

Europe Can and Should be Part of Israel's Victory

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On October 7, 2023, Israel was humiliated, traumatized, and threatened by Iran's multi-front ring of Jihadist aggression. Today, Israel has gained the upper hand. The Iranian "Ring of Fire" has been dismantled, leaving Iran on the defensive. Three of Iran's proxies – Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Assad regime – have been either neutralized or eliminated. The Houthis in Yemen can still fire missiles at Israel and disrupt shipping in the Red Sea, but they are vulnerable to Israel's airstrikes. As for Iran itself, the failure to inflict significant damage in its two massive strikes against Israel – in April and October 2024 – have been a source of humiliation for the Islamic Republic. So too was Israel's devastating counterstrike on October 26.

The war that erupted on October 7 was, from the outset, a war between Iran and Israel. Israel has not yet achieved full victory, but it will. Never has the prospect of a large-scale military strike on Iran's nuclear infrastructure been more feasible or more likely. The crumbling of the Iranian axis and the incoming Trump administration have turned "total victory" from a slogan to a palpable reality.

In this ongoing war, cooperation between Israel and Europe's three main powers – Britain, France, and Germany – has been both crucial and uneven. Those three European countries are also known as the "E3," an informal foreign and security forum established in 2003, shortly after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, which focused primarily on negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. Those negotiations led to the JCPOA in 2015, but that agreement is no longer relevant. The U.S. withdrew from the accord in 2018, Iran has since become a threshold nuclear power, and the military option against Iran's nuclear sites is no longer an empty threat.

The E3 may therefore have lost some of its *raison d'être*, but Israel's cooperation with Europe's three most powerful countries has not. Germany is Israel's second-largest military supplier after the United States, and it has purchased Israel's "Arrow 3" anti-missile system. Britain and France actively participated in the air defense against Iran's two missile attacks against Israel. The French and British navies play a role in countering the Houthis' disruption of trade in the Red Sea.

The fact that Israel and Europe face, together, the Russia-Iran axis of aggression should make the partnership between Israel and the E3 self-evident. It should, yet it doesn't. Germany has been admirably steadfast in its support for Israel's right to defend itself, and it has rejected calls to curb military exports to Israel. Britain and France have not. The

British government has restricted military exports to Israel, and President Macron has called for a military embargo. He has tried and failed twice to ban Israeli companies from participating in military exhibits in Paris.

As Israel emerges as a Middle East great power, backed by a supportive U.S. administration for the next four years, it is time for the E3 countries to rethink their Middle East policy, taking into account that even though the Russia-Iran axis suffered a serious setback, Russia is unlikely to be defeated in Ukraine.

Russia suffers from many weaknesses. It has a relatively small GDP of \$2 trillion (barely bigger than Spain's, but ten times smaller than China's), and a shrinking population of 144 million (about 40% of the U.S. population, and a tenth of China's). It relies on Iranian and on North Korean supplies to fight in Ukraine, and it had to abandon Assad. But its economy has proved resilient to sanctions. Its military industry is running at full capacity. It has a nearly endless reservoir of troops. And it has a huge nuclear arsenal, which Putin has threatened to activate.

When Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014, EU members were spending on average less than 1.4% of their GDP on defense. It took another decade and Russia's invasion of Ukraine for that figure to reach 2%. Russia, by contrast, spends 8% of its GDP on defense (or, I should say, on offence). If you adjust the cost of paying troops, Russia spends more on its armed forces than Britain, France, Germany, and Poland combined. Poland is already spending 4% of its GDP on defense, and it intends to increase that sum to 4.7% in 2025. But what about Germany and France?

Germany has a constitutional provision that limits annual structural deficits to 0.35% of GDP. France, by contrast, has a budget deficit of 6% of GDP and the French national debt will likely reach 115% of GDP in 2025. Both countries have seen their government collapse this year. Germany is going to early elections in February, but France cannot have another snap election until July. Meanwhile, no governing majority can be put together at the National Assembly. The British government is more stable, but it faces discontent. The Labor Party, which is less "de-Corbynized" than what Keir Starmer would have us believe, controls 63% of the House of Commons but barely secured 34% of the popular vote.

To complete the defeat of Iran and to prevent the collapse of Ukraine, the E3 should replace legalistic formalism with political realism. This doesn't mean Europe should abandon its principles. But it does mean that about the time has come to realize that complex problems cannot be managed, let alone solved, with simplistic slogans.

There will be no new nuclear deal with Iran. Ukraine will not regain its 1991 borders. Establishing a 22nd failed and autocratic Arab state next to Israel will not bring peace and stability to the Middle East. The Islamic Republic can be defeated, but the Russian empire can only be contained.

If the E3 countries wish to be constructive in the Middle East in the coming four years, they should cooperate with the U.S. and with Israel on the war against Iran's axis of aggression, and they should keep Qatar's malign influence in check. In Europe, the E3 should help contain Russia not only by cooperating with the U.S. on reaching a sustainable compromise with Putin, but also by significantly increasing European defense spendings. The two are related, because NATO can only contain Russia from a position of strength.

Cooperation between Israel and Germany is a case in point: German-made submarines in Israel help deter Iran, and Israeli-made anti-missiles systems help Germany deter Russia.

Finally, the E3 must be on the same page at the United Nations. This organization has long been hijacked by autocracies that abuse the letter and spirit of international law against the free world. Democracies do a disservice to their own values by playing into the hands of this sham. Precisely because the free world has become a minority at the UN, the least it can do is to stick together on votes at the Security Council, at the General Assembly, and at the Human Rights Council. This should start with E3 countries.

The past year has brought important achievements and victories. To achieve total victory, Israel needs not only the United States but also Europe's main powers. Those powers have an opportunity to reap the benefits of Israel's victory and to be part of "the day after" by cooperating with the incoming U.S. administration and by trading preaching for realism.

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