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**AFTERMATH OF 11TH OF SEPTEMBER:
AN ARAB PERSPECTIVE**

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I Introduction

In September 2000 there was a widespread feeling among ‘ordinary’ Arabs that Arab leaders, perceived to be defensive and on the run, had failed their fellow Palestinian Arabs. Nevertheless, Arab leaders decided to hold a summit meeting and issue a strongly worded declaration condemning Israeli action in the Palestinian territories. A financial commitment to support Palestinians was also declared. Since then, two other Arab summits have taken place, but both have failed equally to lift Arab morale or regenerate self-esteem.

For many Arabs, the balance sheet of the last fifty years of modern Arab history continues to perpetuate a deep sense of failure. They perceive themselves as surrounded by hostile regional and international environments and the tragic events of September 11th and subsequent US responses have only deepened that feeling. From a psychological point of view, Arabs have all the symptoms of paranoia.

It might be a mistake to speak of the ‘Arab world’ as singular and monolithic because the differences between Arab countries can be as great as the differences between North African Arab states and southern European countries. Amman is certainly not Sana and Jordan is not Saudi Arabia. Yet, beneath the façade of modernity and neon lit streets of various Arab capitals lies a far darker and more disturbing reality. Two issues of major importance, fairness and justice and how to translate the social, economic and political changes taking place into a meaningful political process, are either being ignored or only given lipservice by the various Arab political systems. It is only logical to conclude that the challenges will be overcome only if they are addressed in a consensual and peaceful manner.

II The Palestinian issue

It is generally accepted by the rulers, the ruled and the observers that the unresolved Palestinian issue is a source of instability in the Middle East. Many moderate Arab leaders have repeatedly argued that the unresolved Palestinian issue is a major source of radicalization in Arab societies and, one might add, in the Islamic world. For complex historical and normative reasons, it represents a test of legitimacy for many Arab political systems. Indeed, many have justified ‘suspension’ of some democratic practices because of the unresolved Palestinian issue. In some pan-Arabist regimes, the government’s stand on the Palestinian issue has almost become a substitute for democracy and ‘Arab masses’ seem to have accepted that criterion to define the legitimacy or, for that matter, illegitimacy of the regime. That could partly explain

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why protests in Arab capitals are not for more democracy but are aimed at supporting the Palestinians and condemning Israel.

Aware of the challenges the unresolved Palestinian issue is creating, various Arab regimes are gradually shifting their bases of legitimacy to economic development and an essentially domestic agenda. But even if economic performance were to become a source of legitimacy, it would not be trouble free since political regimes would be expected to deliver. It is also doubtful whether economic performance can legitimate a political system without genuine political reform. This could explain the real dilemma Arab political systems are facing and will continue to face .

Solving the Palestinian issue will not end the debate or even the conflict over parameters of political reform in Southern-Mediterranean states but it will focus governments and people on the necessity of addressing that issue. No doubt, solving the Palestinian issue will have a calming effect on the region in the long run. By the same token, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, by addressing the Palestinian issue and becoming more actively engaged in promoting a solution to it, can help the Arab world direct its attention to the issue of political reform.

III The Iraqi Issue

In many ways, the 'Iraqi issue' has only served to strengthen a feeling of victimization among many Arabs. Even some Kuwaitis, whose country was brutally occupied by Iraq in 1990, are not immune to such sentiment. In fact, many Kuwaitis attempted to assassinate and target American soldiers deployed in Kuwait, supposedly to protect the country from possible Iraqi attack. How has the Iraqi issue, despite its complexity and in many ways contradictory dimensions, managed to capture the Arab imagination? In what measure is this highly emotional response similar to that of the Palestinian issue?

For many Arabs, Iraq had paid more than its dues for having occupied Kuwait and the Western attitude towards Iraq is seen as a hollow pronouncement of typically hypocritical behavior. As far as weapons of mass destruction are concerned, many Arab would shrug off such matters by pointing out that there is no proof that Iraq continues to possess WMD and by raising two questions: why is it permissible for other states including regional ones to possess nuclear weapons? And what about Saddam Hussein's brutal use of chemical weapons against his own population? Arab cynicism, in response, goes even deeper and many Arabs point out that Western countries allied themselves with Saddam Hussein when it suited their interests and that Iraq is now being targeted because it symbolizes 'Arab defiance' and self-respect.

Furthermore, many Arabs believe that the main US goal is not the democratization of Iraq but rather control of its oil resources and this has outraged them even more.

What kind of implications might an attack against Iraq have on the Arab mood and what will Arab reactions be to US and European attempts to combat terrorism? The answer is that in the long run combating terrorism will require a move towards democratization and political reforms in many Arab states. The question is, will attacking Iraq lead to a promotion of such a goal? Will that impact be immediate?

What if an immediate democratization process were to produce ‘unintended consequences’ which were not acceptable to the US such as the ‘Islamization of societies and states’? Will that be an acceptable democratic choice or not?

I personally appeal to caution; it is better to prepare the ground for a long-term change than push for an immediate one.

IV Weapons of Mass Destruction

The debate on Weapons of Mass Destruction seems selective, essentially arbitrary and contradictory from an Arab point of view. There is no power of argument there is only power.

Very few would disagree that Weapons of Mass Destruction are a possible source of threat to regional and international security. Precisely because of the unique and indiscriminate nature of their threat, the only way to address the issue of WMD is through multilateral forums. No state should be given the monopoly to decide and identify sources of threat to international security and the right to act accordingly. WMD should be placed and discussed in a clear regional and international context.

Is the development of mini-nukes and third and fourth generation nuclear weapons justified? Can it really be defended? Why do certain major powers give lipservice to international conventions and treaties related to WMD? Why have some actors abrogated international treaties, such as the ABM, and how dangerous is that precedent for international stability and security? Is it not time, for example, to review the validity and logic of the NPT which became permanent seven years ago, not because India and Pakistan have joined the ‘nuclear club’, but to re-examine the logic and value of global nuclear disarmament?

Unless the logic and rationale of dealing with WMD were to become part of a genuine regional and international debate and unless the EU were to play a leading role, whether through the transatlantic debate or in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, with a clear reference to regional and international stability, any action by any state aimed at getting rid of the WMD of another state, no matter how justified, will remain arbitrary and dangerous.

V Hegemony or World Society?

A security-oriented approach for combating terrorism is important but certainly not sufficient and in the long run sole reliance on such a method is likely to prove counter-productive and not effective.

It is important to promote the notion of a fair global order as an essential part of combating terrorism. An order which is not arbitrary and coercive. It is important for people of underprivileged regions of the globe, including the Middle East, to feel that parameters of ‘global order’ are designed to offer them hope for a better future and not merely to control them (i.e. threat of immigration).

Europe's intellectual contribution to such a debate is essential but, unfortunately, the EU's economic experience is progressively seen by many southern states as part and parcel of and not distinguishable from the global experience of market efficiency. Europe responded to the challenge of 'globalism' by adopting a 'mean and lean' approach and the imperative of a balanced budget. The EU's model seems to be similar to that of the IMF and the World Bank. The European 'social model', based on social welfare and a sense of community, has all but vanished. What we see now is self-help and market efficiency. This is indeed a pity. For states in which labour shortage is an alien concept, market efficiency can hardly be an appealing concept. It is also important to be convinced that the debate on a fair world social order is not over and that it should be addressed by the EMP forum, especially considering that Europe is particularly qualified to do it. It would also be unfortunate if the transatlantic forum were to consider discussion of the issue of fairness in the global setting useful merely as an intellectual exercise. Ultimately defeating terrorism will depend on international legitimacy based on a fair global order.

VI Conclusion

September 11th was not the beginning of history and it will certainly not be its end. Issues of instability in the Arab world are not difficult to identify. The problem has always been how these issues can be addressed and by whom? Conflicts of the priorities and interests of the various players have always given the impression of a vicious circle from which it is impossible to escape.

So far, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has fallen short of addressing these challenges. Indeed, with the growing concern for terrorism, seen progressively through a security prism by both Europeans and their southern partners, it is more likely for the forum to lose its original objective, at least from the European point of view, of being a vehicle for change and reform in the south.