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Israel and the EU: risks of the new migration

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Abstract

How to conceive of the security threat facing Israel and the EU when it comes to migration? This paper looks beyond their joint exposure to Syria or Iraq, where vast populations are being displaced, let alone the transit states such as Lebanon or Egypt showing worrying signs of economic and political fragility. And it looks beyond Africa, where economic growth is triggering a steep growth in birth rates – a deviation from the usual pattern of economic development, and a potential trigger for resource shortages and mass human movements.

This paper instead pictures migration as a feature of globalisation. It argues that tight migration control has been a necessary pre-condition for the lifting of restrictions on global trade and capital flows. And it argues that now, as those trade and capital flows struggle to bring sustainable development, people are back on the move again. The EU and Israel, which both have a strong stake in Western-led globalisation, are badly exposed to these people flows and the loss of territorial order they represent.

A crisis of global development

The refugee situation in the Middle East is increasingly recognised as a crisis of development policy: the causes of the conflict can be traced to factors such as resource mismanagement, heavy urbanisation, unemployment and a youth bulge.

¹ This paper was produced in a personal capacity to structure a conference debate, and does not reflect any official views.

The solutions, too, are increasingly being sought in the realm of development policy: Lebanon and Jordan, the World Bank and UNHCR, the US and UK all agree that a humanitarian response would be too short-term and what is required is an effort to create jobs and livelihoods for the dispossessed. But this is just the tip of the iceberg: the links between the ongoing refugee crisis and the crisis of global development run even deeper.

It is important to know that the promise of sustainable development has been key in persuading people in poorer countries to stay in their home countries, and as such is vital to globalisation. Over the past 25 years, the world's economies have massively liberalised trade and capital flows. But they could never have done so, if workers too had been free to move: mass migration from poor to rich countries would have fatally disrupted processes of national state-building. Governments therefore needed to give workers in poor countries a reason to stay home and build institutions – and they did so by holding out the promise of global economic and political development.

Bodies like the World Trade Organisation and World Bank developed the necessary recipe: trade flows would create manufacturing jobs in poorer states, and investment flows would then deliver the technology to transform these into high-skilled work. As unskilled workers joined the middle-classes, they would demand a greater say in domestic politics, laying the foundation for democratic government. They would have smaller family sizes too, as their governments began providing them with welfare support, thus reducing problems of overpopulation. In this way, globalisation would bring people everywhere good government and prosperity so they didn't have to move.

If irregular migration is now on the rise, it is a sign that this recipe has not always been successful. People are not just migrating because of unemployment or political violence – such things have long been routine in the developing world. They are migrating because they have lost hope in any improvement. Ironically, this comes at just the moment global economic convergence has finally begun to occur: for the first time in 150 years, poorer economies are catching up with the rich, facilitated by the decline of the West and the rise of a few large emerging econo-

mies. But this global power shift only increases the geopolitical overtones of the development crisis.

Q1. How is the development crisis affecting migration flows?

Migration control has arguably contributed more to globalisation than has labour migration itself. So it is worrying that the factors which encouraged people to stay put are today breaking down. The promise of equitable global development, the demonstrable spread of democracy, a belief in the sustainability of territorial order, and basic progress in national state-building – all these things are being eroded. The result:

→ ***The world still lacks robust migration channels.*** Until now, people in poorer countries had a reason to stay home: according to the widely-held ‘modernization thesis’, trade and investment would automatically bring them prosperity and democracy. This is one reason why, despite the massive spread of transport links, only a tiny minority of the world’s population has moved countries in recent decades (the figure for 1965 was 2.3%, and it had crawled up to just 3.2% 50 years later). But the modernization thesis is today hardly credible. Officials from Frontex, the EU’s borders agency, report that irregular migrants give one motive above all: they have lost faith in a better future at home. Although pressure for migration is on the rise, however, the world still lacks robust migration channels between poor and rich states, let alone within the ‘global south’.

→ ***Territorial order is seen as a trap not a boon.*** It is still only a tiny minority of people who can move countries. Be these Indian high-skilled professionals or Congolese refugees, a small ‘hypermobile’ minority are picking opportunities between states; they are ‘strings of people’ who pass information and resources back down the line. As such, they add to the growing gap between the mobile minority (just 3% of Swedes, for instance, are estimated to undertake nearly 25% of the population’s entire international travel) and a vast immobile majority. Until now, people have believed that settled communities are normally the best off. But today there is a growing feeling that mobile people are the best off, and the citizens who stay at home to try and build a better life will be stuck with territorial problems like war, environmental degradation, national debt and overpopulation.

→ **Majoritarian rule is becoming the norm.** At all levels of politics, democracy and consensus-building are receding and political power comes down to sheer size. This has implications for migration. Large powers like China increasingly view emigration as a threat. (This is about status rivalry, population size, and the need to show they can provide opportunities to their workers.) Smaller emerging powers view populations in terms of stability. (Ruling parties in democracies from Turkey to Singapore are accused of allowing in large amounts of ethnically-homogeneous groups in order to create permanent sympathetic majorities.) Meanwhile, weak states are plagued by volatile divided societies. (Toxic relations between majorities and minorities are re-emerging – notably in Syria and Iraq, where migration has become linked to ethnic engineering.)

→ **Spoiler states and criminal organisations stand to gain most.** Globalisation's discontents are the players most readily able to exploit the demand to migrate and the lack of legal opportunities to do so. Cross-border crime networks (some of them tribal groups with a mobile or pastoral way of life) have long controlled shadow flows of goods and money and now do the same with labour. Terrorist networks, too, are able to draw advantage from the new flows of people, creating migration services which boost their claims to statehood whilst providing a cash cow. Finally, states which have failed to adapt to the demands of globalisation, may seize upon the migration flows. Recent speculation has focused on the way Russia, unattractive to many international migrants, is able to drive the people flows onwards for geopolitical gain.

Q2. How are these trends playing out in the Middle East and Africa?

Globalisation, with its complicated attempts to combine national state-building with cross-border commerce, has a mixed record in the Middle East and Africa. These regions are characterised by autocratic rentier and top-heavy economies, disputed borders and divided societies. As such, they have felt the crisis of global development hard:

→ **Vast populations are trapped close to home:** Whilst the media like to imagine *flows* of people moving out of Syria and Iraq, the overwhelming reality is of *trapped* populations. Syrians are stuck at home because they are too poor to migrate or too wealthy to divest themselves of assets. Syrian labour migrants who arrived in

Lebanon and Jordan decades ago are now being squeezed by the new arrivals or ejected as 'illegal immigrants'. Refugees form a massive captive economy in zones just across Syria's border. These refugees, subsidised by international food and housing aid, will work for low wages often in an agricultural sector which has been revived in order to feed them and which is draining water and other scarce local resources. They are trapped in a hugely vulnerable position.

→ **Regional migration channels are bottlenecked:** Traditional labour-importing states from Iraq to Libya are now shut to all but the bravest migrants – the Filipino health-workers defying Manila's orders to come home, or the workers from Niger braving the region's menial sector. Traditional labour-exporting states like Jordan, meanwhile, are struggling to create jobs for the vast influx of newcomers. Refugees find themselves funnelled into Jordan's low-wage sector, fuelling new jobs unattractive to native workers. This is creating artificial demand for Egyptian and Ethiopian migrants who are in turn nudging out the refugees themselves. Likewise Lebanon: today, Lebanon must find work for a further 1-1.5 million people, including many Syrians who formerly contributed to the economy as tourists.

→ **Minority-majority conflicts are exacerbated:** Since 1985, around 300,000 Christians and 700 000 Muslims have left Lebanon, suggesting that emigration can function as a safety-valve for inter-ethnic relations in fragile political systems. So too can immigration: the Gulf States still draw their immigrant labour largely from South Asia and the West, worried that regional migration will unsettle their societies. But this leaves them hugely vulnerable to today's messy regional migration flows – especially at a time when internal sectarian tensions in the Gulf are flaring up again, as the economies tank, and native workers locals find themselves leap-frogged in the job market by high-skilled international workers. Across the region, the old informal migration safety valves are blocked.

→ **Criminal organisations exploit the blockages:** A vast swathe of African and Gulf countries, from Yemen to Mauritania, is showing high birth-rates, bucking the trend whereby economic development leads to smaller family sizes. These youth bulges risk triggering instability and resource scarcity, and powers everywhere may wish to cordon off these places and let conflict take its course. Yet conflict is seldom a 'natural corrective' to over-population, and almost all societies actually

end up gaining population following war. If these states are hived off, with no opportunities for mobility, they risk falling into a perpetual cycle of high youth bulges and civil war. From Somalia to Nigeria, non-state actors are already stepping in to deftly exploit these dynamics, offering youth populations status and jobs.

Q3. What risks do the EU and Israel share?

The dangers associated with these uncontrolled migration flows and bottled-up populations are high, but these make up only a part of the migration-challenge facing Israel and the EU. As proponents of Western-led globalisation - and as deviations from its rules in significant ways - the pair is threatened on a deeper level by the underlying shifts in global order:

→ ***Both are deviations from Western territorial order.*** Both Israel and the EU count as deviations from Western territorial order, and have been permitted to develop thanks to their exceptional or model character – Israel as a diaspora state, the EU as a cross-border economic space. But today their rivals and enemies may draw advantage by eroding that status - and migration plays a role here. For Israel, its rivals can exploit the general loss of faith in territorial order to encourage emigration and erode its legitimacy. As for the EU, it may find itself cited as a model by rivals seeking to establish their own cross-border spaces - whether it be Russia, with its Eurasian Economic Union, or the Islamists who view international regimes based on kinship as a salient precedent.

→ ***Both embody a particular pattern of human mobility.*** The Israeli state is founded on a specific pattern of human mobility, providing as it does a safe harbour to a more disparate global community. This leaves it exposed to shifts in global mobility – a rise in immigration from ethnic minorities or emigration by its ethnic majority. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that Western European societies also embody a specific pattern of mobility: Europe is characterised by dense permanent settlement on resource-poor land. This defines its politics, from the emphasis on tightly-regulated borders to a reliance on commerce to gain access to overseas resources. Indeed, everything from welfare systems to five-yearly elections reflect a specific pattern of mobility – including the EU itself.

→ **Both share a globalised geography.** Politicians in both the EU and Israel boast about how globalisation has ‘shrunk time and space’ – how communications technologies have made it possible for goods, capital and knowledge to cover greater distances in ever shorter times. Today, however, ‘time’ is still shrinking but ‘space’ is expanding rapidly: irregular migrants, who were once locked out of the global economy, are now using mobile technology to share real-time information about border controls and GPS to navigate hostile terrains; they are working with people-smugglers who use social media to garner clients whilst maintaining their anonymity. Officials in the EU-28 or Israel find their borders seem to stretch longer than before.

→ **Both share international allies.** The globalised world order which took shape following the end of the Cold War was rolled out from states in North America and Western Europe. These countries witnessed at first hand the transformative effect of trade and investment flows on their poorer neighbours to the East and South. By means of expeditionary foreign policies, state-building interventions and global communications networks, they confidently threw themselves into globalisation. But now, as their power recedes, these states have become beacons for irregular migrants. Irregular migration threatens to undermine the West’s liberal and open economies, as well as sewing discord within the West, as geographically-exposed allies bear the brunt.

Q4. Are there any solutions to the migration crisis?

Developed economies have typically relied on a four-pronged approach to managing disorderly migration flows, addressing every step of the migration route from the causes of disorder abroad to the integration of migrants who arrive. This approach was in tune with the broader mechanics of Western-led globalisation, but as this now falters, so too these methods are coming under fire:

→ **Interventions become illiberal:** Western states used to be able to intervene in problem-countries on the principle of ‘contingent sovereignty’ – that a country could be recognised as sovereign only if it treated its citizens well. This principle is being replaced by another, unspoken one: states are permitted to treat their populations as they like, so long as these don’t spill out. This reconciles migration control with mutual non-interference. Where interventions do still take place,

moreover, it is less for humanitarian grounds than ‘territorial management’ (e.g., drought management in Syria). This interventionism opens a can of worms. Crisis-hit states may cast off to the international community unproductive bits of territory populated by alien or hostile groups. States with territorial ambitions may seize their chance and propose international ‘safe zones’ in war-torn neighbours.

→ **Trade-and-aid measures give people the hump:** Wealthy states also used to channel trade and aid at sending countries in a bid to reduce the root causes of disorderly migration. Now the fear is of a migration hump – that as a state grows richer, people will grow more mobile and that, far from reducing migration, trade and aid will actually increase it. Examples like Nigeria show that, without the political and ideological factors which once persuaded people to stay at home, citizens will use their new wealth to up and leave at the first opportunity. Trade and capital flows may even create instability in weak states, adding to the root causes. In short, western governments not only fear an all-too familiar ‘migration hump’, they also fear new phenomena such as a ‘terrorism hump’.

→ **Inter-connectivity becomes geopolitical:** Rich economies formerly controlled the passage of migrants by controlling the global ‘means of connection’ – the air links by which people cross continents. The US and EU have spun a web of Open Skies air-travel agreements which kept high-skilled migrants moving, whilst keeping less desirable workers at bay. But this modus operandi is proving hard to maintain. Poorer countries like Mexico, Russia, Ukraine or Bangladesh were effectively locked out of this setup, and would-be migrants had to opt for irregular land and sea routes. Emerging powers now accuse the West of operating a divide-and-rule strategy on air liberalisation, and irregular migrants everywhere are taking to land and sea routes.

→ **Immigrant integration is superseded by diaspora politics:** Finally, Western states developed a whole toolbox for integrating immigrants within an integrating global economy. Many came to accept dual citizenship, for instance, as the means to lift obstacles to migrants’ labour-market participation, dropping their previous concerns about citizens with split loyalties. These concerns are back with a vengeance. President Erdogan, when drumming up votes from the Turkish diaspora, called assimilation a ‘crime against humanity’. Moscow proved its ability to mobi-

lise its diaspora with a spate of protests across Germany. And large powers from Russia to China cite the poor treatment of their overseas diaspora as grounds to break the principle of not interfering in other states' affairs.

Conclusions: is the fortress mentality inevitable?

The introduction of border controls is of course an obvious option for both the EU and Israel in these circumstances. But there is a risk that these restrictions will damage trade and capital flows, as well as potentially shutting out parts of the community. A complementary approach, although no less tricky, would be to leverage some emerging trends. These are the (more or less) positive side-effects of the flow of power away from wealthy industrialised economies and towards the global South:

→ ***New regional free-movement regimes:*** At just the moment where many Europeans are calling for the dismantlement of their border-free travel area, the Schengen zone, the rest of the world seems interested in developing their own. Free movement regimes are popping up across Eastern and Western Africa, the Caribbean and Central America, Southeast Asia and perhaps even the Gulf and Western Balkans. Everywhere, states are grouping together to provide their citizens with opportunities to work closer to home. Often these initiatives just neaten up spaces with porous borders (such as in West Africa), but they do potentially take the strain off wealthy receiving states.

→ ***Uneven new partnerships:*** When EU and African representatives met in Valletta, Malta, to discuss the control of migration, they talked about a grand bargain or quid-pro-quo: Europe takes in more migrants from Africa, and Africa keeps more of its population at home. What they didn't talk about so much is pooling their diplomatic resources to pursue goals elsewhere – for instance to press Gulf States or Egypt to open their labour markets. It would be an uneven partnership, but hut how else to, say, end conscription in Eritrea without first preparing legitimate opportunities in wealthy Arab states for its young workers?

→ ***Progressive spoilers:*** Since the beginning of the migration crisis, Brazil has been quietly offering resettlement places to Syrian refugees, as the refugee programmes it launched in the 1990s come to maturity. It launched these to

challenge the West's moral authority, but now they are an intrinsic part of global burden-sharing. Growing numbers of emerging economies today believe an espousal of humanitarianism could bring them gains, be it the expansionist goals of China as it uses Search and Rescue rules in its territorial claims, or the smaller states across Africa cooperating on refugee issues to prevent others intervening in their affairs. This too can be leveraged.