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# THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

## NARROWING GAPS IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

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**G | M | F** The German Marshall Fund  
of the United States

STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To tackle the difficult legacy of the Bush administration in the Middle East, the Obama administration set out a flexible strategy, whereby it would not follow any particular sequence, but would work on the various outstanding crises in parallel. In this perspective, the Israeli-Palestinian issue acquires a somehow central and independent role with respect to other regional crises. The administration launched an important diplomatic initiative in the spring of 2009 with the intent to make Israel and the Palestinians resume talks in the fall and come to an agreement. However, this initiative did not succeed. The first part of the paper discusses the reasons why it failed and the options left to the administration. It pinpoints the convergences and divergences with respect to the available options between the new U.S. administration, the European countries and the EU, and Turkey.

The paper points out that keeping up the present truce and possibly turning it into a cease-fire, while aiming to re-establish the conditions for a political dialogue in the longer term by means of a confidential diplomacy, may be the most realistic approach. It is also an option that can both take advantage of transatlantic bonds and promote them. The paper stresses, however that whatever option the United States picks and whatever the policies it decides to implement, both Europe's and Turkey's strategic convergence with respect to the whole region will be influenced by the level of priority the United States is willing and able to attribute to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Low priority will generate loyal yet passive support from Europe for the United States' overall engagement toward the Middle East. Yet, it might collide with Turkish national interests and increase emerging differences with Ankara throughout the region. In this sense, Obama's policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may affect the coherence—especially in the case of Turkey—and the quality—in the case of Europe—of transatlantic bonds.

The second part of the paper considers Euro-Mediterranean relations and, more generally, EU policies toward the area. These policies have failed to set up a framework of political cooperation to contribute to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the contrary, EU policy has fallen hostage to the conflict, and this has prevented Mediterranean political cooperation from developing. On the other hand, the European Union has failed to include Turkey among its members so as to provide the country with a secure mainstay with respect to the Middle East. While a timely redirection of EU policy toward Turkey seems improbable, the paper argues that the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) could be helpful for both European and transatlantic policy aims, on condition that it is aptly reformed.

In conclusion, the paper maintains that the transatlantic perspective on the Mediterranean and the Middle East can hardly be homogeneous, as it is inherently affected by the differences in focus and interests of the transatlantic stakeholders. In particular, there is an asymmetry in the relationship between the United States and the EU/Europe stemming from the fact that, for the United States, Mediterranean cohesion is not seen as essential to resolving problems in the Middle East. At the same time, EU support for stability in the Middle East is important yet not decisive for the United States. American action to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is clearly decisive for the EU in the Mediterranean. Within the transatlantic circle, Turkey seems bent on a more independent path than Europe. On the whole, even with these differences and asymmetries, the outlook for transatlantic cooperation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East is positive. In this broad perspective, this analysis points to a number of more specific recommendations:

- The United States should for some (even a long) time abstain from taking initiatives directed toward achieving a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Conversely, it should engage in policies aimed at keeping and reinforcing the existing truce and preventing violence from erupting again.
- The United States should invite its allies to join in increased cooperation and to agree with them upon joint or converging policies to keep the truce and prevent violence. There should be an understanding on the division of labor by which the allies pursue objectives and explore solutions that the United States is not, for the time being, prepared to explore.
- This policy should be conceived of and implemented in a transatlantic perspective, with as many actions as possible undertaken in the framework of the Alliance and NATO-EU cooperation; the policy should be the outcome of allied consultations.
- Consultations should also regard the re-establishment of more long-term conditions for a new political Israeli-Palestinian process to take place and possibly reach a solution. The U.S. administration should maintain its parallel strategy toward the Middle East and the relevance this gives to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The U.S. administration should couple its approach toward the Arab-Muslim world with a parallel approach toward Israel, fostering those trends in Israel that may support its approach.
- The European Union should prevent the UfM from being held hostage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as happened with its previous policy. To that end, while contributing to a solution to the conflict in the wider transatlantic framework, it should sideline the UfM political dimension and emphasize the technical-economic dimension, making the UfM work as an opportunity for cooperation both in inter-Mediterranean and global relations. This would provide an opportunity for transatlantic cooperation as well as contribute to making the Mediterranean area more cohesive and, should it be necessary, more prepared to support a new Israeli-Palestinian process.
- The EU should make efforts to include Turkey, but also rethink its overall approach to the issue. While a strategic EU-Turkey partnership would in any case be a second-best solution, the ongoing accession relationship may prove even worse than that, if the EU-Turkey negotiation agenda fails to deal with real problems and real solutions.
- Turkey should provide its relations with its Middle East neighbors and the Muslim world with a firmer rationale. While it is fully justified to seek more attention from its allies, it should also pay more attention to them; as aptly noted by Syrian President Assad, its initiatives may eventually erode its capital of mediation capabilities. If it is true that it is a “central country,” it must learn to stay in the middle.
- All in all, the United States has to involve its allies—both Europe and Turkey—more than it has done so far. In this respect, the new administration still has to prove its multilateralist credentials.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The EU pursues an important and structured Mediterranean policy. In addition, it has a long-standing policy regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its ramifications in the Levant (the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict). However, the EU policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a Mediterranean, rather than a Middle Eastern policy since the EU’s strategic reach, despite intentions, does not in fact go beyond its neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, its policies toward the Gulf and the Middle East have remained weak and limited—as have relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. There is a distinct separation between the Mediterranean and the Middle East in EU policymaking. In sum, the EU’s policy toward its southern approaches focuses almost exclusively on the Mediterranean.

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<sup>2</sup> While its security doctrine (*A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Brussels, December 12, 2003) recognizes the need to commit to security in distant theatres, in practice institutional conditions limit the EU to act in its neighborhood. For a debate on this point in a transatlantic perspective see: Alyson J.K. Bailes, “US and EU Strategy Concepts. A Mirror for Partnership and Defence?,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 49, No. 1, January-March 2004, pp. 19-33; Robert E. Hunter, “The US and the European Union. Bridging the Strategic Gap?,” *Ibidem*, pp. 35-50.

In order to consider the Mediterranean in a transatlantic perspective, the obvious focus for the United States, as well as Europe and Turkey, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, while—as we have just said—this conflict is set by Europe and the EU in the Mediterranean, the United States and Turkey set it in the wider context of the Middle East or even the greater Middle East. Hence the need to consider, when looking from the transatlantic perspective, both the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the former being the focus of the Europeans and the latter of the Americans, with the Turks decidedly moving eastward.

This paper considers the Middle East and the Mediterranean in a transatlantic perspective from the two points of view in order to provide recommendations for making the allies’ approaches more harmonized and convergent. The next section considers the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The third section examines policies in the Mediterranean. In the fourth and final part, the paper sets out conclusions and recommendations.

# 2 THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

## The U.S. administration's emerging approach toward the Middle East

The legacy left by the last Bush administration is an overloaded and politically congested region: a huge space divided by transversal alignments, and connected by strong linkages. To tackle this difficult legacy, the new administration, headed by President Obama, set out on a flexible strategy, directed at dealing with conflicts by taking advantage of, rather than being conditioned by, linkages.

When the new Obama administration came into office, the view generally held was that the first knot to undo was Iran. This country plays an important role with respect to the viability and integrity of the Iraqi state and will, therefore, have significant influence on future developments there and in neighboring countries as soon as the United States withdraws. Furthermore, Iran's role is not limited to the Gulf region: it could play a role in developments concerning the future of Afghanistan and in the management and resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with all its ramifications. In sum, Iran has a finger in all the most significant Middle Eastern pies and, therefore, conditions U.S. policy. As a consequence, the United States—according to the same view—should undo the Iranian knot before tackling any other regional issues.

As soon as the new administration was sworn in, however, a different strategy emerged, whereby the administration would not follow any particular sequence but would work on the various outstanding crises in parallel, in particular with regard to Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This parallel approach surfaced in a number of statements and responses to the press. It was also spelled out very clearly during Israeli Premier Netanyahu's visit to Washington on May 18, 2009. On that occasion, Netanyahu insisted on the need to prioritize the threat stemming from

Iran, but Obama responded that efforts to solve the two crises have to move on “parallel tracks.” The President responded to a question from the press on the existence of an “Iran first” approach as follows: “If there is a linkage between Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, I personally believe it actually runs the other way. To the extent that we can make peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis then I actually think it strengthens our hand in the international community in dealing with a potential Iranian threat.”

These statements suggest that the administration will not wait for Iran to “unclench its fist” to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the administration seems to believe that the linkage between Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cuts both ways. In this perspective, the Israeli-Palestinian issue acquires a somehow central and independent role with respect to other regional crises.

This reshuffling of priorities must be considered with some caution. First, because Iran remains a very important player and will not just sit down and watch while the administration goes ahead with its initiatives.<sup>3</sup> Second, because events in Iran, especially after the June 12, 2009, presidential elections, may advise for a tactical (or even strategic) reshuffling of priorities. Third, because existing linkages are realities that the administration can manage but not solve with a parallel approach. Actually, the flexibility that President Obama clearly opted for means more than a parallel approach; it denotes a readiness to navigate without a set course. Richard Haass and Martin Indyk have very aptly pointed out that “President Obama will need to remain conscious of the interrelated nature of regional dynamics and try

<sup>3</sup> Riad Kahwaji, *Obama's Parallel Track Approach: Wise But Requires Boldness with Allies & Enemies*, INEGMA-Institute for Near East & Military Analysis, Dubai, www.inegma.com, accessed July 27, 2009.

to synchronize the various branches of his Middle Eastern strategy, buying time when there is no alternative while quickly exploiting opportunities of dealing with necessities when they arise.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, developments attest to difficulties and changes in the administration’s plans. Pragmatism is thus expected to go along with flexibility.

With these caveats in mind, there can be no doubt that in the complex framework of the U.S. Middle Eastern policy, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its resolution have taken on more importance and more of a strategic than tactical flavor than in the past. From the Mediterranean/Middle East angle taken by this paper, this is an important fact.

### **The Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

*The Obama administration’s approach*—Having accorded the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a firm priority, this priority has been attended upon by a policy that has failed to live up to expectations and very soon came to a dead end.

Between spring and September 2009, President Obama’s policy toward the conflict aimed at a swift resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the context of renewed Arab-American relations, as advocated by the President in his speech at Cairo University.<sup>5</sup> In this perspective, the Obama administration pursued the preliminary objective of restoring the Road Map process among the parties by adding more commitment to the process

on the part of moderate Arab countries.<sup>6</sup> To that end, Washington asked the Israeli government, in unusually intransigent terms, for a total freeze on settlements—to match progress made in the meantime by the Palestinian National Authority on the security side—and balanced this move with a demand for confidence-building measures in favor of Israel from the moderate Arab countries (allowing Israeli passengers and cargo aircraft to fly over Arab territory, opening trade offices in Arab states besides Jordan and Egypt, holding cultural exchanges and lifting the ban on allowing Arab officials to meet their Israeli counterparts).

This policy did not work for many reasons. On the Arab side, there is the long-standing argument that “unless Israel is clearly committed to withdrawing from Arab lands, there is no interest in incremental confidence-building measures.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, some moderate Arab countries, albeit hesitantly, were ready in principle to accept the confidence-building measures pressed on them by Washington. But Saudi Arabia was particularly firm in rejecting the American request, as the Kingdom believes that, on the one hand—in line with its plan—there is no room for incrementalism and, on the other, any arrangement excluding Hamas is futile.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, this rejectionist stance was reinforced when Ambassador Mitchell’s talks with Israel gave the impression that a compromise of sorts on the freeze was being negotiated and that the early American intransigence—a very significant factor in Arab eyes—was crumbling. On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Netanyahu was adamant in

<sup>4</sup> Richard N. Haass and Martin S. Indyk, “A Time for Diplomatic Renewal: Toward a New U.S. Strategy in the Middle East,” in *Restoring the Balance: A Middle East Strategy for the Next President*, The Saban Center at Brookings and the Council on Foreign Relations, December 2008; quotation from the executive summary of the chapter published in [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2008/12\\_middle\\_east\\_haass.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2008/12_middle_east_haass.aspx), accessed July 29, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Remarks by the President on a new beginning*, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009, [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

<sup>6</sup> A point specifically raised in the Cairo speech is that “The Arab states must recognize that the Arab Peace Initiative was an important beginning, but not the end of their responsibilities.”

<sup>7</sup> Nadia Hijab, “Playing from Strength in the Middle East,” *Agence Global*, August 3, 2009, [www.agenceglobal.com](http://www.agenceglobal.com), accessed August 4, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See Turki al-Faisal, “Land First, Then Peace,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2009.



rejecting any freeze; he went so far as to make an ambiguous statement on the “two state” format,<sup>9</sup> but did not budge an inch on settlements.

In this situation, while President Obama would have liked to have announced the relaunching of “negotiations without preconditions that address the permanent status issues”<sup>10</sup> in his September 23, 2009, speech at the United Nations (UN), all he could do was hold a three-way meeting the day before, which Netanyahu and Abbas attended out of pure courtesy, and limit himself to confirming his will to come to terms with the question, sooner or later.<sup>11</sup> The intensive diplomatic contacts led by the Secretary of State which followed the September 22 meeting again came to nothing.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, in the course of visits paid to the region between the end of October and the beginning of November 2009, the Secretary of State made it clear that the administration had dropped any precondition relating to settlements in view of resuming talks.<sup>13</sup> This, in addition to previous missteps with respect to the discussion of the Goldstone Report in the UN,<sup>14</sup> has convinced

Mahmoud Abbas not to run in the next Palestinian elections, thus putting further and perhaps fatal obstacles in the way of any possible solution.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the administration has not changed policy with a view to initiating a new one. It is basically at a standstill, with no policy at all in hand. Where will the administration go from here?

*The Obama administration's options*—The brief and unfortunate sequence of President Obama's attempts to provide a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has left an unprecedented sense of fatigue in the United States and the West, a sense that the conflict is definitely intractable and that there is nothing the United States or other actors can do to solve it. This sense of fatigue was already there with the Annapolis process, more in general during the last years of President Bush's mandate. It has probably been deepened, though, by the vibrant expectations created by the new President, his apparent resolve to reach a solution, and his inability to live up to all that. In the Middle East, the sequence has stirred a strong sense of disappointment and indignation, as the new administration's policy made people believe at first that it was putting an end to the long-standing American bias in favor of Israel, yet it has now not only restored that bias but has also had the effrontery to state that the Netanyahu government is offering “unprecedented” concessions.<sup>16</sup> This has appeared to everyone in the Arab World as insulting and opened a wound that will be very hard to heal.

In this context, the conclusion currently prevailing among analysts in the United States is that a

<sup>9</sup> In a speech delivered on June 14, 2009 at the Bar Ilan University: see “Netanyahu's Speech on the Peace Process,” *bitterlemons.org*, June 15, 2009, Edition 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Remarks by the President to the United Nations General Assembly*, United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 23, 2009, [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

<sup>11</sup> Michael D. Shear and Glenn Kessler, “Obama Presses Mideast Leaders to Broaden Talks,” *The Washington Post*, September 23, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Landler, “Mideast Gain Is Modest, Clinton Tells President,” *The New York Times*, October 23, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Landler and Alan Cowell, “Clinton Backs Peace Talks Before Israeli Settlement Freeze,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2009; Glenn Kessler, “Administration Missteps hamper Mideast efforts,” *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> President Abbas first decided to support the U.S. request to put off the discussion of the Report, then was compelled to withdraw from this decision by the vehement reaction of the Palestinian public and Hamas' criticism; see Sharon Otterman and Neil MacFarquhar, “Palestinians, in Reversal. Press UN Gaza report,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Schneider, “Abbas rejects reelection bid,” *The Washington Post*, November 6, 2009; Abd-al Bari Atwan, “Le possibili opzioni di fronte a Mahmoud Abbas,” *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, November 7, 2009, translated from Arabic in *MedArabNews* [www.medarabnews.com](http://www.medarabnews.com), accessed on November 11, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Karen De Young and Howard Schneider, “Israel putting forth ‘unprecedented’ concessions, Clinton says,” *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2009.

solution to the conflict is not possible, at least not tomorrow or even the day after. The sense is rather to put the situation of non-violence that is in fact prevailing in the area since the end of operation “Cast Lead” on hold. Two versions of this “pause” can be reported here. Roger Cohen quotes Shlomo Avinery as saying on Cyprus: “A nonviolent status quo is far from satisfactory but it’s not bad. Cyprus is not bad.” Consequently, what Cohen suggests is to stop talking of peace and make the ongoing truce last by setting in motion elements of “détente.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Nathan Brown points out that “[t]he Israeli-Palestinian situation is bleak right now but there is little fighting. In the past, we have used such lulls to let our attention wander elsewhere, spin our wheels in open-ended diplomatic processes, or decide that we could wait until the parties get serious. This time should be different: we cannot end the conflict now but we can take a longer-range view of how to maintain the current calm without entrenching its injustices or making a future round of fighting inevitable.”<sup>18</sup> Brown’s proposals refer to such actions as consolidating the current cease-fire by exchanging prisoners, lifting sanctions on Gaza and allowing its economy to recover, providing international police forces to limit arms smuggling in Gaza, maintaining and possibly enlarging freedom of circulation in the West Bank, expanding economic and humanitarian aid, and so forth.<sup>19</sup>

In truth, these proposals, as minimalist as they are, may prove optimistic. In actual fact, the truce has prevailed in 2009 mainly because of the

<sup>17</sup> Roger Cohen, “A Mideast Truce,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Nathan Brown, *After Abu Mazin? Letting the Scales Fall From Our Eyes*, Web Commentaries, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 10, 2009, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/>.

<sup>19</sup> See Brown’s article, *Ibidem*, and his previous essay, *Palestine and Israel: Time for Plan B*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief 78, February 2009.

expectations raised by the new American President. As these expectations have been disappointed, violence may emerge directly from the local context and/or spurred and supported by outside governments or other stakeholders. In a region of interrelated conflicts and interests—as Ghassan Khatib aptly notes—“no vacuum is possible... when there is no move toward peace, it only provides room for war and violence.”<sup>20</sup>

This is not to say, however, that the truce pointed out by Nathan Brown and Roger Cohen is unfeasible, but simply that it requires diplomatic skill and political resolve to be achieved. For sure, it would require something more than the approach apparently based on incrementalism and civil society initiatives that Secretary of State Clinton hinted at in her Middle Eastern tour, described as “baby steps.”<sup>21</sup> The truce could be construed as a two-track policy, whereby an open diplomacy would limit U.S. and Western action to an array of humanitarian, technical, and assistance actions, whereas a confidential diplomacy would aim at re-establishing the conditions for relaunching a political dialogue in the longer term. In the framework of this confidential diplomacy, the Obama administration, while abstaining from direct political action, should engage allies and the international community and let them pursue political objectives that it cannot pursue. This regards, for example, Arab efforts to reconcile Palestinian factions. So far U.S. policy, while aware of the Egyptian mediation, has failed to coordinate with it: in this way, the basic “West Bank first” American approach has frequently hindered Egypt’s chances of success in making the Palestinians come

<sup>20</sup> Ghassan Khatib, “Obama’s Option: Recognize Palestinian statehood now,” *Bitterlemons-international.org.*, November 16, 2009, Edition 42.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Karen De Young and Howard Schneider, “U.S. hope dims for high-level Israeli-Palestinian talks over state,” *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2009.

to an understanding. If the United States were really to abstain from direct political action and leave Egypt and the Arabs more initiative in dealing with Hamas and Palestinian national unity, the chances of an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue resuming might be greater.

In this same perspective, the understanding the American administration has reached with the Russian Federation to organize an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow in the near future<sup>22</sup> could also help prepare a dialogue in the region, particularly on the Israeli side, without directly engaging the United States for the time being. Washington, while quietly preparing the conference with the Russians, could keep a low political profile in the region and allow the truce to continue.

In sum, the option just pointed out requires effective low-politics actions in the Levant to hold the truce, on the one hand, and intensive international cooperation to prepare the come-back of high-politics in a context of more appropriate and credible conditions of regional dialogue on the other. However, for this to work, it has to be pursued “bona fide.” If, in contrast, it is pursued with the more or less hidden or conscious intention of reinforcing the moderates against Hamas by acting in the wings, it would simply turn into another attempt at promoting a “West Bank first” approach of sorts.

There are reasons to believe that the Obama administration may be tempted by this option. At the end of the day, the Obama administration’s policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict saw the light of day as part of the “West Bank first” family. In fact, Hamas and the role and future of Palestinian democratic institutions have no

<sup>22</sup> Zvi Magen, *A Possible US-Russian Arrangement and Implications for the Middle East*, INSS Insight No. 139, November 12, 2009.

place in this approach. The controversial aspects of General Dayton’s mission, while not receiving any comments from the new administration, have not been amended or redirected either.<sup>23</sup> Actually, in his Cairo speech, President Obama seemed to allude to including Hamas in some form in the process. However, in his policy-making this point has, in fact, been forgotten. President Obama’s approach, while not being against Hamas, like earlier “West Bank first” models, simply neglects Hamas, apparently looking at it as an essentially inter-Arab issue to be settled independently of the two-state talks, beside or after a settlement between Jerusalem and the current Palestinian National Authority. More generally, Obama ignores the complexities of the conflict. He probably thought the Road Map process could be reset on track by ensuring the balance between security and settlements, as pointed out by Mitchell in his early 2001 mission after the Camp David failure, and thus tried to restart the Road Map in a boldly reshaped context of U.S.-Muslim relations, regardless of the developments that had unfolded in the meantime, in particular the Palestinian split and Hamas.<sup>24</sup>

The administration may now decide to shift from Abbas to Fayyad (with his program of state-building, independent of any political peace process).<sup>25</sup> This would mean a softer “West Bank

<sup>23</sup> General Dayton’s program has notably improved Ramallah security forces’ capability to deliver security to Israel in the Road Map context; however, it has also become an instrument of harsh repression against Hamas in the hands of the Palestinian National Authority. See Mark Perry, “The Obama Approach—Slouching toward Ramallah,” *Bitterlemons-international.org*, August 13, 2009, Edition 31.

<sup>24</sup> As Cohen says—*op. cit.*—, the error was “Obama’s assumption that he could resume where Clinton had left off in 2000.”

<sup>25</sup> See the editorial article in *The Washington Post*, “Middle East impasse,” November 5, 2009 (concluding that the administration “would do well to refocus its efforts on supporting Mr. Fayyad”) and Abd-al Bari Atwan, *op. cit.*; see also Salam Fayyad, “Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State,” Program of the Thirteenth Government, August 2009.

first” option than just abstaining from political action. Furthermore, Prime Minister Fayyad’s programme of economic development risks dovetailing with Prime Minister Netanyahu’s “economic peace” concept. Needless to say, this approach would not only prove futile but could also jeopardize any policy aimed at holding the truce and could prevent the present confrontational environment from cooling down. In the end, it would undermine hopes of resuming a process that could lead to a solution of the conflict one day.

Another possible option regards the recognition of Palestinian statehood by the international community. It is not new and is not directly an option of the United States. It is a Palestinian option that may eventually be an option for Washington. This has been repropounded in very clear terms by Ghassan Khatib in the article quoted above. This option questions the assumption that an agreement between the two parties of the conflict is possible (because the Palestinians are so much weaker than Israel) and only needs to be facilitated from the outside.<sup>26</sup> An agreement would stem from the international community’s action: “... one way out of the current impasse is by encouraging the Palestinian side to declare a state on the 1967 borders and on the basis of international legality and relevant Security Council resolutions, while ensuring international recognition for this state in the UN and encouraging the different members of

<sup>26</sup> Whether a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be negotiated by the parties with international support or imposed by the international community is a long debated issue. Stephen Krasner—“Israel-Palestine: three paths,” *Middle East Strategy at Harvard*, August 10, 2009, <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2009/08/israel-palestine-three-paths/>, accessed August 12, 2009—hints at a soft imposition when he suggests organizing separate talks with a third party that would decide (as an arbiter) at the end of the process. Imposition is also the result of a recent analysis by Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, “The Two-State Solution Doesn’t Solve Anything,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2009, suggesting that the two-state formula cannot really be applied and that, since this means that no agreement can be expected from the parties, the international community should impose a solution.

the international community to begin to deal with Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of this new political and legal reality.”<sup>27</sup>

The objection to this suggestion is that Israel would hardly accept such a process and let the UN impose something on it. This could change, however, if the United States’ staunch support for Israel in the UN were to change, but this is not likely. Nevertheless, international engagement is congenial to Obama’s overall vision. This inclination could be reinforced, if an effective international move aimed at this objective were to emerge and engage the American administration as well. It must be added that this option would appear more likely and win more support internationally if it rested on an inter-Palestinian political rapprochement.

A last option worth considering is related to Syria and the resumption of negotiations between it and Israel under U.S. mediation. The argument for an understanding between the two countries whereby the Golan Heights would be returned to Damascus is that Syria’s alliance with Iran and the Hizbollah, as well as its support for Hamas, would be broadly weakened.<sup>28</sup> Yet only very recently, Patrick Seale,<sup>29</sup> an eminent expert on Syria, pointed out that no peace treaty will change Syria’s alliance with Iran and Hizbollah or convince Damascus to weaken its support for the Palestinians. Nevertheless, while this is certainly true in principle, there can be no

<sup>27</sup> From another perspective, the need for statehood links up with its reputed fitness to deal with Israel better than “resistance” groupings: see Abdel Monem Said Aly, “This approach risks aggravating the Middle East’s daunting complexity,” *Europe’s World*, accessed on August 7, 2009, [www.europesworld.org](http://www.europesworld.org) (an article criticizing EU emphasis on national reunification and democracy-building).

<sup>28</sup> Yossi Alpher, *Peace with Syria? An Israeli Perspective*, MEI Commentaries, April 21, 2009, [www.mei.edu](http://www.mei.edu), accessed April 28, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Seale, “Rewards of Syrian Diplomacy,” *Agence Global*, accessed in *MedArabNews*, [www.medarabnews.com](http://www.medarabnews.com), July 13, 2009; see also Muriel Asseburg and Volker Perthes, *op. cit.*

doubt that a peace treaty between Israel and Syria would change the regional balance substantially, even if Syria did retain its alliances.<sup>30</sup>

Syria's impact on the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would stem from Damascus' influence on inter-Palestinian relations, more broadly speaking, inter-Arab relations. So far, Syria has used its influence on Palestinian factions to break negotiations in Cairo, while waiting for its inter-Arab role to be restored (after the rifts that opened with Egypt and Saudi Arabia after the assassination of President Hariri in Lebanon in 2005 and the Israel-Hizbollah war in 2006).<sup>31</sup> The recent Saudi-Syrian rapprochement, with King Abdullah visiting Damascus in October 2009, attests to such a restoration.<sup>32</sup> It can be added that Syrian credit is also increasing because of improvements in its relations with the West, in particular the United States (diplomatic relations picked up after being suspended in 2005) and the EU (resumption of the negotiations for the EU-Syria Association Agreement). So Syria, reassured of its inter-Arab and international credit, is expected to end its opposition to inter-Palestinian reconciliation in Cairo. If this is the case, it would suggest that an Israeli-Syrian peace treaty may not be needed for Syria to exert a positive influence on inter-Palestinian relations. In this sense, this option might be already under way.

Lastly, it must be emphasized that, for a Syrian option to make sense for the United States with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Washington

has to become more interested in Palestinian reconciliation, i.e., it must substantially abandon any "West Bank first" approach. While this shift is not impossible—and may already be in the making—it needs to materialize.

Fundamentally, the United States has few alternatives today to consolidating the de facto existing lull by means of policies that alleviate suffering and prevent new violence from erupting. The options taken into consideration are not mutually exclusive, though. In fact, consolidating the lull does not prevent the American diplomacy from reflecting on the complexities of the conflict it has neglected so far and encouraging allies and international diplomacy to establish the conditions for resuming a political process. One thing the Obama administration has to do in any case in the perspective of resuming the Middle East process is to rethink its relationship with Israel. Demanding that Israel stop its settlements and then withdrawing that demand is neither workable nor sensible and is detrimental to U.S. authority. The President must be prepared to react by countering the Israeli government's opposition, as well as engaging the Israeli public as he did in Cairo with the Muslim-Arab public.<sup>33</sup> In other words, to really set up a new approach to the Middle East, he must have a new and coherent approach to Israel as well.

*The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the transatlantic perspective*—Both Europe and Turkey see the Palestinian issue and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as politically relevant factors in their foreign and security policy. Both European and Turkish public opinions are strongly affected and mobilized by

<sup>30</sup> See Edward Djerejian, "Damascus and the road to Mideast peace," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> See Zvi Bar'el, "Egyptian mediation between Fateh and Hamas: Mediator as partner," *Bitterlemons-international.org*, November 12, 2009, Edition 41.

<sup>32</sup> "Saudi Arabia, Syria call for a unity government in Lebanon," *Arab News*, October 9, 2009, in *Gulf in the Media*, Gulf Research Center, <http://corp.gulfinthemedial.com/gulf-media>, accessed on October 9, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Obama's lack of engagement with respect to Israeli public has been in fact criticized in Israel; see Aluf Benn, "What Obama needs to do for Mideast peace," *Haaretz*, September 25, 2009, accessed on the same day; Yossi Alpher, "Here we go again," in *If the peace process is renewed*, *Bitterlemons-international.org*, September 14, 2009, Edition 36; Alon Ben-Meir, "Winning Back Israel," [www.alonben-meir.com](http://www.alonben-meir.com), August 21, 2009.

these factors. The EU's official doctrine explicitly mentions the conflict and the need to solve it as an issue specifically relevant for European security.

There are differences worth considering, though. The EU and Europe have long been committed to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whereas Turkey shifted from little interest in the Middle East to growing involvement in Middle Eastern politics only after the end of the Cold War and subsequently, and more decisively, with the advent in government of a party with an Islamic background.<sup>34</sup> So, ultimately, Turkey's position on the Middle East has grown closer to Europe's. However, European governments are bent on supporting American policies toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more staunchly than is Turkey today. Furthermore, while in Europe there is, more often than not, divergence between governments and public opinion, in Turkey the present government and the public opinion are largely in tune. The European public opinion would like more explicit support for Palestinians and less subordination to American policy. Lastly, while the attitude of European governments on the Israeli-Palestinian issue continues to be based on acquiescence in whatever comes from the United States, Turkey's approach is growing more independent and, to some extent, even unpredictable.

Emerging differences are clearly reflected in Europe's and Turkey's respective behaviors after the developments in Gaza at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009. In the aftermath of Operation "Cast Lead" and above all after the election of the

<sup>34</sup> Meliha Benli Altunişik, "Redefinition of Turkish Security Policies in the Middle East After the Cold War," in Ali I. Karaosmanoğlu, Seyfi Taşhan (eds.), *The Europeanization of Turkey's Security Policy: Prospects and Pitfalls*, Foreign Policy Institute & Bilkent University (date n.a.); see also the articles on "Turkey's rising Soft Power" in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2008, in particular Meliha Benli Altunişik, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East," pp. 41-54.

new Israeli government, the EU decided to "freeze" temporarily the upgrading of its bilateral relations with Israel, which were being negotiated bilaterally in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).<sup>35</sup> This postponement was confirmed in June 2009. While this has not in practice entailed a downgrading of bilateral economic relations, but simply meant a delay in the upgrading of political dialogue between the parties, this postponement constitutes an unprecedented step in EU-Israel relations. At the same time, the unease that emerged in many European countries was channelled into the June 2009 Conclusions adopted by the EU Council, which for the first time do not mention the Quartet conditions that Hamas is supposed to meet. The Conclusions "call on all Palestinians to find common ground, based on non-violence, in order to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza and the organisation of elections."<sup>36</sup>

Reactions in Turkey were similar, yet definitely of more political significance. The rude treatment that Prime Minister Erdoğan inflicted on President Shimon Peres at the January 2009 World Forum in Davos because of events in Gaza finds no match from any European government. By the same token, Turkey's decision to exclude Israel from the October 2009 NATO air exercises, organized over the Aegean Sea by Turkey, is of a political intensity that makes the EU measures pale in comparison.

Turkey has long been frustrated by the weak support it obtains from Western allies when its Middle Eastern national and security interests are in question, or indeed by the opposition that emerges between Western and Turkish interests, as

<sup>35</sup> See Clara Marina O'Donnell, *The EU's approach to Israel and the Palestinians: A move in the right direction*, FRIDE, Policy Brief, No. 13, June 2009; Claire Spencer, *New Challenges for EU-Israel Relations after the Gaza War*, Israeli-European Policy Network, April 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Council Conclusions on Middle East Peace Process, 2951st External Relations Council Meeting, Luxembourg, June 15, 2009.

in the case of Northern Iraq.<sup>37</sup> After the Cold War, Turkey must have felt abandoned and compelled to go it alone on many occasions. At the same time, this perception—or misperception—of marginalization in the Atlantic framework has been coupled with an objectively growing instability in the region, especially in its neighborhood, that Ankara can certainly not neglect or overlook. While Turkey's interest in and involvement with the Middle East may have emerged because of, or been strengthened by, the government's Islamic ideology—and its resonance with the majority of the Turkish public opinion—emerging Turkish concerns toward its Middle Eastern neighbors are fundamentally rooted in the country's national security interests and the objective threats to its security.<sup>38</sup> The same cannot be said for either individual European countries or the EU, where national interests are more attenuated, borders with the Middle East are far away, and only a few nations actually think about reaching out politically and strategically to the Middle East.

Against this background, both Europe and Turkey, despite differences, strongly and even enthusiastically welcomed the strategic “parallel” approach toward the Middle East articulated by President Obama in the first months of his mandate, the emerging approach to American-

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<sup>37</sup> See F. Stephen Larrabee, *Turkey as a U.S. security partner*, Rand, Project AIR Force, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> As seen through a neo-Ottoman rather than a Kemalist prism. The doctrine of the present Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, sees Turkey's as a “central country.” His geopolitical vision may go well beyond neo-Ottomanism. In fact, it suggests a country willing to go it alone, which would mean more than a country pursuing national interests; see Heinz Kramer, *Turkey's Accession process to the EU. The Agenda behind the Agenda*, SWP Comments, No. 25, October 2009. For neo-Ottomanism, see Ömer Taspınar, *Turkey's Middle East Policy: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism*, Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Middle East Center, No. 10, September 2008. For Mr. Davutoğlu's doctrine see the section on neo-Ottomanism in Nora Fisher Onar, *Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy*, EDAM Discussion Paper Series 2009/03, October 2009.

Muslim relations spelled out in the Cairo speech, and the new policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict announced by the intransigent request to Israel to stop settlements completely. These new approaches immediately attracted the interest of all allies (including non-transatlantic allies) and were regarded by them all as an unprecedented opportunity to revamp transatlantic solidarity and relations given the strongly converging objectives and interests. What is going to happen after the quick and somehow disconcerting defeat of U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

The most significant casualty of the evolution of the new administration's approach to the Middle East may emerge on strategic ground. If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ceases to play the pivotal role it was expected to play in the administration's Middle Eastern strategy, based on “parallel tracks,” and if this strategy focuses back on Iran, Afghanistan and—now—Pakistan, this would present the transatlantic allies with problems similar to those they faced during President George W. Bush's mandate. Turkey's national interests may collide with U.S. policies, especially as far as Iran is concerned.<sup>39</sup> Europe may again split and hesitate to act or renounce action altogether, especially in Afghanistan. In sum, while a U.S. Middle Eastern strategy converging with European and Turkish interests in the Levant may mobilize allies with regard to other Middle Eastern issues or convince them, if necessary, to put off or tone down national interests—as might be the case more in particular with Turkey—a strategy that would once again sideline the Levant could create inter-allied tensions, if not conflict, or obtain only acquiescence. This would be the case especially

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<sup>39</sup> During his October 27-29, 2009 visit to Teheran, PM Erdoğan made statements on the nuclear issue patently at odds with NATO allies (and Arab moderates). Subsequently, Erdoğan's visit to Washington, DC on December 7-8, 2009, while confirming a solid Turkish-American strategic partnership, did not dissipate the emerging differences.

with the Europeans, who would limit themselves to supporting Obama as passively and inconclusively as they did former U.S. President George W. Bush, the Quartet, the Road Map, and the Annapolis Process.

Whichever the option the administration picks from among those discussed in the previous section, the transatlantic allies' response will be undercut by the strategic divergence or weak convergence just discussed. But let's take a more detailed look at the U.S. options, as illustrated above, and the allies' responses.

As pointed out, the United States may try to encourage negotiations between Syria and Israel and act as a mediator with a view, among other things, to re-establishing the conditions for Palestinian unity and, hence, a new Israeli-Palestinian political process. As said, the United States has opened up to Syria. It has resumed diplomatic relations, even though economic sanctions are still in place. For the time being, however, the resumed U.S.-Syrian diplomatic dialogue is focusing on Iraq and Lebanon rather than on connections with Jerusalem, Tehran, and the Palestinian parties. It must also be said that this dialogue is not proving very satisfactory from the United States' point of view.<sup>40</sup> In any case, even if dialogue were to become more productive, undertaking Syrian-Israeli negotiations would depend less on Syria and the United States than on Israel. The latter was willing to talk during Prime Minister Olmert's tenure in the framework of a rather successful Turkish mediation, but Operation "Cast Lead" broke off that mediation and wiped out Prime Minister Erdoğan's willingness to mediate again. The new Netanyahu government does not seem intended to give anything back to Syria and is showing no interest at all in negotiating

with it. As a result, implementing this option calls for a decisive shift in the administration's views and strong action to convince Israel to enter into talks. U.S.-Israel relations are rather poor at present; consequently, this does not look like a very likely option. However, if picked up, it would definitely be welcome and strongly supported by Europe as well as Turkey. Both have made important openings to Damascus in recent times and would be only too glad to support an option that strongly converges with their interests, including the strategic interest in a "parallel" rather than sequential grand Middle East strategy.

The other option would be recourse to the international community and the UN to impose a solution to the conflict. This demarche, as pointed out, is being pushed forward by moderate Palestinian quarters. It would certainly be in tune with feelings in the European and, most probably, Turkish public opinion. The Turkish government may support it. It is more difficult to say what the EU would do. In a speech given in July 2009, Javier Solana, in his capacity as EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), advocated a "real mediation"—rather than a "facilitation"—between the two parties to the conflict. The first step would be to establish borders in the framework of the parameters already set out at Camp David, Taba, and Geneva. Were the mediation to fail, the question would be taken up by the UN Security Council, which would establish the two states within their respective borders and set out all related parameters. It would proclaim the new Palestinian state and draw up an agenda for implementation of its decisions.<sup>41</sup> While this agenda is certainly shared by European Union (EU) citizens, it is less so in governmental circles. In fact, the Palestinian National Authority's request

<sup>40</sup> Andrew J. Tabler, "Syria Clenches Its Fist," *Foreign Policy*, www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/, August 28, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Javier Solana, *Europe's global role—what next steps?*, Ditchley Foundation Annual Lecture, Oxfordshire, Council of the European Union, S 181/09, July 11, 2009.



to the EU for eventual support in the UN for a resolution asking for the immediate establishment of an independent Palestinian state has been politely rejected by the Swedish Presidency, which described it as “premature.”<sup>42</sup> So, this option might be supported by Turkey but would probably not be by Europe. Europeans would support it, however, if it were supported and initiated by the United States since, at the end of the day, the fundamental reason behind Europe’s lack of support remains the desire not to hinder the United States, particularly at this present difficult juncture, and to wait for its initiative, if any.

Most European governments, as disappointed as they may be by the new administration’s failure with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, have not been surprised by it and now share the sense of fatigue that is emerging in the United States. However, Europe is left with two concerns: the downgrading of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s priority in the framework of the U.S. (and western) regional strategy and the negative impact of that lingering conflict on the EU’s Mediterranean policy. These two concerns are linked in that the smouldering Israeli-Palestinian conflict prevents the EU’s Mediterranean policy from working, and since the Mediterranean policy is intended to provide security in a broad sense to the European Union, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as long as it remains unsolved, acts as a significant factor of risk to EU security in its overall neighbourhood, thus the urgent need to solve it.

It must be added that, after Operation “Cast Lead,” European civil society, political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, and, less vociferously, the EU Commission are advocating more strongly than ever that Europe take a more proactive initiative and put pressure on governments. Recently, these feelings and ideas

<sup>42</sup> *Bulletin Quotidien Europe*, n. 10021, November 18, 2009, p. 4.

have been cogently taken up in a paper from the EU’s official Institute for Security Studies (ISS), written by the head of the Middle East research division of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs—Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP): “Europeans should ... stop claiming a role as a ‘player’, and rather assume that role and vigorously engage in politics. Certainly, Europeans are in no position to substitute for the United States as the main power broker in the Middle East, and in providing security guarantees, but they can and should assume a supportive role to move the [Israeli-Palestinian] talks forward, to influence the approaches taken, and to offer concrete contributions to a final settlement that can help bridge the gaps between the parties in the region.”<sup>43</sup>

European governments and civil society would certainly support the truce option. This would mean concrete and effective support, since the policies needed to consolidate a truce significantly match the EU’s capabilities, from economic assistance through to peace-keeping forces. However, European governments would remain under pressure from ideas and feelings circulating in the European Union, particularly in civil society, and thus would prefer the kind of double-track policy mentioned in the previous section, that is consolidating the truce along with measures

<sup>43</sup> The quotation is from Muriel Asseburg, “Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and protracted conflicts in the region: the Israeli-Palestinian predicament,” in M. Asseburg and P. Salem, *No Euro-Mediterranean without peace*, The EU Institute for Security Studies-EUISS and The European Institute of the Mediterranean-IEMed, Paris, September 2009, pp. 13-27. A few months before the paper just mentioned came out, the same authors published a joint SWP-Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) more extended analysis: *European Conflict Management in the Middle East. toward a More Effective Approach*, February 2009. See also Muriel Asseburg and Volker Perthes, “Is the EU Up to the Requirements of Peace in the Middle East?,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2009, pp. 19-25. Along with Nathan Brown’s papers quoted above, these papers attest to the fact that at the level of think tanks there is a transversal Euro-American thinking, which is however lacking or weaker at governmental level.

intended to re-establish the conditions for resuming a political process in the longer term. Europe will also exert pressure on the United States for decisive shifts in political perspectives so as to give more consideration to Palestinian unity and democracy-building. If the United States decided to ask allies to work on perspectives that are still unripe in Washington—such as contacts with Hamas—an understanding with the EU in this sense could surely be found and be productive.

As for Turkey, Ankara already recognized Hamas in 2006. In fact, Ankara would be more effective than Europe in opening up contacts, while the United States would temporarily step aside on condition that the Turkish governments regains its credibility as mediator.<sup>44</sup> In general, Turkey may well agree to consolidating the truce with a view to preparing the ground for a resumption of the political process in the longer term. However, a pause could also collide with Turkey's urgency to come to terms with a number of national security interests. Europe's need for security in the Mediterranean is less urgent than Turkey's problems in the Middle East. Also, its governments are more conservative toward transatlantic relations than Prime Minister Erdoğan's latest initiatives in the Middle East lead one to believe. Consequently, a transatlantic understanding with Turkey may be more difficult than with Europe.

In conclusion, whichever option the United States picks and whichever policies it decides upon to implement it, both Europe's and Turkey's strategic

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<sup>44</sup> PM Erdoğan's recent initiatives in the Middle East have attracted an interesting comment by President Bashar Assad, who recommended Turkey to keep good relations with Israel if it is to keep its mediating capabilities (see Tariq Alhomayed, "Al-Assad's Surprising Advice," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, November 10, 2009). In fact, after recent Turkey's statement and actions relating to Israel and Iran, and Sudan—see Seth Freedman, "Erdoğan blind faith in Muslims," *Guardian.co.uk*, November 11, 2009) the country's mediating credibility may be eroded. See Alon Ben-Meir's comment, "A Strategic Alliance Central To Regional Stability," [www.alonben-meir.com](http://www.alonben-meir.com), November 18, 2009.

convergence with respect to the whole region will be influenced by the priority the United States is willing and able to assign the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Low priority will generate loyal yet passive support from Europe for the U.S. overall engagement toward the Middle East. Yet, it might collide with Turkish national interests and increase emerging differences with Ankara throughout the region. In this sense, Obama's policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could affect the coherence—especially in the case of Turkey—and the quality—in the case of Europe—of transatlantic bonds.

On the other hand, whether and to what extent the Obama administration maintains the Israeli-Palestinian priority is something the allies will have to judge *cum grano salis*. At the end of the day, the administration was probably compelled by developments in Gaza to engage early with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, which may in turn have been a factor in its failure in the shorter run. Furthermore, 2009 brought a number of surprising developments in Iran and Pakistan that have objectively altered the balance the administration is facing. The same is true for the comeback of international terrorism on Christmas Day 2009. So, the pragmatism preached by Haass and Indyk is now a necessity the President cannot overlook. Nor should the transatlantic allies overlook this necessity and act on the basis of strategic misperceptions.

Essentially, in redesigning its Middle Eastern and Levant policies, the Obama administration can count on obtaining ample cooperation from its transatlantic allies, provided it is able to exercise the necessary leadership. In addition, it will have to involve allies—both Europe and Turkey—more than it has done so far. Basically, in this respect the new administration still has to establish its multilateralist reputation.

# 3 THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVE

## Structuring the Mediterranean

Structuring the Mediterranean with a view to enhancing its governance is a long-standing policy of the EU and its predecessors. In this context, the most significant initiative was the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), established in 1995 at a ministerial conference in Barcelona. The EMP was meant to establish a regular political dialogue between the EU and non-EU countries of the Mediterranean area, stimulate economic development by narrowing the North-South gap in the region, and develop dialogue and cooperation in cultural and social matters. This policy lasted for 13 years, yet its failure to live up to ambitions was already clear in the first years of the new century. In 2008, the EMP was replaced by a new format, the UfM, at a summit of heads of state and government held in Paris.

The EMP was a double-track policy: on the one hand, it involved bilateral Association Agreements with each partner and, on the other, multilateral participation and integration of partners in the EU Mediterranean policy framework. In other words, partners were treated like sovereign states in the Association Agreements, but sat as guests in the common Mediterranean house set up by the EU in its EMP institutional framework.

This format allowed for remarkable diplomatic socialization, but it never translated into forms of substantive political cooperation. The EMP's failure was blamed on its poor political legitimacy: its "unequal" format and the technocratic upper hand given to the European Commission in management. This is precisely why it was replaced by a fully intergovernmental Union. According to reformists, while the EMP did not have the ability to make political decisions, the UfM governments do.

In reality, what prevented the EMP from working was less its unequal nature, the Commission's

preponderant role, or any EU foreign policy weakness, and more than the failure of the Madrid and Oslo processes to deliver peace between Israel and the Arabs. The continued worsening of Arab-Israeli relations from 1996 onward prevented any political dialogue from developing in the EMP and made prospects for economic, cultural, and social cooperation in its framework much weaker than expected. In conclusion, the EU's attempt to structure the Mediterranean area by enhancing its governance was disappointing. Today, the quality and strength of relations in the various layers of Euro-Mediterranean activities is very uneven and, with regard to political relations in particular, definitely poor and inconclusive.

This is not to say that the goal of a working Euro-Mediterranean framework of governance should be dismissed. The question is how to reformulate the framework. The UfM is an attempt in this direction. Before assessing this new framework, though, a look has to be taken at the changes that have taken place in the Mediterranean context in the last ten years.

## Factors of change in the Mediterranean

While the unremitting tension between Israel and the Arab partners was the main immediate cause of the EMP's poor performance, new and powerful factors have also emerged in the last decade, altering relations between partner states in the Mediterranean. Let's consider three of these factors: the enlargement of the EU and its neighborhood policy; the emergence of more self-reliant Arab Mediterranean partners; and the shift in EU regional security policy from promoting reforms to eliminate the causes of spillovers to promoting a variety of policies aimed at acquiring direct control over such spillovers.

*EU enlargement and the ENP*—The 2004 EU enlargement and its offshoot, the European

Neighborhood Policy (ENP), substantially modified the EU's Mediterranean perspectives, as well as its policies and objectives. Both had two effects on EU-Mediterranean relations: (a) they decidedly de-emphasized the regional dimension of relations and, conversely, emphasized the bilateral dimension; (b) they upgraded the importance of EU eastern relations with respect to Mediterranean relations.

The entry into the EU of Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries, and later of Bulgaria and Romania, with a view to the future inclusion of all Southeastern European countries, confronted the EU with the problem of what to do with the countries on its new borders that were left out. The EU responded by considering Turkey a candidate for membership, on the one hand, and by working out a special regime for non-EU Eastern European countries, aimed at integrating them in "everything except institutions," on the other.<sup>45</sup> This regime was then extended to Mediterranean countries as well, in the framework of a "neighborhood" concept unifying both eastern and Mediterranean countries in a single arc adjoining the Union.

The introduction of this regime in the Mediterranean diluted the EMP's initial region-wide dimension and its objectives, strongly reinforcing the bilateral dimension. In other words, it weakened the cohesion of the region and forced governance into a hub-and-spokes kind of model centered on the EU.

The 2004 enlargement also proved politically problematic because of strong nationalist and Euro-skeptical trends in most of the new EU members, with security considerations outweighing their

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<sup>45</sup> With this expression, then-President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, pointed out that the EU was offering its neighbors integration in every respect except for the institutional-political dimension of the Union, as they could not become members.

interests in the Union and its political "acquis." These countries' interest in European solidarity is mainly dictated by their perception of the EU as a factor of security with respect to Russia. At the same time, while Russia did not perceive the Eastern European and Baltic countries' membership in the EU as a security threat, it does perceive the EU neighborhood policy as one, since in many respects, Moscow regards it as a source of interference in what it considers its "near abroad." The development of EU bilateral relations with Moldova and Ukraine, neighborhood relations with three Caucasian republics, especially Georgia, and EU activities in the Black Sea make Russia nervous because they compel it to compete with the EU in what is emerging, in fact, as a shared "neighborhood" or "near abroad."

Certainly, Russia is far more concerned about these countries' membership or candidature for entry into NATO and the security relationships they have tended to build bilaterally with the United States. However, because of the ENP, the EU has also become a security and political concern for nationalist Russia, which is emerging from the now distant ashes of the Soviet Union. So, for whatever reason, the enlargement and the eastern segment of the ENP have involved the EU in developments which tend to be more significant for its security than Mediterranean trends. These developments have, for the time being, contributed to slightly downgrading the Mediterranean in the EU's security priorities. In addition, this downgrading coalesces with the weakening cohesion of the EU-led Mediterranean framework of governance stemming from ENP bilateralism.

*More self-reliant Arab Mediterranean partners—* Just as there are trends shifting EU attention from the Mediterranean to the European East, so too are there symmetrical trends shifting Mediterranean Arabs' interests toward the greater Middle East and, more in general, toward global relations. These

trends attest to the Arab Mediterranean countries' greater self-reliance and independence from the EU than in the 1990s, when the Barcelona process was set in motion.

There are many reasons for this. First of all, it is an outcome of the conflicts that occurred during the administration of George W. Bush. The wars waged by that administration and its other political initiatives toward the region, such as the policy of democratization, expanded existing regional conflicts and compacted them into strongly interrelated region-wide alignments, as noted in section 2.1. This development, coupled with Europe's absolutely marginal attitude in favor or against President Bush's Middle Eastern policy, has drawn the Arab Mediterranean countries, more specifically those in the Levant, toward the core area of the greater Middle East, with the result that the Levant has become even more marginal in the Euro-Mediterranean area than it was before.<sup>46</sup> This has contributed to distancing Mediterranean Arabs from the European Union.

Second, during the Bush administration, the moderate Arab regimes, including those on the Mediterranean Sea, were compelled by the war on terrorism, the administration's anti-Muslim bias, and its policy of democratization to find a way to resist pressure and outlive the regional consequences of the administration's policies toward the greater Middle East. They managed American and other Western pressure for change very ably and adapted to it successfully. At the same time, they did not hesitate to reject interference when it became unacceptable. In other words, they succeeded in avoiding destabilization stemming not only from declared foes, such as religious extremists, but also from friends. In the end, they

<sup>46</sup> Also notable is that countries such as Morocco are searching for new geometries in their international relations, including Atlantic as well as Middle Eastern "vocations" (thank Ian lesser for this remark).

have emerged stronger and more independent with respect to Western allies than they were in the past.

Third, the difficulties in their relations with the United States and EU countries in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks convinced Gulf countries to divert part of their investment from the usual Western destinations to destinations in the developing world, especially Muslim countries, including—to a remarkable extent—Arab countries on the Mediterranean shores.<sup>47</sup>

Investment from the Gulf countries is but one factor in a wider trend of economic strengthening and development in the Arab Mediterranean countries. In the last decade, the gross domestic product (GDP) gap with the EU has only narrowed very marginally; nonetheless, the Arab Mediterranean economies have displayed a notable dynamism and significant rates of growth.<sup>48</sup> Other factors have proved equally important, though, such as the sound macroeconomic standings they have acquired thanks to assistance from the EU and international economic organizations, the economic cooperation and reforms implemented in the framework of the EMP, remittances from their migrants, and investment flows from sources other than the Gulf countries (the EU, as well as the United States, and the so-called new actors, China<sup>49</sup> and India).

<sup>47</sup> See Pierre Henry, "Foreign Direct Investments in the MEDA Region in 2007: Euro-Med Integration or Euro-Med-Gulf Triangle?," in IEMed & CIDOB, *Med.2008*, Barcelona, 2009, pp. 56-63. The MEDA countries' (nine Arab countries plus Israel, EU partners in the EMP) usually very modest share of world foreign direct investments (FDI) began to increase significantly in 2003 and reached slightly more than 4.5 percent in 2007. A growing part of this increase stems from the Gulf countries, whose share rose from 16 percent of total FDI in the MEDA in 2003 to 33 percent in 2007.

<sup>48</sup> See Bénédicte de Saint-Laurent, *op. cit.*; see also Franco Zallio, *Gli investimenti nel Mediterraneo dei paesi del Golfo*, ISPI Policy Briefs, No. 34, Milan, June 2006; Franco Zallio, (a cura di), *L'Europa e il Golfo: i vicini lontani*, Milan, Egea, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> François Lafargue, "China in North Africa," in IEMed & CIDOB, *Med.2008*, Barcelona, 2009, pp. 64-68.

These developments are a consequence of the fact that the Mediterranean economy is becoming global. The Arab Mediterranean countries have failed to develop significant horizontal relations among themselves. Yet, with few exceptions, each has undoubtedly gone global in the last years. On the other hand, this trend has been complemented by the global economy's incorporation of the Mediterranean. The sea has become a crucial segment in global transportation routes. In fact, the Mediterranean Sea is involved in all traffic coming from Eastern, Southeastern and Southwestern Asia, both as a destination and, above all, as a transit route to either European or Northern Atlantic destinations.<sup>50</sup>

Economic developments on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea suggest that the situation is very different today from the one prevailing in the 1990s when the Barcelona process was born, and will change even more in the future. New actors are competing with the EU in the area today. The Arab Mediterranean countries have new partners. In any case, their economic relations have begun to diversify *vis-à-vis* the EU. As a consequence, even in this respect, while trade and economic relations will continue to be important—in, for example, the energy sector—these countries are somehow drawing away from the kind of closer relationship they used to entertain with the EU.

*A shift in EU regional security policy*—The last factor of change in Mediterranean relations regards the shift in EU security perceptions following the September 11, 2001, attacks, the subsequent attacks in Europe, and the extraordinary increase in immigration that has taken place since the

<sup>50</sup> Margherita Paolini, Marco Caruso, "Il Mediterraneo nell'Oceano mondo," in *Il Mare Nostro è degli altri, Quaderni Speciali di Limes*, supplement to Limes, No. 3, 2009.

beginning of this century. Both terrorism and immigration have been securitized all over Europe.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, almost everywhere, immigration generates various kinds of anxiety (cultural, economic, identity) in receiving societies. As a result, both the EU and member countries—to various extents—are committed broadly to restricting legal immigration and strongly controlling illegal immigration.

Control is carried out by means of preventive policies and "forward" measures: in addition to readmission agreements with sending countries, the EU and its members provide partners with instruments and resources for controlling people emigrating from their own territory (e.g., by providing surveillance vessels) or for retaining them on their territories (e.g., by setting up detention camps) or preventing them from crossing their territories when coming from farther afield (i.e., traversing North African countries from sub-Saharan Africa). Outsourcing and externalization are dominating EU policies to control and avert immigration.

In this endeavor, bilateral cooperation in the framework of the ENP and the Association Agreements is very important: all plans for cooperation between the EU and partner countries (Action Plans), be they in Eastern Europe or the Mediterranean, include an important section dealing with reforms to improve the performance of the judiciary and the police, for the dual purpose of promoting democratic reform and increasing the country's ability to help the European Union and its members to control immigration and terrorism.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Collinson, *Security or Securitisation? Migration and the Pursuit of Freedom, Security and Justice in the Euro-Mediterranean Area*, EuroMeSCo Papers, No. 19, November 2007, [www.euromesco.net](http://www.euromesco.net); Francesca Galli, *The Legal and Political Implications of the Securitisation of Counter-Terrorism Measures across the Mediterranean*, EuroMeSCo Papers, No. 71, September 2008.

The EU Mediterranean policy has retained its early security driver, namely promoting political and economic reform in the Arab countries with a view to eliminating the causes of spillovers and thus upgrading EU security. However, there is no doubt that the need to control such spillovers and domestic security more directly—through preventive and forward measures which are turning the neighborhood into a kind of borderland<sup>52</sup>—tends to be at least as important as reform promotion today. This is changing the EU's role in the region and the perception of that role by the EU's Southern Mediterranean partners. The EU's search for security through control creates problems for its neighbors, but it also creates opportunities for cooperation in pursuit of common interests such as the fight against terrorism. In fact, there is more cooperation today than there was at the time of the highly idealistic EMP. But, like previous trends mentioned, this also contributes to a more independent, if not distant, relationship between the EU and its Mediterranean partners.

### **Toward new Euro-Mediterranean relations**

The changes that have unfolded in the Euro-Mediterranean framework during the last decade suggest a weakening of the kind of framework of governance initiated by the European Union in the 1990s. The European Union has chosen more selfish objectives in its economic and security relations, while downgrading the search for a regional, collective political dialogue. The Arab countries have become more independent from the European Union and more attracted by the greater Middle East, while all partners, including Israel, are content to develop mostly bilateral

relations with the EU and to be able to opt for the depth and quality of relations that they desire.

The UfM, launched in July 2008, was intended to restore a Euro-Mediterranean framework of governance in that it is based on a rationale that takes these changes into account. The UfM is definitely more pragmatic than the EMP. It is grounded in two elements: a multilateral political dialogue between governments, and a Secretariat tasked with planning and implementing a number of large regional projects of a social, cultural and, above all, economic nature.<sup>53</sup> While the intergovernmental political dialogue is not expected to bring about any relevant political cooperation in the short run, that cooperation is expected to emerge from successful implementation of the shared projects the UfM is to set in motion.

In this new framework, the European Union no longer has a primary role; although it is still part of the process, it does not lead. In fact, the European Union has the important task of developing bilateral relations in the ENP framework. It will keep on seeking, encouraging, and promoting political, social, and economic reforms (more in a human development/good governance than a strictly democratization perspective). The European Union will ensure continuity for previous Euro-Mediterranean endeavors: it will keep promoting a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area (which was supposed to emerge in 2010, but will in fact need more time to be implemented) and, more generally, the integration of the individual economies in the European economic space, again in the framework of the ENP.

Implementation of the big projects is expected to

<sup>52</sup> Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Borderlands: The Middle East and North Africa as the EU's Southern Buffer Zone," in Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaidis (eds.), *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflicts and Memory in a Transnational World*, London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming.

<sup>53</sup> Roberto Aliboni, Fouad M. Ammor, *Under the Shadow of "Barcelona": From the EMP to the Union for the Mediterranean*, EuroMeSCo Papers, No. 77, Lisbon, January 2009; Rosa Balfour, "The Transformation of the Union for the Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 99-105.

restore some cohesion in the region and strengthen Europe's role, which is currently weakened by Arab disaffection and increased competition from "new actors." The large projects the UfM is intended to promote and implement should strengthen the energy relationship between the two shores of the sea (among others, one project is devoted to developing solar energy),<sup>54</sup> as well as to promote economic and financial cooperation with new actors, in particular the Gulf Arab countries, as part of the region's globalization (as with the plan to implement an integrated system of maritime and land highways).

After the disappointing experience of the EMP, the UfM is expected to establish a new working Euro-Mediterranean framework of governance. Less politically ambitious than the EMP and with a focus on regional economic integration, it is meant to build solidity and cohesion in the region *vis-à-vis* adjoining regions and the global context. Will it work?

### **The Euro-Mediterranean framework in a transatlantic perspective**

Setting the Euro-Mediterranean framework in a transatlantic perspective, three aspects deserve consideration. The first regards the importance of an effective American and transatlantic policy to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a view to allowing EU Mediterranean policies to work and preventing them from becoming hostage to the conflict. On the one hand, even if the EU engages in policies *vis-à-vis* the conflict, it cannot solve it alone; it needs U.S. leadership and a transatlantic framework. The EU can and has to be more active in this framework, but it cannot do so without U.S. leadership. On the other hand, while the EU has partly outflanked the impediment caused by the

conflict by largely shifting to a bilateral hub-and-spokes policy (the ENP), the regional dimension of its Mediterranean policy (the UfM) still remains hostage to the conflict. As will be seen, the UfM political dimension has been downsized, but recent developments still attest to lingering and strong interference from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All in all, nothing can really take the place of a solution to the conflict and, in this sense, nothing can really take the place of a working transatlantic policy toward the conflict either.

*Making the UfM work effectively*—The second aspect is the opportunity for transatlantic cooperation that could be provided by a working UfM: a working UfM would be a way both to minimize the impact of the conflict on the EU's regional Mediterranean policy and to invite cooperation from outside the region on big economic projects.

Honestly, one year after its launch, one can doubt that it is working. In fact, the UfM seems unable to start its activities. In reaction to Israeli military operations in Gaza at the end of 2008, the Arab side suspended the launch of UfM activities. In June 2009, while not lifting the suspension, in a gesture of goodwill to their long-standing European partners, the Arabs allowed contacts to be made with the goal of working out the Secretariat's legal status and, consequently, appointing the Secretary with a view to setting the engine in motion. However, at the beginning of November 2009, the ministerial conference scheduled for November 24-25 was postponed. It will be replaced by a meeting of High Officials expected to formalize appointments and allow activities to jump-start.

So, the UfM has definitely become hostage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, just as the

<sup>54</sup> Isabelle Werenfels, Kirsten Westphal, *Solar Power from the Desert: A Sensible and Feasible Energy Solution?*, SWP Comments, No. 12, August 2009.



EMP was.<sup>55</sup> While its suspension was triggered by Operation “Cast Lead,” the ministerial conference has now been postponed because Arab ministers do not want to meet their Israeli colleague, Mr. Avigdor Lieberman. The American administration’s shift on the settlement freeze surely has had some weight in this.

One thing that is certainly going wrong in the UfM is that political factors are being introduced into the Secretariat, whereas the Secretariat was initially conceived as a professional and technical unit tasked with initiating and implementing large regional and sub-regional projects in the Mediterranean. In the talks held in the framework of the November 2008 Marseille conference, the ministers—after deciding that the secretary must come from an Arab UfM country (the candidate is a Jordanian)—yielded to Arab pressure to include the Arab League in the UfM and failed to limit and clarify its role; then, in order to placate Israel’s protests, proposed that an Israeli occupy the post of deputy secretary and Israel accepted (both the post and the Arab League); finally, they consented to establish five deputies to the secretary—Greece, Italy, Malta, and the Palestinian Authority, in addition to Israel—and provided Turkey with ambiguous assurances of a sixth Turkish deputy (which Turkey subsequently decided to accept and now demands). These features—an Arab secretary, an Israeli and a Palestinian deputies, the absence of any Northern European deputy, and a dubious role for the Arab League throughout the Union—will not be beneficial to the Secretariat’s effectiveness if and when it is enforced. But in any case, it will be hard for the Secretariat to be established because it assumes Arab-Israeli political cooperation, which the realities on the ground do not permit.

<sup>55</sup> Roderick Pace, “The Mediterranean Union risks being still-born,” *Europe’s World*, Summer 2009, pp. 148-151.

In contrast, if the UfM is to work, political factors have to be carefully kept on the doorstep. The Secretariat should work with a high degree of independence, based on professional and technical qualifications, somewhat like the EU Commission. In this sense, the Europeans should quickly ask for a revision of the Secretariat’s structure.<sup>56</sup> The countries involved as deputies should show restraint and accept to withdraw with a view to ensuring a professional Secretariat, apart from the political process, with some chances of actually being set into motion.

A working UfM Secretariat would introduce a factor of coherence and integration in the Mediterranean. By promoting big regional projects and functional cooperation in the Mediterranean in sectors such as energy, transport, etc., a working Secretariat would promote transatlantic interests as well. In fact, functional cooperation is important for the United States as it would strengthen the Mediterranean area itself as well as with respect to the Middle East.<sup>57</sup>

*EU and Turkey*—A third aspect is related to EU-Turkey relations. Revamping these relations may help the United States and Europe to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, more in general, conflicts in the Middle East, on the assumption, though, that including Turkey more firmly in the EU would shape Turkish foreign policy and make it more functional to transatlantic requirements. Let’s look briefly, first, at the current state of EU-Turkey relations and their prospects and then reflect on the functional link between Turkey’s possible link to the EU and its foreign policy.

<sup>56</sup> Another aspect of the Secretariat that needs to be changed is that its officials will be seconded by national administrations and will, thus, remain loyal to them.

<sup>57</sup> See Ian O. Lesser, *The U.S., the Mediterranean and Transatlantic Strategies*, Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 141/2009, October 1, 2009, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal>

How are Turkish-EU relations actually doing? Sadly, the answer is not very well.

During the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s first mandate, EU-Turkey relations entered a virtuous circle.<sup>58</sup> The AKP enforced political reforms, as demanded by the European Union, and deepened economic integration with it and globally. Reforms in an EU membership perspective made the AKP win support from the liberal and secularist sectors of Turkish society and strengthened the government. The latter was also encouraged to change Turkey's long-standing opposition to a settlement in Cyprus. In fact, in 2004, Ankara decided to fully support the Annan Plan for the island's reunification. All this brought the AKP far more votes than Islamist votes alone and resulted in the sweeping victory in the 2007 elections.

Yet, as of 2004-2005, the picture began to reverse because of the new French President's position (coupled with that of German Chancellor Merkel), which strongly opposes Turkish membership in the EU as a matter of principle, and because of the Greek Cypriot vote against the Annan Plan. While the opposition of France and other EU countries constitutes a more long-term factor, the evolution of the Cyprus issue is threatening EU-Turkey relations more immediately.

In reaction to the Greek Cypriots' rejection of the Annan Plan, Ankara's Grand National Assembly is refusing to ratify the protocol extending the EU-Turkey Customs Union, and thus, Turkey is maintaining its ports and air space closed to Cypriot vectors. Cyprus' reply, as an EU member, and mostly with the support of France, has been to suspend eight of the main chapters monitored by

the EU Commission to assess Turkey's readiness to become a member.

In mid-October 2009, the EU Commission routinely reported on the state of play of Turkish accession. But this report, as Heinz Kramer has aptly pointed out,<sup>59</sup> is now politically questionable as it does not deal with the real questions affecting Turkey's accession prospects. Turkey's accession no longer really depends on its compliance with the chapters listed in the EU Commission's accession file. Accession depends on other political factors: first of all, on EU ambiguity in pursuing negotiations for accession while openly and strongly putting in question the accession itself, and second, on Turkey's ambiguity in pursuing a foreign policy agenda that suggests that it has now chosen to go it alone. The security relationship between the European Union and Turkey is apparently waning, as some in the European Union no longer see the European Union and Turkey as sharing security interests and feel that Turkey is undertaking an independent course of action. The AKP continues to support Turkey's accession, but the rationale behind this policy is not that clear. In the EU, the activism of those opposing Turkey's accession is matched by the inertia of those in favor of it.

In this connection, the Cyprus issue is a most significant and dangerous factor and could tip the scales by triggering a break in EU-Turkey relations. Talks are going on between the new Cyprus president, Christofias, and the president of Northern Cyprus, Talat, both moderate figures ready to compromise, even though both are under strong rejectionist pressure from their respective constituencies.<sup>60</sup> If diplomacy fails in

<sup>58</sup> Emel Akçali, "Il dibattito ad Ankara," *Aspenia*, No. 45, Rome, 2009, pp. 195-199. The author very clearly explains the link between non-Islamist support to the AKP and the need for Turkey to be embedded in the EU if AKP's moderate secularism is to remain credible and effective in the long run.

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> See Amb. Pavlos Apostolidis, Cyprus, ELIAMEP Thesis, No. 5, July 2009, [www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/thesis/](http://www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/thesis/); David Hannay, *Cyprus: The Costs of Failure*, CEPS, Briefing Notes, September 2009.

Cyprus, a difficult crisis will erupt in EU-Turkey relations. This crisis could damage the prospects for EU-Turkey relations and add to the malaise in transatlantic relations.

To conclude, one might wonder how important a stronger bond between European Union and Turkey and the latter's inclusion in the former actually is for Turkey and its continued firm and reliable membership in the transatlantic coalition of nations. Anchoring Turkey to the European Union may stop the country's drift out of its long-standing Euro-Atlantic affiliation. It would be wrong to expect EU membership to fundamentally alter Turkish national interests and change its foreign policy, though. At the end of the day, this is not happening even with the current EU members. However, the EU compels members to negotiate and, if necessary, moderate or even renounce their national interests. Member states cannot straightforwardly assert their interests in the EU framework; they have to promote them. The European Union is above all a learning process and

a discipline. Bringing Turkey into this framework would be beneficial in any case to western solidarity. The same cannot be said of the ideas presently circulating in France, Germany, Austria, and other countries firmly opposed to or strongly skeptical of Turkey's membership in the European Union, which envisage a "privileged partnership" with Ankara like the one between the European Union and the Russian Federation. This would mean managing the interests that Turkey and the West have in common without any institutional association.<sup>61</sup> Such a solution would certainly single Turkey out with respect to the West and replace a close, albeit difficult, relationship with a distant and dubious one.

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Lippert, *The EU's Enlargement Policy: Ways Out of the Impasse*, SWP Comments, No. 18, August 2009 suggests an E3 dialogue format encompassing the EU, Russia, and Turkey. For the different European positions, see Nathalie Tocci (ed.), *Talking Turkey in Europe: toward a Differentiated Communication Strategy*, Quaderni IAI (English Series), No. 13, December 2008; Ezra LaGro, Knud Erik Jorgensen (eds.), *Turkey and the European Union: Prospects for a Difficult Encounter*, Palgrave MacMillan Press, 2007.

# 4 CONCLUSION

The transatlantic perspective on the Mediterranean and the Middle East can hardly be homogeneous, as it is inherently affected by the differences in focus and interests of the transatlantic stakeholders, the United States, Europe, and Turkey. As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, the United States, while strongly interested in the Middle East, including the Levant countries on the Mediterranean shores, does not have the same interest as Europe in the whole Mediterranean basin nor the same vision. On the other hand, Europe's interest and vision is focused above all on the Mediterranean, from the Levant to Gibraltar, even though it may at times coincide with that of the United States if individual European countries are taken into consideration. As for Turkey, the neo-Ottoman and Muslim trends are becoming more solid, its interest toward the Middle East is definitely increasing, and its long-standing attraction toward Europe is growing more dubious. So, the transatlantic perspective on the Mediterranean cannot help but be a somehow inhomogeneous Mediterranean-Middle East perspective, in which transatlantic allies' focuses and interests, while not excluding complementarity and convergence, feature not negligible differences.

To overcome this state of play, one could argue that the Mediterranean and the Middle East can be united by the strategic transatlantic interest in keeping fluid relations between adjoining regions and free, smooth access from one to another, that is the various regions and sub-regions that make up the great continental masses converging on the Mediterranean and the Middle East (Levant, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, Southern Asia, Central Asia, and Europe). The underlying assumption here is that congestion and fragmentation, as well as exceedingly centripetal or centrifugal movements, should be avoided. Congestion in one region usually stirs fragmentation and gives way to spillover effects and interference in adjoining

regions and makes reciprocal access more difficult. This is what resulted in fact from the policies and wars conducted in the greater Middle Eastern area by the U.S. administration during the first decade of the new century: a politically congested, strongly interrelated greater Middle East, on the one hand, and a fragmented Mediterranean, on the other. In this situation, and in a transatlantic perspective, restoring the cohesion of the Mediterranean as a region and decongesting the greater Middle East can be regarded as two interrelated assets and objectives. Decongestion of the greater Middle East is a necessary condition for achieving more coherence in the Mediterranean area. Conversely, a more coherent Mediterranean region is a condition for helping the greater Middle East decongest.

However, the Mediterranean and the Middle East cannot really be regarded as two sides of the same coin because the relationship between the United States, on one hand, and Europe, on the other, is asymmetrical. This asymmetry stems from the fact that, for the United States, Mediterranean cohesion is not as functional to decongesting the Middle East as the latter is for the European Union to be able to assure cohesion in the Mediterranean. A non-fragmented Mediterranean may certainly facilitate the Middle Eastern policy of the United States in many respects, but it is not in any sense an essential ingredient for it to succeed, whereas congestion in the Middle East, more in particular between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other regional conflicts, is in fact turning out to be an obstacle that Europe cannot overcome.

President Obama's initial approach made the Europeans hope the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be solved, at last, thereby helping the European Union reconcile EU transatlantic convergence as well as EU regional security and interest in a cohesive Mediterranean. Similarly, Turkey had hoped to reconcile its transatlantic convergence with its emerging neo-Ottoman

approach toward the Arab-Muslim world. Unfortunately, for the time being, the outcome of President Obama's policy is not allowing such reconciliations and hinders European Mediterranean interests as well as Turkish Middle Eastern drives. Will transatlantic solidarity suffer as well? The findings of this paper suggest that, on the contrary, convergence in a transatlantic perspective—as inhomogeneous as it may be—could be significant, albeit with a difference between Europe and Turkey.

The difference is that, lacking a common project and sufficient American leadership, Turkey seems bent on a more independent path than Europe. In the European Union, as we know, there is pressure from civil society to “engage in politics.” Furthermore, the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon provides more instruments for the CFSP and more coordination and integration between the communitarian and inter-governmental halves of the Union. This may concretely allow for more EU engagement, in the Mediterranean and the Middle East areas, among others. However, this engagement would be channeled toward transatlantic convergence by governments, since any risk stemming from the unsolved conflict in the Levant is always outweighed by the assurance provided by the alliance with the United States. More EU engagement in the Mediterranean and the Middle East would never be out of step with fundamental transatlantic interests, although it could entail individual initiatives that the United States may happen to dislike or fail to share.

Even with this probable difference between Europe and Turkey, the U.S. options discussed in this paper could involve both allies and could receive support from both of them. In any case, to rein in Turkey's apparent temptation to go it alone and to take advantage of available EU cooperation, the United States will have to redesign its policy and, above all, unlike in 2009, do it in concert with its transatlantic allies.

A number of more specific recommendations can be drawn from the paper:

- The United States should for some (even a long) time abstain from taking initiatives directed toward achieving a final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Conversely, it should engage in policies aimed at keeping and reinforcing the existing truce and preventing violence from erupting again.
- The United States should invite its allies to join in increased cooperation and to agree with them upon joint or converging policies to keep the truce and prevent violence. There should be an understanding on the division of labor by which the allies pursue objectives and explore solutions that the United States is not for the time being prepared to explore.
- This policy should be conceived of and implemented in a transatlantic perspective, with as many actions as possible undertaken in the framework of the Alliance and NATO-EU cooperation; the policy should be the outcome of allied consultations.
- Consultations should also regard the re-establishment of more long-term conditions for a new political Israeli-Palestinian process to take place and possibly reach a solution. The U.S. administration should maintain its parallel strategy toward the Middle East and the relevance this gives to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The U.S. administration should couple its approach toward the Arab-Muslim world with a parallel approach toward Israel, fostering those trends in Israel that may support its approach.

- The European Union should prevent the UfM from becoming hostage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as happened with its previous policy. To that end, while contributing to a solution of the conflict in the wider transatlantic framework, it should sideline the UfM political dimension and emphasize the technical-economic dimension, making the UfM work as an opportunity for cooperation both in inter-Mediterranean and global relations. This would provide an opportunity for transatlantic cooperation as well as contribute to making the Mediterranean area more cohesive and, should it be necessary, more prepared to support a new Israeli-Palestinian process.
- The European Union should make efforts to include Turkey, but also rethink its overall approach to the issue. While a strategic EU-Turkey partnership would in any case be a second-best solution, the ongoing accession relationship may prove even worse than that, if the EU-Turkey negotiation agenda fails to deal with real problems and real solutions;
- Turkey should provide its relations with its Middle East neighbors and the Muslim world with a firmer rationale. While it is fully justified to seek more attention from its allies, it should also pay more attention to them; as aptly noted by Syrian President Assad, its initiatives may eventually erode its capital of mediation capabilities. If it is true that it is a “central country,” it must learn to stay in the middle.

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