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WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

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SUMMING UP BY
FRANÇOIS HEISBOURG

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What Strategy for the Greater Middle East?

Working Paper No. 15 of the European Security Forum

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Chairman's Summing up

François Heisbourg*

We were fortunate in having ahead of the meeting three thoughtful, broad-spectrum papers from which to work. All three of the authors of the papers were asked by the Chairman to pronounce on the validity of the 'Greater Middle East' (GME) concept. Michael Stürmer, who made the first presentation, commented that there is a certain unity to the region, notably in terms of the problems it shares. In referring to his paper, he warned against the American tendency to see democracy as a panacea, as it takes a very long time indeed to establish democracy in cultural terms. In the interval, the Americans should make sure that they really want what they say they want. He also warned against a face-value approach to the GME: there is more than one truth behind what one sees. In looking at the EU's or NATO's action in the region, he underscored the absence of any clear military role in the Middle East, apart, possibly, from the kind of monitoring that occurs in the Sinai.

Steve Simon noted that his paper had a somewhat more optimistic tone than that he wished to convey. He underlined the massive labour supply overhang as a general feature in the GME and that this fact alone made it impossible to be optimistic. He defended the view that democracy should be the priority, albeit one for the long term: it should be encouraged from the outside, but it cannot be imposed. Concerning Iran's nuclear ambitions, he feared that this could prove to be an ultimate source of division rather than of unity between the EU and the US. This situation is all the more worrying given the stakes – it is not for nothing that Saudi Arabia has in the past acquired MRBMs (missiles) from China or that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has bought nuclear-capable aircraft that have the ability of striking Tehran. On Israeli-Palestinian relations, Mr Simon considered that the EU and the US will have to ensure that an eventual Palestinian state will not implode upon its creation.

Irina Zvygelskaya was diffident *vis à vis* the GME category. Indeed, an analysis by sub-regions demonstrated that democratisation was not universally hopeless. In particular, non-Arab states such as Turkey or Kazakhstan offered greater scope for optimism than a state such as Egypt. Similarly, although militant Islam is present everywhere, it is not as great a threat in Central Asia as elsewhere in the GME. In referring to her paper, she expressed special concern about the Islamisation of Iraq as a result of US intervention.

Walter Slocombe was our fourth speaker, recently returned from Iraq, where he served in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) as de facto Minister of Defence. He underscored the huge price the US was still paying for the events of 1991, when Saddam Hussein was allowed to crush the Shi'ite *intifada*. Although considering that there was a reasonable chance of success of the US policy in Iraq, he also noted that this is the first time that members of the international community are trying to build a liberal regime and a market economy in a continued state of war. Against the adversaries on the ground – most notably those Baathist insurgents who revealingly call themselves the 'Party of Return', the US could play on a number of strengths, including the interests of certain groups such as the Kurds, the Shia and women. This enterprise is made more difficult by the fact that no local equivalent of Nelson Mandela or even of Hamid Qarzai in Afghanistan has emerged.

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In the opening round of the debate, one British participant recently returned from duty in southern Iraq observed that Baghdad (and its problems) was not Iraq as a whole. Nevertheless, he criticised the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach of the US to post-war reconstruction in a complex country; unlike Mr Slocombe, he had not learned how to wear a helmet but had learned how not to wear one. Broadening the spectrum, another participant suggested that one of the reasons we use the expression ‘GME’ is because we fear that if something goes wrong in one part of the region, things will go wrong in other parts – it may be worthwhile thinking the other way around.

Yet another participant considered the GME as a useful organising principle, with five key words: democratisation (as an objective); al-Qaeda; Baghdad (arguing, unlike Mr Slocombe, that maybe we shouldn’t have gone in); Tehran (is the prospect of use of force on or off the table?); and Jerusalem (should the Geneva Accords be endorsed by the Quartet?). As a response, there was no dispute with one panellist’s contention that it was too late to argue about whether the war in Iraq was right or wrong, even if the fact remained that no WMD had been found to date and a firm Baathist link with al-Qaeda had not been established. Nor was there any disagreement concerning the strains between the CPA’s action in the centre and the situation in the provinces. Similarly, although there was a strong preference for a cooperative solution with Iran, no one on the panel suggested that force should be entirely and explicitly removed as an option. Yet there was no unanimity on the Geneva Accords: for one panellist, it was unrealistic to talk about the return to the 1967 Green Line while ignoring the central issue of the Palestinians’ commitment to deal with terrorism; however, another panellist thought that the Geneva Accords were better than giving the power of veto to the terrorists.

A French participant noted that all of the worst features pointed out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on the Middle East were related to the lack of democracy; hence, we should not be so conflicted about how democratisation occurs. As for Iran, the non-proliferation regime would implode if countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia did not believe in the long-term and successful commitment of the US and the EU in handling the Iranian nuclear issue.

Democratisation – a key word mentioned by one panellist – encapsulated much of the subsequent flow of discussion, on the themes of transparency, human rights, participation, minority rights and individual property. Indeed, as in the second round of the debate, the discussion of democratisation revolved around the question of what kind of model(s) should be followed. This question drew the general response from the panel that there was no single model that should be followed, given that there was a broad variety of them that could fit in with the keywords given previously. In all cases, however, the role of civil society and non-governmental organisations could not be overemphasised. On a hopeful note, one panellist remarked that pressures for change in the Middle East were translating into more liberal conditions in some places, notably in Morocco (with the reform of the *Code de la Famille*). It was noted by one participant that we should not simply be talking about Tehran, Baghdad or Jerusalem: Sanaa, Rabat or Tripoli were equally deserving of attention.

In closing, it is worth recalling a general point made early in the discussion by one of the authors, that one of the peculiar difficulties in the GME is understanding what feasible mission the US now has in mind in Iraq. The suggestion made by one of the panellists, that the 1925 Iraqi Constitution (minus the monarchy) would be a satisfactory outcome to the crisis, might have been a way of responding to that remark. It remains to be seen whether such an aim is (still) achievable and whether it will produce the sort of democratisation that the American promoters of regime change had in mind when they embarked on the road of Baghdad.

What Strategy for the Greater Middle East?

A European Perspective

Michael Stürmer*

*What is the situation?
What challenges do we face?
And what is it that we have to do?*

What is the situation?

Will the West, after having won the cold war, meet its fate in the Greater Middle East? After an ominous start in Iraq, all bets are open and the fallout has not yet been fully assessed – let alone the debris cleared out of the way – while more conflicts beckon. The Atlantic, in recent months, has been stormier than ever and the trans-Atlantic rift runs right across Europe. Europe is in disarray not only over its economic core business and the euro but also over its role in the world. This crisis happens at a critical juncture when the draft Constitutional Treaty aims at the deepening of ties between member states, while the widening of Europe's borders is already far advanced. Never was Euro-rhetoric so far away from Euro-reality.

The Greater Middle East (GME) is a post cold war concept that comprises the cauldron of crises from the Caspian to the Nile and from Cyprus to the Persian Gulf, as well as the strategic idea of dealing comprehensively with the region. In spite of all its conflicts and contradictions, the GME has to be seen in its interdependence. It is the playing field of the new Great Game between the US and Russia, with the Europeans unsure of where they stand on many issues – such as the recent war in Iraq. But it is an unforgiving strategic landscape that promises to provide the world with most of its crises, possibly major wars over terrorism and WMD, energy and supply routes, and issues of access and transit.

The list of possible differences between the West and Russia is long – almost as long as the list of differences within the West itself, which could be summed up by Shakespeare in the phrase, “It will make us or mar us”. The most recent addition is Georgia after former President Eduard Schevardnadze, which has been contested between the US and Russia since the country was put back on the map in 1991. Or take Turkey as another example: for those who want Turkey in the EU, notably Washington, the recent terrorist acts provide ample argument for accession. For those who want to preserve the cultural unity of Europe and its cohesion in time of crisis, Turkey's accession, with or without terrorist acts, is impossible.

The case of Iran being en route to nuclear weapons is another example: European foreign ministers, in a well orchestrated good-cop/bad-cop routine with the US, received assurances in Tehran that all suspect nuclear research and development would be ‘suspended’. They had asked for ‘cessation’ but had to settle for significantly less. Meanwhile the US provided the military pressure from nearby Iraq, without which the Europeans would have returned empty-handed. Maybe the Europeans learned something from this experience about the relationship between deterrence and *détente* in the modern age or maybe not. If not, the phrase used by André Glucksmann in the title of his recent book, *L'Ouest contre l'Ouest*, is a real possibility, and not just a philosopher's speculation.¹ The Iranian crisis is by no means over and the military option, as John Bolton said at a recent conference on weapons of mass destruction

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¹ See Andre Glucksmann (2003), *L'Ouest contre l'Ouest*, Plon: Paris.

(WMD), “remains on the table”. If Iraq is any guide to the future, the cohesion of the West is at risk. It will need a shared sense of danger, direction, balance and *fingerspitzengefühl* – in short, the rare commodity called statecraft.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is another item on the list where the relationship between the Europeans and Americans could, if there is another peace process, easily fall apart. The Europeans have some influence with the Palestinian Authority and the Americans some influence with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Neither, however, can dictate or control. The Road Map was, and still is, an attempt to coordinate carrots and sticks. But the test will come when guarantees have to be given, troops deployed and controls applied.

There are other serious differences, but none are more important than those on WMD, their platforms and the methods to deal with offenders. Yet there are also conflicts over oil, gas, access routes and shipping lanes. Meanwhile, Iraq continues to provide the mother of all West-West crises.

What challenges do we face?

Is the Greater Middle East on the verge of moral and political transformation? After Saddam Hussein, Iraq points in one direction. At the same time, Morocco under the enlightened and Koran-legitimised reforms of King Mohammed VI, points to another. Algeria, on the eve of next spring’s presidential elections, aims at yet another direction. Imported transformation, home-grown transformation or post-traumatic transformation – the winds of change are blowing across the fertile crescent of the Arab world, and they do not stop at the gates of Turkey en route to Europe or at those of Iran en route to a new, post-revolutionary equilibrium.

Whether or not these transformations will be peaceful and how they interact with each other and with the outside world is impossible to predict; however it is of great, in fact strategic importance for the West, Europe and North America alike. It would be unwise to assume that Islamic countries are unfit for peaceful change and democracy – nor should it be taken for granted that the ride now beginning will be anything but rough and risky.

“An arc of fire” is how Singapore’s Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew described Europe’s southern and south-eastern neighbourhood. In their time, the British called it the Middle East, overseen by the Middle East Command in Cairo, Egypt, before they were forced to transfer their ancient holdings ‘East of Suez’ to Uncle Sam. The Americans, after the fall of the Soviet Empire, have thrown their own coordinates across the region, in economic, political and military terms. Their influence is backed by the US Central Command, situated in Bahrain, along with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the Fifth Fleet in the Indian Ocean underlining their capacity to project air and sea power.

The Greater Middle East. The GME is much more than 280 million Arabs, the Holy sites of Islam, the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict, a dramatic shortage of water, enormous and continuing environmental degradation, sand dunes, rocks in abundance, dates, camels, oil (for the last 100 years or so), and the princes’ luxury and the masses’ plight. There are also 70 million Turks in a multi-ethnic state, roughly the same number of Iranians (also in a multi-ethnic state) and the state of Israel – with 5 million Jewish Israelis and 1 million Arabs carrying Israeli passports. In this context, it should not be forgotten that the majority of Muslims live to the east of Tehran in Central and South-East Asia, and as far away as China.

The GME region has a very long collective memory, where the conquests of King David or the heavenly ascent of the Prophet Mohammed are like yesterday's events. It has no organising principle, no economic integration, no system of arms control, let alone collective defence. The Arabs and the Iranians can agree on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as being the common cause – but on nothing else. Meanwhile, the Turks, not friends of the Arabs since many centuries, are in a silent alliance with Israel, on topics from tourism to air space, the upgrading of ageing US warplanes, the organisation of air force manoeuvres and the squeezing of Syria. At the same time, Egypt and Jordan are trying to balance their cold peace with the Jewish state against the countervailing pressure from the Islamic underground and the mosques.

The Saudis are, for the time being, the centre and the turntable of the Arab world, at least the Sunni part of it. Nevertheless, in the US they are increasingly being seen as – to quote Laurent Murawiec (formerly at RAND and since then at the Hudson Institute) from a leaked statement before the US Senate – “the kernel of evil”.² Since the events of 11 September 2001, US intelligence services, especially the National Security Agency (NSA) and the White House have shown them the instruments;³ the Pentagon has moved the vast installations of the Prince Sultan Airfield to Qatar and the Department of Energy is doing everything to reduce US dependence on Saudi (or for that matter OPEC) oil.

The Saudi regime remains dependent on US support, but the princes also recognise that, after Osama Bin Laden's declaration of war against ‘Zionists and crusaders spoiling the sacred land of Islam’, their involvement with US power is potentially a kiss of death, which they cannot avoid. The Saudi princes, notwithstanding the strict standards of their particular brand of Islam, are the vigilant defenders of the ultra-puritan and joy-averse Wahabite faith at home, but are not above conspicuous consumption – from women to booze – in the London West End, in Geneva or in the sunny Riviera resorts of the idle rich. Although the per capita income of the Saudi population rose to a staggering \$24,000 in 1974, at the time of the first oil shock, population growth and a fall in oil prices have reduced it to a mere \$7,000. This amount still puts the Saudis into a much better category than most of their neighbours (Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are the only countries far ahead of them in terms of per capita income).

The steep decline in real income is an ominous indicator of conflicts to emerge and uncertainties to explode. Next spring, for the first time, local councils will be elected in a democratic way. Yet the regime is slowly running out of the resources to buy peace at home. Moreover, the Saudi bourgeoisie has produced 15 of the 20 hijackers involved in the attacks of 11 September 2001, and the royals are suspected of funding Islamic charities that pass on the money to al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups – in fact, they seem to be paying protection money to their mortal enemies in hopes of avoiding their wrath and diverting it towards infidels and Jews. Thus, they undermine the same America that is of vital importance to their survival. It is obvious that the Bush Administration will withdraw its hand from the regime as the importance of oil from the region is reduced.

Poverty is not the first thought that springs to mind when Westerners think of Arab potentates who are running countries like family firms or military dictatorships, or as a combination of the two. But the vast majority of the people are – literally – dirt poor, lacking in education and living in squalor. The 2002 UN Development Programme report, written by two Arab authors, was a devastating account of backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance of the modern world and

² See Laurent Murawiec (2003), *La Guerre d'après*, Paris: Albin Michel.

³ See, for example, the article “A King's Ransom”, by Seymour Hersch in *The New Yorker*, October 2001.

distance to the resources of the information age.⁴ This deplorable state of affairs is largely because of the dictatorial character of most Arab regimes, the misallocation of resources, the exclusive pre-eminence of religious education and, above all, the suppression of women in many areas, including their exclusion from professional pursuits in most Arab countries. This report is another variation upon the extensive work on the Arab civilisation by Bernard Lewis: Arab society was, once upon a time, a beacon of scholarship, trade, culture and the martial arts by comparison with Europe in the Dark Ages, but is now in limbo. What went wrong?

Whether in education, knowledge, internet penetration or GDP per capita – the Arab world is in a poor state. Asian Tiger countries send their children to school for ten years, girls and boys alike, whereas the average Arab child attends less than five years. There is a dramatic knowledge gap between the Arabs and the rest of the world. Knowledge attainment is generally poor, for women even more so than for men. In terms of the enjoyment of overall access to services for human development, cultural diversity or links to global state-of-the-art improvements during the last decade – much less than half the population express satisfaction. Internet penetration is 30% in the UAE and further declines in Bahrain, Qatar Lebanon and Jordan. Saudi Arabia registers internet use by some 5% of population, Sudan and Iraq nil, and all the others are in between. One of the reasons (or so the Israelis suspect) most Arab regimes have no interest in peace between Israel and Palestine is the fear of cultural and democratic spillover, first from Israelis to Palestinians and from there to the rest of the Arab world.

The GME is not a system but a geo-strategic concept. Notwithstanding the many conflicts and contradictions among the various regional players it resembles one of those 1960s works of art called a ‘mobile’. If you touch it in any one point, everything else begins to move and sometimes swings out of control. Moreover, the GME does not exist in isolation but sells its oil to the world, taking in large amounts of US dollars. Demographic pressure and political oppression combine to produce large scale emigration, especially to Europe, where France is home to approximately 6 million Muslims and Germany is home to 2.5 million Turks, one-third of them Kurds. Since the early 1990s, apocalyptic terrorism is another export commodity to the entire globe, with terrorists like Osama bin Laden fighting their wars against Arab regimes on American soil and trying to force the US to remove its protection from local rulers in Egypt, Saudi-Arabia and other countries.

Some countries, however, are more important than others in the GME owing to population, oil, radicalism, strategic location and internal strife – more specifically Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Palestine.

Saudi Arabia is foremost among these as the pre-eminent Arab country because of location, its oil wealth and the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. But its golden towers rest on proverbial clay feet. The country is under pressure from outside and from within. Externally, the US views the kingdom as the financier of international terrorism, where the absence of political debate and participation creates vast frustration among the bourgeoisie and forces all opposition under the cloak of religious fanaticism. Moreover, the contrast between the strictness of Wahabism at home and the luxury displayed by the princes abroad cannot fail to raise serious concerns. Army officers, now that the oil wealth has to be shared with ever-growing masses and real income is dwindling, feel underpaid. Reforms from above, which the regent is considering, are slow to materialise; no debate is allowed nor is any direction pointed out. Perhaps the strongest indication that the star of the House of Saud is sinking is

⁴ See United Nations Development Programme (2002), *Arab Human Development Report*, UN, New York.

the fact that the US has been moving all military installations out of the country to nearby bases and seeks to reduce traditional dependence on Saudi oil.

Iraq. Once the seat of the biblical Garden of Eden, Iraq is today and for a long time to come the centrepiece of the fertile crescent. If Iraq does not find internal peace through compromise or separation, and if the Allies withdraw before law and order are established and an orderly transfer of sovereignty is possible – the Franco-German couple are pressing for an early transfer of sovereignty, meaning in so many words ‘Yankee go home’ – a large scale Lebanon will ensue, bringing ethnic and religious strife, power struggles, massacres all over the place and repercussions throughout the entire region. The outside world has parted ways at the donors’ conference in Madrid: the US collected large contributions, but France wanted its debt paid and Germany refused to forego its \$4.4 billion of outstanding debt – though with zero chance of ever getting a penny back. Meanwhile, chances for a reconstructed Iraq are growing, notwithstanding the daily carnage.

Iran. The country is in a similar situation as Germany was in at the turn of the 20th century: too big for balance and too small for hegemony. It has no friends and only difficult neighbours. With the Arabs, there is nothing to unite the two sides but the trumped-up Jerusalem issue and the radical opposition to the existence of Israel. The war in Iraq has eliminated the Saddam Hussein threat – but for how long remains to be seen and it is to be doubted that Tehran sees much reassurance in the US presence. From the long war with Iraq and from the experience of the two last Gulf wars, the mullahs seem to have concluded that, in order to become invulnerable, they need a nuclear capability. There seems to be hardly any nuclear debate inside the country, nor are questions being asked about the consequences for neighbouring countries. Between Iran and the outside world the nuclear weapons issue has moved to the top of the agenda.

The October mission of the three foreign ministers from Germany, France and UK looked, on the face of it, like a well-considered and consulted ‘good-cop/bad-cop’ policy, with the Americans providing the sticks and the Europeans the carrots. In the concluding statement, the Iranian side promised to ‘suspend’ – not cease – the uranium enrichment process, while the Europeans indicated that they cannot wait to do business. The European differences with the US are only papered-over for the time being, as Washington wants intrusive inspections and definitive results, while the Iranians continue to procrastinate. The Europeans want to keep the issue out of the UN Security Council, but the US, not unlike Israel, wants maximum pressure. The mullahs, who to offer the best sources of intelligence to Israel and the US, are on the way to nuclear weapons for long range missiles, which stem back to North Korean help. If this materialises, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) would be nothing but a scrap of paper and countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey could start thinking about their own nuclear deterrent. The West, however, has a dilemma. The short term strategy to stop Iran on its way to nuclear weapons falls in the way of the long-term strategy that would wait for demographic change to do its work. Iran’s student population today is probably the most pro-American crowd in the world – but they are also largely unemployed, frustrated and resentful. Among the young generation only one in three has the slightest chance of finding a paying job. This situation creates pressure on the regime to open and to modernise, yet such an opening can only be facilitated through the technology and capital investment of the West.

Is there a magic formula to bring peace and stability to the troubled lands of the Greater Middle East? The US seems to have decided that for the time being nothing can replace the role of the Central Command as a balancer from beyond the sea. In fact, it is the US that keeps all the uneasy balances of the Middle East under control. But, as Richard Haas warned

all of us in his 1997 analysis, the US is a ‘reluctant sheriff’, and imperial overstretch is looming large.⁵ Moreover, the close ties between the US and the state of Israel makes Washington a difficult ally for its friends and dependents around the Middle East, and what looks like a guarantee of security may well be the kiss of death.

The European Union. Can the Europeans project enough stability into the region to protect themselves from spillover effects? Turkey’s eventual EU membership, which has been promised since the free trade Association Agreement of 1963, is being advertised by the US as the panacea. But nobody can gauge the effects this would have on Turkey’s social and economic structures, nor is there much willingness among Europeans to open the door to ever more poor people from foreign lands. In addition, an ever-wider EU can also be an even more unmanageable system. The best concept may still be found in the European Economic Space (EES), which now consists of only Norway, Iceland and Finland, or in the Greater Europe concept – which, however, is sadly lacking in reality. Should NATO pick up the pieces, as the *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman recently suggested, in full earnest, when referring to Iraq, Turkey and Israel? That is most unlikely.

What can be done and what must be done, however, is to revive the best of the various approaches that have been tried since the end of the cold war, from the Madrid process for Middle East peace to the Barcelona Process for Mediterranean development, from the Road Map to the stabilisation of Iraq under US tutelage. A comprehensive system of arms control, especially WMD, must aim at halting the arms race among all the major players in the region. First and most importantly, however, is the objective of helping to establish peace in the Holy Land. But in the long run, the second UN Development Programme report on the Arab world,⁶ just published, is probably right in saying that key to the improvement of the Greater Middle East, its endemic poverty, its demographic explosion and its dictatorial politics is investment in education, the empowerment of women, and, concurrently, a slow and measured process of political participation.

What is it that we have to do?

In a recent study, Geoffrey Kemp, who is among the foremost American experts on the Greater Middle East (although not of the ‘Europeans are from Venus and Americans are from Mars’ school) gave some healthy advice to European governments: “Europe must stop fretting about the dominant role of the United States in the Middle East and start asserting European interests in Europe’s backyard. Towards this end, confrontation with Washington is not required. Rather, closer and more equitable transatlantic cooperation on matters of vital importance to all three regions will benefit everybody.”⁷

For many years, perhaps decades to come, the Greater Middle East will remain the cauldron of crises, competing and interacting with the Indian-Pakistani nuclear and religious standoff and with the Far Eastern struggle for mastery. There is no escape from this set of post-cold war threats. The West, if not hanging tough and keeping together, will probably split and fail.

⁵ See Richard Haas (1998), *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press.

⁶ See United Nations Development Programme (2003), *Arab Human Development Report*, UN, New York.

⁷ See Geoffrey Kemp, “Europe’s Middle East Challenges”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2003/2004, pp. 163–177.

First of all, it is important to share the intelligence as well as the broader analysis. If the overall picture differs dramatically, strategy is bound to diverge and conflict is likely to arise – to the point of blockade and failure – as witnessed by the recent Iraqi crisis. It should be noted that it was not so much a change in the grand strategy that caused the rift, but that Western nations, especially France and Germany, stumbled upon it almost by accident, i.e. electoral convenience and intra-European power play.

Secondly, we should make use of the different experience, strength and expertise that the US, Canada and the various European countries bring to the rendezvous, including soft powers, hard powers, distance and closeness, to achieve a maximum of influence and formative power.

Thirdly, we need to make practical use of those differing formations, experiences and approaches, not only the good-cop/bad-cop routine *vis á vis* Iran but even more so when it comes to mixing the proverbial carrots and sticks. The EU has a great reputation for the cornucopia it seems to be wielding, while the US ability to use brute force inspires compromise and reticence. The two approaches, normally regarded as Venus and Mars, need not exclude each other but, if applied gently, consistently and regularly, make a successful formula. Of course, fairness in dividing the benefits of trade and investment is essential.

Fourthly, we must make sure that what we pray for is what is in our best interest. In American ears, the democracy sermon sounds like the winning formula. But it is rare to hear the same pious wishes from Israel or among the more intimately involved European countries. They would be content with governments halfway between Turkey's democracy and Egypt's authoritarianism. 'Osama for President' is a battle cry the Europeans hear when Arab democracy is mentioned while Americans tend to believe that democracy more or less US-style must surely be the panacea for the woes of the Greater Middle East. It is important to try to settle for a pragmatic, reasonable, open-ended compromise. It was Samuel Huntington, of *The Clash of Civilizations* fame, who warned the US against imposing its value system on far away nations that have a different narrative and follow different stars. Modesty and pragmatism may be the better part of valour.⁸

It is also relevant to look at whom one calls a 'friend'. If in doubt, criteria should be found for long-term engagement or, possibly, disengagement. Some advice on this point for the Saudis is: if you have such friends, you do not need enemies. Nevertheless, their oil-policies and their domestic power play regulate the price of the most strategic resource the world's oil economies need. We must not forget, before Western oil reserves have been exhausted, that there is only one oil market in the world, largely dominated by OPEC (more especially by the Saudis) and that it is very inflexible.

Further, we need to make sure that strategic objectives are broadly understood and widely shared. NATO's strategic guidelines of the 1991-vintage had already included strategic minerals – meaning oil – and access routes. But that meant nothing in particular in terms of force rebuilding and transformation: the next Middle Eastern crisis came like a thief in the night.

Adding to the diplomatic toolbox, having enough escalation dominance is crucial to prevail in any test of strength, be it crisis management or be it a full-blown confrontation. No European nation has sufficient means to do so; not even the European security and defence policy

⁸ See Samuel P. Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.

(ESDP) would make much difference. For such an effect it takes NATO and NATO's assets, including its headquarters, to bring home the more robust points.

It is ironic that Europeans, much closer to the Islamic arc of fire than the US, seem to be much less worried about general insecurity and instability coming from the region than about practical administrative, economic and social issues arising from the southern and eastern neighbourhood. This need not be a source of weakness, or a reason for a public display of antagonism but on the contrary a source of strength, suggesting complementary approaches and different ways of making use of naturalised citizens from southern shores, such as Turks and Iranians in Germany, and Arabs in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Finally yet importantly: we must make sure that NATO remains the centrepiece of Atlantic security and a supplier of stability for the Greater Middle East. It is within NATO that both the analysis and the strategy can be shared. No separate European expedition would have sufficient deterrent effect and escalation dominance to suppress warlords and wars throughout the Near Eastern arc of fire. Moreover, as the nature of the threat is in most cases global, the response must also be organised along the lines of the old J. P. Morgan motto: 'Global reach, local touch'.

Author's note: Among the vast and ever growing body of literature, see also these specific references:

"A Survey of Islam and the West", *The Economist*, 13 September 2003.

Hunter, Shireen (1998), *The Future of Islam and the West, Clash of Civilisations or Peaceful Coexistence*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Publications, CSIS, Washington, D.C.

A Grand Strategy for the Middle East: An American Perspective

Steven Simon*

The Middle East is undergoing a long-term political, economic and demographic crisis. Over the next 12 years, the total population of the Middle East will grow by 32%. Despite declining fertility rates in some countries (Iran, Egypt and Tunisia), demographic momentum will continue to yield high growth. Moreover, 50% of Arabs and 54% of Iranians are under the age of 20; over 60% are under 30. In high-income OECD countries, the percentage of the population under 20 is 25%.⁹ Though most Arabs and Iranians can read and write the quality of their education is not good enough to shape them into a labour force capable of competing in an increasingly competitive global market. It is, however, good enough to make unskilled labour an unacceptable alternative. As can be inferred from the population growth figures, the Middle East has the fastest growing labour force in the world: 3.4% each year between 1990 and 1998. Some countries, such as Syria at 4.8%, Algeria at 4.9% or Yemen at 5.6%, face potentially serious problems. (For comparative purposes, the US labour force has been growing at 0.04% and the EU's at 0.08%.) Unemployment in the region is between 12% and 35%, depending on the country. If total fertility rates decline more sharply than expected, population growth will eventually slow too, thereby taking some of the pressure off labour markets – in theory. In practice, however, fertility rates will decline only if women are better educated, which implies that they will then be joining males in the labour force to produce a net increase in the number of young people looking for non-existent jobs. In such circumstances, labour market equilibrium must yield either higher unemployment or lower wages.¹⁰ On average, real wages in the region have remained unchanged for 30 years.

On the demand side, GDP growth has lagged behind the rest of the world for at least two decades. The region has in effect disengaged from the global economy. While over the past 20 years OECD economies grew by 1.4% per year, East Asia's (excluding Japan) by 5.8% per year and Latin America's by 1%, the Middle East has not grown at all. Real wages and labour productivity are unchanged. Adding to the region's miseries has been the extremely rapid urbanisation in countries that are unable to pay for the infrastructural improvements needed to keep cities from collapsing under the weight of internal immigration.

There is general consensus on how this parlous state was reached. Rent-seeking behaviour by distributive states militated against transparency and accountability and in favour of corruption and unsustainable subsidies. States occupied increasingly large shares of national economies, became employers of last resort and adopted import-substitution policies. In some

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⁹ See the International Labour Organisation Bureau of Statistics (retrievable from <http://laborsta.ilo.org/>). The 30 OECD member countries have populations of individuals under 20 that comprise 27.5% of the total population. Alternately, in the high-income OECD countries (which excludes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Mexico, Poland, Slovakia, and Turkey) the under-20 population stands at 24.9% of the total population.

¹⁰ The rigid labour market regulation typical of Middle Eastern countries can produce equilibria at higher unemployment and lower wage levels.

countries, military procurement added to dead weight losses. All these factors have discouraged foreign direct investment. Such policies and practices are difficult to reverse.¹¹

Against this socio-economic background, it is unsurprising that the United States has come to be seen as an enemy, either because it supports national governments that have presided over this decline, or because it has laid siege to regional regimes and undermined their ability to improve living conditions. Perceptions of U.S. policy toward Iraq and Palestine, as well as of the conduct of the war on terrorism, have contributed to the United States' disastrous standing in the region. Public opinion surveys conducted by the Pew Foundation and Zogby International offer a vivid statistical picture of this disaster.

The Pew Global Attitudes Project survey released in June 2003 found that "the bottom has fallen out of support for America in most of the Muslim world".¹² Only 27% of Moroccans, 15% of Lebanese and Turks, 13% of Indonesians, 12% of Pakistanis, and 1% of Jordanians and Palestinians had a favourable view of the US. (These numbers are broadly consistent with recent surveys of other countries in the region. Just 6% of the Egyptian public has a favourable impression of the US, while more than half the population has "very negative" views, according to a 2002 Pew study.) As a result primarily of the invasion of Iraq, the erosion has accelerated. Compared with Pew 2002 results, the 2003 returns show a marked drop: the Lebanese and Turkish figures declined by 50%, the Indonesian figure dropped 62% and the Jordanian figure fell 96%. Moreover, the antipathy has spread beyond the Middle East to other Muslim countries: the percentage of Nigerians who held positive views of the US plummeted from 71% to 38%, and in Indonesia the figure fell from 60% to 13%.

With this sudden decline has come a change in the nature of such public opposition to America. For many years, Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere distinguished between their disapproval of US policies and their feelings about the American people. Whatever their government might have done, Americans were admired for their wealth, can-do attitude, popular culture, devotion to democracy and technological achievements. But the statistical spread between opposition to Washington's policies and negative attitudes towards the American people has narrowed considerably, and in many countries a crucial line has been crossed: Americans are increasingly despised as a people. For example, between 2002 and 2003, the number of Pakistanis holding positive views about American fell from 39% to 16%, and for Jordanians from 54% to 18%. These sentiments are fed by the spreading belief throughout the Muslim world that the US poses a serious threat to Islam. In seven of the eight Muslim populations surveyed, 50% or more believed in that specific American threat; only Nigeria, where 42% shared this belief, was the figure below the half-way line. Remarkably, significant majorities in seven of the eight Muslim populations – with a near majority in Morocco – worried about a potential US military threat to their own countries.

Thus, popular opinion is increasingly receptive to the Jihadist dogma that America is the enemy. Muslims also feel the need for a powerful figure to defend them. In six of the populations studied, the Pew research found that 40% or more had confidence that Osama bin

¹¹ Nor is the IMF agenda, the so-called 'Washington Consensus', (export-led growth, flexible labour market, deregulation, market prices for domestic consumption) necessarily appropriate to states that (a) have no particular advantage in non-oil commodities and no skilled labour, or (b) where subsidies are crucial to civic order and regime survival.

¹² "Views of a Changing World 2003, How Global Publics View: War in Iraq; Democracy; Islam and Governance; Globalization", The Pew Global Attitudes Project, The Pew Research Center, Washinton, D.C. (retrievable from <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=185>).

Laden would do the right thing in world affairs – with a majority of Jordanians (56%) and Palestinians (72%) placing their trust in his leadership.

The discourse in major daily newspapers published in the region (including Qatar, a key host for US military forces in the Gulf) present US policy in terms of the supposedly decisive role that Jews play in determining America's aggressive or exploitative actions in the region. The broad point is that America's approach to the reason for its policies – the pursuit of any 'grand strategy' – will be received with scepticism at best, or hostility. Attacks against the UN and the Red Cross, as well as British, Italian and Bulgarian forces in Iraq, and the British Consul General in Istanbul show that countries perceived to be connected to the American presence in the region are liable to be tarred with the same brush.

Against this dismal background, a grand strategy towards the Middle East must attempt more or less simultaneously to integrate the region into the global economy, promote democratisation, stave off the proliferation of nuclear weapons, stabilise local military balances and neutralise terrorists while redressing negative attitudes about the US and its partners. Concurrent with these daunting, long-term tasks, there is a Palestinian state to be created and nurtured, Iraqi insurgency to be defeated and an Iraqi state to be reconstituted. George Bernard Shaw remarked that marriage in the context of daily life amounted to "a battle in the midst of a war". Incubating these two states while coping with the broader demands of a Middle East strategy will seem much the same to policy-makers.

Democratisation. If any of these elements of a strategy has priority, it must be democratisation. This is a project, of course, not a panacea. It has been observed that democracy is a cure for just one ailment – tyranny – and that there are both poor and illiberal democracies. The future may also hold Islamist, anti-Western democracies. Nevertheless, democracies predicated on rule of law entail accountability and a degree of transparency that reduce the opportunity for corruption and misallocation of resources, while giving people a stake in decision-making. Thus democratisation would serve two vital purposes. First, it would improve economic performance and provide a better climate for investment, thereby reducing the labour supply overhang that poses such a severe threat to stability. Second, it would give frustrated, even alienated, publics a sense of empowerment at home that would reduce their resentment of powers abroad.

A commitment to democratisation would also have to encompass a commitment to bringing women into the workplace in countries where they are now excluded from the economic sphere. The faster this happens, the faster fertility rates will fall. Cultural barriers to the integration of women will naturally be reinforced by the economic threat these new entrants into the job market will pose to the hordes of unemployed young men already propping up walls in Middle Eastern cities. This is one reason, among many, that the overall programme of democratisation will have to proceed slowly. Another is that the distributive economies typical of some of these states undercut the incentives of the state and of society to adopt democracy. Yet another reason is the ubiquity of Islamist oppositions, whose commitment to Western-style democracy is unclear and who therefore cannot win the trust of reform-minded regime players essential to the pact-making that must precede the emergence of democracy. The Bush administration's Middle East Partnership Initiative is well adapted to these constraints and focused on key objectives: the empowerment of women, support for civil society and enhancement of education. The EU has been pursuing these objectives for a number of years, at a somewhat more modest level. The potential synergy of US-EU work in these areas would serve our shared interests well.

These programmes, however, are not enough. Pressure on governments to open up political

space is essential. Here, too, the West must think in terms of the long run. We cannot afford to precipitate crises with regional governments or withdraw support entirely when these relationships serve other important interests and there is no acceptable near-term alternative to existing arrangements. The administration's symbolic punishment of the Mubarak government in Egypt for hounding the sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim represents the sort of signal that we should be sending more broadly.

Trade and aid. Financial assistance will remain necessary for most of the states in the region. The Bush administration's Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), until a large part was re-allocated for use in Iraq, represented an interesting departure from an approach that had steadily lost credibility – and congressional support – between the mid-1980s and the end of the last decade. The inspiration was a Victorian dedication to the deserving poor, except in this case the poor are countries whose attempts, however feeble, to implement Washington Consensus rules made them deserving of help. The virtues of this approach were the enthusiasm it generated among Congressional appropriators and the smaller chance that the money would be wasted by recipients. The problem is that it punishes the undeserving poor; states that have not – and may never – meet the standard of economic reform that access to MCA money is intended to facilitate. Yet these failing states are precisely the ones that pose the urgent threat to Western interests. A successful strategy will have to allocate funds to the feckless poor as well as the righteous poor.

Aid is not the whole story. Trade is a far better way to help these societies perform better. Assistance tends to perpetuate the structures that hinder democratisation and hobble growth. Trade would take the funds from corrupt, favour-dispensing regimes and put it in the hands of a commercial middle class, empowering civil society and helping to create the conditions for democratic transition. The United States has finally adopted this policy towards the Pakistani textile industry and – as a policy, if not a political matter – made pursuit of free trade arrangements an important part of its foreign policy. This is another area where the harmonisation of US and EU policies can pay real dividends.

Maintain the regional military balance in the Persian Gulf. It will take years before Iraq emerges as a military power in the region – one hopes with exclusively conventional capabilities. Similarly, Iran will not emerge from its own economic weakness and political confusion for years. Nonetheless, the prospects for Iraq's regeneration and Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons are real enough. An over-the-horizon military presence, combined with forward-deployed US air force units in Qatar, a fleet headquartered in Bahrain and ground force equipment in Kuwait, will be needed to reassure the states on the Arab side of the Gulf, while injecting some caution into a nervous Iran and Iraq. The US – and its allies – will want to keep their forces available, but out of sight, to avoid inflaming public opinion.

Stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Few of the regional states are interested in a nuclear capability; most support non-proliferation goals. Although Iran has apparently experimented with uranium enrichment and would like to develop a production capacity, Tehran has not likely concluded that actual nuclear weapons are necessary or desirable. This will depend on the trajectory of Iraq's development in the coming years, perceptions of the threat posed by the US and the potential diplomatic and economic costs of proliferation if the US and Europe are united in their determination to block it. The US and its allies have at least some control over all three factors. A grand strategy for the Middle East would entail coordinated, firm exercise of this control. Unfortunately, exercising this control will demand a greater level of inter-alliance respect and cooperation than is currently on tap.

Combat terrorism. Whether or not terrorism has root causes susceptible to Western efforts to deal with them, terrorists will have to be rooted out. As al-Qaeda has evolved from a relatively small group of Egyptian revolutionaries and Saudi mystics into a widely shared ideology, this is going to be increasingly difficult. The presence of these insurgents in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region will force the US and the UK to foster close ties to regimes whose politics spurred the insurrection in the first place. Although this enforced dependence cannot be avoided entirely, a grand strategy would require that it be balanced by nuanced pressure on autocratic regimes and transmitted ‘in the clear’. The balance is extremely delicate and the risk of making this worse will be high.

Find a way to talk to opposition movements. It is said that a monologue is one person talking to himself; a dialogue is two people talking to themselves. Recognising the problems inherent in dialogue, the US in particular needs to explain itself better to the young, regional, technocratic elite. During a period when US credibility is at all-time low, this will not be easy. Yet a grand strategy for the region demands that the US – and its allies – be perceived as partners in the advancement of its people, rather than predators or clumsy hegemon, or worse, religious adversaries. What Fouad Ajami called the belligerence and self-pity of contemporary Arab discourse will get in the way, but we will have to forge ahead with some sort of dialogue despite this. The religious expression of opposition language poses an even more daunting challenge. Despite the religious window-dressing of American rhetoric, US policy is governed by secular concerns. Europe, of course, has expunged religion from the public sphere and private piety is on the wane. Engaging with the self-consciously religious language of the only truly organised and credible oppositions in the region will not be easy. But governments must try.

Palestine and Iraq. Palestine is not the source of America’s problems in the region, but it must be part of the solution. A coherent grand strategy would demand more robust US involvement. The disincentives are strong. The parties remain far apart, the two societies are fatigued but not wrung out, politics in both camps remain stagnant and the Bush administration is unlikely to take risks before a potentially close US election. But Washington must be seen to push for conditions that will favour a successful Palestinian state: territorial contiguity and borders close to the 1967 Green Line, with sensible adjustments. Failure to do so will pose not only near-term diplomatic costs, but lead to longer-term liabilities in the form of a stunted, violent Palestinian state that is a source of instability in the region and beyond. Similarly, the US – and its allies – must get Iraq right. The centre of gravity in the region is shifting from the West (Egypt and Syria) to the East. Politics in Iran are turbulent and arguably democratic; in Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Abdullah talks about elections (and must cope with an insurgency); in several of the smaller littoral states, genuine participatory democracy is beginning to replace the sham practices of an earlier time. The evolution of Iraq will have an enormous impact on these trends. If the state fails or reverts to a dictatorship, these exciting developments may fade; if it succeeds, a regeneration of the region is dimly possible.

What Strategy for the Greater Middle East?

A Russian Perspective

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An answer to the question of whether a common strategy for the Greater Middle East is possible is closely associated with how we understand the term ‘Greater’ and what regions or subregions are included into this macro-region. There is an impression that despite the differences in details many researchers are nowadays inclined to consider the Middle East as a territory extending from North Africa to Pakistan and including the Persian Gulf, Palestine, Central Asia and the Caucasus. If one is to proceed from this definition, the subregions just listed differ significantly from each other by the vicissitudes of historical fate, the level of socio-political and economic development, the specificity of ethno-confessional makeup and the degree of the involvement of external forces. At the same time it is commonly supposed that this new Middle East reproduces common security challenges and threats. Given that the area has a high concentration of despotic regimes and failed states, it is the site of politically radical and militant Islam, terrorism and conflicts. Several countries in the region also produce and supply drugs. To this one may add the danger of further violation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and of WMD falling into the hands of irresponsible extremist groupings.

There is no reason to regard the challenges mentioned above and threats arising in different parts of the new Middle East as identical or uniform for the entire macro-region. A gradual transformation of societies generating these threats is underway – a fact that changes, if not their essence, then at least the particular features of their manifestation. In this connection there is no common strategy to combat these threats, nor can there be, though a use of similar instruments cannot be excluded.

This paper attempts to present the Russian approach to the main security issues in two subregions of the Greater Middle East – Central Asia and Palestine.

Central Asia

In comparison with the traditional Middle East, Central Asia ranks much higher on the list of Russian foreign policy priorities. The transparency of borders, constant migration flows and the contacts that had been formed back in Soviet times made Russia much more dependent on the evolution of the situation in the states of Central Asia than had ever been expected. Central Asia has become a region independently generating threats and challenges to Russia’s security and simultaneously a transit corridor for threats coming from forces outside its borders. Among them is the growth of extremism in the form of militant Islamism, drugs and arms trafficking, the disputed border issues, tense relations between individual countries, the degradation of the environment and others. These threats do not simply affect Russia, but spread to its territory, intertwining with the Russian domestic security challenges and fostering their intensification.

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Over the past years, Moscow has determined its role as a guarantor of the region's security and its defender from external threats. These interests induce Russia to pursue a 'costly' policy. Because of the growth of extremism and terrorism, Russia tried to share the burden of responsibility for security with China (in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SCO) and then virtually acquiesced to the American military presence.

The greater part of Russian politicians and experts agree that in the short term, US action in many aspects meets the demands of strengthening security in Central Asia and in this respect can only be welcomed by Russia. These activities are, in particular:

- setting up an interim government and taking measures to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan;
- deterring extremism in Central Asia by demonstrating a military presence;
- diminishing the channels of foreign assistance to radical Islamists; and
- assisting the states of the region and their economies.

At the same time, in the long term it is not quite clear what the consequences of changing the geopolitical balance in the region will be. The growing geopolitical importance of Central Asia among the priorities of other states may cause difficulties in Russia's relations with them. Thus in case relations between the US and China deteriorate, the American presence in the region can become a factor of tension in relations between Russia and China. The American presence may also create problems in relations between Russia and Iran. Though the large-scale destabilisation of the situation and the outbreak of violence in Central Asia seem improbable, one cannot completely exclude a negative scenario. The US is unlikely to interfere in regional affairs or protect a particular regime, and will probably curtail its presence in Central Asia. In this case, Russia's responsibility for the establishment of stability and its involvement in Central Asian affairs could increase many times over and require huge resources and efforts on Moscow's part.

A threat most often referred to is militant Islamism. The Islamic radicalism in Central Asia has emerged chiefly under the influence of domestic and not external reasons. In the poorest states, a massive restructuring of the economy – de-industrialisation attended by the growth of the comparative importance of the trade and service sector – has resulted from the increase of negative economic tendencies soon after independence. The social welfare sphere has suffered an especially heavy blow. Problems in connection with the payment of pensions and allowances, with the maintenance of the system of education and public health services, and an extremely low level of public safety have promoted the trends to return to traditional practices. Working in the same direction have been such factors as corruption and nepotism in the highest bodies of power, infringement of legality and the weakness of law-enforcement agencies. The people, feeling defenceless, have naturally clung to traditional structures regulating personal and public life. From here greater attention has been directed towards religion, which was, under certain circumstances, expressed in borrowing the recipes for a just reorganisation of society within the framework of political Islam.

The above mentioned features of current development of Central Asian societies have created a breeding-ground for the emergence of extremist Islamic organisations there (e.g. Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). Outside assistance and support on the part of international Islamic foundations and certain governments of Muslim states is playing an important, but nevertheless secondary role. The productivity of this support, which includes financial aid, the training of militants and the export of ideology (the latter quite often at variance with the local tradition), is conditioned by the existence of contradictions, discontent

and frustration in the region. In its turn, such support rapidly becomes an instrument of mobilisation, giving an opportunity for protest sentiments to be more swiftly released.

Given the American presence, in the long term this trend may prove ineffective from the standpoint of maintaining stability. This result may happen if the West too actively engages in the introduction of Western standards of democracy, market economy and human rights. Still, it must be admitted that the Americans are beginning to understand the counter-productivity of such approaches in the cultures of traditional Oriental societies, in which respect for the supreme authority is ingrained.

American support, promoting the legitimisation of the Central Asian regimes and their consolidation, could simultaneously engender among them a temptation to use tougher methods towards the opposition, represented largely by the Islamists. Meanwhile, political Islam in Central Asia is far from being homogeneous politically. Coexisting within its context are both those moderate Islamists who are ready to cooperate with secular regimes in the name of national interests and the champions of a radical approach that is gaining in strength.

The main vulnerability of the official US approach, which is shared by neither Russia nor the European states, consists of shifting the accent to methods of military, forceful pressure, which do not leave political Islam the right to self-expression (it is certainly not just a question of either the terrorists or the extremists). In the Central Asian region there is an ever greater need for using the methods of political influence upon the radicals, isolating them within the framework of political Islam itself, along with the methods of military pressure where these are necessary.

In the long term, the American military presence *per se* can become a powerful, irritating factor, stimulating the manifestations of radical and above all, Islamic opposition, which will represent an especially serious challenge to Russia's security. Although the situation in Central Asia has nothing in common with that in Iraq, one cannot disregard the fact that the American military campaign and its military presence in the country have been encouraging re-Islamisation of the two states ruled by secular Baathist regimes, namely, Iraq and Syria.

In Central Asia as a whole, Russia (while developing cooperation in the security domain with the West along with China), is increasingly prepared to act independently, safeguarding its interests through bilateral and multilateral military-political and military-technical cooperation with the states in the region.

Palestine

The situation in the zone of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not a priority for Russian policy. At the same time, as the negative tendencies developing there increasingly spillover the limits of the region, Russia also feels the frustrating impact of the Middle Eastern factor.

The crisis of expectations associated with the peace process has fostered a radicalisation of the Palestinian society, which is less and less ready to accept a compromise variant of settlement with Israel. Even representatives of Fatah (Arafat's organisation) have declared that the peace process was a conspiracy against the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. The per capita income has decreased by 20% in comparison with 1993 (before the conclusion of the Oslo agreements), a significant growth of unemployment has been observed, the freedom of movement has been restricted, the construction of Israeli settlements has continued and the number of Israeli settlers has doubled.

At the same time, the Palestinian authorities haven't demonstrated any efficiency or ability to resolve socio-economic issues. Corruption, the absence of professionalism and the haphazard process of decision-making have resulted in a situation where social problems have largely been given over to the tender mercies of Islamist organisations – Hamas, Islamic Jihad and so forth. These have been raising funds for the Palestinian poor, organising the education of the youth and have naturally pursued a corresponding ideological indoctrination of the population. The political role of Islamist organisations traditionally calling for a 'jihad' against Jews has clearly been growing. Thus the ethno-territorial and ethno-political conflict underlying the Palestinian problem has gradually acquired an ethno-confessional dimension as well. Basically, a confrontation on inter-confessional grounds was not peculiar to the Palestinian-Israeli differences. Among the Palestinians themselves there are Christians and the main Palestinian organisations were represented by secular nationalists who did not use religious slogans as an instrument of military-political struggle in a practical manner. Nowadays, even young Fatah fighters have been gambling with terrorist methods under Islamic slogans, having created their own military formation of al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades.

The Russian interests in the Middle East are being formed under the influence of various factors. First, there is the demonstration effect that the events in Palestine have had. For the Muslim world, the Palestinians are a symbol of fighting against the humiliations suffered by Muslims. It is in this context that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is used by Islamic radicals calling for war against the infidels. The talk about the 'Palestinisation' of the Chechen conflict started after the appearance of Chechen women as terrorists, though this comparison is incorrect. These two conflicts are of a completely different nature; death as a human bomb is not in Chechen traditions – Chechen men will not offer themselves in such a manner. Attempts at such an imitation, however, testify that things happening in the traditional Middle East are ever more affecting the security of Russia proper. It is not ruled out that both the Palestinian radicals and the Chechen terrorists at times receive funding from the same sources. Second, the Russian Federation is compelled to take into consideration the presence of a significant number of Russian citizens in Israel. This factor cannot help but influence Russia's policies, as the leadership of the Russian Federation (RF) is anxious over their security, which under the conditions of the ongoing conflict, is constantly jeopardised. Third, the Israeli support for the Russian policy in Chechnya is also playing its role, especially against the background of constant criticism and resentment of any RF actions in this republic on the part of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), quite often viewed in Russia as evidence of double standards and attempts towards the appeasement of Islamic extremists.

Given this connection, Russia has an interest in promoting the speediest settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In the process, the direct parties to the conflict nowadays perceive the RF as an honest broker. On the one hand, it has retained its traditionally close ties with the Palestinians and the Arab states. On the other hand, it has wide-ranging relations with Israel, which believes that the Russian Federation is confronted with similar problems of struggle against terrorism. Nevertheless, Russia has neither the ambitions nor the resources to assume an active, independent role in promoting the process of settlement. It is ready to work within the framework of the efforts of the Quartet, advancing the Road Map for peace.

Conclusions

It seems that attempts to construct a new or expanding Middle East have been dictated by political reasons. An automatic incorporation of the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus

into the traditional Middle East may have only initially reflected a certain reality expressed in the quest for a national identity and in the attempts to revive connections with coreligionists and ethnically related peoples. But later on, these concepts came to occupy a special place in the system and structure of international relations, linking an opportunity of accelerated development mainly with the expansion of ties with the West. The question of whether the Greater Middle East is united by common security challenges also seems rather contentious. For example, the hierarchy of reasons for the radicalisation of political Islam and the growth of extremism in Palestine and in Central Asia are different. Various external forces have different foreign-policy priorities in these regions and, accordingly, their assessments of the intensity and danger of these threats also differ seriously. Such a conclusion means that the instruments and methods of combating the existing threats are not universal and, consequently, one may hardly calculate on a single strategy for the new Middle East. In each specific case, an approach of its own should be developed and only under such circumstances can its efficiency be ensured. Such an approach will require a coordinated effort, leaving enough room for manoeuvre by each of the parties interested in the stability of the Greater Middle East.