgently needs to put in place a comprehensive, streamlined process for identifying and registering new arrivals and determining their status as either economic migrants or asylum-seekers before allowing movement to perhaps more permanent destinations farther into the continent. The situation of Greece is particularly difficult, with freedom of travel within the Schengen borders complicated by the fact that it does not share contiguous borders with other Schengen-zone nations. What’s more, some EU citizens feel that governments are providing too many services to new arrivals at the expense of local communities. Addressing host community needs in addition to the needs of new arrivals will be critical to maintaining “space” for refugees to find new homes in Europe. Furthermore, refugees, host communities, and governments need access to reliable, timely information about safe travel routes, available services, and potential economic opportunities.

The EU, its member-states, and their citizens must confront potential security concerns: who are these refugees and migrants? Demographic information including age, profession, “former fighting role,” and country of origin are highly important, but information-gathering is completely insufficient and seriously differs between host-states. What risks, if any, does this migration pose to existing communities? What role will border fences play? ISIS may have infiltrated the refugee flow, along with former combatants, and other foreign criminal elements. In terms of the legal framework for dealing with mass migration, many international legal norms and standards have revealed themselves to be outdated. For example, the European Court of Human Rights and the convention on refugees have interacted in unintended ways, alongside the EU’s inadequate Dublin framework. EU states have been forced to question their open border principles versus the ideal welfare state and the consequences of open internal borders. The longevity of the crisis is also uncertain. It may instead be
the “new normal.” Borders will only alter refugee routes or means of transit.

Better cooperation is strongly encouraged for EU states and regional countries to combat illegal smuggling, while Syria’s neighbors, primarily Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, need massive infusions of additional resources in order to sustain the millions of refugees from Syria they are already hosting. The international community should fully support the UN agencies, NGOs, World Bank, and IMF programs designed to stabilize local communities, repair and rehabilitate infrastructure, and extend public services.

Possible solutions exist for dealing with the unprecedented flow of migrants and refugees, in both the short and long term. First, existing registration methods should incorporate new technologies (social media, mobile applications) to identify incoming refugees and economic migrants. These additional resources can better facilitate the registration processes. Dissemination of accurate, timely information through digital and textual means will be crucial for host governments and refugees as they continue on their journeys. Second, a reworking of the Dublin Three framework can help provide additional resources to frontline states to enhance implementation. Reform of EU legal approaches will also facilitate handling the scope and nature of this specific migrant situation. Third, wherever possible, illegal smuggling networks should be interrupted and replaced with legal checkpoints and assistance centers. Smugglers and their networks must be eradicated at the source using legal, civil, and military means. Lists of known smugglers within the model of UN sanction lists should be actively maintained. Finally, collaboration with local communities is crucial to ensure effective and positive local refugee relations. In this domain, consultation of the best legal and social practices of past mass migration movements in the European context, e.g. post-1945 and Bosnia in the 1990s, should not be overlooked. As one participant noted, the principle of subsidiarity could be a more practical remedy than a larger, more unwieldy political system. The regulation of migrations by the Gemeinde (townships or communes) may be the best way to ensure a democratic response to migration flows.

CHAIR’S ADDENDUM: REQUIRED PARADIGM CHANGES

The complexity of the current situation in and around Europe, the multiple competing crises, and their cumulative effects on crisis management and leadership capabilities have begun to cause crisis-fatigue and loss of trust in leadership. One can even observe some appeal of authoritarianism and a questioning of European integration, the EU’s efficiency, and the transatlantic relationship.

Several critical paradigm changes are urgently required in order to stop this downward spiral:

1. **International crisis management needs to address not just the effects but the root causes of crises and their actual and possible interaction with other challenges.**

   This includes anticipating and addressing causes for radical (religious) fundamentalism which inspires terror acts. This does not necessarily require an increase in traditional military operations, i.e. bombs and missiles, but rather highly informed strategic, sociological, and religious intelligence, special operations, and sophisticated analysis of information, propaganda and social media. For EU states this urgently suggests a move from national to supranational intelligence cooperation, whether against ISIS or related terrorism. In this regard, it is important to rethink overall media and information strategies. Perhaps a more restrictive approach, or even a policy of “blocking out,” would be a more appropriate tool. Likewise, it is necessary to rethink the uses of banking and financing mechanisms on a global, particularly European, scale as it relates to (organized) criminality and terrorism.

2. **The general paradigm shift in global energy production and consumption currently underway has the potential to profoundly impact and reshape regional and geopolitical relationships.**

   The OPEC states in the Gulf have operated for decades on the assumption that they would be delivering to the OECD members something which these critically need: energy in the form of oil or natural gas. In the
past, this gave OPEC an exclusive status and position. Now, with the United States having become one of the world’s leading petroleum and gas producers, and with the falling oil and gas prices, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and others are suddenly confronted with increasing budgetary challenges. At the same time, energy-saving measures and the shift to alternative energy sources in Europe and other markets are beginning to take effect, neutralizing the relevance of the OPEC states and gradually reducing the relevance of carbon. This may eventually cause serious problems for energy-export-dependent economies like the Saudi, Russian, and others, and lead to regional destabilization.

3. Inclusive systems of education and the creation of sophisticated, values-based political cultures, rooted in responsible information dissemination, must be a priority.

There is the danger that collective war memory and related suffering will be forgotten or manipulated, including the attempt by some to try to rewrite or reinterpret history for consumption by the younger generation. Such diluted memories, ignorance of historic facts, manipulated historical interpretations, and the accompanying increase in risk-taking and reduced conflict avoidance are becoming apparent. Since 1945 and the end of World War II, two generations have passed and a third is entering leadership positions. Memory of wars, suffering, and destruction is vanishing in Europe and elsewhere. In the Middle East, the next generation of political leadership is also arriving, seen quite prominently in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The incoming leadership may be much less restrained than the previous ones.

4. It would be beneficial to expand crisis management leadership to more effectively include civil society organizations and NGOs, and to directly engage and collaborate with them instead of spending time and resources subordinating them to government overseers.

A paradigm change exists in the active relationships of civil society to government in addressing European crises. Recently, civil society and NGOs have been in the forefront of effectively dealing with an overwhelming influx of refugees and migrants. They have also been instrumental in pushing governments to undertake more effective steps. It is highly recommended that governments engage with civil society groups, NGOs, and non-traditional actors, such as the business sector, more actively.

5. An identification process for refugees should take place on the EU’s enforced external borders in a humane and efficient manner, and in accordance with European values and international law.

With regard to the current refugee crisis, Europe has three basic response options. One would be to do nothing and wait—but that would certainly lead to political and economic chaos. Another possibility would be to act only once refugees reach EU member states. This option would then lead to re-established intra-European boundaries, and a serious challenging of Schengen. But areas might be destabilized where refugees become concentrated. Thus, third, it seems more relevant to deal with the causes of the refugee flow before this becomes a crisis within the EU. Nevertheless, it is absolutely legitimate to want to know who is entering the EU and for what reasons. Information sharing among EU members and intelligence cooperation is key to effectively deal with related security issues.

6. An acceptance in western nations of a “new normal” that is more tense and potentially insecure is necessary, and responses to security threats should be adjusted and media tools utilized more effectively to address these but with a goal of maintaining a sense of normality.

While there is no new “Cold War,” it has to be accepted that strategic competition, cyber criminality, terror, a change in the tone of the international discourse, and even “hybrid warfare” and locally limited direct confrontation have become part of a new normal in an increasingly multipolar global actors system. High-quality, balanced, objective, and properly contextualized information should be offered to all via traditional and new forms of media. Such a strategy should also encourage the deepening of internal EU cooperation and the formation of a common European will without which the creation of effective, sustainable solutions will not be possible.
7. A more ambitious response to the current refugee crises in the MENA region is through an effective, sustainable stabilization initiative.

The ultimate goal of such an initiative should be to change the Middle East and North Africa from a zone of crisis to a zone of peace, stability, prosperity, and opportunities for all, Europeans included. The MENA region should not be perceived as a threat, but as an opportunity. Stabilization should include direct involvement of the people themselves, not a top-down approach like that of a neo-colonial regime. Alongside public resources, private funds and initiatives should come into play, from stabilization, security and humanitarian aid, to training and investment projects.

One of the first concrete steps that must be taken to address the refugee crisis is for EU member states to take a lead in moving forward a successful Syria peace negotiation—including all key stakeholders—with the immediate goal of securing a meaningful, sustainable cease-fire as soon as possible. The EU as a whole and member states individually must be willing to leverage maximum pressure that they can bring to bear through a stained effort for both immediate and lasting effects.

An effective stabilization initiative requires an all-encompassing outline, and case-by-case analysis in order to assess the critical needs of the states and communities concerned and to determine for the immediate, medium, and longer term what resources and support are needed and who should contribute. This includes possible use of force by a “coalition of the concerned,” to neutralize, in particular, actions by various spoilers. Citizens should be assisted in developing and upholding the rule of law in accordance with their national culture. Safety and effective humanitarian assistance, disarmament, security sector reform and demilitarization ought to be first priority, followed by targeted and supervised economic-industrial investment projects. Initiatives for bottom-up involvement can help avoid a foreign-instigated top-down approach. Enhanced law and order will increase attraction for foreign investors, and it eventually ought to be possible for stable MENA states to have special agreements with the EU. Dual track professional training, and sustainable investment projects and public-private initiatives should be encouraged.

This stabilization initiative demands determination, cooperation, and a clear strategy. It must be innovative and sustainable to bring (relative) peace and prosperity to a region which has been for too long the center of conflict and suffering, and from which global crises have spread. Such an initiative promises to be the most cost-effective way to adequately address and counter the causes for the flight of the region’s highly qualified people who will be crucial for rebuilding these states. Palpable improvements in the MENA region might convince former refugees to return home, since many still have their families in the region. However, the longer such an initiative is absent, the more likely an intensified regional conflagration will further exacerbate the refugee crisis and the crises in Europe. A MENA Conference on Peace, Stabilization, and Economic Development (MENA-COPED) under African Union, EU, and UN auspices should be established to systematically assess the situation in each crisis country in the MENA region and support effective and sustained cooperation.

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