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**EUROPE'S ROLE IN THE GULF: A TRANSATLANTIC
PERSPECTIVE**

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EUROPE'S ROLE IN THE GULF: A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

What political and security role could Europe play in the Gulf? This is certainly not a new question. And the response that the role, if any, is bound to be limited is not new either. However, the Greater Middle East policy pursued by the current US administration, the crisis it has triggered in Iraq, and the repercussions of that crisis on Iraq's neighbours – obviously including the countries on the Gulf's shores – have once again put forward the question and call for new attempts to be made to answer it. In this context, what is new is that voices are being heard in Europe demanding that Europe's role in the Gulf be enhanced and enlarged. These voices come from both the capitals and the European Union (EU). The latter has endorsed a "EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East"¹. This document – to which we will go back later in this paper – illustrates the EU members' apparent willingness to expand EU Southern policies away from their traditional focus on the Mediterranean so as to include the Gulf. In sum, the question is worth picking up again.

As is well known, the Gulf is a region whose security is influenced by long-standing conflicts and complex factors. Domestic and structural factors affecting internal stability are especially important for the Arab Gulf countries, less so for Iran. A good number of sectarian and ethnic fault-lines acting on domestic stability link up with regional stability with serious effects. The balance of power between the major players of the region is unstable and includes structural asymmetries and geopolitical paradoxes. Pollack, for instance, notes that "any Iraq that is strong enough to balance and contain Iran will inevitably be capable of overrunning Kuwait and Saudi Arabia".² One could add that any understanding between Saudi Arabia and Iran would alert Iraq and the smaller Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and so forth.

In this difficult arena, the United States is the only external power today that concretely influences the security, the policies and the objectives of the regional players. No one doubts – not even the Europeans – that when it comes to security, Europe is not a player or perhaps only a minor player in the region. A few major European powers, such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany may play a limited role. However, as pointed out by Gause,³ while Europe is definitely an important economic partner for the countries of the region, it cannot constitute a significant strategic or security partner as well.

¹ The "EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East" is published in the series *EuroMed Report*, Issue No. 78, 23 June 2004.

² Kenneth M. Pollack, "Securing the Gulf", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 4, July-August 2003, pp. 2-16.

³ F. Gregory Gause III, "The Gulf and U.S.-EU Relations", in Christian Koch (ed.), *Unfulfilled Potential: Exploring the GCC-EU Relationship*, Gulf Research Center, January 2004, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, pp. 73-82.

This is not to say that Europe's role cannot be enhanced, in fulfilment of the apparently emerging aspirations. If so, however, this role must take the United States into account. Thus, a possible European role in the Gulf needs to be considered in a transatlantic perspective. There is room for an autonomous role. However, respective interests, perceptions and, most of all, approaches would have to be harmonised. This harmony, as testified by current events, cannot be taken for granted. Different situations or scenarios can be worked out according to different patterns of transatlantic solidarity and different European roles in the Gulf. In this paper, three such scenarios are set out:

- A scenario of weak strategic convergence, as prevails today in transatlantic relations;
- A scenario with some transatlantic cooperation, as in the case of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI);
- A scenario in which transatlantic relations in the Gulf are characterized by some degree of enhanced EU presence in the Gulf region.

2. Europe and the United States in the Gulf after the Cold War

The three scenarios mentioned above need to be preceded by a summary of these developments. Let's go back briefly to them.

In 1990-91, the administration of George Bush Senior set up a very "benign" coalition, within the framework of a full UN mandate, to roll Iraq back from Kuwait. Subsequently, the US "dual containment" strategy with its sanctions, particularly on Iraq, raised doubts and opposition in Europe and, while many Americans advocated a continued US-European coalition there, if not the expansion of the Atlantic Alliance to the Gulf, what survived the heyday of 1990-91 was a US-British coalition. In 2001, after the September 11 attacks, the administration of George Bush Junior unleashed a war on terrorism from a rather unilateralist platform. The administration rejected the activation of NATO Art. 5 that allies offered immediately after the attack. The U.S. went to war in Afghanistan alone and only subsequently accepted limited NATO participation in operations.

When the same administration decided to invade Iraq with a view to toppling Saddam's "Republic of Fears"⁴ on the basis of an extremist and unconvincing "pre-emptive" agenda, it was unable to garner international consensus. It nevertheless went ahead aggressively, declaring "either with us or against us". This platform excluded by definition the working of a partnership or alliance, including the Atlantic Alliance. It created unprecedented divisions among the European allies – and within the Union – namely between those willing to support the United States for their own domestic purposes and those plainly in disagreement with the initiative. Consequently, the United States acted by means of another coalition of states. Subsequently, the negative evolution in post-war Iraq and the overall region made the US administration attenuate its unilateralism. The Atlantic Alliance, while not changing its mind, made a modest come back by setting up the ICI. In any case, whether in Afghanistan or in the Gulf

⁴ This the title of the famous book by Kanan Makiya, University of California Press, 1998 (originally published in 1989 under the pseudonym of Samir al-Khalil).

(with the ICI), NATO is employed on the margins of US initiatives, less as an alliance proper than for coalition support.

In general, trends in U.S.-European relations in the Gulf have reflected very aptly the difficulties the transatlantic relationship is facing after the end of the Cold War. While the interests of the United States have shifted heavily towards the Gulf since the end of the confrontation with the Soviet Union, the Euro-American military alliance has failed to expand to that area. If and when Americans and Europeans have cooperated militarily in the Gulf, this has been by means of *ad hoc* coalitions, excluding the Alliance. And since *ad hoc* coalitions have prevailed, the Europeans have from a political point of view acted more as junior than as full partners – to be generous towards them.

A way out of this predicament could be an expansion of NATO commitments to the Gulf. In the 1990s, RAND produced a number of reports – some of them solicited by Southern European governments – arguing that, if the Europeans wished to revitalise NATO and their transatlantic relationship, they had to ensure a more global orientation for the Alliance by joining US efforts in the Gulf.⁵ This would prevent Europe from becoming irrelevant to the United States and NATO from being confined to European regional security. It would give the transatlantic bond a more global flavour and allow it to play a pivotal role once again. More or less the same argument, although encased in an updated perspective (essentially, the joint transatlantic urgency to promote democracy), has been put forward again after the crisis in transatlantic relations triggered by the intervention on Iraq.⁶

Why have these calls coming from America-friendly voices – as interested in transatlantic values as in moderating American unilateralism – gone unheeded? Two explanations seem to be more relevant than others. First, the European countries, while united in their national security approaches and policies towards European security, have different views and objectives when it comes to other areas and global issues. So, while they have rather homogeneous policies and visions as long as the alliances they belong to – EU, NATO, OSCE – deal with European regional challenges, they differ as soon as these alliances tackle global issues or areas lying outside of Europe. The result is that, while individual countries (such as the UK, Italy, Estonia, Poland, etc.) may be responsive nationally to the calls mentioned above, as members of NATO, they may not necessarily be so.

Second, as divided as European countries may be, there are strong strategic views on the Middle East that unite them, independently of alliances and national security policies. Apart from their contingent national interest, even the European countries participating into the Iraq coalition today converge on these views. This European strategic

⁵ R.D. Asmus, R.L. Kugler, F.S. Larrabee "Building a New NATO", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, n. 4, Sept.-Oct. 1993, pp. 28-40; Ronald D. Asmus, Robert D. Blackwill, F. Stephen Larrabee, "Can Nato Survive?", *The Washington Quarterly*, 19, 2, Spring 1996, pp. 79-101; D. C. Gompert, F. Stephen Larrabee (eds.), *America and Europe. A Partnership for A New Era*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 191-217; F. Stephen Larrabee, Jerrold Green, Ian O. Lesser, Michele Zanini, *Nato's Mediterranean Initiative: Policy Issues and Dilemmas*, Rand, Santa Monica (Ca), 1998; I.O. Lesser, J.D. Green, F.S. Larrabee, M. Zanini, *The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Initiative. Evolution and Next Steps*, Rand, Santa Monica (CA), 2000.

⁶ See R.A. Asmus, L. Diamond, M. Leonard, and M. McFaul, "A Transatlantic Strategy to Promote Democratic Development in the Broader Middle East", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Spring 2005, pp. 7-21.

convergence has engendered a long-standing divergence with the United States on the Middle East. In next section, we will consider two such strategic differences, one concerning an issue as old as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and another on the new strategy towards the Middle East pursued by the present US administration. These two differences make for the first scenario of “weak strategic convergence”.

3. US and Europe in the Gulf: (a) weak strategic convergence

The Middle East and the Mediterranean have never been favourable for strong transatlantic convergence. There was a strict strategic convergence during the Cold War but, starting with the rise of Islamism and the first wave of terrorism in the 1980s, convergence has eroded. Today, there is broad convergence on the significance of a set of strategic trends and challenges, such as WMD proliferation, terrorism and failed states, much less so, however, on their nature (whether they are risks or threats), their reach and significance, their inter-linkage and respective priority and, of course, on how to deal with them. This means differences, even divergence. It must be pointed out, however, that these differences are firmly contained by the “community” of shared values and a multitude of transactions between the civil societies on the two shores of the North Atlantic – perhaps the most important such community in the world. Moreover, the Atlantic community is strongly institutionalized. Its “community” nature makes the Atlantic Alliance work even at a time when its rationale is less rooted in strategic realities than it used to be during the East-West confrontation. So, at the end of the day, divergence is there, but it is kept at bay.

Against this backdrop, two main differences can be discerned with respect to the Middle East and the Mediterranean – to use the “European” concept – or the Greater Middle East – to use the current American geopolitical vision:

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis - In a strategic perspective, the Europeans have always believed and continue to believe that solving this crisis, abiding by international law, remains the central tenet of the region’s normalization and pacification. Despite the compromise reached in the wording of the documents at the mid-2004 meetings at Sea Island (the G8) and Dromoland Castle (the annual U.S.-EU gathering), the Europeans do not believe that political normalization in the region – be it democratic or not – can take place independently of a solution to the outstanding regional crises.⁷ While the US strategy is to focus on democratisation, the European strategy continues to emphasize the need to focus preliminarily on existing regional crises, in particular the Palestinian one. In a sense, while the U.S. thinks that democracy would open the way to normalization, the Europeans are not sure that this will suffice –nor do they believe that solving the crisis is a preliminary condition for democratisation to start (all these being but “heroic” sequences, of course). In fact, it should be noted that, in the “European Security Strategy” endorsed by the EU at the end of 2003,⁸ security challenges stemming from the Mediterranean and the Middle East are less related to terrorism than

⁷ The compromise is reflected in the following G8 final declaration’s statement: “The resolution of ... the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is an important element of progress in the region. At the same time, regional conflicts must not be an obstacle for reforms. Indeed, reforms may make a significant contribution towards resolving them”; indeed, this formula eliminates the need to establish a definite priority.

⁸ *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

to regional conflicts, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In addition to this fundamental difference, the Europeans are concerned about the political viability of the Palestinian state which could emerge. If the entire Palestinian state were shaped as unilaterally as Gaza and its ultimate form determined by the “fence” and the closing ring of settlements around Jerusalem, this would generate further and lasting conflict in Palestine, while continuing to send shock waves throughout the region.

Fight against terrorism and democratisation – As said, the subject of terrorism has always brought to the fore differences between the United States and Europe, first in the Palestinian-Israeli context, then in the first wave of terrorism unleashed in the 1980s by the then emerging radical Islamism and the post-Egyptian-Israeli-peace Arab-Muslim rejectionism. The difference concerned and today concerns the need to pay more attention to terrorism’s political background and social consensus. The upgrading of terrorism to the level of an existential threat to Western security by the U.S. administration after the September 11 attacks has magnified transatlantic differences not only on terrorism but in a broader strategic perspective.

First, the Europeans do not agree on bringing together all kinds of terrorism under the same label: Hamas, the Chechens, ETA, the Jihad and al-Qaeda. Terrorism is a scourge in any case. However, to understand its rationale and be able to fight it, one has to make distinctions rather than generalizations. Second, it is very clear that Europe does not see terrorism as an existential threat. Even the most important attacks in Europe (the stations in Madrid and London) have not been perceived as existential threats. Nobody in Europe doubts that terrorism is a terrible bane and a fearful threat, but few see it in a strategic perspective.

This difference in assessment of the strategic importance of terrorism reflects on democracy promotion policies. In U.S. policy towards the Greater Middle East, democratisation as a response to terrorism is based on a pessimistic cultural assessment of the societies concerned (a swamp to be drained). In the European view, democracy promotion plays a pivotal role in the Mediterranean and the Middle East (in particular since the inception of the Barcelona process), but it is regarded as a long-term transformation requiring a number of cooperative responses on both sides (a process in achieving so-called “structural stability”⁹). Moreover, democratisation in the European perspective may require peace operations and coercion in an international legal framework, but would never contemplate the use of military force, as in Iraq.

The strategic vision of the current US administration¹⁰ – terrorism as an existential threat, preventive intervention, poor international legality, forced changes in other countries – has for the first time created a transatlantic fault line. This is reflected in the split over Iraq: while a few European governments joined the U.S. coalition for specific

⁹ For the concept of “structural stability” see SWP-CPN, *Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building: A Practical Guide*, Berlin, December 2001; also *Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention*, COM (2001)211 fin., Brussels 11 April 2001.

¹⁰ On the US strategic doctrine and its political implications see *US Strategies for National Security. Winning the Peace in the 21st Century*, A Task Force Report of the Strategies for Us national Security Program, authored by Larry Korb as Chairman of the Task Force, and edited by Michael Kraig, The Stanley Foundation, October 2003.

national reasons (national security for the Baltic countries and to a lesser extent for Eastern European countries, ideological and domestic politics reasons for Mr. Aznar and Mr. Berlusconi, a traditional tenet of post-imperial British foreign policy for Mr. Blair), European public opinion thoroughly rejected the intervention in Iraq and, with it, the rationale of the emerging US strategy.

In sum, while the United States and Europe are apparently conducting the same policy of fighting terrorism and “civilising” Arab-Muslim peoples, they are actually pursuing different policies, based on different premises, visions and contents. Strategic approaches are basically different. This is why American calls for the Europeans to join their Middle Eastern policies in the Gulf under a transatlantic umbrella receive only limited responses, if any at all.

This is not to say that these differences in strategic approach are causing conflict or breaking off transatlantic relations. As said, the “community” remains an important safety net (and the U.S. Europe's most important strategic asset). The overall result, though, is a kind of sluggish and, above all, uneven cooperation, based on voluntary performance and variable geometries. Transatlantic cooperation in the Gulf and the Middle East is ultimately limited by strategic divergence – as well as a languishing American leadership. This is the current “weak strategic convergence” scenario.

4. NATO in the Gulf

Cooperation is not lacking, however. While the U.S. and the EU-3 (France, Germany, United Kingdom) have ultimately succeeded in harmonizing their approaches to oppose non-civilian development of Iran's nuclear industry, a good deal of transatlantic cooperation in the Gulf area is taking place within NATO. The latter, while not supporting the U.S. presence in Iraq militarily, is implementing an open-ended political initiative towards the Gulf region with the ICI. Furthermore, the Alliance is incrementally contributing to Afghanistan's stabilization, just north of the Gulf region. Finally, NATO provides a loose framework for those members willing to train Iraqi forces. In both Afghanistan and the Gulf, NATO is the framework in which the transatlantic cooperation that exists is unfolding. At the end of the day, it is in this framework that the Europeans are playing a security role in the Gulf.

To evaluate the scenario of transatlantic cooperation in the Gulf within the NATO framework, we can, first, comment on ICI's performance in pursuing its own finalities. In this respect, we have to bear in mind that, at least for the time being, what the Alliance is doing in the Gulf through ICI is providing security cooperation. ICI is not there to prepare any GCC membership in the Alliance or to provide a security guarantee. Second, we can speculate on ICI's possible contribution to preparing the conditions for the emergence of a region-wide security organisation. Looking into these two points should make it possible to draw some conclusions on Europe's role in the area when acting in the framework of the Alliance.

To assess ICI's performance, we have to refer briefly to its predecessor, the Mediterranean Dialogue carried out by NATO with a number of Arab countries and Israel since 1995. While the Dialogue did not really succeed in dispelling negative perceptions and improving NATO's image in the Mediterranean Arab countries, nor in establishing a substantive political dialogue, it did manage to set up a much appreciated

bilateral military cooperation with the governments in question. Attempts have been made by NATO to enlarge this military cooperation to security governance after the model of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), but to no avail.

The NATO Secretariat has devoted considerable efforts to developing ICI in its first year of life, with the direct commitment of the Secretary-General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and his Deputy, Alessandro Minuto Rizzo. They succeeded in increasing the opportunities for exchanges and contacts. The limits to the ICI, however, are similar to those already observed for the Mediterranean Dialogue. These limits stem from the Arab ruling classes' ambivalence vis-à-vis the West. While political dialogue with the Western countries is an asset for their economic, military and international strengthening, it is a liability from the point of view of their domestic constituencies. So, while Arab governments participate in the cooperative frameworks set up by the West – such as the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue or the EU Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – with a view to drawing from them all the advantages they can, they avoid fully engaging in political cooperation as this would clash with their public opinions and weaken their legitimacy.

Some countries, like Qatar and Kuwait, closer to the United States than others, see NATO as a reinforced American presence and welcome it without problems. Other countries see with favour the European allies stepping in as they may offer more flexibility in domestic and regional political relations vis-à-vis the United States. Most of the elites are perplexed, however, about the contradictions stemming from the NATO's poor image in the Gulf region at the level of public opinion. In a recent interview, these issues have been epitomised by Mustapha Alani, Senior Advisor in the Gulf Research Center.¹¹ He points out that NATO is widely unknown in the Arab countries and, when it is known, “the average Arab citizen ordinarily has a negative image of it”. As for governments, “as yet, they are not certain of emerging NATO strategies nor do they see them clearly”. More importantly, by making reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he stresses that security convergence between Arabs and NATO remains weak, if not negative.

These perceptions curb Arab governments' freedom in dealing with NATO no less than the performance of NATO cooperation. What one finds is a multiplication of exchanges and meetings that do not bring about any substantive joint political initiatives. The activity lavished by NATO (the same could be said with regard to the EMP, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) does not manage to go beyond a certain diplomatic ceiling. It never achieves the political breakthrough the West expects from its initiatives.

The liberals and the opposition have other kinds of problems with NATO. For some, it is not clear how NATO will be able to walk the tight rope between stability and reforms, interference and partnership. They see a potential contradiction between, on one hand, NATO's ability – already tested in the Mediterranean – to reinforce the partners' armed forces militarily and, consequently, the incumbent regimes politically and, on the other, the possibility of introducing security governance and political reforms. While all Arab regimes shy away from accepting and introducing security governance,¹² political reforms are not within NATO's scope or competence. If security

¹¹ “L'Alliance atlantique et le Monde Arabe », *La Lettre du CERMAM*, /, Octobre 2005, pp. 2-3.

¹² Heiner Hänggi, Fred Tanner, *Promoting Security Governance in the EU's Neighbourhood*, EU-ISS, Chaillot Paper No 80, July 2005, pp. 66 and ff.

cooperation – so the argument runs – is not preceded or effectively linked up with political reform, including security governance, the net result may well be a reinforcement of incumbent regimes and a more difficult path to democratic transition.¹³ This perspective is particularly strong in the Gulf environment, where civil societies' transition to reform is in a way more advanced than in the Mediterranean.¹⁴

When it comes to building a regional security cooperation perspective, the role of ICI cannot be easily defined. Regional security cooperation may be pursued either in a balance of power or in a cooperative security perspective. If the perspective is to set out a working balance of power among the countries of the region, ICI may play a positive role whether it remains limited to the GCC countries or is enlarged to Iraq. With the GCC countries and Iraq in the same security framework, the historical Iraqi threat to the GCC would be attenuated, if not ruled out, and the intractable Gulf's security triangle would be simplified. On the other hand, the establishment of a firmer balance of power with respect to Iran would reinforce mutual mistrust and threat perceptions and create Arab pressures for ICI to be turned into a kind of Gulf Treaty Organization. So, if ICI is regarded in a balance of power perspective, its role could entail negative as well as positive aspects.

In a cooperative security perspective, ICI could surely provide the GCC countries (and Iraq) with an extensive and well-tested experience with military cooperation and confidence-building. This experience could assist the Gulf countries in setting up the pattern of regional security cooperation Pollack calls a "security condominium", namely a Gulf CSCE. However, unlike the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), the situation in the Gulf hardly allows for the participation in the initiative of non-regional powers. To lay down the foundations of such a Gulf regional security organization, the pact must be among regional countries only. This is not to exclude the ICI. At least in principle, the GCC countries could well sign a regional pact while keeping their alliances. But ICI cannot be the platform on which to build a regional security organization. One may add that, in the event, ICI should keep a low profile. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine the Gulf countries sitting together to talk about regional security in a framework in which ICI would be enlarged to Iraq and/or reinforced so as to look more like a Gulf NATO. NATO's presence in the Gulf, while definitely an important factor in the regional balance of power, requires more prudence in a cooperative perspective. Otherwise, it might work as a divisive factor. This is certainly an element being weighed by governments and elites in the GCC today and, should the ICI be enlarged to Iraq, in this country as well.

All in all, NATO and the ICI do not appear particularly suited to the task of providing security to the GCC countries and the Gulf in general. To be effective in a balance of power perspective, ICI should evolve towards providing some kind of security guarantee. While such a development would hardly be approved by NATO members today, it is not that sure that it would be welcomed by the GCC countries (or probably

¹³ Selwa Calderbank, "Nato and the Middle East", *Middle East International*, No. 742, 21 January 2005, pp. 30-32.

¹⁴ On the emerging democratic environment in the Gulf, see Jill Crystal, Political reform and the Prospects for Democratic Transition in the Gulf, FRIDE, Working paper No. 11, Madrid, July 2005; Giacomo Luciani, Felix Neugart (eds.), *The EU and the GCC. A New Partnership* (updated version), Bertelsmann Stiftung, CAP, RSCAS, Gütersloh, February 2005 (see the section on "The New Arab Bourgeoisie" pp. 17 and ff).

Iraq) either. For the time being, not knowing what Iraq will be like in the future, we do know that the GCC countries' preferred option is a form of regional security understanding, if not organization. In this sense, they would not allow the ICI to become a kind of Gulf NATO, as such an evolution would create tensions with Iran. They do not want to become the battlefield in a clash between the West and Iran. They want the West to reassure them, while trying to establish some kind of regional security understanding or organization.

In this context, there can be no doubt that Europe's security role is weak and not that supportive with respect to ICI, but this is not the point. The point is that ICI and NATO do not seem suited to Gulf security. They could even play a negative role. In the framework of security cooperation, as weak as that presently provided by the ICI, neither the United States nor Europe can play a significant role. In a sense, concentrating on cooperation with ICI could even be detrimental to European aspirations to play a security role in the region. A strengthened autonomous European role would seem more appropriate to European aims as well as more helpful in transatlantic terms.

5. The European Union in the Gulf

In this section, we consider, first, how Europe and, in particular, the EU are seeking to play a more significant political and security role in the Gulf and, second, how these endeavours are set in a wider transatlantic perspective.

The EU and its members have recently singled out three main policy leads: (a) the "EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East" initiative; (b) renewed concern for strengthening their relations with the GCC countries and the GCC itself; (c) concern relating to regional WMD developments in the region, in particular with respect to Iran.

Strategic Partnership - The EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East is in a sense the EU's "response" to the US Greater Middle East Initiative. It lists the EU's actual and potential relations with Middle Eastern and Mediterranean areas – such as the Southern Mediterranean countries comprised in the EMP and the Gulf Arab countries included in the GCC, as well as individual countries such as Yemen, Iraq and Iran – with a view to developing uniform EU approaches and policies towards them, applying the same principles in carrying out policies, and setting out an overall agenda contemplating measures that fit the different countries and the state of EU relations with them.

The EU recognizes that its relations with the countries "east of Jordan" are considerably less developed than those with the Mediterranean countries. The Strategic Partnership stresses precisely the need to develop relations "east of Jordan", still it provides differentiated responses and measures on a country-by-country or area-by-area basis rather than a homogeneous agenda. Ironically, at the end of the day, what it fails to work out is precisely a strategy: EU policies will be guided by similar concepts and objectives but they will not be directed at shaping new patterns of regional relations with the countries concerned, nor will they provide the wider Mediterranean-Middle Eastern region with a shared framework similar to that of the EMP, the EU-GCC, the ICI or the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA). In this sense, while the

EU's emerging willingness to reinforce its relations with the countries "east of Jordan" (namely the Gulf countries and Yemen) is clearly stated, as are the principles the EU intends to apply in developing relations with these countries, an overall design is lacking and, as said, this leaves the EU without a strategy towards the area.

This relative underdevelopment in EU relations with the Gulf countries is being accentuated by the fact that the EU has meanwhile dynamically started to develop its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) with the Mediterranean countries belonging to the EMP. While there is no doubt that the ENP and the strategic significance the "neighbourhood" concept has assumed in the EU's broad strategy do not allow for any comprehensive cooperative scheme including both the Southern Mediterranean and the Gulf countries, a systemic link between the two areas needs to be worked out. Neugart and Schumacher have proposed a "concentric circles" policies.¹⁵ This seems a good suggestion. They support the need for a more stringent and systematic bond between the two areas in the framework of a genuine EU broad strategy towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East. They express a special concern that EU relations "east of Jordan" need to be developed in the framework of a comprehensive Mediterranean and Middle East rationale.

Yet, while such a comprehensive rationale could be referred immediately to the GCC countries (and probably Yemen), for the time being the same cannot be easily done as far as Iraq and Iran are concerned. An inclusive strategy should, however, be clearly stated by the EU today, testifying to the EU's willingness and intention to engage in the Middle East in addition to the Mediterranean. The present "EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East" states that the Strategic Partnership's "policy agenda will be developed mainly through existing instruments and mechanisms". While present differences between countries, in particular between the Mediterranean and the Gulf, in are a reality that nobody can overlook, the anticipation of a new instrument with its new mechanisms, namely a comprehensive project combining the Mediterranean and the Middle East, would help shape a broad and homogeneous regional policy framework for the future.

In sum, the EU Strategic Partnership, while forcefully stating the EU's broad willingness to reinforce its relations with the Gulf, does not really provide a strategic vision of EU relations in the region. This does not prevent the document from including a number of interesting and helpful policy orientations and, in any case, from including a platform for a jump forward in EU relations with the countries in which that is possible, primarily the GCC countries.

EU-GCC relations – EU-GCC relations have progressed slowly over time, certainly more slowly than their size and reciprocal interests would require. Further progress was made recently after the 15th GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting which took place in Manama on April 5, 2005. In fact, Saudi Arabia managed finally to sign the bilateral agreement with the United States which was needed for the country to become member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Its membership in the WTO, in turn, paves the way for finalising the very long negotiations on implementing an EU-GCC free trade area. This agreement will not in itself solve a number of important issues,

¹⁵ Felix Neugart, Tobias Schumacher, "Thinking about the EU's Future Neighbourhood Policy in the Middle East: From the Barcelona Process to a Euro-Middle East Partnership", in C.-P. Hanelt, G. Luciani, F. Neugart (eds.), *Regime Change in Iraq*, Florence, RSCAS Press, 2004, pp. 169-92.

such as petrochemicals,¹⁶ but it will provide a strong signal that EU-GCC relations are being strengthened.

This reinforcement would also allow for progress in the various issues that form the object of the EU-GCC political dialogue. There happens to be significant convergence in the political dialogue. One aspect of that convergence regards the future of Palestine. There is a strong correspondence in the feelings and objectives of the EU and the GCC states on this point. The Joint Communiqué issued by the 15th Joint Council devotes a long section to commenting on “Developments in the Middle East”: nine of the eleven paragraphs are devoted to Palestine, all expressing a strong convergence on short-term as well as long-term questions. The political dialogue includes topics such as human rights, security organization in the region, terrorism and non-proliferation. More in general, it is opening the way for addressing the question of political reform in intergovernmental relations, provided it is done judiciously, following the extensive and positive experience accumulated by the EU in the EMP framework. The EU Strategic Partnership could also be of help here. With respect to the EMP, where methods are excellent but results are somehow lagging behind, smaller GCC states are showing autonomous reform dynamics that should allow for more and more rapid successes.

The conditions for making EU-GCC relations a success-story are there. The EU needs to go ahead with firmer and more convinced intentions to enlarge its pattern of relations from the Mediterranean to the Gulf. The latter may turn out to be rather responsive. A more important EU role in the GCC would give Europe a higher profile and more credibility in the entire Gulf area and would allow for it to address the need to develop more diversified and solid relations with Iraq and Iran. This higher European profile would match GCC expectations. It would strengthen the GCC countries politically in the regional framework and give them more stability domestically. A reinforced GCC in the region would solidify the present balance-of-power mechanism which ensures a rather fragile regional stability. A more solid balance-of-power setting would, in turn, allow for a shift to a more modern and stable regional security organisation based on cooperation. Domestic stability in the GCC would also allow for reforms to be undertaken in the GCC countries, as differentiated and gradual as that could be. These reforms would also contribute to enhancing security in the region. All these changes would be mutually reinforcing.

WMD and non-proliferation - Non-proliferation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East is a concern that the EU has recently begun to address more systematically than in the past. Of late, the EU has mainstreamed its non-proliferation policies by introducing standard clauses on this issue in its agreements with third countries, in this case countries in the Mediterranean – where the clause is being discussed within the framework of the Association Agreements – and in the Middle East. The EU Strategic Partnership contemplates this policy and differentiates between its application in the Mediterranean (where it is already ongoing, as mentioned) and an illustration of the instruments available for negotiating on non-proliferation “east of Jordan”. As pointed out, in fact, non-proliferation is a topic on the EU-GCC political dialogue’s regular agenda.

¹⁶ On this specific point, as well as on the full range of EU-GCC relations, see Giacomo Luciani, Felix Neugart (eds.), *cit.*; also the essays written by Jamil Merdad and Abdullah Baabood in Christian Koch (ed.), *cit.*, respectively on pp. 35-41 and 43-54.

The EU has practically delegated three member countries, France, Germany and the UK, to negotiate with Iran to try to prevent the nuclear industry which the country is developing from being turned into a military industry fit for producing nuclear weapons. The EU has linked itself to these negotiations by associating its Secretary General/High Representative (who represents the EU intergovernmental dimension) to the so-called EU-3. Negotiations were interrupted by the new Iranian conservative government presided over by Mr. Ahmadinejad sworn in in mid-2005. Efforts are being made in harmony with US diplomacy to resume talks.

Non-proliferation in the Gulf is an extremely sensitive issue, whose relevance and impact goes beyond the region to affect the whole of the Middle East and North Africa. The EU is trying to address this challenge in a cooperative way. Its activity in this field, although probably not sufficient to ensure success, contributes to enhancing its security profile in the region and giving the EU a chance to participate in the endeavour of making some kind of regional security organisation possible.

These three clusters of EU activity in the Gulf offer a mixed picture. On one hand, it is clear that the EU hesitates to play a role in the region. No doubt, EU relations with the GCC – the most developed ones in the region – are, all in all, lagging behind. The perspective set out by the “EU Strategic Partnership” puts forward a number of broad policy orientations but – as argued above – ironically fails to provide an overall strategy aimed at increasing the EU’s intercourse with the region. The EU seems more preoccupied with a number of important, though still limited, economic interests than with the need to develop its presence and its political and security capabilities in the Gulf region, in addition to the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, the EU-3 initiative towards Iran shows that Europe can play a security role based on its own principles and objectives. True, the EU-3 initiative did not succeed. However this was due less to weaknesses in the European diplomatic platform than to the changes that cropped up in Iran’s international and domestic conditions. If European diplomacy proved unable to come to terms with the radicals now in power at Teheran, the United States cannot hope to coerce Iran either, for a number of evident reasons: Iraq is overstressing American forces; Iraq’s weakness and the role the Shiites play in the country are objectively reinforcing Teheran; and the UN Security Council’s constellation is not necessarily in favour of the West. While these conditions have brought about – as tactical as it may be – a transatlantic rapprochement tilting towards European “dialogue” rather than US coercion, what is worth noting here is that the EU cooperative approach makes sense and may well evolve into a platform for joint transatlantic action.

If this mixed picture is taken into consideration, what it seems to suggest is that Europe can play a security role in the Gulf precisely by developing and strengthening its own initiative. In a transatlantic perspective, autonomous reinforcement of the European and EU role in the region will be more helpful than participation in the inherently limited ICI operations. At the same time, a more autonomous European role is what the GCC countries, in particular, expect and desire. These countries are rather disappointed and concerned by the US’ performance in the Gulf and its consequences. They see the reinforcement of the European presence in the GCC and the Gulf in general as a reassurance and a necessary balancing. Thus the EU is called upon to play a security role, beneficial to both the United States and the regional countries, in terms of more

and bolder initiatives in the region. At the end of the day, all it has to do is to be more assertive and confident in renewing and enhancing its links with the GCC, setting out a substantive and consistent strategy towards the region, and developing – wherever possible – its political initiative in the same way it did with the EU-3 negotiations with Iran. Finally, Europe should take note that a new regime is emerging in Iraq which deserves support. It is, in fact, high time for the Europeans to set out a policy towards Iraq, independently of transatlantic rifts.

6. Conclusions

Can Europe be a security player in the Gulf? After looking at the three scenarios, the response can be affirmative, but it has to be qualified by two conditions: (a) the role is bound to be limited, albeit never unimportant; (b) it is not bound to emerge in a conventional transatlantic context.

What seems to prevail today is a kind of sluggish scenario of no-opposition and no-cooperation. Europeans and Americans, while definitely not hindering respective agendas, are not really cooperating either. There is no synergy. Each runs its own initiatives and where Europeans are cooperating, as in the ICI, the pattern of cooperation follows the lines of the split over Iraq. The Italian government, for example, is contributing to the ICI and to the BMENA Democracy Assistance Dialogue, while other European governments pretend these initiatives do not exist or provide only very marginal contributions. As argued here, transatlantic strategic convergence on the Gulf and the Middle East has never been strong. However, such weak convergence has been turned into a split by the US decision to intervene in Iraq and, above all, by the legal, ideological and political settings in which that decision was taken. As a result, the idea that a European security role in the Gulf can be developed in association with the United States, in a conventional transatlantic context, seems hardly to be feasible – at least for the time being.

On the other hand, the alternative should not be between acting in a conventional transatlantic context or not acting at all. What the analysis above suggests is that Europe and the EU should be more assertive and less hesitant in carrying out their cooperation policies, both in the economic and the security spheres. These policies may reassure and strengthen the GCC countries and offer a prospect for emerging Iraqi parties. These policies can also provide the United States with alternatives and new options with respect to policies that are presently not working, as in the case of non-proliferation diplomacy with Iran. In this way, while the EU's role as a Gulf player is enhanced, it would also become more helpful and significant in transatlantic terms.

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Abbreviations

BMENA	Broader Middle East and North Africa
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
UK	United Kingdom
US (U.S.)	United States of America
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organisation