



# Re-thinking Western Policies in Light of the Arab Uprising

## Report of the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2011

Miguel Haubrich-Seco

### Abstract

The upheavals in many states of the Arab world have shaken the grounds that long upheld regimes, which have either lost power, have been pushed into reforms or are still fortressing against change. The uprisings have also laid bare the unsustainability of the West's approach to the region. With stability at the very top of their agendas, the transatlantic partners too often gave preference to authoritarian regimes and neglected opposition and civil society. The result is that they placed their bets on the wrong actors for many years. Now confronted with unexpected revolutionary changes in both North Africa and the Middle East, the United States and the European Union urgently need to reformulate their approaches to the Arab world. With a view to discussing the potential transatlantic cooperation in the region, the 2011 edition of IAI's Transatlantic Security Symposium brought together experts from the US, Europe, and North Africa. This report contains the main points debated during the Symposium.

**Keywords:** *North Africa / Middle East / Arab revolts / United States / US foreign policy / European Union / European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) / Transatlantic relations*

## Re-thinking Western Policies in Light of the Arab Uprising Report of the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2011

by Miguel Haubrich-Seco\*

### Introduction

The upheavals in many states of the Arab world have shaken the grounds that long upheld regimes, which have either lost power, have been pushed into reforms or are still fortressing against change. The uprisings have also laid bare the unsustainability of the West's approach to the region. With stability at the very top of their agendas, the transatlantic partners too often gave preference to authoritarian regimes and neglected opposition and civil society. The result is that they placed their bets on the wrong actors for many years. Now confronted with unexpected revolutionary changes in both North Africa and the Middle East, the United States and the European Union urgently need to reformulate their approaches to the Arab world.

The 2011 edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium aimed at discussing the potential for cooperation between the Western partners when dealing with the region. The Symposium gathered experts and policy-makers from both the US and the EU, as well as from Southern Mediterranean countries, allowing for a fruitful exchange between separate communities of experts and policy-makers.

### 1. Agenda

The conference explored the 'Arab Spring' from four different perspectives: a) it analysed the upcoming challenges in those Arab states that have defied or overthrown their old regimes, b) scrutinised the US response to the upheavals, c) moved on to the past and future role of the EU in the region and d) finally explored potential areas for transatlantic cooperation when engaging with the region.

*Stefano Silvestri*, IAI's president, and *Pierfrancesco Sacco*, Head of the Analysis and Programming Unit at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, welcomed the participants and emphasised the value of having convened experts from the Southern Mediterranean, Europe and the US to discuss the transatlantic response to the Arab Spring from different perspectives.

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Report of the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2011, held in Rome at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2011. The meeting was made possible by the generous contributions of the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

\* Miguel Haubrich Seco is Marie Curie PhD Fellow on EU external relations. He was Research Assistant at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) from February to October 2011 in the framework of the EU-wide training programme EXACT. He is now EXACT Research Assistant at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS).

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*Riccardo Alcaro*, Researcher at IAI's Transatlantic Programme and in charge of the Transatlantic Security Symposium, explained the rationale of the conference and presented the topics of the different sessions.

A keynote speech by *Steve Heydemann*, Senior Vice President of the Grants Programme of the US Institute for Peace (USIP), and the subsequent debate chaired by *Ettore Greco*, Director of the IAI, kicked off the discussion by highlighting the main challenges in the region for both local actors and the transatlantic partners.

The first roundtable session explored the US Responses to the Arab Upheavals and pointed out the US challenges and priorities in the region. *Richard Youngs*, Director General of the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo (FRIDE) in Madrid, chaired the roundtable, which comprised:

- *Robert Springborg*, Professor, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey;
- *Issandr El Amrani*, freelance journalist and former International Crisis Group staff member;
- *Hassan Nafaa*, Professor of Political Science, Cairo University;
- *Raffaella Del Sarto*, Pears Fellow in Israel and Mediterranean Studies, Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford University, and Adjunct Professor, SAIS Bologna Center, Johns Hopkins University.\*\*

After this first roundtable, *Rolf Schwarz*, Political Officer for Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) & Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) countries in the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division at NATO, explained the role of NATO during the Arab upheavals, especially in Libya, and underlined the potential for future cooperation with the countries of the region in areas such as security sector reform or securing civilian oversight of the military.

The second roundtable examined the EU Responses to the Arab Upheavals, identifying the forthcoming challenges and priorities for future action. The roundtable was chaired by *Michael Wahid Hanna*, Fellow and Programme Officer at the Century Foundation in New York, and was further composed of:

- *Silvia Colombo*, Researcher, Mediterranean and Middle East Programme, IAI;
- *Nathalie Tocci*, Deputy Director, IAI;
- *Ahmed Driss*, Director, CEMI, Tunis;
- *Daniel Levy*, Senior Research Fellow, American Strategy Programme, Co-Director, Middle East Task Force, New America Foundation, Washington, DC;

The third and last roundtable - Coordinating Transatlantic Response to the Arab Uprising - delved into the potential for transatlantic cooperation in the region and outlined areas of cooperation as well as ones in which different approaches were more likely. Chaired by *Roberto Aliboni*, Scientific Advisor of IAI, the roundtable featured:

- *Khaled Elgindy*, Visiting Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution, Washington;
- *Muriel Asseburg*, Head, Research Division Middle East and Africa, SWP, Berlin;
- *Ashraf Kishk*, Head, Diplomatic Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo Branch;

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\*\* From 1 October 2011, Raffaella Del Sarto has been with the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute.

- *Soli Özel*, Lecturer of International Relations, Kadir Has University, Istanbul;
- *Yossi Alpher*, Co-Editor, Bitter Lemons, Tel Aviv.
- *Fabrizio Colaceci*, Head of the NATO Unit at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, closed the conference with some concluding remarks.

## 2. Contents

### 2.1. *The West and the Arab Spring: Accepting the Challenge, Embracing the Change*

**The change has been accepted...** Participants stressed that Western governments have understood that the changes taking place across the Arab world are not just an ephemeral appearance but are of epochal importance for the region. Although the West did not see the changes coming - partly because of its strong emphasis on securing stability and its subsequent involvement in supporting the *anciens régimes*, the authoritarian regimes that ruled the region for decades - it has now realised that the uprisings have dramatically reshuffled the conditions on the ground and that the era of stability-oriented support for authoritarian rulers is over.

**...but Western governments should avoid outdated models and templates.** It was emphasised that the West is at risk of applying worn out and unfitting transition concepts in its new approach to the Arab states. Caught by surprise by the developments in Tunisia and Egypt, and not knowing in what direction developments are heading, Western governments are inclined to try to fit the Arab Spring into the mould of past experiences. In the last weeks and months, Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan, Latin America and Eastern Europe have all been singled out as possible models for the post-revolutionary development of Arab countries. Most participants agreed that applying such models, well known to experts from the US and the EU, could result in a misreading of the differences in the context and political dynamics on the ground.

**Economic transformation is of the utmost importance for the success of regime change.** Most participants agreed on the crucial importance of economic recovery and reform in order to provide a stable basis on which democracy can flourish. Lack of opportunities, high social disparities and the economic distress suffered especially by the young generations were all mentioned as key factors triggering the revolutions. It was contended that, as in the case of political reforms, the West should avoid applying familiar but not always correct templates when offering help and advice on economic reform. Examples from Eastern European transformations are already doing the rounds among the Western policy community. Yet many participants pointed out that liberalisation of markets is not necessarily the best policy to choose. Many of the countries involved in the Arab Spring already underwent free market-oriented reforms under their tyrannical rulers. These reforms ended up putting formerly state-led economies under the domination of small elites connected to the ruling regimes. Therefore, some participants argued that promoting social policies and redistribution would be a more effective way of meeting the protesters' demands. Economic reform was deemed as one policy area in which Europe could contribute with its experience and its tradition of state-provided welfare. However, several participants doubted that the EU would be able to actively engage in this area due to its lack of resources. At any

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rate, participants agreed that overlooking the economic side of transformation would put the whole political process at grave risk of backlash.

**The influence of Western governments in the post-revolutionary context is set to diminish.** In a time in which the US seems more cautious about engaging in international affairs and the US and the EU are facing severe financial constraints, the discussion of both the will and the means of Western governments to engage with the Arab world played a prominent role at the Symposium. First brought up for discussion was whether the West even has the will to engage more actively. As one participant argued, the resolve of Western governments might indeed be less firm than in previous times, as strong external engagement is generally more difficult to sell at home in times of crisis. Other participants further argued that there are a number of reasons that could make engaging in reforms in the Arab world more and more difficult for the West. Local actors might reject Western attempts at assisting change, as this could be perceived as interference. Adding to this, a participant from the region noted that the uprisings were not directed only against despotic governments but also against their backing by Western actors. According to several participants, the same risks could apply to stronger involvement of Western civil societies, for which a cautious approach was suggested. This 'soft-hand' approach is also valued because it would diminish the risk of dispute with the new governments in office, which are generally expected to take policy positions in the economic as well as the political and security fields not fully in sync with the West's. Opposition to free-market economy on the economic side, and hostility towards Israel on the political side, were singled out as the main cases in point. In addition to this, some participants noted that the room for deep reforms in the countries of the Arab Spring should not be expected to be particularly big, as new governance solutions will often have to be agreed upon between new actors and those of the *anciens régimes*. One participant noted that these complicated conditions might, in the worst case, even lead Western governments to restrain from engaging in the region at all.

**Further uprisings risk being violent.** The concern was raised that the peacefulness of regime changes in Egypt and Tunisia should not be seen as a pattern for the rest of the Arab world. Rather than models, Egypt and Tunisia have been outliers because the regimes there failed to secure support from the military and/or security services. When they were able to secure this support, as in Bahrein, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, the uprisings have turned violent. Some experts, therefore, raised the concern that the West should be prepared to engage in full-fledged post-conflict reconstruction in violent contexts.

## 2.2. US Responses to the Arab Upheavals: Challenges and Priorities

**Standing at the forefront...** While the US has provided an important push in specific moments - such as during the toppling of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt - according to most participants it is adopting a rather cautious approach in embracing the Arab uprisings. As noted by one participant, the US had come up with neither a new diagnosis nor a new long-term strategy. One participant expressed the opinion that US President Barack Obama's profile with regard to the matter has been modest, and drew attention to the fact that most statements on the Arab uprisings have been made by lower-level spokespersons of the administration. In this context, it was argued

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that the US runs the risk of falling into adopting a doctrine of restraint. By sticking to such a timid approach, a participant argued, the US is losing the opportunity to invest in the desecuritisation of its relations with the Arab world. Washington, so the argument went, will incur severe opportunity costs because investing in long-term development and democratisation would allow it to reduce military costs precisely in that region of the world that has accounted for most of the US's military expenditure.

**...or accepting the US's limitations?** On the other hand, many participants adhered to the idea that a too proactive US could, at best, have no positive effect and, at worst, exacerbate the situation. It was argued that the US should reformulate its approach towards the region pursuing the *leitmotiv* that the new governments and their populations wanted to be treated as partners and not clients. The uprisings have shown that Arab public opinion does matter and that US influence is limited - at least in the short run. In this context, it was further argued that the US should refrain from the temptation of selecting its favourite candidates for government in the upcoming elections in Egypt and Tunisia in advance, assuming it could even do so (which many doubted). A participant from the region added that US restraint is also necessary because of the prevailing perception in the Arab public opinion that the US is mainly interested in securing energy supplies and in protecting Israel. Any local actor backed by the US would therefore lose support, while visible US engagement could give anti-Western political forces the upper hand in the forthcoming political debates in the countries of the region.

**The reasons for US shyness.** The reasons behind the US stance on the Arab Spring were widely discussed during the conference. Discussion crystallised around two different views. Some participants stressed that US restraint derives from the acknowledgement that its leverage in the region - especially after the fall of the Egyptian government - is limited. Others, instead, insisted on domestic constraints. It was argued that US foreign policy towards the region is increasingly influenced by the Department of Defense rather than the Department of State. Policy, therefore, suffers from an over-reliance on military means or at least from a narrow security-driven perspective. Other constraints were also mentioned, in particular the concern that Islamism might come out as the winner of the uprising, but also the powerful lobbying by Israel and Saudi Arabia, two countries that for different reasons do not look favourably upon changes in their geopolitical context. Some participants contended that US policy towards the region would remain indecisive as long as the influence of Israeli positions on US policy-making remains as strong as it is today.

**An agenda for desecuritising the US approach to the region.** Several participants contended that the US should not necessarily reduce its engagement in the region, but definitely change its approach. They argued that, after decades of security-oriented cooperation and engagement, the time has come for a broader, desecuritisised agenda. Such a broader agenda should include increased support for democratisation and a strong financial engagement mirroring the experience of the 'Marshall Plan'. Two main arguments were advanced to back this strategy. The first was that without a strong economic boost to alleviate the severe social and economic shortcomings that contributed to triggering the uprisings, the nascent Arab democracies would be at risk of failure. The second argument was that desecuritisisation would in the long-term reduce the considerable burden of the US's security-related financial and military

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involvement in the region. This proposal did not however find unanimous backing among the participants. It was contended that such a strategy still reflected a logic of treating the region as a set of US clients. If the US really wants to play a supportive role in the democratisation of the region, it should listen instead to local political initiatives. Another participant pointed to a narrower but still ambitious agenda for the US in the region: by guaranteeing free communication and engaging in institution-building, the US could provide help in building the social-political 'fabric' necessary for developing democracy.

**Treating the Arab countries as partners, not clients.** Most participants - both from the West and from the Southern Mediterranean - agreed that the US has committed too many mistakes in its approach to the region. The US has too often failed to deliver what it has promised, most notably in supporting democratic reform and contributing to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, thereby worsening its stand among the Arab public. In order to improve the public perception of the US, it was argued, the US should treat the countries that have undergone a revolution as partners and not clients. In this regard, it was noted that Qatar and Turkey had been able to play a rather constructive and effective role precisely because they have engaged these countries on an equal footing, making plain the advantages of pursuing regional ownership of the most critical issues.

**Regional implications...** Participants agreed that the Arab Spring would certainly have a lasting impact on the regional picture. One participant argued that the US strategy of isolating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the rest of the region is now going to be challenged more than ever. The new governments, especially if accountable to their peoples, will certainly claim a more active role in the peace process. This probable striving for a more protagonistic role, in particular by Egypt, can nevertheless be seen as an opportunity. Some participants maintained that it would deprive the Arab governments of a pretext for instrumentalising the situation in Palestine to their own advantage. Instead of just criticising the status quo (while not doing anything to solve it), post-revolutionary governments are going to be called on to bring forward some feasible ideas, and to deliver on their promises of supporting the Palestinians. It was nevertheless noted that such a development cannot be expected during times of transition, but only in the longer term. In this context, a participant encouraged the US to foster Arab self-responsibility and drew parallels to Latin America, where most states now refrain from blaming the US for their problems.

**...and Israel's role in a new geostrategic context.** Participants discussed with special emphasis Israel's role in its changed neighbourhood and the effects of the Arab Spring on its foreign policy. Several participants questioned that the 1978 Camp David peace accords between Israel and Egypt can remain the framework through which the US acts as a guardian of relations between its two allies. While peace between Egypt and Israel was not seen as being in danger, several participants stressed that a new strategic framework will have to be found to give Egypt the room it will most probably claim to pursue its aspirations as a regional power. In this regard, it was noted that the assault on the Israeli embassy in Cairo in September 2011 was condemned by Egyptian mainstream commentators as well as by the Muslim Brotherhood. A participant further underlined that the Arab Spring provides a window of opportunity for Israel to adopt a more constructive role towards some of its Arab neighbours.

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Participants also discussed how far the US administration can exert influence on the management of the conflict, and concluded that the prospects are rather modest as Israel's influence on US foreign policy is currently higher than the other way round. It was nevertheless also contended that there have already been some changes in Israel's approach to its neighbours, for example in its relationship with Qatar, with which it has established a more constructive relationship since the upheavals.

### 2.3. EU Response to the Arab Upheavals: Challenges and Priorities

**Overcoming the mantra of stability.** Consensus was reached among participants that the European approach towards the Arab world has suffered from an obstinate pursuit of stability rather than other objectives. The will to back the stable incumbent regimes as the 'lesser evil' in order to secure energy supplies, reduce migration to Europe, contain Islamist political forces and prevent terrorism has apparently rendered other EU policy objectives, most prominently democratisation and good governance, unattainable. Participants from the region agreed that the EU's focus on security has severely harmed the perception of the EU as a trustworthy partner and will continue to harm it if security remains as high on the European agenda as before. It was therefore suggested that both the EU and other Western partners should in the future pursue a policy oriented towards long-term sustainability rather than short-term stability. Such an agenda for state sustainability has to start from the reasoning that stability and democracy are two mutually reinforcing elements.

**The EU needs to adapt to different realities on the ground.** The heterogeneous and more fragmented character of the region was identified as one of the main challenges for future European engagement in the region. While the EU has so far pursued a relatively homogenous approach in its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), it will now have to tailor its action to at least three likely developments in the region. Some states, most probably Egypt and Tunisia, will embark on a transition towards more open regimes while probably including parts of the *anciens régimes*. In other cases, such as Morocco, the scenario of top-down reform is the most likely, while in cases such as Libya a complete overturn with a strong need for institution-building is the likeliest development. The situation in Syria, where the uprisings are being violently suppressed, does not qualify at the moment for a long-term EU engagement, but warrants a more focused response to isolate the Syrian regime while empowering the protesters.

**Has conditionality failed?** A lively debate emerged on the effectiveness of conditionality, by which the EU offers improvements in its bilateral relationship with ENP countries in exchange for political and economic reforms or, alternatively, threatens to withhold or withdraw such benefits if the recipient country backtracks on reform. Discussion involved both positive and negative assessments of conditionality, and emphasised three main points. It was first argued that conditionality has not been effective because of its design. Proponents of this reading stressed that the conditionality upheld by the EU often lacks clear benchmarks and has not been sufficiently brought to bear by the EU during implementation. Regarding these shortcomings, several participants argued that conditionality would be more successful if it were tied to widely accepted norms such as human rights. Benchmarks going beyond international law always risk being perceived as illegitimate interference and

therefore subject to politicisation. A second strand of the discussion highlighted that the shortcomings of conditionality are a matter not only of design but also of a lack of political will on the part of the EU. Since the leverage of accession is not available to countries in the Southern Mediterranean, the EU has to offer other meaningful incentives to exert influence in the region. Opening up to migration was considered a powerful incentive the EU could offer. The focus on enhanced mobility for certain groups of persons (students, businessmen, women, etc.) in the new ENP proposal therefore aims in the right direction, but participants generally shared the view that this is still only a small improvement. Finally, a participant from the Southern Mediterranean maintained that conditionality was an important instrument in the context of transition. While the participant acknowledged that conditionality has failed to promote democracy and effective reforms in the last years and has also provided a recurring point of criticism regarding the EU's apparent "neo-colonialism", he was confident that conditionality could in the new context avoid a fallback to authoritarianism by increasing the payout for successful reforms.

**What prospects for the revamped European Neighbourhood Policy?** During the discussion, three main shortcomings of the revamped ENP were identified: its still strong emphasis on security, its vagueness especially as to conditionality and a certain logic of insularity by which the EU does not take account of the importance of both old and new foreign actors in the region (such as the US, Turkey, the Gulf Cooperation Council member states and resurging and emerging powers like Russia and China). Despite these shortcomings, several participants welcomed the fact that the upgraded ENP also stresses the need to include incentives for the Southern Mediterranean states, mainly in the areas of trade and migration. Still, it was argued that both incentives would require adjustment to the realities on the ground. Offering trade agreements that involve the adoption of parts of the cumbersome EU *acquis* in trade matters or limiting migratory access for restricted groups of citizens to circular migration, while requiring stronger border controls and readmission agreements, was seen as an imbalanced offer. A positive, though still to be substantiated, element was seen in the stronger emphasis that the EU has put on support for civil society.

**Engaging with civil society, but how?** Most participants noted positively that the EU has put an emphasis on strengthening civil society in the Southern Mediterranean countries. If the EU continues to attach strict limits to its most attractive incentives such as market access and migration, engaging with civil society can at least provide more room for positively influencing democratisation processes in the region, it was argued. One participant said that a strengthened civil society could increase the EU's leverage by creating a context that supports and controls the adherence to EU conditionality. It nevertheless remained disputed how, precisely, relations with local civil society should be conducted. While one participant suggested that civil society should have an institutionalised role in the bodies overseeing association agreements between the EU and Mediterranean states, others warned that an institutionalised approach could backfire. They expressed the concern that such an approach could favour those parts of civil society that had been co-opted by the former regimes, as they were often the only sufficiently institutionalised actors. These participants warned about underestimating the heterogeneity of Arab civil society and added that too an active approach could do more harm than good if perceived or portrayed as interference in favour of certain factions of society.

**Confronting Syria.** As a result of the ongoing fighting and violent repression by the state in Syria, some of the discussion time was devoted to analysis of the events in Syria and the way the EU has reacted to them. Despite calls for stronger engagement directed at both the EU and the US, it was argued that the West's reaction has not been so bad after all, given the circumstances. Since the protesters are currently debating whether or not to carry arms, stronger external engagement might both encourage the demonstrators to arm themselves and give the government an excuse to react with still more violence. Given these conditions and Syria's relationship with Iran and Hizbollah, EU sanctions as well as political pressure aimed at pushing the Syrian government into accepting the Arab League's peace initiative for the Middle East conflict were said to be positive steps. It was recalled that the Syrian government did not accept the Arab League plan because it still felt that it was in a strong position. One participant contended that only if and when the regime fell, should the EU pursue a more assertive stance and push for democratisation. Otherwise it would do more harm than good.

#### *2.4. Coordinating Transatlantic Response to the Arab Uprising*

**A more modest approach to transatlantic consensus-building.** The Quartet for the Middle East Peace Process, involving the US, the EU, the United Nations and Russia, was discussed as a prominent example of transatlantic coordination in the region. It was argued that, since the US and the EU are by far the Quartet's most important actors, assessing its performance makes it possible to draw some conclusions about transatlantic coordination in the region. One participant held three main factors accountable for the Quartet's lack of impact on the Middle East Peace Process. First, its informal and loose structure allowed individual Quartet members to ignore the decisions of the group if they were inconvenient. Second, the imbalance in power inherent in the Quartet also meant that US-backed policies were often the ones the Quartet adhered to as a whole. Finally, the lack of overall consensus among the Quartet members led to its work being limited to areas in which consensus existed (e.g. the strengthening of Palestinian institutions), thereby leaving aside the most complicated and intractable issues (e.g. mediation between Israel and Palestine). Drawing from these observations, it was argued that a cooperation group like the Quartet, in which one member is much more important than the other(s), always runs the risk of being either ignored or manipulated by the strongest party. The bottom line was that, since the Quartet could not express itself but on the issues to which the US agreed, it actually served as little more than an amplifier of the US' voice. Several participants drew a rather pragmatic lesson from this: no consensus at all among the Quartet partners was a better outcome than an artificial consensus not backed by action.

**Can an EU-US division of labour work?** Cooperation based on a division of tasks between the US and the EU was considered by some participants as the right approach for combining their respective policy strengths. It was argued that such an approach would make it possible to profit from the EU's still more positive public perception in the region. By pursuing 'flexible' cooperation, the EU and the US would leave room for engaging regional partners, especially Turkey, in their effort. Adapting to the specific needs of the individual countries and local realities would also reduce the

danger of transatlantic coordination being portrayed in terms of an 'imperialist' or 'neo-colonialist' grand strategy for the region and increase the ownership of the reforms and policies promoted.

**Is the EU able to break with the US if necessary?** The question of whether the EU should play a more autonomous role in certain instances was debated extensively. The issue was most prominently discussed in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Most participants agreed that the EU should carve out some room for action independent of the US, in particular concerning the demand on Israel to take some concrete steps facilitating the resumption of talks - a demand that the Obama Administration first made but then miserably failed to uphold. Several participants argued, however, that it is more probable that a break would occur within the EU than between the EU and the US. They recalled that the stance of several European countries on the Middle East conflict hinges on their wish to keep up good relations with the US, a more important strategic goal for them than devising potential solutions to the Middle East conflict upon which the US would not look favourably.

**Coordination with Turkey is essential for both the EU and the US.** The growing role of Turkey in the region was repeatedly recalled throughout the discussions. This was generally acknowledged as a challenge for the transatlantic partners, as part of Turkey's renewed protagonism stems from its position on several critical issues in the area, ranging from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to relations with Iran, which are not in sync with the West's. Several participants maintained that ignoring Turkey is not an option, as it will not only lead to tensions, but also limit, perhaps severely, the leverage of the transatlantic partners in the region. Another participant argued that the more assertive foreign policy of Gulf Cooperation Council countries, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar, should also be factored into the transatlantic strategic re-thinking on the Mediterranean and Middle East region.

**Security sector reform and ensuring civilian oversight of the military.** Several participants argued that in countries in which the military played a leading role, it was now of the utmost importance to engage in security sector reforms, gradually putting the armed forces under civilian control. This was identified as an area for coordination between the transatlantic partners and countries in the region, including in the framework of NATO's initiatives of cooperation with the Mediterranean and Gulf countries (the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, respectively).

**Human rights violations must be condemned and punished.** During the discussion it was argued that, despite the virtues of pursuing a division of labour between the EU and the US, the upholding of human rights was an area in which the transatlantic partners could achieve the most if they conveyed the same messages to the region, ideally not only from the EU and the US together, but also from Turkey. Otherwise, and taking into account the transatlantic partners' poor record on the matter in the last years, an ambiguous or vague message in this sensitive area could easily be perceived by governments in the region as a matter open to bargaining.

### 3. Conclusions

Although dealing with a still evolving issue of immediate topicality, the *Transatlantic Security Symposium 2011* provided analysis and specific strategic proposals drawn from the experience and intellectual proficiency of experts from three areas of the world: the US, Europe and the Southern Mediterranean.

Conclusions of the discussion can be summed up along three broad lines:

1) First, several *gaps in the Western view and approach towards the Arab uprisings* were uncovered:

- It was questioned whether Egypt and Tunisia can be seen as models for the rest of the Arab world because of the peaceful character of their revolutions. Uprisings in other states of the region have run a much higher risk of drifting into violence or have already done so, as shown by the case of Bahrein, Libya, Syria and Yemen.
- Western-like democracies were not deemed to be the most probable outcomes of the ongoing transition processes in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya (or elsewhere). In fact, doubts were raised as to whether this should be seen as a problem, as safeguarding the endogenous nature of Arab democratisation, with all its specificities and diverging standards compared to those of the West, is considered a key element in ensuring the Arab Spring's success. In most cases, transition will have to involve arrangements between the new political actors of the uprisings and elements of the old regimes. In order to allow these processes to yield sustainable results, the West should avoid promoting certain models of transition, supporting instead the creation of the conditions for competition between diverse political proposals. Specific support to certain actors because of their ideas on foreign policy or political and social values might be perceived as interference and could do those very actors more harm than good.
- Economic support to the region is of paramount importance, as is not adopting pre-fixed economic schemes as a one-size-fits-all recipe. In particular, free-market solutions, such as privatisation of state assets, should be applied with prudence, with a view to avoiding economic shocks and the excessive concentration of wealth in the hands of a few people. The lack of opportunities and the social disparities that contributed to triggering the uprisings in countries such as Tunisia or Egypt needed to be addressed first.

2) Second, it became clear that *the US's approach to the region needs to be reformulated*.

- While it remained a disputed question whether the US should adopt a more active stance on the region or, on the contrary, stick to its lower-profile approach, most participants agreed that the US has to reformulate its regional strategy factoring in all implications of the Arab Spring. Proponents of more active engagement maintained that this provides an opportunity for desecuritising US relations with the region in the medium term by investing in democratisation and stepping up non-military financial support. Proponents of a more prudent approach stressed that political sustainability can only be reached by leaving enough room for local ownership.

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- The US should avoid the temptation of “picking” or influencing specific political groups during the transition processes. In order to avoid radicalisation, US (and EU) support should concentrate on creating the enabling conditions for a peaceful political competition. Stressing ownership with long-term political sustainability in mind was deemed more important than achieving short-term political objectives, if this puts the sustainability of the democratic transitions at risk.
  - The US should accept increased activity not only by the EU, but also by local governments, in regional matters. In the coming months, and especially if accountable to their peoples, governments in the region will claim a more active role in dealing with local conflicts, most notably the Israeli-Palestinian one. The US should try to orient regional ownership towards proposing balanced solutions. It should also look more favourably upon instances in which the EU holds views different from its own, in particular when artificial transatlantic unity risks turning into diplomatic paralysis (again, the main case in point is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more specifically the attitude towards Israel). Other regional powers, such as Turkey and the Gulf states, will also have to be involved if long-term sustainability in the region is to be achieved.

3) Third, the short-term and stability-driven strategy of the EU towards the region has to evolve into an *EU agenda for long-term sustainability*.

- The EU’s focus on secure energy supplies, stricter migration controls, and cooperation in the fight against Islamist militants - in other words, the rationale behind its support for the authoritarian regimes - has proved to be short-sighted. In the future, the EU should pursue a less securitised agenda and offer incentives, especially in the areas of migration and agriculture trade, in order to boost the momentum for political reform in countries undergoing political transition.
- Conditionality was generally regarded as much less effective than planned, undermined as it was by the scarce appeal of the incentives put on the table and by the greater urgency EU countries attached to other issues. Participants agreed that conditionality can only work if tied to appealing offers, including significant trade and migration incentives, and if its benchmarks are spelled out more clearly. Negative conditionality - that is, withholding or withdrawing benefits - was also considered a policy option on which the EU should show greater resolve.
- Supporting civil society could prove a promising initiative to avoid the pitfalls of the past and contribute to the development of political cultures with a long-term effect on political sustainability in the region.

Finally, some lessons can be drawn on transatlantic coordination in response to the Arab uprisings:

- Coordination in the future should be decided on the basis of *appropriateness*, rather than as an end in itself. The NATO operation in Libya was identified as the only really coordinated transatlantic action in the region. All participants agreed that the potential for transatlantic coordination was wider, for instance in upholding human rights or in jointly dealing with Turkey. It was also argued that there are many areas in which the transatlantic partners should engage separately in order to make use of their respective strengths and reputations.

- As the *Middle East conflict* cannot be insulated from the fate of the region, transatlantic coordination in this area is essential in ensuring a sustainable solution to the conflict and contributing to the long-term stabilisation of the whole region. But also here, a broad understanding of coordination was upheld allowing for different but complementary approaches by the transatlantic partners.

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**Istituto Affari Internazionali**

Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 00186 Roma  
Tel.: +39/06/3224360 Fax: + 39/06/3224363  
E-mail: [iai@iai.it](mailto:iai@iai.it) - website: <http://www.iai.it>  
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