

Editorial

By Yasar Qatarneh

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The very idea of “reform” remains a more controversial subject in Euro-Mediterranean affairs than observers might first admit. Indeed, it is generally recognized that reform is one preventive instrument, yet the precise details about how it is to be realized, under what circumstances, when, and by whom, remain significantly underdeveloped, if not vague. This is partly a problem for analysts, whose techniques for assessing volatile situations and prospective remedies could be further sharpened. In the same way, it is partly a problem for organizations and institutions—both local, regional and international whose practices, styles of decision-making and systems of learning and accountability, often inhibit effective response to the complex environments in which reform may subsist.

Against this background, and as real partnership within the Euro-Mediterranean framework involves understanding, the RCCP and IAI are eager to follow-up on the subject of reform in this second issue of their joint bulletin Conflict IN FOCUS. It addresses the nexus between political reform, on the one hand, and conflict prevention in the Mediterranean/Middle East, on the other. In the Forum, the second section of Conflict in Focus, Farid Khazen and Reinhardt Rummel analyze the significance and impact of political reform in terms of conflict prevention in the Middle East. With the final aim of provoking a debate on such a sensitive subject, their analysis lead to some interesting conclusions that Euro-Mediterranean partners should always keep in mind when working on or contemplating joint ventures. Moreover, entitled “The EU 2004 Mid-Year Report on Conflict Prevention”, Roberto Aliboni’s article assesses recent developments concerning the EU activities within the framework of conflict prevention, including implementation of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts. The analysis leads to some interesting conclusions that enhance our understanding of the European agenda and capabilities in the field of conflict prevention. ■

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THE EU 2004 MID-YEAR REPORT ON CONFLICT PREVENTION

By Roberto Aliboni

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The most significant recent development concerning the European Union (EU) conflict prevention policy has to do with the “Report to the European Council on EU Activities within the Framework of Prevention, Including Implementation of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts.”⁽¹⁾ This Report is issued every mid-year by the incumbent Presidency after the June 2001 European Council endorsed the Goteberg Programme on the Prevention of Violent Conflict. Prepared by the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management, the 2004 Report was presented to the different EU institutions involved, and finally, included in the Irish Presidency Conclusions of 18 June 2004.

The Irish Presidency gave conflict prevention a prominent role on the agenda of its activities. It organised a Conference on Conflict Prevention at Dublin Castle from 30th March - 2nd April 2004, which was attended by officials and NGOs who heard a keynote address, on the inauguration session, by the EU Secretary General, Javier Solana.⁽²⁾ The Conference came up with an Agenda duly accounted for in the Presidency’s Report. The interest of the Presidency in conflict prevention, while reflecting an Irish foreign policy priority, is also the outcome of the significant role attached to conflict prevention by the “European Security Strategy” (see the previous issue of this newsletter).

The Report is not a detailed account of conflict prevention activities carried out between June 2003 and June 2004 by the EU. Actually, the Report makes this fact clear as it indicates, at the outset, that it “is not a summary of all activities with a preventive dimension. These are too many to itemise.” The difficulty in accounting for EU conflict prevention activities and measures stems from the fact that conflict prevention is mainstreamed in all EU activities. Such mainstreaming is recommended by the Goteborg Programme, and a most prominent character of both EU conflict prevention philosophy and practice. As everything the EU is doing is endowed with a preventive dimension, a “quantitative” report on EU conflict prevention would coincide, at the end of the day, with the overall EU activity. This explains the reason why the 2004 Report says that conflict prevention activities are “too many to itemise;” a statement that, at first, might seem eccentric.

Rather, the Report, taking advantage of the Agenda endorsed at the Dublin Castle Conference, provides a number of “qualitative” assessments of the EU conflict prevention activities. In particular, it comments on the issue of “better coordination” amongst EU institutions,

with particular emphasis on the Commission and the Council’s Secretary General-High Representative for Foreign Policy. Likewise, contributions from other actors (national governments, civil societies, etc.) are to be taken into account. Thus, the question of improving coordination comes to the limelight - as the Report says very aptly - the “dialogue between the security and development communities.” The fundamental need for “better coordination” is neatly pointed out by the “European Security Strategy” and, in fact, it is a central point for EU action to succeed. It is an obvious consequence of the highly integrated character of the EU actions and policies concerning conflict prevention and, more broadly speaking, crisis response.

Furthermore, the Report builds on available instruments. It concludes by providing a non-systematic picture of the most important conflict prevention activities accomplished by the EU covering the period monitored by the Report. This article dwells on coordination and instruments.

Coordination between “security” and “development” was one item discussed in details by the security experts on the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management, and the experts on Development Assistance at the Dublin Castle Conference. Among other things, these experts explored ways and means to support UN conflict prevention activities, capacity building, coherence between EU national governments, bilateral actions, security sector reform, and the practical implications of the concept of human security.

An example of a more coherent approach to preventing violent conflict is the support provided to the Peace Facility for Africa (an African Union’s structure) under the European Development Fund (in itself a developmental tool). As a consequence of this integrated measure, “whilst mainly focused on the deployment of peacekeeping troops and related capacity building, [the Facility] will support conflict prevention by reinforcing the early warning systems, conflict mediation and cease-fire observation.”

(1) The Report is an attachment to the Irish Presidency Conclusions. However, at the time the author consulted the web site, it was not displayed with the Conclusions. The copy kindly made available to the author can be quoted as: Council of the European Union, Draft Report to the European Council on EU Activities within the Framework of Prevention, Including implementation of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, Brussels, 02/06/2004 (02.06), (OR. en), 10051/04.

(2) Summary of the remarks made by EU HR Javier Solana at the Conference on Conflict Prevention - Dublin 31 March 2004, 1-4-2004 (English) - Nr: S0095/04.

http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/79788.pdf

On the other hand, another example of a more coherent approach to trade issues within the framework of conflict prevention is the incorporation of mutual conditionality clauses into agreements with partner countries. This is done by reciprocally endorsing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS); a commitment to prevent “conflict diamonds” (traded to fund conflict) from entering the legitimate diamond trade.

The third relevant issue dealt with in the Report is in relation with the building by the EU of appropriate capabilities. The Report points out that “there is a clear link between our capabilities and our ability to prevent violent conflict.” The Report lists, first of all, the establishment of a Civilian-Military Cell within the Union and states that this Cell “will enhance the EU capacity for crisis management planning, harnessing both civilian and military instruments in responding to crises.” Clearly, this instrument addresses a key problem of coordination (between the military and civilian branch of the EU, the Council and the Commission).

This same concern - the Report points out - is influencing the broader development of the EU military capabilities by 2010 (the expansion and reinforcement of the already available EU military force). This development, in fact, aims at “applying a fully coherent approach to the whole spectrum of crisis management operations... This includes humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping tasks, and tasks to combat forces in crisis management. This might also include joint disarmament operations, support for third countries in combating terrorism, and security sector reform,” that are also typical preventive actions.

The Report accounts for a significant progress in diplomatic instruments. In this sense, it quotes the increase in the number of EU Special Representatives-EUSRs. These EUSRs serve as a classical instrument in conflict prevention. Presently, there are six EUSRs, including the last one appointed in July 2003 in Southern Caucasus (an area recently included in the new European Neighbourhood Policy-ENP, thus, increasing the political interest of the EU).

Following the Goteborg Programme agenda, there are efforts to extend with the objective of improving EU early warning capabilities. The Report explains that “an important issue... will be to link early warning capabilities with the new planning capabilities and the refinement of indicators on key issues such as genocide prevention and failed states.”

Finally, the Report refers to the improvement of the EC (i.e. the Commission’s) Rapid Reaction Mechanism-RRM. So far, the RRM made possible a number of interventions, including military and civilian as well as ante- and post-conflict elements. Afghanistan is cited in this respect as an example.

The Report concludes by highlighting a set of future priorities, such as the development of the link between security and development, and the enlargement of EU capabilities allowing for common work with international institutions, with particular reference to the United Nations. ■



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POLITICAL REFORMS IN THE ARAB WORLD: WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED?*

Farid El Khazen⁽¹⁾

It took an event of the magnitude of 9/11 to make the discourse on political reforms in the Arab world legitimate and pressing on both sides of the divide: The United States of America and the Arab regimes. Although the discourse on reforms, both political and economic, has been with us for some time since the early 1980s, it was never a priority. It was commonplace to talk about reforms in the Arab politics; Arab “revolutionary regimes”, in particular, seized power by force in the name of reform and under the plea of change to rid their countries of the “feudal” practices of the ancient regime accused of monopolizing political power and economic resources. In the same manner, it was politically correct for the United States to occasionally remind Arab regimes of the need to reform their political and economic systems, though no reform was expected to materialize and the status quo prevailed.

For a long time, Washington has learned to live with authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and elsewhere. During the Cold War, democracy and human rights did not figure on U.S. foreign policy agenda, except during the Carter administration and in few Latin American countries. During the Reagan administration, Washington pressed for democracy and human rights in Soviet-ruled regimes, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, with a view to counter Soviet domination. However, it was only after the end of the Cold War that political reforms, touching various aspect of governance, became a priority issue for Washington as well as for the international community.

The Middle East, however, continued to be an exception to the norm even after the end of the Cold War. For Washington, stability in the region came first and democracy was largely viewed as a recipe for chaos. This was the predominant “Washington consensus” about the Arab world prior to 9/11. Even the peace process was initially played down by the George W. Bush administration following direct presidential involvement in Clinton’s last year in office.

The European Union, by contrast, was far more engaged in reforms than the United States. Geographic proximity, trade relations, and problems over illegal immigration to Europe from Arab countries, especially from North Africa, led the European Union to initiate a multifaceted reform platform in the Barcelona conference in 1995 focusing on security, trade, and governance. Although political reform was given low priority and was the most “sensitive” issue in bilateral relations between the European Union and Arab countries, reforms as a theme became part and parcel of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. But progress in questions relating to political

reforms was very much dependent on the course of the Arab-Israeli peace process which broke down in 2000.

The September 11 attacks left no room for ambiguity: the promotion of political reforms were not only lofty objectives now, but rather, necessary to combat terrorism. If, for Arab regimes, the discourse on reforms prior to 9/11 was more in form than in substance, for the United States, the September 11 attacks elevated reforms to an issue of national interest. Henceforth, reforms were no longer viewed as a luxury but an integral component of the war on terrorism. In a way, the war on terrorism suddenly became a “war” for political reforms. But words are easier than deeds. Of all countries in the region, Saudi Arabia, for example, posed an unprecedented dilemma. A longtime ally of the United States, Saudi Arabia was not only the birthplace of the fifteen terrorists (out of 19) who hijacked the civilian airplanes that hit New York and Washington but also the birthplace of Al-Qaeda leader, Bin Laden, and several of his associates.

The U.S. response was sweeping, but the problem was too complex: where to begin with the implementation of reforms and how to implement reforms without jeopardizing the stability of friendly regime? Although Saudi Arabia is usually accused or perceived as an authoritarian rule, problems are no less intractable in other Arab countries. It was, after all, an emergency situation imposed on the United States and Arab regimes by the 9/11 attacks and, like in any emergency situation, blunders, misperceptions, and impatience abound.

The Arab world, to be sure, was not hermetically sealed against change and reform. Countries like Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait have embarked on a process of democratization since the early 1990s by holding fairly competitive elections and allowing political pluralism. But these moves, important as they were, amounted to preemptive attempts to absorb internal pressure and/or to contain crises. The ability of these regimes to pursue reform depended on regional developments and, specifically, on the democratization process or lack thereof in the Arab state system. Not surprisingly, the regional environment, dominated by the cartel

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the regional environment, dominated by the cartel of authoritarian regimes, was not conducive to any sustainable movement toward genuine political reforms.

In recent years, Arab regimes have pursued two approaches to reforms. One approach involved incremental adaptation to an open, market-based economy (infatih). The other approach, on the other hand, was reformist in tone but not in substance. The model that regimes in Syria and Egypt, for example, sought to emulate was that of China and Malaysia: that is, economic reforms combined with authoritarian rule. But even that model came to a halt. One manifestation of this approach was the emergence of civil society groups, which were allowed to operate but had no impact on the political process, as was the case in Egypt, or were subsequently banned, as was the case in Syria.

Pressed by the U.S. to implement reforms after 9/11, Arab regimes had to adapt to this unprecedented challenge. And there was little time and equally little room for adjustment and maneuver. Three types of Arab responses to Political reforms surfaced: first, reforms are being imposed from outside by the United States to serve American interests rather than those of Arab regimes; second, reforms cannot be implemented in the absence of a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict and as long as the Iraqi war continues; third, reforms would weaken regimes and lead to a power vacuum which would be filled by Islamist groups bent on using violence in pursuit of political objectives.

Clearly, too many obstacles stand in the way of political reforms. While it is true that reforms are imposed from outside and that “imperial” objectives are served in the process, it is equally true that the Arab world was not undergoing sweeping changes in state-society relations prior to the U.S. abrupt interest in reform. In other words, the U.S. (and European) insistence on reforms did not in anyway hinder Arab plans to implement reforms either at state or regional levels. But irrespective of what “outsiders” have in mind and irrespective of their objectives, Arab political systems are in dire need for reform not for the purpose of complying with “imperial” designs, but rather, because the Arab world can no longer afford to be the exception to the norm in the post-Cold War international system.

Arab objection about the imposition of reforms from outside would stand on firmer ground, had Arab regimes been singled out as a target for change and reforms to serve the interests of major powers. In reality, the Arab world is a latecomer to reforms in comparison with countries in other parts of the developing world where major powers exercise no less influence than in the Arab world.

More importantly and historically, ideas and/or incentives for change, that can be traced from the Ottoman Empire up to the present, have originated outside

the Arab world and were transmitted to the region. Muhammad Ali’s modernization drive in Egypt in the early nineteenth century, for instance, and the Ottoman Tanzimat during that same century were “imported” from Europe. Muhammad Ali’s effort to reform the administration and build a modern army laid the groundwork for the emergence of Egypt’s modern state, while the Ottoman Tanzimat, on the other hand, were a response to a deepening a crisis in the Ottoman empire and in Ottoman-European relations.

In the post-Ottoman era, following the formation of new states in the region, much of the political practices and ideologies, both before and after independence, were inspired by the Western model. Constitutional government, political parties, and ideologies of the left and right were introduced in the region by intellectuals and activists who studied in Europe or were exposed to Western thought and political practice. So was nationalism in its various manifestations, notably Arab nationalism and Arab socialism, whose theoretical foundations and secular orientation are Western in origin and scope.

The other objection to reforms in Arab politics concerns the timing and the absence of a hospitable regional political environment for the implementation of reforms. There is an element of truth in the linkage between reforms of Arab politics and regional conflicts, particularly in the Arab-Israeli conflict. A settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict leading to a two-state solution would, undoubtedly, facilitate the task of reformists in the Arab world. It would deprive Arab regimes of whatever excuse they have to maintain the status quo and would subsequently encourage Arab public to turn attention to immediate domestic concerns. American support for Israel’s actions--the undermining of the peace process, the continuous expansion of settlements and, more recently, the construction of the security fence, denounced by the international community-- have created conditions that prevent a just and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and have greatly weakened US credibility as a advocate of reform. Similarly, a peaceful and orderly post-Saddam Iraq would allow Arab regimes, particularly those that are predisposed to opt for reforms, to take bolder steps toward change and lessen their preoccupation with security and the unpredictable repercussions of the ongoing Iraq war.

Notwithstanding these legitimate concerns, there is no hiding of the fact that political reforms are needed for Arab societies to integrate in the modern world and to attend to genuine problems that impede progress and development. Reforming the judiciary and public administration, fighting corruption, improving the status of women, investing in human capital, and reforming the educational system need not wait for the ending of regional conflicts and for the restating of US foreign policy priorities for the reshaping of US-Israeli relations.

The third Arab objection to an ambitious agenda of political reforms is linked to the Islamist challenge. To be sure, Islamist groups have neither championed the cause of reform nor are they reputed for their commitment to democratic government and political pluralism. But the distrust of Islamist groups and their recurrent use of violence need not result in freezing change in the name of combating Islamist extremism. A policy of inclusion vis-à-vis moderate Islamist groups will yield much better results in the long run than the outright banning and/or permanent exclusion of opposition groups, Islamists and non-Islamists. Regimes that opted for a policy of inclusion of Islamist groups, such as Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait have fared better than regimes that allowed no such political pluralism. Certainly, the nature of the Islamist threat has differed between countries, but an incremental inclusion is far more beneficial than a zero-sum confrontation between government and opposition. Nor would a policy of Islamization, pursued by some regimes to counter heavy-handed policies toward Islamist groups, enhance the prospects of democracy and reform.

Never before was the rift between the Arab world and the West as deep as it is today. Whether it is a clash of civilizations or a clash of states and national interests, the labels matter a less since the essence of the relationship between the Arab world “and the rest” is crisis-ridden. In the past, the three phases of modernization that the Arab world has known--the cultural renaissance in the second

half of the nineteenth century (al-Nahda), the liberal era until the 1950s, and the radical transformation of states and societies in the 1950s and 1960s-- resembled the phases of modernization in other parts of the world, both East and West. But since the 1980s and, more specifically, since the 1990s, the Arab world has parted ways with the patterns of modernization and change that unfolded in other parts of the globe.

In previous decades, the introduction of modernity and secularism in Arab political practice produced no clash with the outside world, both East and West, and was not a zero-sum game. Arab states, especially in the Arab East, Egypt and North Africa emulated models of change, both radical and conservative, without being on the defensive and with no apology to make and no guilt to overcome. If modernity was universal in the Arab land two or three decades ago, why is it not today?

At present, modernization and reforms are equated with Westernization by government and opposition for self-serving objectives. While in the cultural domain, religion plays an important role, democracy and political pluralism, be they called reforms or otherwise, are neither detrimental to Arab values nor to Islam nor are they needed to please the United States. Authoritarianism after all has run its course and has produced ossified polities that kept the Arab world frozen in rigidity and underdevelopment. Is it not time for a new start? ■

THE MIDDLE EAST: A CASE FOR IN-CONFLICT CONFLICT PREVENTION*

Reinhardt Rummel⁽¹⁾

It has been claimed that the concept of conflict prevention may make sense in many parts of the world except in the Middle East. Certainly, this region has its own particular features, part of which can be traced to a long history of attempts to use violence in order to solve conflict inside states and between them. Yet, the Middle East has an even richer history of learning that violence, more often than not, leads to major damage, destroys mutual trust, and breeds very little hope for a better life. This knowledge from within the Middle East is a very valuable resource for peace and security that should be exploited to the full. The region may not qualify for classical prevention, given that most of its potentially violent conflicts have already escalated since long. Nevertheless, the core benefit of prevention can still be realised - and this, by simply reducing the use of force where possible, even during armed conflict. Thus, while war and violence continues, the Middle East would cultivate its own approach of prevention, a concept of "in-conflict conflict prevention."

The term, in-conflict conflict prevention, may sound paradoxical, but it signals exactly the paradox of the present situation. As violent clashes recur, almost on daily basis, inside several Middle Eastern countries, the need for political reform and modernisation of societies is now deemed more urgent than ever before. While war-like tensions between states are prolonged, the level of regional co-operation and rehabilitation remains comparatively low. Although the projection of military power by outside actors becomes ever more mighty, the interventions seem to produce less and less prospects for sustainable development. Yet, the good news from the analytical, as well as the practical world is that these paradoxes can be dissolved. The art of prevention is by now differentiated and advanced enough to provide for the conviction, the tools, and the techniques adaptable to such complex emergencies as they exist in the Middle East region, where situations of pre-violence, outright fighting, and post-war reconstruction overlap.

This article cannot be the place where to design a program of in-conflict conflict prevention for the whole region, let alone for each local state. However, it can encourage academics, politicians and activists, in each of these states, to study the merits of prevention, as compared to the use of violence, and to introduce preventive thinking into their activities, as compared to simply extrapolating past traditions. I predict that the results of such an analytical exercise will turn out strikingly in favour of prevention, unless people are by now totally addicted to fighting. People with an understanding and with a free will to chose will opt

for a policy of prevention, and support it actively. Prevention can actually be designed and implemented if the manpower is devoted to such a strategy, and if the resources are wisely committed towards serving this noble purpose.

There are three levels to a successful conflict prevention strategy: (a) the domestic level of political reform, (b) the regional level of co-operation, and (c) the international level of powerful actors. Following are brief remarks concerning each of these layers.

Combining preventive thinking with political reform

It would be naive to assume that if one applies the right preventive measure(s) in the Middle East, violence will be phased out or eradicated immediately. In-conflict conflict prevention does not mean to sideline or ignore the perennial Israeli-Arab conflict, nor the ever-deteriorating post-war situation in Iraq. At the same time, it would not be justifiable to declare that these mega-conflicts cannot be treated successfully, by means of a conflict prevention approach. Rather, these two examples show, first, the magnitude of efforts that are needed to be exerted in order to avoid their further escalation; and, second, the importance of resorting to early and suitable policies in order to avoid armed solutions to political problems right from the very beginning. Moreover, the urgency of the political, economic and social reconstruction in Iraq proves that progress on the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot serve as a precondition for launching preventive initiatives and implementing political reform elsewhere in the Middle East.

As the two case studies on "The Debate on Constitutional Reform in Egypt" and "The State of Governance in Jordan" in the previous edition of Conflict in Focus demonstrate, many more items exist on the agenda of reform that qualify for a serious check or for a proactive attention, be it on the state or sub-state level. As recognised by the Declaration of the Arab League Summit of May 23, 2004, cross-cutting items such as good governance, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, gender, respect for the rights of minorities,

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co-operation on non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and economic development are all part and parcel of the Middle East conflict prevention agenda.⁽²⁾

A policy of prevention is not to be conceived as a distinct policy area that stands on its own in separation from other political sectors and activities. To the contrary, this policy represents a conflict-sensitive approach which is to be integrated in all relevant state and non-state functions. Mainstreaming conflict prevention helps in guiding politicians and activists alike to bring about suitable instruments that can address specific conflict factors. The act of determining the most influential feature of a conflict has its risky output, whereby the act itself can be rated as no more than an academic exercise.⁽³⁾ Yet, to be in a good position to prepare efficient countermeasures that can be connected with political reform requires, at least, a distinction of root causes of violent conflict, an identification of aggravating and prolonging factors, as well as the capacity to trigger events as they are typical for Middle Eastern societies. Each of these conflict causes demands its own distinctive answer.⁽⁴⁾

Concerning the root causes of violent conflict, one would want to have a sharp eye on the legitimacy deficit of undemocratic governments, the systematic violation of group rights, the various degrees of state failure, the culture of impunity, the employment shortage combined with demographic stress, and the mutual destabilisation by neighbouring regimes. Of course, each of these factors needs elaboration with regard to individual countries or regions, with regard to their timeline, and with regard to their content of ownership. This is a prime field for political reform including education.

Aggravating factors refer to conditions contributing to the (re-)escalation and prolongation of conflict in existence. This category of conflict causes seems to be of particular importance in the Middle East, as it includes such items as the security management of refugee camps, perception of a fundamentalist threat and religious confrontation, radical rhetoric and hate media, increasing corruption, undermining the state monopoly of the use of force, illicit trade of arms, and external intervention - just to mention a few. Many of these factors can be addressed by a substantial renewal of civil administration.

Triggering events set off and escalate violent conflict. They consist of an unlimited list of factors ranging from local disputes to mass demonstrations, from the assassination of key leaders to military coups, from the breaches of accords to peace enforcement operations, etc. If at all, these factors can mainly be addressed from within countries, they would require a well-functioning early warning system. This is especially so in situations of in-conflict conflict prevention where - by definition - the environment is already explosive, and the triggering

events need particular attention.

Long-lasting conflicts, as is the case in the Middle East, change their pattern over time and develop their own dynamics during the conflict cycle. Therefore, different preventive packages have to be composed for different stages of conflict. Roughly speaking, pre-conflict can be addressed by non-military means; crisis management requires peacekeeping forces; post-conflict periods are characterised by a first period of security concern and then require all the skills for state-building and reform. These prescriptions sound like social engineering which can never fit Middle East reality. However, without a refined methodology and an interest in the internal structure of society, neither prevention policy nor political reform will succeed.

Regional co-operation as a preventive tool

Measured by the quantity of attempts in the last decades to bring together the whole of the Middle Eastern states (or some sub-groups of them), one would expect to see a solid network of multilateral relations in place that could be transformed into a framework of regional peace and security. Such a framework would set the standards for peaceful conflict resolution, and thus, back up intra-state processes of political reform and social responsiveness, as referred to hereinabove. It would also set the rules for cross-border and interstate behaviour, as well as provide the instruments and the infrastructure to respect those rules. It seems, however, that, so far, political leaders in the Middle East and activists alike have grossly underestimated the preventive potential of regional co-operation.

It is true that meaningful regional co-operation among states and populations with partly hostile histories, disparities in resources, and incompatible desires is not an easy task, especially if popped up by colonial legacies and interfering external powers. Yet, one need not refer to the standard example, viz., the integration process in Europe, to prove that even the most difficult obstacles can be overcome. Africa may well serve as a little showcase in this regard. In recent years, the African Union (AU) and various African regional organisations have managed to make their institutions deal with peace

(2) Arab League: "Tunis Declaration of 16th Arab Summit" Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the USA, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/2004News/Statements/StateDetail.asp?cIndex=421>, 2004. Last accessed on: 23 July 2004.

(3) For an exception to this rule, see Aliboni, Roberto and Guazzone, Laura: "Democracy in the Arab Countries and the West" in: Aliboni, Roberto (Ed.): *Peace-, Institution- and Nation-Building in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, Rome, 2003, pp. 7 - 17.

(4) For a systematic assignment of appropriate measures in order to target specific problem areas and causes of conflict, see Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-Conflict Prevention Network, "Conflict Prevention and Peace-building: A Practical Guide," Berlin/Brussels, December 2001 (CD-ROM).

and security more operationally and effectively. Maybe the African example is worth studying in order to find out some practical ideas for the Middle East case as well (and vice versa).

Certainly, substantial regional co-operation will not advance much if official leaders and non-governmental activists do not dare to test unconventional avenues. The Constitutive Act of the AU has not only significantly shifted the balance from the principle of national sovereignty and non-interference towards the responsibility of the member states to ensure peace and security on the continent, and to intervene in the case of grave circumstances. It also created successful new structures to implement these tasks. The new Peace and Security Council will be supported by a continental early warning system, a panel of the wise as well as an African stand-by force, and a peace fund. Flanking initiatives are the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation (CSSDCA) which tries to copy the CSCE model, as well as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) which tries to organise reform and political commitment in the socio-economic field. Likewise, crisis-related NGOs have spread recently, and are co-operating efficiently on regional basis.⁽⁵⁾

One should not raise expectations too high on those initiatives neither on the African nor, if similar structures were to be installed, in the Middle Eastern case. On the other hand, such an indigenous dynamic can, as the African example demonstrates, mobilise considerable political will at home, along with active support from abroad. Not only have the UN, the G-8 Group, the US and the EU endorsed the home-grown plans for operationally effective co-operation on the AU level, they have also - by extension - encouraged (financially and otherwise), and supported the strengthening of sub-regional groupings such as ECOWAS, SADC and IGAD, including regionally focussed NGOs. These groupings, in turn, have started to use their capabilities for crisis management and prevention.⁽⁶⁾

The lesson to be learnt from the African case is that practical improvements can be realised even in the midst of major on-going hostilities. One cannot see why the constellation in the Middle East would not allow a similar leap forward in strengthening region-wide and sub-regional organisations (governmental and non-governmental), and assisting them in their effort to mainstream prevention and to tackle key causes of conflict. This can be done - as again, the African example suggests - regarding all kinds of existing regional organisations starting with the larger organisations, such as the Arab League and the Greater Arab Trade Area,⁽⁷⁾ and leading to the smaller groupings, such as the Gulf Co-operation Council, the Arab Maghreb Union, and the Agadir Agreement. South-South regional integration structures (as the ACRS framework⁽⁸⁾), as well as the reflex of regional co-operation in times of tension

(as displayed by Arab leaders during the last war in Iraq⁽⁹⁾) deserve a review with regard to the imperative of prevention.

The call for regional co-operation is certainly not a new one, but in the midst of insecurity and conflict in the Middle East, it might sound helpful to renew regional co-operation with the hope of advancing conflict prevention.⁽¹⁰⁾ In-conflict conflict prevention should screen and develop existing regional frameworks, as they can serve as a source of understanding and co-operation and can help to re-establish trust. The relationships in the Middle East should not be left to the unholy law where violence breeds violence. Instead, areas of practical and pragmatic co-operation should be identified and emphasised, in order to encourage societies to construct bridges of fruitful cooperation between and amongst each other. The experience of the so-called "Harmel Approach" which, during the heydays of the Cold War, allowed for mutual agreement and common problem solving among hostile camps, comes to mind in this context. In this sense, each item on the long agenda of conflict is also a nucleus for prospective co-operation. This is true for the parties to the Quartet regarding the Arab-Israeli-conflict and for a respective group regarding the stabilisation of post-war Iraq that will have to include all its neighbouring states.

Restructuring European politics for preventive goals

If regional co-operation were to be enhanced in the Middle East and given a conflict prevention focus, outside actors like the EU would feel a stronger obligation to engage. The EU has been advocating the regional concept

- (5) European Centre for Development Policy Management: "Regional Approaches to Conflict Prevention in Africa," In Brief, no. 4 (October 2003), pp. 1-12.
- (6) Fernanda Faria, "Crisis Management in sub-Saharan Africa. The Role of the European Union," Paris, April 2004 (European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper no. 51).
- (7) Euro Arab Management School: "Arab Commercial and Economic Co-operation: The Greater Arab Free Trade Area" Granada, 2001, <http://www.eams.fundea.es/research/AFTAarea.pdf>, Last accessed on: 23 July 2004.
- (8) Monterey Institute of International Studies, Centre for Non-proliferation Studies: "Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East (ACRS)," Monterey, 2002, <http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/inven/pdfs/acrs.pdf>, Last accessed on: 23 July 2004.
- (9) See the ad hoc attempt of Arab officials and scholars to organise an "Arab Security Council" as a regional fall back structure for after the Iraq war. Gulf News of 5 May 2003: "Call to Set Up Arab Security Council to Protect Members," <http://www.gulfnews.com/Articles/news.asp?ArticleID=86480>, Last accessed on: 23 July 2004.
- (10) For one of the most thorough and sensible regional designs which, at a later stage lead to a draft Security Charter for the region, see Peter Jones, "Toward a Regional Security Regime for the Middle East: Issues and Options," Stockholm International Peace Research Institutes (SPRI), Stockholm, December 1998.

as a prime tool of preventing violent conflict. The case being so, how could it then not take an active stand and show respect and honour towards indigenous concepts and activities with that focus? There is even the chance that the Europeans could be open to unconventional efforts.⁽¹¹⁾ On the other hand, the initiators should not expect too much assistance from the EU, given that Brussels has a mixed record in this field.⁽¹²⁾

The EU, in fact, is both a pioneer and a latecomer of conflict prevention. It is a pioneer with regard to advancing the idea of conflict prevention, at home, inside and among the European nations. After all, the search for peace is one of the founding reasons for the EU's existence. The question that dictates itself is: Can the European states contribute towards reproducing a similar success story outside the EU? This goal must be much harder to achieve because it will not only - not even primarily - depend on the Europeans, but on whether other regions of crisis quit the habit of war and engage in peaceful approaches to conflict. Given its positive experience in Europe, and its influence in the world, the EU holds, however, many keys to a decisive contribution in terms of advancing a culture of prevention in other regions of the world.

Therefore, it is surprising and can hardly be justified that the EU is also a latecomer in conflict prevention, especially when it comes to efforts beyond its borders. It is only a few years ago when Brussels has discovered this field. Conflict prevention and crisis management have lately been added to the EU's agenda. In the mid-1990s, the EU and its member states felt that they could have made a difference had they acted early on to reduce large scale human suffering (including outright genocide like in Srebrenica and Rwanda). Likewise, they could have tried to avoid the fact that the positive results achieved during many years of world-wide development aid were wiped out by civil wars and trans-border fighting over a number of days or weeks. Moreover, the EU member states could have agreed, earlier, that they "should be ready to act before a crisis occurs," and that in their view "conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early." (Javier Solana)

The European Security Strategy (ESS) paper⁽¹³⁾ endorsed by the 25 heads of state and government in December 2003 explains the EU's shift towards a new "preventive engagement" in world affairs: the new threats are dynamic and less territorial; the risks of proliferation grow over time; left alone terrorist networks will become ever more dangerous; and state failure and organised crime will spread if they are neglected. This assessment also explains why the EU is pushing its geographical focus beyond the Balkans and Africa, particularly to Central Asia and the Middle East. As the ESS states, it is in the European interest that countries on the EU's borders are well-governed: "Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised

crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe."⁽¹⁴⁾

The new European perception is as much driven by new threats as it is animated by the geo-strategic realities of the ongoing EU enlargement process. If accession talks with Turkey started in early 2005 - a likely scenario in the case of a positive check at the end of 2004 - the Union could pretty soon become an immediate neighbour of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the Republics of the Caucasus. Hence, it becomes imperative to invest more in the build-up of security in the EU's neighbourhood, and to revise respective programs, as well as implementation structures.⁽¹⁵⁾

The launch of a more strategically oriented European neighbourhood policy starting from, but moving beyond, the Barcelona Process, is part of this new thinking in Europe.⁽¹⁶⁾ Equally important is the revision of the EU's instruments and foreign policy structure enshrined in the new EU Constitutional Treaty of June 2004. If the EU is not prepared for, and not capable of reform at home, how can it convey a convincing message of reform to the nations of the Middle East? One crucial aspect in this respect is the EU's attitude with regard to the use of military force. The EU used to be rated as a civilian power lacking the will and the potential to use military force in international relations. Surprisingly, there was no collective military force of the EU worth to be mentioned until quite recently. With the build-up of the European Security and Defence Policy since 1999, and its 60,000 peacekeeping force, the situation has changed. The EU has now its autonomous and specialised forces to offer when asked to assist in a UN stabilisation mission, or when called by a regional organisation to support a preventive operation.

The EU was wise enough, though, to exclude its participation in any pre-emptive strike. It knows that "none of the new threats is purely military; nor can

(11) The EU has recently made an exception regarding the use of its development fund (EDF). Brussels is now prepared to contribute from the EDF to the AU's Peace Fund which includes the support of African intervention forces.

(12) Rummel, Reinhardt: "The EU's Involvement in Conflict Prevention - Strategy and Practice," in: Jan Wouters and Vincent Kronenberger (Eds.), *Conflict Prevention: Is the European Union Ready?* Brussels 2004, pp. 95-118.

(13) The European Council: *A Secure Europe in a Better World*. European Security Strategy, 12 December 2003, drafted by Javier Solana.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

(15) Scholars had been asking for this improvement to come about since long, see Everts, Steven: "The EU and the Middle East: A Call for Action," Centre For European Reform, London, 2003.

(16) Feliu, Laura: "Political Reforms in the Mediterranean as a Conflict Prevention Methodology" in: *Conflict in Focus*, Issue No. 01. Amman, 06.2004, pp. 14-17.

any be tackled by purely military means.”⁽¹⁷⁾ Not only that violence cannot simply be encountered with violence, Brussels’ comparative advantage is a variety of instruments and skills. In fact, the prevention-package which the EU offers includes civil and military instruments, just as it encompasses incentives and sanctions, as well as immediate and structural means. Originally, these packages had been prepared and projected mainly for pre-violence and post-conflict conflict prevention. Since the EU has started to use its military and police forces, it can also offer to participate in conflict prevention operations during on-going violence.

Like many Middle Eastern actors, Brussels, too, is in a learning process with respect to in-conflict conflict prevention. In this regard, the new EU-25 can choose from a more extensive set of diplomatic, economic, financial, political and military means for either direct preventive action or support of other actors engaged in peace-building and conflict prevention. The long-term instruments comprise trade, development of co-operation, human rights and environmental policies, as well as political dialogue and arms control. The short-term instruments include a wide range of diplomatic tools coupled with confidence building measures and humanitarian assistance. Many of these traditional means of the EU’s relations with third countries are now being adapted to conform with these new challenges of conflict prevention. A vivid external demand for these assets would encourage further respective transformation of European foreign and security policy.

Alongside its internal preparation, the EU is about to renew its two most important strategic partnerships with the Middle East and the United States of America. The EU intends to expand its special relationship with the Mediterranean countries to include the countries “East of

Jordan.” The recently designed “EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East”⁽¹⁸⁾ has a typical European emphasis on a comprehensive, multidimensional, and institutional approach, and thus, contrasts with the US approach of a “Strategy for Freedom.”⁽¹⁹⁾ Attempts are being made on the governmental as well as on the non-state level - like recently in Istanbul⁽²⁰⁾ - to reconcile the two approaches and to bring the EU and the US closer together as partners.

The Middle East should make sure to have a strong voice in this part of the Euro-American partnership. The more innovative the Middle East can present itself in terms of both intra-state reform and regional co-operation, the stronger the voice will be. Regarding prevention, and more specifically in-conflict conflict prevention, the nations of the Middle East can be optimistic to find the EU at their side, and potentially also the US, depending on who is in power in Washington. ■

(17) European Security Strategy, p. 7.

(18) European Commission: “EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East,” Euromed Report Issue No. 78 Brussels, 23 June 2004.

(19) Rudolf, Peter: “The ‘Strategy of Freedom’ in the Middle East. The Rhetoric and Reality of US Policy” Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2004, http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?id=746&PHPSESSID=149e532819eeaac2bc721c6356cf4b26. Last accessed on: 23 July 2004. Perthes, Volker: “America’s ‘Greater Middle East’ and Europe”, SWP Comments, February 2004, http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?id=778. Last accessed on: 23 July 2004.

(20) For the official side, see the record of the NATO June 2004 meeting; for the non-governmental part see: The German Marshall Fund of the United States and Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Eds.): “Democracy and Human Development in the Broader Middle East: A Transatlantic Strategy for Partnership” (Istanbul Paper #1), Istanbul/Washington, 2004.

About ConflictINFOCUS:

Conflict In Focus is a bi-monthly online bulletin designed to provide busy readers in the EMP policy community and interested general public with a concise and regular update on the current state-of-affairs of the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict in the Middle East. Conflict in Focus is compiled by RCCP/IAI, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our software (CCP).

Conflict in Focus alerts readers to situations where, in the near future, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict. In specific, the newsletter is divided into three sections.

The first section includes accounts of and comments on EU developments and policies during the previous two months in the field of conflict prevention.

The second section aims at providing experts and researchers from the Partnership with a forum for common work and collaboration. Toward this end, the newsletter will host, in each issue, two short articles, one by a European scholar and the other by a Middle Eastern scholar on conflict prevention in the Middle East, with the final aim of provoking a debate on such sensitive subject.

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