

SLAWOMIR SIERAKOWSKI

Germany is still playing defense

An old joke among non-Americans is that they, too, deserve a vote in U.S. presidential elections, given how central that office is to their lives. When Germany's Christian Democratic Union met this month to select a new leader, Europeans probably felt the same way.

Not only is the CDU Germany's largest party; it is also the largest in the European Union. At its recent congress in Hamburg, the word "Europe" was uttered constantly, with most speakers declaring a sense of responsibility for what happens across the EU.

The election of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer to succeed German Chancellor Angela Merkel as party leader reflects this sentiment, as it amounts to a bid for continuity. As a Merkel loyalist, Kramp-Karrenbauer is not likely to push the chancellor out before her term ends in 2021.

Throughout Merkel's 13 years in the chancellorship, the German government's policies have been almost exclusively reactive. Even the "decision" to admit more than 1 million refugees in 2015 was really just a decision not to place barbed wire and armed soldiers at Germany's borders (imagine the world's reaction to that image). Likewise, Merkel's decisions to phase out Germany's nuclear-power plants and impose sanctions on Russia, while decisive and hard, were defensive.

Among the three contenders to replace Merkel, Friedrich Merz was the most vocal proponent of a more active approach at home, within Europe, and abroad. Some saw in Merz a chance to restore the CDU's right-wing character, thereby saving Germany's two-party system. As matters stand, the CDU and the Social Democratic Party have both come to represent the center, while the Greens and the populist Alternative für Deutschland have carved out clear ideological positions on the left and right, respectively. That will now remain the case.

The election of Kramp-Karrenbauer means that the slow unraveling of Germany's two-party system will continue. Future federal governments will have to be based on fragile coalitions, and the German presence in the European Parliament will be fragmented among different parties, rendering it less effective. Most likely, German conservatives in the European People's Party will have to solicit the support of Hungarian strongman Viktor Orban, whose Fidesz party commands an increasingly important voting bloc within the party group.

Apparently, Merz came off as too cold, analytical and impersonal for the CDU delegates. The conservatism of today's CDU is based not on ideology, but on the need for community. The party requires a mother or father figure at the helm, in the tradition of former Chancellors Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Kohl and, now, Merkel (whose nickname is "Mutti").

Most likely, Kramp-Karrenbauer was

elected (by a slim margin) because her speech at the congress centered on her personal history and experiences, and her commitments to her party and home region.

In response to those who see her as a "mini-Merkel," she expounded on her 18 years as minister and minister-president of the state of Saarland.

Merz, by contrast, said nothing about himself, and focused entirely on foreign and economic policy.

In keeping with his cautious support for French President Emmanuel Macron's EU-reform proposals, he called for European unity, arguing that the United States would not respect a Europe that did not speak with one voice. He hailed Germany as the most open country in the world, but warned that openness has its limits. And at a time of rising illiberalism, he championed the rule of law.

The CDU delegates rejected Merz but not his program, suggesting that they would like to see Kramp-Karrenbauer pursue a Merzian policy agenda.

This fact has not been lost on Kramp-Karrenbauer, and likely explains why she chose Paul Ziemiak as the party's general secretary. Ziemiak favored Merz and Jens Spahn over Kramp-Karrenbauer in the leadership race, and has been one of Merkel's most vocal detractors within the CDU.

Ziemiak has openly criticized Germany's admission of economic migrants, even though he is an immigrant from Poland. Still, as a Polish-speaking, Polish-born politician in Germany, he may show a special understanding for Germany's important eastern neighbor, as has Merkel (whose grandfather changed his surname from Kazmierczak to Kasner in 1930). At a minimum, he will not be as difficult a partner for Orban and Poland's de fac-

The country might look like an oasis of relative stability, but the oasis is a mirage

to leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski as Merz or Spahn would have been.

Interestingly, all three candidates in the CDU leadership contest raised concerns about Germany's partnership with Russia on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. It would seem that they are of the same mind as Manfred Weber, the EPP's Spitzenkandidat in the contest for the European Commission presidency, which will be decided after the May 2019 European Parliament election.

At this point, Kramp-Karrenbauer's views on economic and foreign policy are largely unknown. She avoided these issues entirely during her leadership

campaign, because she did not want to give the impression that her remit as CDU leader would overlap with that of Merkel as chancellor. With a series of local elections coming up in 2019, Kramp-Karrenbauer will likely focus on domestic politics, and Merkel will see to the country's foreign affairs.

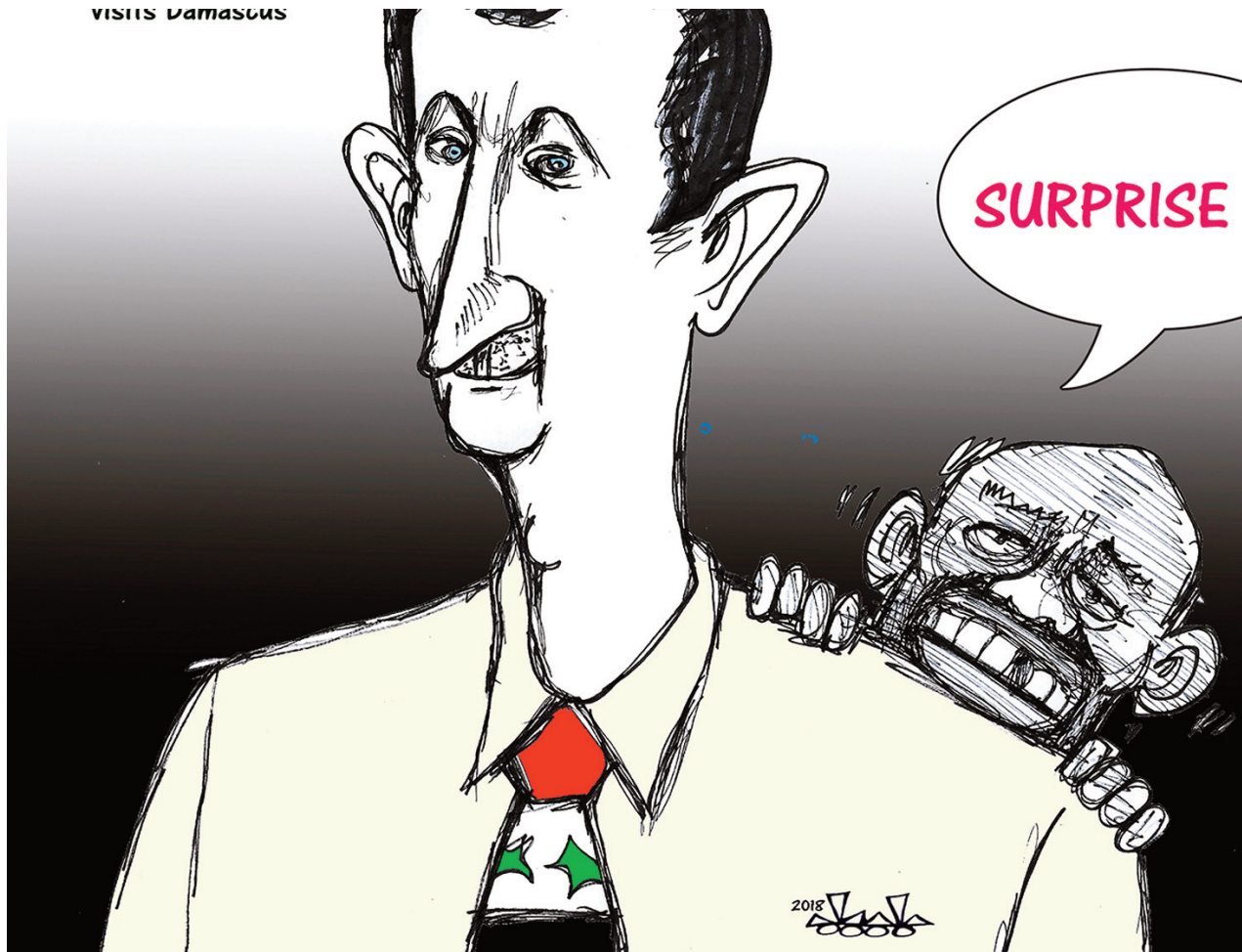
With France suffering the return of violent street protests and the United Kingdom's Brexit circus descending into chaos, Germany might look like an oasis of relative stability. But the oasis is a mirage. The reality is a deep-seated sclerosis that has long hindered desperately needed EU reforms.

Given the heightened tensions within the EU and between Europe and the U.S., Germany's habitual defensive politics will no longer suffice. The country now finds itself in the crossfire of an escalating Sino-American trade war.

It could have avoided this situation if it had taken the initiative to reform the EU and the eurozone earlier, when it had the chance. Kramp-Karrenbauer's rise provides no reason to expect that it will change course now.

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VISITS DAMASCUS



CHIBLI MALLAT

A Beirut-Tokyo axis of nonviolence

At the University of Tokyo on Nov. 17, 2018, an unusual assortment of Middle Eastern and Japanese scholars met over a conference on "nonviolence as strategy, and nonviolence as future." One oddity – or novelty – of the discussions came from the convergence of interest in nonviolence from scholars of vastly contrasting interests.

Another came in the keen interest of "Islam and gender" female professors of the Middle East in Tokyo and Kyoto in the reading of an Arab Spring as the fount of a new philosophy of history, a philosophy where nonviolence was the anima of revolutionary break with a violent past. A third novelty was the contrastive context of overwhelming violence in the Middle East since World War II, and the rejection of violence in Japanese domestic and foreign policy for the same period, embodied most symbolically in Article 9 of the Japanese constitution.

Within this context, religious nonviolent figures such as the Syrian "alem" (traditionalist scholar) Jawdat Said and political leaders such as the Burmese Aung San Suu Kyi were presented with the paradoxes inherent to the specific interpretation of the Quran by Said as a message of characteristic nonviolence, against a reality where Islam and other Middle Eastern monotheistic religions are exploited by Daesh (ISIS) and Middle Eastern governments to justify vast massacres and the killing of political dissenters.

In the case of Burma, the transformation of a non-violent political leader like Aung San Suu Kyi into a withdrawn and quietist approach to the deporting of thousands of Rohingya Muslims was the subject of a lively debate between the proponents of efficacy in politics – the withdrawal of the Amnesty International award for her silence, as opposed to her calling for international mediation to consciously compensate for her inefficacy to counter the military domination in Burma and the vast anti-Rohingya sentiment common in the non-Muslim majority of Myanmar.

There is no magic wand that can turn an academic discussion into a solution to an increasingly violent world, except that, perhaps for the first time in history, a symbolic axis of nonviolence ran from Beirut to Tokyo on the strength of the nonviolent nature of the early days of the Arab revolutions.

It also marks a shift to universalism of a key debate for the future of the planet from traditional European-American academia and policymaking to an Asian-based academic and activist commonality based on a future of a nonviolence philosophy of change.

Characteristically also, the leadership for the conference had been instilled by female Japanese public intellectuals who appreciated the centrality of women in the modern Middle East, and across Asia, while remaining intent to avoid essentialism. To avoid essentialism is to privilege the fight for nonviolence by women to the exclusion of men, while acknowledging forms of gender-based brutality inherent to the authoritarianism of "strong men" (such as those in Egypt imposing virginity tests), rarely of "strong women."

The birth of a Beirut-Tokyo axis of nonviolence is one symbolic response to the characteristic retreat of the human rights agenda globally, and the looming confrontations unchecked strong men are threatening the planet with, namely the return to a state of savage disorder which ended up in a devastating world war.

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NIMA KHORRAMI ASSL

Why Israel could be Oman's answer to having a post-oil economy

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Oct. 25 visit to Oman spawned speculation about Muscat's position on the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process and myriad regional security challenges. However, it is Oman's economic concerns that drive its interest in renewing relations with Israel after having cut ties in 2008. Oman has struggled to shift to a post-oil economy in recent years.

Worries over the health of Sultan Qaboos bin Said and an uncertain succession have given the sultan and his government added urgency to start such an economic transition. Crude exports currently account for up to 71 percent of government revenues, which Muscat, rather predictably, has been relying on to ease the economic burdens of rising youth unemployment, increasing Yemeni refugee flows, and subsidizing the basic living costs of around 84,000 low-income households, or roughly one-third of its citizens.

Oman's already dwindling oil and gas reserves, which are set to deplete in 14 and 27 years respectively, are becoming costly to extract at a time when suppressed global oil prices have diminished their returns.

Muscat has been forced to seek alternative ways to increase its revenue and address its growing budget deficit, which stood at 3.5 billion Omani rials (\$9.1 billion) in 2017, around 10 percent of GDP.

The government has contemplated fuel and energy subsidy cuts and additional taxes, but it is wary of public pushback against such austerity measures.

It removed fuel subsidies in 2016, which drove oil prices up so much that public protests broke out in Muscat on Feb. 2, 2017 – the first major demonstrations since 2011 – forcing the government to reinstate a smaller subsidy the following week.

Instead of austerity measures, Muscat sees economic diversification as a solution, making it the top priority in its Vision 2040 development plan, issued in 2017. The plan, a repackaging of Oman's Vision 2020 launched in 1995, focuses on modernizing agriculture, creating technology and startup ecosystems, boosting tourism

and establishing free industrial zones near the port cities of Salalah and Duqm.

Israel can be of immense assistance to Muscat, especially in the agriculture and the high-tech sectors. While Oman can source these technologies from other countries, it also recognizes that Israeli leadership increasingly values having relations with Arab states as part of its wider strategy of countering Iran. Following the lead of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in slowly warming up to Tel Aviv, the public meeting between Netanyahu and Sultan Qaboos, during which he officially called for the recognition of Israel, puts Muscat ahead of the curve in pursuing normalization and all its economic and strategic benefits.

As part of Vision 2040, Oman's Council of Ministers mandated the Agriculture Ministry and the Oman Food Investment

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Holding Company to develop, invest in, and implement programs aimed at boosting farm production.

This includes increasing exports of dates, honey and fruits. To achieve this, Oman aims to introduce precision irrigation and nonthermal processing to increase crop yield and quality while using less water.

Given Israel's own arid climate and water scarcity – in addition to a strategic desire for agricultural independence and food security – Israeli companies are among the leading players in the global market for such agricultural technology.

Israeli firms such as Metzger, Amiram and Hazera have particularly distinguished themselves in carrying out effective projects in Africa and China to improve irrigation, seeding technology, pest control, desalination, renewable energy and waste management. The technology Oman needs to achieve its agricultural targets, Israel has in abundance.

Israel has also been successful in the

establishing and managing highly functional startup ecosystems despite its relatively small population. This includes experience regulating and coordinating university programs with those of the incubators, accelerators, and seed and venture capital funds – as well as relevant ministries and public bodies, such as the Industry, Trade and Labor Ministry and the Israel Innovation Authority – within a single framework to promote innovation.

Oman has made some progress on its own to become a regional startup hub.

Various incubators and funds have set up in Muscat in recent years, among them Riyadh, Zubair SEC, Al Raffid Fund and Iskan Oman Investment. However, there seems to be a mismatch between the startups these funds support and the research and policy agendas of the Commerce and Industry Ministry, the Public Authority for Crafts Industries and top academic institutions such as Sultan Qaboos University.

For example, while the government seeks to nurture tech startups, Sultan Qaboos University has yet to set up an independent information technology or computer science college. National universities also do not synchronize their research programs with the Labor Ministry's projected demands within the job market.

Therefore, officials at the Supreme Council for Planning can learn a great deal from Israel's experience.

Moreover, as part of its wider diversification move, Oman has been relentless in pursuing diversified sources of defense equipment. This is evident in recent deals with India, including the signing of a memorandum of understanding in February 2018 to let the Indian navy berth at the port of Duqm.

Increased illegal border crossings from Yemen are feeding Oman's fears terrorist cells could emerge inside its refugee camps.

Tensions with Saudi Arabia and the UAE over its neutrality in Yemen and Qatar are also stoking worries that Oman may become a target of these countries' increasingly hawkish foreign policy.

Vision 2040's aim of developing Salalah

and Duqm as major maritime hubs further pits Oman against the UAE economically.

Although the United States has also increased its military sales to Oman, the current U.S. administration appears to be siding with the UAE and Saudi Arabia over unresolved border disputes between Abu Dhabi and Muscat, making access to Israeli surveillance and monitoring technologies an attractive backup.

Most importantly, Oman hopes to enlist the services of Israeli cybersecurity firms given its private and governmental sectors' vulnerabilities to large scale, sophisticated cyberattacks from either its immediate neighbors or more distant states.

Having seen how Qatar and the UAE have targeted each other's networks in recent years, increasing and strengthening its cyber resilience is among Muscat's top priorities. Israeli private firms already play a critical role in enhancing the cyber capabilities of the UAE and Saudi governments, seemingly attaching no strings such services save a tacit recognition of it as a legitimate state. It should not come as a surprise that Muscat too wants to get its hands on their software.

For Tel Aviv, resetting relations with Muscat gives it access to a new and relatively lucrative market in a strategic location. Israeli firms would also gain easier access to the nearby Indian market by operation through Oman, which has fewer logistical hurdles. NaanDanJain, an Israeli-Indian firm that specializes in water irrigation systems for rice production, can potentially set up a storage and processing facility in Oman without having to obtain as many permits as it would in India.

Similarly, Israeli companies can seek to establish working relations with the Oman India Fertilizer Company to develop and sell products for export to India for a lower cost of labor.

Israeli IT firms could potentially also tap into the large pool of Indian IT talent already residing in Oman – thereby avoiding the bureaucratic red tape of establishing a presence in India.

Israel (as an innovation hub) and Oman

(as a logistical hub) are both important to China's and India's wider global strategies, as they invest in Israeli tech firms and develop Oman's port of Duqm.

Oman and Israel could use this to forge a reciprocal relationship for trade with these economic giants, building on their geographical and technological attributes.

For instance, Israel is already a major supplier of weapons and technology to India – which buys 49 percent of all Israeli arms exports, making Israel its largest military supplier after Russia and the U.S. – and China – to which Israel sold \$3.5 billion worth of goods and services in the first eight months of 2018, primarily surveillance and cybersecurity technology.

Partnering with well-funded Omani entities, such as the Oman India Joint Investment Fund and the Duqm-based

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China-Arab Wanfang Investment Management (Ningxia) Company, would further enable Israel to set up factories or research and development centers for export to these major hubs.

Yet for that to happen, Oman's pragmatic, principled, and independent foreign policy will be indispensable in the post-Qaboos era. Given the highly personalized nature of decision-making under his rule, there is a danger his efforts might get interrupted even though he has already prepared the ground for his inevitable departure. The more stubborn obstacle is whether Israel is truly committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state, as this has been of paramount importance to Muscat for decades.

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