

Europe's Responsibility in the Middle East



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The end of the Second World War created a power vacuum in the Middle East, caused by an abrupt departure of former colonial powers - the UK and France. With the exception of the Gulf States, there was no time left for traditional local merchant and tribal elites to regain control over society. The power vacuum was followed by a security vacuum. Naturally, the new elites coming from the previous security arrangement, both military, police and intelligence services quickly filled the power vacuum. However, their lack of any political and social experience, combined with low cultural capital, made the majority of the new regime representations highly vulnerable to direct threats and needs of the emerging Cold War order. As a consequence, the new elites' power was based, with some exceptions, on the external Soviet and US support, as well as on new "manna" - oil revenues. The policy of stability became the principal approach of the outside towards the Middle East throughout the second half of the 20th century.

The fall of the Iron Curtain and the victory of democracy in Eastern Europe have brought neither increased stability, nor change for the better to the Arab World, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Israel. The Greater Middle East area, where power continues to be based on security control, nepotism, corruption, a very narrow distribution of oil revenues, poses threat to new democratic developments in Europe, as well as to old democracies - the EU, USA and Israel. Moreover, the growing militancy of badly integrated migrants from the Middle East in Western societies, particularly in Europe, continuing armament and threat of acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by rogue states and states supporting terrorism, political Islam, extremism, terrorism, and Sallafyia Dhjhadya are only few symptoms of the new threat. A threat which open, loosely protected, information-based, post-industrial democratic societies have been largely unprepared to confront.

However, harsh economic conditions, high unemployment, non-existing or inefficient social systems and education, prevailing tribal organization of societies in many rural areas, security intimidations, the lack of any freedom of expression and political freedoms in many parts of the Greater Middle East are only consequences. It is the almost total inability of individuals to make choices about their lives and those of their children, which is the source of the malaise in the region and its growing tension with the democratic world. This combined with the heavy security apparatus, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability in state and public institutions put a great pressure on the only existing ideological and political tool in the region - Islam, and political Islam.

Arab nationalism and Arab socialism are nurtured by the above failings in Arab societies. Liberalism has no roots in the Middle East, with the exception of Turkey. However, even there, it has been polluted by an atmosphere of corruption and a lack of transparency by recent governments. The only existing fertile soil, vivid and omni present in social, cultural and political mind sets is Islam, both in its Sunni and Shia versions. Political Islam, as we called it now, comprises of unlimited sets of schools, reformist movements and political teachings. Nevertheless, its common denominator is the fight against corrupted and promotion of transparency and welfare policies, education, functioning necessarily invoking the complex Shairya. and purify its societies. Purity, reflect the demand for a more open and a In sociological terms, the demand for and political in Islam is the actual task of contrast with the 'fatalism' we tend to Nevertheless, due to persisting policy of East, only a very minor part of their their growing discontentment with existing

As a result, the growing frustration ticking bomb. This situation is exploited fundamentalist/extremist groups. Hizbullah, GIA, PKK and many other the ruling elites. The groups' appeal to the Islamic charity system, which poses a welfare systems in the Middle East. The way for the frustrated public to ventilate 'tolerated' by the state. This tolerance is only artificial, as the pretext of fear of extremism has been skilfully exploited by the states to impose martial laws, oppression and the suspension of liberties to "protect" the population against extremism.

The result of such politics is disastrous. Terrorism, as well as state-sponsored violence by local governance, are on the rise. Moreover, terrorism hits as hard the Middle East as it does Western democracies which it is targeted at. Indeed, the death toll of Arabs killed in terrorist attacks is even higher than the number killed Westerners. For instance, about one million missing Iraqis were killed or displaced by Iraqi state. The world witnessed decades of war in Lebanon, terrorist attacks and a violation of human rights in Saudi Arabia, a civil war in Algeria, the cleansing of whole tribes in Libya and Morocco, massive detentions and violations of human rights in Egypt and Tunisia, Arabisation and ethnic cleansing in Darfur, refugees forced to live in Palestinian camps for generations, knowing only gun and fire.

Contrary to the prevailing public opinion in Middle East, the main source of the grave structural problems in the region originates in the region itself and has little to do with the so-called Western, imperialistic influence. Therefore, the main target for change should not be the Western presence or influence in the Middle East, but the semi-autocratic state system itself. The issue is not a clash of civilizations, but a clash between the individual will and right to live an honest, free and fruitful life, and massive abuses of power by structures representing autocratic regimes.

The complexity and scale of the tragedy does not allow for a simple analysis and clear-cut solutions and short cuts. Questions about the difference between external and internal inhibitions of change about either democratization or modernization as the main tool for change, about which priority should take Arab-Israeli conflict solution, are secondary. The 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process asks for our own democratic analysis and reflection. The Oslo and Cairo Agreements, the death of Yitzhak Rabin, and the second Intifada did not bring us closer to Israeli-Palestinian conflict solution. Paradoxically, it was the death of Yassir Arafat, which allowed for first truly democratic elections not only in Palestine, but also in other parts of the Greater Middle East. It was not the Road Map, but an unanimous decision of PM Ariel Sharon to go for Gaza disengagement, which partly freed at least part of the Palestinians. It was not as much the Quartet activity outcome, which substantially lowered the number of suicide bomber attacks and casualties, as it was the effect of the contested security fence. By the same token, the future development of democracy in Palestine, which will be closely watched by international monitors during the next PLC elections depends very much on international ability to help materialize President Mahmoud Abbas policy of economic, social and legal change.

Similarly, the first open, free and fair elections in Lebanon and the agreement on UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calling for the complete withdrawal of Syrian forces, including military intelligence, from Lebanon, was facilitated primarily by internal political game of the Syrian ruling family aiming to discredit president Bashar al-Assad through the death of Rafiq Hariri. Without a clear, concerted and unified international pressure, Syrian troops would never leave Lebanon as they recently did.

The externally-led operation Iraqi Freedom toppled Saddam Hussein and allowed internal democratization process, which has gone as far as popular agreement on the state constitution. Thousand of like-minded coalition troops found their death in combats, and it is difficult to recognize, that we could have saved some of the lives by a much better preparation of the operation. Negligence, low knowledge and analysis of local conditions, masterminded disinformation on WMDs, the lack of effort and understanding of the necessary role of transatlantic institutions in such a massive and key operation almost led to failure. Nevertheless, further mutual blackmailing between both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, a NATO stalemate, the lack of a clear European support for the reconstruction of Iraq and the probability of a failure there is a far more dangerous development.



inefficient state systems, the accountability, social, health and economy and justice without its principal goal is to clean the state transparency and accountability decisive position of individual citizen. greater fluidity between the social political Islam, which seem to attribute to our romantic vision of it. intimidation by regimes in the Middle societies actively seek change despite regimes.

among Middle East societies is a by power-seeking religious Paradoxically enough, Hamas, groups have grown in recognition by public has been largely based on the direct challenge to failing state groups' extremism also serves as a their frustration in a fashion which is

European and American approaches to the Middle East have not been cooked up to be contradictory. The gravity of the situation there does not permit us to continue the virtual debate whether we should first democratise and then modernize the region, whether democracy first and peace later, whether the rule of law should precede economic growth, whether to seek free and fair elections or a better role of NGOs, or whether local ownership of change is more important than an outer pressure on a bilateral or international basis. Any of these debates is superfluous, costing us time, resources and political will and capital necessary for changing the Greater Middle East into a more developed and competitive society.

Deep knowledge and respect of local past, traditions and conditions is absolutely necessary before any action is taken in the Middle East, be it peace building, peace keeping or counter terrorism fight. The situation has also shown, however, that the potential for local dynamics is rather low and irregular, and depends more often than not on sporadic events such as deaths of rulers or coup d'état. Therefore, international presence seems unavoidable. Knowing this, we are obliged to find the most appropriate means and tools of such presence. Not a single EU action could match the size and potential of the US engagement. Not a single US presence can be successful without the EU support. Similarly, we cannot distinguish between UK, US or Spanish victims of terrorism, between new and old Europeans, between Democrats and Republicans. United we stand, we can bring both the change and stability the Middle East needs. Transatlantic cooperation, reflected in the complementarity of the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is the way to proceed. For this cooperation to succeed, an essential condition is the end of rivalries among the EU member states themselves based on their particular, and often petty, interests vis-à-vis their traditional (post-colonial) Middle East partners. A common transatlantic approach will not bear fruits without a truly common European policy.

New structures, new proximities and a new political context are part of a new reality. Old divisions and borders have no more their strategic/tactical importance. European neighbourhood is no longer defined merely by geographical proximity. The electronic distance of 24-hour global news, between Riyadh and Madrid is virtually none. Therefore, policy distinctions based on geography have no more meaning, nor does the division between external and internal security policy and foreign relations. Dealing with foreign relations and outer security and defence policy in the so-called 2nd (intergovernmental) pillar of the EU without taking into account immigration and terrorism measures dealt with under the justice and home affairs EU pillar, and economic migration and the free movement of services in the first (EC) pillar, we will fall short of bringing democratization, the rule of law, respect for human rights and equal opportunities to the Middle East. Only a comprehensive policy recognizing the necessity to deal with inter-connected issues, such as foreign relations, security, counter terrorism measures, immigration, border control and economic migration will make the EU a more effective player in the Middle East and a credible partner in transatlantic relations.