

Conference

RUSMENA Roundtable in Florence

02 June 2022

Sala Europa - Villa Schifanoia, Via Boccaccio 121 - Florence

Tine Gade | Senior Research Fellow – Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Jakub Godzimirski | Research Professor – Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Introduction

This roundtable explores the role and interests of Russia in the MENA region focusing on its historical legacies and ongoing great power competition. It will also analyse the relationship between Turkey and Russia in this context and shed light on other aspects of Russia's presence in the region. What is the role of religion in Russia's policy in the Middle East? How is Russia viewed in Syria from Damascus's point of observation? What is Russia's role in Syria from the point of view of the Kremlin?

Draft Programme

2 June

09:30 - 16:00 **09:30-11:00 Session 1: Russia as an actor in MENA**

Chair: Tine Gade

- Short presentation of EUI work on the Middle East – Olivier Roy, EUI (max 5 minutes)
- Short presentation of the RUSMENA project – Jakub M Godzimirski, NUPI (max 5 minutes)
- Russian great power repertoires – Iver B Neumann, FNI
- Russian repertoires of power in Syria and Ukraine: similarities and differences – Agnes Favier, EUI
- Russia's interests in the MENA region: the official MFA narrative – Jakub M Godzimirski, NUPI
- Russian strategic innovation: private security companies in MENA – Karen Philippa Larsen NUPI/DIIS



11:00-11:15 Coffee break

11:15-12:30 Session 2: Imperial legacies and great power competition

Chair: Iver B. Neumann

- Imperial legacies and great power competition in the MENA region – Jeff Mankoff, NDU
- Russia and the imperial legacies in Central Asia – Olivier Roy, EUI
- Turkey and Russia in the MENA region: cooperation and conflict – Siri Neset, CMI
- EU interests and repertoires in the MENA region – Michel Duclos, former French Ambassador to Syria
- Religion in Russia's policy in the Middle East – Vassily Klimentov, Geneva Graduate Institute
- Russia and the Christians in the Middle East – Georges Fahmi, EUI

12:30 -13:30 Lunch

13:30-16:00 Session 3: Syria as a power playground:

Chair: Georges Fahmi, EUI

- Russia in Syria: view from Damascus – Jalal Mesady, HD (15 minutes)
- Russia in Syria: view from the Kremlin – Julie Wilhelmsen, NUPI
- Russia in northern Syria: Rojava and beyond – Patrick Haenni, HD/EUI
- Concluding remarks – Jakub M Godzimirski, NUPI and Olivier Roy, EUI

Speakers

Michel Duclos	Institut Montaigne
Meriem El-Haithami	Columbia University
Georges Fahmi	European University Institute
Agnès Favier	European University Institute
Tine Gade	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
Jakub Godzimirski	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
Patrick Haenni	Humanitarian Dialogue Centre
Vassily Klimentov	Graduate Institute of Geneva
Karen Philippa Larsen	Danish Institute of International Studies

Jeff Mankoff	National Defence University
Mohammed Masbah	Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis
Jalal Mesady	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Siri Neset	Chr. Michelsen Institute
Iver Neumann	Fritjof Nansen Institute
Olivier Roy	European University Institute
Simone Tholens	University of Cardiff
Julie Wilhelmsen	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

EUI RUSMENA Workshop Firenze 2 June 2022

Short bios of participants (in alphabetical order)

Michel Duclos Special Advisor to Institut Montaigne, has had a long diplomatic career. He was first Deputy Director of the Centre for Analysis and Forecasting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, between 1984 and 1987. He was then an ambassador at the COPS in Brussels, from 2000 to 2002, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations from 2002 to 2006, and Ambassador of France to Syria from 2006 to 2009. He was diplomatic adviser to the French Minister of the Interior from 2009 to 2012, then Ambassador to Switzerland from 2012 to 2014. He is the author of the policy paper, “Syria: To End a Never-Ending War”, published by Institut Montaigne in June 2016, and of *La Longue Nuit Syrienne* (Les éditions de l’Observatoire, 2019). He spearheaded the World of Neo-Authoritarians project with the latter publisher. A frequent contributor to various press media, he is also a non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council (Washington).

Meriem El Haitami is a visiting fellow at Columbia University specializing in Gender and Religion, and the Morocco-based PI for a multi-institutional project entitled « Gender, Politics and Critique in the MENA: Towards a Critical History of Feminism, 1970s until Today ». Her research explores trends of Islamic feminism in post-2003 Morocco, gender perspectives in preventing and countering violent extremism and the role of women in state religious policy and Islamic scholarship.

Georges Fahmi is a research fellow at the Middle East Directions Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, at the European University Institute in Fiesole, Italy. Previously, Fahmi was a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut, Lebanon. His research focuses on religious actors in democratic transition in the Middle East, the interplay between state and religion in Egypt and Tunisia, and religious minorities and citizenship in Egypt and Syria. He received his PhD from the European University Institute

Agnès Favier is a Part-time Professor at the Middle East Directions Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. She leads the Syria Initiative and is the project director of the Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria (WPCS) project. She has been an external collaborator at the European University Institute of Florence, Italy (EUI) since March 2016. Favier is a political scientist who specializes in comparative politics and conflicts in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Lebanon and Syria. She is currently working on social and political transformations in Syria after 2011. Her research interests include social movements and youth mobilizations, local governance and political elites, armed conflict and conflict resolution. Previously she has been a senior researcher at the French Institute for the Near East (Beirut), and postdoctoral researcher at College de France (Paris). She also has significant experience as an independent consultant and an analyst on the MENA region for European organisations and governmental bodies.

Tine Gade is a Senior Research Fellow in the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs’ (NUPI) Research Group on Peace, Conflict and Development. She holds a PhD in political science from Sciences Po Paris and is a former Max Weber fellow at the European University Institute and the 2012 recipient of the Michel Seurat prize. She is the author of *Sunni City: Tripoli from Islamist Utopia to the Lebanese Revolution* (forthcoming, CUP, 2022). Tine has previously conducted research on Sunni movements in Lebanon and Iraq. Her new research project (*Reactions to state regulation of Islam in times of Daesh (STATEISLAM)*), funded by the Research Council of Norway, analyses the cases of Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and

Tunisia. Tine is currently a visiting fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the EUI.

Jakub M. Godzimirski is a Research Professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs NUPI. He has been at NUPI since 1995 where his main areas of research have been Russian foreign, security and economic policy, energy policy and developments in the post-Soviet space and in Central and Eastern Europe. Godzimirski has conducted several studies on Russian foreign and security policies focusing on Russia's role in the post-Soviet conflicts, Russia's relations with other actors (OSCE, NATO, Norway, Poland) and on Russia's and EU's energy policy. He is currently in charge of the project *Russian Repertoires of Power in the MENA region (RUSMENA)* funded by the Research Council of Norway that examines Russian power practices in the Middle East and North Africa.

Patrick Haenni PhD in Political Sciences - Institut d'Etudes Politiques/Paris (2001). Author of *L'ordre des Caïds* and *L'islam de marché*. Visiting fellow at the European University Institute Covering the Syrian file, with a special focus on the opposition held areas where he is conducting regular field trips in addition to his engagement with US, Turkish and Russian officials.

Vassily Klimentov is a Visiting Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute in Florence. He is also a Postdoctoral Researcher and Guest Lecturer in international affairs at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva. He has received his PhD in International History and International Relations/ Political Science from IHEID in 2020. His PhD thesis dealt with the Soviet-Afghan War. His research interests also include Islamism in the North Caucasus, and Soviet/ Russian foreign policy in the Middle-East. Before his PhD, Vassily Klimentov has worked for six years as a conflict analyst and assessment officer in humanitarian NGOs, including in the field in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Karen Philippa Larsen is a PhD Fellow at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) currently visiting the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Karen Philippa Larsen's work focuses on Russian private military companies and the role they play as political actors in Russian foreign policy. Her other interests include Russian foreign policy actors in general and privatisation of security in Africa. Larsen holds a master's degree in Peace and Conflict studies from University of Innsbruck and wrote her master's thesis on the 2014 war in Eastern Ukraine from a conflict transformation perspective.

Jeffrey Mankoff is a Distinguished Research Fellow at the U.S. National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies and a non-resident Senior Associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). His main areas of research include Russian foreign policy, regional security in Eurasia, nationalism, and historical memory. He is the author of *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, 2011). His new book, *Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security* (Yale, 2022), examines the impact of the imperial past on Chinese, Iranian, Russian, and Turkish politics and foreign policy.

Mohammed Masbah is the Founder and President of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA). He is a political sociologist whose work centers on public policy, democratization and political Islam, with a focus on North Africa. Dr Masbah is an Associate Fellow at Chatham House in London and adjunct professor at Mohammed V University. He was previously a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center, and a fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik,

SWP) in Berlin. Dr Masbah obtained his PhD in Sociology from Mohammad V University in Rabat.

Jalal Mesady is a mediation advisor at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). He has 20 years of experience working on conflicts in the Middle East, focussing on areas such as the development and counterterrorism nexus, climate change and food security, stabilization and recovery policies in post conflict situations. Mr. Mesady has worked with several international organizations such as the World Bank, European Investment Bank, and several UN organizations. Since 2019, Mr. Mesady is working with HD as their advisor based in Damascus.

Siri Neset is a political psychologist and an associate research fellow at Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway. Neset's academic interests include foreign policy decision-making, security studies, geopolitics, Turkish domestic and foreign policy, and U.S. relations with MENA. Her work is focused within the intersection between theoretically informed approaches and policy related issues. Relevant projects and publications include; "Policy Choices in Turkey's Second Republic Phase" (2019), "Turkey as a Regional Security Actor" (2020) and "Changing Geopolitics of the South Caucasus: The Prospect for Regional Cooperation and the Role of the External Actors" (forthcoming 2022) funded by the Norwegian MFA.

Iver B. Neumann is Director at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Norway. He holds doctorates in Politics (Oxon, 1992) and Social Anthropology (Oslo, 2009), and has worked as a professor in Russian Studies at the University of Oslo and in International Relations at the London School of Economics. His research interests are Russian Foreign Policy, diplomacy, social theory and method and states systems. He is the author (with Einar Wigen) of *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations: Russia, Turkey and European States Building, 3000 BCE- 2018 CE* (Cambridge, 2018).

Olivier Roy is currently joint-chair at the RSCAS and SPS department of the EUI, and Adjunct Professor at the EUI School of Transnational Governance. Previously he has been senior researcher at the French CNRS and Professor at the EHESS (Paris). He headed the OSCE's Mission for Tajikistan (1993-94) and was a Consultant for the UN Office of the Coordinator for Afghanistan (1988). He has been heading the ERC funded project "ReligioWest" since 2011. His field works include Political Islam, Middle East, Islam in the West and comparative religions. Prof. Roy received an "Agrégation de Philosophie" (1972) and a Ph.D. in Political Sciences. In 2008-2009 he has been a visiting Professor at Berkeley University. He is the author, among other books, of "Globalized Islam" (Columbia University Press), 2004, and "Holy Ignorance" (Oxford UP), 2010. His last book is "En Quête de l'Orient perdu" (Seuil 2014). He is presently working on "Islamic norms in the public sphere", conversions and apostasy and comparative religions.

Simone Tholens is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at Cardiff University, and co-director of the *Centre for Conflict, Security and Societies*. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre/European University Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Johns Hopkins SAIS, Bologna. Her main research interest are postliberal interventions, security assistance, bordering processes, and materiality of global war practices, as well as theories of contestation and practice. She has been working on these themes in the context of the Middle East, the Western Balkans and the wider Euro-Mediterranean area, focusing in

particular on Security Assistance, border management, and arming/disarming of local partners. Her ongoing projects include a monograph (in progress), supported by the Leverhulme Trust, called “Assembling Security Assistance: Knowledge, materiality and networks,” and a Special Issue (w/ Abdullah Al-Jabassini) with *Mediterranean Politics* on “Reordering the Middle East: The evolution of Security Assistance as an international practice.”

Julie Wilhelmsen is a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). She holds a PhD in Political Science and conducts research in the fields of Russian foreign and security policies, the radicalization of Islam in Eurasia and critical security studies. Her work has appeared in *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Slavic Review*, *Journal of Global Security Studies* and numerous other peer reviewed journals. She is also the author of ‘Russia’s Securitization of Chechnya: How war became acceptable’ (Routledge, 2017). Wilhelmsen has been editor of the journal ‘Internasjonal Politikk’, member of the Norwegian Government Expert Group for the Defence of Norway (2015) and in 2020 she won the prestigious Skjervheim Price for her research and outreach to the Norwegian public on Russian politics.