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IS THE MEDITERRANEAN STILL GEO-STRATEGICALLY ESSENTIAL?

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Is the Mediterranean Still Geo-strategically Essential?

By Barry Strauss

The Mediterranean Sea is today, as it has always been, a crossroads. The name itself testifies to that, as it means “the sea in the middle of the earth,” a Latin term reflecting an earlier Greek belief. We know better, or do we? From Syria to Libya and on the high seas, and with outside players including China, Iran, Russia, and the United States, the Mediterranean has reemerged of late as a cockpit of conflict. In an era of renewed Great Power competition, with a contrast between prosperity to the north and instability and poverty to the south and east, with revisionist powers present and with a clash of ideologies (Western secularism versus radical Islam) in the mix, the Mediterranean’s recent prominence is not surprising. The region was rarely completely at peace in the last century. Indeed, the Mediterranean is only returning to a role it has often played before, and for good reason. The Mediterranean is both a fault line of cultures in conflict and a geostrategic choke point.

Three continents meet around the Mediterranean: Africa, Asia, and Europe. Nowhere else on earth are three continents in such close proximity. Furthermore, the Mediterranean offers access to the Atlantic Ocean in the West and the Black Sea in the East, each through narrow waterways. In the West lies the Strait of Gibraltar between Europe and Africa, while in the East the Hellespont, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus separate Europe and Asia by the thinnest of margins. Ever since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Mediterranean has also been connected to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea. Even in ancient times, a series of small canals connected the Nile River—and, thereby, the Mediterranean—to the Red Sea, but they were in no way as efficient or as navigable as the Suez Canal.

In historical terms, the Mediterranean has often been the crucible of conflict between East and West. Think, for example, of the battles of Salamis between Greeks and Persians in 480 BC or Cannae between Rome and Carthage in 216 BC or Lepanto between the Ottoman Turks and a Christian alliance in 1571. Since the Middle Ages the Mediterranean has represented an often-shifting border between two great conquering religions, each with a claim to universality, Christianity and Islam.

The Mediterranean is an enclosed sea, about 2.5 million square kilometers in area. Warm and relatively tideless, it is generally navigable, although not without some challenging winds and currents. The ancients avoided sailing the Mediterranean in the winter. Yet they knew that it served as a highway, as a medium of exchange and a path of invasion. Plato’s Socrates put the Mediterranean’s centrality succinctly when he said: “We live around the sea like frogs around a pond” (Plato, *Phaedo* 109B).

The Romans called the Mediterranean *mare nostrum*, “our sea,” and with good reason. They were the first people in recorded history to unify the Mediterranean and to govern all the lands surrounding it. The Romans all but wiped out piracy. Under their rule, there was no major naval battle on the Mediterranean between the Battle of Actium in 31 BC and the Battle of Cape Bon in 468, with the exception of the Battle of the Hellespont in 324, for 350 to 500 years of peace.

Not only were the Romans the first people to unify the Mediterranean, they were the last. No other empire or hegemon has done the same since, although various powers, from the Arabs to NATO, have predominated in one period or another. That is surely a sign both of the competitors in the Mediterranean and of the challenge facing any one state to defeat all others in the region.

Historically, the Mediterranean has been a crossroads, and it remains so today. Currently the Mediterranean is bordered by nineteen separate countries, including two sovereign islands (Cyprus and Malta) as well as Gaza and British territories (in Cyprus and Gibraltar). In another sign of a crossroads: although the Mediterranean comes under the U.S. European Command, it is bordered by countries in CENTCOM (U.S. Central Command) and U.S. Africa Command.

Trade has always been a part of Mediterranean life, from the so-called thalassocracy or “sea domination” of Bronze-Age Minoan Crete, to the reflections of ancient trading patterns in Homer’s *Odyssey* (the Mycenaean Greeks traded in Sicily and Southern Italy), to the grain fleet that sailed from Egypt to feed imperial Rome, to the Arab, Italian, and Jewish merchants of the Middle Ages, to today’s European Union, in which the states of the southern rim live in very uneasy economic coexistence with the rich northern states like France (itself partly Mediterranean) and Germany. The flip side of trading is piracy and raiding, a recurring phenomenon in the region from the Sea Peoples who threatened empires at the end of the Bronze Age, to the Barbary Pirates of the nineteenth century. For a time in the early twenty-first century, piracy was a problem off the Horn of Africa, threatening shipping that had come through the Suez Canal. An international task force has, in recent years, successfully suppressed the threat.

But there are other, less violent challenges to the economy. The economic success and political stability of the European Union, particularly in northern Europe, make it a migrant magnet. In 2015, a very busy year for migration, over one million arrived in Europe by sea. Others came via the land route. That year Germany alone accepted nearly a million migrants, mostly from Syria. The ensuing political controversy continues to shape German (and European) politics. But migration is nothing new in the Mediterranean. The Late Antique and medieval periods, for example, saw various Germanic, Slavic, and Turkic peoples—some refugees, some conquerors—move into Mediterranean realms.

Since 1945, decolonization—the retreat of empire—has been a major theme of Mediterranean history. Colonization and conquest, however, have been more common motifs in the region over the millennia, beginning with Iron-Age Greek and Phoenician colonies from the Black Sea to Spain’s Atlantic Coast. Then there were the great, conquering empires. Macedon (and its successor states), Carthage, and Rome all carved out territorial empires within the Mediterranean and, in the case of Macedon and Rome, for example, beyond it.

Some of the most impressive Mediterranean conquests, however, were made by outside invaders. In ancient times, Assyria and Persia (both in the Achaemenid and Sasanian periods) expanded from southwestern Asia into the Levant and Egypt. In Late Antiquity, Germanic peoples, most notably Goths and Vandals, crossed the Rhine and Danube, invaded the Roman Empire, and conquered such Mediterranean lands as Spain, Italy, and North Africa. In the Middle Ages, the Arabs advanced from Arabia to conquer the Levant, North Africa, Spain, and Sicily, long governed parts of southern Italy and France, continually attacked Corsica and Sardinia, and even raided the Vatican. In modern times, Italy and France each acquired imperial positions in North Africa and in the Aegean and the Levant.

Hegemonic rather than territorial empires also have played a key role in Mediterranean history, as is only appropriate for a sea. Various states have sought bases to promote maritime trade and project naval power rather than lands to settle. In antiquity there was Athens; in the Middle Ages, Genoa and Venice; in more recent times, Britain's Royal Navy and the United States and its NATO allies have each dominated the Mediterranean Sea, but not without challenges. In the World Wars, Germany and Italy competed with the Allies for control of the sea. Russia, which has long had Mediterranean ambitions, continues today to project power in the region, most notably in Syria, where it has both an air base and a naval facility. China has recently become a major investor in such places as Greece, Israel, Italy, and Turkey.

Iran represents a different kind of hegemonic power in today's Mediterranean, working primarily through land forces and aviation rather than by sea. Iran has a strong presence in Syria and Lebanon, over a land bridge through Iraq. Its arc of influence extends eastward to Yemen, and further east into Central Asia. This marks the greatest extent of Iranian power since the Early Byzantine era.

And then there is Turkey. The Mediterranean is NATO's southern flank and, in Turkey, it also includes NATO's largest Old-World army. And Turkey is a restless ally under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, full of neo-Ottoman ambitions and eager to expand its influence. Turkey has proven a ripe target for the equally revisionist and immensely shrewd Vladimir Putin, who has successfully revived Russian power. Russia's sale of its S-400 air defense missile system has put a dent in NATO's armor, adding to U.S.-Turkish tensions involving the Kurds and Syria. The upshot advances Putin's ambitions.

While northern and western Europe have been largely spared war since 1945 (with Ukraine a recent exception), the Mediterranean has suffered. Traveling around the basin clockwise, and staying relatively close to the sea, we have: the Yugoslav Wars, the Greek Civil War, the invasion of Cyprus, the Syrian Civil War, the Lebanese Civil War, the various Arab-Israeli wars, the Libyan Civil Wars, the Algerian War of Independence, and the Algerian Civil War.

In ancient times underground resources sometimes proved to be of strategic significance. Athens, for instance, financed the fleet that defeated the Persian Invasion of 480–479 BC with silver discovered in the mines south of the city. Carthage paid for Hannibal's mercenaries with silver from the mines that it had conquered in Iberia.

More recently, large amounts of oil and gas have been discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, and Israel have established cooperation agreements, but other countries are trying to gain influence over these resources. China, Iran, Russia, and Turkey all want a share, and at least some have launched challenges for control.

In one regard, the Mediterranean might become less important, and that has to do with its role as a transportation hub. Today the key to shipping between Europe and East Asia, the Suez Canal in the future might be overshadowed by alternatives. One possibility is a sea-land transport route linking western Europe and South Asia and involving India, Iran, and Russia. Another is an Arctic Ocean shipping route, which may become commercially feasible because of global warming and ice melt. That route is two weeks faster than the current itinerary between East Asia and Europe via the Suez Canal. So, if continued warming makes it feasible, it would mark a genuine change.

Yet that remains to be seen. For the foreseeable future, the Mediterranean will continue to be a restless route of commerce and conflict. Neither Athens nor Rome, Istanbul nor Jerusalem, Cairo nor Madrid might have the power they once did in ages past, but their destiny is not something that London or Berlin can safely ignore, not with Moscow, Teheran, Beijing, and Washington all taking part. The Mediterranean continues to be a central sea.



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The Wrong Side of the Pillars of Hercules: The Mediterranean Just Doesn't Matter Much Anymore

By Ralph Peters

The United States is an Atlantic and Pacific power by virtue of geography, strategic necessity, and economic opportunity. A forward defense of the far littorals—Europe and the East-Asian barrier states facing China—is the essential requirement for our security. All else is not only secondary or tertiary, but often an ill-advised and grossly costly drain on our resources.

The Mediterranean matters to us only because of its importance to our NATO allies. At this point, it offers nothing essential to the United States. From our encounters with the Barbary Pirates through our mis-

begotten engagements in the eastern Mediterranean during the (now-waning) Age of Oil, our commitments to the region have produced cumulative negative returns.

We are blinded to the Mediterranean's strategic obsolescence by intellectual inertia and romance. Only in the wake of the collapse of the British Empire, did we inherit responsibility for a sea that had been a "British lake" since Trafalgar, yet the sense prevails in Washington, DC, that "we've always been there and always will be." The romance arises from culture, history, and popular myth. Instead of a strategic backwater, we see a seductive "wine-dark sea" and the birthplace of our civilization. In reality, the Mediterranean is a sea of insoluble problems and the best of our civilization matured elsewhere, in the rain-swept, wind-blasted Atlantic world that would begin wresting primacy from the Mediterranean by the sixteenth century.

As for the Mediterranean's problems, we elevate the importance of our brief regional rivalry with Russia (in its various incarnations) while timidly rejecting the reality that long shaped and ultimately deformed the Mediterranean world: the longest clash of civilizations known to history, that between Christian and Islamic cultures, which continues after nearly fourteen centuries.

Following a millennium of triumphs, Islam's expansion was blocked by the seventeenth century and soon began a precipitous decline (the effect of the power shift from "Mediterranean World" to "Atlantic World" accelerated—if it did not cause—Islam's economic and strategic decrepitude). With the post-Great War Ottoman dissolution, the Middle East's irrelevance seemed to have been confirmed.

But the world's growing thirst for oil gave the region a temporary reprieve—a last, false flowering—as petroleum enriched the most backward and barbaric elements beyond the Mediterranean littoral. The

last great gasp of Arab and Persian power came in the 1970s, when king, sheikh, and shah overplayed their hands with oil embargoes, alerting us to our vulnerability if we failed to develop alternatives. Meanwhile, Muslim-majority states without oil wealth rotted, while those laden with hit-the-petro-lottery riches did nothing to develop modern, productive, competitive societies. Failure was not imposed upon them; they chose it.

Embracing the worst elements in the region during the Cold War, we assumed responsibility for safe passage on the sea routes through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, and we still spend mightily to maintain that security—even though wealthy Europe, not North America, relies on Middle-Eastern oil today.

As for the Cold War, it's over, leaving behind an obstreperous-but-hollow Russia which, despite superficial "victories," is overextended, while sources of oil and gas have expanded vastly even as demand will peak and decline. Today, there is no rationale for a major U.S. Armed Forces presence in or commitment to the Mediterranean, except were our NATO allies attacked or should Israel—an outpost of our civilization—be threatened. Even so, we should play supporting, not primary, roles in both cases. Israel is more than a match for its self-lacerating enemies, while NATO's greatest threat is from Russian mischief on Europe's eastern marches, not from refugees trafficked across the Mediterranean by smugglers and NGOs.

Meanwhile, we continue to commit expensive and finite strategic forces to hopelessly exposed positions in the Mediterranean and adjacent seas. In an age of precision, hypersonic weapons, our ships (most notably aircraft carriers) could not survive in the shooting gallery new armaments have made of the Mediterranean—and of the Black Sea, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf: The first requirement in deploying military forces is that they must have at least a slim chance of survival. In these days of turbulent peace, we get off lightly, but a "real war" would cost us terribly—for no vital strategic return.

Our outdated and, regrettably, unchallenged view of the Mediterranean as an indispensable strategic passageway funneling into the Suez Canal substitutes habit for strategy. As with the decline in importance of decadent oil-funded potentates, the Suez Canal will lose importance as climate change opens alternative, better routes between the world's productive states and cultures—avoiding the strategic sinkholes between the Nile and the Indus.

As we approach the third decade of the twenty-first century, the United States is in grave need of a global strategic reassessment that casts aside costly legacies, reapportions power, retrenches where merited, and reinvigorates core alliances—rather than diffusing our capabilities in attempts to save doomed societies from themselves.

As we transition, we should reduce our presence on "the wrong side of the Pillars of Hercules," maintaining only sufficient force and support infrastructure to meet our NATO commitments or to respond to authentic emergencies. Southern Europe's shores, not the Persian Gulf, should be our new frontier beyond the Atlantic.

The predictable response to this proposed realignment will be that the Russians, Iranians, Chinese, terrorists, and other bad actors will fill the vacuum. Let them. Let them bear the burden and pay in blood for the self-inflicted incapability and venomous tantrums of the Middle East. Let them take their turn at paying exorbitantly for this global booby prize: Russia can't afford it; Iran can't dominate it; and China can't impose order on it (the much-hyped Belt and Road Initiative notwithstanding). As for Islamist terrorists, their coreligionists must defeat them. Let all of these eager players quarrel over the carcass rotting between Cairo and Karachi.

If there is a single concept that our strategists, such as they are, should adopt from economics, it's "sunk costs." You cannot bring back the dead or recoup wasted resources by investing more lives and trillions.

The Mediterranean is over. The Middle East should be over for us, too. Any unavoidable future intervention in the Mediterranean or the Middle East should be hyper-violent and come with a dated return ticket.

In recent years, we've heard superficial debates about whether this will be a Pacific century or another Atlantic century. The answer is both. Wealth wins. The strategic and trade centers of gravity will remain the Atlantic and Pacific theaters and they will only grow more prosperous, while the Mediterranean world beyond Europe sinks back into civilizational incompetence, comforting somnolence, and occasional bursts of self-immolating fanaticism. As this century develops, Latin America will be of far greater relevance to us than the Middle East.

Enjoy your Mediterranean vacation and the latest translation of Homer, but send our warships and combat aircraft elsewhere.



RALPH PETERS is the author of thirty-four books, including works on strategy and security affairs, as well as best-selling, prize-winning novels. He has published more than a thousand columns, articles, and essays here and abroad. As a U.S. Army enlisted man and career officer, he served in Infantry and military intelligence units before becoming a foreign area officer for the dying Soviet Union and the new Russia. As a soldier, journalist, and researcher, he has experience in more than seventy countries, covering various wars and trouble spots. His historical fiction won the American Library Association's Boyd Award for Literary Excellence an unprecedented three times and also received the Herodotus Award and the Hammett Prize. Additionally, he was the 2015 recipient of the Goodpaster Award, presented each year to a distinguished American soldier-scholar. In 2017, he was selected for the U.S. Army's Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame.

Europe's Mediterranean Frontier

By Angelo M. Codevilla

The Mediterranean abruptly separates Europe's civilization from those of Africa and the Middle East. On one side, reaching north to Scandinavia and east to the Bering Strait, some seven hundred million mostly prosperous people live according to principles derived from Judeo-Christianity, Greek philosophy, and Roman law. Their number is shrinking. On the other side, southward to the Cape of Good Hope and east to the Indian subcontinent, are three times that number of mostly poor peoples, most of whom live according to beliefs and traditions alien from those on the northern shore. As these grow in number, more and more press to migrate across the sea; not to join the aliens on the other side, but to replace them.

The sea is not nearly wide enough, and democracy seems impotent, to secure this frontier against this demographic and civilizational imbalance.

On either side of the sea, the peoples are no longer the bearers of self-confident civilizations, based on coherent religious ideas and habits. Rather, the intermingling and the clash are between civilizations in advanced stages of decay. Islam and its civilization seem vital only by comparison with European elites' outright denigration of Christianity, and hence with European peoples' concomitant rejection of a religion discredited by its own clerics.

Islam's apparent resurgence is largely a political phenomenon. It involves people who give little evidence of concern with spiritual affirmation, but who seem eager to fit European secular habits into their existing social structures. This does not argue for the success of either civilization over the other. The Muslims who come to Europe and who want to succeed have to learn to act more and more like Europeans—though certainly not to think like them. The rest assert only their power to wreck life for ordinary Europeans. In short, Muslim migration is not turning and cannot turn Europe into any kind of model Muslim civilization. It only contributes to destroying Europe's.

The vast majority of Europeans do not wish to be replaced, even though their unwillingness to reproduce themselves has made their replacement arguably inevitable. They clamor for the migration to stop. The class of persons in charge of Europe's governments do not have it in themselves to do that, not least because they are openly contemptuous of their peoples' civilization. This adds to the increasing enmity between Europe's rulers and their peoples, and is one more reason for European governments' impotence in international affairs.

European elites' scuttling of their own civilization is sure to be a subject for historians for generations to come. From Pope Francis's veneration of a statue of migrants in St. Peter's Square and European religious hierarchies' characterization of conservative parties as racist, fascist, Nazi etc.; to the denial by governments from Spain to Scandinavia of the fact that migrants are responsible for the vast majority of violent crimes; to the German government's publication of an illustrated pamphlet that instructs migrants on how to have sex with German women without doing them violence; to the ruling classes' forlorn attempt to substitute the

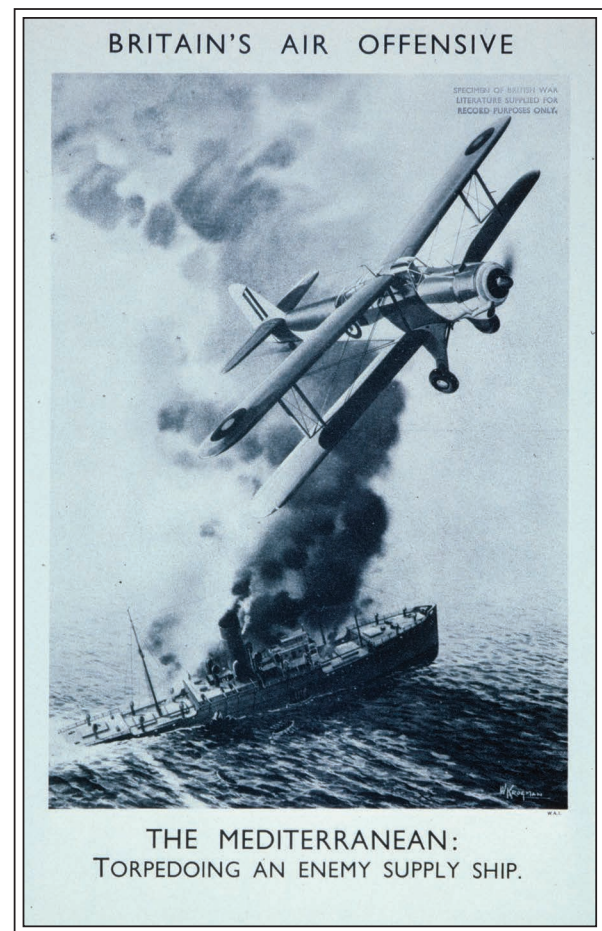


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votes of migrants for the ones they are losing from ordinary Europeans—we see these classes’ commitment not so much to anything outside of their own identities, but rather against their peoples’ civilization.

That is why, democracy notwithstanding, the majority of Europeans’ good wishes for European civilization’s long life are not terribly relevant. No civilization is democratic in nature. For better and for worse, leaders define civilizations. It is difficult and not terribly consequential for ordinary people to be more Catholic than the pope, or more German than whoever dispenses Germany’s offices and honors. Hence, in our time as well as in all others, it is difficult to imagine that the electoral rise of majorities to save European civilization by holding fast the Mediterranean frontier can succeed in doing so.

After all, these majorities are forming by rejecting their own countries’ secular and spiritual authorities. To succeed in securing their civilization, these electoral majorities would have to wage a revolution against what that civilization has come to mean. The absence from Europe of leaders big enough to found or restore civilizations indicates that nothing of the sort will happen.

The above is not to negate the significance of the electoral revolts against the ruling class that are taking place from Crete to North Cape, from Gibraltar to Siberia. During our lifetimes, persons who these revolts bring forth may be able to leverage the Mediterranean’s waters, as well as to bribe or perhaps even intimidate the governments on the southern side, to slow the migration. But so long as European peoples do not reproduce sufficiently, and so long as they do not live as proud champions of what had been their ways of life, no frontier can protect them.



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China in the Mediterranean

By Gordon G. Chang

China believes it should rule the world, so of course it thinks it has every right to control the Mediterranean. In a few years, it will do so, if we extrapolate even just a little.

Beijing's dominate-the-Med strategy begins at the water's edge, where it has embarked on an impressive ports-buying spree.

We start in Greece. The port of Piraeus is the anchor, the centerpiece, of the Chinese presence in the Med. China Ocean Shipping Company, better known as COSCO, invested in one pier there in 2008, obtaining franchise rights for 35 years. Eight years later, the firm controlled the publicly listed management company that had the contract to operate the entire port.

One of the first things COSCO did in Piraeus was arrange to have Huawei Technologies, China's "national champion" telecom-equipment manufacturer, install an IT network and a communications system.

We can expect similar camel's-nose-in-the-tent tactics in Italy. In March 2019, Rome signed a Belt and Road memorandum of understanding with China. The document, derided by some as "insignificant," accompanied agreements for China to operate port facilities in Genoa and Trieste.

Chinese state enterprises either control or have an interest in the Spanish port of Valencia and the refrigerated terminal at Vado in Italy.

CMA CGM, a French container and shipping company, borrowed large sums from China in 2015. The Marseille-based shipping line, like COSCO, is a member of the Ocean Alliance, one of the world's three shipping consortiums. This loan helps China lead the group.

Finally, Shanghai International Port Group agreed in 2015 to build a container port in Haifa, also the site of Israel's main naval base and where the U.S. Sixth Fleet often docks. China's concession, lasting 25 years, begins in 2021.

Why has Beijing made a concerted push into ports? Christopher O'Dea of the Hudson Institute makes the case that China is weaponizing logistics to ultimately dominate trade flows.

And there is another reason he and others have identified: civilian port facilities can serve as naval bases. For instance, in both September and October 2014 a Chinese submarine and its tender docked at the Chinese-funded Colombo International Container Terminal in Sri Lanka. Therefore, we should view each of the Chinese port facilities in the Med as a potential Chinese navy base.

The Chinese navy is, in fact, no stranger to the Mediterranean. One incident in particular highlights Beijing's ambitions there. China committed one of its most impressive looking warships, the 689-foot-long *Jinggangshan*, to the Eastern Mediterranean to sortie with Russian vessels in 2013 at the height of the Syrian civil war. There were unconfirmed reports placing other Chinese vessels in the area.

Beijing said the *Jinggangshan* was heading to Syria's coast merely to "observe," but a less benign interpretation is that the ship was there to augment the Russian fleet—the Chinese and Russian navies even then had a history of operating together—and to intimidate the U.S. Navy. It's hard to think of a reason why Beijing would send one of its most important vessels to the Syrian coast if it were not there to show Beijing's support for Damascus.

China also intends to control the other end of the Med, specifically the approaches to its mouth. Beijing has been seeking a port and the 10,865-foot runway of Lajes airfield on the island of Terceira, in the Azores.

From Terceira, Beijing could restrict access to the nearby Mediterranean Sea as well as interdict shipping and aircraft crossing the Atlantic.

The Mediterranean, therefore, looks like a stepping stone for China to one day rule the Atlantic. By the way, Terceira is about the same distance to New York as Pearl Harbor is to Los Angeles.

The U.S. is waking up to Chinese penetration of the Mediterranean but has been slow off the mark. For instance, Washington, acting belatedly, was not able to get Israel to back out of the Haifa port deal.

The stakes are high. Should Huawei wire up the Med—part of Beijing’s Digital Silk Road initiative—it will be able to filch data from NATO allies and friends in the region. That’s no theoretical concern. Beijing surreptitiously downloaded data for a half decade from the headquarters of the African Union through Huawei servers. America is attempting to stop Huawei, but many say it is too late.

China is deep into the Med, and it will take a long time to dislodge it.



GORDON G. CHANG is the author of *The Coming Collapse of China*, *Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes On the World*, and the just-released *Losing South Korea*. Chang lived and worked in China and Hong Kong for almost two decades. He is a columnist at the *Daily Beast* and also writes regularly for *The National Interest*. Chang has given numerous briefings at the National Intelligence Council, the CIA, the State Department, U.S. Strategic Command, and the Pentagon. Chang frequently appears on CNN, Fox News Channel, Fox Business Network, Bloomberg, CNBC, MSNBC, and PBS. He is a regular co-host and guest on The John Batchelor Show. He has served two terms as trustee of Cornell University.

The Italy Crux

By Angelo M. Codevilla

Italy’s people are revolting against a political class that has ruled contrary to the voters’ will since at least 2011. As in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, popular discontent with the ruling class includes its support of migration and its attachment to the EU. Since Italy stretches almost all the way across the Mediterranean and has been the main avenue of migration into the EU since Turkey was induced to close the land route, what happens in Italy will affect the rest of Europe. Italy’s internal conflict is especially interesting because its voters’ lively rebellious sentiments and its ruling class’s entrenchment seem to portend some kind of eruption.

Reopening Italy’s ports to vessels bearing migrants from Africa was the first act of the government that took office in Rome on September 3. On September 29, Pope Francis unveiled a statue of migrants in St. Peter’s Square. Thus did the Church hierarchy again join the rest of the country’s political class in slapping the face of a public who have been close to unanimous in their desire to halt migration. The division between rulers and ruled is wide and bitter.

Italy's ruling class has retained power by co-opting the leaders of opposition parties. Between 1994 and 2011, Silvio Berlusconi won most of Italy's elections on right-of-center platforms but governed in tune with the ruling class, led by what had been the Communist Party and had gone on to call itself the Democratic Party. In November of that year, pressures from the EU led Berlusconi to resign and swing his parliamentary majority to support a series of "technocratic" governments really run by the Democrats. After the 2013 elections, Berlusconi made a deal directly to support a government under Democrat Matteo Renzi. The public deemed these governments illegitimate. In 2017, it massively defeated a referendum by which Renzi meant to strengthen his hold on power.

In 2018's national elections, the voters revolted against the country's ruling class and its alignment with the EU bureaucracy. But while the North voted for the "League" party (Lega Nord), conservative in the U.S. sense, the South voted heavily for the Five Star Movement, whose antiestablishment slogan was "vaffanculo" (an obscene insult), but which has no firm political identity. These very different winners formed a government. The League's leader, Matteo Salvini, became its de facto leader. His Euroskepticism and restriction on migration—as well as his proposed tax cuts—more than doubled his and his party's popularity.

"Europe" struck back at Italy with threats of sanctions, and financiers raised the interest rate on Italy's borrowings. France supports Libyan factions that threaten to upset Italy's arrangements to limit migrants' embarkations, and Germany strongly supports NGOs that try to smuggle migrants into Italian ports. The pope called Salvini "the devil." All this added ammunition to the establishment's effort to persuade the Five Star party to switch allegiances, which it did.

The government that took office on September 3, though led formally by the nominally nonpartisan Giuseppe Conte, is really run by Matteo Renzi and his faction, which he removed from the Democratic Party in order to try doing in Italy what Emmanuel Macron did in France. As far as the public is concerned, this is the fourth time that the Democrats have taken power after losing an election. The government's popularity is in the low 30s. Salvini's popularity, more than double that of any other politician, continues to rise.

Led by Salvini's League, the center-right now governs eighteen of Italy's twenty regions. These governments' eagerness for economic deals with foreign countries, prominently including China, is spurred by an economy that has been severely restricted by national policy since roughly 2011.

Because Italy is the crux of much that roils Europe, the outcome of its political war is sure to have widespread effects. Migration and the corollary issues of cultural identity, as well as the quintessential question of who controls whose lives by what right, are roiling all Europe. Italian voters have placed their country in the forefront of resentments felt throughout Europe. They are in the process of testing the boundaries between electoral and bureaucratic power. The outcome of struggles in Italy may well signal the direction of events in the rest of Western Europe.



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Refining U.S. Strategy in the Mediterranean

By Chris Gibson

Thesis: China and Russia are increasingly gaining access to and leverage within the Mediterranean Sea region and the United States should refine its strategy to counter these concerning trends.

Background: The Mediterranean Sea connects three continents supporting almost one-fifth of all global shipping and is the nexus where our most important alliance (NATO) meets the volatile Middle East region. Since World War II, the U.S. has enjoyed enormous influence in this region, which has contributed to its pre-eminence in world affairs and economic vitality. Arguably, however, since the end of the Cold War the U.S. has taken this for granted, reducing its priority and presence in this region of the world. This trend has continued with the Trump administration. In fact, the word “Mediterranean” does not even make an appearance in the Trump administration’s 2017 edition of the *National Security Strategy (NSS)*. As I write this piece in mid-October 2019, China and Russia are increasingly engaged throughout this region, and Turkey, Egypt, and Israel, among others, are flirting with the idea of establishing more formal arrangements with these global competitors. Clearly, it is high time for the United States to review its strategy in the Mediterranean.

Way Forward: The reality is that the United States has limited resources and must prioritize them to achieve national goals and objectives. We can’t be everywhere, all the time, and thus a major shift in resources to the Mediterranean is not possible, nor needed. What we should do, however, is refine our strategy, better nesting our existing regional investments with overarching national goals to gain maximum effectiveness. I recommend a renewed focus on *alliances* to get that done.

In the *NSS*, the Trump administration places primacy on advancing peace and prosperity for the American people with a grand strategy of principled realism. The *NSS* cites the rise of global competitors, China and Russia, and outlines ways to counter their advances. Deterrence will be key to this approach and thus a revitalized NATO is paramount.

Turkey’s increasing economic and military ties with China and Russia, which threaten the future of NATO, are very concerning. *Revitalizing our relationship with Turkey and reversing these disturbing trends should be our top priority for the region.* This will not be an easy task.

Turkey presently is committed to purchasing the Russian S-400 air defense system, which is incompatible with NATO systems and diplomatically unacceptable. We will have to persuade Turkey to abandon that course of action, which likely means we will need to accommodate them on another important issue. An example of this could be expressing more understanding of Turkey’s concerns with its internal security from the threat of the PKK. Turkey has communicated clearly that they see a difference between the PKK and the Syrian Kurds (an ally of ours in the fight against ISIS), and we should hold Turkey to that statement.

We clearly have an interest in stabilizing Syria and preventing it from becoming a safe haven for ISIS. At the same time, the Trump administration also rightly wants to bring an end to our military occupation there. In all these competing priorities and challenges, there may be an opening.

First, we should continue to work with Turkey to ensure northern Syria is stabilized, with Turkish forces playing a key role. Second, we could pursue an Arab force to replace us throughout Syria. That is possible if we continue to encourage and foster stronger relations between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel. Indeed, the fact that these nations are working together at all is one of the most intriguing and potentially productive strategic developments of the Trump administration. If this trend continues and formalizes, that could be the

opportunity for us to reposition our forces out of Syria as we are backfilled with an Arab force. Such moves could assuage Turkey and inspire them to forgo formal ties with Russia and China and instead renew and strengthen their commitment to NATO.

Given the recent track record of China following up the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with formidable military presence in places like Sri Lanka, Djibouti, and Pakistan, we should be concerned with Chinese investments in Mediterranean ports, bridges, and other infrastructure projects. This is especially so since the vehicles to implement BRI are state-owned enterprises like COSCO Shipping Ports and China Merchants Port Holdings, giving the Chinese government more power to instantiate their will. Although China is creating international “antibodies” with their heavy-handed tactics, they are not without champions. After all, Chinese investments in the Greek Port of Piraeus have made that entity highly successful and profitable for all stakeholders. Even Israel is getting in on the action with China now building new ports in Haifa and Ashdod.

Russia, too, is making aggressive moves in the Mediterranean region. President Putin’s risky decision to escalate and invest heavily in the troubled and tainted Syrian president Assad was largely driven by his desire to shore up Russian control of the Port of Tartus. Moreover, Putin’s diplomatic maneuvering with Turkey is designed to drive a wedge in NATO and further Russian influence in the Mediterranean region.

Thus, our relationship with Turkey will be key to countering all of these developments. No doubt we presently have a lot of issues and friction with the Turkish government and its leader President Erdoğan, but we must keep the larger strategic picture in mind as we move forward. Erdoğan has solidified his position in Turkey and will likely be in charge there for years to come. We must find a way to work with him. These diplomatic initiatives to strengthen NATO and support this burgeoning Arab-Israeli relationship would certainly check Chinese and Russian influence in the Mediterranean region.

As far as longer-term strategic moves in the Mediterranean region to counter Iran, if the current diplomatic work between Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and Israel materializes into something more meaningful, we could consider formalizing that initiative by entering into an alliance with these countries. In addition to balancing Iran, such an alliance could lead to a new day for Arab-Israeli peace talks, which could ultimately restructure Middle East politics entirely.

Looking further down the road, should we achieve these two major moves, that could set the conditions for something truly transformational—working with Russia and Iran to check growing Chinese global ambitions. Historically, the U.S. has worked with both these of these great nations in the past to the mutual benefit of all. As we march towards mid-century, such an alliance could help thwart Chinese global ambitions and lead to a renaissance for the West.

There are a lot of possibilities going forward, but step one is to recognize what’s going on now and to take action to counter the disturbing trends in the Mediterranean region.



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The Importance of the Mediterranean Sea

By Jakub Grygiel

The Mediterranean Sea is one of Europe's inland seas, linking the continent with the rest of Eurasia, and most immediately with the Middle East and Africa. As such, it has two characteristics. First, its strategic relevance to outside powers (such as the United States) depends on whether they deem European political dynamics of vital interest. If continental Europe (and to a lesser degree the Middle East) loses geopolitical appeal, then the Mediterranean is of little significance. Second, the stability of the Mediterranean can be guaranteed only when one power (or friendly powers) controls access to it as well as its circumference; when its shores are under the sway of rival powers, it becomes an unstable frontier sea. This geopolitical unity of the Mediterranean is now breaking because of the political instability on its southern and eastern shores, Russia's reentry, and Chinese influence over the politics and economics of southeastern Europe.

In brief, the importance of the Mediterranean Sea is conditional and its nature favors continental control; it is a sea of passage and a sea of land powers.

1. The prize of the Mediterranean: Europe

For Italy, severed from continental Europe by the Alps, and for Greece, anchored in the Aegean archipelago, the stability of the Mediterranean determines their security and prosperity. But for other powers, such as Great Britain in the 17th–18th centuries and the United States since World War II, the Mediterranean was, and continues to be, important for strategic purposes that go beyond the confines of the immediate basin. This sea is a means of influence or connection, and it matters only insofar that the target to be influenced (or connected) is relevant.

Thus, for Britain, the Mediterranean Sea was a key link to India as well as a means of influencing economic dynamics within continental Europe. After 1945, for the U.S. it became the linchpin of American preeminence in Europe and the Middle East.¹ An absence of American (and earlier, British) predominance in the Mediterranean often eased a hegemonic bid by a continental power (France or Germany) in Europe. Julian Corbett's observation that the "period during which England abandoned the Mediterranean coincides exactly with the zenith of Louis XIV's power" can easily be applied to other periods in history.² The Mediterranean, that is, offers an entry point into Europe to powers, such as Great Britain, the U.S., and now Russia and China, that are outside of its continental core.

Hence, U.S. foreign policy towards the Mediterranean seeks outcomes that are external to the sea in itself, to be found in European security and Middle Eastern stability. If Europe (and to a lesser degree, the Middle East) does not matter, then the Mediterranean is a backwater of touristy interest. If it matters, however, the Mediterranean is crucial.

Because the Mediterranean is recognized as a lever of influence over Europe, it has always attracted external powers whose interests transcend this sea and focus on Europe. As an observer put it in 1938, the Mediterranean is "a string which, when pulled, has revealed that its other end was in India, Vladivostok, the Middle Danube, or Mosul."³ Connecting the Orient and the Occident, the North and the South, the Mediterranean becomes the place where European powers clash among themselves (e.g., Britain and Germany) and with non-European potentates (Russia, Ottoman Empire, and now, increasingly, with China). The rationale for these clashes is rarely the Mediterranean per se but the Mediterranean as a way of extending greater influence over Europe. The prize is not the sea, but the continent.

2. The Mediterranean as the sea of land power

The second characteristic of the Mediterranean is that its unity and stability depend on the ability of one power—or a group of friendly powers—to control its shores and access points. The Roman Empire managed to achieve this only after the final defeat of Carthage. In the 8th century with the Arab expansions, the Mediterranean unity was broken, cutting Europe off from the east and creating recurrent security pressures arising from the southern shores, as Henri Pirenne famously argued.⁴ From then on, many powers attempted to replicate the great Roman success in the Mediterranean Sea, but none of the great Italian maritime republics, for example, proved to be capable of being more than local commercial potentates. Arguably, only the United States managed to restore the geopolitical unity of the Mediterranean, making the sea an “American lake” by expelling the Germans and Italians in its 1942–45 North African and Mediterranean campaigns and then by keeping the Soviets effectively locked out beyond the Bosphorus.⁵

The necessity of geopolitical unity arises from the fact that the security on one Mediterranean shoreline resides on the opposite shores. That is, the security of southern Europe is not on the Sicilian beaches but on Libyan shores. What happens on—and who controls—the North African seafront has a direct impact on the European states on the other side of the sea. Even in ancient times, when distance was a much greater hindrance to power projection than now, the Mediterranean waters were never sufficient to provide enough protective depth. They connected more than separated. That connective quality has only increased as technology progressed, bringing the Mediterranean coasts closer.

Whoever controls the Mediterranean coastlines controls the sea. This gives land powers a considerable advantage because naval superiority is not sufficient to dominate the basin, and in fact, by itself, it is useless. Naval battles are not insignificant in Mediterranean history, of course, but a naval victory without controlling the Mediterranean shores does little to establish control over this sea. Without controlling the shoreline—the ports, the access points, the markets and the politics on them—navies alone are useless and, in a sea controlled by its shores, are an expensive target. Powers that had firm control over the circumference of the Mediterranean became the maritime hegemony. And those that controlled key locations (e.g., the Dardanelles or the Suez Canal or the narrow seas between Sicily and Tunisia) could exercise disproportionate influence in the basin, even in moments of their own great weakness. The Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans create rivalries of navies; the Mediterranean invites rivalries over shores.

As a consequence, the Mediterranean puts a premium on the ability to exercise political and economic control over the shores over mere naval prowess. Land powers here can be maritime powers with often minimal or inferior naval capabilities. This is why China’s current advances in the Mediterranean basin are worrisome: they aim to influence the political dynamics of states located on the shores of this sea and, by doing so, they can deny a more powerful naval power the ability to exercise control.

3. Three contemporary breaches of Mediterranean unity

Given these geopolitical characteristics of the Mediterranean, recent developments in the region carry wider consequences. Over the past decade, three breaches in the unity of this basin developed, turning the Mediterranean into a frontier sea of competition: political collapse of its southern and eastern shores, Russian reentry into the region, and gradual Chinese forays into the economies and politics of some coastal states.

First, the political collapse of North Africa and the Levant has lifted the barriers to mass migration. There are of course multiple reasons for this situation, from demographic pressures in Africa and Asia to the persistent Islamist menace and the messy “Arab spring.” But the broad outcome is that the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean lack the relative stability that allowed it to keep its problems contained, disgorging instead large numbers of people seeking shelter and the promise of a better life in the wealthy European states. The Mediterranean may be turning again, as it has been often in history, “to what it was at the height of the Mohammedan Empire, a water frontier along which opposing powers and fundamentally different cultures faced each other.”⁶

The second breach is Russia's reentry into the region. Using the Syrian war as a window, Russian forces are now entrenched in Syria. However limited, and with an even smaller naval presence, Russia's intervention has placed Moscow in a position of great influence over European politics, being able to turn on or off migration flows from the region. Russia does not have to have a sizable naval presence beyond one sufficient to supply logistical support to its military forces in Syria, and yet, it has inserted itself into European politics through the Mediterranean.

The third breach is the slow and so far peaceful spread of Chinese influence in the Mediterranean. Through investments in strategic sectors, in particular in Southeastern Europe, China is building a European terminus for its "Belt and Road Initiative." Acquiring ports, railroads, airports, while at the same time extending political sway through various means (e.g., the Confucius institutes), China may be able to move the foreign policies of the most vulnerable countries away from a firmly Atlanticist posture.

The combined effect of these three breaches is that the Mediterranean is losing its status of an "American lake." There is no naval rivalry yet among hostile powers, but there need not be one in order for the Mediterranean to lack unity. And when it lacks unity, Europe becomes more dependent on the forces percolating from Africa, the Middle East, and the broader Asian continent. If we assume that Europe continues to be of vital importance to the U.S., then the Mediterranean basin will maintain its salience, and the United States will have to reassert its role there.

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- 2 Sir Julian Corbett, *England in the Mediterranean* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1917), 2:420.
- 3 Elizabeth Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 1.
- 4 Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939).
- 5 Joseph Roucek, "The Geopolitics of the Mediterranean," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 13, no. 1 (October 1953), 82.
- 6 William Reitzel, *The United States in the Mediterranean* (Yale Institute of International Studies, 1947, Memorandum No. 25), 29.



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Roiling the Waters: Changing Alignments, New Threats, and American Withdrawal Symptoms in the Contemporary Mediterranean

By Josef Joffe

The Mediterranean is destiny, the cradle of our civilization. Think Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Persia, then Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome. What the Romans called “Mare Nostrum”—our sea—joined three continents. It was the highway of trade and culture, conquest and war. The basin was practically the world then, and a constant object of desire. This is where civilizations clashed and empires rose and fell for millennia.

In the Age of Discovery (1500ff.), the arena expanded into the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific. This is where until 1945 the great wars were fought out, on land and on the seas. As a result, the Mediterranean became “smaller.” In the 20th century, this theater lost its centrality, though not its importance. Unlike Venice, Habsburg-Spain, and the Ottoman Empire, the key powers were no longer abutting on the Med: the U.S., Britain, Germany, Russia, Japan, and now, China. The contest became worldwide, and the Med contracted into a battlefield for regional powers, notably Israel and the Arabs. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. did stake out their claims, but never fought each other in the one million square miles extending from Agadir to Aleppo.

The fate of the Sixth Fleet highlights the Med’s declining role in the 2000s. As a permanent presence, the Fleet began to shrink to the point where only one command ship was permanently on duty, with major combatants steaming in and out as needed. Note also the “pivot to Asia” under Barack Obama. The Soviet Union was gone, and so was the worst strategic threat in and around the basin. Nor were new rivals roiling the waters, and the northern littoral was in the hands of NATO members from Spain to Turkey, with Israel and Egypt as informal allies.

This friendly climate is no more. De facto, Turkey is an ally in name only. Hosting Russian naval and ground forces, Damascus is back in Moscow’s camp. Iran has bought itself a border on the Med with the help of Hamas (Gaza) and Hezbollah (Lebanon) while building a land bridge across Iraq and Syria. Beset by poverty and Islamism, Egypt is no longer a pillar of stability, let alone a strategic actor. Tunisia is in turmoil, and Libya a playground of warlords.

Add the threat of resource war. Israel estimates that its seabed contains around 75 trillion cubic feet of gas and 6.6 billion barrels of oil. Mainly offshore in waters eyed by hostile Turkey and within range of Hezbollah missiles, this bounty makes for a natural flash point. Such risks must be weighed against the good news, which is the declining relative importance of Arab fossil riches now further diminished by the U.S. as the world’s largest oil producer (ahead of Saudi Arabia and Russia).

Yet the overall prospects are not rosy for the United States. Russia is back, Iran is expanding, Ankara is edging toward Moscow, and volatility lurks from Cairo to Tripoli on the southern littoral. On the plus side is the strategic realignment from Greece to the Gulf. Athens is closing ranks with Washington and Jerusalem. Israel is no longer the focus of all Middle East hatreds, but enjoying an informal alliance with the Sunni powers against Iran.

The upshot, though, is that America’s dreams of extracting itself from the vicious struggles of the Eastern Med (and adjacent lands) have been evaporating. Barack Obama’s visions have turned into illusions. Drawing down U.S. forces in Iraq brought on the rise of ISIS. Refusing to engage in Syria was to issue an invitation to Russia and Iran. Obama thought he could recruit Tehran by distancing the U.S. from Israel and the Sunni powers. Instead, he fueled Iranian ambitions. To call such miscalculation foolish is no exaggeration.

Ironically, Donald Trump, for all his bluster, is hardly Obama's strategic antipode. He, too, suffers from withdrawal symptoms. U.S. forces in Iraq are down to 5,000, in Syria to 2,200, with a "measurable decrease" still to come, according to unnamed officials. If the U.S. leaves Afghanistan, as the engagement with the Taliban suggests, so will all of America's allies. Naturally, a radical Islamist regime, though far away, will have repercussions all the way to the Med. It will encourage Moscow and Tehran while prompting local players to recalculate their interests and commitments. Retraction from the Hindu Kush to the Levant will not improve America's standing in the Greater Middle East.

The proper antidote to entrapment in the region's endless wars is not abandonment. Maybe the Middle East has become less important economically because of declining dependence on Arab/Iranian oil. Maybe it is wiser to disentangle from the irreconcilable conflicts of the area. But the international system abhors a vacuum, and so hostile powers invariably move in. Those who leave, as the history of post-WWI Europe shows, will have to come back at a far higher risk and price.



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The Prudence and Limits of President Trump's Strategy of Recalibrating American Engagement in the Middle East

By Robert G. Kaufman

For too long, the Middle East has dominated American foreign policy agenda to the detriment of addressing the nation's most significant long-term challenges. The Trump Administration's National Security Strategy has begun prudently to correct that, recalibrating America's ranking of interests and threats to reflect geopolitical realities.

Even at the apogee of the Middle East's significance during the Cold War, preventing hostile powers from dominating either Europe or Asia loomed as the paramount challenge. Even so, the United States rightly deemed it vital to prevent either the Soviet Union or any other hostile power from directly or indirectly dominating

the Middle East's oil reserves on which the United States, its allies, and much of the world depended. Now that the United States has become an energy superpower, the significance of the Middle East will continue to diminish, especially relative to the Indo-Pacific, by far the world's most important power center for the 21st century, and to Europe.

The Trump Administration defines accordingly “the central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the *reemergence of long-term, strategic competition* by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers,” according to the January 2018 Summary of The National Defense Strategy. The Administration envisages both the revisionist regimes of China and Russia as striving for a “world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.”¹ The Administration has reallocated America’s economic, political, and military resources accordingly. President Trump’s Asia Pivot is real rather than rhetorical. While cajoling our European allies to contribute more for their own defense, the President has also bolstered American presence there and increasingly contested Russian ambitions in Ukraine and Syria.

Correspondingly, the Administration has scaled back American strategic ambitions in the Middle East, pursuing more traditional and limited ends while remaining engaged in the region: 1) preventing a single hostile hegemon from dominating the region; 2) deterring rogue regimes from crossing the nuclear threshold and/or sponsoring terror; and 3) broadening and deepening cooperation with a decent democratic Israel sharing similar values and largely compatible strategic interests.

Thus, the Administration has abandoned President Bush’s noble efforts to promote democratic regime change in the Middle East, which the premature American withdrawal from Iraq has doomed beyond repair for the foreseeable future. In the Indo-Pacific and Europe, President Trump’s rhetoric if not his actions understates the benefits of values-based alliance systems in Europe and Asia where more propitious conditions for their success exist. In the Middle East, however, the President’s transactional inclinations serve the United States better than any of the plausible alternatives. Here, the United States must choose its often unsavory strategic partners in the region—Israel excepted—based on the ethic of the lesser moral and geopolitical evil—without permanent allies, but permanent interests.

Second, the Trump Administration has substantially though provisionally restored strategic and moral sanity to American foreign policy in the Middle East by reversing his predecessor’s feckless policies towards Iran and Israel. Instead of conciliating the virulently Islamist Iranian regime, the Administration has rightly identified Iran’s nuclear and regional aspirations as the paramount threat to American interests in the region and those of our allies. The Administration abrogated President Obama’s fatally flawed nuclear deal with Iran that facilitated the Iranians’ crossing the nuclear threshold while subsidizing the rogue regime economically by lifting sanctions. The President has reimposed and intensified sanctions on Iran that bite while encouraging the formation of a regional coalition including Israel and Saudi Arabia stoutly to resist Iranian ambitions. Meanwhile, the Administration has refused—prudently until now—to rise to mounting Iranian provocations aimed at dragging the United States into a premature confrontation.

The President’s decision to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem is a not so ironic example of principle complementing his strategic calculations more than his critics recognize.² In contrast to his predecessor, President Trump recognizes that a strong, powerful, decent democratic Israel is a strategic asset, not a moral liability. Assuming the President stands firm rather than folds on Iran, his fulfillment of his embassy pledge may go down as the positive inflection point of the Administration’s national security strategy—just the opposite of President Obama’s Syrian cave-in that lowered the barriers to predators everywhere.

Third, the Administration has inflicted a major defeat on ISIS, which has lost its large safe haven and the preponderance of its capabilities.

Even with President Trump’s strong start sensibly recalibrating American ends and means in the Middle East, perils and uncertainties remain. Iran’s brazen attacks on the Saudi oil fields call into question the President’s calculation that his strategy of maximum pressure, bolstering American military presence in Saudi Arabia,

and sanctions will suffice to deal with this increasingly desperate and bellicose regime. The resignation of John Bolton—the Administration’s most hawkish voice on Iran—does not bolster the credibility of American rhetorical resolve that Iran may deem a bluff. Nor do we know whether the Administration’s determination to withdraw from Syria will create a power vacuum allowing some form of ISIS to reemerge. The reckoning has also come on what to do about Turkey. An increasingly Islamist, authoritarian, anti-American Turkey no longer belongs in NATO or serves as a reliable partner in the Middle East. As a former Deputy Secretary of Defense for President George W. Bush warns, Turkey’s taking delivery of Russian S-400 missile air defense systems on July 12, 2019, is “the latest of a long series of events through which Turkey has proven itself to be an adversary rather than an ally.”³

The upshot: On one hand, the Middle East will remain important but increasingly secondary to America’s larger strategic interests in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. The Trump Administration’s pursuit of more limited ends in the region well accords with the dictate’s strategic prudence. On the other hand, the mounting defiance of a revolutionary Iran reminds that the United States cannot disengage entirely from a region still vital to our vital allies.

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To What Degree Has the Importance of the Mediterranean Waxed or Waned in American Strategic Thinking?

By Peter R. Mansoor

The United States has a long history with the Mediterranean littoral. The first American overseas military expedition, the war against the Barbary pirates, took place in the Mediterranean in the first decade and a half of the 19th century. Although U.S. naval operations and Marine expeditions against the North African states of Morocco, Tripoli, Algiers, and Tunis did not immediately end piracy against American vessels, they did signal the willingness of the United States to use military force in the furtherance of its national security interests beyond its shores.

Following this period European powers—most notably Britain and France—controlled the Mediterranean Sea, a dominance acceptable to the United States, at least until World War II brought German submarines and Italian warships to contest control of the area. With President Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision to support an Anglo-American invasion of North Africa in 1942, the United States returned to the Mediterranean to stay. Air bases and seaports in North Africa and Italy supported the campaign against the European Axis powers, and a number of these facilities remained in American hands after V-E Day.

The Cold War witnessed the pinnacle of American involvement in the Mediterranean region, as the United States and the Soviet Union vied for control of the sea-lanes between the Strait of Gibraltar, the Dardanelles, and the Suez Canal. The United States and the USSR also courted the support of the littoral states in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—the southern tier of NATO and Israel in the case of the United States, and Syria and Egypt in the case of the USSR. The U.S. Sixth Fleet was one of the premier naval commands during this era, engaging in expeditionary operations and airstrikes in Lebanon in 1958 and 1983 and again when its ships and planes participated in freedom of navigation exercises in the Gulf of Sidra and subsequently in Operation El Dorado Canyon in 1986, the air raids against Libya in retaliation for Libyan terrorist actions in Europe.

The end of the Cold War seemed to relegate the Mediterranean once again to a backwater of American strategic discourse, at least until terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001 brought the war against Islamist terrorism to the forefront of national security considerations. Although by this time Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi had foresworn state-sponsored terrorism and had voluntarily dismantled his nuclear program, the Obama administration unwisely supported a multistate NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011, resulting in the fall of Gaddafi and the descent of the country into civil war. The Arab Spring also led to civil war in Syria, leading to Russian and Iranian intervention and a mass exodus of refugees into Europe. Economic and political refugees have also flocked across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa to Europe, destabilizing the domestic politics of a number of European Union states. Meanwhile, Turkish president Recep Erdoğan is recharting his nation's course in Mediterranean affairs, a wild card in a region that has once again become an arena for great power competition.

The Mediterranean has always been a crossroads of civilizations, and it will continue to play this role in the 21st century. With its intervention in Syria, Russia is renewing its strategic presence in the region. China is buying its way into the region's infrastructure. Although another Cold War may or may not be in the offing, the United States ignores these developments at the peril of its national security and the domestic stability of its European allies.



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Competition in the Mediterranean

By Mark Moyar

During the Cold War, and for more than two decades after the Cold War, the United States was the dominant power in the Mediterranean. Barack Obama's reduction of the U.S. military presence in the Mediterranean and the ensuing Russian intervention in Syria in 2015 allowed Russia to gain in influence at the expense of the United States. Russia reestablished itself as a maritime power in the Mediterranean by securing a 50-year lease on the port of Tartus in Syria, Russia's only major port outside of the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Russia is exploiting its growing presence in the eastern Mediterranean to increase its exports. Russian arms manufacturers are selling weapons to Egypt and Algeria, and Russian energy companies have bought oil exploration rights in Syria and Lebanon. Russia has loaned Turkey \$20 billion to finance a nuclear power plant built by a Russian state-owned company, and has loaned \$25 billion to Egypt for the same purpose.

Russia's rising influence also gives it opportunities to thwart competition with Russia's oil and natural gas industries. Russia is trying to persuade Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel to undermine efforts to build a pipeline from Israel to Europe, which would reduce Western Europe's reliance on Russian energy and hence its vulnerability to Russian pressure. Russia has provided support to Libyan strong man Khalifa Haftar in the hope of gaining access to Libyan oil fields.

Russia also views itself as the protector of Orthodox Christendom in the Mediterranean, and for this reason has natural affinities with the Orthodox populations in Greece, Syria, and Lebanon. The recent split between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow on recognition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has, however, provided a wedge that the United States is seeking to exploit. By backing Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the United States may be able to weaken the cultural ties between Russia and the Mediterranean countries.

China has been moving aggressively into the Mediterranean in the past few years in order to develop links in its Belt and Road Initiative. The Chinese have bought stakes in several major European and Israeli ports. In addition to providing commercial advantages, the port deals allow the Chinese to monitor the activities of U.S. Navy ships. China has been especially successful in building relations with the authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Algeria, which the Chinese find easier to trust because they do not preach at them about democracy as other countries in the region do.

Russia and China are both competing for influence in Israel, at the expense of the United States. Chinese investment in Israeli technology firms has created such consternation in the United States that Washington has threatened to curb sharing of intelligence with Israel unless it takes greater precautions against Chinese chicanery. Russia's presence in Syria has compelled Israel to obtain permission from Russia to strike pro-Iranian targets in that country, which makes Israel less inclined to side against Russia on other issues.

Turkey has been moving toward closer relations with Russia while distancing itself from Europe and the United States. It has purchased Russian missile defense systems despite complaints from NATO allies, and employed the threat of migrant flows to extract funds from the Europeans and Americans. The Trump administration has found some areas of mutual interest with respect to Syria, and has recently turned over the problems of the Syrian Kurds, the ISIS captives, and Syrian refugees to Turkey.

The countries that stand to lose the most from the ascendancy of Russia, China, and Turkey in the Mediterranean are the United States, the Western European nations, and Japan. In September 2019, the European Union and Japan signed an infrastructure deal with \$50 billion in funding intended to rival China's Belt and Road Initiative. They believed that transparency, good labor, and environmental practices will make their model more attractive than China's. Closer American involvement in this initiative may be useful.



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The Mediterranean: Britain's Lake, America's Burden, and U.S. Strategic Thought

By Ralph Peters

The salient point about U.S. strategic thought and the Mediterranean is that, for most of our history, we didn't think about it. Between our feud with the Barbary pirates and our World War II engagement in that wine-dark sea, we accepted that the Med was a British lake, in which the Royal Navy would guarantee security for trade and wartime dominance. From the Seven Years' War onward, and despite Napoleon's ambitions, Britain remained master of the Mediterranean—the importance of which soared higher still in 1869, with the opening of the Suez Canal, the new shortcut and soon-to-become-lifeline to vast British India.

We shrugged and looked elsewhere. The American impulse marched—and sailed—westward. Greater even than our continent and Manifest Destiny, we turned toward the realms that were not yet taken. Our westward thrust took us to the Far East.

The nineteenth century truism was that “trade follows the flag,” but for the young American republic, the flag followed trade as the drive west took us across the Pacific. First, our China traders developed—and competed with Britain for—market share. (It was said of Philadelphia's Quaker dynasties that “They went to China to do good—and did very well, indeed.”) Meanwhile, waning powers, such as the Spaniards in the Philippines or the Dutch in the East Indies, struggled to maintain geriatric empires. The British led us in Chinese concessions early on—because of the Opium Wars and the opium-for-tea trade—but commerce, strategy, technology, and service ambitions came together to thrust us ever more robustly into the Pacific, from the early nineteenth century's rapid expansion of whaling to our Navy's mid-century “opening of Japan” with our steam-powered “black ships.”

In our Civil War, the northern Pacific was an important naval theater, as Confederate commerce raiders took hundreds of U.S.-flagged vessels. The Mediterranean was of no strategic consequence. Then, in our bloodiest war's wake, we bought Alaska from Russia in 1867 and confirmed our role as a Pacific presence and power, a hegemon in waiting. In 1898, we formally annexed Hawaii and relieved Spain of its colonies.

We had our own “lake,” at last. Naval encounters in the Mediterranean were limited to historical examples from the age of sail studied in dreary classrooms at Annapolis.

The Second World War and Britain's precipitous decline as a power, naval and otherwise, along with the world's growing thirst for Middle-Eastern oil, the establishment of Israel and the collapse of empire and mandates throughout the region, thrust the U.S. Navy into a new role, replacing Britain as the Med's security guarantor—which our Navy remains today.

Now the danger is that we have become so habituated to assign great strategic importance to the eastern Mediterranean that we are in danger of missing its second great realignment in a century: The first was Arab independence and the explosion of oil wealth on the soil of new and newish states that had been backwaters for a millennium, while the second, now underway, is the diminishing relevance of that oil (and gas) as fossil fuels come under assault even as abundant new sources become available. Have we the strategic clarity to recognize, for example, that, apart from being an odious client, Saudi Arabia may have no strategic value by the mid-twenty-first century? Even now, our Middle East wars and interventions may amount to little more than a brawl over corpses. Unless we intend to reenact the Crimean War, the Med looks to matter ever less to us (if not to the Europeans, facing mass immigration and related security challenges).

We are a Pacific power. Our Second World War began at Pearl Harbor, not in Poland. Our Atlantic ties remain vital, strategically and economically, but the future lies between San Francisco and Shanghai. The Med is for tourists.

As for Russia's risible recent interest in the eastern Med, they're showing up after the party's over. A vital region for two thousand years, the eastern Mediterranean is now the booby prize. It would be wonderfully ironic if the old dream of the czars for a Mediterranean presence were to come true just when it had become strategically irrelevant.



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Implications of the Ascendant Chinese Presence in the Mediterranean for Europe and the United States

By Hy Rothstein

The growing Chinese presence and activism in the Mediterranean, an area beyond Beijing's core interest areas in the East and South China Seas, are raising new questions about China's conception of the future world order. The key question is whether China's economic expansion is a case of the flag following international trade, or is trade a mechanism to expand global presence, influence, and control. The answer to this question may adversely impact the way of life for Europeans and Americans.

Three central facts today about China should be troubling to Western liberal democracies when considered as a whole. First, China has been experiencing enormous economic growth and is leveraging its economic

power globally. Second, China continues to build its naval force and currently operates around the world. Unchecked, China will likely be capable of achieving some level of control of the maritime commons and even sea superiority within the next two decades. Third, China is ruled by an increasingly dictatorial regime hostile to any form of free expression and private enterprise. More disconcerting, China believes its model of development is superior to the West's and is *the* path for other countries to modernize and achieve economic growth.

Investment in Mediterranean ports is the most visible aspect of China's new maritime Silk Road. Chinese state-owned companies are taking advantage of poorly performing economies by flaunting seemingly unlimited investment funds. To understand the depth and breadth of this maritime Silk Road, consider that Chinese state-owned companies have significant holdings in at least seven Mediterranean ports: minor holdings in ports in Bilbao, Genoa, Istanbul, Valencia, Marseille, Marsaxlokk in Malta, as well as in Piraeus, Port Said at the exit to the Suez Canal, and Tangier-Med, at the entrance to the Gibraltar Strait. Beyond ports, Chinese investments are significant in European high-tech industries such as aerospace, robotics, advanced railway equipment, artificial intelligence, and clean power production, and are connected to the supply chains that support these industries.

China's claim, supported by aggressive public diplomacy, is that these investments are designed to construct a seamless network for selling goods in an important commercial region. Keep in mind that China does not support reciprocal means for Western nations to sell their goods in China. Countries eager to grab their slice of Chinese capital have minimized the fact that Chinese policy tasks its military to defend the country's overseas interests. This policy has justified the rapid expansion of the PLA Navy and the construction of a naval facility in Djibouti. Additionally, Chinese law requires that ports owned or managed by Chinese companies provide logistical support to their military forces when requested. In other words, China's maritime Silk Road is a dual-purpose network. The security implications are serious considering NATO countries' navies use all of these ports too. The economic implications are also significant since Chinese ownership and control of trade infrastructure and advanced technologies will prioritize China's interests and dictate the terms of business to their European partners. European industries are bound to suffer.

China's economic and military activism, even when considered together, are not sufficient to proclaim a serious threat to the current international order. However, the threat changes when you consider the words and actions of China today. Furthermore, the answer to the question posed in the beginning of this article begins to emerge.

Any hope that China was liberalizing has been put to rest. President Xi Jinping's consolidation of power and the increased repression of his people has alarmed the West. The Chinese government uses advanced technologies and artificial intelligence to monitor citizens' every move. A social credit system judges the trustworthiness of everyone. More than a million Muslim Uighurs are confined to reeducation camps.

Beyond its shores, Chinese cyber espionage is increasing along with state-sponsored hacking of foreign industrial and technological secrets. More menacing, Beijing routinely threatens democratic Taiwan, supports the world's most repressive regime in North Korea, and has militarized reefs in the South China Sea. International Court rulings denying China's claims to these territories are ignored. While President Xi Jinping is cordial in public and declares adherence to international norms, his actions tell a different story. In fact, Mr. Xi's own words portray a global imperial vision with a unified world ruled by the Chinese.

Fortunately, the promise of prosperity through increased economic ties is giving way to greater apprehension about China's endgame. Their investments were never solely economic—they are also about building political influence. There is a growing recognition that China is undermining Western values, rules, and standards. European countries have begun to limit Chinese investments in crucial industries. Still, several countries, especially those with struggling economies, have been susceptible to China's strategy of making friends through economic engagement.

Democracies in Europe and North America need to offer an alternative. Liberal democracies have advantages in trade, intellectual property, innovation, economic heft, and social values and must use these advantages to oppose the negative aspects of China's global influence. Not doing so, and accepting China's economic model, will likely result in having to accept their political model and the resulting loss of choice about how we want to live our lives.



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China in the Mediterranean and Implications for the United States and Europe

By Nadia Schadlow

"One Belt, One Road is like a symphony involving and benefitting every country."

—Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

"Seen from Beijing, Europe is an Asian peninsula."

—Angela Merkel

Two decades ago, the strategist Mac Owens wrote a seminal essay on classical geopolitics. He described geopolitics as "the study of the political and strategic relevance of geography to the pursuit of international power," adding that it involved the control of spatial areas that have an impact on the security and prosperity of nations. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), of which the Mediterranean is a key part, has forced the United States and Europe to think more seriously about geopolitics for the first time since the Cold War. Geopolitical competition requires the orchestration of political, economic, and security instruments—a "symphony" in the words of China's foreign minister. The challenge for the United States and Europe going

forward will be to agree on the problems posed by BRI, and then to develop a set of integrated strategies in response. The Mediterranean would be a good starting point, though any such strategy would first need to recognize and overcome several key challenges.

First, China has a head start. It will thus be quite difficult to chart a path to reverse course on its existing infrastructure projects and investments—all designed to link China more closely to Europe. Since 2012, China has created a network of port and other coastal infrastructure projects, and invested in key information-related projects. Greece has become a focal point for these investments, with Beijing having invested more than \$10 billion there. In 2016, a Chinese company acquired a controlling 51 percent stake in Greece's principal port, Piraeus. Two major Chinese entities, Cosco and China Merchants Port Holdings, have been buying other terminals in the Mediterranean. In addition, most recently, Cosco finalized the takeover of a terminal in Belgium's second-biggest port, marking the Chinese firm's first bridgehead in northwestern Europe. Overall, China controls one-tenth of all of Europe's port capacity.

Second, China's presence and active investments in the region have divided friends and provided them with alternatives to the EU and the United States. Several examples are now in play. China has siphoned EU members away from cooperation with the United States and Japan on WTO suits against China. Recently, Greece successfully blocked a European Union statement at the United Nations that criticized China's human-rights record—the first time the EU was not able to issue a unified statement at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Perhaps more importantly, countries are asserting their national sovereignty in different ways. Greek foreign minister Nikos Kotzias characterized himself as a Europeanist who looked “forward to building bridges with the new emerging world.” The head of the Greek Parliament's foreign affairs and defense committee noted that while “the Europeans are acting towards Greece like medieval leeches, the Chinese keep bringing money.” In a 2017 public opinion survey in Greece, a majority of respondents listed the EU as the most important foreign power, but when asked which ranked second, more respondents (53 percent) listed China than the United States (36 percent). China's active investments in the region likely will also eventually create tensions with one of the America's closest allies, Israel. Israel and China's “comprehensive innovation partnership” and China's growing investments in Israel's high-tech sector could, over time, create problems—at the very least strain information sharing—between the U.S. and Israel.

China's strategic investments in the Mediterranean are similar to its incremental investments in island building in the South China Sea—which over time, created a new status quo. This new status quo, combined with current tensions within NATO and the EU, will make it much harder for the West to reverse China's gains. A starting point requires first, the political will to develop a counterstrategy. One step might be for the United States and its allies (it should be a joint initiative) to undertake a serious and detailed study of China's “hard investments” as well as its “soft” or “sharper” instruments (such as high levels of engagement by Chinese companies, political and diplomatic leaders, and universities). Such an assessment will require granular economic information about existing and emerging connectivities in the region.¹ Complementing such an assessment would be an analysis of the resources available across the Multilateral Development Banks, and the U.S.'s new Development Finance Institution. At the very least, such assessments can provide a common operating picture for concerned states.

But given that, as Jakub Grygiel noted in his paper for Hoover's fall Military History workshop, the nature of the Mediterranean Sea favors continental control—“it is a sea of passage and a sea of land powers”—and that its unity and stability depend on the ability of one power—or a group of friendly powers—to control its shores and access points, any successful strategy will require steps to restore the political cohesion of states in the region. Given the current climate, this author is not feeling especially hopeful.

1 In *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2018), Bruno Maçães describes (p. 52) the concept of an economic corridor approach, which is more than merely a transportation corridor, but rather about more complex economic geographies that take “advantage of both specialization and connectivity to bring about superior economic outcomes.”



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How Important Is the Mediterranean in American Strategic Thinking?

By Bing West

In posing this question, the Hoover Institution advanced both a major and a minor subject. The major issue is defining what passes as strategic thinking in America; the minor subject is the role of the Mediterranean within that context.

American Strategic Thinking. After the Soviet Union fell apart, the communal spirit that infused Democratic and Republican administrations fractured. To be sure, that spirit had frequently seemed to splinter, especially in the case of opposition to the Vietnam War. But by and large, there was a consensus within Congress and successive administrations to act internationally on behalf of core American interests. Notably, this meant confronting the Soviet Union as the other global superpower that possessed both the military power and the ideology to constitute an existential threat. After the Soviet Union disintegrated, America lacked a perceived adversary that demanded a unity of defense, despite domestic political differences.

At the same time, America's military and economic power had grown immensely. So too had the steady accretion of foreign policy control within the White House. This meant that one person—the president—could willy-nilly commit the entire nation to courses of action with ill-defined end states and scant assessment of risk. President George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Afghanistan without insisting that the military implement a campaign to destroy al-Qaeda. When al-Qaeda escaped into Pakistan, President Bush changed the mission to one of building a democratic nation. Similarly, he ordered the invasion of Iraq with no plan for ending the mission after Saddam Hussein was overthrown. In similar fashion, President Barack Obama signed an agreement with a hostile Iran that committed America, while refusing to submit the agreement to the Senate. Where President Bush was evangelical in viewing America's global role, President Obama suggested that America historically had acted as a colonial overlord whose power had to be curtailed.

These two separate fonts of strategic thinking were summarily stanchied by the election of President Trump, whose global view was based upon transactions rather than values or interpretations of history. Rather, foreign policy was defined as a matter of quid pro quos in place of steadfast alliances or enduring principles. To President Trump, safeguarding the economic interests of the nation constituted a paramount duty. Conversely, his opponents for election seemed intent upon transforming or deconstructing the free market system, while uttering scarcely a word about America's foreign policy. Indeed, their emotional antagonism toward President Trump renders null and void any consensus about foreign or domestic policy.

There are two overarching points. First, American strategic thinking about foreign and domestic policy has come loose from its moorings. Second, strategic thinking is driven more by the occupants and staff in the White House than by any national consensus and is episodic, changing with elections.

The Importance of the Mediterranean. Under the current administration, strategic thinking about the Mediterranean is focused upon maintaining a warm emotional relationship with Israel. All else seems secondary. ISIS has been deprived of a sanctuary in devastated Syria. Whether America retains sufficient forces in Syria to protect those Kurds and Sunnis who fought with us against ISIS is problematic. When the president off-handedly declared he was pulling out all our troops, Secretary of Defense Mattis resigned. The resulting furor caused the president to backtrack, but that was due to political pressure, not to a change in strategic thought. There is no policy concerning Syria. The same is true in Iraq. As for Turkey, President Erdoğan seems intent upon emerging as a pivotal, nonaligned force among the Sunni states in the Middle East. As is the case with Syria, America has no policy, let alone strategic thinking about how to deal with this development. America is drifting.

POLL: Is the Mediterranean still geo-strategically essential?

- ☐ Mediterranean geography always ensures it will be as important as in ancient times.
- ☐ Turkey-Greece, Israel-Palestine, China's Silk Road/Harbors, Syria-ISIS-Hezbollah, remind us why the Mediterranean is critical.
- ☐ The Cold War is over and the U.S. is energy independent, so the Mediterranean is declining in relevance.
- ☐ The Mediterranean is now as important or not important as the Baltic or South Atlantic.
- ☐ Power has shifted to Asia, so the Mediterranean is a fossilized lake of little or no interest to the U.S.



BING WEST is a military historian who has written a dozen best-selling books about the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His most recent book, with co-author General Jim Mattis, is *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*. A graduate of Georgetown and Princeton Universities, where he was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, he served in the Marine infantry in Vietnam and later as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Among other awards, he is the recipient of the Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the Marine Corps Heritage Award, Tunisia's Médaille de Liberté, the Colby Military History Award, the Goodpastor Prize for Military Scholarship, the Marine Corps Foundation Award for Leadership, the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Media Medal, and the Free Press Award.

Discussion Questions

1. Why exactly has the Mediterranean been a center of war since antiquity?
2. What new crises replaced those of the Cold War in the Mediterranean?
3. How have NATO's challenges and the EU's financial status altered Mediterranean strategies?
4. Has Israel's steady ascendancy, coupled with the Iranian-Arab world split, made the Mediterranean more or less important?
5. Which power now is the most influential in the Mediterranean?

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Should the United States
Leave the Middle East?



Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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