



[Looking West](#)

Less Trump, More Europe!

America's Tilt Away from the Middle East
Requires Stronger European Commitment

[Edmund Ratka / Marc Frings](#)

US President Trump is continuing his country's withdrawal from the entanglements of the Arab world, a withdrawal that was already initiated under Obama. In political arenas such as the Saudi-Iranian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, the Trump administration has gambled away its ability to serve as a mediator by virtue of its unilateral measures. Germany and Europe will therefore face more responsibility.

Even though the “Arab Spring” protest movement largely failed, the region is still in a deep and protracted phase of upheaval, which affects both the domestic policy structures of the Arab states and the regional order. Under President Donald Trump, the United States largely intends to remain aloof from the inner workings of the Arab states. George W. Bush's attempt to “proactively” initiate a democratic revolution in the region is history, just as are Barack Obama's attempts to integrate Iran into the regional security architecture. Instead, Trump is taking a hard line against the Islamic Republic, and is relying on traditional US allies in the region. These include a number of pro-Western Sunni states – most important amongst them Saudi Arabia and Egypt – as well as Israel. In the Middle East conflict, the US under Trump has more clearly than ever supported the Netanyahu government, and has so far unilaterally increased pressure on the Palestinians.

Whether Trump's policy, which in this way differs from that of his two predecessors, will be successful, is more than uncertain. Simple arrangements with Arab autocrats will not lead to long-term stability and sustainable development in the region, nor will a “deal” between Israelis and Palestinians that does not take the legitimate interests of both sides into account. It is now up to Europe to compensate for Trump's withdrawal from the Middle East – if at all possible, without widening the rift with the US. If Europe – be it in the EU format, as part of ad-hoc coalitions of European states, or in the form of greater German-French cooperation – capitalises on this opportunity to enhance its capacity

for action in the region, it will also be taken more seriously in Washington as a potential partner. The US and Europe must endeavour to bring their political approaches closer together again, or to engage in complementary action as part of a transatlantic division of tasks, in view of newly strengthened regional actors, such as Russia.

Common Interest in Stability – But at What Price?

“We are not here to lecture – we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.”¹ Trump's address to the Arab Islamic American Summit in Riyadh in May 2017 made Washington's *realpolitik* course correction obvious. It was not democratic revolution that was to be supported, but the preservation of the status quo – especially in a fragile region like the Middle East. Autocrats, from Egyptian President el-Sisi, to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, will apparently once again be tolerated in the White House. Trump's penchant for strongly personalised foreign policy with “strong men” may well be reflected in this. However, the new US president is only consistently pursuing the course already set out by his predecessor: withdrawing the US from its entanglements in the Arab world. Obama was already distancing the country from the transformative Freedom Agenda for the region to which the US had committed itself under the neoconservatives during the George W. Bush presidency.

The disastrous consequences of the 2003 Iraq war were high among the factors that largely

discredited Bush's Freedom Agenda. In his celebrated 2009 Cairo speech, Obama promised "A New Beginning" in US relations with the Islamic world, marked by mutual respect. While Obama promoted human and civil rights, he made it clear that "No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other."² After the failure of the experiment in external democratisation in Iraq, came the hopes for democratic revolution via domestic protest movements, raised during the "Arab Spring" of 2011. These have in the meantime also largely been shattered. With the subsequent assassination of the US ambassador in Libya, the strengthening of political Islam in democratic elections, the military coup in Egypt, and Syria's descent into civil war, it became clear as early as 2012/2013 that the lofty expectations of democratisation in the Arab world would not be fulfilled so soon. The rise of Islamic State (IS), a terrorist group that was able to take advantage of the power vacuum in the region and carried out a series of attacks, some of them in the West, along with the migratory movements toward Europe in the years that followed did the rest: Stability – or more precisely, even short term – once again became the supreme maxim of Middle East policy.³

In Europe, discourse has also gone full circle. "The path to stability is through democracy,"⁴ said Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, a formulation that appeared to be the lesson from the fall of Ben Ali in Tunis and Mubarak in Cairo. During the peak of the "Arab Spring", this readjustment of both German and European perspectives on the region was accompanied by self-criticism for the previous Middle East policy, which had above all focussed on cooperation with autocratic governments, and underestimated the internal development dynamics of Arab countries. But in the face of the disintegration of state and regional order in its neighbourhood, which had immediate effects on Europe, there was a quick about-face here as well. "Resilience" is the new name of what is essentially an old theme; the concept is now prominent in many places, including the June 2016 European Union Global Strategy, which the EU intends to

promote in its eastern and southern neighbourhood: "A resilient country is a safe country, and safety is the key to prosperity and democracy."⁵ In other words, on both sides of the Atlantic, a paradigm of stability and security dominates policy; this certainly provides prospects for joint action. This is most evident in the fight against terrorism. For instance, within the framework of the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014, a US-led military alliance was forged to combat IS. The founding members include key European states such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Since then, around 80 countries and international organisations have joined. The fact that IS's territorial bases in Iraq and Syria were smashed is in no small part due to this international – and transatlantic – cooperation.

Geopolitical rivalries and traditional societal and ruling systems are responsible for the constant unrest in the Arab region.

Trump has continued this effort, which was begun under Obama, but at the same time has repeatedly emphasised that the allies must contribute more and relieve the load on the US. As early as April 2018, Trump announced that the US goal of destroying IS has almost been reached and that US' troops could soon be withdrawn: "Let other people take care of it now."⁶ When Trump actually announced the withdrawal of the remaining 2,000 US troops from Syria in December of 2018, the move was met with dismay not only among Western and regional allies, such as the Kurds, but also in Washington itself. The fear is that the move will cost the West even more influence. Following the announcement, US Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, and US envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Brett McGurk, both resigned. The Trump administration then emphasised that the withdrawal would be orderly, carried

out over several months, with a small contingent of US troops finally remaining in the field.⁷

As problematic as the US withdrawal may be in individual cases for the situation on the ground, the fact that regional players should assume more responsibility for the security, stability, and development of their own region is a concern that Trump shares with the Europeans. This is illustrated by the German federal government's 2016 "enable and enhance initiative", which also includes three Arab priority countries, Tunisia, Jordan, and Iraq, which are receiving security policy support and training. There is little doubt that such measures could be leveraged if Europeans and Americans were to succeed in better meshing their approaches.

Beyond the specific situation in Syria - where the continued existence of the Assad regime, and the pronounced Iranian and Russian presence pose special challenges for Americans and Europeans - both sides of the Atlantic share a fundamental interest in restoring the integrity and ability to act as functioning states to sources of conflict such as Libya, Iraq, and Yemen. Nevertheless, neither Washington nor European capitals should forget that, in addition to geopolitical rivalries, it is ultimately structural problems in the traditional societal, economic, and ruling systems in Arab countries that keep the region in a constant state of unrest.⁸ Merely relying on potentates to hold their countries together with strong-arm tactics, thus allegedly keeping refugees and terrorists out of the West, is not sufficient. Without reforms that are as inclusive as possible and broaden at least the socio-economic and, ideally, the political basis of participation, countries in the Middle East and North Africa will not enjoy sustainable stability. In addition to this *realpolitik* argument, there is also a normative one. If the West wishes to continue to be a community of values, it cannot remain indifferent to gross violations of human and civil rights elsewhere. In view of the extreme focus on a state-centred status quo in US Middle East policy under Trump, it is all the more incumbent on Europeans to engage the ruling elite in Arab countries in a critical dialogue surrounding these

Iran



issues, and to involve and strengthen the forces of reform within civil society, wherever possible. Obama's long-standing foreign policy advisor, Ben Rhodes, recently encouraged Europe to take a "clear stance" in human rights questions: "Now that the American voice on democracy and human rights has gone silent, it is important for Europe to take this step and become the global spokesman."⁹

Geopolitics in the Gulf: With Riyadh Against Tehran?

The common interest of Europeans and Americans in stability is especially great in the Gulf region. The Sunni ruling houses in the six Gulf monarchies (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman), which have joined together to form the Gulf Cooperation Council, are traditional allies of the West. As early as 1942, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the founder of Saudi Arabia, Abdelaziz bin Saud, concluded an alliance



Bogeyman Iran: Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement counteracts previous efforts aimed at mediation and de-escalation in the region. Source: © Amir Cohen, Reuters.

between their countries, which was essentially an American guarantee of security in exchange for access to Arab oil.

Even though Europe, and to a greater extent the US – thanks to its shale gas extraction – have become less dependent on oil imports in recent years, the stability and security of the region that has the largest oil reserves and is the biggest oil producer remains of vital economic interest to industrialised countries due to its influence on global market prices. This is especially true in view of Trump's reinstated sanctions regime against Iran. More than that, the Gulf States are important trading partners for Europe and the US. In 2017, the EU countries alone exported goods worth 100 billion euros to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The EU is the Gulf Cooperation Council's most important trading partner.¹⁰ The economic reforms initiated in Saudi Arabia under "Vision 2030" are expanding the demand for consumer goods and include large infrastructure projects. They thus

offer new opportunities for Western companies. Finally, the US has had military bases in the region for decades (in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman), as has France, since 2009 (in the UAE), and the United Kingdom, since 2018 (in Bahrain). This makes these states pillars of military power projection, especially for the United States, whether to operate against IS in Syria, al-Qaida in Yemen, or to secure trade routes.

Moreover, in view of state disintegration in the region, Saudi Arabia is now also considered by many to be the "only remaining Arab stabilising power".¹¹ As protector of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, the kingdom exerts influence throughout the entire Islamic world. Riyadh would thus also play a significant role in any peace agreement between Israel and Arab-Muslim countries, and any resolution to the Middle East conflict. Against this background, the stability paradigm remained valid even during the Arab Spring. When the protests in Bahrain were violently suppressed with support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Western criticism was much more muted than it was for similar actions elsewhere, and no action was taken at all.

Although this status quo-oriented basic view has remained a constant for years on both sides of the Atlantic and will continue to exist, Donald Trump's election as US President heralded a course change that ultimately tore apart the joint transatlantic approach to the Gulf. It is worth noting that the new president's first trip abroad was to Saudi Arabia in May 2017. Security for the region and job security for the US was the *leitmotif* of Trump's visit. Saudi investments in the US worth more than 400 billion USD were agreed upon, and contracts for arms purchases worth about 110 billion USD were concluded. The second great focus of Trump's visit, and the

real break with the Obama administration's policy, was Iran. During his visit to Riyadh, Trump used his keynote address to representatives of more than fifty Muslim countries to accuse the Iranian government of providing terrorists with "safe harbour, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment". He said that Iran had "fuelled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror" for decades.¹² Trump held to this line of argument in his justification for US termination of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran in May 2018. The "deal" did not ensure peace, he said, since it failed to limit Iran's destabilising activities in the region.¹³

The Trump administration's Gulf policy is thus to maintain stability and security by strengthening Saudi Arabia, and containing Iran. In contrast, the strategy pursued by the Obama administration and Europe (in this case, with the EU and Germany, France, and the United Kingdom as negotiating partners) focussed on limiting Iran's nuclear capabilities and the associated risk of war, while incrementally integrating Iran via the nuclear deal into a regional security architecture and ultimately encouraging more cooperative behaviour in other areas of conflict in the Middle East as well. Two years after the deal was signed in 2015, Europe should have been more open to the indeed justified criticism from Washington – shared beyond Trump's decision-making circle, especially from the Republican Party – that Iran had not stopped its expansionary regional policy, but had instead invested the dividends gained from the lifting of sanctions in that very policy.

Divergent US and European approaches complicate relationships to important partners in the Persian Gulf.

But that must not obscure the fact that Europe was and remains prepared to take action to counter threats issued by the Islamic Republic. It continues to demand a real political process

that would ideally end the Assad regime, which is allied with Tehran. However, this outcome does not currently appear likely. In Yemen, the EU supports the internationally recognised, albeit domestically disputed government that is also an ally of the Saudis. Along with the US, the United Kingdom and France also supply weapons to Saudi Arabia. These weapons are used in the Yemen war against the Houthis, who are loosely allied with Iran. The nuclear deal, which Europe supports, forbids Iran from developing ballistic missiles that are capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

A common transatlantic position in dealing with Iran, with a corresponding shift in emphasis, would have been conceivable after the Obama administration. But Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, and his apparently unconditional support for Saudi Arabia, constitute an extreme position that counteracts previous Western efforts aimed at mediation and de-escalation in the region.

It is unlikely that the US president will change this position. Even after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist living in the US, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, in October 2018, triggered a wave of criticism of Saudi Arabia, especially in Washington, Trump has remained steadfast. The US did quickly impose entry bans against the Saudi suspects (as did Germany, the United Kingdom, and France shortly afterwards) and admonished the Saudi royal family to clarify what had happened. But Trump also emphasised that Saudi Arabia had been a "a great ally in our very important fight against Iran. The United States intends to remain a steadfast partner of Saudi Arabia to ensure the interests of our country, Israel, and all other partners in the region."¹⁴ Meanwhile, Saudi policy has received more critical attention since Khashoggi's murder, not only in European, but also in American public discourse and politics. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham called for harsh sanctions against Saudi Arabia, and his fellow Republican Robert Corker accused the White House of "moonlight[ing] as a public relations firm for the Crown Prince of Saudi

Arabia”.¹⁵ The US Senate passed a resolution (which is not legally binding) calling for an end to American support for Saudi Arabia in the Yemen conflict. Another resolution expressed the belief that “Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi”. The European Parliament also passed a resolution calling for an EU-wide halt to weapons exports to Saudi Arabia and taking Crown Prince bin Salman personally to task for his country’s human rights record.¹⁶ While the German federal government, in view of the Khashoggi case, had already decided to cancel even approved weapons exports to Saudi Arabia, France and other EU member states were not prepared to take similar steps.

Ultimately, the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia, remain important but difficult partners. As welcome as the rapid socioeconomic opening of the country may be, the centralisation of political power, the restrictive approach to opposition, and the Kingdom’s aggressive foreign policy give rise to criticism. The conduct of the war in Yemen, the blockade of Qatar, and the temporary forced resignation of the Lebanese prime minister during his visit to Riyadh all rather detract from stability in the region. However, if Europe wishes to persuade Saudi Arabia and its Gulf State allies to adopt a more constructive regional policy, it should also emphasise that it takes their security concerns seriously. An important part of this is recognising Iran’s hegemonic ambitions and expansionary policies as a problem and striving to contain them. A combination of American pressure and conditional European incentives for Tehran could be productive here – if the will to pursue a joint or at least coordinated strategy re-emerges on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Middle East Problem: Is Trump Squandering a Chance at a Two-State Solution?

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both Americans and Europeans, especially Germany, share an interest in Israel’s security. At the same time, the Palestinians right to self-determination

and – after negotiating a solution with Israel – to their own state has, so far, been part of the transatlantic consensus on the Middle East. The US is Israel’s closest ally, and in international fora, such as the United Nations, traditionally defends it more steadfastly than many European countries do. However, since Ronald Reagan’s recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1988, all subsequent US presidents have pursued a strategy that essentially aims at striking a balance between Palestinians and Israelis based on the land-for-peace formula, which guarantees the security and recognition of Israel in return for a Palestinian state. Although the peace process, launched at the Oslo negotiations in the early 1990s, has been idle for years, and the Obama administration failed to achieve a breakthrough, that administration emphatically supported a two-state solution and attempted to at least limit the building of new Israeli settlements.¹⁷ Trump appears to be breaking with this foreign policy tradition. He is abandoning the primacy of negotiation, pursuing a unilateral approach, and no longer unconditionally supports a two-state solution.

Trump has so far been unable to resolve the Middle East conflict and has primarily acted according to Israeli interests.

Trump announced a “deal of the century” to end the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but has not yet formulated a strategy. His position, therefore, cannot yet be conclusively assessed. But in the first two years of his presidency, he has recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moved the US embassy there; cancelled 360 million USD in aid funds to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which supplies over five million Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories and neighbouring countries; reduced bilateral aid for the



Unveiling: With the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the transfer of the US embassy there, Trump has created facts. Source: © Ronen Zvulun, Reuters.

Palestinian Authority and economic projects on the West Bank and in Gaza by 200 million USD; closed the PLO office in Washington, which had previously functioned as a representation for Palestinians in the US; and closed the US Consulate in Jerusalem, which was dedicated to the Palestinian Territories, and is instead to be integrated into the US embassy in Jerusalem.

Trump and his Middle East team (led by Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt, his son-in-law and advisor Jared Kushner, and United States Ambassador to Israel David Friedmann) intend to reduce or pre-empt the so-called final-status issues, i.e. core areas of the conflict still to be negotiated, such as the status of Jerusalem, the treatment



of Palestinian refugees and their demands of return. It is true that Trump's Jerusalem decision left the recognition of borders to the parties involved in the conflict, and thus did not rule out a later consensual solution. Nevertheless, the US considers the question of the capital city to have been settled. Additionally, US treatment of UNRWA, the UN refugee aid agency, also gives

the impression that the refugee problem is considered purely a matter of finances and administration. This led Washington to call on Jordan to integrate the Palestinian refugees living there and remove their refugee status. This indicates that the US has no interest in true political negotiations with and between the two sides, but instead intends to dictate one roadmap and a possible agreement. Judging by Trump's steps so far, such an agreement would be strongly oriented on the views of the Israeli government. Meanwhile, the position of those on the Palestinian side who are willing to negotiate, is of frustration, as they feel excluded by US strategists; those in Israel who favour building settlements, rejoice.

Europe, on the other hand, continues to support a two-state solution and direct negotiations between the two sides. It is telling that 22 of the 28 EU members voted in the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017 to condemn the shifting of the US embassy to Jerusalem, among them Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.¹⁸ So far, no EU country has followed the American lead and moved its embassy to Jerusalem. The EU and its member states are thus sticking to the international consensus that the capital city question can only be finally resolved in the course of a peace agreement, and that the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem is not to be recognised.

Even though it is difficult to achieve unity among all EU countries, Europe can work in flexible formats to exert a moderating influence on the Israeli government. In the summer of 2018, for instance, the threat of the imminent demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, near Jerusalem on the West Bank, was put on the international agenda. This occurred after the Israeli supreme court declared the government's project of removing the shacks, which had been erected without official approval, to be legal. While Washington remained silent on the issue, international pressure generated by petitions from Europe have so far prevented the Israeli government from demolishing the village and forcibly resettling the Bedouins. It remains

unclear, however, whether and how Germany and other European countries might translate such efforts into a coherent, active role for Europe in resolving the Middle East conflict.

Differences in methodological approach and in the assessment of legal implications impede cooperation between Europe and the incumbent US administration. While the EU favours negotiations between two players who are on an equal footing, the US government marginalises the Palestinian perspective. As a normative, rule-based player in international relations, the EU will also find it difficult to work with Washington on the Middle East peace process if the Trump administration fails to accept the primacy of agreements under international law. One indication of this is the obvious assumption on the part of the US that attacking UNRWA can resolve the refugee question. In reality, however, even dissolving UNRWA would not change the status of Palestinian refugees, regardless of which generation they belong to. The EU has meanwhile helped temporarily resolve the financial crisis at UNRWA.¹⁹

In communication with Palestinians, Europe must express both support for a two-state solution and criticism of political injustices.

Given the lack of communication between Palestinian leadership and the US government, and the dismantling of diplomatic representation on each side, Washington is finding it increasingly difficult to gauge the mood of Palestinians. This means that it is already incumbent upon Europe to intensify its exchanges with Palestinian leadership and civil society. The viability of the Palestinian National Authority (PA) should be given special focus. This also means addressing the increasingly autocratic tendencies within the PA more clearly and openly than has as yet

been done. It additionally means, if necessary, making aid conditional upon a reduction of corruption and of the harassment of critical parts of civil society. The leadership under President Abbas must be made to understand clearly that European support of the Palestinian right to a state is not a blank cheque for poor governance.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that if the PA were to collapse, there would be immediate consequences for Palestinian resilience and Israel's security. Nor would it be clear that the political leadership would continue to pursue negotiations. Internationalisation strategies, such as the recognition of Palestine, its improved standing in international organisations, and boycott campaigns against Israel clearly show that the Palestinian government could count on the mobilising power of global civil society in circumventing state and diplomatic structures. Already today, many Palestinians assume that they can strengthen international opinion in their favour in a coalition of civil rights movements and lobby groups. This thesis is supported by the fact that American Jews, who tend to be more liberal, are increasingly distancing themselves from the policies of the Israeli government. According to a June 2018 survey, the majority of Israeli Jews (77 per cent) support Trump's handling of American-Israeli relations, while a majority of American Jews (57 per cent) oppose it.²⁰

While Palestinians have lost faith in the US as a mediator, and the two-state solution becomes increasingly improbable, it is up to the European Union to develop at least an interim strategy so as not to completely erode the hope of a two-state solution ever coming about. Because the Oslo model, i.e. bilateral negotiations under the aegis of a mediator, has not been successful for the past 25 years, Europe must consider an alternative conflict-settlement mechanism. Empirical studies show that the EU does not need to reinvent the wheel: Israeli and Palestinian majorities for a two-state solution would be more likely if a multilateral forum were to promote the Arab Peace Initiative.²¹ One possibility is a coalition of the members of the Quartet on the Middle East (the EU, the United Nations, the US, and

Russia) in conjunction with the central players in the region – Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The conclusion of the Iran nuclear treaty was impressive proof that coalitions formed for individual cases can also act effectively. The treaty came about at the prompting of Europeans; the US became involved only after the negotiation process was underway. The United States will ultimately have to be involved in any solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including a two-state solution. But as long as Trump is in charge of US Middle East policy, the two-state solution would be served by shifting the US's role from sole negotiator to negotiation participant.

When Trump speaks of an “ultimate deal”, he means one that encompasses the entire Middle Eastern region. Israel is currently trying to use small steps to expand its bilateral relations to the Arab Gulf States. It is using the common threat from Iran and benefitting from the current waning of importance of the Palestinian question on the regional and international agenda. However, the deepening of the Israeli-Arab rapprochement has so far taken place primarily at the government level. In recent years, Arab rulers have not prepared their populations to accept a new Israel policy, so scepticism continues to dominate among them. This is true even of states that have peace treaties with Israel. In the shadows and excluded from relevant societal forces, normalisation will reach its domestic policy limits. This became very clear in Jordan when anti-Trump protests broke out there in the aftermath of the Jerusalem decision. While Trump is taking a great risk here with his personalised leadership style, such as in his connections to the Saudi royal family, Europe could assume a sustainable mediating role between Israel and the Arab world precisely through its work in and with Arab civil society.

Conclusion

The Trump administration has made a course change in Iran policy and the question of the Middle East conflict. It has continued to distance the country from a transformative agenda, fundamentally reducing American involvement

in the region – a process which started under Obama. Nevertheless, the US remains a critical player in the region. Both its military and trade policy clout allows the US to exert more influence than Europe, which often struggles for unity. It is for this reason that if Europe wants to stabilise the region, it must increase its involvement and balance out US withdrawal. This will require more flexible formats. If it proves impossible to achieve unity among all member states, ad-hoc coalitions of member states (including a potential non-member state, the United Kingdom) can secure European ability to act in the Middle East. At the same time, pains should be taken to establish transatlantic cooperation wherever possible and, if necessary, on a selective basis. The negotiation of the Iran nuclear treaty and the successful fight against IS have shown how useful European leverage can be.

But ultimately, the future of the Middle East will be decided in the Middle East. The region is experiencing upheaval, states are disintegrating, and polarised societies are searching for identity and new models of coexistence. These far-reaching processes can be accompanied but not controlled linearly from outside. Even though these limitations on influence apply to both the US and Europe, much more is at stake for Europe, which borders on the Middle East geographically and whose culture is interwoven with it. Creating spaces for reforming voices to resonate, seeking a constructive, critical dialogue with elites, serving as a reliable partner and impartial mediator – it is time for Europe to assume more responsibility in its turbulent neighbourhood.

-translated from German-

Dr. Edmund Ratka is Desk Officer for the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Middle East and North Africa Department.

Marc Frings is Head of the Ramallah office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

- 1 Trump, Donald 2017: Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit, 17 May 2017, in: <https://bit.ly/2R6pZEw> [4 Dec 2018].
- 2 Obama, Barack 2017: A New Beginning: The President's Speech in Cairo, 4 Jun 2009, in: <https://bit.ly/2HmNHcl> [4 Dec 2018].
- 3 This approach is taken explicitly by political consultants that come from the Obama administration. See, for example, Karlin, Mara / Cofman Wittes, Tamara 2019: America's Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Jan / Feb 2019.
- 4 Westerwelle, Guido 2011: Bundestagsrede, 27 Jan 2011, in: *Deutscher Bundestag: Plenarprotokoll 17/87*, pp. 9767-9769. For an extended presentation of the German discourse on the "Arab Spring", see Ratka, Edmund 2014: *Deutschlands Mittelmeerpolitik: Selektive Europäisierung von der Mittelmeerunion bis zum Arabischen Frühling*, Baden-Baden, pp. 177-196.
- 5 European Union External Action Service 2016: *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union*, Brussels, p. 23.
- 6 Quoted in Talev, Margaret / Flatley, Daniel 2018: Trump Says He Wants U.S. Troops to Leave Syria Soon, *Bloomberg*, 3 Apr 2018, in: <https://bloom.bg/2uQHmTM> [4 Dec 2018].
- 7 See also Jaecke, Gregor / Gerlach, Sebastian 2019: US-Abzug aus Syrien mischt Karten neu. Zu den Folgen eines reduzierten Engagements der USA in dem Konfliktland, *KAS Country Report*, Jan 2019, in: <https://bit.ly/2Ramyws> [23 Jan 2019] and for the fundamental geopolitical implications of the Syria conflict, see Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2018: *Syrien - Der Krieg und die Folgen*, *Die Politische Meinung* 553, Dec 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2ByOJQT> [12 Feb 2019].
- 8 For the current discussion on the background and perspectives of the transformation process in the Arab world, see Birringer, Thomas / Ratka, Edmund 2018: *The Arab World Struggles for Order: Beyond Autocrats and Islamists - Is there a Liberal Alternative?*, *International Reports* 4/2018, pp. 60-72, in: <http://bit.ly/2Stokyr> [12 Feb 2019].
- 9 Rhodes, Ben 2019: "Trump ist Europa feindlich gesonnen". Obamas Ex-Berater über Amerika, den Westen und die Welt, in: *Internationale Politik* 01, Jan / Feb 2019, pp. 44-53, here: pp. 46-47.
- 10 Cf. European Commission 2018: *Countries and regions: Gulf region*, in: <https://bit.ly/2DvXTV> [4 Dec 2018].
- 11 Hermann, Rainer 2018: *Arabisches Beben: Die wahren Gründe der Krise im Nahen Osten*, Stuttgart, p. 120.
- 12 Trump 2017, n. 1.
- 13 Trump, Donald 2018: *Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*, 8 May 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2DuqpRC> [4 Dec 2018].
- 14 Trump, Donald 2018: *Statement from President Donald J. Trump on Standing with Saudi Arabia*, 20 Nov 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2FuWxh> [20 Nov 2018].
- 15 Quoted in Böhme, Christian / Seibert, Thomas 2018: *Pakt mit dem Prinzen*, in: *Tagesspiegel*, 23 Nov 2018, p. 7; see also Williams, Aime / England, Andrew 2018: *Trump affirms Saudi alliance despite Khashoggi case*, *Financial Times*, 20 Nov 2018, in: <https://on.ft.com/2A99ZeB> [21 Nov 2018].
- 16 European Parliament 2018: *The Killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul*, 2018/2885(RSP), 25 Oct 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2U68g1K> [4 Dec 2018].
- 17 Among Obama's final acts in office was allowing UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (23 Dec 2016) to pass by abstaining. The demands in the resolution including a halt to the building of settlements, an end to violence, local policy favouring a two-state solution, and - addressed to the international community - a clear policy differentiation between Israel and the territories occupied following 1967. Cf. Frings, Marc 2017: *Spätes Handeln, keine Folgen*, *KAS Country Report*, Jan 2017, in: <https://bit.ly/2sJ5bcm> [4 Dec 2018].
- 18 UN Resolution A/ES-10/L.22 (22 Dec 2017). Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Hungary abstained.
- 19 Cf. European Commission 2018: *The European Union proposes additional €40 million for Palestine Refugees to Keep Schools and Health Clinics Open*, Press Release, 27 Sept 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2HuGdaU> [4 Dec 2018]; see also Frings, Marc 2018: *Es braucht die UNRWA: Die USA verkennt erneut völkerrechtliche Grundsätze*, *Tagesspiegel Causa*, 29 Aug 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2U9DXyc> [4 Dec 2018].
- 20 Cf. American Jewish Committee 2018: *AJC Comparative Surveys of Israeli, U.S. Jews Show Some Serious Divisions*, 10 June 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2FTIBFW> [4 Nov 2018].
- 21 An August 2018 survey shows that a regionally embedded peace agreement has the greatest support in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Cf. PCPSR (Ramallah) / TSC (Tel Aviv): *The Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll*, in: <https://bit.ly/2MslYMf> [4 Dec 2018].