

Shifting Eastern Mediterranean Geometry

The security architecture that the United States helped establish after the Cold War in the Eastern Mediterranean is crumbling. That architecture emphasized two triangular partnerships: U.S.–Turkey–Israel and U.S.–Egypt–Israel. Each had its origin in the Cold War and gained new emphasis afterwards as a cornerstone of U.S. efforts to promote Middle Eastern stability. Yet the evolution of internal politics in Turkey over the last decade, combined with more recent shifts in Egypt, have brought to the fore civilian politicians who are openly critical of such partnerships and who have sidelined the partnerships' military proponents. The demise of these two triangles has profound implications for Israeli security, as well as for the U.S. military and diplomatic role in the Eastern Mediterranean. The changing geometry of U.S. relationships in the Eastern Mediterranean is part of a set of broader trends that make it more difficult for the United States to shape outcomes and set agendas in the region. This change in particular is likely to force the United States to emphasize bilateral relationships and ad hoc direct action in the future, placing a greater demand on ongoing U.S. management than has been the case in the past.

Origins of the Geometry

Narrow Cold War considerations inspired the creation of each triangle. At the forefront was containing Soviet regional intervention and, by extension, pro-Soviet Arab regimes. It took time for the broader benefits of the geometry that these relationships created to become clear, and for the United States to

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integrate the two triangles into a regional strategy. That geometry came to strengthen a number of policy objectives and U.S. interests, including maintaining regional stability, securing the free flow of global energy supplies, and pursuing comprehensive Arab–Israeli peace.

Despite the considerable benefits to the United States, the U.S. role in promoting these relationships was often informal or indirect. The United States provided an umbrella which fostered networks of shared interests, common

threat perceptions, and cooperation. That cooperation deepened after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the United States became free to shape a new regional order and took a more active approach to fostering a closer network of relations among the three allies.

The seeds of the U.S.–Turkish–Israeli triangle were planted first, but they did not involve the United States directly. In 1949, Turkey was one of the first Muslim countries to recognize Israel, and Turkey was central to Israel’s early strategy of building ties with non-Arab states on the periphery of the Middle East. Cooperation deepened after the 1958 secret meeting between Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, which set out the parameters for Israeli-Turkish intelligence and military cooperation.

Turkish–Israeli ties were based primarily on common threats: both countries were growing increasingly concerned by the behavior of the Soviet Union, and rising Arab nationalism troubled them as well. The 1958 Iraqi revolution, which overthrew Iraq’s Hashemite monarchy, set off alarm bells in Turkey and Israel, as did the political union between Egypt and Syria that same year which created the United Arab Republic. Turkey and Israel each felt that revolutionary Arab states now flanked its borders, and each was searching for regional protection. Though Turkish ties with Israel remained largely secret, they were apparently wide reaching and even included joint plans for war against Syria.¹

There is little evidence that the United States played an instrumental role in fostering cooperation during this period, or even saw it as beneficial, despite Israeli requests for U.S. support.² The United States principally viewed Turkey as a European, not a Middle Eastern, country, and Turkey was central to U.S. security thinking while Israel was peripheral. Turkey was a large NATO ally bordering the Soviet Union and controlling Soviet access to the Mediterranean via the Black Sea. Israel, by contrast, was a small country with a modest military

capability whose ongoing conflict with its Arab neighbors provided an opening for Soviet influence in the Middle East.

By the time U.S.–Israeli ties warmed during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Turkish–Israeli cooperation was unraveling largely due to the Cyprus crisis of 1963, which became a focal point for Turkish foreign policy. As Turkey sought to shore up Arab support for its position in the United Nations, it increasingly distanced itself from Israel. For most of the next several decades, Turkish–Israeli relations were uneven, and of little strategic interest to the United States. Turkey had no obvious role in the Middle East, and the United States had no interest in fostering one. The elements of the triangle were there, but the legs did not come together.

The elements of the U.S.–Egyptian–Israeli triangle came together much more quickly and purposively, and its Cold War import was much more evident from the start. Paving the way for Arab–Israeli peace and turning Egypt from a Soviet client into a U.S. one represented significant victories for U.S. strategy in the Middle East. Though the United States preferred a comprehensive Arab–Israeli agreement, the 1978 Camp David Accords were an important step along the way. Between 1948 and 1973, Israel and Egypt had fought five wars.³ Striking an Egyptian–Israeli peace deal made a broad regional war far more unlikely and helped insulate the region from Soviet encroachment. If war did break out, the aftermath was likely to be more localized and manageable without Egyptian participation,⁴ as the war in Lebanon in 1982 demonstrated. The subsequent three decades have borne out this strategy.

In addition, Egypt's historic pivot toward the United States under President Anwar Sadat, which began in 1970 and culminated with the U.S.-brokered Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty of 1979, stripped the Soviet Union of its most powerful Arab client. Egypt's demographic weight as well as its political and cultural influence made it a center of gravity in the region; when combined with friendly U.S. relations with the smaller Arab states in the Gulf, a pro-U.S. Egypt ensured that the United States reigned as the undisputed external powerbroker in the region.

Closer U.S.–Egyptian ties had additional benefits for the United States. They helped sustain the U.S. military presence elsewhere in the Middle East by assuring free passage through the Suez Canal and preferential transit for U.S. warships, military overflight rights, and expanded military and intelligence cooperation with the Arab world's largest state.

Even so, U.S.-Egyptian-Israeli ties did not constitute a durable triangular relationship in the early 1980s, just as U.S.–Turkish–Israeli ties did not. It took a fundamental change in the world order to create the opportunity for the triangular ties to rise in importance.

The Post-Cold War Regional Order

The end of the Cold War left the United States relatively unchallenged to pursue its Middle East policy, but threats remained. Arab–Israeli peace was still not done, Iran remained meddlesome, and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was a growing menace. Israeli security had risen on the list of U.S. priorities, and the prospect of Israeli hostilities with its neighbors remained worrisome. During the 1991 Gulf War, the United States essentially parked Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger in Israel to reassure its leaders of U.S. support and to ensure that Israel did not respond to Iraqi provocations. Even without the Soviet Union, U.S. concern about stability in the Middle East was high.

The solution that the George H.W. Bush administration constructed, and the one on which the Clinton administration elaborated, was to use the Eastern

Mediterranean as an anchor of regional stability. Through further securing Israel and boosting its ties to the other major littoral powers in the area, the United States sought to eliminate causes for regional war, end the festering Arab–Israeli conflict that fed both extremism and anti-American sentiment, and make the region inhospitable to radical regimes and groups alike. The geometry of these relationships, two triangles that bound the United States to Israel and to its most powerful neighbors, would provide the foundation for regional stability. These two triangles in the Eastern Mediterranean represented the positive components of U.S. regional strategy;

These two triangles bound the U.S. to Israel and provided the foundation for regional stability.

the other part was “dual containment” in the Gulf, which was essentially a negative strategy that sought to hem in Iraq and Iran simultaneously. The stability that these triangles fostered could spread not only through the Middle East, but also through the whole Mediterranean basin.

The U.S.–Turkey–Israel triangle was in many ways harder to develop in the 1990s than the U.S.–Egypt–Israel one, because its seeds lay in the more distant past. It was only when uncertainty over NATO’s future grew that Turkey became more interested in renewing ties with Israel. As in the 1950s, Iraq was the catalyst. The 1991 Gulf War weakened Baghdad’s control over Northern Iraq and its Kurdish population, and consequently intensified the Kurdish insurgency against Turkey.⁵ Turkey’s secular leaders were growing increasingly concerned with the wave of religious radicalization that was expanding to its south in the aftermath of the war, and it shared with Israel a sense of threat from terrorism and militant Islam. Beyond security cooperation, Turkey saw Israel as a potentially powerful ally with the U.S. Congress. Ankara remains sensitive to

charges that it carried out genocide against Armenian Christians in the years after World War I, and Armenian–Americans had been building interest in Congress to pass a resolution condemning Turkish behavior. For some Turkish officials, the best way to head off the Armenian–American lobby was to counter it with support from the even more influential pro-Israel lobby.

Turkish–Israeli ties were more than merely political. After several years of warming ties, senior visits, and signed agreements, the relationship took a strategic turn with the signing of a military cooperation agreement in 1996. The agreement had a number of components, including one that allowed the Israeli Air Force to use Turkish airspace for training. Israel remains a small country, with little space to train soldiers in advanced warfare, and Turkey provided Israel with strategic depth.

In return, Israel agreed to provide Turkey with access to military platforms and technologies that the United States and Europe declined to provide. In this way, Turkey became a lucrative market for Israel's defense industry. But the relationship was not all one way. Israel's military power also bolstered Turkey's military deterrent. Diplomatically, as a Muslim state, Turkey served as a model for Israel's potential relations with Muslim states and gave Israel a valuable degree of legitimacy in the region. Ankara in turn saw Israel as a valuable asset in making Turkey relevant to the United States after the Cold War and, as noted, building support for Turkey in Congress.

While the Turkish military was both the booster and the protector of the Turkish–Israeli partnership, bilateral trade has also been an important component. In 1991, when Turkey upgraded diplomatic relations with Israel, bilateral trade stood at about \$100 million annually. In 1997, Turkey and Israel signed a free trade agreement, and within less than a decade trade had jumped to nearly \$2 billion annually.⁶

The Clinton administration expanded support for the Turkish–Israeli strategic partnership. As Secretary of Defense William Cohen stated, the United States would “continue to stress the need for greater cooperation between Israel, Turkey, and Jordan” in order to enhance the level of security arrangements in the region.⁷ State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns echoed that sentiment, declaring that, “We think it's positive that Israel has friends beyond the immediate region in which Israel resides. Turkey's a very powerful, very important country in the Eastern Mediterranean and it makes sense to us that Israel and Turkey would want to be friends, would want to have military and political and economic cooperation.”⁸ By 2001, the United States military was participating in trilateral air force and search-and-rescue exercises with Israel and Turkey.

Overall, two dynamics shaped the way the United States fostered a deeper Turkish–Israeli partnership without forcing it. First, the United States did not

want to threaten its Arab allies, so it was sensitive not to portray its support as part of a triangular alliance. Though it openly participated in joint search and rescue naval operations and trilateral security discussions, it also sought to emphasize that the military exercises were humanitarian in nature. Second, the United States wanted to ensure that close Turkish–Israeli ties did not supplant close U.S.–Turkish cooperation or compete in the realm of military sales.⁹ As one analyst described it, “the United States sought to provide an umbrella for the relationship, while seeking to prevent them from taking a course independent of U.S. interests.”¹⁰

The deepening Turkish-Israeli partnership advanced several U.S. policy objectives. With regard to potential foes, the two countries have the most powerful militaries in the region, and a trilateral partnership strengthened U.S. regional deterrence. In addition to putting pressure on Syria, Iran, and Iraq, Turkish–Israeli cooperation helped “enhance Washington’s ability to address specific issues such as theater ballistic missile defense and terrorism.”¹¹ With regard to allies, the partnership helped integrate Israel more deeply into the region, mitigating Israeli isolation and thereby reducing the likelihood of a regional war escalating in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, some scholars dismiss the idea that this relationship constituted a strategic triangle at all, outside of a brief window between the late 1990s and early 2000s. They argue, instead, that the United States saw each partner operating in a separate sphere: the Israelis in an Arab–Israeli context, and the Turks in a European one.¹² The division mirrors the bureaucratic divisions in the U.S. government that consistently lump Turkey with Europe and Israel with its Arab neighbors. Above the mid-level bureaucratic pigeonholes, however, strategic thinkers in the U.S. government appear to have grasped the utility of this triangular relationship for a number of goals. Indeed, it was the commonality of interests and assessments that gave rise to the relationship in the first place, and a consistent pattern of U.S. actions gives every indication that the U.S. government acted to enhance that commonality, even if a practical series of considerations meant they did not want to talk about it too much.

Common interests played a similarly large role in securing the Egyptian–Israeli partnership. Once the respective militaries were able to get beyond three decades of war fighting and preparation for war, the two countries found they shared a wide number of interests. Those interests included combating Iranian influence in the Levant, fighting terrorism and Islamic extremism, and maintaining regional stability. Later, Egypt and Israel would be bound by a natural gas pipeline, which provided Israel with an important supply of energy. While cooperation remained politically sensitive, Israel had

agricultural expertise from desert farming which helped Egypt to extend its arable land beyond the Nile Valley.

However valuable the material aspects of the relationship were, its greatest impact was in the diplomatic realm. Egypt's peace treaty took the shock out of Arab cooperation with Israel and provided political cover for Palestinians and other Arabs to negotiate directly with Israel. Palestinians signed a formal interim accord with Israel in 1993, and Jordan signed a peace agreement in 1994. In so doing, they transformed the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the initial impact of the Camp David Accords was to isolate Egypt, the accords actually returned Egypt to its trend-setting mode, and the Arab world came to follow the Egyptian lead.

For Israel, the reassurance that came from a friendly Egypt was immeasurable. Peace with Egypt not only removed an immediate military threat from the Israeli consciousness, but it more subtly reinforced the notion that regional acceptance and an end to Israeli regional isolation was possible.

Whereas the United States was reluctant to play too visible a role in fostering Turkish-Israeli ties, it was far less reluctant to play that role with Egypt and Israel. In part, U.S. diplomacy was central to the Egyptian-Israeli rapprochement and the peace treaty that followed it, so no one doubted where Washington stood. Also, Egypt's embrace of peace with Israel left it more exposed to Arab criticism, leading the United States to seek to compensate Egypt for its isolation. For Egyptian leaders, the treaty with Israel paid off handsomely: it led to a full return of Egyptian territory lost during the 1967 War and solidified an aid relationship with the United States that led to more than \$2 billion in annual aid.

Independently and together, these two triangular partnerships strengthened U.S. interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Throughout their development, and particularly over the last two decades, U.S. ties with all three allies evolved and the partnerships took on a reinforcing geometry. The frameworks' logic lay in the military and security realm, and had their main sponsors in the military-dominated regimes of Egypt and Turkey.

After nearly two decades of stability and predictability however, the relationships are now shifting dramatically, eroding these two pillars of U.S. regional security strategy and stability. The consequences for the ways the United States thinks about security in the Eastern Mediterranean will be profound.

The Geometry Breaks Down

The rise to power of new groups of civilian politicians in Turkey and Egypt, and the diminishing role of military leaders in public life, has cast doubt on the

strategic relationships that prevailed in the 1990s. Whereas military regimes built and nurtured the strategic geometry described above, new political leaderships that rose in Turkey in the early 2000s and in Egypt after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 have sought greater distance from Israel and have embraced more complicated bilateral ties with the United States. As a result, all three countries—Turkey, Egypt, and Israel—are pursuing increasingly independent policies which clash with U.S. interests, policies, and threat perceptions more than in the past.

Turkey's civilian government, headed by the Islamically inspired Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2003, led a shift away from nearly eight decades of military-influenced politics. While the government did not take an immediately hostile position against Israel, it did move swiftly and successfully to sideline the Turkish military, the traditional guardian of Turkish-Israeli cooperation. It did so in part with support from EU harmonization requirements, which called for greater civilian oversight of the military. Over time, the AKP government granted itself both oversight and control over the military's extra-budgetary funds, removed military officials from civilian

boards such as the Higher Education Board, and most importantly restricted the National Security Council (MGK), which had been the primary vehicle for military influence over Turkish politics.¹³ More recently, the AKP government has purged the officer corps, jailing hundreds and putting former senior officers on trial for alleged conspiracies to overthrow the government.

As Turkey has changed internally, its foreign policy priorities have changed as well. Turkey and Israel shared common threat perceptions for most of their modern history. Yet, as Turkey put more

and more emphasis on its role in the Middle East, Turkish and Israeli policy preferences became increasingly irreconcilable. As one Turkish analyst notes, "Turkey increasingly sees itself as a regional power and seeks to be America's main partner in the region."¹⁴ Israel went from being a vehicle for Turkish ambitions to being an obstacle to them.

The breakup has been slow and painful. The AKP and Israeli governments were at odds over a range of issues, including Turkey's recognition of Hamas' 2006 electoral victory and the growth in Turkish-Syrian cooperation following a free trade agreement signed in 2004, which led to a decline in Israeli military transfers to Turkey. Still, Ankara sought to play a mediating role in brokering Israeli-Syrian negotiations in 2008, which were disrupted by the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009. The

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way the Turks tell it, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan felt humiliated by the fact that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert visited Turkey just before the Israeli assault on Gaza but gave him no clue it was in the works. Erdogan's sting at not being told was compounded by the possible appearance that he had given a green light to the assault. Shortly after, in 2009, Turkey excluded the Israeli Air Force from the annual Anatolian Eagle air exercise. In response to the Turkish action, the United States cancelled its participation. By the time of the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla incident in May 2010, in which Israeli commandos killed nine Turkish citizens aboard a Turkish ship attempting to break Israel's blockade of Gaza, Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation had already deteriorated dramatically.

Turkey has also emerged as a vocal supporter of Palestinian efforts to gain full membership in the United Nations and actively seeks to undermine Israel diplomatically. (After heavy lobbying from the United States, Turkey voted to admit Israel into the OECD in May 2010.) For example, Turkey has welcomed Hamas leaders to Turkey on several occasions, and according to Israeli reports continues to support efforts to break Israel's embargo of

Gaza. In September 2011, after efforts to broker an Israeli apology for the *Mavi Marmara* incident failed, Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador and downgraded diplomatic relations to the second secretary level.¹⁵ Most recently, Turkey has actively tried to block Israeli cooperation with NATO and sought to veto Israel's participation in the May 2012 NATO summit held in Chicago. With Turkey's military neutralized as a political force, there is no strong Turkish constituency to promote a Turkish-Israeli rapprochement. Cooperation and friendship have been replaced with public accusations, threats, and animosity.

Turkey's political evolution, and its growing distance from Israel, occurred over a decade. By contrast, Egypt has undergone much sharper political change, and its relationship to Israel appears to be changing more abruptly. Egypt's 58-year-old military-led order came crashing down after only 18 days of popular protests in February 2011. President Hosni Mubarak in particular, but also the military from which he came and which he protected, placed a high priority on maintaining Egyptian-Israeli ties. That partnership was the glue behind \$1.3 billion in annual U.S. military aid to Egypt as well as tens of billions of dollars of economic assistance which flowed in the decades since Camp David. The assistance helped modernize and equip the Egyptian military, and it also ensured that military resources could go toward building military institutions rather than entering into an arms race with a technologically superior Israel. Egypt's peace

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with Israel had resulted in restoring all of the Egyptian land occupied in 1967 and diminished the potential threats facing Egypt, but even so, many Egyptians remained openly hostile to Israel, and the notional foe for the Egyptian army remained its neighbor to the east.

While Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has attempted to preserve the military's prerogatives and interests in the post-Mubarak period, the effort remains a work in progress. Fifteen months of direct military rule have sullied the reputation of Egypt's generals, and the public mood is shifting clearly toward reorienting Egypt's ties to both Israel and the United States.

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Two questions loom. One is how successful today's military leadership will be in preserving Israeli ties in the years after a civilian leadership comes to the fore. The military has carefully guarded its relationship with Israel as central to its wellbeing, but the relationship does not have strong constituencies among the broader Egyptian society. The second uncertainty has to do with the nature of Egypt's military as a whole in the coming years. The SCAF currently bears the imprint of President

Mubarak, who favored cautious generals supportive of the status quo. Whether the character of Egypt's military will change in the wake of broader changes taking place in Egypt is unknown. While the current leadership can negotiate a role for itself in Egypt's future, how its successors will seek to exercise its prerogatives, and what they will see their priorities to be, remains unknown.

In any event, Egypt's new political elite will likely seek to rebalance Egyptian-Israeli relations, reducing economic ties and security cooperation.¹⁶ While political leaders have suggested they would not abandon the Camp David Accords, they have signaled their belief that Israel has neither fulfilled its obligations nor given the Palestinians independence, and that they may either call for a renegotiation or obviate Egypt's responsibility to fulfill all of its obligations.

As Egypt's new politicians articulate their views of a new regional order, Israeli and Egyptian common interests appear to be shrinking. Egypt is now more open to accommodating Hamas in Gaza after a five-year siege imposed by the Mubarak government. The new Egyptian government is less likely to tolerate Israeli military campaigns in Gaza or instinctively share the same threat assessment of Iran. While the Camp David Accords do not appear in immediate danger of collapsing, there is a wide spectrum of negative outcomes for Israel between an absence of hostilities and a return to open conflict. Those outcomes are already taking shape, and may only continue to do so. The announcement by the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation in April 2012 that it would cease

selling natural gas to Israel is a modest example of the deterioration of Egyptian–Israeli strategic cooperation.

Ramifications

Democratization has long been a U.S. foreign policy priority, but in both Turkey and Egypt it complicates the delicate geometry that the United States established to buttress regional stability. Military governments in Turkey and Egypt saw the logic of tying their future to the United States, and they understood the benefits of drawing from Israeli military might rather than confronting it. The passions of the streets, and the arguments of the politicians whom the streets brought to power, are different, and the geometry that the U.S. helped establish is becoming harder to sustain.

Such shifts in the regional strategic geometry come at a time when U.S. domestic politics and budget pressure make it harder to formulate effective strategies abroad. Critics assert that the United States' ability to shape outcomes and set agendas in the region is waning, and many U.S. allies are questioning U.S. strategic judgment. These shifting conditions could have several implications after decades of relative stability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Democratization in both Turkey and Egypt is complicating regional stability.

One is military clashes between states, whether accidental or intentional, in a number of potential scenarios. A chief area of concern is in the Sinai Peninsula. After years of neglect, Sinai has become an arms smuggling haven and a base for terrorist attacks against Israel.¹⁷ Egyptian police forces have virtually withdrawn from Sinai, and army troops have replaced them, but attacks against Egyptian authorities and international peacekeeping troops persist. The resultant security vacuum threatens Israeli population centers near the Egyptian border. Cross-border attacks from Egyptian territory have escalated, and in August 2011 eight Israelis were killed in a series of coordinated attacks. Two Egyptian soldiers were accidentally killed in the ensuing retaliation by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Another cross-border attack with similar casualties could lead to a massive Israeli retaliation into Egyptian territory. Such operations would not only further strain diplomatic relations, but could also trigger an accidental Egyptian–Israeli military confrontation. Another IDF military assault on Gaza similar to the 2008–2009 engagement could also lead to a less restrained Egyptian policy. Under such scenarios, the Egyptian government would likely face domestic pressure to take a more confrontational diplomatic position against Israel.

A clash in Eastern Mediterranean waters over energy reserves poses similar challenges. In 2009, Israel made three offshore natural gas discoveries that could contain an estimated 25 trillion cubic feet of gas.¹⁸ More recently, Israel has demarcated a maritime boundary with Cyprus and begun exploring for natural gas offshore of Cyprus through the U.S.-based company Noble Energy, which is 30 percent Israeli-owned.¹⁹ Turkey has responded sharply, declaring the agreement illegal and reportedly threatening to use Turkish naval ships to prevent Israel from extracting energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁰ Though both Israel and Turkey have attempted to cool the rhetoric, the threats are a reminder of the volatility and precariousness of the security situation surrounding regional energy production.

Second, the decline of military-led regimes means that domestic politics will weigh more heavily in the foreign policies of all of these states, introducing new actors and dynamics while putting much beyond the reach of U.S. influence. Turkey's opposition to UN Security Council resolutions against Iran in June 2010 was a clear signal of Turkey's more assertive and independent policy in the Middle East and beyond, and it was linked at least in part to Turkish public opinion. The crisis over the trial of U.S. NGO workers in Egypt in early 2012 signified changes in U.S.-Egyptian ties as well. The U.S. military is concerned that overflight rights, preferential transit of the Suez Canal, and cooperation on counterterrorism are all at risk. More trouble may be on the way.

U.S. Policy Implications

Predictions about the future security of the Eastern Mediterranean are more deterministic, and often more dire, than what reality is likely to prove. Much remains unsettled, and incentives for accommodation are larger than many acknowledge. Even so, the shifting geometry of Eastern Mediterranean security has several policy implications for the United States that are worth noting.

First, the United States is likely to be called upon to play a more direct role in managing Israel's relations with the rest of the world. Some of this has already happened. Both the White House and State Department worked unsuccessfully to broker an acceptable Israeli apology to Turkey in the year following the Gaza flotilla incident. When mobs stormed the Israeli embassy in Cairo in September 2011, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta appealed to the SCAF to intervene and save the stranded diplomats. By some accounts, had the SCAF waited another hour, the final barrier in the embassy would have been breached and Israeli-Egyptian peace would have been in shreds—along with the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. The geometry of two reinforcing triangular relationships with Turkey and Egypt, respectively, gave Israel considerably more security than it would otherwise have had, and played some role in

mitigating Israeli actions as well as likely responses to them. An Israel that feels more exposed in a hostile region may act more unpredictably, creating concomitant risks for the United States.

Second, the United States needs to reevaluate whether the Eastern Mediterranean is as strong a platform to project regional security into the Middle East as it once was. With key relationships under strain, political turmoil ongoing, and the possibility of civil war in Syria and beyond, the Eastern Mediterranean poses a shaky foundation for regional peace. Indeed, rather than pivoting off a stable Eastern Mediterranean, it may prove difficult enough just to put out fires in the region. A broader perspective and a new paradigm for regional security will be needed.

Third, the United States needs to induce Europe to play a greater role in Eastern Mediterranean security than it has done to date. Europe has influence with Egypt, Israel, and Turkey for a wide range of economic reasons, many of which revolve around access to European markets. The United States should work with European allies to persuade them to make shoring up regional security one of their major priorities in the Mediterranean, and to use their economic weight to do so.

Finally, the United States needs to recognize that the Eastern Mediterranean will be a site of greater risk for it and its interests. While there is a great incentive to find ways to diminish the U.S. military and diplomatic presence around the globe, the Eastern Mediterranean is not a place where cuts should be made. Military and diplomatic engagement, information-sharing exercises, and networks that create working-level cooperation between governments and their militaries have upfront costs, but they are an investment in preventing crises which sweep through the region.

Thinking Ahead

The United States did not design from scratch the triangular partnerships that prevailed in the Eastern Mediterranean throughout the 1990s. Those partnerships built on existing ties which arose out of a very different logic rooted in the Cold War. Nevertheless, the partnerships have long served U.S. interests, and their breakdown will have a profound impact on those interests. Looking forward, the increasingly strained relations between Egypt, Turkey, and Israel will complicate U.S. strategic calculations in the Eastern Mediterranean. The United States has deep ties with all three allies, each of which is central to longstanding U.S. interests and policy objectives in the region.

The resultant changes will force the United States to rethink its model for regional stability. While the goals of U.S. policy remain unchanged—maintaining the flow of energy, securing the Gulf, supporting Israel's security,

and preventing nuclear proliferation—achieving them will become more difficult.

Notes

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