

# China's European Moment Has Arrived

The simplicities of the postwar order have just begun to pass into history, writes Patrick Lawrence.

By **Patrick Lawrence**

*Special to Consortium News*



It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Xi Jinping's visits to Rome, Paris and Monaco last week. In bringing his much-remarked Belt and Road Initiative to the center of Europe, the Chinese president has faced the Continent with the most fundamental question it will have to resolve in coming decades: Where does it stand as a trans-Atlantic partner with the U.S. and – as of Xi's European tour – the western flank of the Eurasian landmass? The simplicities of the postwar order, to put the point another way, have just begun to pass into history.

In Rome, the populist government of Premier Giuseppe Conte brought Italy into China's ambitious plan to connect East Asia and Western Europe via a multitude of infrastructure projects stretching from Shanghai to Lisbon and beyond. The memorandum of understanding Xi and Deputy Premier Luigi Di Maio signed calls for joint development of roads, railways, bridges, airports, seaports, energy projects and telecommunications systems. Along with the MoU, Chinese investors signed 29 agreements worth \$2.8 billion.

Italy is the first Group of 7 nation to commit to China's BRI strategy and the first among the European Union's founding members. It did so two weeks after the European

Commission released “EU–China: A Strategic Outlook,” an assessment of China’s swift arrival in Europe that goes straight to the core of the Continent’s ambivalence. Here is the operative passage in the E.C. report:

“China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the E.U. has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the E.U. needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.”

There is much in this document to chew upon. One is the mounting concern among EU members and senior officials in Brussels about China’s emergence as a global power. This is natural, providing it does not tip into a contemporary version of the last century’s Yellow Peril. At the same time, the Continent’s leaders are highly resistant to the confrontational posture toward China that Washington urges upon them. This is the wisest course they could possibly choose: It is a strong indicator that Europeans are at last seeking an independent voice in global affairs.

### **Looking for Unity**

They are also looking for a united EU front in the Continent’s relations with China. This was Emmanuel Macron’s point when Xi arrived in Paris. The French president made sure German Chancellor Angela Merkel and E.C. President Jean–Claude Juncker were there to greet Xi on his arrival at the Élysée Palace. The primary reason Italy sent shockwaves through Europe when it signed onto Xi’s signature project is

because it effectively broke ranks at a highly charged moment.

But unity of the kind Macron and Merkel advocate is likely to prove elusive. For one thing, Brussels can impose only so far on the sovereignty of member states. For another, no one wants to miss, in the name of an E.U. principle, the opportunities China promises to bring Europe's way. While Macron insisted on EU unity, he and Xi looked on as China signed contracts with Airbus, Électricité de France, and numerous other companies worth more than \$35 billion.

There is only one way to read this: Core Europe can argue all it wants that China is unrolling a divide-and-conquer strategy, but one looks in vain for on-the-ground resistance to China's apparent preference for bilateral agreements across the Continent. On his way home, Xi stopped in Monaco, which agreed in February to allow Huawei, China's controversial telecoms company, to develop the principality's 5G phone network.

In numerous ways, Italy was fated to demonstrate the likely shape of China's arrival in Europe. The Conte government, a coalition led by the rightist Lega and the Five-Star Movement, has been a contrarian among EU members since it came to power last year: It is highly critical of Brussels and of other member states, it opposes EU austerity policies, it is fiercely jealous of its sovereignty in the EU context, and it favors better ties with Russia.

Closer to the ground, the Italian economy is weak and inward investment is paltry. Chinese manufacturers have made short work of Italian competitors in industries such as textiles

and pharmaceuticals over the past couple of decades. A map, finally, tells us all we need to know about Italy's geographic position: Its ports, notably Trieste at the northern end of the Adriatic, are gateways to the heart of Europe's strongest markets.

As the westward destination of Xi's envisioned Belt and Road, Europe's economic and political relations with China were bound to reach a takeoff point. The accord with Italy, Xi's European tour and an [EU-China summit](#) scheduled to take place in Brussels on April 9 signal that this moment has arrived.

### **Shift in Relationship**

But it is not yet clear whether Europeans have grasped the strategic magnitude of last week's events. In effect, the Continent's leaders have started down a path that is almost certain to induce a shift in the longstanding trans-Atlantic relationship. In effect, Europe is starting – at last – to act more independently while repositioning itself between the Atlantic world and the dynamic nations of the East; China first among them by a long way.

No European leader has yet addressed this inevitable question.

Let us not overstate this case. Trans-Atlantic ties have been increasingly strained since Barack Obama's presidency. President Donald Trump's antagonisms, most notably over the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear agreement, have

intensified this friction. But there is still no indication that any European leader advocates a rupture in relations with Washington.

Can U.S.–European ties evolve gradually as China’s presence on the Continent grows more evident? This is the core question. Both sides will determine the outcome. The Europeans appear to be preparing for a new chapter in the trans–Atlantic story, but there is simply no telling how Washington will respond to a reduction in its long-unchallenged influence in Western European capitals.

There is one other question the West as a whole must face. The E.C.’s “strategic outlook” terms China “a systemic rival promoting alternative forms of governance.” There are two problems with this commonly sounded theme.

First, there is no evidence whatsoever that China has or ever will insist that other countries conform to its political standards in exchange for economic advantage. That may be customary practice among Western nations and at institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It is not China’s.

Second, as we advance toward a condition of parity between West and non–West – an inevitable feature of our century – it will no longer be plausible to assume that the West’s parliamentary democracies set the standard by which all others can be judged. Nations have vastly varying political traditions. It is up to each to maintain or depart from them. China understands this. So should the West.

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## PATRICK LAWRENCE: Pompeo, Pence & the Alienation of Europe

If the objective was to further isolate the U.S., the two officials could not have done a better job last week, writes Patrick Lawrence.

By [Patrick Lawrence](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



What a job Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo did in Europe last week. If the objective was to worsen an already critical trans-Atlantic rift and further isolate the U.S., they could not have returned to Washington with a better result.

We might have to mark down this foray as among the clumsiest

and most abject foreign policy failures since President Donald Trump took office two years ago.

Pence and Pompeo both spoke last Thursday at a U.S.-sponsored gathering in Warsaw supposedly focused on “peace and security in the Middle East.” That turned out to be a euphemism for recruiting the 60-plus nations in attendance into an anti-Iran alliance.

“You can’t achieve peace and stability in the Middle East without confronting Iran,” Pompeo said flatly. The only delegates this idea pleased were Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and officials from Gulf Arab nations who share an obsession with subverting the Islamic Republic.

Pence went on to the annual security conference in Munich, where he elaborated further on a few of the Trump administration’s favored themes. Among them: The Europeans should ditch the nuclear accord with Iran, the Europeans should cut off trade with Russia, the Europeans should keep components made by Huawei and other Chinese companies out of their communications networks. The Europeans, in short, should recognize America’s global dominance and do as it does; as if it were still, say, 1954.

It is hard to imagine how an American administration can prove time and again so out of step with 21<sup>st</sup> century realities. How could a vice-president and a secretary of state expect to sell such messages to nations plainly opposed to them?

### **Pounding the Anti-Iran Theme**

Pompeo, who started an “Iran Action Group” after the Trump

administration withdrew last year from the 2015 nuclear accord, returned repeatedly to a single theme in his Warsaw presentations. The Iranians, he said, “are a malign influence in Lebanon, in Yemen, and Syria and Iraq. The three H’s—Houthis, Hamas, and Hezbollah—these are real threats.”

Pence ran a mile with this thought. “At the outset of this historic conference,” he said, “leaders from across the region agreed that the greatest threat to peace and security in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran.” To be noted: all the “leaders from across the region” in attendance were Sunnis, except for Netanyahu. The major European allies, still furious that Washington has withdrawn from the nuclear accord, sent low-level officials and made no speeches.

The European signatories to the Iran accord knew what was coming, surely. While Pence insisted that Britain, France and Germany withdraw from the nuclear pact—“the time has come,” he said—he also criticized the financing mechanism the three set up last month to circumvent the Trump administration’s trade sanctions against Iran. “They call this scheme a ‘special purpose vehicle,’ ” Pence said. “We call it an effort to break American sanctions against Iran’s murderous revolutionary regime.”

There were plenty of European leaders at the security conference last weekend in Munich, where Pence used the occasion to consolidate what is beginning to look like an irreparable escalation of trans-Atlantic alienation. After renewing his attack on the Iran agreement’s European signatories, he shifted criticism to the Nord Stream 2 gas



pipeline.

Now under construction, this will be the second undersea pipeline connecting Gazprom, the Russian energy company, to Germany and other European markets. Last month the U.S. renewed threats to sanction German companies working on the \$11 billion project. “We cannot strengthen the West by becoming dependent on the East,” Pence said at the security conference Saturday.

These and other remarks in Munich were enough to get Angela Merkel out of her chair to deliver an unusually impassioned speech in defense of the nuclear accord, multilateral cooperation and Europe’s extensive economic relations with Russia. “Geo-strategically,” the German chancellor asserted, “Europe can’t have an interest in cutting off all relations with Russia.”

## **US Primacy V. Europe’s Future**

Merkel’s speech goes to the core of what was most fundamentally at issue as Pompeo and Pence blundered through Europe last week. There are three questions to consider.

The most obvious of these is Washington’s continued insistence on U.S. primacy in the face of full-frontal resistance even from longstanding allies. “Since day one, President Trump has restored American leadership on the world stage,” Pence declared in Warsaw. And in Munich: “America is stronger than ever before and America is leading on the world stage once again.”

His speeches in both cities are filled with hollow assertions such as these—each one underscoring precisely the

opposite point: America is fated to continue isolating itself, a little at a time, so long as its leaders remain lost in such clouds of nostalgia.

The other two questions concern Europe and its future. Depending on how these are resolved, a more distant trans-Atlantic alliance will prove inevitable.

First, Europe must soon come to terms with its position on the western flank of the Euro-Asian landmass. Merkel was right: The European powers cannot realistically pretend that an ever-deepening interdependence with Russia is a choice. There is no choice. China's Belt and Road Initiative, as it progresses westward, will make this clearer still.

Second, Europe must develop working accommodations with its periphery, meaning the Middle East and North Africa, for the sake of long-term stability in its neighborhood. The mass migrations from Syria, Libya and elsewhere have made this evident in the most tragic fashion possible. It is to Germany's and France's credit that they are now negotiating with Turkey and Russia to develop reconstruction plans for Syria that include a comprehensive political settlement.

As they do so, Washington shows no sign of lifting sanctions against Syria that have been in place for more than eight years. It may, indeed, impose new sanctions on companies participating in reconstruction projects. In effect, this could criminalize Syria's reconstruction-making the nation another case wherein Europe and the U.S. find themselves at cross purposes.

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## Yellow-Vest Women Stake Their Claim to the Movement

Women gathered in Paris to confirm their commitment to the populist movement and women’s place in the country’s revolutionary history, reports Léa Bouchoucha from Paris for Consortium News.

**By Léa Bouchoucha  
in Paris**

*Special to Consortium News*



“I’m your wife.” “I’m your mother.” “I’m your colleague.” “My child matters.” “Stop violence.” “I am your Grandma.”

Those were some of the signs carried Jan. 6 in Paris by women in the first all-female demonstration of the Yellow Vest movement.

Following [some outbreaks of violence](#) in larger-scale demonstrations on Saturday, the women's protest was cast in some social media posts, as well as [this AP account](#), as a bid to restore peace to the movement. However, the all-female protest was not responding to Saturday's events. It had been planned in advance, since Dec. 20, via [a Facebook page](#) that registered 15,000 people expressing interest and 2,000 committing to protest. The Paris demonstration on Sunday attracted several hundred, according to press accounts.

However, some women carried signs that said "stop violence," reflecting on the violence that has marked many demonstrations and by some estimates hurt the movement's popularity.

Although the festive mood contrasted with the often-angry demonstrations on Saturday, women at the Paris protest reiterated the same basic frustrations about everyday life becoming more of a struggle.

Framboise Clause, a mother of five who demonstrates every weekend with her daughters at their home in the northwestern Bretagne region, made a trip of 437 kilometers, about four hours by car, to join the Yellow Vest women in Paris.

### **No Real Revolution Without Women**

"Mirabeau used to say that as long as women are not involved, there is no real revolution," said the mother of

five, referring to Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, the count of Mirabeau, an early leader of the French Revolution.

Clausse said she came to Paris to protest things she hears about during her work as a consultant in a job-placement center.

“People are broken because of their working environment,” she said. “The world is very difficult and violent and what we need is to have a sharing, a true sharing.”

Clauss earns 1,500 euros, or about \$1700 a month and her husband is currently drawing unemployment benefits of about \$900. She said she is anxious about her dwindling purchasing power.

“As the years go by, I noticed how we are eating less meat because we cannot afford it,” she said “Basic products are more expensive. Let’s not even speak about the high cost of rents, which are expensive, even in the rural area where I live. Getting to the end of the month is very, very difficult. One of my daughters, who is doing professional training, had to come back to live with us because she can’t afford living by her own.”

As with all those quoted, Clausse spoke in French and the interview was translated.

Clausse said she left her ballot blank during the second round of the 2017 presidential election that delivered President Emmanuel Macron to office. “Today, we need a revolution. Not a revolution from war and violence but a revolution from heart and love and it is why we are here,” she said.

For many detractors, Macron [symbolizes the European Union](#) and a capital-markets approach to transforming an economy that has long provided generous social services that are undergoing cutbacks and austerities.

Anaë Piat, 45, spoke with **Consortium News** during the protests. “We organized as women because women are the one who give births, hoping that the future of our children would be the best as it could possibly be.”

Wearing a conical Phrygian, or liberty, cap with the tricolor, Piat said she was not protesting as a feminist, but as a Yellow Vest. “I’m here for all the Yellow Vests: men, women, children, retired. For all the people who are currently struggling.”

The protests began in November and just completed their eighth week.

An *AP* story described the movement as “losing wind with repeated violence at weekly demonstrations.” By contrast, *The [Wall Street Journal](#)* cast the large-scale demonstration on Jan. 5 as a sign of “staying power.”

Last week, a 33-year-old truck driver who was one of the first to call for nationwide protests was arrested, [sparking outrage](#) from leaders on different ends of the political spectrum about [an abuse of power](#). The French daily *[Le Figaro](#)* says the arrest may have reactivated the movement.

*[Agence France Presse](#)* reports that an online poll conducted Jan. 2-3 by Odoxa Dentsu consulting found 55 percent of those surveyed wanted the protest movement to continue.

**Poverty in Female Heads of Household**

As has been noted since the start of the demonstrations, households headed by single women are among those having the hardest time meeting their living costs. Young people under 30 and single-parent families are the most affected by poverty, finds a [2018 report](#) by [L'observatoire des inégalités](#), an independent monitor of social conditions in France. About 35 percent of one-parent families live under the poverty line and 80 percent of that group are single mothers with children.

“Life is becoming more and more difficult, we can’t take children on a vacation and products covering basic needs are already too expensive,” said Piat, who is married and has three children.

The female protesters of all ages sang the French national anthem “La Marseillaise” and chanted anti-Macron slogans. They gathered Sunday morning on the steps of the Opera Bastille, which overlooks the symbolic [Place de la Bastille](#), site of the Bastille prison that was stormed by revolutionaries between 1789 and 1790.

In a phone interview before the demonstration, Magali Della Sudda, a political science researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research, the largest governmental research organization in France, reflected on French women’s role in the country’s revolutionary history. “During the French revolution, women were here among the revolutionaries. They have been there throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, such as the Commune of Paris in 1871 and later on in the different social struggles of the inter-war period.”

Sudda said the women are more visible today in the Yellow Vest movement. “Because of the strong social dimension of the conflict and because the movement is outside all political structures and union organizations, people are forced to turn their attention to the ‘ordinary’ participants, including women.”

Sudda said women in the Yellow Vest movement span the social and economic strata. “We find nurses, care givers, women who work in schools with children,” she said.

Sudda points to the symbolic significance of the songs and chants heard during the women’s Yellow Vests protest on Sunday. “Women have always sung and vocalized with spirit in the demonstrations,” she said. “Their chants insist on solidarity, fraternity and what is done in common.”

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# 'Regime Change' Strategy Spreads Chaos

Official Washington's "regime change" strategy for governments that have somehow gotten on the "enemies list" is now threatening to destabilize not just the Mideast and Africa but Europe as well, yet there is little indication that these policies will change, as Nat Parry describes.

By Nat Parry

It has long been an article of faith that despite whatever slipups it might make along the way in pursuit of its foreign policy, the United States is always motivated by a sincerely held desire to promote democracy and human rights around the world, which, in turn, is seen as vital in ensuring global stability and prosperity.

The roots of this principle can be traced back to the days of "Manifest Destiny" the prevalent mid-19th Century view that it was Anglo-Saxon Americans' providential mission to expand their civilization westward across North America and can be identified in the pronouncements of presidents including Woodrow Wilson and John F. Kennedy. But it was perhaps most eagerly embraced by George W. Bush, who claimed it as his divine mission to combat tyranny around the world. He called it "the Freedom Agenda."

In the waning days of the Bush presidency, on Jan. 12, 2009, the White House even issued a "fact sheet" attempting to secure Bush's legacy and defend his record in "spreading freedom," which by then had already been largely discredited thanks to the disastrous U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

"President Bush has kept his pledge to strengthen democracy and promote peace around the world," the fact sheet read. "He has promoted the spread of freedom as the great alternative to the terrorists' ideology of hatred, because expanding liberty and democracy will help defeat extremism and protect the American people."

Although it was never fully articulated precisely how the use of U.S. military force would "promote the spread of freedom," the so-called Freedom Agenda had broad appeal among American neoconservatives, arms manufacturers and others who had a vested interest in expanding U.S. power and deepening the nation's involvement in geopolitical hotspots.

The narrative of "spreading freedom" also resonated with an American public long conditioned to believe that as the self-evident "good guys," the U.S. could do no wrong or, even if it did occasionally "make mistakes," it was nevertheless

guided by altruistic motives and therefore given a pass when “blunders” took place.

Much of the rest of the world also may have reluctantly accepted some American boorishness as the price to be paid for all the “good” that the U.S. did in promoting democracy and providing security.

But with the world now clearly in a state of rising instability and insecurity on multiple fronts with refugee crises, violent extremism, economic volatility and climate chaos threatening to undermine the very foundations of civilization throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and North America it has become increasingly obvious how misguided these policies have been.

Rather than establishing liberty and democracy as the irrefutable and irresistible alternatives to hatred and extremism, U.S. military involvement in the Middle East has played a key role in creating the conditions that have given rise to vicious groups like the Islamic State, or ISIS. The ongoing wars to “spread freedom” in the region have led to a humanitarian disaster and refugee crisis, the likes of which haven’t been seen in many decades.

### **Intelligence Assessment**

Although the link between U.S.-led wars and the rise of extremism was once primarily made by left-wing dissidents and what conservatives dismissed as the “blame-America-first crowd,” the link became so obvious at some point during the Bush years that even so-called “serious” people in the intelligence community and foreign policy establishment began publicly stating this case.

Nearly a decade ago, a National Intelligence Estimate representing the consensus view of the 16 spy services inside the U.S. government starkly warned that a whole new generation of Islamic radicalism was being spawned by the U.S. occupation of Iraq. According to one American intelligence official, the consensus was that “the Iraq war has made the overall terrorism problem worse.”

The assessment noted that several underlying factors were “fueling the spread of the jihadist movement,” including “entrenched grievances, such as corruption, injustice, and fear of Western domination, leading to anger, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness,” and “pervasive anti-U.S. sentiment among most Muslims all of which jihadists exploit.”

But rather than leading to substantive changes or reversals in U.S. policies, the strategy agreed upon in Washington seemed to be to double down on the failed policies that had given rise to radical jihadist groups such as “Al Qaeda in Iraq,” which later vomited up its brutal offshoot ISIS. In fact, instead of withdrawing from Iraq, the U.S. decided to send a surge of 20,000 troops in

2007, and the combat mission dragged on well into President Barack Obama's first term, despite his being elected on a wave of antiwar sentiment in 2008.

After its failure in Iraq, the U.S. turned its attention to Libya, overthrowing the government of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 utilizing armed militias implicated in war crimes and backed with NATO air power. Following Gaddafi's ouster, his caches of weapons ended up being shuttled to rebels in Syria, fueling the civil war there. The U.S. also took a keen interest in destabilizing the Syrian regime and to do so began providing arms that often fell into the hands of extremists.

The CIA trained and armed so-called "moderate" rebel units in Syria, only to watch these groups switch sides by joining forces with Islamist brigades such as ISIS and Al Qaeda's affiliate the Nusra Front. Others surrendered to Sunni extremist groups with the U.S.-provided weapons presumably ending up in the arsenals of jihadists or sometimes just quit or went missing altogether.

As the Wall Street Journal rather dryly reported last January, "All sides now agree that the U.S.'s effort to aid moderate fighters battling the Assad regime has gone badly."

The "moderates" only managed to hold control over small pockets of northern Syria, while radical jihadists gained ground culminating earlier this month in the seizure of the last major oilfield under Syrian government control by ISIS.

As the Sunni extremist groups have consolidated control, the ranks of refugees have swelled, overwhelming authorities in European countries who lack any sort of cohesive policy to deal with the crisis. The numbers of refugees are growing as attacks by rebels have increased in recent months, with the United Nations now projecting that at least 850,000 people will cross the Mediterranean seeking refuge in Europe this year and next.

Although Assad continues to be blamed for the vast majority of civilian deaths in the civil war, rebel mortar attacks on Damascus and a wave of car bombings in major cities like Lattakia, Aleppo, Homs, Hassakeh and Qamishli have driven thousands from their homes, according to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees.

"Inside Syria, the last few months have been brutal," UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming told a press briefing in Geneva on Sept. 8. "Fighting has intensified in almost all governorates."

As bad as it currently is, the situation will likely dramatically worsen if the Assad regime collapses. Already, some are predicting a dramatic upsurge in refugees fleeing the country if the Islamist groups continue their advance on Damascus.

Writing in the British Independent on Sept. 6, Patrick Cockburn noted that ISIS is currently threatening to capture a crucial road, the M5 highway, which is the last major route connecting government-held territory in Damascus to the north and west of the country. The loss of this highway “could touch off a panic and the exodus of several million refugees from government areas, in addition to the four million who have already fled,” Cockburn warns.

Stressing that the Assad government at the moment is relatively secure, Cockburn predicts that “any sign that it is weakening will convince millions of Syrians that it is time to leave the country” in a last-ditch attempt to flee the brutality of ISIS.

### **‘Bad, Bad Sick Joke’**

Reelected by large margins last year in a partial presidential election (excluding areas of Syria not under government control), Assad is widely viewed as the protector of Syria’s Christian, Shiite and Alawite minorities, groups that will likely be among the first victims of ISIS’s mass executions should these extremists seize control of Damascus.

But despite this reality and the already dire situation of refugees fleeing to Europe and elsewhere, Western governments are doing little to help end the Syrian civil war. In fact, true to form, while the U.S. attempts to block Russia from providing any sort of support to the Assad government, the Obama administration continues to fuel the war by supporting rebel groups with training, weapons, and air support.

A \$500 million Pentagon program meant to replace or supplement the CIA’s earlier training program with a view towards more comprehensively supporting “moderate” Syrian rebels is reportedly being re-examined in light of criticism that the first group of U.S.-trained Syrian fighters was handily defeated by Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate in late July. The Islamists apparently attacked the group and took an unspecified number hostage, with the remaining fighters fleeing and still unaccounted for.

As the Associated Press reported on Wednesday, “Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook offered no details on how the program could be revamped, but told reporters that Defense Secretary Ash Carter still believes training and equipping moderate Syrian rebels and sending them into battle against the Islamic State is the right strategy.”

Despite these reassurances, congressional hawks like Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, are withdrawing their support for the program just a year after Congress authorized it. “It’s a bad, bad sick joke,” said McCain of the program,

while Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Connecticut, called it “a bigger disaster than I could have ever imagined.”

But perhaps this just goes to show how limited U.S. policymakers’ imaginations are and how tone-deaf they remain to criticisms and words of caution. Russia, for one, has long been raising concerns over Washington’s support for the Syrian rebels, a policy which is blamed not only for the refugee crisis destabilizing Europe but also the failure to defeat the Islamic extremists in Syria.

Russian criticisms reached a new height last month when it was announced that the U.S. would be providing air support to the rebels fighting both Assad and ISIS. Officials in Moscow warned on Aug. 3 that Obama’s decision to back allied Syrian rebels with airstrikes would unleash wider chaos and instability in Syria.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Russia has “repeatedly underlined that help to the Syrian opposition, moreover financial and technical assistance, leads to further destabilization of the situation in the country.”

But now it is Washington that has gone on the offensive in the war of words between the U.S. and Russia. Following reports that Russia sent a military advance team to Syria, State Department officials objected to what they call Russia’s military “buildup” in Syria.

In a call to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry “reiterated our concern about these reports of Russian military activities, or buildup if you will, in Syria and made very clear our view that, if true and borne out, could lead to greater violence and even more instability in Syria,” according to State Department spokesman John Kirby.

### **Who’s Destabilizing Whom?**

It’s a classic tactic of Washington when it is guilty of destabilizing a country, it points the finger at another culprit to deflect attention from the mess that it has made. Yet, far from being the result of Russian meddling, the destabilization of Syria starting in 2011 can actually be traced back to 2001, when plans were hatched in the Pentagon for taking out governments in seven Middle Eastern countries.

According to former NATO Commander General Wesley Clark, shortly after 9/11 he was shown a confidential memo by a general at the Pentagon detailing plans to overthrow governments in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran.

Of those seven, two governments (Iraq and Libya) were subsequently overthrown, one country (Sudan) was cut in half, one (Somalia) became “the most failed state

on earth” and two (Syria and Lebanon) have been destabilized. War with Iran was only narrowly averted thanks to multilateral diplomacy and perhaps a little luck.

The reality is that the four-year old civil war in Syria, fueled in large part by Washington’s training and arming of the rebels, appears to have the goal of implementing “regime change” through an armed insurgency, much in the same way as it has been done in other countries, including most recently Libya.

This is Bush’s “Freedom Agenda” in action, and the four million Syrians who have already fled their homelands could rightly be considered “Freedom Agenda refugees.”

The dangers of pursuing these policies are palpable, as we see the worst refugee crisis since World War II playing out across Europe, but the worst of the ramifications may be yet to come.

### **Destabilizing the World**

When it comes to Syria, the refugees who have already fled mostly came from opposition or contested areas that have been devastated by fighting. But most of the 17 million Syrians still in the country live in government-controlled areas, which are now increasingly threatened by ISIS. If these people find themselves more exposed to ISIS’s notorious brutality, they will likely swell the ranks of refugees beyond anything we have seen to date.

And this is only Syria. It should be kept in mind that another U.S.-fueled war in nearby Yemen the poorest country in the Middle East could contribute to yet another wave of refugees attempting the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean into Europe.

In a recent report, Amnesty International described the situation in Yemen as dire. “Prior to the conflict, more than half of Yemen’s population was in need of some humanitarian assistance,” according to Amnesty. “That number has now increased to more than 80 percent, while a coalition-imposed blockade on commercial imports remains in place in much of the country and the ability of international aid agencies to deliver desperately needed supplies continues to be hindered by the conflict.”

The human rights group points out that although the United States is not formally part of the Saudi-led coalition, “it is assisting the coalition air campaign by providing intelligence and aerial refueling facilities to coalition bomber jets,” as well as weapons including banned cluster munitions being used against Yemeni civilians.

Its assistance “makes the United States partly responsible for civilian casualties resulting from unlawful attacks,” says Amnesty, noting that “the countries that supplied the weapons have a responsibility to ensure that they are not used to commit violations of international law.”

In another recent report, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute documented that the U.S. has become further entrenched as the world’s top exporter of weapons, now accounting for 31 percent of all arms sales around the world. SIPRI noted that the volume of U.S. arms exports rose by 23 percent since 2005, with the biggest increase in transfers going to the Middle East.

Besides flooding the planet with small arms and light weapons, heavy artillery, armored vehicles, and warships, the U.S. has also increased its military assistance to various countries through joint exercises and training missions.

Nick Turse reported at the Intercept on Wednesday that “from 2012 to 2014 some of America’s most elite troops, including Navy SEALs and Army Green Berets, carried out 500 Joint Combined Exchange Training missions around the world.”

Many of these missions are contributing to rising tensions everywhere from Eastern Europe to the Korean Peninsula. Taken together, they are certainly cause for concern for anyone hoping to live in a world at peace and security. Indeed, the fallout from the Freedom Agenda playing out now in Syria could be just the beginning unless U.S. policymakers take a step back and reassess their actions across the globe.

Nat Parry is the co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.* [This story originally appeared at Essential Opinion, <https://essentialopinion.wordpress.com/2015/09/11/fleeing-the-u-s-freedom-agenda/>]

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## Obama’s Libya Fiasco

**Exclusive:** With Libya’s bloody “regime change” in 2011, the Obama administration and its European allies opened the door to anarchy and now the emergence of another Islamic State terror affiliate, but chaos and indecision continue to dominate the West’s reaction to the crisis, says Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

U.S. Marines are expanding the U.S. military presence in Spain with eyes set on

Libya's escalating three-way civil war, which threatens to become a Syrian-like quagmire on Europe's doorstep, an unintended consequence of the 2011 U.S.-European-led "regime change" that overthrew and killed longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

While there's little chance for now that the Marines will get entangled in yet another military adventure, America's European allies are fumbling the Libyan crisis, allowing the Islamic State (Daesh, ISIS, ISIL or whatever you call it) to exploit a power vacuum, though still far from taking over.

The agreement, signed this week and awaiting only ratification from Spain's Parliament, will make the Morón de la Frontera air base in southern Spain into a permanent base of operations against jihadists in North Africa, covering not just Libya but also Mali, Tunisia and Algeria. Troops stationed there will swell from the 850 currently there under temporary agreements to 2,200, plus 500 civilians. The agreement also involves basing 26 aircraft.

Morón will house a forward-operating base with a potent armory and fast-reaction special-op teams to carry out elite counter-terrorism operations, like the one in 2013 when American forces captured an accused Libyan terrorist for his role in the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Or the 2014 capture of the alleged mastermind of the 2012 attack in Benghazi that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. diplomatic personnel.

And perhaps as a prelude to what is to come, there was the stealth air assault earlier this week in Libya (the first American one since the 2011 NATO campaign) that targeted Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the elusive Algerian Al Qaeda leader who led the attack on an Algerian gas plant in 2013 that left 38 hostages dead, including three Americans. (His death is not confirmed and Al Qaeda's branch in northern Africa denied that Belmokhtar is dead.)

To be sure, the U.S. deal with Spain is not a strategic shift, but rather a military acknowledgement that Europe may not be able to deal with the Libyan chaos. The Islamic State franchise already controls coastal territory and is now targeting Misrata, the third largest city.

The threat is real – and individual countries like Italy have called for a more active military role. The problem is that NATO is divided. And, while the Islamic State menace is still nascent, Libya's strategic position just a few hundred miles south of Sicily represents a danger to Europe, underscored by recent attempts of migrants to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Libya.



The Libyan conflict is looking like the early stages of the Iraqi conflict after longtime dictator Saddam Hussein was ousted and killed, unleashing pent-up hostilities among competing tribes, ethnic groups and political factions. There are similarities, too, with the Syrian civil war in which U.S. Arab allies and Turkey have supported the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad.

In Libya, there are two governments operating, each with their own foreign support. In the east, based in Tobruk on a cruise ship, is the "Dignity" government, which most European countries and the Saudi-Egyptian alliance endorse. The Tobruk government is backed by an authoritarian and volatile general, Khalifa Haftar.

In the west, based in the capital Tripoli, is a moderate Islamist coalition under the "Libya Dawn" banner, backed by Qatar and Turkey. Though Muslim Brotherhood-based, the coalition is mostly allied warring clans that mistrust their eastern rivals. The U.K. and the U.S. officially remain on the sidelines, supporting United Nations negotiations aimed at unifying the Tripoli and Tobruk factions.

The civil war and military stalemate has so far thwarted all attempts to build a reconciliation government, a prerequisite to combat gains by ISIS and other radical militants, including Al Qaeda. The UN-set deadline expired this week with no signs of a breakthrough, basically because most European countries continue to support the eastern bloc despite its fragile political position.

The latest UN-pitched deal favors the Tripoli faction, but it has been rejected by the Tobruk faction. In essence, each warring side demands to have a commanding role in any future national unity government, while rejecting any prominent role for the other.

Sound familiar? Rival political factions unable to resolve their differences while extremists Al Qaeda and the Islamic State gain strength and consolidate territory. This was the pattern in Iraq and Syria and now Libya, where the ISIS franchise is bulking up in Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown, smack in the center of the two other sides.

ISIS is still far from posing a serious threat, but some of the militants are battle-hardened from the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. ISIS is also slowly winning over support from local militants, although still lacking the necessary economic muscle, a situation that could soon change.

ISIS already controls vital water and power supply lines and is targeting oil facilities to the east. Strategically, however, ISIS is looking west on Misrata, the last bastion before ISIS can target Tripoli. The ISIS attacks are already

straining the front lines of the “Libya Dawn” coalition.

The UN Security Council is alarmed and is pressing the two political factions in Tripoli and Tobruk urging both sides in Libya to cooperate and compromise, but that doesn’t change the situation on the ground. Europe is divided as is the Arab world and Turkey, creating more space for ISIS to put down roots and grow.

By compounding Europe’s already serious immigration crisis, Libyan instability is urgent for Europe. There are reportedly between 500,000 and 1 million migrants waiting to cross from the anarchic country, especially to Italy. Gaddafi, in fact, warned Europe not to depose him because the disorder could create fertile ground for both Islamic extremism and an immigration crisis.

Besides flooding Europe with immigrants, ISIS could transform Libya into a training hub, bordering Egypt and Tunisia, which is even closer to Italy. Then what? Which is why President Barack Obama is increasingly alarmed at the situation.

As Europe and NATO dither, the U.S. is bolstering its military presence through bilateral partnerships, not just in Spain but also Italy. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin Dempsey said it bluntly last week speaking at a Naples Navy base:

“The truth is, in our line of work, the very last thing we want to do is play a home game. We really want to play an away game and we need teammates to do it. We need to be forward. And we need to be sure that as conflict approaches and conflict will approach we have a shot at shaping it before we’re in it.”

Obama’s goal is not to get deeply involved in the Libyan civil war, again. His acquiescence in 2011 to demands from then-National Security Council aide Samantha Power and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to join in the overthrow of Gaddafi was a major factor in creating the Libyan chaos in the first place.

However, after Obama leaves office, the next president whether Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush or some other contender might opt to side with Saudi Arabia and Egypt against the “Libya Dawn” bloc in Tripoli, radicalizing Libya’s more moderate Islamists and driving many into the arms to ISIS.

The risk of a full collapse of Libya is real with Europe seemingly unable to get its act together and Obama failing to act with the necessary urgency. As with so many other foreign policy issues, Obama seems indecisive, unwilling to control his administration’s hardliners and hoping for a consensus that never comes. In the meantime, the U.S. military is making preparations for a military scenario.

And, while it may be better for the U.S. to play away games than home games,

Europe does not have that luxury because Libya is getting very close to home for Europe.

**Andrés Cala is an award-winning Colombian journalist, columnist and analyst specializing in geopolitics and energy. He is the lead author of *America's Blind Spot: Chávez, Energy, and US Security.***

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## How Discrimination Breeds Radicalism

The radicalization of young Muslims has similarities to anger among other disaffected groups frustrated over the lack of economic and other opportunities. This problem is especially acute in European nations without much history of immigration and assimilation, says Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

One of the most troubling developments resulting from the escalation of violent extremism in the Middle East is the rise in the number of Muslims from the West who are joining the ranks of jihadist groups, notably ISIS.

Western governments are struggling to find out what motivates young Muslims to leave their sheltered lives, many are well-to-do and educated, only to join radical organizations that offer an elusive goal and the prospect of violent death.

It appears that the determining factor behind this phenomenon is the absence of integration, by choice or design, of young Muslims into the mainstream of their respective Western countries. For this reason, integration must be the engine that propels deradicalization, and of necessity it takes a whole range of socio-economic, religious and political measures to mitigate the vulnerabilities in these areas that young Muslims experience.

The rise of violent extremism is only at the early stages, and if the West wants to stem the flow of volunteers to these ruthless groups, Western countries should make a concerted effort to engage and understand the nuances of their Muslim communities, especially the families from which these volunteers are coming.

Unlike assimilation, where an individual stands to lose his identity by absorption into the mainstream culture, integration involves a mutual recognition and respect of the other, a harmonization that includes difference rather than denies it.

Lewis Mumford put it best when he stated that: "Integration proceeds by a deliberate heightening of every organic function; a release of impulses from circumstances that irrationally thwarted them; richer and more complex patterns of activity; an esthetic heightening of anticipated realizations; a steady lengthening of the future; a faith in cosmic perspectives."

The psychological dimension of violent extremism needs to be understood as there is no one single root cause or path that leads to the mental and emotional conditioning that transforms young Muslims from being ordinary peaceful individuals to violently radical.

The threat emanating today from ISIS, al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups is inspired by religious teachings, distorted under the guise of defending purist Sunni Islam, which ultimately aim to infect susceptible Muslim youths to whom religion provides an escape and a sense of belonging.

Violent extremists wage a war on Western cultural and religious precepts and wish to see their acts fused into the identity of their own Muslim community so they can be recognized as being representative of the larger community, especially by the media.

Many of the young men and women who live in Western countries feel increasingly marginalized economically, socially and politically, and are particularly vulnerable as they are often in transitional stages in their lives, whether as immigrants, students in search of friends, job seekers, etc.

On the whole, they are in need of an outlet to vent their frustration, and consequently, they become easy prey for extremists seeking new recruits in mosques and online. There is, however, a common denominator behind most of the causes that radicalize Muslim youth, which is the lack of integration into their new social milieu, caused by:

-Disinterest in being integrated, as many young Muslims are living in a bubble where they feel comfortable and secure and are not encouraged to step out beyond their immediate circle of peers and family. This is further compounded in situations where extremism runs deep in a particular family, or where they have certain gripes against the socio-political milieu in which they live.

-No deliberate effort by governments to integrate Muslim youth into general society, a condition further aggravated by entrenched prejudices in most West European societies, such as Britain and France. Citizens of foreign descent in these states are often identified and remain as "foreigners," regardless of how long they have been living in their adopted countries, even if they are second or third generation citizens.

–The growing pervasiveness of Islamophobia among Europeans, precipitated by the rise of violent extremists of all colorations and the seemingly endless bloodshed between Muslim communities and against Westerners, which has produced a conscious and unconscious repudiation of anything related to Muslims in general.

–A deeper, growing sense of alienation, which is the antithesis to inclusiveness, leading young Muslims in particular to find ways to resist and defy rather than seek new opportunities to integrate and become loyal nationals of their adopted countries.

Interestingly enough, the number of young American Muslims joining violent extremist groups remains proportionately considerably less than the number of British and French Muslims joining ISIS. This perhaps can be explained by the fact that the U.S. is essentially a country of immigrants, and having foreign roots is part of American culture.

Therefore, the incorporation of foreigners into the main social stream, with some exception, is left up to the individual and is generally constrained only by the person's qualifications and ambitions. West European Muslims in particular seek to maintain their identity and can do so through integration, where their identity as a Muslim is not lost, rather than assimilation.

If West European countries are to subscribe to Mumford's notion of integration, they must develop a comprehensive strategy that would prevent young disenfranchised Muslims from being lured to join the ranks of violent extremists.

Before these countries can develop such a strategy, they must avoid generalizations (for example, that Islam is inherently violent), understand why young Muslims and converts are joining, and why many of them come back. Only then should governments take specific steps to ensure that those who joined and return are de-radicalized and become useful citizens who can dissuade others from following their path.

There are no quick fixes for this alarming development, and no amount of law enforcement and coercion will halt the flow of volunteers of West European Muslims to join the ranks of violent extremists other than inclusion.

To successfully counter violent extremism, West European countries, together with Muslim leaders and educators in their respective communities, must investigate who is embracing radical views through field studies, raise awareness and analyze the real root causes in different Muslim communities, which was and still is missing.

This approach would enable them to present credible counter-arguments with candid, transparent, and open-ended dialogue that could change the socio-economic and political dynamics to create a new atmosphere that would single out young Muslims in a positive light. To that end, West European governments must:

–Adopt a new public narrative by using a strategic way to communicate utilizing every conceivable media outlet to counter extremists with facts, avoid moral preaching and address the perception of Western nations assailing Muslims, which leads the young to seek justice through violence;

–Develop community service programs to introduce young Muslims to the larger community of their Western peers and begin a process of integration in which they develop personal interests to fill the social, economic, and political emptiness they feel; –Invite credible and respected voices from the Muslim world to discredit the messages of the extremists, that there is no path to glory in death, that joining such violent groups only reinforces the vicious cycle of death and destruction, and that there is no martyrdom in their senseless self-sacrifices;

–Encourage young Muslims to join sport activities and provide opportunities to show off their talent and ability to excel, while supporting those who seek to establish their social identity and be recognized; –Prevent prisons from becoming incubators for new terrorists by rehabilitating prisoners through community programs, schooling, professional enhancements, and assigning of responsibility within the prison’s setting; nearly 80 percent of prisoners who went through such rigorous programs in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Yemen ended up being completely rehabilitated and became role models for other prisoners to emulate;

–Foster the desire of young Muslims to participate in local political discussion groups, be involved in the decision-making process from the bottom up, and be part of any positive changes to advance the interests of their communities and enhance their self-esteem;

–Develop international exchange programs to expose young Muslims to what is happening in other communities, areas of social and economic progress, and new innovations and ideas that can be duplicated to benefit their own families and communities;

–Finally, all of these programs require a commitment for long-term funding. No country directly or indirectly affected by violent extremism can afford to be long on talking and short on funding. They must provide the financial and human resources to meet this unprecedented challenge, regardless of how costly and how long it might take.

Given that the violent turmoil sweeping the Middle East, especially the Sunni-Shia conflict and the civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya, is unlikely to settle any time soon, a growing number of young Muslims will join the ranks of extremists posing an ever-greater national security menace for Western countries.

For this reason, we must distinguish between what's possible and what's impossible to achieve, and what might become more probable if circumstances change. Western governments must develop a long-term de-radicalization strategy to stem the flow of Muslim volunteers with the objective of substantially reducing the threat they pose upon their return to their respective countries.

There is no shortcut and no other means by which to de-radicalize young Muslims other than by taking the measures outlined above, and approaches tailored to specific communities. Failure is not an option as the consequences will be extraordinarily dire. A state of constant alarm, emergencies, and terrorism will become a way of life, haunting Western democracies and violently destabilizing the Middle East for decades to come.

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## Should Jews Flee Europe to Israel?

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's appeal to European Jews to seek refuge in Israel has offended many leaders in Europe who reject the charge that recent cases of violent anti-Semitism justify such a drastic step. Netanyahu's call also smacks of political opportunism, says Professor Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

The killing of a security guard at a synagogue in Copenhagen over two weeks ago has renewed Benjamin Netanyahu's call for mass immigration of European Jews to Israel. Although he has made such impetuous appeals before, he now makes a new brazen claim that as Prime Minister of Israel, he represents and can speak on behalf of world Jewry.

This delusionary claim is an insult to European governments and the nearly 1.5 million Jews who live, work, and flourish in Europe. The irony is that Netanyahu represents neither the Jews around the world nor even the majority of Israeli

Jews, other than the fraction who voted for Likud in the previous election.

Nevertheless, he seized the opportunity to usurp the political debate in Israel leading up to the election, irrespective of how harmful it may be to the very people he presumably wants to shield, merely because he believes it serves his interests.

Although Israel represents a sanctuary where any Jew is welcome, not a single non-Israeli Jew living outside Israel has appointed Netanyahu to be their spokesperson or protector. No honest observer can deny that the upsurge of violent attacks against Jews is connected to the rise of anti-Semitism, which has not occurred in a vacuum.

It is a direct result of growing anti-Israeli sentiment due to Netanyahu's misguided policies toward the Palestinians and the continuing occupation. Netanyahu's call for European Jews to immigrate to Israel, live in "safety," and not be subjected to terrorism was met with indignation by many Jewish leaders, including the Chief Rabbi of "Denmark, who said "If the way we deal with terror is to run somewhere else, we should all run to a deserted island."

Western European leaders have also taken great offense. Denmark's Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt remarked that "[Jews] belong in Denmark. They're part of the Danish community and we wouldn't be the same without the Jewish community," which echoed what the French Prime Minister said following January's terror attacks in "Paris on a Jewish supermarket.

Notwithstanding the Jewish Diaspora's affinity for Israel, they are loyal citizens of their respective countries, and Netanyahu's illusion that bringing Jews to Israel will guarantee their security is only surpassed by his craven arrogance. His call for mass immigration alienates Diaspora Jews and may put them at even greater risk. Eighty times more Israelis were killed in Israel by violence with the Palestinians in the past 25 years than all the Jews killed in Europe by terrorists during the same period.

There is no doubt that Netanyahu's call for Jews to immigrate to Israel is also driven by his strong desire to increase the Jewish population in Israel and sustain the Jewish national identity of the state. This also explains his demand that as a prerequisite to reaching a peace agreement, the Palestinians must recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people.

Here is where Netanyahu's hypocrisy is on full display. Indeed, if he wishes to shield the Jews from acts of terrorism and encourage them to immigrate to sustain a Jewish majority in Israel, he should first focus on addressing the causes behind the rise of violent attacks by vigorously attempting to solve the



Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I maintain that once a peace agreement with the Palestinians is reached, many Jews would immigrate to Israel without any prompting. They would be willing to build a new life in Israel not because they will necessarily feel safer there, but because peace would rekindle the pioneering spirit which was behind the mass immigration to Israel in years past, regardless of the uncertainty and the prospect of violence.

Sadly, Israel is no longer arousing that spirit, especially in young European and American Jews, because of the continuing conflict which has sapped it, leaving a void that cannot be filled with empty political slogans.

Netanyahu should wake up to the gloomy reality that nearly one million Israelis emigrated from Israel in the past 25 years. Many of them have left not only because they have become weary of endless violent conflict, but also because they feel betrayed by self-indulgent political leaders.

With only a few exceptions, Israel has been plagued with leaders who are no longer true to the vision behind the creation of Israel. As a result, many Jews have little hope that the political environment will change any time soon, unless new leaders emerge who are committed to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Not surprisingly, many Israelis who emigrated see no reason why they should return, only to see their children be inducted to a military that has become the oppressor rather than the proud guardian of a free, independent and prosperous country at peace with itself and with the people that co-inhabit the land. This, of course, doesn't trouble Netanyahu.

For him, this is a do-or-die political campaign. He will do and say anything to remain the focus of public discourse, even by exploiting the sensitive issues of anti-Semitism, violent extremism against the Jews, and Iran's nuclear threat.

He already crossed a major red line by accepting the invitation to address a joint session of Congress to the dismay of many Congressmen and Jewish leaders in and outside Israel, as well as a majority of the American public, while showing complete disrespect to President Barack Obama, and more importantly to the Executive Office of the President.

He is determined to project an image of a courageous leader and the champion of Jewish causes, when in fact he has no courage but raw boldness befitting a politician who would sell his soul to the highest bidder. Consequently, he brought Israel's indispensable relations with the U.S. to a state of crisis, infuriated European leaders, embarrassed Jews everywhere, and further isolated

Israel.

The Israeli electorate, who will soon cast their vote, will do well to remember that they must now seek a new horizon and send a loud and clear message to Netanyahu: enough is enough.

**Dr. Alon Ben-Meir is a professor of international relations at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University. He teaches courses on international negotiation and Middle Eastern studies.**

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## Europe Presses Israel on Palestine

As Israel heads into a historic election, more European parliamentarians are urging recognition of Palestine and an end to the Israeli occupation. But it's unclear if Israeli voters will heed the sentiments for peace or dig in deeper for more repression, as John V. Whitbeck explains.

By John V. Whitbeck

The European Parliament, after a late compromise in pursuit of consensus, passed on Dec. 17, by a vote of 498 to 88 with 111 abstentions, a resolution stating that it “supports in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution and believes these should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks, which should be advanced.”

This compromise language bypasses the fundamental question of when the State of Palestine should be recognized, using vague words whose imprecision neither those who genuinely wish to achieve a decent “two-state solution” (and thus support recognizing Palestine now so as to finally make meaningful negotiations possible) nor those who support perpetual occupation (and thus argue that recognition should await prior Israeli consent) can strongly object to.

In doing so, the European Parliament has missed a rare opportunity to be relevant by joining the United Nations in recognizing Palestine’s “state status” or following the recent trend of European national parliaments urging their governments to join the 135 UN member states, representing the vast majority of mankind, which have already extended diplomatic recognition to the State of Palestine.

The overwhelming 274-12 vote in the British House of Commons on Oct. 13 has been followed by favorable votes in France (339-151 in the National Assembly and 154-146 in the Senate), Ireland (unanimous in both houses), Portugal (203-9) and

Spain (319-2).

On Oct. 30, Sweden took the essential further step of actually extending diplomatic recognition to the State of Palestine, becoming the first European Union state to do so after becoming a member of the EU. However, it was not, as some media reported, the first European state to do so. It was the 20th.

The State of Palestine had already been recognized by eight other EU member states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and by 11 other states which are commonly considered to be "European" (Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine).

Since the British, French, Irish, Portuguese and Spanish parliamentary resolutions are not binding on the executive branches of their respective governments, they have commonly been dismissed as "symbolic," even while those favoring perpetual occupation have expended major efforts to prevent the votes from taking place. It is also commonly asked whether they matter at all.

Whether they matter, at least in a constructive sense, depends entirely on what happens afterwards. European parliamentary resolutions urging their governments to recognize the State of Palestine would not only be purely symbolic but actually counterproductive and dangerous if they are not followed relatively rapidly by actual recognitions of the State of Palestine.

### **Offering Hope**

These resolutions offer hope, but if, even after the latest Israeli onslaught against the people of Gaza, the European governments which have not yet recognized the State of Palestine prefer to ignore the clear will of their own peoples, as expressed by their elected representatives, and to continue prioritizing the wishes of the American and Israeli governments, then the last hope of the Palestinian people for ending the occupation and obtaining their freedom by non-violent means would have been extinguished.

These resolutions are thus a double-edged sword, offering both immediate hope and the potential for definitive despair.

The hope for peace with some measure of justice which actual European recognitions would generate is based on the assumption that the occupation by a neighboring state of the entire territory of any state which one recognizes as such is not something which any state with the influence and capacity to take meaningful action to end that occupation could tolerate indefinitely and that, by virtue of diplomatic recognition, meaningful action to end that occupation (including economic sanctions and travel restrictions) would become a moral,

ethical, intellectual, diplomatic and political imperative for European states, which, alone, possess the requisite influence and capacity.

The occupation of Kuwait by Iraq was permitted to last seven months. The occupation of Palestine by Israel is in its 48th year, the entire lifetimes of the great majority of Palestinians in occupied Palestine.

European governments are conscious of Europe's unparalleled leverage as Israel's primary trading partner and cultural homeland, and their realization that diplomatic recognition of Palestine would make meaningful action to end the occupation imperative surely constitutes a primary reason (in addition to the fear of upsetting the American and Israeli governments) why even those European governments which do not support perpetual occupation and genuinely wish to see the achievement of a decent "two-state solution" are reticent, hesitant and nervous about extending diplomatic recognition to the State of Palestine now.

Yet if not now, when? It is now or never if, indeed, it is not already too late.

European governments must seize their unprecedented opportunity to have a positive and potentially determinative impact on Israel's March 17 election and the composition of the next Israeli government by writing indelibly on the wall a new reality which could convince a critical mass of Israelis, for the first time, that a fair peace agreement is preferable for them personally to perpetuation of the currently comfortable status quo.

Only then can a new and true "peace process", under new management, based on international law and relevant UN resolutions and with both Israel and Palestine negotiating with a genuine desire and intention to reach an agreement, begin.

The Israeli electorate has been estimated to be divided roughly equally into three groups those firmly on the right and extreme-right, those firmly on the center-left and those "swing voters" in between. Those in between will determine the composition of the next government. European governments have the influence and capacity to move them in a positive direction in the best interests of Israelis, Palestinians, the region and the world.

It remains to be seen whether European governments have the wisdom, courage and political will to do so.

**John V. Whitbeck is an international lawyer who has advised the Palestinian negotiating team in negotiations with Israel.**

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# A Fascist Revival Stirs in Spain

**Exclusive:** The economic pain from the Wall Street crash of 2008 and the ensuing Great Recession has fueled the right-wing Tea Party movement in the United States and a revival of fascism in parts of Europe, including hard-hit Spain where some leaders are promoting the brutal Franco era, writes Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

Last week, a mayor of a Madrid suburb threatened through his Twitter account to send some “skinheads” to target opposition political leaders. The mayor, a member of the ruling conservative Popular Party, later said he was just joking and no “skinheads” actually showed up to rough up the mayor’s opponents.

In Galicia, an area in Spain’s northwest, the mayor of another town under Popular Party rule proudly showcases in his office a picture of fascist dictator Francisco Franco. The mayor also plays the fascist anthem to anyone who will listen. Yet, he has faced no official reprimand. (Last week, a small bomb believed set by anarchists damaged one of his municipal buildings.)

And earlier this month, a small town near Madrid, also governed by the Popular Party (or PP), allowed a fascist group to put up a stand in a public school exhibiting Franco-era and Nazi memorabilia. Officials later apologized and said that they weren’t aware of the stand.

Though anecdotal, these incidents fit with a rising public nostalgia for the Franco era in Spain and are symptomatic of a broader resurgence of extreme right-wing ideology in Europe and globally. Renewed sympathy for fascism in Spain also stirs troubling memories because the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s was an early victory for European fascism. Spain also was the last European state to cast off fascism in 1975.

Another point of concern is that nationalist, populist and fascist movements have historically found fertile ground during times of economic pain, like that felt across much of the world since the Wall Street crash of 2008. In reacting to the financial crisis and in grappling with the public’s anger over lost jobs and lost benefits mainstream democratic parties have seen their legitimacy questioned and their political support drained.

In Spain and to a lesser extent in some other European countries the immediate danger is not so much from a handful of incipient reactionary movements, but rather from the underlying official permissiveness from more mainstream conservative parties, like the Popular Party, bordering on patronage.

Some elected Popular Party officials and party militants are openly making the Nazi salute, proudly displaying fascist flags and other memorabilia, and posting pro-Franco messages on social media sites.

### **Rewriting History**

And this trend is not limited to the party's lower-level officials and the rank-and-file. As part of this effort to make fascism more palatable, the Popular Party is institutionally trying to rewrite history, blaming the civil war that started in 1936 on the defeated republican side. At least half a million people died in the war in which Franco received vital support from Adolf Hitler of Germany and Benito Mussolini of Italy. More than a million fled in the aftermath to escape death squads.

Yet, some Popular Party officials have said and posted on social networking sites that those killed by Franco's forces deserved it. The party's second most powerful legislator in parliament has equated Franco's crimes to those of the democratically elected republican government that Franco's fascist regime defeated. The same legislator also has minimized the risk from today's rising fascist tide.

Amid the Popular Party's recent political success, with its latest high-water mark the gaining of an absolute majority in parliament, many of the party's stalwarts have reminisced about the Franco era as a prosperous time, though it wasn't. By the time Franco died in 1975, Spain had become an economic backwater in Europe. In 1986, when Spain entered the European Community (now the European Union), it was one of the poorest members, requiring substantial help to raise its living standards to what was normal in other western European states.

But the severe economic recession that spread across the world after the Wall Street crash and the EU's austerity-oriented policies imposed in response hit Spain especially hard with the country's unemployment rate soaring to around 27 percent. The loss of jobs and the failure of the democratic political structure to devise an adequate response created an opening for the rightists to revive nationalistic and other traditional cultural messages that had underpinned Franco's politics.

Though the Popular Party is generally considered conservative not extreme right it absorbed the pro-Franco fascist "base" after that movement lost its political representation in parliament in 1982, seven years after Franco died. That extreme right now amounts to about 10 percent of the Popular Party's constituency, according to some studies.

The numbers of far-right members are high enough so that the Popular Party is

politically unwilling to chastise fascist sympathies and thus alienate a significant portion of its support. But the party is making a dangerous bet that the pro-Franco faction will not gain effective control of the Popular Party and thus fully hoist the banner of fascism again.

Last week, along the lines of that risky appeasement, Populist Party legislators voted down for a second time a motion backed by all opposition parties calling on the government to declare fascism, Franquism and Nazism as ideologies "inciting violence and hate."

The proposal was in line with the policies of most European countries that since the devastation of World War II and the genocide against Jews and other minorities have forbidden sympathetic displays of fascism. But Popular Party legislators said inclusion of such restrictions in an overhaul of the penal code was unnecessary.

### **Nationalist Tendencies**

On their own, extreme-right parties in Spain have so far been insignificant, although five groups including violent neo-Nazi cells and a political party that the Supreme Court is considering banning in July formed a platform called "Spain on the March." Its leaders have warned they will resort to violent acts if required to preserve Spain's territorial unity, which they feel is threatened especially by regional independence aspirations.

Secessionist plans from Catalonia, Spain's economic motor, have served to unite nationalist forces and radical fascist groups, but the most forceful opposition to Catalanian separation is coming from the right wing of the Popular Party, led by former Prime Minister Jose MarÃa Aznar.

Last month, a dozen radicals of the new coalition forced their way into a library where Catalonians were commemorating their national day, injuring several people, including legislators, and tearing down Catalanian symbols. Police arrested them in the aftermath, but Catalonians have suggested authorities did little to protect the commemoration.

Also, in September, several rightist groups formed a new coalition to try to gain political representation ahead of European elections.

Police estimate there are about 10,000 Spaniards involved in violent extreme-right groups. But the concern is not so much over these very small violent groups. These are mostly contained, experts agree. The bigger worry is that Franco's political heirs retain significant influence within the ruling Popular Party and amid the euro crisis they could gain greater political clout.

For condoning fascist sympathies among Popular Party followers, the government has been criticized by the opposition, regional governments and human rights groups. However, although Spain stands out in Europe for these public pro-fascist expressions, the extreme right is making gains across much of Europe.

Perhaps the biggest game-changer is the renaissance of the French National Front party, once a pariah. Its leader, Marie Le Pen, won 18 percent of the votes in the first round of presidential elections in 2012 and her party is leading the polls for 2014 elections to the European Parliament.

In Greece, the leaders and legislators of the openly neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party will soon face court action for their role in promoting hate crimes, but the fact remains that the party won 7 percent of the national vote in 2012, and official efforts to shut it down could only embolden its followers.

This past week, Norway's extreme right Progress Party was invited to join the government for the first time after making electoral gains. In Austria, extreme-right parties retain strong parliamentary representation, as do their equivalents in the Netherlands, Poland, Italy and Bulgaria.

Though there is little official patronage for this right-wing resurgence across Europe unlike what the Popular Party is doing in Spain the electoral prowess of these European right-wing movements gives them increased negotiating power and even some ruling authority.

In Spain, the chief concern is that an increasingly desperate public will be attracted to the historical glow that is being created around a mythical era of successful fascism under Franco.

"It's true that this is not Greece or France, where the extreme right has become a political power," Félix Ortega, a sociology professor and expert in public opinion in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, told me recently. "But you never know, especially if it seems that the PP tolerates it."

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## Spain's Tahrir Square

Angered by "free-market" policies that have created high unemployment and are now forcing government spending cuts, tens of thousands of Spaniards are



occupying central squares in Madrid and other cities in a challenge to the country's economic elites, as Pablo Ouziel describes in this guest essay.

By Pablo Ouziel

May 19, 2011

Spain's people's movement has finally awoken. La Puerta del Sol in Madrid is now the country's Tahrir Square, and the "Arab Spring" has been joined by what is now bracing to become a long "European Summer."

As people across the Arab world continue their popular struggle for justice, peace and democracy, Spain's disillusioned citizens have finally caught on with full force.

Slow at first, hopeful that Spain's dire economic conditions would magically correct themselves, the Spanish street has finally understood that democratic and economic justice and peace will not come from the pulpits of the country's corrupt political elite.

Amidst local and regional election campaigns, with the banners of the different political parties plastered across the country's streets, people are saying "enough!"

Disillusioned youth, the unemployed, pensioners, students, immigrants and other disenfranchised groups have emulated their brothers and sisters in the Arab world and are now demanding a voice demanding an opportunity to live with dignity.

As the country continues to sink economically with unemployment growing incessantly one in two young people is unemployed across many of the country's regions.

With many in the crumbling middle class on the verge of losing their homes while bankers profit from their loss and the government uses citizen taxes to expand the military-industrial complex by going off to war; the people have grasped that they only have each other if they are to rise from the debris of the militarized political and economic nightmare in which they have found themselves.

Spain is finally re-embracing its radical past, its popular movements, its anarcho-syndicalist traditions and its republican dreams.

Crushed by Generalissimo Francisco Franco 70 years ago, that Spanish popular culture seemed like it would never recover from the void left by a right-wing dictatorship, which exterminated many of the country's dissenting voices.

But the protests of the 15th of May 2011 were a reminder to those in power that Spanish direct democracy is still alive and has finally awoken.

In the 1970s a transition through pact, transformed Spain's totalitarian structures into a representative democracy in which all the economic structures remained intact.

For the highly illiterate generations of the time, marred in the reality of a poverty-stricken country, the concessions made by the country's elite seemed something worth celebrating.

Nevertheless, as the decades passed, the state-owned corporations were privatized robbing the nation of its collective wealth, and the political scene crystallized into a pseudo-democracy in which two large parties PP and PSOE marginalized truly democratic alternatives.

As this neoliberal political project advanced, the discontent began to resurface, but the fear-mongers, including many of Spain's baby-boomers who had once fought for democracy, were quick to remind the youth of the dangers of rebellion.

For many decades in Spain, the mantra was, "it is better to live as we are than to go back to the totalitarianism of the past, and if you shake the system too much, it will take away our hard-earned rights."

So the youth mostly remained silent, fearful of what could happen if they spoke out.

Through the prism of this generational divide, some contented baby-boomers blamed the youth and their supposed unwillingness to work hard for bringing the country to its knees.

But the youth have stopped this blame game, recognizing the true risks to their own future and finally encouraging the whole country to mobilize for a better future.

The economic and political project of Spain's elite has destroyed the economic dreams of whole generations of naive and apathetic Spaniards; it has left the country in the hands of bond speculators and central bankers, and Spaniards will have to pay that price.

Across the continent, Spaniards look out at a failed European project, with its borders quickly being reinstated, a collapsing Euro currency, and the examples of Greece, Portugal and Ireland as stark reminders to those on the streets what they are fighting to disassociate themselves from.

What has begun in Madrid's Puerta del Sol and has been echoed in 52 cities across the country is the crystallization of a popular movement for freedom, which has no intention of fading away.

The people have no choice. Either they take city squares as symbols of their struggle, or their message is never heard.

The government knows this and that is why it has quickly responded by trying to disperse the crowds with its repressive police force, but following some arrests, the people are back with more strength.

A silent revolution has begun in Spain, a nonviolent revolution which seeks democracy through democratic means, justice through just means, and peace through peaceful means.

This struggle has finally captivated the imagination of the Spanish people, and many young Spaniards believe there is no turning back. The challenge ahead will be in keeping the collective spirit nonviolent as the police force does everything in its power to destroy the movement.

The popular movement also must be alert to bond speculators who will threaten the country with economic sanctions in order to scare the population into submission.

A constructive program also will be needed to articulate sustainable alternatives for a different Spain.

A steering committee must emerge from the crowds with the capability of making clear and viable demands that grab the imagination of the country and force the political elite to comply.

These are delicate times in Spain. If this spontaneous nonviolent movement succeeds, Spain may welcome a brighter future. If it fails, violence may become the only option for those in pain.

**Pablo Ouziel's articles and essays are available at [pabloouziel.com](http://pabloouziel.com)**

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