



## ECFR MENA Monthly Brief

A selection of articles, reports and publications from ECFR's Middle East and North Africa Team.

### Publications

#### Tunisia's elections and the consolidation of democracy

This Sunday's parliamentary elections in Tunisia are a significant step forward for the country's transition. With hopes of democratic reform after the 2011 Arab uprisings dashed across the rest of the Middle East, Tunisia still offers hope of a genuine transition to democracy. But to consolidate democracy after Sunday's elections, the country will still need to overcome further challenges.

In this policy paper, ECFR's Senior Policy Fellow Anthony Dworkin explores the next steps and outlines how the country's politicians must show that they can form an effective government and avoid the polarisation that almost derailed the transition last year. Then they must show that this government can deal with the country's economic problems and security threats so that the Tunisian people do not feel that democracy has only made their living conditions worse.



Tunisia is about to hold its first regular parliamentary and presidential elections since a wave of popular protests nearly four years ago forced the departure of the country's long-time autocratic leader. Over 50 million have voted and watched the Arab revolutions of 2011. Following the adoption of a new constitution at the beginning of this year, legislative elections will take place on 26 October, followed by a presidential election to be held in November and December. At a time when hopes of lasting towards political reform and meaningful democratic elections in the Arab world have been dashed, Tunisia is the only country where the aspirations of the Arab springs may yet be fulfilled in the near future.

Even if Tunisia's example does not inspire any immediate followers in the region, the consolidation of a successful democracy in the country would be a powerful signal that reform and political pluralism are not doomed to fail in the Arab world. Furthermore, the ECFR is pleased to be contributing to this by helping secure success in Tunisia. The country has already overcome a crisis of legitimacy and chaos, but in order to consolidate democracy it will need to take further steps. In the short term, further stability and popular discontent must be avoided by creating a political balance after the elections that allows the government to tackle pressing economic and security problems. Beyond this, the larger challenge of systemic reform will ultimately determine whether Tunisia can truly find the democracy that delivered the opportunity, dignity, and social justice that the revolution demanded.

## Commentary & Analysis



### [Europe and the Islamic State: venturing down the wrong track](#) - Nick Witney

Slowly and circumspectly, after weeks of hesitation over how to react to the 'Islamic State' phenomenon, European governments are now setting off down the wrong path.

### [The Islamic State and the struggle for control in Syria](#) - Julien Barnes-Dacey

Both Assad and his rebel opponents hope to leverage the US fight against the Islamic State to help them with the civil war.

### [The Islamic State in the Jewish state's wing mirror](#) - Daniel Levy

The biggest danger for Israel, as it is for some of its neighbours, is that the "Islamic state metastasising threat narrative" could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### [Palestinian options at the UN and the International Court of Justice](#) - Victor Kattan

President Mahmoud Abbas might want to consider asking the UN General Assembly to seek advice from the International Court of Justice.

### [What Palestinians can expect from Europe](#) - Hugh Lovatt & Mattia Toaldo

As Europe becomes more sympathetic, Palestinian leaders must better articulate their statehood strategy. (This article first appeared in Arabic on [al-Quds al-Arabi](#))

### [Gaza reconstruction: the new Israeli strategy](#) - Dimi Reider

An easing of the blockade with a severe oversight on rebuilding materials by Israel is simply an upgrade to the Strip's prison status.

### [Iran's strategy against the Islamic State](#) - Ellie Geranmayeh

Iran's strategy for combatting the Islamic State has entailed a broad political and firm security response channelled through the governments in Damascus and Baghdad and local Shia groups.

### [Turkey: under pressure to take a definitive stance](#) - Andrew Hammond

Turkey stands apart from regional players by refusing to commit to combat missions against the Islamic State.

### [Why fighting the "war on terror" in Libya is a mistake](#) - Mattia Toaldo

Libya's ruling elite is exploiting the West's fear of terrorism to fight battles against its domestic opponents.

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### [Pivoting back to the Middle East - where next for American MENA policy?](#) - Podcast

ECFR MENA Director Daniel Levy is joined by three renowned US experts and former officials - Ambassador Chas Freeman, Juan Cole, and Jeremy Shapiro - who gave a broad overview of American policy across the Middle East region during the Obama administration and the tumultuous period of the Arab uprisings including a look at the implications for US policy in the Middle East of the anti-ISIS military interventions in Iraq and Syria. You can listen to a podcast of the event [here](#).

### [As Iran warms up to the West, is the West warming up to Iran?](#) - Podcast

Israel's Netanyahu has thrown cold water on Iran's "charm offensive", but President Obama and other leaders take it more seriously. ECFR MENA Director Daniel Levy joins a discussion on KCRW's radio show [To the Point](#) assessing the feasibility of working out a nuclear settlement by the November 24th deadline. Will Netanyahu and hardliners in Congress try to scuttle the deal? You can listen to the podcast [here](#).

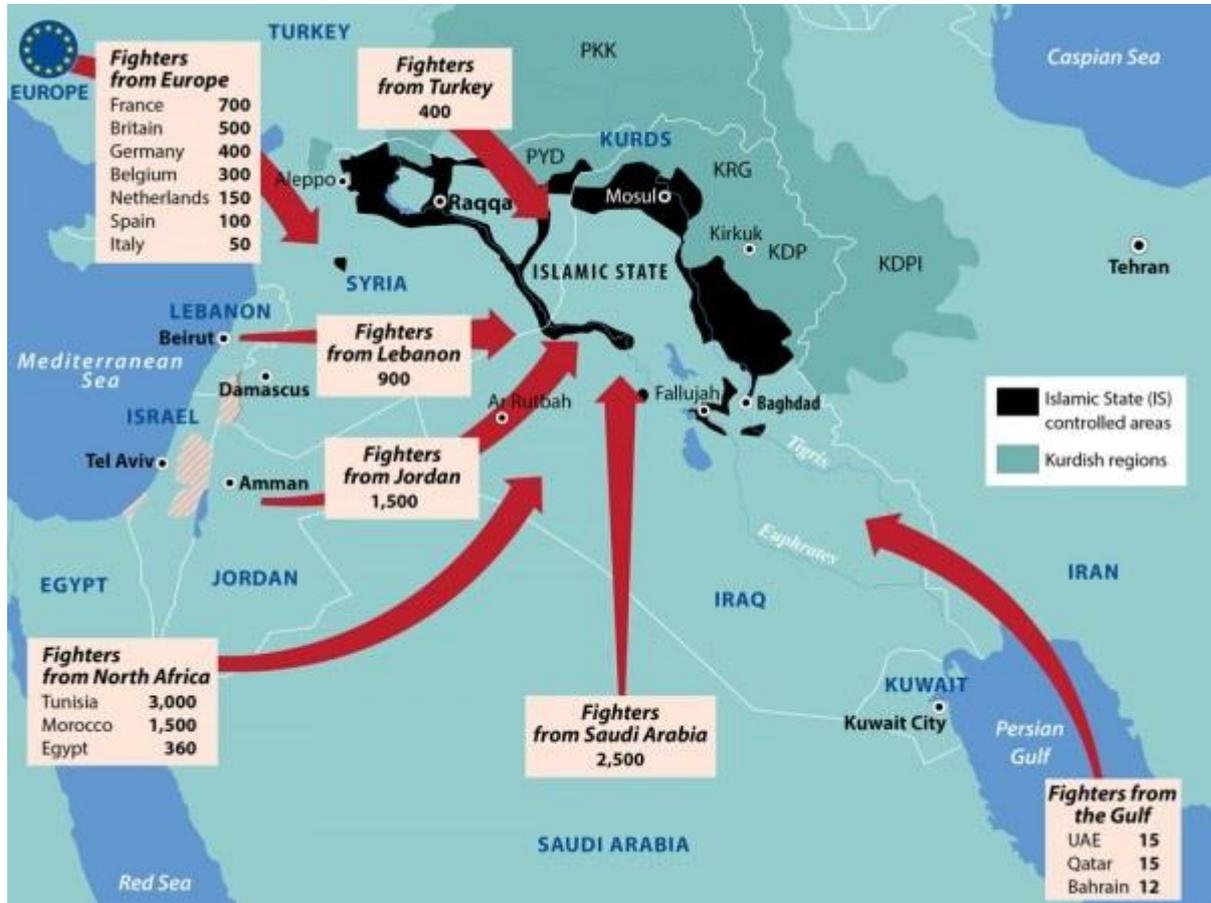
## **The Islamic State through the Regional Lens**

In a series of 14 essays, many of which are highlighted above, ECFR explores the regional dimensions of the IS crisis, examining the reaction of key Middle Eastern actors, as well as looking at European policy options, the dynamics driving IS itself, and the impact within Syria and Iraq respectively. Each of the 14 pieces presents and dissects the perspective of one of the different actors, mapping out the threats and interests driving developments.

The rise of IS being seen as a significant challenge to neighboring states and Europe, but it is also being used by some as an opportunity to press forward with domestic and regional political ambitions and frequently as a guarantor of the status quo. In some countries such as Iraq and Lebanon, the threat posed by IS has forged regional consensus, in others like Syria it remains divisive.

- The collection includes pieces examining the reaction from [Europe](#), [Iraq](#), [Syria](#), [Iran](#), [Saudi Arabia](#), [Turkey](#), [Qatar](#), [Kuwait](#), [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Israel](#), [Egypt](#) and the [Kurds](#), as well as pieces on the [Islamic States's](#) own regional ambitions.

You can explore our interactive map, timeline and the collection of 14 essays, [here](#).



## Rebooting EU Foreign Policy

Ukraine and the Middle East have underlined how ill-equipped the EU is to respond to foreign policy crises. This [policy paper](#) argues that the EU's new foreign policy High Representative, Federica Mogherini will have to contend not only with a world in which Europe's weight is greatly diminished but with a reluctance at the heart of the EU to face reality.

This paper, co-authored by Nick Witney, Mark Leonard and ECFR's Heads of Programme including Daniel Levy, argue that the culture of denial is exemplified by cherished EU foreign policy constructs such as "Europe's neighbourhood", "strategic partners", and "the comprehensive approach" which have become a substitute for real strategic thought and have encouraged a lethal complacency about the effectiveness of the EU's external policies.



## Selection From The Press



ECFR's Senior Policy Fellow Nick Witney is interviewed by [France 24](#) on how the international community should respond to the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and in Syria as well as being quoted by [La Libre](#) and [Le Matin](#).



In a recent article for the Italian geopolitical magazine [Limes](#), ECFR's Mattia Toaldo discusses what Italy can do to avoid all-out civil war in Libya as well as being interviewed in French by [JOL Press](#) on Paris's willingness to intervene in the country.



Following recent developments in Iraq and Syria, ECFR's Senior Policy Fellow Julien Barnes-Dacey is quoted by [Al Jazeera English](#), [El Pais](#), [RIA Novosti](#) as well as being interviewed by [Syria Deeply](#) on Europe's reaction to the widening of US military action .

## ECFR Recommends

[Afghanistan: 'A shocking indictment'](#) - Rory Stewart (The New York Review of Books)

Why should we be any better at targeting ISIS than we were at targeting the Taliban and al-Qaeda?

[An Iran nuclear deal is there for the taking](#) - W. Luers, T. Pickering & J. Walsh (National Interest)

Both sides know that failure to reach a comprehensive agreement after the collaborative atmosphere that has developed would result in a renewed downward spiral in the relationship.

[Why Syria's disaster threatens a war in Turkey](#) - Hugh Pope (The Guardian)

The advance of ISIS on Syria's Kurds is undermining the peace process between Turkey and the PKK.

[Egypt and Libya: a fatal embrace?](#) - Karim Mezran (Atlantic Council)

The stalemate emerging from the armed political conflict in Libya today suggests that neither the Islamist-backed Operation Dawn nor the more secular Operation Dignity movements have the capacity to dominate the other.

