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TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE BROADER MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

WHERE ARE WE? WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

**TAMARA COFMAN WITTES, YEZID SAYIGH,
PETER SLUGLETT, FRED TANNER**

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6

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Preface

The first semester of 2004 saw a remarkable transatlantic rapprochement on the various issues at stake in the area which the allies agreed upon, at the 26 June 2004 U.S.-EU Summit in Dromoland Castle, Ireland, to call the Broader Middle East and North Africa.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546 provided the engine for that rapprochement. The United States has recognized the role of the United Nations and the international community in the management of the Iraqi crisis, somehow receding from its earlier unilateral stance. The European allies provided explicit legitimacy and support for the U.S. military presence in Iraq and the political transition to re-build the Iraqi state set in motion by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the UN.

The overall regional strategy put forward by the United States under the heading of "Greater Middle East" was reformulated, largely taking European (and Arab) concerns into account. The U.S.-EU document approved at Dromoland Castle reflects significant agreement on a number of previously contested points, such as the role of the Palestinian issue within the context of the entire common U.S.-EU strategy towards the Broader Middle East and North Africa, as well as the broad principles that should inform transatlantic policies of democracy promotion towards the area concerned.

There are, however, points of weakness in this rapprochement. At the Istanbul NATO Summit, the allies' contribution to stabilizing Iraq within the framework of UNSC Resolution 1546 proved limited. Also very limited and undefined was the expected upgrading and/or enlargement of the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue to the Broader Middle East, in particular the Gulf area. Furthermore, despite the joint G8 document on the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future, Europeans' support to the latter seems far from being firm and general. In particular, one can sense an underlying European perception of American intrusion on long-standing EU policies in the Mediterranean area.

Within this framework, the participants in the conference took these trends into consideration and assessed perspectives and achievements with a view to contributing to strengthen future triangular cooperation between Europe, the United States and the broader region of the Middle East and North Africa.

1. A Sisyphean Task. Putting the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process Back on Track

*Yezid Sayigh**

1. A political prognosis

The death of Yasser Arafat on 11 November 2004, after 35 years as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and ten as President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), was widely heralded in the international community as providing an opportunity to resume the Middle East peace process. However, a careful look beyond the facile public statements issued by various capitals and leaders, not least US President George Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, reveals that there has been little change in the objectives, strategies, and incentive structures for any of the relevant actors. More to the point, it indicates that the leading members of the international community are not reconsidering their approach to conflict resolution in the Israeli-Palestinian context in any meaningful way, and are not about to introduce significant alterations in their policies in the foreseeable future.

There is indeed a window of opportunity for positive change in Palestinian politics on both the domestic and external fronts, but this is likely to be missed and eventually to lead to even greater domestic strife if it is not matched by a similar shift on the Israeli side. Such a shift appears exceedingly unlikely. Indeed, all indications are that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, parties of the Israeli nationalist-religious Right, and the powerful settler lobby see an opportunity of a very different type: to extend even further and legitimise the colonisation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while deferring for at least a decade, if not permanently, discussion, let alone resolution, of the status of East Jerusalem and the rights of Palestinian refugees.

This deeply worrying prospect is reinforced by the uncritical support provided to the government of Israel by the administration of US President George W. Bush, which has marked a sea-change in the US position on the political, legal, and territorial issues of the conflict. Recent statements by the president suggest an intention to base US diplomacy in the Middle East peace process on precisely the preceding scenario, long promoted by Sharon.[1] Indeed, no less a cause for pessimism is that US support for Palestinian statehood – which, ironically, was made a formal objective of US policy for the first time ever by the Bush

[1] Speaking in the presence of three former US presidents in Arkansas on 18 November 2004, for example, Bush said he was ready for an interim agreement in which a Palestinian state is established, leaving the permanent issues to the future. According to A. Ben, "No change in political process for now", Haaretz, 21 November 2004 <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/ spages/ 503956.html>.

administration and endorsed at its initiative in UN Security Council Resolution 1397 in March 2002 – reverted almost immediately to being something contingent, rather than a matter of principle. Instead, exercise of the Palestinian right to national self-determination, long recognised by virtually the entire international community, and formally called for by the EU since its Berlin summit statement of 25 March 1999, is now conditional on the badly-battered and discredited PA's performance and its compliance with certain provisions set down in Bush's speech of 24 June 2002 and adopted in the Quartet's 'Road Map' to peace published in May 2003. The transformation of this Palestinian right into something conditional has therefore been accepted in effect by the three other Quartet members – the EU, the UN and Russia – representing a distinct regression for the Palestinians and ultimately for hopes of a durable peace.

The central argument of this article, therefore, is that the most likely prospect for Israel and Palestine is a continuing situation of no-peace on a long-term basis, with attendant violence of varying form and intensity. This is not least because all indications are that the international community is, and will remain, unwilling to undertake interventions of a scope and scale that might alter the underlying disintegrative dynamics and negative incentive structure of the conflict, the present opportunity notwithstanding. In turn, this unwillingness has to do with the general reluctance of the remaining international and regional players to take their discomfort with Israeli policy to the point of affirmative action, precisely because this would require a willingness to confront this aspect of the US administration's Middle East policy or at least diverge from it openly. Yet it appears that without marking a distinct, and if necessary divergent, course of action, the administration's three co-sponsors of the Road Map have little credible hope of exerting meaningful pressure on their US partner or consequently of leading to substantive change in US policy.

2. The path to deadlock

In retrospect, the principal failing of the international community since 1994 has been precisely its unwillingness, for a variety of reasons both good and bad, to intervene effectively enough to alter the cost-benefit calculations of the PA and Israel in ways that would help achieve the desired end-goal of a two-state solution to the conflict, with security for Israel and viable statehood for the Palestinians. This is not to say that there have been no interventions, including some of considerable severity, but these proved often to be either dysfunctional, especially in the 'Oslo era' of 1994-2000, or heavily one-sided, especially since the outbreak of the second intifada. Sanctions applied since 2000 have almost entirely affected the weaker PA, leaving Israel virtually unaffected although it exercises near-absolute physical control over the entire territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) and East Jerusalem, along with their population, borders, and natural resources.

In the first phase (1994-2000), maintaining the momentum of the peace process (peace-building) was understandably viewed as of paramount importance, but this often led to dysfunctional results. On the one hand, this approach persuaded Arafat that the Palestinians were indispensable and consequently that he could operate as he willed in employing

patronage-based politics to construct his domestic social control. No less significantly, it persuaded him that the international community placed too great a premium on achieving Palestinian-Israeli peace – as a key to Middle East stability, and implicitly to a secure oil supply, more generally – to allow it to fail. The international community would intervene forcefully in a crisis to salvage the process, in short, a perception that explains much of Arafat's behaviour once the intifada broke out at the end of September 2000.

On the other hand, the priority given by the international community on peace-building discouraged it from acting forcefully against Israeli colonisation of the WBGS and East Jerusalem, which continued to expand, and even accelerated, in the Oslo era. From just under 200,000, the total settler population rose by 100 percent to around 400,000 by the time the al-Aqsa intifada started. This included the launch of the controversial Jabal Abu-Ghneim/Har Homa settlement project to the south of East Jerusalem, virtually completing the ring of settlements enveloping the city and cutting it off from PA-controlled Bethlehem. Settlement expansion was driven by massive government subsidies, tax breaks, and other special incentives (such as the provision adding years of seniority to the ranking of teachers and civil servants), as well as infrastructure, natural resources of land and water, and security. This unfolded under successive governments headed by both the Labour and Likud parties throughout the Oslo era and since.[2] The Israeli government moreover reneged on its assurance that it would not alter the status quo regarding the operation of certain East Jerusalem institutions, most notably closing down the PA's informal headquarters at Orient House. Yet no diplomatic penalties were imposed by the international community in response to any of these processes, let alone material ones by Israel's main provider of military and economic assistance – the US – and its main trading partner – the EU.

2.1 The negative impact of the premium on security

The added premium placed on security by the Israeli government, and along with it the US administration, also impeded international interventions or distorted their impacts. Ironically, this was most evident in the insistence on turning a blind eye to the lack of transparency surrounding certain public funds in the PA and the diversion by Arafat of considerable domestic revenues towards internal patronage. These practices were tolerated in the Oslo era at Israeli and US request, on the grounds that this was necessary for Arafat to co-opt possible 'spoilers' within his own movement, Fatah, and thus to gain control of the security situation. The immediate results were to inflate the PA's public payroll, saddling it with a growing deficit and limiting its capital investment in public infrastructure, and thus making it more dependent on the international donor community for aid.

Most damaging, however, was repeated Israeli recourse to 'border closures' in the WBGS – blocking internal movement of people and goods, both within the West Bank and

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[2] An excellent review of government policy instruments to encourage settlement is in Land Grab: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank, Comprehensive Report May 2002 (B'Tselem: The Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 2002).

between it and the Gaza Strip – as a means of compelling the PA to meet its security obligations. By blocking normal civilian movement and trade, closures not only reduced PA revenue, but also affected the Palestinian population and economy as a whole and thus constituted a form of collective punishment. The PA responded to the resultant net drop in per capita GDP and unemployment by further expanding the public payroll, and became even more dependent on international assistance. The international community failed to respond to the indiscriminate nature of the economic sanctions imposed by Israel, implicitly accepting its security argument. In doing so, the international community fundamentally abdicated active peace-building, and by extension Palestinian state-building, and accepted that management of political issues should be determined by security needs and logic as defined by the Israeli government and endorsed by the US administration.

Not surprisingly, the militarisation of the intifada fed into, and confirmed, these two tendencies: that of Israel and the US to favour a military-based security logic, and that of the rest of the international community to defer on these matters, even though the ultimate outcome was to suspend diplomacy and prevent effective peace-building. The violence of the intifada has proved counter-productive and self-defeating for the Palestinians, but both its eruption and its subsequent path were considerably influenced by patterns and dynamics established in the earlier period of 1994-2000.

As noted above, the intifada has inflicted a terrible cost on the Palestinians. In an immediate sense, this is the result of the direct military assaults, suspension of revenue transfers, and economic strangulation conducted by Israel, leading to the physical reoccupation of the whole West Bank and dismemberment of the Gaza Strip into separate pockets, which have additionally been the target of punitive reprisal raids that have left thousands of refugees homeless and ever more destitute. Palestinian GDP has shrunk by 35 percent compared to pre-intifada levels (1999).[3]

2.2 One-sided economic conditionality

Material as well as political costs have also been incurred as a result of international sanctions. In fact, such sanctions have not been uniformly negative in their impact. The EU was reluctant to consider, let alone implement, aid conditionality during the Oslo era, but has applied it to its emergency budgetary assistance to the PA on several occasions since 2000. This has led to beneficial results in terms of consolidating PA accounts and bringing greater order to its public finances, not least in the matter of making the security forces' payroll and public investments managed on Arafat's behalf transparent.

However, the unwillingness of the international community to apply similar measures to Israel – for example by imposing deductions on aid flows or trade concessions commensurate with its spending on the settlement drive – has negatively skewed the incentive structure on both sides, persuading the Israeli government that it could act with impunity while convincing the PA

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[3] World Bank, Four Years - Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment, October 2004, pp. xiii and xiv.

that little was to be gained from complying with donor expectations. Possibly most damaging in this respect has been the failure of the international community – and particularly the EU which is the largest donor to the PA when national contributions from member states and the collective contributions channeled by the European Commission are combined – to protect its own substantial investments in Palestinian public infrastructure, which has been deliberately targeted and repeatedly destroyed by Israeli forces in the WBGS. The PA was also subjected to political sanction in the form of the US boycott of Arafat declared by Bush on 24 June 2002, and subsequently observed tacitly by the EU and most of its member-states until his death.

2.3 Failure to impose sanctions on Israel

Last but not least, the conditionality attached to Palestinian statehood by the US administration since June 2002 is potentially the most damaging form of international intervention. At the very least, it provides Israel with the opportunity to extract further concessions on territory, status of East Jerusalem, and refugee rights, should peace talks resume. In this regard specifically, additional and potentially irreversible damage to prospects for achieving viable Palestinian statehood has been done by the Israeli "security barrier" being constructed inside the West Bank. This effectively detaches 20 percent of West Bank territory and attaches East Jerusalem to Israel, leaving 200,000 Palestinians isolated in the city and another 125,000 trapped between the barrier and the pre-June 1967 'Green Line'.[4] Once again the US and EU failed to follow their diplomatic objections to the barrier with more effective measures; indeed the US and certain European states opposed taking the issue to the International Court of Justice for adjudication at Palestinian request, although all EU member states subsequently supported a UN General Assembly vote in line with the Court's ruling that the construction of the security fence inside the Occupied Territories was illegal and that it should be removed.

Again, in each and every one of the above cases, the international community in general, and more pertinently the US and EU, failed entirely to apply even token sanctions, let alone commensurate ones, to Israel. This had the effect of encouraging Sharon to qualify, indeed cripple, his government's acceptance of the Road Map with 14 official reservations, and even then to stall on every single commitment he actually did make in the framework of the Road Map or bilaterally to the US administration.[5] Most notable in this regard has been the continuation of Israeli subsidies to 'illegal' settlement outposts in the West Bank that Sharon had formally promised to dismantle; indeed, their number has risen in the interim from around 18 to 80, the latest of which are clearly intended to entrench Israel's hold on the Jordan Valley ahead of any resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians.[6]

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[4] For a useful critique of the security barrier's impact and its connection to the Gaza unilateral disengagement plan, see M. Klein, "A Path to Peace: Sharon's Disengagement Plan or the Geneva Accord?", Logos, vol. 3, no. 3, 2004 <http://logosjournal.com/klein_sharon.htm>.

[5] For a powerful insight into Sharon's approach and US complaisance, H. Siegman, "Sharon and the Future of Palestine", The New York Review of Books, vol. LI, no. 19, 2 December 2004, pp. 7-14.

[6] For example, the Israeli State Comptroller reported the diversion of $6.5 million from the Ministry of Housing for illegal settlement construction in three years. Cited in Klein, "A Path to Peace".

In summary, the international community has displayed a singular lack of will to invest the political and material capital needed to undertake the tasks of peace-building in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Nowhere is this demonstrated more tangibly than in the poor track record of the Quartet: having agreed a collective approach to international diplomacy and incorporated the US agenda as the basis for the Road Map to peace issued in May 2003, the Quartet's remaining three members have failed visibly not only to obtain genuine partnership with the US administration, but even to ensure the latter's adherence to its own agenda or to the benchmarks by which the compliance of Israel, as much as the PA, was to be measured.

3. Searching for an elusive exit

As noted at the outset, Arafat's death immediately triggered speculation about the chances of reviving the peace process and sparked a flurry of political pronouncements and diplomatic overtures by the US administration and such allies as the UK. These focused on ensuring three issues: a smooth and peaceful succession process in the PA to replace Arafat, continued commitment by the GoI to its own plan for 'disengagement' from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and integration of the disengagement into the Road Map, particularly with a view to attaining some form of Palestinian statehood during the next four years. The flaws and weaknesses of the international community's approach are already evident with regard to each of these issues.

The most immediate issue is the conduct of elections to produce a new Palestinian leadership. The PA was able to ensure an admirably, if somewhat surprisingly, smooth and violence-free transition in the wake of Arafat's death, with the PLO selecting Mahmoud Abbas (a.k.a Abu Mazin) as his successor as Chairman of its Executive Committee, and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) confirming its Speaker Raouhi Fattouh as caretaker President of the PA, as required by its constitutional document, the Basic Law. There was a reminder of the deep political divisions and the potential for fragmentation and internecine conflict when Fatah militants denouncing Abbas as a traitor shot dead two of his bodyguards during a visit he paid to Gaza, but this remained an isolated incident. The dominant dynamic seemed to be one of internal dialogue between the mainstream PLO/PA leadership, Fatah and the militants of its own al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, and the Islamist opposition movement Hamas. Nevertheless, Hamas has since then called on its members not to vote in the presidential elections.

3.1 When parliamentary and local elections?

Also on the positive side, the US administration moved quickly to support the PA's call for a general election in the WBGS on 9 January 2005 to select Arafat's successor, and to persuade the GoI to allow the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem to vote, as they did in 1996. However, this left unanswered the significant question of whether or not parliamentary and local elections would also be held at a later date. This was important because it had long

been an objective of Hamas and the Fatah militants to translate their grassroots support into electoral gains, and their observance of a ceasefire beyond the presidential election would be contingent on the assurance that parliamentary and local elections were imminent. It was also important because, by bringing the militants into the political system, these elections would increase their stake in a negotiated outcome with Israel and would moreover make them directly and publicly accountable for their policies and actions. At the very least, by renewing the legitimacy and authority of the PLC and the PA ministerial cabinet, elections would grant them the mandate to assert the rule of law and, specifically, to act decisively against anyone who resorted to armed opposition to the government policy of resuming permanent status negotiations with Israel.

On this precise point, the internal dialogue launched after Arafat's death also revolved no less crucially around developing Palestinian consensus for a new 'peace platform'. Abbas made it clear that Hamas and other militant factions could not expect to take part in elections and join the political system overtly, and thus enjoy its privileges and immunities, unless they were willing publicly to endorse a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel. This would moreover be broadly along the lines outlined in Bush's speech of 24 June 2002 with regard to borders approximating those of 4 June 1967, and with the PLO's long-declared objective of establishing its capital in East Jerusalem and confirmation of the refugee right of return (without detail on the extent or modality of this, if to be implemented at all). That Hamas and Fatah engaged in the dialogue while aware of this underlying agenda was a significant sign that they now envisaged a moment when they would cross the Rubicon of declaring a frank public position on their ultimate goals and minimum demands.

The benefits of re-establishing legitimate and accountable government through these multiple elections are therefore clear, not only for the Palestinians but also for the peace process and, hence, for Israel. Yet the US, having originally insisted on scheduling general Palestinian elections as a means of replacing Arafat – and on incorporating this requirement in the Road Map – subsequently worked behind the scenes to block them. The reason was simple: belated realisation that Arafat would win hands down, and that Hamas and Fatah militants would most likely also make significant gains. The US was therefore quick to endorse the PA presidential election of 9 January 2005, but non-committal or silent in response to repeated statements from Abbas and other PA leaders on the need to conduct parliamentary and local elections as well. Clearly, allowing a group on its 'terrorist list' such as Hamas to participate openly in elections would be hard for the US to swallow, but this could prove critical for the post-Arafat Palestinian leadership, if it is to be a credible interlocutor externally and enjoy solid legitimacy domestically.

This is not to say that a further round of elections is completely out of the question for the US, or even for the Israel government, which has hardly ever been keen. However, Israel, the United States, and other members of the international community have already set high expectations in advance of the new PA president, that he will be hard put to meet, especially if Hamas and Fatah see no imminent prospect of the parliamentary and local elections they seek. With a fragmented and partly disarmed police force and battered economy, and continued if reduced Israeli military presence, Arafat's successor may quickly lose credibility and legitimacy, and the militants may resume their attacks on Israel within a matter of months. In

such a situation the international community, and especially the US administration, will be even less likely to press Israel to allow the second round of elections sought by the Palestinians.

3.2 Unilateral disengagement from Gaza

Yet the most serious impediment to a resumption of meaningful peace talks is the Israeli government's plan for 'unilateral disengagement' from Gaza, implementation of which is due to commence after the Israeli Knesset's final vote in March 2005. The new PA president will be expected to start delivering immediately on the security obligations set out in the Road Map, in association not with the declaration of Palestinian statehood (however provisional) or the start of final-stage peace talks as originally envisaged in the Road Map, but rather with the Gaza disengagement. This is highly problematic. In October 2004, Dov Weisglass, until recently Sharon's senior adviser, revealed that the planned disengagement aimed at 'freezing' the political process: "And when you freeze that process you freeze the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion about issues such as the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. ... All this with a [US] presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of Congress."[7] The US administration meekly, if unconvincingly, declared itself satisfied that Sharon – denying Weisglass' statements – remained committed to the Road Map, and was echoed loyally by the UK government, which had until then hoped to present itself as a prime mover in resuming the peace process.

The US administration moreover repeated its view that it regarded the Gaza disengagement as complementary to the Road Map. In doing this it once again reset the agenda for the international community's diplomacy in way that effectively impeded, if not contradicted directly, the Quartet's original design and the balance of rewards and obligations it had incorporated in the Road Map. Whether or not Sharon still intends in the wake of Arafat's death to supply "the amount of formaldehyde that's necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians", in Weisglass's words, [8] he is still likely to block the way to further Palestinian elections.

Sharon's reluctance to seek parliamentary and local elections since the Israeli reoccupation of the PA's autonomous areas in the West Bank in April 2002 clearly has had much to do with his longstanding ideological position of seeking to settle the "whole and complete" Land of Israel and therefore of denying any other, competing national patrimony. Palestinian elections designed to produce a credible negotiating partner and renew a peace process leading to sovereign Palestinian statehood in the WBGS, with additional and internationally-endorsed claims to East Jerusalem, are hardly welcome. Yet Sharon has also had pragmatic reasons to stall. Elections would restrain Israel's freedom of action in the WBGS in several ways. Israeli forces would have to conduct a substantial withdrawal from Palestinian population centres, facilitate Palestinian movement within the WBGS (for the

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[7] Interviewed by Ari Shavit, "The Big Freeze", Haaretz, 7 October 2004. <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=485928>
[8] Ibid.

purposes of voter registration, campaigning, and voting), and refrain from offensive action against Hamas or other militant candidates; moreover, Israel would have to permit the Palestinians of East Jerusalem to vote.

Rather than oppose Palestinian elections openly, however, Sharon is more likely to attach conditions that the Palestinian leadership would find hard to accept, and that if accepted would deprive the elections of much of their significance in terms of leading to renewal of a credible peace process. Indeed, he may well anticipate domestic and international pressure to resume meaningful peace talks with a new, elected Palestinian leadership by seeking prior concessions on the shape and substance of future negotiations in return for allowing elections to proceed. Going on his previously stated positions, these concessions could include PA and, no less importantly, US agreement to limit provisional Palestinian statehood to the Gaza Strip and pockets of the West Bank for a long interim period of at least a decade, deferring all discussion of the status of East Jerusalem or the fate of the refugees for a similar time, and leaving large settlement 'blocs' such as Maaleh Adumim and Ariel out of future talks altogether.[9]

That this is a credible prospect was borne out by Weisglass, who stressed specifically and repeatedly in his interview of October 2004 that the Gaza disengagement meant an indefinite delay in the "evacuation of settlements, … partition of Jerusalem, …[and] return of refugees". He also emphasised the fact that the US had already committed itself officially, in written and verbal statements from the White House and resolutions passed by both houses of Congress, to the annexation of the large settlement blocs to Israel. For his part, having altered the starting point of any future negotiations – further reducing the territory under discussion and pre-judging the final borders of a Palestinian state – Bush later moved the goal posts by indicating that what he sought in his second term as US president was statehood, but not explicitly an end to the conflict. In other words, he adopted Sharon's preferred approach, of accepting the inevitable with regard to Palestinian statehood, the subject of complete international unanimity, while putting off any resolution of the core issues of conflict. This was no more than the platform with which Sharon came to power in 2001.

Conceivably, a Palestinian leadership keen on ensuring its survival and on salvaging some hope of statehood might accept an Israeli offer entailing less than the Barak offer at Camp David in July 2000, the Clinton parameters of 28 December, or the near-agreement of Taba in January 2001. However, it is improbable that a government led by Sharon or his most likely successors would genuinely make even a minimally tempting offer. At the very least, the Palestinian leadership would only enter a peace process limited by Sharon's stipulations if it felt sufficiently confident that the new interim arrangements offered it genuine hope of restoring something approaching the "parameters" of 2000-01 at a later date. For this it would need credible international assurances, at a minimum.

Otherwise, a peace treaty closer to Sharon's approach would simply not be durable, and any Palestinian leadership would balk at signing it. For this reason it would also be wholly reluctant to engage in the Gaza disengage-ment process in 2005 unless the international community could give clear and credible evidence that it would see through the

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[9] Weisglass confirms that Sharon sought to extend implementation of the Road Map's three stages over a period of 14 years.

implementation of the Road Map in full. This would mean ensuring Israeli withdrawal, lifting the economic closure, suspending settlement activity, and subsequently moving towards full and viable Palestinian statehood, with all that has come to mean in terms of territorial extent and contiguity, inclusion of East Jerusalem, and free and unfettered access to the outside world, allowing a 'return' of refugees to their new state. To engage on any other terms would trigger the defection of Hamas and Fatah militants from the process and lead to a breakdown of the ceasefire with Israel, taking the mainstream Palestinian leadership back to square one.

4. Looking beyond 2005

The above political analysis may prove flawed in its basic assumptions, and reality could unfold in substantively different ways. As proponents of the peace process on both sides point out, public opinion polls continue to show that a majority of Israelis and Palestinians remain supportive not only of a two-state solution, but also of making the concessions necessary for a historic compromise, so long as they can be assured of genuine peace and security in return. With most Israelis and Palestinians still favouring negotiation, and with the commitment of the international community, there should, and indeed could, be an alternative prospect. There is nothing inevitable about the failure of future diplomatic initiatives, any more than the breakdown of the peace process and the outbreak of a militarised intifada in 2000 were unavoidable. The opportunity opened up by the passing of Arafat from the scene is modest, but no less real for that.

Yet, for a number of reasons what should be a winning combination of factors may not translate into convergent political strategies by leaderships and active political forces on both sides. Nor will it in the medium-to-long term, in all probability. This is due in large measure to the manner in which politics within each society, and relations between the two sides, have become restructured over the past four years of conflict.

After all, the launch of the Middle East peace at the Madrid conference in October 1991 and the later Palestinian-Israeli Oslo Accords of 1993, were only possible due to a very particular conjunction of factors and processes conducive to conflict resolution, not least the end of the Cold War and the resolution of the 1990-91 Gulf crisis. It was this that opened a window of opportunity for peace and made Palestinian statehood imminent by the end of the decade. But the same circumstances no longer pertain for any of the three main actors: the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, or the US administration. Nor is there sufficient reason or opportunity, especially after the re-election of President Bush with an increased Republican majority, to expect the political strategies and interests of the US administration, the other Quartet members or any other international or regional actors to undergo a fundamental shift in the foreseeable future.

4.1 Or what if the 'opportunity' is lost?

Rather, it is more probable that the international community in general will at best maintain its current 'holding pattern', of political and financial assistance designed to prevent

the status quo from further regression, although the situation is not in fact static and such a passive policy will come under constant strain from new developments and emerging trends on the ground. The new political, economic and social realities that have evolved on both sides – whether a result of conflict-induced brutalisation and trauma, economic recession, and social polarisation, or of secular factors and trends unrelated to the conflict such as widening income disparities and ethnic or other social stratification – often enhance the disintegrative dynamics triggered by the mutual violence of the past four years. Factors that might prompt peace-building – such as war-weariness on both sides – are therefore counter-balanced constantly. The divergence between majority public opinion and aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians on the one hand, and the political and security calculus and behaviour of their leaders and main parties on the other hand, is moreover explained by the often negative impact of changes in the international environment, not least the 9/11 attacks and the consequent reframing of international security in terms of a global war on terrorism.

To put it more simply, what if Arafat's death proves not to be an opportunity, for whatever reason, or is missed through acts of commission by one or more parties to the conflict or of omission by the international community?

4.2 Growing fragmentation among Palestinians

As noted above, the structure of conflict as it has evolved over the past four years has produced a number of trends and dynamics that now have a reality of their own, and that will shape both conflict and peace-building in the foreseeable future. It consists of a number of factors. One of these is the physical fragmentation of the Palestinian territories through the overlapping grids of checkpoints, military bases and perimeters, 'bypass' roads linking these and Israeli settlements, the newly-constructed security barrier. Coupled with the severe restriction of the movement of Palestinian persons and goods – within the WBGS, into East Jerusalem or Israel, or to and from the outside world – the result is a far-reaching 'ghetto-isation' effect. This is reflected not only in the instilling of a siege mentality or the acceleration of the collapse of the PA and its various civilian and police agencies, but also in the atomisation of the Palestinian economy and the emergence of local, subsistence-focused mini-economies.

Clearly, the long-term damage to the economy and to the viability of the battered private sector is serious. This is compounded by emigration of the professional and middle classes, about which there is little hard data but may safely be assumed to be occurring. Even less visible is the damage to the Palestinian social fabric, though increasing evidence of sharp rises in domestic violence and reports from mental health agencies indicate the effects of brutalisation and unemployment, which are likely to be long-term as well. (Children exposed to the violence of the first intifada formed the hard core of the armed militants in the second one, and this cycle is likely to be repeated in the years to come.)

Among the short- and medium-term consequences are growing signs that the nationalist dimension of the conflict against Israel is gaining an additional class character, as the more marked weariness with the continuing intifada and closures occurs among the middle class,

whereas most of the armed militants (of all persuasions, whether Fatah or Hamas) come from sectors of the urban poor or refugee camps. Class is moreover overlaid by criminality, as paramilitaries who have lost their livelihood due to unemployment or to the loss of unreported salaries from the PA and its President Yasser Arafat turn increasingly to extortion or other criminal activity.

These trends may slow down, especially if Israel relaxes some of its controls. However, the extensive and multi-layered system of Israeli security, administrative, and economic control is now firmly in place and will not be dismantled, even if relaxed. At present, the impact of this system on Palestinian administration, economy, and society is severe, producing effects and symptoms that characterise failed states. Elsewhere this might trigger international intervention, but in Palestine the political restrictions on external involvement mean that international assistance acts effectively as a palliative. European (and Arab) financial assistance enables the PA to continue to pay the salaries of some 140,000 persons and thus avoid economic meltdown in a society already suffering a 40 percent drop in GDP since 2000 and unemployment rates of 40-60 percent in the WB and GS respectively.[10]

4.3 The acquiescence of the international community

The international community (and not least the EU) quietly acknowledges that it has no political options and that the Quartet's Road Map is stillborn, but so far has preferred not to withdraw its financial support, in the interest of shoring up the political and territorial status quo, lest disengagement trigger a total economic and social collapse. This leaves it underwriting the Israeli occupation in effect, unable to influence Israeli security policy or even to impede settlement activity in any meaningful way, yet unable and unwilling to intervene as forcefully as is necessary in order to alter fundamentally the structure of conflict and reopen opportunities for resumption both of normal civilian life and trade in the WBGS and of genuine peace talks. Diplomatically, it leaves the unilateral disengagement plan from Gaza as the only 'game in town', something that allows Israel "to do the minimum possible in order to maintain our political situation" and that "transfers the initiative to our hands. It compels the world to deal with our idea, with the scenario we wrote."[11]11. The peace process is consequently reduced to platitudes, a pious hope that Sharon will either go through an ideological transformation and 'change his spots', or else that events will escape his control once he has evacuated Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and set a momentous precedent for the West Bank.

This is why it is so strategically important that the obstacles to Israeli settlement in the WBGS have been severely, perhaps fatally, reduced over the decade since the signing of the Oslo Accords. The international political and legal consensus established after June 1967 –

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[10] A World Bank report issued in October 2003 states that roughly half the Palestinian population in the WBGS lives below the poverty line, which is set at $2 a day. Four Years – Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment, October 2004.

[11] "The Big Freeze", Haaretz, 7 October 2004.

describing both settlement and the wider acquisition of territory by force as illegal – was effectively superseded by the Oslo Accords, and will not be revived if, or when, the latter are finally recognised as dead and inapplicable. A second main obstacle, and a key element of the international consensus, was the US position: specifically, this has shifted over time from describing settlements plainly as illegal, through 'unhelpful', to finally making US opposition to them contingent solely on Palestinian action against terrorism, and additionally to excluding the fate of large settlement 'blocs' from future negotiations altogether. The third and last obstacle to Israeli settlement was the emergence of a viable, unitary Palestinian national movement, embodied in the PLO until 1993 and since then in the PA, but this is on the verge of institutional collapse and of a long-overdue generational change, and appears wholly powerless to act coherently or effectively against Israeli settlement activity, both in the WBGS generally and in East Jerusalem in particular, where the Israeli security barrier is most seriously entrenched. The Israeli nationalist Right might well be able to claim the final historic triumph of Zionism in settling the whole of mandate Palestine.

This is not to say that such victory is assured or unchallenged. Nor is it the result, specifically, of the Israeli control system that has been put into place. Hypothetically, any and all elements of this system, whether physical or procedural, can be dismantled and their effects undone and negated. However, none of the actors that might challenge Israeli predominance in the field or resist the proclivity of Israel's incumbent leaders to deepen its grip on the WBGS (including East Jerusalem) are likely to do so: the Palestinians are undergoing a fundamental transition of political leaderships, generations, and institutions, the outcome of which is highly uncertain and may take years to crystallise; the Israeli peace camp remains on the defensive and is unlikely to regain the initiative so long as the present, degenerative nature of the conflict persists; and the international community is over-stretched and over-burdened already, not least in Iraq, and is unlikely to confront either the Israeli or the US administration as and when this is necessary in order to reassert the parameters that would permit Palestinian compliance and durable peace, namely viable statehood in contiguous territory, with sovereignty in East Jerusalem and a reasonable resolution of the refugee problem.

In the absence of the latter – unlikely – outcome, the status quo will harden into a new physical and political reality, one of two populations inhabiting the same territory yet living under two, radically divergent legal, administrative, and security systems and with hugely different access to land, water, the outside world, and economic resources and opportunity. In short, a quasi-apartheid relationship will obtain between Israel and the Palestinians of the WBGS and East Jerusalem. Over the next decade Palestinians and Israelis will then come to struggle over new historic agendas altogether, where the alternative to a reality of quasi-apartheid will appear to be a bi-national Jewish-Arab state. None of these agendas may actually be feasible or successful, but their main import is simply that the window for the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will have closed for at least the next generation.

Conclusion

The question arises once again, in closing: can the international community intervene effectively and salvage a viable two-state solution? The answer is it can, if its key actors have

the political inclination and determination to commit themselves unequivocally and consistently to a clear vision of the desired end-goal, outlining the principal parameters for the resolution of the core issues of contention. The fatal flaw of the Oslo process was that it left the final outcome undefined and undetermined, and thus invited competitive and confrontational behaviour by both Israelis and Palestinians aimed at improving their bargaining position ahead of the final negotiations on permanent status. What has been lacking all along is evidence that the international community is unshakeable in its unity and determination not to recognise the outcomes of policies intended to alter the final end-goal. Taking such a stance would require considerable political will and capital, but would avoid the negative costs and consequences of punitive approaches such as censure and sanctions.

Such an approach would convince the Palestinian side that the international community can actually ensure attainment of the stated end-goal, allowing the mainstream leadership to carry the doubters and militants and leaving it responsible to do all it can to expedite the process and to prevent a return to armed confrontation. On the Israeli side, a firm and consistent international approach would affect the critical relationship between the cost-benefit calculations of the Israeli government and of the Israeli public. It has been Sharon's acute grasp of the critical need to secure the support of both his domestic public and the US administration that has so far enabled him to out-manoeuvre political allies and foes within Knesset, his governing coalition, and even the Likud Party. A public perception of unshakeable international, and especially US, political resolve will render any further investment in settlement expansion in the WBGS and any further delay in reaching a permanent status agreement increasingly intolerable. Only then can a credible working coalition of political parties, factions, and other associations emerge with a viable alternative and convincing argument to deliver the Israeli side of the peace process.

If, on the contrary, the international community demonstrates that the goalposts can be repeatedly moved back, then the incentive structure will work to reverse effect – for conflict-making not peace-building – and the international community will find itself facing the same dilemmas of whether and how to intervene effectively well into the next decade.

2. The Future of Iraq: Uncertainty, Disenchantment and Despair

Peter Sluglett[*]

Let there be no mistake: the situation in Iraq has been degenerating rapidly over the last year, and it will almost certainly degenerate very much further before there is any significant improvement. Even that much-wished for prospect seems to be receding further and further into the background amid ominous talk of failed states, systemic failure, and so forth. Iraq is in a state of anarchy, and most middle-class Iraqis in a position to do so are trying to emigrate because of the endless violence and the near-total breakdown of public security.

On 9 September came the grim news of the thousandth US death in Iraq. In spite of this, a combination of evasiveness and economy with the truth, and the result of the recent US elections means that the sheer magnitude of the failure of the Bush administration's policy in Iraq has made less impact on public opinion in the United States than an observer on Mars might reasonably have expected. Contemplation of either the immediate or the long term future of Iraq leaves little room for complacency. In general, it is difficult to see how the US and the UK will be able to extricate themselves with ease and honour from the pit which they have been so assiduously digging for themselves, particularly the US, over the past year and a half.

In a recent article, Larry Diamond of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, who served with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad between January and April 2004, gives a useful insider perspective on many of the blunders that observers of the process further removed from the scene have also been highlighting for several months.[1] In "What went Wrong in Iraq" (without a question mark), Diamond catalogues the many errors of judgement of the coalition forces and the CPA, from the point of view of both design and implementation. On his list of the most significant of these are: the inadequate numbers of US troops deployed for the operation in the first place; the lack of attention to the kind of peacekeeping force which would be required, and what duties it would need to perform (after all, 'victory' could never have been seriously in doubt); the extraordinary failure on the part of the Pentagon to take proper account of the detailed planning exercises that the State Department had been carrying out since at least 2001; the decision simply to disband the Iraqi armed forces in May 2003 without even attempting to confiscate their weapons, the over-hasty de-Baathification programme – the list goes on and on.

In broad terms, the administration's obsession with Iraq has transformed the 'war against terrorism' into the war in Iraq, and the incompetence with which matters in Iraq have been

[1] "What Went Wrong in Iraq", Foreign Affairs, vol. 83, no. 5, Sept./Oct. 2004, pp. 34-56.

conducted has actually increased the threats the United States faces from terrorism. In a recent article, James Fallows reports: "'Let me tell you my gut feeling,' a senior figure at one of America's military-sponsored think tanks told me recently after we had talked … about details of the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq … 'In my view we are much, much worse off now than when we went into Iraq. That is not a partisan position. I voted for these guys". (A few paragraphs earlier, Fallows comments: "in the nature of things, soldiers and spies are mainly Republicans").[2] While there are limits to the benefits of hindsight, it would have required only a limited amount of aforesight to predict that, for example, the heaviest resistance outside Baghdad would come from the smaller towns immediately to the west and north of the capital (Samarra, Ramadi, Falluja) where much of the bedrock of support for the previous regime came from, but which were also known to be susceptible to 'jihadism' (to use a modern media term) or Sunni Islamic extremism.[3]

It is hard to support any hypothesis in which the present chaotic situation in Iraq is the result of deliberate planning in some form or other, the wilful setting of Sunnis against Shias, for example, in order to fulfil some deadly principle of 'divide and rule'. But, as Diamond remarks, "In post-conflict situations in which the state has collapsed, security trumps everything: it is the central pedestal that supports all else. Without some minimum level of security, people cannot engage in trade and commerce, organize to rebuild their communities, or participate meaningfully in politics."[4]

Clearly, the most urgent task facing the coalition is to restore, or bring into being, some minimum level of civic order, a task whose accomplish-ment, at least at the moment, appears to be becoming more impossible as each day passes. Parts of the country are developing into no-go areas where coalition forces cannot or do not go, and even worse, where no single faction dominates. In these circumstances, Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's apparent determination to press ahead with national elections in January 2005, though music in President Bush's ears, means that he must have very different conceptions from most people of what such elections might be supposed to demonstrate, since, at the very least, it will be impossible to hold them in areas which the US does not control.

Furthermore, to touch on a matter eloquently dealt with in a recent article by Toby Dodge,[5] if these elections are to take place at the end of January, who will the Iraqis be voting for anyway? Although many, perhaps most, of those involved in the interim government may be decent people, its performance over its first months in office does not augur particularly well, in the sense of its ability to institutionalise support in the country as a whole, let alone taking any major steps towards the restoration of public security. Of course, it would be wrong to underestimate the immensity of the task facing any attempts to restore or, more

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[2] "How the War in Iraq Undermined the War on Terror", Atlantic Monthly, Oct. 2004, pp. 68-88.

[3] This general sentiment has a longer history than is often realised. The previously secular Saddam Hussein's appeal for a jihad against the enemies of Islam in the spring of 1990 would have resonated among this social and geographical constituency. See M. Farouk-Sluglett and P. Sluglett, Iraq since 1958: from Revolution to Dictatorship (London: I.B. Tauris, 3rd edition, 2001) p. 282.

[4] Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq", p. 37.

[5] "A Sovereign Iraq?", Survival, vol. 46, no. 3, 2004, pp. 39-58.

accurately, create democracy and democratic institutions in a country that has been so ravaged so dreadfully and for so long.

1. The broader perspective

Before analysing the local situation and its repercussions, it is worth briefly surveying the broader international picture. The US effort has not been supported internationally with any great enthusiasm: the 'coalition of the willing' consists of the United States (130,000 troops), the United Kingdom (9,000 troops), Italy (3,000 troops), Poland (2,460) and some thirty other countries contributing a total of a further 10,000 troops, with contingents ranging between 1,600 (Ukraine) and 25 (Kazakhstan). Spain pulled out its 1,300 troops as a result of the elections which took place soon after the terrorist bombing of the main railway station in Madrid last spring, and the Philippines pulled out its 80 troops after several kidnappings of Filipino truck drivers and other service workers.[6] In the same way, the United States has been unsuccessful in its efforts to obtain international financial assistance for Iraq. It failed in its efforts to push round the begging bowl at the Madrid Donor Conference in August 2003, and much the same kind of disdain was evident at the session of the UN General Assembly in September 2004, where none too subtle hints were dropped about adhering to the 'rule of law'.

Part of this international disapproval, and the general unwillingness to contribute to what might otherwise have seemed a worthy cause, is caused by the obvious corruption of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the scandalous awards of extremely lucrative contracts to US companies, often as a result of tenders with a single applicant. At another level, it seems strange that so many Filipinos, Turks, and so on have been kidnapped in Iraq. The fact is that, in spite of massive unemployment, foreign contractors are not employing Iraqis, preferring to hire personnel from South and Southeast Asia either to service the US occupation forces or to 'reconstruct Iraq'. It is difficult to imagine practices more likely to inflame local resentment. Most Iraqis wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein, and they were unable to do it on their own, but they did not want this to be accompanied by an almost total breakdown of public security in large swathes of the country. Nor did they actively seek the installation of a government composed largely of former exiles, who – without necessarily questioning their personal integrity – are self-evidently American puppets.

In a similar vein, in an ideal world, one country should not send an army of occupation to another, nor should it seek to compensate itself for the military expenditure it has incurred by awarding a number of lucrative postwar and reconstruction contracts to its own nationals, in processes which, to say the least, are evidently far from transparent. However, the US has indeed overthrown a vicious and isolated regime, and the construction, or the encouragement,

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[6] Figures taken from <http://www.geocities.com/pwhce/willing.html#list4>. Although Britain has sent a relatively sizeable contingent to Iraq, British public opinion has always been profoundly opposed both to the war and to the commitment of British troops. Similarly, a survey conducted for Corriere della Sera at the end of March 2003 showed that 70 percent of the Italian public were opposed to their government's support for the impending war in Iraq.

of democracy is not an unworthy aim; indeed it is an objective which will command almost universal support throughout the region. The main problem, it seems in Iraq at the moment, is getting it right.

2. Impact on Iraq and its neighbours

Turning to the impact on Iraq and its neighbours of the events that have taken place there over the past eighteen odd months, the most ubiquitous and apparently insoluble problem – as mentioned previously, a direct consequence of the inadequate numbers of troops assigned to the operation – is that of public order, which has been deteriorating steadily since April 2003. Car bombs go off daily in Baghdad, Mosul or Kirkuk; Falluja, Samarra and Ramadi are no-go areas; Kerbala and Najaf are perpetual potential flashpoints for the expression of Shia hostility to the US occupation, not, generally, on the part of a united front of local inhabitants but on the part of adherents of Muqtada al-Sar's Mahdi army. The US has felt it necessary to mount attacks on Sadr City (fomerly Madinat al-Thawra, then Madinat Saddam), and more recently and more devastatingly on Falluja, in an attempt to flush out the opposition. It is significant that the south of the country, largely under British control, is very much quieter; this is perhaps partly because the British presence is less intrusive and the local population perhaps more unanimously relieved that the regime has been overthrown. But it may also be because of the fund of experience in dealing with hostile urban environments that British troops have gained in Kosovo and of course in Northern Ireland.

Among the Sunni Arabs, the part being played by the 'old Baathists' as such is probably rather minimal, since there is not much ideological wind left in that set of bagpipes. It is true that foreign military occupation, especially as tactlessly conducted as this has been, is not pleasant for anyone, but the call to rally round the banner of Baathism does not seem likely to arouse widespread popular appeal. On the other hand, jihadism, or Sunni Islamic activism, probably has much wider appeal, and it may well be that the former Baathists have slipped more or less seamlessly from one loose opposition grouping to another. This is the kind of resistance that has been emanating from the Sunni Arab areas within a radius of approximately 100-150 kilometres around Baghdad.[7] Much of it is probably directed by individuals with links of some kind or other to al Qaida, like al-Zarqawi, who are responsible for most of the set piece attacks on buildings or institutions in Baghdad and elsewhere, or on individuals or groups working for, or hoping to work for, the provisional government.

The Syrian and Jordanian borders with Iraq are so long and so unremarkable – in the sense that they are lines in the sand rather than separations marked by clear geographical features – that fairly large numbers of troops (on either side of the border) would be needed to stop infiltration from outside. In spite of the Pentagon's assertions to the contrary, it of course is very far from Syrian President Bashar al-Asad's interests to encourage this kind of

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[7] Although a little dated, "The Sunni Insurgency in Iraq" by Ahmed S. Hashem, Middle East Perspectives (Washington: The Middle East Institute, August 2003) remains a useful and highly articulate guide to the subject.

infiltration – it is far more likely that the Syrian military cannot stop them. On the Jordanian frontier, King Abdullah II presumably finds himself in much the same position without being so publicly lambasted for it.

On the other hand, the no-go Sunni areas mentioned earlier (Falluja, Ramadi, Samarra, perhaps Baquba), seem to be controlled by a combination of home-grown leaders and roving bands of 'insurgents'. They do not seem to be in the hands of any one group, but of several different factions, and it is conceivable that the factions may eventually attack one another in a struggle to obtain the upper hand, a situation reminiscent of the Lebanese civil war. If this is in fact so, it is extremely serious and will not easily be overcome by whatever palliatives the interim government and the US may think fit to offer.

The 'radical' Shia opposition, on the other hand, seems to be less 'systemic' and more an expression of frustration at the ever widening gap between the promise of liberation and the everyday reality of shortages of power and water, unemployment, inadequate provision of basic services, and so on. The United States has now realised that it is pretty much dependent on maintaining the support of the Shia clerical hierarchy, and is even prepared, for example, to allow Muqtada al-Sadr to participate in politics if his followers disarm and behave like a political party. There is obviously some infiltration from Iran, but this is not necessarily alarming, given that the Iranians, like the Syrians, have less to gain from anarchy than from stability in Iraq. In short, the problems in the Sunni areas and Baghdad are of a far greater order of gravity than those posed by Shia militants, partly because Shia demands are in a sense more 'conventional', bread and butter, and ultimately easier to satisfy, and partly, as was demonstrated during the summer, because the clerical hierarchy is both unified and at least for the moment able to make leaders like al-Sadr toe the line. In contrast, there are no similar authority figures for the factional leaders in Ramadi to respond or listen to.

A further curious feature of the early months of the occupation was the failure to reach out to the Shia clerical leadership at both national and local levels, since it constituted an influential group almost entirely untainted by any dubious association with the previous regime. Eventually the US seems to have grasped this, as evidenced by its seeking the aid of Ayatullah Sistani, another strong opponent of the notion of creating an Islamic state in Iraq.

There is some doubt about the validity of the assertion in the National Intelligence Estimate to the effect that there is quite a large possibility of 'civil war',[8] unless this is understood as 'intra-Sunni fighting'. The prospect of Shias and Sunnis fighting each other does not seem immediate, partly because the communities tend to live apart from each other (except for Baghdad where some 12 out of 25 million Iraqis live). So far, there is no fire-eating sectarian talk emanating from the Shia leadership, and the Shias seem fairly united politically.

Another spectre is the prospect of Iraq falling apart into what are described as its Sunni Arab, Shia Arab and Kurdish components. This has always seemed palpable nonsense. The overthrow of the Baath regime has facilitated a far likelier outcome: the emergence of a federal state consisting of 'the Kurdish areas' on the one hand and 'the rest of Iraq' on the

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[8] K. Pfleger Schrader, Associated Press, 15 September 2004: «The National Intelligence Council presented President Bush this summer with several pessimistic scenarios regarding the security situation in Iraq, including the possibility of a civil war there before the end of 2005.»

other. Since the Kurds have been running their own affairs for some twelve years, they will not wish to be dominated by Baghdad at any time in the future, and in that sense a form of federation which gives autonomy to Iraqi Kurdistan is not an unreasonable project. However, that would be the beginning and end of the amount of federation which will be sought now or in the future. In the other scenario, where would the Sunni and Shia Arab parts of Iraq go? To some sort of union with Iran? or with Syria? or with Saudi Arabia?

Far more likely than 'the break up of Iraq' is the kind of sectarian factionalism which may arise from an over-emphasis on sectarian affiliation. Religious affiliation in Iraq and elsewhere in the Muslim world is something that one inherits, passively as it were, rather than something which is necessarily embraced actively. To make it plain, while religious affiliation and activism in the United States is very largely a matter of choice, this choice is not so easily available (because of social and community pressures) in much of the Muslim world. Hence, trying to fit people into neat categories based on their sectarian affiliation, as is happening in Iraq, let alone actually dividing up the political and economic spoils on the basis of sectarian affiliation, is not only ill-judged but highly dangerous. Perhaps the most negative aspect of this approach is that it suggests that people only relate to each other in this way, rather than as fathers, sons, shopkeepers, citizens desiring a better life, and so forth. In fact, most Iraqis, unlike, say, many Syrians, were never very enthusiastic about Arab nationalism, and generally feel a much stronger sense of Iraqi identity. An over-utilised but nevertheless useful example of this is Iraq's war with Iran in the 1980s, which was largely fought between Iranian Shia conscripts on one side against Iraqi Shia conscripts on the other.

3. Repercussions on the region as a whole

What are some of the more significant results of eighteen months of coalition occupation apart from the overthrow of the previous regime? Mention has been made so far of the relative isolation of the United States in the forum of world public opinion and the general lack of support for the invasion on the part of world, and especially European, public opinion. It is also important to underline the negative consequences of the invasion for both Afghanistan and the 'war on terror'. In Iraq itself there has been ever growing insecurity, the rise of Sunni Islamic jihadism and other religious insurgency, the rise of factionalism and anarchy, the installation of an interim government which has little or no resonance in the country as a whole, and the general disillusionment of the population with the occupation and the slow pace of reconstruction. Let us take a very brief look at some of the repercussions of these many negative outcomes for the region as a whole.

While a substantial reason for the absence of any progress towards a solution to the Palestine-Israel impasse over the past four years must be laid at the door of Yasir Arafat, it would be absurd to depict the Israeli side as a virtuous but rejected suitor.[9] It is still too early

[9] If one is to believe the argument put forward by Dennis Ross in The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), to the effect that a major spec-

to predict the possible impact of Arafat's recent death. Certainly, both before and after the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration took only the most perfunctory steps towards helping to implement a peace settlement. The 'Road Map' of 30 April 2003 has proved almost completely irrelevant, as would be the case with any settlement which neither party is obliged to accept. Of course, the fact that the Bush administration has supported virtually any policy of the present Israeli government, however provocative or outrageous, has severely damaged the United States' credibility in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and also destroyed the admittedly thinning pretence that the United States might be considered an 'honest broker' in the conflict. In general, the combination of extreme partiality towards Israel and the mess that has been made in Iraq has produced a widespread dimunition of respect towards the United States among ordinary people in the region.

Iran, Syria and Turkey are extremely concerned about the effects that anarchy or state failure in Iraq might have on their own populations. The regimes in Iran and Turkey are fairly stable, Syria's rather less so, and of course allegations of Syrian support for 'terrorism' formed the grounds for the passing in the United States of the Syrian Accountability Act of May 2003, which involves some (albeit fairly mild) US sanctions against Syria. As elsewhere in the region, ordinary people are pleased that the dictatorship has been overthrown, but fearful of what may follow unless stability returns.

If, as seems likely, Turkey's application to begin negotiations for European Community membership is successful, the Turks will have to be even nicer to their Kurds than they have started to be over the last few years; it is not clear how this will affect their attitudes to an Iraqi Kurdistan which might form part of a federal Iraqi state.

An important part of the neo-conservative vision of the future was to reduce American dependence on Saudi Arabia, which the events of 11 September 2001 seemed to make a particularly urgent priority. However, soaring world demand for oil (from China and elsewhere) and the Saudis' abundant possession of it, means that this dependence is unlikely to diminish any time in the near future. The Saudi government, perhaps somewhat more rattled than usual, has responded to the latest series of crises by announcing a series of more or less sclerotic steps towards democratisation which are unlikely to lead to earth-shattering results. A spate of bombings directed largely against expatriate workers earlier this year has probably led to heightened security but to no other fundamental changes. Like its other neighbours, Saudi Arabia is naturally fearful of the consequences of anarchy in Iraq, but its rulers know that they are too important to the United States to remain undefended in a major crisis. If democracy were ever to make any real headway in Iraq, this would be a considerable embarassment to the Saudis, but it is also the case that there is no obvious alternative, no coherent or organised opposition, to the ruling family.

All in all it is very difficult to evince any optimism about the future of Iraq. The insurgents have been chased out of Falluja, but some of them have reappeared in Mosul, as they will no doubt reappear in Ramadi, or Samarra. In its second term, the US administration

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tre haunting Arafat was that of not wanting to go down in history as the person who signed the agreement formalising the handover of Palestinian territory to Israel. In fairness, Ross does not present the Israelis as paragons of virtue either.

may be more prepared to admit some of its mistakes, but their cumulative effect is sufficiently serious to make it hard to believe that it will be possible to hold meaningful elections in January 2005. It is clear that a major reformulation of US policy is needed, but with the voice of moderation having left the State Department, and much of the team most directly responsible for the current shambles still in office, if not always the same office, it is not clear from where any such sober reconsideration might come. It is a sad fact that, increasingly, emigration constitutes the most attractive option for those Iraqi profes-sionals whose expertise and commitment is of such vital importance to the effective reconstruction of the country.

3. Promoting Democracy in the Arab World: The Challenge of Joint Action

*Tamara Cofman Wittes**

The vituperative disputes that plagued transatlantic relations during 2003 centred around policy toward the Middle East, specifically Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given this fresh history, it is perhaps surprising how much energy the Bush administration invested in 2004 toward joint US-European action to promote democratisation in the Middle East. Europe and the United States have now come to some agreement on key goals regarding the political, economic, and social development of the Middle East, and on the stakes for the West in the Middle East's developmental success. The question remains: how meaningful is this apparent consensus, and what does it portend for the ability of Western states to influence developments in this important neighbouring region?

This article will assess the transatlantic agreement on democracy promotion in the Middle East that was embodied in the three transatlantic summits of June 2004,[1] and mainly in the G-8's 'Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa' and its 'Plan of Support for Reform' (hereafter jointly referred to as the 'BMENA Initiative').[2] Second, it will critically evaluate the approach to democratic reform evident on both sides of the Atlantic and the challenges this approach presents for effective action to advance democracy in the Arab world. Finally, the article will lay out two key programmatic challenges and one diplomatic challenge that remain to be tackled before effective mechanisms can be formulated to implement shared US and European objectives regarding Arab reform.[3]

[1] The Sea Island G-8 summit, the Ireland US-EU summit, and the Istanbul NATO summit. For the US-EU Declaration Supporting Peace, Progress, and Reform in the Broader Middle East and in the Mediterranean, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06 /200406 26-1.html>; for the NATO declaration of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, see: <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/docu-cooperation.htm>.

[2] These two G-8 documents are available through the White House website at <http://www. whitehouse.gov/g8/index.html>.

[3] The BMENA Initiative and other unilateral and multilateral efforts by the transatlantic states encompass the region stretching from Morocco to Pakistan. This article, however, will concentrate on the core challenge of promoting democratic reform in the Arab states.

1. The BMENA Initiative

The documents produced at the G-8 summit in Sea Island, Georgia suggest that, at long last, Europe and the United States have arrived at a common understanding of the problem that confronts them in the region, and of the goals of the intended intervention on the issue of Arab reform.

The BMENA Initiative cements a consensus among Western states that continued political stagnation in the countries of the Middle East threatens the peace and stability of that region, as well as the security of Western states. There is a shared understanding today that overcoming Arab countries' developmental stagnation is not simply a question of mitigating labour migration or generously promoting socio-economic development, but a question of avoiding a real and increasing risk of radicalisation and state failure that can produce effects directly threatening to the rest of the world.

The G-8 documents clearly articulate the goal of Arab reform as democracy, a step forward from the looser formulations regarding good governance or human rights that prevailed before. Stating the goal as democracy implies a set of expectations regarding political rights and political participation that Western states can operationalise and refer to in their relations with Arab states. If the region's efforts at reform are going to meet Western needs, as set down in the G-8 statement, then being specific about what Western interests require of the reform process is important both for honest dialogue with regional partners, and ultimately for the effectiveness of Western intervention. How the Western states follow up on this declared goal of democracy is, of course, important and much less evident at this stage.

The BMENA statement of principles (the 'Partnership for Progress' document) clearly articulates that democratic values are universal. Moreover, the G-8 states agree that the uniqueness of local circumstances "must not be exploited to prevent reform", a clear reference to states, like Saudi Arabia, that claim that their faith and conservative identity make progressive social and political reform unpalatable to their societies. So the G-8 has set a useful limit on Arab states' claims of particularity, which had been used to create an obstacle to effective Western democracy promotion in the past.

The BMENA documents ensure that the dialogue on democratic reform between the West and the Middle East will include not only governments, but also business and civil society groups. The documents state that government, business leaders and civil society groups from the Arab world are all 'full partners' in the work of democratic reform. Defining partnership in this way is new and an important step forward in Western democracy promotion projects. Local ownership doesn't mean that governments get a monopoly on the articulation of reform goals for their citizens. Taking up the challenge, the most impressive part of the preparatory 'Forum for the Future' meetings in New York in September 2004 were the presentations by the civil society and business leaders to the group of G-8 ministers.[4] This question of civil society's role is central to what we do now, and will be a focus in the text below.

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[4] The BMENA Initiative's flagship program is a regular meeting of G-8 and Middle Eastern ministers called the 'Forum for the Future'. Middle Eastern business and civil society representatives are meant to have simultaneous parallel meetings alongside the Forum sessions.

The G-8 summit was also important in that it finally moved the United States and Europe beyond their long-running and sterile debate as to the relative urgency of attending to Arab reform or to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the BMENA Initiative notes that resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is "an important element of progress in the region", it argues that "regional conflicts must not be an obstacle for reforms". At this point both Europe and the United States recognise the necessity of action as well as the limited scope for action on these issues.

But while the BMENA Initiative achieved transatlantic unity behind the goals of regional reform, it did not provide much in the way of credible mechanisms to realise that commitment. Beyond its Forum for the Future and Democracy Assistance Dialogue, the Plan of Support for Reform commits G-8 states to some small-scale economic and social development programs, many of which are only tenuously related to democracy promotion. It is not lost on the regional actors, both governmental and non-governmental, that little new money for even these small, uncontroversial programs has been allocated. In a Middle Eastern environment where Western (not just US) intentions are suspect, and where Western deeds have fallen far short of declarations in Iraq and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the failure of the G-8 states to commit to robust implementation of their Sea Island commitments may hamper their attempts to play a positive role in the ongoing process of political change in the Arab world.

The advocates of the BMENA Initiative see the Forum for the Future as the central institution for advancing the democratic agenda and holding Arab governments accountable to both internal and external demands. But a significant flaw in the Forum's design, one that reflects a fundamental unresolved question in Western attempts to address this issue of Arab reform, will make it very hard for the Forum to play its intended role. The Forum is meant to include a regular meeting of ministers (and, in parallel, business and civil society groups) to discuss reform issues and monitor progress on democracy. The Forum is loosely modelled on the APEC Forum and the Helsinki process, two cases in which a group of sovereign states jointly created a mechanism for regular dialogue on issues including human rights and political freedoms. But this Forum does not resemble the Helsinki process or APEC in one key respect: the Helsinki process grew from an agreement in which Western and Eastern bloc states jointly committed to respect each other's sovereignty and not to overturn each other's governments by force. In exchange, they agreed to a dialogue on human rights and increased freedom for civic groups at home.

The G-8 Forum is rooted in no such bargain. It was created with Middle Eastern states treated as 'targets' of the reform dialogue. The G-8 states do not link joining the Forum with enjoying other benefits of the G-8 reform package (and certainly not with a mutual guarantee of sovereignty). This failure means that G-8 states have already given away much of the initiative's potential to persuade Arab autocrats to loosen their domestic controls. And with no human rights criteria for participating in the G-8's new literacy, job training and business promotion programs, Arab states are offered the help of the West to implement economic reforms they largely want, while ignoring Western rhetorical pressure for the political reforms they do not want.

2. Linking political and economic reform through conditionality

Why does the G-8 document fall short on this key question of linking economic to political reform and providing effective economic incentives for Arab regimes to undertake gradual political change? Experiences including the Barcelona process and the Gore-Mubarak Partnership[5] have demonstrated to Western countries the futility of promoting economic liberalisation as a precursor for expanded political freedoms.

The struggles of Egypt and other Arab states to implement structural economic reforms in the 1990s revealed the limitations of an economically-focused reform policy. The fact that most economies in the Arab world are state-dominated means that economic reform is itself a very political act and that, without determined political reform, it is difficult to undertake the necessary structural reforms of Arab economies. In addition, the experience of other developing countries undertaking structural reform show that economic reform is as likely to produce economic dislocation and exaggerated income disparity (and thus social tensions) in the short term as it is to produce economic growth and new jobs in the longer term. Without political reform, economic reform can increase, instead of decrease, citizens' frustration and social instability and lead to undesirable political outcomes. Moreover, in a post-9/11 world, economic development alone in the Arab world is not sufficient to meet Western interests in the region's reform process – basic liberty and greater public participation in governance are important to reduce the legitimacy of violence and the radical politics that supports it.[6] Yet this understanding is not clearly integrated into the G-8 or other transatlantic plans to support regional reform.

There are different reasons in Europe and in the United States for why this failure to change policy occurred. When the European Union launched the Barcelona process in 1995, the European states' main concern was economic: labour migration from the southern Mediterranean to the north was the core problem that required addressing. Because this was the motivating factor, economic development for its own sake was a shared goal of the Mediterranean states and their European partners. This naturally made the Barcelona process move in practice much more quickly on economic development and trade relations than on its human rights agenda. In a post-9/11, post-Madrid world, that shared interest in economic development remains, but the European interest in the region's development should be broader. European governments at this point have reason to view economic development in the southern Mediterranean as a means to something larger, not so much as an end in itself. Whatever the extent of that realisation (and clearly some European capitals do hold this view), it is not yet apparent in the programmatic commitments of European governments.

There remains, evidently, a gap between the understanding of many European analysts, including those who have worked on the Barcelona process, and the practice of European governments, regarding the relationship between economic and political reform. Some

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[5] Formally the US-Egypt Partnership for Economic Growth and Development, begun in 1998.

[6] See the reasoning in, for example, the speech by Joschka Fischer, German Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the 40th Munich Conference on Security Policy, Munich, 7 February 2004 <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/ausgabe_archiv?archiv_id=5338>.

European governments feel deeply invested in the trade and assistance relationships they have built with Arab governments in the Euro-Mediterranean process, and they remain disinclined to embrace a policy that more tightly conditions economic relations on political reform.

On the US side, despite a willingness to consider greater political conditionality in economic relations (this willingness is evidenced, for example, in the creation of the Millennium Challenge Corporation), there is as yet no clear answer to the question of how to make conditionality effective in US-Arab relations, or how to prevent conditionality on political reform from exacting costs in terms of Arab cooperation with strategic American goals in the region, especially in the peace process and the war on terrorism. Since the US government has no comfortable answers to these questions, it has been reluctant to upset the apple cart by restructuring its aid and trade relations with Arab states to fully incorporate political reform as a goal.

As a result of the disjuncture on both sides of the Atlantic between the lessons of experience and the imperatives of daily policy formulation and implementation, and with the added incentive of least-common-denominator multilateralism, the G-8 reform plans also emphasise economic development, particularly private sector development, and have very little content regarding political reform. Washington, at least, comforts itself with the belief that, in the long run, private sector growth and middle class growth tend to create pressures for greater transparency and citizen participation in governance. European capitals may also be willing to satisfy themselves with this theorised linkage between political and economic reform. Unless that complacency is challenged, Western governments will likely face another round of disappointment in stalled or even reversed reform, just as occurred in Egypt in the 1990s. More dangerous, such complacency in not enforcing the clear relationship between political and economic reform, and the resulting failure of economic liberalisation to succeed in changing Arab citizens' lives will not only undermine the credibility of Western commitments to democratic reform, but may also discredit among Arabs the very notion of reform as an effective answer to the contemporary problems of Arab societies.

Some Western observers and even some policymakers reject the idea of conditionality outright, believing it to be inconsistent with the principle of 'partnership'. That may be true, if by partnership is meant a partnership of Western governments with Arab governments. But if one takes as a starting point the desire of Western states to address Arab citizens who want to improve their lives, and who as individuals choose to stay at home or to emigrate, to remain productive citizens or to join a violent radical movement, then partnership must go beyond government-to-government relations. In this environment, conditioning Western relations with Arab governments on their behaviour toward their own citizens seems wholly appropriate.

The larger Arab states, especially, have embraced a strategy of controlled liberalisation in response to internal and external pressures, seeking to reform in ways that improve government and economic performance without changing the distribution of political power. While a few forward-leaning regimes have placed some power in the hands of their peoples through constitutional and electoral reforms, many others are trying to create just enough sense of forward motion to alleviate the building public pressure for change at the top. As discussed above, the United States and some European states have already concluded that the path of controlled liberalisation in the Arab world is not consistent with their needs and goals

for the reform process there, and that meaningful economic reform and meaningful political reform must go hand-in-hand to be successful. In principle, therefore, and according to the terms of the BMENA Initiative, the United States and its Western partners have a basic strategic disagreement with most Arab governments on their reform strategies, with perhaps a handful of exceptions. Western governments and institutions must keep this hard-won insight in mind as they proceed to plan new interventions on this issue.[7]

As it stands today, the transatlantic community's main initiative to promote Arab reform still reflects the pre-11 September bias among Western governments to let Arab governments set the agenda for reform. This fundamental problem was clearly on display at the preparatory meetings for the Forum for the Future in September 2004. The United States government invested a great deal of effort and political capital to achieve Arab governmental participation in the preparatory meeting. Although the participation of Arab governments in the ministerial meeting was almost universal, the substantive component of that meeting was extremely thin. This likely reinforced among Arab regimes the conviction that their symbolic accession to the G-8 reform agenda was of greater value to Western states than their actual progress on domestic political freedom.

3. The role of civil society

In practice, the continued ambivalence in the United States and Europe over political conditionality for economic assistance to Arab governments, and the resulting gap between the G-8's enunciated reform principles and its plan of support for reform, has essentially cut new slack for the regimes of the Middle East and thrown the burden for change onto civil society actors. A core challenge for democracy advocates and policy analysts in the West, then, is to determine how to make the limited democracy assistance available maximally effective in helping Arab civil society promote reform.

Civil society in the region may yet be small and weak, but its voice has grown significantly in strength over the past two years.[8] Indeed, the most promising aspect of the G-

[7] This is not meant to suggest that Western governments are, or should set themselves, in opposition to Arab regimes and foment popular revolutions in Arab countries, even were this a feasible strategy. However, if Western governments recall that their main concern is to moderate the attitudes and behaviours of individual Arab citizens rather than of Arab governments, and that Arab citizens are thus meant to be the primary targets and beneficiaries of the reform process, this has necessary implications for Western policies and relations with Arab governments.

[8] Civil society conferences have produced courageous and detailed agendas for reform including, inter alia, the "Alexandria Declaration" of March 2004 <http://www.arabreformforum.org/ English/Document.htm>, the Final Report from the Arab Civil Forum in Beirut, 19-22 March 2004:
 <http://www.euromedrights.net/english/Download/Report_arab_cf_beirut.doc>, and the blueprint for economic reform issued by the Arab Business Council of the World Economic Forum in January 2004 <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/ABC/ABC_R1.pdf>.

8 plan of support for reform is its integration of Arab civil society and business activists into the Arab-Western dialogue about reform which largely excluded them in the past.[9]

Because the burden for initiative within the region is now on civil society, Western governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with implementing effective democracy assistance programs must determine how to address two centrally important political forces: liberals and Islamists.

3.1 Arab liberals

The first challenge for Western democracy assistance is how to engage with, nurture, and strengthen Arab liberals so that they can present a credible alternative to authoritarian regimes and to radical Islamists – and how to provide this support without making Arab liberals vulnerable to the charge of acting as Western puppets.

It is undoubtedly true, as an empirical matter, that Arab liberals are a minority among politically active Arabs, and that they appear to be out of the mainstream of Arab public opinion. But does this mean that liberals are not likely to be effective voices on behalf of democratic change in their societies? Some have been arguing that Arab liberals are an ageing, shrinking, and marginal group, out of touch with the mainstream of Arab opinion.[10]

Historically speaking, this would not be surprising: liberals have always been, in every society, a small, elite group isolated from the "grassroots". This was true in revolutionary America, in enlightenment Europe, and in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Liberal activists do not generally enjoy wide popularity because liberalism is not a populist ideology. The importance of liberal activists lies less in their numerical support than in their ability to articulate and fight for a definition of justice that represents the deepest aspirations of a wide variety of citizens. But it is not accurate, as some argue, that liberals in the Arab world are ageing and decreasing in number.[11] It may be that 'liberal intellectuals' in the tradition of those who flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century are ageing and decreasing in number. But there is a younger generation of liberals who are not intellectuals: they are businessmen, lawyers and doctors, and they are fairly pragmatic in their strategies for promoting liberal politics and liberal ideas. These Arab liberals have not universally chosen an oppositional stance in their political strategies within their own countries; they are not all dissidents, operating underground. Many have chosen for the time being to work through

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[9] At the preparatory meetings for the Sept. 2004 Forum for the Future, the business and civil society meetings were apparently the most substantive and inspiring portion of the proceedings, such that even US Secretary of State Colin Powell, a relative sceptic regarding US democracy promotion in the Middle East, came away impressed with the need to support these reform activists. That this outcome reflects civil society's growing strength and organisation rather than any Western engineering is evident from the fact that the US government itself devoted little planning to these "side" meetings, as compared to the ministerial meeting.

[10] J. Alterman, "The False Promise of Arab Liberals", *Policy Review* no. 125 (June/July 2004).

[11] T. Cofman Wittes "The Promise of Arab Liberalism", Ibid.

persuasion of their ruling regimes, to work within ruling parties and regime-dominated institutions to push their ideas as far as they can.

It is this bifurcation within the Arab liberal elite that makes supporting Arab liberals such a difficult challenge for Western democracy advocates. How can the West support those liberals who are working for change within their existing systems, but in a way that doesn't end up legitimising the system itself and facilitating the regimes' attempts to co-opt and neutralise their liberal critics? And how can Western supporters ensure that their regional partners remain committed to liberal politics, without insisting that these liberal activists stand wholly in opposition to the regimes that rule them? US and European funders and aid agencies must support liberals on both sides of this divide: those who are trying to achieve as much as they can by persuasion , and those who have passed the limits of allowable persuasion and are suffering the consequences of challenging their ruling regimes.

Two initial steps will help outsiders who wish to provide assistance strike this difficult balance. First, Western donors should be very clear both among themselves and with their regional interlocutors (government and NGO) about the principles and standards that guide their assistance – and here the explicit goal of democratic reform, as opposed to merely good governance, should be a relevant guide for their actions. Second, Western supporters should stay in close contact with the liberal activists in the countries where they are working to ensure that outside assistance (and diplomatic pressure) reinforces the locals' chosen strategies.

Over the past decade, the Western approach to democracy assistance has been based on the assumption that Arab civil society was inadequate to the task of pressing for change. Western donors looked for chinks in the armour of the authoritarian state and tried to employ technical assistance as a wedge to create constituencies for reform. Today, Western donors can work with extant developments on the ground. If a liberal minister is trying to introduce tax reforms, what can Western states do to help? If a journalists' union is trying to expand its role into advocacy on behalf of real press freedom, how can Western democracy assistance support them? Here the Democracy Assistance Dialogue that is part of the G-8 and that is co-chaired by Italy, Turkey and Yemen might prove a very useful coordinating institution between Western donor agencies and democracy assistance NGOs on the one hand, and regional democracy activists on the other hand.

3.2 Islamist movements

In addition to Arab liberals, there is another, overlapping, constituency that Western states must address seriously in order to improve political freedom in this part of the world. Thus far, Western governments have failed utterly to integrate Islamist political movements into their vision for the region's political future and into their strategies for promoting political reform.

Islamist movements still command the majority of what exists today as popular oppositional sentiment in the Arab world. European and American governments share the concern that Islamist movements represent potential (perhaps even likely) spoilers in the

democratisation picture in many Arab states. It may prove that their current apparent support is in fact an artefact of stunted political dialogue and will not survive long in a freer public square.[12]12 But the 'lesson of Algeria', the Western fear that too-quick political openings might lead to take-overs of Arab governments by radical Islamists, has created a near-allergy among Western governments to dealing with nearly all Islamist parties. Western governments have become so afraid of empowering the 'wrong' Islamist movements that they don't try to empower any at all.[13] As Richard Youngs has noted, the current Western attitude leaves Islamist political movements as the "untouchables of the democracy assistance world".[14]

Liberals and Islamists are not necessarily mutually exclusive or mutually antagonistic groups, but the prevailing political framework in most of the Arab world today makes them behave that way. When the regimes restrict speech and association everywhere but in religious institutions, Islamists enjoy an advantage, and have no incentive to argue for liberal political rights. When Islamists enjoy this protected position as the only viable opposition, disadvantaged liberals likewise have no incentive to show tolerance for religious values or expression in politics, indeed their resentment at the imbalance is sometimes expressed as anti-religious bigotry. Liberals and Islamists will probably remain unable to unite behind a pro-democracy agenda as long as the regimes that control them continue this cynical manipulation of their domestic political space.

Western governments must press regimes to open up the public square to real competition of political ideas in order to level this playing field and enable the emergence, where they exist, of liberal Islamist politicians who can compete, and perhaps cooperate with Islamists on an equal basis. Western governments must ensure that the Islamists with whom they engage embrace democracy as an end and not a means – and that may mean that it is best, at least at first, to engage them through and within a broader pro-democracy civil society coalition. But their intentions cannot be tested until there is a competitive political process in which they have some incentive to participate. In such circumstances, it would be self-defeating for Western agencies to blacklist all political actors who say that their public policy platform is religiously inspired.

The US and Europe have a powerful tool to aid their governments and civil society actors in exploring the possibilities for Islamist participation in building more democratic societies in the Arab world: their own Muslim diasporas. With the increased strength and political mobilisation of these communities, the US and European governments should

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[12] By design, the regimes' top-down liberalisation does not relax state control sufficiently to enable the formation of any organised political alternative to the state itself or the Islamist opposition movements. The Islamists have the mosque as a place to organise, while other arenas of social organisation are still tightly restricted. In this way, the regimes maintain control – but also maintain the Islamist opposition as the only alternative to their rule. At the same time, the Islamists' dominance of the opposition is the excuse many regimes offer Washington as to why truly free politics is too dangerous and political reform can go only so far and no farther.

[13] Western embassies, however, do maintain informal dialogues with some among them.

[14] R. Youngs, *Europe's Uncertain Pursuit of Middle East Reform*, Carnegie Papers no. 45 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2004).

encourage moderate voices within them to make themselves heard not only in their adopted homes but in their homelands as well, spreading a message of tolerance and also of Muslims thriving in situations of diversity and freedom in the West. Of course, for this message to be conveyed it must be heartfelt, and that means that the utmost must be done to integrate Muslim immigrants into Western societies and to facilitate their success as equal citizens.

The United States has an additional resource it can draw on in the coming months and years in re-evaluating its attitude toward Islamist movements in the Arab world: its growing experience in Iraq of negotiating and sharing governance responsibilities with active, grassroots Islamist parties like the Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. While Sunni-Shia differences are important in political religion, it is nonetheless true that Iraq presents an example of an Arab political space in which multiple, legitimate, respected religious parties compete (mainly) peacefully for audience and adherents. If successful elections can be conducted in January 2005, as planned, the Iraqi example will be even more relevant and inspiring for the United States and for the region.

4. The unavoidable importance of diplomacy

The above points on liberals and Islamists are meant to help Western actors strategically employ their democracy assistance and democracy-building programs in ways that would facilitate the role of Arab civil society in winning its own political freedom. But there is another side to this coin that is also critical.

A final crucial challenge for Western states is how to forge effective joint diplomatic action toward Arab regimes to press for greater political rights and freedoms for Arab citizens. In the end, Western democracy assistance to civil society is meaningless unless regimes allow greater political freedom for those local groups to operate. If one key goal of joint action is to prevent the Arab governments from playing Europe and the United States off against each other, then the transatlantic states must come to common agreement on goals regarding the enhancement of political freedom, and also on red lines with respect to Arab executives exercising their current privileges.

In order to do this, each Western government individually must do a better job of integrating democracy promotion into its bilateral and multilateral diplomacy with the governments of the Middle East.[15] Traditionally, democracy and human rights programs in Western bureaucracies are run separately from regional bureaux, and foreign development assistance is in a third category. As a result, the democracy agenda does not get woven into the day-to-day communications of regional bureaux with their counterparts in the Arab world. An effective democracy assistance policy will have to begin with breaking down these bureaucratic divisions.

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[15] For more discussion of integrating democracy promotion into foreign policy, see Wittes, "Promise of Arab Liberalism" and M. Durocher Dunne, Integrating Democracy Promotion into US Middle East Policy, Carnegie Papers no. 50 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2004).

But even if the internal structures were in place, could European and US officials present a united front on any significant diplomatic question related to the expansion of political freedom in the region? There is little reason for optimism. Even on issues where they agree strongly on the goals of action and the risks of inaction, such as in dealing with Iran's nuclear program, they do not seem to have much success in implementing joint action in a way that impresses their Middle Eastern interlocutors. Given the inevitable intrusions of local interests, it seems too much to ask that Europe and America should formulate an effective joint response to, for example, Tunisian president Ben Ali's blatant manipulation of the electoral process that gave him a third term in office in October 2004.

More fundamentally, the inability of Western governments so far to persuade their Arab counterparts of the necessity of political rights and freedoms reflects enduring Western ambivalence about the project of democracy promotion, regardless of their declared commitment to that project. Both the US and Europe want to pursue reform, but to pursue it in a way that is not too destabilising and that does not jeopardise other core interests in the region: stability of energy supply, counterterrorist cooperation, Arab-Israeli rapprochement, stabilisation in Iraq. Europeans are often accused of being overly risk averse on this point, whilst Americans are often accused of being reckless. Rhetoric aside, both tend to overvalue the risk of instability and devalue the risk of doing nothing or acceding to local government preferences for glacial paces of progress. A clearer under-standing of the possibilities and opportunities for change and a more empirically informed and clear-eyed assessment of Islamist politics in a post-Algerian-civil-war Arab world would help cure Western policymakers of this tendency to discount the risk of allowing the status quo to continue.

If Western states are to commit truly to progressing beyond the status quo in their relations with the Arab world, and commit truly to building a zone of peace, prosperity and progress, then they must invest in it. The paltry sums the United States has today devoted to the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the National Endowment for Democracy are nowhere near to sufficient to establish US credibility, much less US leadership, on this issue. The same point has been made about European investments in democracy programs in the region.[16]

An instructive example of the power of investment is evident in the effect on Turkish political development wrought by dangling the carrot of EU accession before the Turkish body politic. The existence of that incentive and its obvious advantages forged a pro-reform coalition out of what had been disparate and often opposing elite social forces: moderate Islamists, the business community, and the human rights community. It may prove impossible to provide a similarly powerful carrot to Arab elites, but none of the current efforts even begin to approach the necessary threshold.

The transatlantic community will only be willing to make the necessary investment to produce effective democracy promotion when they have overcome their own ambivalence about the project itself, and when they have developed and internalised what has only just emerged from the transatlantic diplomacy of the past nine months: an objective articulation of

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[16] Youngs, *Europe's Uncertain Pursuit*.

Western self-interest in the goal of reform. Too often, both European and US governments have wished to frame their interventions on this issue as altruistic projects of noblesse oblige or "universal values" rather than as the rational pursuit of self-interest. That has sometimes led to policies that were too hesitant or too tolerant of the prejudices and preferences of their governmental partners in the Arab world. The post-11 September era demands a greater degree of honesty about the self-interest that motivates Western engagement on this issue because, for the peoples of the West and of the Middle East, the self-interest is both obvious and mutual. Honesty about the West's self-regarding interest in Arab reform also requires honesty in evaluating and communicating to Arab counterparts what types of reform do and do not meet Western needs.

In the end, effective democracy promotion by Western states in the Middle East will rely on a clear-eyed and confident sense of why the West cares about this region's political future, and on the transatlantic community's ability to slay the demons outlined above: the shadow of Islamist politics and the consequences of reform for other Western interests in the Middle East.

4. NATO's Role in Defence Cooperation and Democratisation in the Middle East

Fred Tanner*

Today, NATO has multiple roles and identities in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region. Under the auspices of the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), the Alliance appears as a partner for defence cooperation promoting soft security arrangements. Since 9/11, it is present in the region with the task force 'Active Endeavour' as a military response to threats of Islamic terrorism. It has acquired a presence in Iraq through the participation of some 15 NATO member states in the US-led multinational force. And more recently, it has accepted the responsibility to train the Iraqi army and security personnel. Finally, in 2004, NATO jumped on the bandwagon of democracy promotion in the Middle East at the NATO summit in Istanbul.

In view of these multiple roles and identities, the question this article addresses is: can NATO credibly act as a forum and promoter of defence reform and democratisation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East? For this purpose, the article will examine NATO's liberal internal and external track record in this field and then explore how transatlantic relations today condition NATO's policy towards the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions. It will then briefly examine the obstacles to governance-based security cooperation before it looks at where NATO can act and where such collaboration may have a chance to advance NATO's liberal agenda in the region.

1. NATO, defence cooperation and democratisation

Defence cooperation can cover a broad spectrum of bilateral or multilateral measures ranging from defence assistance and arms transfers to cooperation in the field of reform and modernisation of the armed forces. It can, but does not necessarily have to include cooperation in the areas of democratic governance, security sector reform and democratic control of armed forces.

What is NATO's relationship with democratisation? NATO's tradition in the field of democratic governance has its origins in the final phase of the Cold War. As a consequence, its transformation in the 1990s was based on liberal principles. The London Declaration of 1990 stated that NATO could "help build the structures of a more united continent, supporting security and stability with the strength of our shared faith in democracy, the rights of the

individual and the peaceful resolution of disputes."[1] The transform-ational and liberal ideas of the nineties were driven primarily by the US in view of NATO's eastward enlargement. This approach took a programmatic shape in 1994 with the Partnership for Peace (PfP) meant to pull former Warsaw Pact enemies into NATO's collaborative orbit. The externalisation of democratic requirements was codified in the PfP Framework Document and the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The measures to promote democratisation included defence reform, democratic control of armed forces, defence education, but also actions related to the human security agenda such as cooperation on small arms and light weapons (SALW), mine action, and human rights training of security forces. NATO strengthened its democratic governance identity by requiring the new NATO member states to comply with provisos on civil-military relations and the democratic control of the armed forces. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which includes countries from the Balkan, the Caucasus and Central Asia, endorsed at the Istanbul Summit (28/29 June 2004) a Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building. This action plan is based on the explicit understanding that defence institutions should be subordinate to civilian and democratic mechanisms.

In view of these developments, it appears that the shared liberal democratic values and norms are at the heart of NATO's legitimacy today. It is on the basis of this common identity "that NATO in the post-Cold War period has turned to focus on democracy promotion as a core principle for its activities."[2]

The unique character of NATO lies in its ability to combine robust, military operations with soft power to assist countries in transforming their security and defence sectors. The notion of soft power includes a large spectrum of cooperative activities that engage partner states, such as the promotion of interoperability, security governance, defence reforms and other activities aimed at strengthening civil-military partnerships. Institutional frameworks for soft security cooperation include the Partnership for Peace and the Mediterranean Dialogue, which was elevated at the Istanbul Summit to a 'Partnership'.

These "soft power" activities are becoming ever more important to NATO, particularly the efforts to promote governance and democratic reform in countries adjacent to NATO. NATO's MAP has also acquired the status of a normative reference for countries outside the enlarged NATO, particularly countries in the Balkans, the Ukraine and possibly also countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

2. Transatlantic bargain over democracy promotion in the Middle East

2.1 US-European convergence and disputes

NATO's transformation towards a liberal value-based international security actor is very much a function of a transatlantic bargain on democracy promotion. This bargain exists as far

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[1] See M. Webber et al., "The Governance of European Security", Review of International Studies, vol. 30, no. 1, 2004, pp. 9-19.
[2] H. Sjursen, "On the Identity of NATO", International Affairs, vol. 80, no. 4, 2004, p. 689.

as the centrality of liberal values in world affairs is concerned. It includes the transatlantic agreement that democracy promotion should be pursued in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. But, at present this common liberal philosophy is eroded by different world views, different threat perceptions and different policies. Europe focuses on its wider neighbourhood. For Europeans, the construction of a liberal and civil European model, multilateralism and international law are constants and imperatives in their international conduct. For the US, on the other hand, the "support for universal rules of behaviour really is a matter of idealism".[3] The transatlantic difference over values and the rule of law was first epitomised in the dispute over the International Criminal Court and then over Iraq.

With regard to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Europe sees the need for democratisation in the region as a corollary to its mainstream policies of development assistance and economic as well as political partnership-building. Moreover, the EU sees its programmes for the promotion of reforms in the Middle East as complementary to, but independent of those of the US.[4] The Bush administration, in contrast, was compelled by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to focus on the Middle East region and to address as one of the 'root causes' of Islamic terrorism the lack of democracy and exclusionary policies in the region. As a consequence US policymakers had to accept that fighting Islamic terrorism also requires promoting democratic governance in Arab countries.

In terms of style and policy conduct, the US has a much more direct and 'can-do' perspective on democratisation in the Middle East. In 2003 President Bush launched the 'Forward Strategy of Freedom' that has led to numerous initiatives promoting political reform, governance, civil society and the empowerment of women, among other things.[5] They include the 2003 Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the US-led 'Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Broader Middle East and North Africa' adopted in the context of the 2004 Sea Island G-8 Summit and the NATO Istanbul Summit Initiatives.[6]

2.2 NATO and the Middle East

President Bush's vision of the Alliance and its twenty-first century responsibilities are about "fighting terrorism and promoting democratic values".[7] But, NATO is unlikely to serve as a forum for a common US-European approach to reforms in the Middle East because of its multiple identities and the resulting lack of a common strategy. There is a distinct US-

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[3] R. Kagan, "Power and Weakness", Policy Review, no. 113, June/July 2002.

[4] V. Perthes, "Bewegung im Mittleren Osten", SWP-Studie, September 2004, p. 23.

[5] For a survey of the notion of democracy in US foreign policy towards the Middle East, see D. Neep, "Dilemmas of Democratization in the Middle East: The 'Forward Strategy of Freedom'", Middle East Policy, vol. IX, no. 3, 2004.

[6] For a history of the launching of these initiatives, see "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth", Middle East and North Africa Briefing, International Crisis Group, Brussels/Amman, 7 June 2004.

[7] "NATO Affords Gains for U.S. Foreign Security Policy", Washington File, 30 June 2004.

European difference of view and policy with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iraq war. Zbigniew Brzezinski rightly argues that Europeans suspect the sudden focus on democracy by US administration officials as an effort "to delay any serious American effort to push the Israeli and Palestinians to reach a genuine peace settlement".[8]

An informal consensus exists within the Alliance that NATO as a regional organisation has to think globally in order to survive in the new security environment. The Istanbul Summit clearly showed that, henceforth, NATO's 'out of area' debate is over. With the most recent round of enlargement, the Cold War 'eastern border' has all but disappeared. Instead, the US has been pushing for NATO to get involved in the Middle East, both militarily and in terms of partnership-building. US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns argued that NATO's mandate to defend Europe and North America can only be achieved by deploying "our conceptual attention and our military forces east and south. NATO's future, we believe, is east and is south. It's in the Greater Middle East."[9]

2.3 Disputes over Iraq

With regard to Iraq, there has been no shared NATO position at any stage of the crisis. Indeed, as a political or military alliance, NATO was almost irrelevant both during the pre-war period and the war itself. NATO's paralysis almost turned lethal with the short but intensive controversy over Turkey's request to NATO to assist in strengthening Turkey's defensive capabilities against potential retaliatory strikes by Iraq in case of a US attack. NATO's failure to support Turkey initially with defensive means led to widespread warnings of "the end of NATO".[10]

Some members, especially the US, wanted NATO to play a primary role after the transfer of sovereignty on 30 June 2004, drawing attention to the fact that 16 NATO member countries were already in Iraq as members of the coalition forces. Other members, however, remained ambivalent or non-committal.[11]

The positions of NATO members have largely been defined in relation to that of the US. Poland, Italy and the UK already have a significant role in Iraq.[12] The aftershocks of certain ideological differences nevertheless continue to affect discussions over UN involvement, and therefore any involvement of NATO troops.

Spain had one of the largest troop contingents in Iraq, but with the defeat of the Aznar government by the Socialists, the new Spanish government withdrew its troops from Iraq. The

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[8] Z. Brzezinski, "How Not to Spread Democracy", International Herald Tribune, 9 March 2004.

[9] N. R. Burns, "The New NATO and the Greater Middle East", remarks at Conference on "NATO and the Greater Middle East", Prague, 19 Oct. 2003.

[10] See, for instance, "The End of NATO", The Wall Street Journal, 10 February 2003.

[11] J. Chalmers, "Divisions on Iraq cloud NATO's enlargement party", Reuters, 3 April 2003.

[12] When Poland assumed command of the Multinational Division in southern Iraq as part of the international stabilisation force, NATO supported the mission by providing intelligence, logistics expertise, movement coordination, force generation and secure communications support. This support function did not, however, provide NATO with a presence in Iraq.

new Prime Minster, José Luis Zapatero stated that "the only viable form of occupation would be for the UN to take political control, for more multinational forces including many Arab countries led by the Arab League to be involved".[13]

Last, but not least, there are the perspectives of France and Germany. From a political point of view, France has consistently insisted on an enhanced role for the UN,[14] given that the Bush administration pursued a policy of selective multilateralism from the outset. Also, France has re-asserted that NATO is "simply not the right place" for decisions on Iraq once sovereignty is returned by the occupying powers.[15] Germany has sought to draw attention beyond NATO to the wider social and cultural issues: the 'causes of terrorism' and the cultural and ideological context in which 'jihadist terrorism' is possible.[16] Moreover, the German government has expressed concern that NATO involvement in Iraq would overstretch its troops and resources, given that commitments already exist in Afghanistan, Kosovo and the fight against 'terrorism'. The conflicting perspectives of NATO countries, as described in this section, were only superficially addressed by the Istanbul Summit. NATO's main shortcoming remains the lack of a shared strategic vision by all partners on how to deal with the urgent problems of the Middle East.

3. Obstacles to governance-based security cooperation in the region

The Greater Mediterranean is one of the regions in the world with the largest democratic deficit.[17] There are multiple reasons for this, ranging from underdevelopment, the difficult colonial heritage, the presence of authoritarian regimes, an excessive but partially understandable bias for internal stability and external mistrust. Moreover, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Iraq are often used as a pretext by Arab governments for not engaging in Western-induced democratic and political reforms. But there are other reasons for the difficulties in promoting democratic governance in the security sector.[18] The first obstacle is the intimate and opaque relationship between the security sector and ruling elites in most southern Mediterranean states. This intimacy is based on shared interests in maintaining power, but also on economic accommodations. In many countries "the military has its own sources of revenue for which it is not accountable and is under no observable

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[13] A. Cawthorne and D. Trotta, "Spain's Zapatero: Iraq Pull-Out Looks Inevitable", Reuters, 21 March 2004.

[14] Recent reports suggest that France would require the UN to have "responsibility for all operations". "No NATO role before UN in charge – France", Reuters, 6 April 2004.

[15] Chalmers, "Divisions on Iraq cloud party".

[16] J. Fischer, speech to the 40th Munich Conference on Security Policy, 7 February 2004.

[17] "Freedom calls, at last?", The Economist, 3 April 2004.

[18] For an in-depth analysis of the democracy deficit, Western and Arab concepts of democracy and human rights, see R. Aliboni, Common Languages in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, Euromesco Papers No. 31, May 2004.

political pressure either better to utilize its capital or to divest itself of enterprises, as is the case with regard to the civilian public sector".[19]

Second, on a more conceptual level, the compatibility of Islam with democratic governance is questioned by some analysts.[20] They typically point both to the absence of liberal/individualistic ideas in Islam as a religious and political doctrine, as well as to the lack of a tradition of democratic governance in Arab countries. Less categorical arguments within this debate suggest that Arab countries could achieve some form of democratic governance, but not necessarily a 'Western-style' democracy.

A third obstacle is the apparent double standard in the Western states' preference in the region for 'stable', even if undemocratic, regimes over 'unstable' but potentially more democratic ones. This is particularly the case when 'instability' could have spillover effects on EU countries in the form, for instance, of large-scale refugee flows. The policies of European countries towards Algeria after 1992 provide clear evidence of this preference. The same argument applies to the West's 'war on international terrorism'.[21]

Finally, there is widespread belief in the Arab population that the objective behind the US' use of force in Iraq is to secure access to oil supplies. Bechir Chourou argues that this belief undermines US "declarations to the effect that the US is interested in promoting universal values (democracy), protecting humanity against universal evils (terrorism), insuring 'civilised' and responsible behaviours (respect of international law), or helping the downtrodden (Middle East Partnership or MEPI)…". They are considered "…insincere and unconvincing attempts to justify wrongful actions".[22]

4. What can be done?

The section above shows that reform in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region is a difficult obstacle, particularly in an environment of political insecurity and protracted violence. These reasons have constrained NATO engagement in the region in the past years to soft cooperation in the context of the Mediterranean Dialogue. On an operational level, NATO has established bilateral action plans with each partner state. The menu is very rich, but the consumers are also very choosy. During the first few years and up to 9/11, the MD was basically irrelevant with regard to regional security or defence reforms of partner states.

The MD also comprises a number of functional activities or instruments that have no political strings attached and that could – over time – lead to more confidence and therefore

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[19] R. Springborg, Military Elites and the Polity in Arab States, Development Associates Occasional Paper no. 2 (Arlington, Va: Development Associates, 1998) p. 6.

[20] B. Lewis, What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East (New York: Harper Collins/Perennial, 2003).

[21] T. Carothers, "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror", Foreign Affairs, vol. 82, no. 1, January/February 2003.

[22] B. Chourou, "A Southern Perspective on Mediterranean Security After 9/11", mimeo, 4 October 2004.

more security in the region. Such activities include military visits, observation of military exercises, training both in the NATO schools and in partner countries (mobile training teams), and engagement in the NATO Science Programme, Humanitarian Mine Awareness operations and civil emergency planning.[23] The programme also includes port visits to MD countries by the NATO Standing Naval Forces. In view of the increasing threat of terrorism in the partner region, the mutual interest in defence cooperation is shifting towards practical measures in the areas of border control and small arms management. Jordan, for instance has been seeking NATO support in its attempt to secure its border with Iraq more effectively. The border security project is aimed at preventing the smuggling of weapons and explosives from Iraq to Jordan.

After 9/11, the 2002 Prague Summit endorsed the document "Upgrading the Mediterranean Dialogue including an inventory of possible areas of cooperation". This 'Enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue' moved from purely bilateral (19+1, then 26+1) information exchange meetings in Brussels to a more programmatic approach that has also led to meetings with all seven partner countries at various levels of representation. In addition to information exchange, very little has been achieved to date or if there has been some achievement, NATO has kept it low key in order not to 'embarrass' partner states. A more interesting development has been – outside the MD framework – the agreement of some Arab partner states to join NATO-led operations in the Balkans, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina (IFOR/SFOR) and Kosovo (KFOR). Moreover, Jordan has joined the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.[24]

5. The Istanbul Initiatives

At the June 2004 Istanbul Summit, NATO agreed to three 'soft power' initiatives aimed at increasing its presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The first is an effort – which falls far short of a 'Greater Middle East Initiative' – to deepen the existing Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) with seven countries in North Africa and the Middle East, and to transform it into a genuine 'Partnership'. It is not yet clear what the 'deepening' should entail, particularly in view of the sombre mood of some Arab states regarding the US presence in Iraq.[25] Formally, the objectives of the Partnership are dialogue, interoperability, defence reform and the fight against terrorism. For the first time – for some NATO officials possibly

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[23] The mobile training teams have been delivering modules to MD partners on diverse topics such as civil-military relations, public information policies and military medical issues.

[24] Jordan also participates in IFOR/SFOR and supports US operations in Yemen. Morocco participates in IFOR/SFOR and KFOR, while Egypt participated in IFOR/SFOR and supports Operation Enduring Freedom.

[25] According to NATO Policy Document, "A more Ambitious and Expanded Framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue", 9 July 2004: the "deepening" of the MD should be based on the following principles: close consultation with MD countries; the possibility of self-differentiation without discrimination; complementarity with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and the possibility of expansion to other interested countries in the Mediterranean region on a case-by-case basis.

prematurely – the MD calls for "promoting democratic control of armed forces and facilitating transparency in national defence planning and defence budgeting in support of defence reform".[26]

The second is the 'Istanbul Cooperation Initiative' (ICI). With this initiative NATO reaches out for the first time to Gulf states (the 'broader Middle East region'). The somewhat surprising aspect of ICI is that it contains explicit language on security governance, but this may be because the initiative is a PfP template. Yet there is no formal institutional link to PfP, nor is there a PfP-type 'Framework Agreement' that stipulates the political acceptance of good governance and democratic control of armed forces.[27]

According to the North Atlantic Council, the ICI aims at enhancing security and stability through a new transatlantic engagement, offering "tailored advice on defence reform, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations, promoting military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability [and] fighting terrorism […]".[28] Its objective is "to develop the ability of countries" to operate with those of the Alliance by contributing to NATO-led operations in the fight against terrorism for example, stemming the flow of WMD materials and illegal trafficking in arms, and improving countries' capabilities to address common challenges and threats with NATO.[29]

In order to avoid political problems, NATO has stipulated a number of caveats. First, it makes clear that this new initiative cannot be instrumentalised by the new partners with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the US-led coalition in Iraq: it cannot "be used to create a political debate over issues more appropriately handled in other fora". Second, to prevent Arab 'no-shows' to Initiative events where Israel may also be present, the new Partnership will function on a 26+1 basis: the 26 NATO members will work with each Gulf country on a 'one-to-one' or individual basis.

The third NATO offer in Istanbul was for the training of the new Iraqi army. France initially agreed to the so-called NATO Training Implementa-tion Mission in Iraq (NTIM-I) on the condition that it would be done outside Iraq. It had to drop this requirement under pressure from the allies, but continued to stonewall the initiative by arguing that the cost of creating a NATO training academy should be borne by the NATO allies participating in the US-led coalition.[30] In the meantime, other NATO countries, such as Norway, began to train senior Iraqi officers at NATO's Joint Warfare Centre in Norway. The NATO training activities should cover the following areas: in-theatre briefings, interoperability, peace support operations,

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[26] Ibid.

[27] L. Borgomano-Loup, "New Roles for NATO in the Middle East", in Dufourcq, J. (ed.) After Istanbul: A Preliminary Assessment, Occasional Paper 2 (Rome: NATO Defence College, Academic Research Branch, September 2004).

[28] Quoted in NATO School, Polaris, Special Issue, 7 August 2004, p. 12 <www.natoschool-shape.de/site_polaris/Polaris_Special_August%202004.pdf>

[29] Programmes include NATO-sponsored border security; cooperation and training in civil emergency planning, civil-military coordination, and crisis response to maritime, aviation, and surface threats; exchange of information on possible disaster assistance; and invitations to join or observe relevant NATO/PfP exercises.

[30] "France and Belgium Block NATO Iraq Training Plan", Financial Times,18/19 September 2004.

civil-military cooperation, NATO Operation Planning Procedures and NATO Public Information Procedures, Intelligence, military medical operations, civil protection and the roles of international and non-governmental organisations.[31]

6. Developing a "Dense Web of Cooperative Offers"

With the Istanbul Initiatives for MD and ICI, the institutional conditions now exist for conducting a regular political and military dialogue and for engaging in a "dense web of cooperative offers on many levels based on the proven PfP principle of self-differentiation".[32] Nevertheless, recalling the above mentioned obstacles, the success of future defence cooperation in the context of the Istanbul framework depends on the political will and added security values and other benefits that both NATO members and MD/ICI partners will get from such cooperation. For NATO, the main challenges are its persistent Cold War image as an instrument of Western intervention, its lack of resources and the conflicting national agendas of member states.

While information sharing and partnership building could overcome NATO's negative image in the mid- to long term, the lack of resources (including equipment) are a more serious concern, because the funding of MD projects depends primarily on national sponsors of NATO and other EAPC countries. But above all, the problem for NATO planners is that both individual NATO members and MD partner states may have intensive bilateral cooperation programmes on a host of activities, ranging from training, military exercises, all the way to arms sales and defence agreements.[33] Transfer of the soft part of such bilateral cooperation to the multilateral framework of NATO's MD is not easy. NATO member states may feel that their national agenda would be watered down on a NATO level, whereas MD partner states prefer bilateral cooperation for political and practical reasons.

In contrast to the PfP, the carrot of NATO membership cannot be used with MD/ICI states. This is why the proposed activities should be attractive for the partner state without appearing intrusive. Moreover, the normative side of defence cooperation and democratisation will have to remain on the back burner. This means that it is too early to provide the partner states with a Mediterranean Partnership Framework Agreement similar to that of the 1994 PfP Framework Agreement. In view of the 'non-discriminatory' clause that is inherent in the MD process, a Framework Agreement would have to be agreed by all partners of the MD, a requirement difficult to meet today. This situation is reminiscent of the EU's futile efforts to promote a Charter for Peace and Security in the Mediterranean in the context of the Barcelona

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[31] Polaris, 7 August 2004, p. 18.

[32] C. Donnelly, "Forging a NATO Partnership for the Greater Middle East", NATO Review, Istanbul Summit Special, 2004, p. 28.

[33] France, for instance, has bilateral military cooperation agreements with most MD countries, which usually comprise three elements: training, transfer of military equipment and joint exercises. Spain has a special bilateral relationship with Morocco, while the US has a strategic relationship with Israel and close military cooperation with Egypt, Jordan and Morocco.

Process.[34] Southern partners will continue to shy away from formal arrangements in the field of security governance and democracy. This is why the "progressive and individual" provisos of the Istanbul summit are currently the most pragmatic formula for NATO's security and defence cooperation in the region. There remains hope that some MD country may – under courageous national leadership – begin to embrace the process of democratisation of the security sector. Progress in this domain, as timid as it may be, should be supported by substantial positive inducements from the North. But, because NATO is not able to provide economic incentives, it will be imperative to develop programmes with other organisations, including the EU and the World Bank. Only a combined soft security, political and economic approach can help countries in transition to engage in a sustained process of reform and democratisation.

Conclusion

The promotion of reforms and democratisation in the Mediterranean and Middle East today is as necessary for security building as it is difficult to achieve. This article has tried to show that NATO's defence cooperation and democratisation efforts are not just running into resistance from the southern partner states. One of the most important obstacles is transatlantic disagreement over NATO's role and vocation as a promoter of democracy in the Middle East. In addition to this is the 'systemic' problem of implicit rivalry between the NATO states' national programmes with MD partners and NATO's current efforts to achieve a more significant cooperation agenda on its multilateral track. NATO's lack of empowerment may keep security governance off the agenda in NATO-MD partner relations for a long time to come. In this context, it is important to remember that NATO is an intergovernmental organisation with 26 member states that may all have different perspectives, interests and policy agendas with regard to the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The promotion of defence reform and democratisation requires a common alliance strategy, not just an agreement about a few measures. NATO as an intergovernmental organisation has great difficulties in acting as a driver in the governance area. This is in contrast to the EU, where the Commission often appears to be an avant garde for the promotion of liberal policies. Also, in its Security Strategy Paper, the EU explicitly recognised the link between democratic governance in the security sector and institution-building outside the EU area.[35] Closer cooperation between NATO and the EU will become inevitable as defence reform can only be carried out in a sound environment of sustainable development.

[34] The Charter remains off Barcelona's policy agenda primarily because some Arab states would give their consent to such a formal and comprehensive security arrangement only after a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[35] "A Secure Europe in a Better World", 12 Dec. 2003, states: «As we increase capabilities in the different areas, we should think in terms of a wider spectrum of missions. This might include …. security sector reform. The last of these would be part of broader institution-building.»

Finally, NATO's chances to advance a liberal agenda in the context of defence cooperation will not be very good as long as the Israeli-Palestinian and Iraqi conflicts are not addressed in a coherent and credible way. Now that the US presidential elections are out of the way, there is a need to re-engage in the Middle East process. The influence of NATO with regard to Israeli-Palestinian conflict management may be minimal, because NATO is – in contrast to the EU – not a member of the Road Map Contact Group. Chris Donnelly argues, however, that NATO could, provided its ISAF force succeeds in stabilising Afghanistan, play the 'honest broker' in the Near East to "help negotiate and then enforce a sophisticated security package".[36]

Finally, collaborative projects in the context of the MD/ICI frameworks have to be attractive to the partners without appearing intrusive. Indeed, reform and democratisation efforts will not work with MD states if there is no clear ownership of the states in the South. Mohamed Kadry Said argues that "the Alliance must seek to develop a two-way relationship with Arab countries and also to address their security concerns".[37] Given the democratic deficit in the region, however, the security concerns of the governments may not be congruent with those of their societies.

[36] Donnelly, "Forging a NATO Partnership", p. 26.
[37] M. K. Said, NATO Review, no. 1, 2004.

Appendix 1

Activities of the IAI project on Transatlantic Perspectives on Relations across the Mediterranean border

1. "Setting up a nucleus of NATO Mediterranean Dialogue Academic Institutions", Rome July 7, 2001

Papers

Roberto Aliboni, *Think Tanks As A Cooperative Factor In Nato's Mediterranean Dialogue*

Jean-François Daguzan, *Le rôle des institutions académiques dans le renforcement de la coopération en matière de sécurité autour de la Méditerranée*

Carlo Masala, *Western-Mediterranean Security Relations: Issues And Challenges*

Daniela Pioppi, Report on the Seminar "Setting up a nucleus of NATO Mediterranean Dialogue Academic Institutions", Rome, July 7th, 2001

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Observers Gabriele Tonne, Assistant Editor of *The International Spectator,* IAI-International Affairs Institute, Rome

2. "Governing Stability Across the Mediterranean Sea: a Transatlantic Perspective", Rome 21-23 March 2002

Papers

Roberto Aliboni, *Between Dialogue and Partnership: What North-South Relationship Across the Mediterranean?* [published as "Upgrading Political Responses in the Mediterranean", *The International Spectator*, Rome, Vol. XXXVII, No 2, April-June 2002, pp. 103-112.]

Béchir Chourou, *Islamism: Roots and Prospects*

Álvaro de Vasconcelos, *Ten points on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* [published as "Seven Points on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership", *The International Spectator*, Rome, Vol. XXXVII, No 2, April-June 2002, pp. 113-120.]

Michael D. Intriligator, *Globalization of the World Economy: Potential Benefits and Costs and a Net Assessment*

Ian O. Lesser, *Coalition Dynamics In The War Against Terrorism* [published as "Coalition Dynamics In The War Against Terrorism", *The International Spectator*, Rome, Vol. XXXVII, No 2, April-June 2002, pp. 43-50.]

Maria Cristina Paciello, Conference on "After September 11th, Governing Stability Across the Mediterranean Sea: a Transatlantic Perspective", Rome, 21-23 March 2002, A Conference Report

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Gabriele Tonne, Assistant Editor of *The International Spectator,* IAI-International Affairs Institute, Rome

3. "Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Mediterranean Relations: Perceptions in the Aftermath of September 11th" - Rome, October 1st, 2002

Papers
Roberto Aliboni, *After September 11th: Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East in a Transatlantic Perspective*.
Mohammed Khair Eiedat, *Aftermath of 11th of September: An Arab Perspective*.
Mark A. Heller, *After September 11th*.
F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Impact of September 11 on U.S. Policy in the Middle East and Transatlantic Relations*

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4. "Tasks for transatlantic cooperation: Peace-, institution-, and nation-building in the Mediterranean and the Middle East", Rome, 4-5 July 2003

Papers

Roberto Aliboni & Laura Guazzone, Promoting Political Reform in the Middle East and the Mediterranean

Jarat Chopra, *Third Party Intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

Mohammed Dajani, *The Palestinian Reform*

Tim Niblock*, Reconstruction and Economic Development in the Mediterranean and Middle East in a Transatlantic Perspective*

Marina Ottaway, *Nation-building in the Greater Middle East*

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7. Published in the IAI Paper Series

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