

## **The Greater Middle East: A Thirty Years' War**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, and in particular between 2003 and 2004, the United States unleashed a series of wars in the Middle East and Central Asia that were intended to advance its economic interests and re-establish imperial hegemony. Targeting New York and Washington, the attacks by Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda were a trigger for this series of American interventions, akin to the way the Defenestration of Prague on May 23, 1618 led the Holy Roman Empire into a Thirty Years' War.

*Keywords:* Middle East, Westphalia Treaty, Al Qaeda, Bin Laden, USA, ISIS, Russia, Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan

## **El gran Medio Oriente: una Guerra de Treinta Años**

### **RESUMEN**

Tras los ataques del 11 de septiembre de 2001 y, en particular, entre 2003 y 2004, Estados Unidos desató una serie de guerras en Oriente Medio y Asia Central destinadas a promover sus intereses económicos y restablecer la hegemonía imperial. Los ataques de Al-Qaeda de Osama bin Laden, dirigidos a Nueva York y Washington, fueron un desencadenante de esta serie de intervenciones estadounidenses, similar a la forma en que la Defenestración de Praga el 23 de mayo de 1618 llevó al Sacro Imperio Romano a una Guerra de Treinta Años.

*Palabras clave:* Medio Oriente, Tratado de Westfalia, Al Qaeda, Bin Laden, EE. UU., ISIS, Rusia, Turquía, Siria, Afganistán

## 阿拉伯民族主义和伊斯兰主义： 关系的破裂与延续

摘要：

西方国家试图让阿拉伯民族主义和伊斯兰主义产生对立。这种故意造成的误解自2003年萨达姆·侯赛因政权被美国及其联盟所推翻时便极为明显。事实上，阿拉伯民族主义和伊斯兰主义之间的对立，尽管有时存在暴力，但却表达了拒绝在理论差异、甚至是政治差异之外产生过多竞争。

关键词：阿拉伯，伊斯兰，民族主义，伊斯兰主义，美国，巴勒斯坦

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, and in particular between 2003 and 2004, the United States unleashed a series of wars in the Middle East and Central Asia that were intended to advance its economic interests and re-establish imperial hegemony. Targeting New York and Washington, the attacks by Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda were a trigger for this series of American interventions, akin to the way the Defenestration of Prague on May 23, 1618 led the Holy Roman Empire into a Thirty Years' War that lasted until the signing of the Peace of Westphalia on October 24, 1648.

This "European civil war" brought the Hapsburgs of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire—supported by the papacy—into conflict with the German Protestant states, allied with their primarily Protestant neighboring European powers—the United Provinces and Scandinavian countries—along with France which, although a Catholic country and fighting Protestants at home, wanted to reduce the House of Hapsburg's power on the European continent. The war involved all European powers, whether they were for or against the Emperor. Mercenaries were widely used. Fighting took place primarily in the central European territory of the Holy Roman Empire, before shifting to the Plain of Flanders, Northern Italy, and the Iberian Peninsula. Battles, famine, massacres, attacks, and migration led to the deaths of several million people.

While I shall refrain from yielding to the delightful historical anachronism of superimposing the confrontation between the Catholic Holy Roman Empire and Protestant states on top of that between the United States and Muslim countries—often described as a "clash of civilizations"—, a number of military, diplomatic, and

even religious analogies highlight several revealing geopolitical constants. Like the Holy Roman Empire in its own time, the modern United States falls back on a grand doctrinal narrative with a messianic purpose and seeks to “naturalize” and outsource its wars in the name of a shared global and humanitarian good.

In this case, the United States implemented a doctrine that consisted of remodeling the Middle East, a crescent of twenty-seven countries stretching from Mauritania in North Africa to Pakistan and Afghanistan, passing through Turkey, the Mashriq, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Persian Gulf. As it did for the Holy Roman Empire, this “Greater Middle East,” or simply “Greater” project, quickly turned into disaster.<sup>1</sup> It led to numerous atrocities, the consequences of which are still coming to light, and continues to impede the establishment of a regional, if not global, peace.

Gambling on regime change, the Greater doctrine inspired multiple military interventions that created waves of migration on a scale not seen since the end of the Second World War, and provoked rupture, reshaping, and the relocation of a terrorist threat now inseparable from the mechanisms of globalization.<sup>2</sup> Finally, it contributed to destroying the remaining major sources of structural stability at an epicenter of crises where a new Great Game has begun to play out: a breeding ground for many kinds of danger. In a different style, the two Obama administrations did not fundamentally break with the Greater agenda, pursuing the same objectives despite moving away from large-scale military intervention toward multiple covert operations involving drones, special forces, and auxiliary forces.

This “democratic” will to pursue the Greater agenda through other means is consistent with the rationale perfectly described by former spymaster George Friedman: “to rebalance America” by trying to reconcile the messianic dimension of what he calls “the accidental empire” with the “Republican” values of its Founding Fathers; or in other words to ensure the re-establishment of American hegemony in the face of Russian resurgence, neutralizing Europe while containing the strategic consequences of China’s economic expansion and preserving the supremacy of the US Navy on the seas and oceans.<sup>3</sup>

A new version of the “free world,” the Holy Empire against the “Evil Empire,” the main result of this “divine” mission was to stir up a new and radically active Cold War across multiple asymmetric conflicts in the Middle East, including in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Qatar. It features a clear opposition between two camps or blocs: on one side the United States, their European allies, the Gulf

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1 Michel Raimbaud, *Tempête sur le Grand Moyen-Orient* (expanded and updated second edition) (Paris: Editions Ellipses, 2017).

2 Richard Labévière, *Terrorisme, Face Cachée de la Mondialisation* (Paris: Editions Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2016).

3 George Friedman, *The Next Decade: Empire and Republic in a Changing World* (New York: Anchor, 2012).

states (Qatar, too close to Iran, has been ostracized) and Israel; and on the other, Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah forces, and other Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani Shiite organizations. Eventually, one of the two sides in this Cold War must win in Syria, which could be the focal point and epicenter of a new Peace of Westphalia, or even an “Eastern Yalta” that results in a new carve-up of the world.

Following the recapture of Aleppo by Syrian government forces and their Russian, Iranian, Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite militia allies in December 2016, the same game was afoot during summer 2017. In addition to the recapture of Mosul and the liberation of Raqqa (seat of the Syrian forces of “Islamic State” (ISIS)), fighting was focused in the east of Syria and the oil fields between the towns of Deir ez-Zor and Daraa. At the intersection of the vast eastern, Asian, African, and Mediterranean tectonic plates, the battle for Eastern Syria constitutes the latest twist in a global confrontation that pits two contradictory and irreconcilable cartographic visions against one another. At the heart of this geography of war,<sup>4</sup> three countries all aspire to be the dominant regional power: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran.

## **Two Cartographic Visions and Three Regional Powers**

**A**s part of the “war on terror” declared by George W. Bush the day after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States and NATO launched a number of military operations in Afghanistan, ostensibly to wipe out the hiding places of Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda, who had claimed responsibility for the dramatic attacks on American soil. Carried out primarily from the air, these interventions did not result in the eradication of Al-Qaeda, the capture of bin Laden, or a reduction in the level of the terrorist threat.

Al-Qaeda reorganized itself across Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the tribal areas of Waziristan, Southeast Asia, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa. Osama bin Laden passed through Karachi and Islamabad before settling in Abbottabad in Northern Pakistan, a town known for its military academy, university institutions, and tourist attractions. Some Al-Qaeda fighters joined Taliban militias; others set up in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Southern Philippines, Yemen, and Somalia; and the rest returned to their countries of origin to continue the jihad in places such as Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia.

The next stage of the “War on Terror” was the invasion of Iraq in spring 2003. Regardless of the government lies, obligingly relayed by the international press, about untraceable weapons of mass destruction and imaginary links between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, Washington decided to take control of the most strategically important country in the region and its oil reserves, the second largest in the world after those of Saudi Arabia. The US Army easily

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4 Yves Lacoste, *La Géographie, Ça Sert d’Abord à Faire la Guerre* (Paris: Editions Maspéro, 1976).

gained a foothold in Baghdad, but quickly found itself faced with an insurrection that took up all of its resources despite the fact that its objective was to use Iraq as a platform from which to project forces toward all its neighboring countries. By dismissing the officers of the Iraqi army and Baath Party—dominated by Sunnis—Washington destroyed the country's power structures, which then fell into the hands of their Shiite rivals. As George Friedman describes: “[t]errified of a Shiite government (which, incidentally, would have some affinity with the Shiite majority that dominated Iran), the Sunnis in Iraq were put in a position where they had nothing to lose and embraced random shootings and roadside bombs ...”<sup>5</sup>

In the longer-term—as in Afghanistan—ethnic and tribal polarization quickly overran a nation state framework, which exploded along ethnic-religious divides. Today—de facto—the Iraqi nation state no longer exists, torn between a quasi-independent Kurdistan, a southern marshland area in the hands of Shiite forces that is relatively autonomous from Baghdad, and with the rest of the country under the control of Mafia-like Sunni militia. This territorial and political fragmentation would go on to inspire an equally representative situation in Muammar Gaddafi's Libya.

Supported by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, Paris and London—with support from Washington and NATO—launched a military operation in Libya on March 19, 2011 to support the rebellion in Benghazi (in the east of the country).<sup>6</sup> This continued until October 31, 2011, with Muammar Gaddafi mortally wounded on October 20, 2011 during an operation overseen by Western special forces. The same causes produced the same effects, and the collapse of Libya ensued. Today—de facto—the Libyan nation state no longer exists, torn between a United Nations-backed government in Tripoli (in the west), an autonomous region in the hands of General Khalifa Haftar (in the east, including Benghazi), and the south of the country—the Fezzan—where several dozen jihadi camps can be found in a line from Sabha to Ghat, on the Algerian border.

These two examples perfectly illustrate the old principle of the *Imperium Romanum*: divide and conquer, the organic nature of all forms of imperial and colonial hegemony. This old formula notably inspired David Ben-Gurion's famous 1948 speech calling for the exploitation of minority divisions in the Middle East, and Oded Yinon's plan published in the journal *Kivunim* in 1982.<sup>7</sup> This strategic guidance document argued that it was in Israel's interest to favor creation in the Arab world of antagonistic microstates that were too weak and too divided to offer

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5 Friedman, *The Next Decade*.

6 Resolution 1973 was adopted on March 17, 2011. It followed Resolution 1970, and enabled any country wishing to do so to contribute to a no-fly zone over Libya in order to protect the civilian population, and to “take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970 (2011), to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.”

7 Journal published by the World Zionist Organization, based in Jerusalem.

it effective opposition: “The dissolution of Syria and Iraq later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas such as in Lebanon, is Israel's primary target on the Eastern front in the long run, while the dissolution of the military power of those states serves as the primary short term target ( ... ) Iraq, rich in oil on the one hand and internally torn on the other, is guaranteed as a candidate for Israel's targets. Its dissolution is even more important for us than that of Syria. Iraq is stronger than Syria. In the short run it is Iraqi power which constitutes the greatest threat to Israel.”<sup>8</sup>

In relation to and beyond the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, this *Imperium* comes back to the conceptual foundations of the Bush administration's Greater Middle East. More broadly still, it converges with the influential leanings of the economic, commercial, and financial globalization directed from the global decision-making centers of Wall Street, the City (London), and Brussels. Seeking widespread deregulation, this form of globalization detests three things: nation states, public services, and redistributive social policies. Like the Yinon Plan, such a shift posits the creation of microstates—like Kosovo (February 17, 2008) and South Sudan (July 9, 2011)—under the protection of Western powers and their oil companies, among others.

In contrast to this cartographic vision, which posits the fragmentation, if not retribalization, of the globe, Russia, China, and their allies present an opposing vision founded on the principle of state equality and sovereignty. This is the subject of Article 2 (paragraph 1) of the United Nations charter: “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members,” with sovereignty defined as possessing a supreme nature that does not submit to any other. As a result, all states subject to international law are necessarily sovereign states: it would appear to be the very essence of statehood. With events in Libya having left a lasting impression, Moscow and Beijing are now committed to defending the borders of United Nations member states, beginning with those in the Middle East.

A product of the First and Second World Wars, this counter-globalization cartographic vision is opposed to all forms of partition, cantonization, or federalization of the countries in the Arab-Muslim world, which are directly targeted by implementation of the Greater Middle East doctrine. The consequences ensuing from this confrontation affect the future of three countries in the area that each seek to become “the” dominant regional power: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran.

The first of these has been an historic ally of the United States since the signature of the Quincy Pact (February 14, 1945), which was renewed for sixty years by George W. Bush in 2005, and with the signing of “tremendous” business deals during Donald Trump’s visit to Riyadh on May 20, 2017. With Washington’s

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8 Oded Yinon, “A Strategy for Israel in the 1980s,” trans. Israel Shahak, *Kivunim*, no. 14 (1982).

support, the Wahabi monarchy seeks to extend its domination across the whole of the Arab-Muslim world. The second, Turkey—the world's fifteenth-largest economy—seeks to restore the Caliphate within its historic borders and its Turkmen sphere of influence in Central Asia, playing Washington and Moscow off against each other in order to counter the emergence of Kurdish groups (except in Iraq) on its borders, a legacy of the treaties that marked the end of the Ottoman empire. Finally, Iran—home to a 7000-year-old culture—aspires with support from Moscow and Beijing to re-establish its historic role as a bridge between Asia (India and China), the Middle East, and their African and Mediterranean outlets.

The intentions of the first two countries suit Washington's aims as they strengthen the re-establishment of its imperial power, while Iran consolidates the Russian and Chinese agenda based on the perennial existence of the nation states formed from the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Ultimately, this battle of maps and pivotal powers impacts on the search for an end to the crisis in the Middle East. Achieving such a peace will be highly challenging, as it depends not only on resolution of the Syrian crisis and its Yemeni and Bahraini off-shoots, but also on a return to the forgotten centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The adoption of a future "Peace of Westphalia" and "Eastern Yalta," which will have a major impact on the new landscape of international relations for decades to come, depends on the diplomatic and political management of these interlinked crises. Such issues require us to revisit the "symptomatic" foundations of the Greater Middle East and the very conceptual foundations of neoconservative ideology.

## **Doctrine, Ideology, and *Weltanschauung***

**P**resident George W. Bush was the first to allude to the doctrine of "remodeling the Greater Middle East" on February 26, 2003 during a meeting at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a neoconservative research center, before developing it further on May 9, 2003 during a speech at the University of South Carolina. The doctrine covered a huge range of states with different histories and cultures: the twenty-two countries of the Arab League and five non-Arab states (Israel, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). The original doctrine of the Middle East Partnership Initiative was thus remodeled into the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) with the aim to "transform the political and economic landscape" of the countries above.

During his State of the Union address on January 24, 2004, Bush explained: "As long as the Middle East remains a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends. So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the Greater Middle East"—thus laying the foundations for what would later be called

the Bush Doctrine. The ideological basis of the doctrine has a long history. Its creators—Douglas Feith, William Kristol, Daniel Pipes, and Jeane Kirkpatrick, among others—began by criticizing the “permissiveness” of Jimmy Carter and his secretary of state Cyrus Vance before joining the Republican party when Ronald Reagan came to power on January 20, 1981.

Contesting the legitimacy of the United Nations, this neoconservative school advocated unconditional defense of the Jewish state while drawing closer to the Committee on the Present Danger—an interest group focused on radical hostility to the Soviet “Evil Empire”—of which Ronald Reagan was a former member. Many neocons were then members of the Republican party, although some, such as Richard Perle, remained with the Democrats.

After the Reagan presidency, the neocons were sidelined. Advocating a “realist” foreign policy, George Bush Senior held them at arm’s length, most notably when they pushed him to overthrow Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. But the rise of radical Islam put them back in business. In the late 1990s, neoconservatism experienced a resurgence thanks to a new generation of activists such as Robert Kagan, who edited *The Weekly Standard* magazine with William Kristol. In 1997, neocons Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and William Kristol created the Project for the New American Century, which was explicitly intended to impose American hegemony in the next century by preventing the emergence of any rival power; to create a new world order based on moral consensus; and to launch multiple military interventions through coalitions of convenience. They were supported by numerous Republican decision-makers including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Robert Kagan, recognized as “the” theorist behind American unilateralism.

It was with the election of George W. Bush in 2001 and the appointment of Paul Wolfowitz as deputy secretary of defense, with the active contribution of Richard Perle, chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee, that this ideology reached its peak. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, unconditional support for Israeli military operations and the extension of settlements in Palestine, the break-up of Libya in 2011, and equally unconditional support for Saudi interventions in Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, were the product of this neoconservative ideology.

One of the masterminds behind this shift in American policy toward internationalism and so-called “democratic” messianism was historian Bernard Lewis, who coined the phrase “clash of civilizations.” Born in Great Britain, he now holds American and Israeli citizenship. Outside of his academic activities, he remains a controversial figure due to his defense of Israel, his apologism for Western military interventions, and his repeated denial of the Armenian genocide—for which he was prosecuted in France under Article 1382 of the French Civil Code for “fault” and “causing damage to another person.”

During the Reagan presidency, Bernard Lewis—an advisor to Benjamin Netanyahu, then Israeli ambassador to the United Nations (1984–88)—also devised the four pillars of neoconservative ideology: denial of the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the arc of crises in the Middle East; transformation of the region purely as a question of security and the fight against terrorism; the priority henceforth given to regime change in Israel's neighboring countries; and finally, the ultimate recommendation to no longer speak of the "Arab world" but of groups, microstates, and tribes, in line with the order for territorial and political fragmentation outlined in the Yinon Plan. In a further echo of the Holy Roman Empire, but established on an explicit ideology, the neoconservatives imposed a *Weltanschauung*, a "world vision" consistent with Anglo-American views of globalization founded on "democracy" and free enterprise.

This *Weltanschauung* obtained support from the European Union, unable to transcend its status as financial backer for the Palestinian Authority and establish itself as a political mediator. It spread across Europe to Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and in particular to France, where it became the primary reference point for our foreign policy following the G8 summit in Evian in June 2003.<sup>9</sup> In the closing years of the reign of Jacques Chirac, who had been attacked in the United States and Great Britain for refusing to support the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in spring 2003, Chirac allowed himself to be convinced to give full support to Resolution 1559, which was adopted by the Security Council in September 2004, spelling the end of forty years of Gaullian diplomacy in the complex world of the Middle East.

## A Catalog of French Failures

Nicknamed "La Meute" (the Pack) or "La Secte" (the Faction), French neo-conservatives gained ground during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, their notable successes including France's return to the NATO military command in April 2009 and the priorities of its Middle Eastern policy. This petered out as the poorly-prepared launch of a Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was nipped in the bud by Chancellor Angela Merkel, and her firm line on Iranian nuclear weapons did not entail any recognition of Israel or the Gulf monarchies.

Rapprochement with Doha and Sarkozy's plan to make Qatar the pillar of our "new Arab policy" had two damaging consequences with long-term effects. The first of these was to strengthen the diplomatic megalomania of the Wahabi micro monarchy, home to the Muslim Brotherhood—one of the core ideological vectors of radical Islam, which targeted our soldiers in Mali and caused multiple attacks on national soil. The second was to open up the French market to full-scale investment from the emirate in support of substantial tax exemptions.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Labévière, *Le Grand Retournement—Bagdad/Beyrouth* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006).

The pursuit of Gulf money became established as one of the primary drivers of our diplomatic policy. The press revealed that Qatar had paid, in full, for the president of the Republic's divorce and for the liberation of Bulgarian nurses imprisoned in Gaddafi's Libya—symptomatic of a diplomatic policy that privileged media and compassionate successes over a foreign policy built around the core interests of our country.

But it was in the face of the misnamed “Arab revolutions,” and events in Syria in particular, that the failures proved even greater still. In January 2011, while Tunisia was in turmoil following the public suicide of a young vegetable vendor, foreign affairs minister Michèle Alliot-Marie offered “French expertise” to Ben Ali's police in order to cope with the street demonstrations. Equally out of his depth amid the Egyptian protests that brought down president Hosni Mubarak, the new head of France's foreign ministry—Alain Juppé—went to Cairo to offer France's economic support ... to the Muslim Brotherhood! One year later, Juppé took the astonishing decision to close France's embassy in Damascus.

What had happened since Bashar al-Assad sat in the official gallery for the Bastille Day parade on July 14, 2008? Looking to reproduce a line from the Chirac playbook of a special relationship between France and Baathist Syria, Nicolas Sarkozy invited the Syrian president to Paris on July 8, 2008, first to meet the new president of the Lebanese Republic, Michel Suleiman, in the presence of the emir of Qatar, and secondly to include him in the launch of the UfM. But the grand plan hidden behind this highly publicized invitation lay in Sarkozy's hope of driving a wedge in Syrian and Iranian relations, with the aim that the Damascus government would distance itself from its strategic ally: the Islamic Republic of Iran. Sarkozy's error was threefold: he misunderstood the historic nature of the Syrian-Iranian alliance, overestimated the weight of Qatar as a player in the Middle East, and finally, misjudged the personality of Bashar al-Assad.

The shockwaves of an illusory “Arab Spring” were lost in the sands even as Washington prepared an equally illusory “Thermidorian” response: supporting the Muslim Brotherhood's accession to power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and ... Syria. Fearing that Al-Qaeda would seize upon ongoing movements and prevent the Greater doctrine, in which “revolutions” played a major role, from becoming a reality, American special forces attacked Osama bin Laden's Abbottabad resort on May 2, 2011, killed him, and buried him at sea.

In Syria, the initial protests, which took place in March 2011 in Daraa—a city near the border with Jordan—quickly descended into armed confrontation even while the Western press were stressing their “peaceful” nature. The Syrian Armed Forces were targeted from the roofs of working-class neighborhoods by snipers wearing balaclavas, and they responded by taking a dozen victims before the uprising spread to other cities across the country. During summer 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood launched the religious call to arms: “Alawites to the grave,

Christians to Beirut.” During winter 2011-12, armed confrontation became widespread, as a report censored by the Parisian press—“Syrie: une Libanisation Fabriquée” [Syria: a Manufactured “Lebanonization”]<sup>10</sup>—very clearly explains.

In March 2012, Paris broke off all diplomatic relations with Damascus. This decision was particularly damaging because it severed the close ties that had developed over several decades between the intelligence services of the two countries, notably in the context of co-operation over anti-terrorism, at a time when numerous jihadis of French origin were beginning to flock to Syria via Istanbul. The Turkish intelligence services flatly refused to assist their French counterparts until they provided them with information on Kurdish activists who had sought asylum in France. Now both deaf and blind, the French special services had to rely on the goodwill of their Jordanian, Lebanese, American, and Israeli counterparts.

This began a period during which, with no plan B in place, the French diplomatic service gambled and focused all of its hopes on the rapid downfall of Bashar al-Assad, feeding the incantatory rhetoric of the “Butcher of Damascus” and the fabrication of an unlikely and fictitious “moderate,” “secular,” and even “democratic” opposition. Notes leaked to the press from the foreign ministry’s Centre d’Analyse et de Prévision (CAP, Center for Analysis and Planning), emphasizing the “Islamization” of the opposition to Bashar al-Assad, were abandoned to the gnawing criticism of the mice.

Upon his accession to power in 2012, François Hollande did not break with the line set by his predecessor. On the contrary, while unloading the brief onto his foreign affairs minister Laurent Fabius, the president took an even harder line, increasing emotive reactions and giving free rein to ad-libbing with a sole focus on the theme of human rights. The decision to align with Saudi Arabia was however clearly dictated by the demands of an “economic diplomacy” launched with Qatar during the Sarkozy era.

Before the sarin gas attack in Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus—the origin of which remains unclear—, several reports from the foreign ministry concluded that public opinion should be prepared for the idea of military intervention in Syria. Laurent Fabius explained this strategy in the France 2 television studio on June 5, 2013. On August 21, the chemical attack in Ghouta was immediately attributed to the Syrian government forces. France dispatched a frigate off the coast of Syria, put the Rafale fighter jets at the Abu-Dhabi base on alert, and prepared the Mirage 2000 fighters on British bases on Cyprus. The UK parliament voted against intervention, followed by Barack Obama who backed the agreement on Syrian chemical weapons led by Russian foreign secretary Sergey Lavrov during the G20

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10 Report produced by the Centre International de Recherche et d’Études sur le Terrorisme et d’Aide aux Victimes du Terrorisme (CIRET-AVT, International Center for the Research and Study of Terrorism and Help for the Victims of Terrorism) in collaboration with the Centre Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement (CF2R, French Center for Intelligence Research), Paris, January 2012 (translated into English and Arabic).

summit in Saint Petersburg on September 5 and 6, 2013. Losing face, François Hollande recalled the French troops who had been put on stand-by.

On June 9, 2014, ISIS seized control of Mosul, Iraq's second city. On June 29, ISIS proclaimed a Caliphate. The French foreign ministry then introduced a new credo, "neither ISIS/nor Bashar," accusing the Syrian president of fabricating ISIS from scratch! Failing to recognize either that the emergence of ISIS was a by-product of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, or the support lent by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait to the terrorist organization, Paris sent arms (including FAMAS assault rifles and MILAN missiles) to groups of the Free Syrian Army (FSA).<sup>11</sup> Some of these materials were resold to terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda in Syria), while in August 2012 Laurent Fabius declared that "Bashar al-Assad does not deserve to live." In December 2012, he added that the "boys of the Al-Nusra Front are doing a good job," even though this jihadi organization had just been classified as a "terrorist" group by the United States.<sup>12</sup>

On several occasions, my colleague Renaud Girard of *Le Figaro* presented a clear deconstruction of this "neither/nor," noting that Syrian government army soldiers did not threaten French interests, while terrorist groups active in Syria had recruited and armed the activists who murdered young French people in the streets of Paris.<sup>13</sup> As for financial support for the spread of radical Islam and terrorist groups active in Syria and Iraq, the French press eventually published a number of reports, investigations, and testimonies proving the culpability of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait in particular.

Alain Chouet—former head of the DGSE (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure, France's external intelligence agency)—wrote: "French political leaders cannot continue to ignore the existence of the political, ideological, and financial abettors and support that have stoked and mishandled Salafist violence for thirty years in an attempt to preserve their faltering legitimacy in the face of competition from Islamic Iran and from democratic changes. It is in our interest to strongly oppose such support through both political and diplomatic means."<sup>14</sup>

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11 The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was formed on July 29, 2011. It was the main armed force in opposition to the government of Bashar al-Assad and his regular army, before being supplanted by jihadi and Salafist factions. Initially formed of former Syrian army officers, it quickly split into over fifty factions, including the Ahdaf al-Rasul Brigade, the Farouq Brigade, the Hazzm movement, the Yarmouk Army, the Sham Legion, the Levant Front, the Sword of the Levant Brigade, the Al-Rahman Legion, the 1<sup>st</sup> Coastal Division, the 101<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, the Mountain Hawks Brigade, the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, the Fastaqim Kama Umirt Union, the Martyrs of Islam Brigade, the Northern Division, the Northern Storm Brigade, the Sultan Murad Division, and the Raqqa Revolutionaries Brigade. Other groups formed part of the FSA before withdrawing from it, including the al-Tawhid Brigade, the Suqour al-Sham Brigade, and Liwaa al-Umma.

12 *Le Figaro*, December 10, 2014.

13 Renaud Girard, "La France doit sortir de son aveuglement néoconservateur au plus vite," *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 2016.

14 Alain Chouet, preface to Richard Labévière, *Terrorisme*.

Laurent Fabius's final triumph concerned the issue of Iranian nuclear weapons. Moments before finalization of an agreement between Iran and the so-called P5+1 group of Western powers (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China, and Germany) on July 14, 2015 in Vienna, the head of French diplomatic policy was still voicing his objections and criticism. On July 7, 2015, the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* noted: "on his trip to Israel and Egypt last month, Laurent Fabius surprised his companions by speaking of the possible danger of any agreement, as it would encourage Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and the Middle East more generally, to develop their own nuclear capacity. One observer remarked that Fabius appeared to be *'no less convinced on this issue than Netanyahu'*."

In fact, "in the last two years, Laurent Fabius has become the 'bad cop' in the Iranian nuclear negotiations, a reputation he earned in particular for having torpedoed the temporary agreement of November 2013 by calling for a new round of negotiations before final signature of the agreement. The fact that the temporary agreement did not lead to the lifting of any sanctions or access to frozen oil assets owes a great deal to French pressure," the Israeli newspaper added.

Although Laurent Fabius visited Tehran with a MEDEF (Mouvement des Entreprises de France, a business lobbying group) delegation a few days later—at the invitation of his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif—"the authorities of the Islamic Republic will not easily forget a position that consisted of defending the interests of Tel-Aviv above those of Paris," noted a senior figure from the Iranian ministry of foreign affairs.<sup>15</sup>

This review of trials and tribulations, properly termed "a catalog of French failures," sheds light on the probable reasons for the absence, if not exclusion, of our diplomatic service from the search for a solution in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. Despite an improvised last-ditch attempt to intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the French diplomatic service appears to have lost all say in the Middle East. Following the arrival of Emmanuel Macron in the Élysée Palace, can French foreign policy make progress, or even reform itself, in order to regain a place in Middle Eastern affairs?<sup>16</sup> Can it rediscover its independence and creativity in order to retain its position in the New Great Game of the decade to come? In the highly volatile post-Brexit landscape, with the strategic resurgence of Russia and the election of Donald Trump, will it be able to build "alliances de revers" to protect its vital interests, as it did during the Thirty Years' War? We shall see ...

## **Awaiting a New Peace of Westphalia**

**I**n the immediate future, such a leap would require three shifts in policy: reconsideration of the sanctions against Russia in order to restore more balanced relations with Moscow; reopening our embassy in Damascus, if only to man-

<sup>15</sup> *Prochetmoyen-orient.ch*, September 19, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Macron, "L'Europe n'est pas un supermarché," *Le Figaro*, June 22, 2017.

age security and counterterrorism issues; and finally, reforming our foreign policy toward Iran, in particular through increased support to French businesses subject to the diktat of American banks. Although necessary, these various shifts are unlikely to be enough to enable France to fully enter into the new Middle Eastern Great Game underway in Syria.

The round that began in March 2011 has undergone radical transformation: the civil war has expanded into a widespread civil-global conflict. This global dimension is both the result and the cause of four levels of conflict, which do not simply compound one another but entangle, interact, and have an impact on all international relations.

The first of these is of course the creation of a new Cold War, a new “Russian evil,” despite the collapse and breakdown of the Soviet bloc. Millions of jobs depend on the re-establishment of this threat, not only in the American military-industrial complex, but also in the various analysis and intelligence services, and the myriad private consulting firms that specialized in, expanded, and were fed by a Soviet threat whose disappearance would now be an economic catastrophe.

Secondly, Saudi Arabia’s age-old obsession with re-establishing complete hegemony across the entire Arab-Muslim world through multiple direct and indirect confrontations, with the Shiite world, and in particular with Iran. Beyond events in Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, this strategy is driving Riyadh to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the United States to attract Donald Trump’s support, as a new guarantor of the historic Quincy Pact whose objective—security in exchange for oil—has now been renewed until 2065. And the Wahabi monarchy is not averse to propagating incidents and provocations, linked to its custodianship of the holy sites in Mecca and Medina, in order to support its claim to represent the “true Islam,” while pursuing a unique rapprochement with Israel.

Thirdly, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Turkey is sinking into authoritarian, even fascistic, tendencies, as it pursues a strategic obsession against the Kurds comparable to that of Saudi Arabia’s preoccupation with the Shia. The residual Kurdish irredentism of the PJAK in Iran and Kurdistan in Iraq, which has very cordial relations with Ankara, are unlikely to represent a real threat. Instead, it is in Syria that Ankara is cracking down and waging its primary war in order to destroy any vague hopes of a future Kurdistan regardless of its judicial and institutional status.

Fourthly and finally, the confrontation instigated by the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq between Al-Qaeda’s remaining “global jihadis”—the original wing—determined to pursue a holy global war in the name of the *Ummah*—the worldwide community of believers—and the “local jihadis” of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Supported by the Wahabi monarchies, the primary goal of these latter is to overturn the Shiite/Alawite powers in Iraq and Syria. This schism led to the creation of ISIS and the proclamation of the Caliphate in June 2014. The various operations led by different coalitions to liberate Aleppo (December 2016), then

Raqqa—the seat of ISIS in Syria—and the area around Mosul—the seat of ISIS in Iraq—do not target the same interests, nor the establishment of a lasting regional peace.

## **The Die Is Not Yet Cast**

**B**e that as it may, the ongoing break-up of ISIS territory (in Iraq and Syria) does not signal the end of the organization, with a multitude of armed factions having already taken up the banner in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Libya, and the rest of the Sahel-Saharan strip (from Mauritania to the Horn of Africa). In these various hubs of guerilla activity and failed states (rife with corruption, trafficking, and informal economies), ISIS and Al-Qaeda—or rather their primarily self-proclaimed franchises—will continue to wage rivalry, or even war, to establish the hegemony of terror. For the offshoots of ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the rules of the game boil down to a very simple challenge: who can create the most fear?

The Thirty Years' War played out on both the religious front of the clash between Protestantism and Catholicism, and on the political front of an institutional opposition between the feudal system and absolutism, the foundation of nation building. For the wars in the Greater Middle East, the religious confrontation sets the powers of the Christian West and Israel, allied to major Sunni countries and Wahabi monarchies, against a coalition led by an Orthodox Russia with Iran and its Alawite and Shiite partners from countries such as Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, and Afghanistan.

On the political front, the first camp can be seen as imperial—the new Holy Roman Empire—positing a form of globalization whose currents weaken and fragment nation states. In opposition, the second camp—Russia, China, Iran, Syria, and Shiite organizations—is a coalition founded precisely on the defense of nation states, albeit not devoid of its own desire to hegemonic pretensions, against the opposing empire, or even against an Anglo-American version of globalization.

With the Peace of Westphalia, the political issue was settled by the victory of the absolutist model, which also resolved the wars of religion. War was effectively waged in the name of rival conceptions of Good. By turning away from basing society on such a view of a Good imposed on all, the civil peace could then be built on the priorities shared by all human communities: fear and the rejection of violent death. In the form of absolutism, as described by Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, the modern nation was born: an entity exerting a monopoly on legitimate violence within its recognized borders and defending itself externally with a national army.

The Peace of Westphalia thus laid the foundations of European public law—*ius publicum Europaeum*—and inaugurated a new system of international rela-

tions founded on equality between all states, each the holder and guarantor of its own sovereignty. War was then seen as a secular action of one sovereign state against another sovereign state.

Today, between Russian talks in Astana and negotiations in Geneva under the aegis of the United Nations, not only the nature, reconfiguration, and future of political and geopolitical actors is effectively at stake, but also the nature of war, of a war that has spread and intensified through multiple military, economic, cultural, and digital forms and off-shoots. Conventional war is gone, and asymmetric, economic, cultural, and digital wars are waged everywhere. By rooting its use of terrorist methods in a specific territory, ISIS has also changed the nature of war and terrorism, through a form of terrorism whose ideals are now in conflict with those of contemporary globalization.

By seeking to act on the four interrelated levels of conflict examined above, a new Peace of Westphalia must not only produce an Eastern Yalta, the guarantor of a new methodology for international relations, but also provide a sustainable response and means of retaliation to current and future terrorist threats. We can only hope that it does not take thirty years for this Greater Middle East episode to result in a new equilibrium, if not a new international order.