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THE MIGRATION CHALLENGE FROM MENA: CONSIDERING THE EU'S STRUGGLES

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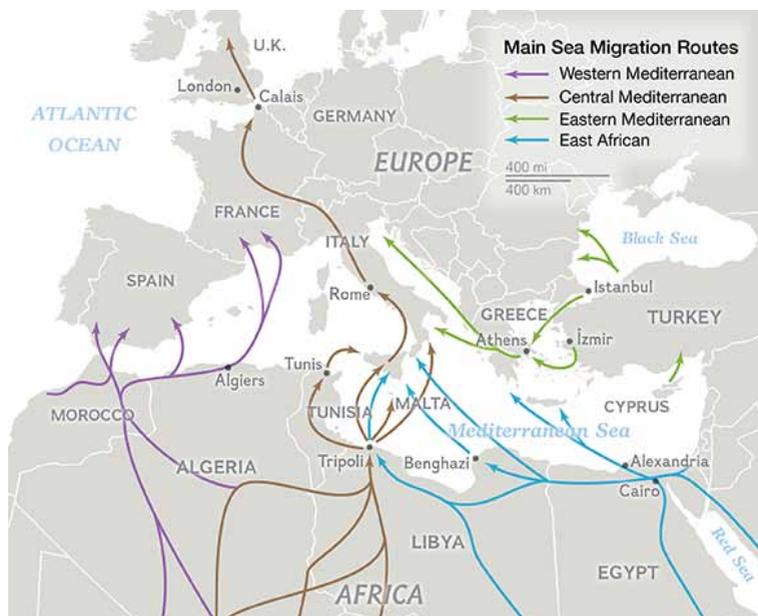
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The Migration Challenge from MENA: considering the EU's struggles

James H. Wyllie

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The European continent is profoundly vulnerable to adverse political and economic developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Geography means that Europe cannot remain immune from the salient, pressing issues of the region. Marseilles, Rome and Athens are much closer to the Levant and North African littorals than they are to London, Brussels, Copenhagen, Berlin and Warsaw. Adverse developments in MENA are often of a high-security nature, and pose threats of varying degrees to the states of Europe as well as to the collective character of European society as it has been for many generations. A tense strategic relationship between Europe and MENA is not unique to the second decade of the 21st century. European anxieties, sometimes of an existential nature, about the security of energy supply, great power struggles over dominance of a region contiguous to Europe, proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the spill-over of Islamist terrorism into Europe have been present for decades. Challenging as such threats may be, normally there would be ready military, economic and diplomatic operational instruments with which to manage them. However, in 2015, consequent to the turmoil of the 'Arab Spring/Winter', a novel threat, potentially of existential proportions in the *longue duree*, emerged. Member states of the European Union (EU), primarily Greece, have encountered the unregulated mass migration of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the conflicts of MENA. It is reckoned that over 900,000 people made unofficial crossings, via Turkey, to the Greek islands. In the first month of 2016, three times the number of January 2015 took the 'Aegean route' from MENA. There are expectations that the 'Central Mediterranean route' from Libya to Italy, witness to many tragic drownings in recent years, will see an increase in numbers throughout 2016, particularly if EU diplomatic and economic efforts to encourage



Main Sea Migration Routes. (Map by Matthew Chwastyk and Ryan Williams, National Geographic. Illustration first published in “The World’s Congested Human Migration Routes in 5 Maps”, National Geographic, September 19th 2015.)

Turkey to diminish and regulate better the huge numbers heading for Greece have some degree of success. In theory and in law the EU has a common external border. It is not only the heavily-pressurised ‘front-line’ states of Greece and Italy, but also the ‘inland’ states shaken by the considerable social and infrastructure problems from waves of unknown people, many with no security clearance, who look to the EU to deliver coherent, remedial policies and reassurance. To date, in February 2016, EU policies have lacked traction, and reassurances have lacked credibility. What does the EU need to do, and why does it find it so difficult to do?

Strategic perspective

This profound crisis necessitates a genuine strategic approach. Policymakers need to understand what strategy is, and is not. Strategy is not a preferred view of how things should be, nor is it some exclamation of moral concern. It is a very specific mode of behaviour, with serious and often costly implications, which should

always be related to a clear political objective. It is ‘the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy.’¹ It is ‘the art or science of shaping means so as to promote ends in any field of conflict.’² The calibrated, well-ordered use of coercive capabilities, in kinetic mode or latently so, in the face of opposition is what strategy is all about, and to use the term otherwise is misleading and may have outcomes contributing to costly insecurities. For instance, wittingly or unwittingly, leaders may lead their publics to believe that threats have been rigorously assessed and forces procured and deployed to meet such threats when, in reality, all that has been declared is a preferred view of the world and how it should work, and this *Weltanschauung*, or “world view”, has been labelled as a strategy. Frequently ‘the noun and adjective, strategy and strategic, are purloined by the unscrupulous or misapplied by those who are careless or ignorant. Such sins or errors can have dire consequences in practice for a realm of behaviour that is, after all, about life and death, victory or defeat.’³

First of all there is a need to establish beyond doubt what the overarching, high political objective of EU efforts is, or should be, when dealing with challenges from MENA. This clear objective then governs what capabilities need to be procured, and the method and intensity of deployment in order to achieve the objective. Is the EU objective to secure and sustain the primarily liberal, secular but ‘light-touch’ Judaic-Christian value system which forms the basis of North Atlantic and European liberties and societal organisation as at present? Or is the objective something different? No viable strategy can be pursued until a decision is clear. Let us remember that, in modern times, two bloody world wars and a long, deeply – challenging ‘cold war’ were fought, at great cost, to protect and nurture a liberal democratic system which, centuries ago, had come to a comfortable accommodation with organised Christian religion thereby allowing a routinely clear division of roles, responsibilities and authority between churches and secular governments. These painful conflicts of arms and ideas in Europe were not fought for some vague kind of idealistic cosmopolitanism, imbued with naïve notions of a multicultural - or perhaps multi -civilizational is a more accurate description - hotchpotch of traded values.

If the grand objective is, indeed, to protect and sustain liberal democracy, then some hard-headed, ‘real-world’ understanding and behaviour is required by the legitimate, central authority, but it is difficult to be optimistic about what the EU will do or even can do. Presently, in early 2016, as the primary guide to the quality of EU strategic thinking, we have to look to the European Security Strategy (ESS) from December 2003.⁴ Any quick perusal will reveal that the ESS was not a strategy at all, but rather it was a vacuous document intent on ‘virtue-signalling’, and acting as a self-regarding EU moral riposte to George Bush’s strategically robust 2002 United States National Security Strategy which, *inter alia*, posited the acceptability of preventative and pre-emptive war when faced by imminent high security threats.⁵ In fourteen pages of ESS text, the terms ‘military instruments’ and ‘military assets’ were each used once. The term ‘military force’ never appeared. The ESS utterly failed to deliver a coherent EU strategic doctrine. Efforts to up-date, to remedy, and to make the ESS more applicable to the modern, dynamic international security environment have occurred periodically since 2003, but until now to no avail. However, after a little over twelve years from the production of the original ESS, the preparation of a new ESS is reportedly underway in Brussels. A new ESS, with a specific global perspective, is expected in the summer of 2016.

All the early indications are that it will follow the political vogue for so-called ‘comprehensive’ strategies, with all the resultant interrelated weaknesses:

- The indiscriminating, over-securitisation of an array of public policy issues which, to a greater or lesser extent, are viewed as challenging.
- A crowded, low-energy, slow decision-making process which struggles to retain focus.
- The consequent failure to distinguish, and to prioritise, what are the truly existential issues from challenging but routine political problems.
- The political reluctance to name and measure the real, core enemies and threats, and the proclivity to identify threats in mostly abstract terms.

- The inability to procure, organise and deploy coercive capabilities to address directly the core, crucial threats.
- And, of course, a profound lack of awareness that there are very few 'citizens' out there that are willing to fight and die, or even pay, for such 'comprehensive' strategies. This is a particular problem for the EU as it has a dearth of legitimacy as a security actor.

Theoretically, the EU is not a military alliance such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The EU is a wide-based, semi-integrated (but not cooperative) multilateral organisation, which many states have joined for a variety of differing reasons. Apart from a few of the early members, security rarely figured amongst the most compelling reasons for membership. Nonetheless, with the emergence of European Political Cooperation (EPC) as an embryonic European Community foreign policy in the 1970s and, then, post-Maastricht Treaty, with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) evolving in the 1990s, the EU has adopted some of the elements, and also the aspirations, of an alliance. However, when attempting to deal with high security issues the EU suffers from problems which, in character, are similar to some of those experienced by NATO.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and EU High Representative Federica Mogherini before the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers on cooperation with the European Union, May 20th, 2016. (Photo: NATO.)

At 28, there are too many members. Some states did join the EU (and also NATO) to be better protected, but not necessarily to do any 'heavy-lifting' in the defence of the EU. Certainly, most members did not join to be subject to fanciful sociological experiments seeking to gauge how well hundreds of thousands of unknown individuals from deeply different cultures can be absorbed into European society. The EU is too widely spread geographically to be an effective security actor in times of crisis. Geography still matters, and political, social and security perspectives are naturally very different in Riga from Lisbon. The EU has existed for too long. Its institutional roots are as a mid-twentieth century economic organization comprised of a few, contiguous states. It is ill-equipped for the new security environment of the mid-21st century. Essentially, the EU is a sprawling system of bureaucratic regulation of social and economic matters falling within a very long and poorly-policed common external boundary. Given the immense democratic deficit at the heart of EU governance, few of its people have confidence in the EU as a credible actor in high security matters. Its manifest fecklessness in managing the migrant crisis throughout 2015 has reinforced such popular perceptions. There is the absence of a strategic common denominator, equally important to all members, which binds the association of states firmly together. What is the strategic priority? Is it Russia, ISIS, mass illegal immigration from an alien civilization holding fundamentally different values but with a much higher birth rate, or 'securitised' disputatious public-policy issues such as climate change?

By the Lisbon Treaty 2009, the ESDP was transformed into the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In the event of armed aggression against an EU member, Article 42(7) of the Lisbon Treaty requires all members to do everything in their power, including military force, to assist the state under attack. Clearly, the mass unregulated movement of people across the EU's external borders, mostly into Greece, in 2015 was not armed aggression. However, in the event of a natural or man-made disaster, Article 222 of the Lisbon Treaty calls for the EU to mobilise all instruments at its disposal, including military instruments, to address the crisis. Arguably, the unregulated mass migration of nearly one million people into one of the poorest EU states constitutes a 'man-made' disaster. The EU

has a population of over 500 million people and often claims to be a world player. Within its external borders there are 2 million people in uniform (and also reservists of over 2 million; and paramilitary forces of nearly 1 million). There are also naval forces aggregating 120 destroyers and frigates, with many more patrol and coastal protection vessels.⁶ This immense security actor apparently cannot defend its shores from waves of illegal immigrants in flimsy boats ‘invading’ the southern borders on a rather narrow front.

Strategic torpor

Augmenting the structural obstacles described above, there are related, ingrained attitudinal problems distorting clear strategic understanding by the EU policymaking elites. There is a distinct cultural myopia present in EU decision-making. Mass movements of people are not unusual in European history, especially in regions of central and east Europe following the upheavals of the Second World War. Political and social tensions did result but, over a relatively short time-frame, assimilation and acceptance of the new situation largely prevailed. Regardless of some nationalistic frictions, common Judaic-Christian and Enlightenment culture delivered a strong basis for societal peace and a reasonable level of harmony. In this regard, Islam is a problem, especially brands of fundamental Islam as understood and practiced in the desert Arab societies of the Middle East and the interior societies of south Asia. Separation of Church and State, the role of women in society, independent and liberal education, the application of secular law, the appreciation of what constitutes good governance, and many other issues are sources and illustrations of deep incompatibility between the Western and Islamic-based civilizations. However, there has been and continues to be a refusal by the European political and intellectual elites, wedded to the EU project, to recognise this immense problem as it will compromise their liberal political ‘virtue’ which, amongst other things, subscribes to a cosmopolitan, ‘state-free’ Europe.

Compounding the problem of cultural myopia is the actual rate of growth of the Muslim populations in Europe. Pew Research figures (before the recent 2014 – 15 mass inflow) reveal the following: in 2010 Germany had 5% Muslim population and by 2030 will have 7.1% ;

France 7.5% in 2010, to be 10.3% by 2030; the Netherlands 5.5% to 7.8%; Norway 3% to 6.5%; Italy 2.6% to 5.4%; and Sweden 4.9% to 9.9%; and the UK 4.6% to 8.2%.⁷ European Muslim birth rates collated by Pew Research in 2014 sustain these predictions. In Belgium the number of children per Muslim family was 2.5 and the number per non – Muslim family was 1.7. In Denmark the respective figures were 2.7 and 1.8, in France 2.8 and 1.9, in the Netherlands 2.7 and 1.6, in the UK 3.0 and 1.8, and in Norway 3.1 and 1.8.⁸ The 2009 United Nations Arab Human Development Report, independently authored by Arab scholars, delivered depressing reading. Amongst a catalogue of challenges, it highlights ‘... the economic vulnerability of one – fifth of the people in some Arab states, and more than half in others, whose lives are impoverished and cut short by hunger and want. Human insecurity is palpable and present in the alienation of the region’s rising cohort of unemployed youth and in the predicaments of subordinated women, and dispossessed refugees.’⁹ In 1980 the population of MENA was 150 million, in 2007 it was 317 million, and in 2015 it was 395 million. 60% of this population is under 25 years of age.¹⁰ Ever increasing migration pressures on Europe can only be expected. Together with the increases in the European Muslim population relative to the non-Muslim European population, largescale migration from the MENA potentially could result in very substantial Islamic voting blocs, and related pressure groups, operating in European politics.

Competently addressing the challenges posed by large scale, unregulated migration from MENA is compromised by the prevailing character of the elite EU leaderships. Most are insulated from the every-day impact of concentrated mass immigration and are, with rare exceptions, very poorly equipped, intellectually and professionally, to manage these challenges. The majority are ‘welfarist’ politicians, long-schooled in domestic issues, with little appreciation that the international system, even in a so-called age of globalisation, remains a very different place from their own domestic political arena – particularly outside Europe. ‘International’ political relations inside the EU, and with associated European states such as Norway, is of a different order in terms of real intelligence, moral and legal codes of behaviour, acceptable policy instruments, and levels of trust compared to the much tougher, ‘bare-knuckle’ character of high international politics in the wider world. Most EU leaders are imbued with self-

regarding but counter-productive strategic mantras such as coercion must always be the last resort. History, including that of modern times, is replete with instances when considering the use of force or the credible threat of force as a last resort was a massive strategic mistake, for instance standing by as Nazi Germany re-militarized the Rhineland in 1936 against the stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles. Rapid Western military opposition would, at that point of Nazi rearmament, brought down the Hitler regime. There is a strong case that early military intervention in the Syrian crisis to establish clear 'safe zones' could have profoundly reduced the refugee crisis the EU is currently experiencing. In the wake of the recent Iraq and Afghanistan interventions, the will of the European public to support the use of the military instrument in Syria would most likely have been very low, but it is the primary responsibility and duty of the heads of the EU governments to face up to challenging strategic circumstances and to lead. Strategic skill-sets, and the courage to make difficult choices about the use of coercion, are sorely absent in European leaderships cosseted over many decades by the fundamental security provided by NATO and the military power of the United States. Over a generation or two, misguided adherence to fashionable, often unctuous, and usually inchoate notions of 'soft power',¹¹ and lazy, misplaced conceit about the strategic traction of European ideals delivering real security by virtue of the inherent superiority of EU values, have contributed to the creation of an otiose EU strategic culture.¹²

At the core of the 'soft power' delusions is the misplaced and complacent reliance on 'economic development' home and abroad as an 'answer', when it is either irrelevant or makes matters worse. Over twenty years ago the EU 'Barcelona Process', which delivered five billion Euros to MENA, had the aim of inducing economic growth and development of the Western model, and thereby reinforcing political stability and countering anti-Western terrorism throughout the region. In 2007 the European Neighbourhood Policy was extended to include MENA and 18 billion Euros was allocated to the programme. Neither of these initiatives can claim any meaningful success. Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Al Qaeda, Al-Nusra and ISIS have not emerged, and behave as they do, because there is not enough Western-style economic development. Indeed, it is the threat posed to their civilization by encroaching Western 'development' which

enrages and fuels the core as well as the latent support. Those in Western societies who have a career and institutional interest in promulgating international aid as a benign security instrument refuse to confront the reality that many of the recipients are not grateful but are, rather, resentful. Western-style economic management and social policies, often levered into MENA societies, paradoxically are perceived as subversive and intent upon transforming the traditional norms. The record of large scale legal migration from MENA into the EU is that many of the migrants were not attracted to Europe for religious or social reasons, and when in Europe have sought to create and propagate communities reflecting the home society. The thousands of young Europeans of families originally from MENA who have travelled back to the region to fight for ISIS suggest that such attitudes are even more pronounced in the second and third generations. A 2006 Pew poll of young European male Muslims, aged 18 – 29, asked if suicide bombing was ever or often justified. The poll yielded the following, uncomfortable, affirmative responses: Germany 35%, Spain 46%, UK 54% and France 61%.¹³

In modern Europe, at least west of the Russian Federation, only a few members of the policymaking elites in the national capitals and also in Brussels have had exposure to rigorous instruction and education in foreign policy, strategy and history in the schools and universities. This regrettable condition has arisen over the past 25 years or so, roughly coincidental with the end of the Cold War, when it became presumably safe, and also fashionable, to argue that the Enlightenment was a form of intellectual tyranny, as was knowledge of any relevant fact or detail. So-called ‘critical’ theories of international relations and security, which advance Marxist, gender-related, ecological or post-colonial objections to the construction of power and the concept of the state, subverted empirical, largely realist, understandings of how the realms of national security, war and peace actually operate and the principles of behaviour which must be pursued to manage and mitigate the inevitable challenges delivered by a dynamic, anarchic international system. Notions such as ‘human security’ are artificially disaggregated from national security, and given a moral value above that of the denigrated concept of national security without much thought given to the consequences. One recent salient illustration, from 2015, would be



Refugees on a boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea, heading from Turkish coast to the northeastern Greek island of Lesbos, January 29th, 2016. (Credit: Mstyslav Chernov/Unframe/CC BY-SA 4.0)

Chancellor Angela Merkel's 'open door' invitation to hundreds of thousands of MENA displaced people to come to Germany, regardless of the fact that this unilateral action was in direct transgression of the EU Dublin Convention on refugees seeking asylum in the EU. All too predictably there was soon a political backlash from many EU states deeply alarmed by the implications for their respective national securities. The implications comprised not just alarm over the infiltration of groups of Islamist terrorists into the EU hidden amongst the masses of unregulated migrants, but also the prospective immense strains on national infrastructure and social harmony.

In addition to the issue of little real strategic understanding on the part of high policymakers, there is also the problem of redundant and counter-productive laws on asylum and human rights which are derived from very different circumstances seventy years ago and, regrettably, unsuited to the new security environment. This is a case of the 'best being the enemy of the good'. The 1951 Refugee Convention, which requires individual protection of refugees, was essentially designed for the European theatre, and for the management of relatively small numbers of refugees from European

countries. The care and settlement of such refugees would not involve issues of civilizational conflict of any consequence. The 1967 Protocol extended the 1951 Convention to a global scale, without thought to the repercussions from mass migration across civilizational boundaries. A substantial body of human rights laws and conventions, not least the European Convention on Human Rights, obliges signatories to deliver personal security and dignity to refugees. Such commitments are laudable, but in the real world of the mass migration of millions in a relatively short period of time, such obligations are costly and extremely challenging operationally. The EU Dublin Convention 1990, and its subsequent amendments up to 2013, requires that the state where the migrant first seeks asylum must determine the legitimacy of the asylum claim. The asylum seeker cannot make multiple claims in many states. Dublin III (2013) sought to raise standards of efficiency and protection by guaranteeing rights to information, personal interview and ample, early warning of preparedness. All of these stipulations put immense pressure on the 'front-line' states, such as Greece and Italy, who have been receiving the bulk of the migrants over the past two years. There is also an ethical argument which Machiavelli would have recognised. The private or personal morality of providing adequate care and protection for people from terrible conflict zones seems, at first consideration, to be beyond debate. However, there is a profound issue of public morality which European leaderships have a duty to take into account. What is best for the security of their states and their nationals must be given priority, accompanied by secondary but still vital strategic consideration of the future of the conflict region from which there is the mass exodus of people. On this latter point, it is in the long-term strategic interest of the EU not to have a large collapsed state on its vulnerable southern flank for decades to come. So, while the current human rights laws and refugees conventions deliver an initial 'feel-good' factor to elements of the EU populations, consideration must be given to the 'pull-power' of such European obligations, not least for the professional middle classes from the conflict zones who have the money to pay the 'people-traffickers'. However, these are the very people who are required to rebuild their countries. Their absence 'hollows out' the societies of states such as Syria and will seriously impede recovery. Clearly, for operational and also ethical reasons the body of laws

and conventions governing European behaviour when confronting mass migration on an unprecedented scale require a hard-headed reconsideration to take into account the new security environment. The eminent, late Professor Samuel Huntington famously wrote about the 'Clash of Civilizations' over twenty years ago. Huntington was deeply sceptical about Western notions of a post-Cold War 'universal civilization' based on Western norms and ideals, and he anticipated reactions against 'human rights imperialism'. He argued that

'Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language culture, tradition and, most important, religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes'.¹⁴

Huntington is often misrepresented as suggesting that the West and Islam are set on an irrevocable the path to global conflict. While not impossible, he thought it highly improbable. However, a salient concern of Huntington was the increasing threat posed by the danger of 'cleft societies'.¹⁵ A 'cleft society' describes the situation where one civilizational model may find itself in deep competition with another model of civilization over the cultural identity of the state. As multi-civilizational societies are a chimera, conflict will be the outcome. Demographic trends in many parts of the EU, compounded by mass, unregulated migration from MENA, present a serious danger of the emergence of 'cleft' societies on the European continent in the medium to longer term.

Remedies

In the short term, preventative action must be pursued. There needs to be an honest and transparent recognition of the severity of the issue, not clouded by 'virtue-signalling' idealism. Huge waves of migration from across a dysfunctional MENA may well descend on the southern

shores of the EU over the next few years unless coherent strategies are put in place. A few key states with military capabilities need to coalesce (outside the EU framework) and, with Greece, patrol the waters and either, return the migrant boats and their human cargoes to their departure points, or intern them in Greece before their return. Internal to the EU, the Schengen Agreement must be paused, and the automatic free movement of people throughout the EU severely restricted for the duration of the crisis, albeit perhaps for a long time. Migrants in massive numbers must be discouraged from travelling to the EU by diluting the 'pull power' of current EU legal and social arrangements, and the able-bodied men should be encouraged to stay and fight for the future of their own societies. In this regard, for firm reasons of legitimate, ethical self-interest, capable states should use military force to carve out 'safe zones' in Syria, adjacent to those areas controlled by the Assad government. A pragmatic, real-world attitude should be adopted towards the strategic facts on the ground, and some accommodation reached with the government in Damascus and its supporters in Moscow. If NATO's 28 members can come to some agreement on objectives and strategy, then this is an opportunity for this large, historical alliance to manifest its utility in meeting crises around the periphery of the alliance – a role it trumpeted when questioned about strategic reasons for its existence after the demise of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the Soviet Union. If NATO chooses not to take the field, then a 'coalition of the willing' is required. While the will for robust action may be weak amongst the European public, and any operations will be costly, not to act could well have profoundly detrimental outcomes for liberal society in the EU over the longer-term.

Notes

- 1 Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p.17.
- 2 Hedley Bull, 'Strategic Studies and its Critics', *World Politics*, 20 (4), 1968, p.593.
- 3 C. Gray 1999 (above), p.16.
- 4 See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>
- 5 See <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>
- 6 See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2015*, Routledge, London, 2015.
- 7 See <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>
- 8 See <https://muslimstatistics.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/pew-fertility-rate-for-muslims-and-non-muslims-in-europe/>
- 9 <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2009e.pdf>, p.4.
- 10 UN Arab Report (above), p.2.
- 11 See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2005.
- 12 See Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, Atlantic Books, London, 2003, pp.53 – 67 for elucidation.
- 13 See Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans – Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150429155650/http://www.pewresearch.org/files/old-assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf#page=60><https://web.archive.org/web/20150429155650/http://www.pewresearch.org/files/old-assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf#page=60>, p.54.
- 14 Samuel Huntington, 'Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (3), 1993, p. 25.
- 15 See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, The Free Press, London, 2002, pp.137 – 139.

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