



POLICY PAPER

Changing Nature of Al-Qaida and Long Term Strategies to Contain Terrorism

Expert Advisory Group (EAG)
European and South Mediterranean Actors:
Partners in Conflict Prevention and Resolution

This second policy paper of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) – European and South Mediterranean Actors: Partners in Conflict Prevention and Resolution – focuses on the “Changing Nature of Al-Qaida and Long Term Strategies to Contain Terrorism”. In the overview, Gerrit F. Schlomach presents the results of the discussions of the EAG and the papers presented during a workshop on the 29th to the 30th of September 2007 in Brussels.

In the absence of a general consensus on how to define terrorism, this policy paper focuses on Al-Qaida. Carlo Masala describes how the changing face of the organisation reflects a geographical and organisational adaptation strategy. In assessing the rise and activities of Fatah Al-Islam in Lebanon, Oussama Safa questions its possible links to Al-Qaida. In view of Al-Qaida’s past attempts to use other methods of mass destruction, Mohamed Abdel Salam suggests rethinking nuclear terrorism. The following contributions broaden the discussion by taking a deeper look into the general debate on terrorism. In a Northern perspective, Antje Nötzold assesses the impact of terrorist attacks on European Energy Security. In a view from the South, Ahmed Driss analyses the causes of terrorism in the region, while Fouad M. Ammor deepens the search for explanations of terrorism by highlighting the ideological factor. The concluding authors recommend the promotion of better education and a debate on value change as cornerstones for long-term strategies to contain terrorism. Cagri Erhan and Markus Pösentrup highlight strengthening educational approaches. Against the background of controversial external democratisation strategies, Martin Beck advocates a value change in the Middle East based on universal values.

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Overview

*Summary of discussions,
prepared by Gerrit F. Schlomach*

Six years after the 9/11 tragedy in the United States, we have witnessed the changing nature of Al-Qaida and the adaptation of measures to deal with it. Due to continuous international and national efforts to prevent large-scale attacks and to reduce the space in which it can maneuver, Al-Qaida has recently focused on regional and national goals and strategies. After the 9/11 attacks, Al-Qaida presented itself as an international actor pursuing a transnational agenda. On a general level, its goals included global jihad, the fight against the West or, more concretely, the withdrawal of US forces from the Arabian Peninsula. Its transnational orientation has shifted into sub-regional and national orientations. This reflects the adaptable structure of the organization as it functions under the rules of a franchise or keiretsu system (literally translated from the Japanese ‘decentralized decision-making system’).

Against the background of these geographical and institutional adaptations, the potential risks of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) terrorism continue to exist. This is evidenced by recent small-scale attacks or foiled plots, like the planned chemical attack in Jordan in 2004, and several

attacks using trucks loaded with chlorine in different regions in Iraq.

Accordingly, a re-assessment of weapons likely to be used for possible Al-Qaida attacks remains crucial in the fight against terrorism. On the one hand, some experts have expressed skepticism about how realistic it is that terrorists are going to use NBC weapons because of technical challenges and the need for specialized knowledge related to production, ways of proliferation, and use. Furthermore, it is questionable whether Al-Qaida would run the risk of affecting its legitimacy within its own constituency by using these weapons. On the other hand, Al-Qaida activities are characterized by an unlimited and unbounded use of violence providing legitimacy within their own fundamentalists’ camp. Therefore, it seems possible that Al-Qaida might continue to consider ‘methods of mass destruction’.

NBC facilities rank high on the list of possible targets because of their vulnerability and potential for widespread destruction, if hit. Among other vulnerable facilities, production and processing plants stand as common targets, together with transport chains on both shores of the Mediterranean. In the decade to come, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is set to gain greater significance for European energy supply

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because the MENA countries account for about 60 percent of the world oil reserves and 45 percent of total natural gas reserves, respectively. The prominent position and responsibility of the region for the future oil and natural gas supply stands in contrast to its instability.

Besides a host of economic and domestic problems, Arab nations themselves have increasingly become targets of terrorist attacks. In this context, attacks on energy production, processing and transport facilities are numerous, such as the acts of sabotage in Iraq, attempts to attack oil refineries in Yemen, and the foiled attempt to hit the world's largest oil-processing complex in Saudi Arabia in April 2007.

Strategies to fight terrorism and to curtail terrorists' space to manoeuvre have to take into consideration the reasons and motives why people turn into terrorists. To put it differently: why does a six-year old child in the MENA region turn into a terrorist or why does a Muslim convert follow an extremist doctrine or ideology? Socio-economic, political and ideological reasons have been considered. However, it remained controversial within the group whether a direct link exists between the existence of foreign forces, considered as occupation forces by most people in the region, and the emergence of terrorists.

In light of these complex reasons, only a realistic inter- and intra-regional dialogue, based on common interests, can pave the way for further activities. Considering the results of the controversial attempts to “democratise” the region and the resulting negative impact on the perceptions of democracy in the region, a broader meaning of democracy has to be the baseline for action. In this approach, democracy has to be understood on the basis of specific values including democratic procedures, such as general and fair elections or legitimate changes in power. Consequently, this includes the establishment of a critical dialogue in which the partners are ready to abandon talks, if mutually agreed upon benchmarks are not met.

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The Changing Face of Al-Qaida: Still Dangerous But No Longer Invincible

by Carlo Masala

“The West” has considerable difficulties in fighting international terrorism effectively, namely due to the highly adaptive nature of terror organisations, such as Al-Qaida (The Base). While most instruments designed after 9/11 to combat Al-Qaida have focused on the global approach of Al-Qaida and its sponsors and donors, the

organisation itself has changed quickly and adapted to its new operational environment so that instruments to fight the organisation (especially multilateral instruments) have gathered rust. Simultaneously the changing nature of Al-Qaida weakens its global reach and opens, if properly understood, possibilities to effectively and efficiently fight against it.

The Al-Qaida terrorist group can be described as a loosely coupled, highly adaptive network organisation. The ability of Al-Qaida to survive under immense pressure put on the organisation after 9/11 suggests an enhanced pattern of organisational learning. The extent to which Al-Qaida is able to sustain itself as a may determine its ability to survive and conduct further terrorist acts despite a sustained global anti-terror campaign. There is no denying that Al-Qaida continues to be a very serious threat. It is comprised of three consistent elements: a core central group of leaders and strategists who are Osama bin Laden / Ayman al-Zawahiri's direct associates, a nebula of more traditional groups that are formally or informally aligned (often called the “network”); and localized factions (even individuals) who have no physical contact with the centre but associate themselves with the worldview and label of “Al-Qaida.” All three aspects of Al-Qaida have become stronger in response to mistakes made by the west.

The franchise system that Al-Qaida has developed after the occupation of Afghanistan by coalition forces in 2001 has some major advantages and disadvantages for the fight against international terrorism. Among the advantages are that the center can easily face a loss of operational control. In this respect, Al-Qaida's advantage, its tripartite structure is also its vulnerability. Those in the core are most responsive to its agenda; but the leaders do not have operational control over all elements calling themselves “Al-Qaida”. The network of new and established groups has a pot-pourri of local organisations, some of which act without direction or even permission from the centre.

Yet, actions taken in Al-Qaida's name have often worked against its agenda. The lessons of how terrorism ends indicate that it is clearly in the interests of those who oppose Al-Qaida to take advantage of the movement's direct and indirect responsibility for attacks that offend and hurt Muslims. Whether or not operational control actually exists, the actions taken by local groups, claiming an association with Al-Qaida, reflect upon the Al-Qaida movement overall and are a serious vulnerability. Further to this, there is a clear lack of unity in this disparate international movement

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packed with ideological discord. Therefore calling Al-Qaida itself "an ideology", as some in the west like to do, is unhelpful from a counter-terrorism perspective; there are many crucial differences of opinion among the groups that, formally or informally, call themselves "Al-Qaida".

Many groups are far more interested in local political aims than they are in the rhetoric of Al-Qaida. There are vast differences in the motivations, worldviews, tactics, and aims of groups all of whom have some association with Al-Qaida. Even those who have more recently professed their loyalty to bin Laden, including Allah's Brigade (Palestine), the Al-Qaida Maghreb Commandment (Morocco), and the Brigades of Kurdistan (Iraq) differ in their specific local aims. And yet it is in the interests of local groups to align themselves, at least in their public pronouncements, with the vaunted Al-Qaida logo. To a certain extent Al-Qaida as a franchise or Kairezu system has become over the last years more regional and local, rather than global. Therefore national solutions and regulations to fight terrorism have gained more importance than they had immediately after 9/11.

Al-Qaida is dangerous, but it is not immortal. We can inoculate ourselves against the psychological manipulation of terrorism and think more clearly about how to formulate effective counter-terrorism strategy by focusing on how terrorism works. But we need to understand the changing nature, phase and structure of this organisation in order to be able to fight it.

3 Terrorism in Lebanon: Al-Qaida' New Threat?

by Oussama Safa

For many months this past summer, the attention of the anti-terrorism world was riveted to Tripoli's Nahr El-Bared Palestinian camp in Lebanon. Ensnared there was a curious, obscure militant faction by the name Fatah Al-Islam (FAI). The group first came to public prominence in November 2006 as a defected faction of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian (PFLP), as declared by its leaders. No sooner had allegations started to surface that the pro-Syria PFLP was behind the rise of FAI than the latter declared its allegiance to the infamous Al-Qaida. The shadowy and obscure rise of FAI and its connection to both Al-Qaida and Syrian intelligence agencies are currently under investigation.

The FAI is blamed for a string of car bombs, the assassination of the incumbent Minister of Industry in November 2006 and the bombing in February 2007 of two civilian buses in Lebanon. While the accusations have never been proven beyond a shadow of doubt, it is not yet clear what the

declared objectives of FAI in Lebanon were. Unlike in other Moslem Arab countries where the public goals of Islamist militants are to overthrow the ruling regimes, in Lebanon the FAI's agenda seemed determined to destabilize the current government and potentially establish a sphere of influence in the Sunni-dominated North of the country.

The FAI's demise began in May 2007 when, in one day, its members robbed a local bank in the northern province of Kura and got into a car chase with the internal security forces that tracked their hideouts in the city of Tripoli. The rapid succession of events following the car chase indicated that FAI was well on its way to expand beyond the camp of El-Bared to neighbouring civilian areas and to terrorize the security forces by inflicting high casualties in their ranks with a view to negotiating a peace settlement, which would be tantamount to acknowledging the existence of FAI as a fait accompli. To this end, FAI militants attacked unarmed army personnel in their sleep and, in a matter of hours, slit the throats of 27 soldiers; the war on FAI had just begun.

For three months, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) fought one of their most challenging wars in their fifty years of existence. With little intelligence, primitive equipment and a hesitant political backing, the LAF's courageous and innovative units laid siege to Nahr El-Bared and 170 officers and soldiers, and were able to sap the military capability of the FAI and overrun the camps. The forbidding urban fighting environment that faced the rusty troops, coupled with a well-concocted plan by the FAI to drag the fighting and slow the advancement of the troops indicated that the planning had been long in the making to impose in the North a military fait accompli.

During the fighting in the North, two deadly attacks against the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) troops took place in the South, presumably by Islamist militants. In the southern refugee camp of Ein al-Hilweh, two Islamist militant factions, Usbat Al-Ansar and Jund El-Sham, remained sympathetic to FAI and tried to ease the pressure on the siege laid to Nahr El-Bared by dragging the LAF into a shootout that claimed the lives of two soldiers. Plans to start another round of fighting in the South were quickly foiled by the LAF and their security apparatus.

The rise and quick demise of the obscure FAI remains an unsolved mystery. Was it an Al-Qaida offshoot trying to take root in Lebanon? Was it a tool in the hands of Syrian Intelligence Agencies to destabilize Lebanon? What was the FAI exactly and what its goals were will probably remain a puzzling riddle for some time to come. It is noteworthy, however, that the detainees of FAI have revealed under investigation that 80% of the

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organisation's members came from Syria, with the rest coming directly from Arab countries or recruited locally. All of its fighters were trained at a pro-Syria PFLP base in the Bekaa valley. The military breakdown of FAI does not mean that its threat has been eliminated. The group's leader, a certain Shaker Al-Absi, remains on the loose. In the southern camp of Ein Al-Hilweh the two groups of Usbat Al-Ansar and Jund El-Sham remain armed and dangerous. PFLP training grounds are also open for these movements. This means that Lebanon is still under the threat of Islamic militants for the time being and will continue to be a target in the near future.

Some of the senior FAI leaders arrested by the security forces along with highly sensitive documents and plans have divulged a connection with insurgent groups in Iraq. In fact, the recruitment motto for most FAI fighters was that they were training in Lebanon to move to Iraq and fight there. Further investigation revealed that Al-Qaida senior commanders had visited Al-Bared and assessed the FAI but provided no commitment for support or aid. Is FAI a form of a decentralized, devolved Al-Qaida structure? The answer to this question will remain inconclusive until the senior group leaders are arrested and investigation is completed.

4 Rethinking Nuclear Terrorism: They are Trying to Use Other Methods of Mass Destruction

by Mohamed Abdel Salam

During the past five years, there have been serious warnings about the possibility of acts of nuclear terrorism. There have been indications that terrorist groups are seeking to acquire nuclear components and Al-Qaida's leadership issued public statements clarifying its nuclear intentions. Suicide strategies of unlimited violence pursued by Al-Qaida have indicated that it could effectively use "nuclear means" if it acquired them, but nuclear terrorist attacks have not happened. This situation has led to a rethinking of the nuclear terrorism issue. Two credible main trends have emerged in this context.

The first trend affirms that it is difficult for the terrorist elements to have nuclear weapons, even if they were willing to do so. There are regional powers that have been unable to acquire such weapons, as technical reasons make the possession of nuclear weapons difficult. The likely situation is that an organisation that is all the time under watch does not have the time or the security necessary to build a nuclear device, even a Radiological Dispersed Device.

The second trend focuses on the less severe scenarios of nuclear terrorism, such as a situation

in which terrorists can manufacture dirty bombs from non-nuclear radioactive material, or in which terrorist elements can attack nuclear reactors or facilities within States. Those actions could be dangerous, but not devastating. What is noticeable is that the non-nuclear terrorist mass destruction strategy has also experienced considerable problems in practical application. These operations have occurred infrequently, as evidenced by the fact that only 5 actual operations have been reported, despite the availability of chemicals in the open market. Most of the chemical-based terrorism operations have been somewhat primitive. Terrorist groups have thus far been unable to use biological agents, despite their knowledge that these agents are the most potentially devastating. Perhaps this reflects limited technical knowledge about how to use such agents.

More importantly, the major chemical attacks, actually launched against Jordan and Saudi Arabia, have failed. Also terrorist groups have not been able to launch similar attacks against Western capitals; all chemical attacks have been launched against Arab States, indicating that the counter-terrorism strategy, at this level, works reasonably, or that terrorist groups are still not trained well enough in those types of attacks. Here, it must be noted that some of the terrorist groups in the Arab region issued statements against these types of operations; there is also an internal check against such operations, or at least an inability to adopt them in the face of public opinion.

In the end, it has always been understood that the likelihood of nuclear terrorism belongs to a special category of worst-case scenarios. That category is sometimes called Black Swans, which refers to the less likely events in terms of the possibility of their occurrence, but which would cause significant destruction if they actually occurred. States must, therefore, continue to detect the nuclear activities of terrorist elements, to prevent them from approaching the mere possession of any radiant (poisonous, epidemic) element. To do this States must think in unconventional ways. The Al-Qaida groups will continue to consider "methods of mass destruction" all the time. While the experience of the past few years indicates that Al-Qaida has encountered difficulties in this regard, and that this kind of terrorism might not matter for the time being, it should never be ignored.

5 The Impact of Terrorist Attacks on European Energy Supply Security

by Antje Nötzold

Increasingly Arab countries have been the targets of attacks by terrorists. One of the less discussed aspects of the terror threat is the vulnerability of energy supply facilities and infrastructure. This

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infrastructure is crucial for the local economy, and attacking it could harm oil-dependent countries. One potential target is the transport chain. Three quarters of the internationally traded oil is shipped on tankers, and some of the principal maritime routes contain narrow straits vulnerable to accidents, piracy or terrorist attacks as happened in 2002 to the French Tanker Limburg. The blocking of these chokepoints would lead to massive short-term oil-supply disruptions. With regard to the Strait of Hormuz, while the effects of a blocked strait would only be of temporary nature and tankers could be escorted relatively easily by military ships, the risk could grow as the regional strategic channels become more heavily used and overstrained as a result of increasing oil exports and additional tankers to export liquefied Middle Eastern natural gas.

Terrorist plots on production and processing facilities by comparison, however, would cause long-term supply disruptions as the installations would need to be reconstructed. Thus, after several successful plots since Al-Qaida began attacking Saudi oil industry in 2004, last year the mere announcement of an averted large-scale attack of Al-Qaida aimed at Saudi energy facilities led to the highest oil price in 8 months.

An additional factor to consider is that attacks on regional energy facilities would affect the global oil market, it being very tight and reacting – maybe overreacting – to any real or possible failure of supply. The Middle East plays a prominent role due to its immense resources (38 percent of worldwide exported oil is produced there) but even more so because it presently holds the only considerable spare capacity to raise production in order to balance supply disruptions anywhere, which no other region could counterbalance.

Therefore terrorist attacks in this region pose a dangerous potential threat to worldwide oil, and increasingly to the natural gas supply as well. Taking into consideration that fossil fuels remain the dominant source of primary energy and that Europe, in particular, is and will remain highly dependent on imported oil and natural gas, the share of the region in imports to Europe will very likely increase sharply within the next decades. A secure and steady supply is essential as it is a precondition for economic growth, secure affluence and, therefore, stability in our countries. So the refocus of Al-Qaida towards attacks in the region means at once a security problem for us as well!

6

On Conditions to Counter Terrorism in the Region

by Ahmed Driss

According to a widely shared perception in the Arab region, the situations both in Iraq and in the occupied territories in Palestine serve, as one,

among other important arguments, to enlist Jihadists who come to swell the ranks of the new terrorism for suicide acts in the West or against the West’s interests in the world.

Over ten years after the Madrid Peace Process and as many years since the Oslo accords, the situation, as regards Palestine, is practically unchanged-except for Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip-, if not worse-as the disastrous living conditions and the weakening of the traditional partner have brought the Islamist circles into power. Unresolved territorial issues in the Middle East serve as one of the justifications for armed acts and for direct violent confrontations.

On the other hand, the invasion of Iraq by the US army has fuelled, since 2003, a burst of terrorist acts in this territory. The major part of such acts have targeted the US army, considered as an occupation force, whose presence in the perception of certain Iraqi nationalist circles prolongs a de facto state of occupation, and this, in spite of the transfer of power to Iraqi authorities. The current outbreak of sectarian violence, in which Al-Qaida terrorism also takes part, is but a direct consequence of this situation.

This so-called “new” terrorism, which is not really a protest terrorism, is one of a total rift, closed to any alternative argument, and accommodating no dialogue or compromise. This global Jihadist terrorism “struggling for the restoration of an authentic Islam and for the establishment of a great Islamist State stretching over the whole planet, removing all current national borders, sweeping away all corrupt political entities and toppling all western powers which hamper the advent of this Islamist State” ends up having a totalitarian, inaccessible, unachievable and utopian objective.

In the Southern Mediterranean, governments, as well as political organisations, intellectuals, civil society and public opinion, hold and affirm that stemming violence is dependent on the end of one of its sources, which is occupation. It is, therefore, restating the obvious to say how important it is for the security of the region to find a sustainable Israeli Palestinian conflict settlement and deprive the terrorist-Jihadists of their essential arguments so that they no longer find in occupation a justification capable of ensuring them the support of a certain opinion.

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7 Terrorism in the Maghreb Countries: The Reasons Behind the Facts

by Fouad M. Ammor

Notwithstanding the categorisations of the terrorist acts perpetrated in the past few years in countries of the Maghreb and notwithstanding the ways they have manifested themselves, the efforts to detect the actual underlying reasons for such acts remain modest. Broadly speaking, there are three main approaches, which are not mutually exclusive, to explaining the terrorist acts perpetrated in the Maghreb region. Such approaches seek to abridge a complex and diverse reality, so that the frequency and impact of these acts differ from one country to another.

First of all, there is the socio-economic approach, which seeks to explain the terrorist acts by the multiple socio-economic disparities that characterise these countries. It is in this vein that emphasis is placed particularly on the high unemployment rate among the youth (this rate being as high as 20% among the age group 20 - 35 years), the precarious situation of the quarters on the periphery of major cities and the marginalisation of large population groups. However, it must be noted that this poverty and this precariousness are far from new. Such economic discrepancies are to be seen as conditions conducive to these acts but not sufficient alone. Suffice it to point out, that such disparities have always been there without having translated into violent acts, as has been the case in the recent years.

The second type of approach is that which focuses on the political dimension. The democratic deficit and maintaining the status quo, in spite of regional and international dynamics, fan the flames of discontent and leads to terrorist acts. According to this approach, the lack of prospects for large numbers of youth, as well as the low mobility and mere reproduction of elites in these countries exacerbates conflicts and frustrates aspirations. The rejection stance manifests itself during legislative and municipal elections under the form of disenchantment among a large part of the electorate, above all the young electorate. Similar to the prior point about an economic explanation, the democratic deficit is far from being new. Democratic progress, in this part of the globe, has been unsteady and irregular.

The third type of approach, which remains in a barely developed heuristic state, emphasises the ideological and archaeological dimension as a last-resort explanation of the terrorist acts. This approach is rather “risky”, because it is slippery and likely to lead, surreptitiously, to confusion between Islam and terrorism. However, the only

major new factor in the present manifestations of this approach is the ideological factor. Today, the affiliates of Arab-Muslim culture feel increasingly humiliated, locally by the political regimes in place and, globally by the frustrations vis-à-vis a modernity that is inaccessible to large categories of their populations. There is, now, an aspiration among the population for more freedom and justice. The mass media in an increasingly open world have espoused international standards, in terms of a right to a better standard of living and well-being. The various conflicts affecting the Arab-Islamic world (Iraq, Afghanistan, Israeli-Palestinian) and the way they are handled on the international level nurture hostilities and prepare for a move to action.

A regional solidarity in both directions, North-South and South-South, has become urgent in order to narrow these gaps. Accordingly, a revision of the educational systems to grant more space to the values of solidarity, ethics and mutual respect (civic education) is a prerequisite for the establishment of a veritable cultural dialogue between institutional and non institutional bodies from the two rims of the Mediterranean and beyond.

8 Education As a Long Term Strategy to Contain Terrorism

by Cagri Erhan and Markus Pösentrup

Educational insufficiency is one of the major causes behind terrorist organisations’ current success in recruiting ideological supporters and even militants in the Middle-East region. According to the most comprehensive analyses conducted through the UNDP annual Human Development reports, the Middle East is one of the most problem-ridden regions in the world with respect to socio-economic conditions and quality of life. About 65 million adult Arabs are illiterate, two thirds of whom are women. These numbers will increase if non-Arab peoples in the region such as Turks, Kurds, Persians, Berbers etc. are added to the list. Illiteracy rates are much higher than those in much poorer countries. Moreover, some other data show that educational problems are unlikely to disappear in the near future. The Arab Human Development Report for 2002 underscored that “ten million children between 6 and 15 years of age are currently out of school; if current trends persist; this number will increase by 40 per cent by 2015.”

Insufficient education is a direct cause of high unemployment rates in the region. When coupled with current and future economic stagnation, low levels of investment, under-performing macro economic variables and poor cost-effectiveness of public institutions, the socio-economic situation in

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the Middle East will continue to present a climate that is quite conducive to radicalism and fundamentalism. Although taken into consideration in several international meetings conducted under the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative since 2003, the ultimate goals of “education for all in the MENA region” and of “reduction of illiteracy, especially among the female population” are by far unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

EU support to the education systems of the MENA partner countries comes mainly under the form of policy dialogue with and assistance to the key systemic actors, partner governments. Besides, education cooperation and student and teacher mobility are key factors, furthering part of the civil society dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Scholarships for under-graduate, post-graduate and doctoral studies, as well as university teachers coming to the EU, are made available. EU Life-long Learning programmes have been opened for the participation of third countries’ organisations and institutions in partnership, project and network activities. Training of young professionals in the EU is impossible for the time being, but the proposal is under discussion. A noteworthy exception is the direct and substantive support to UNRWA for the basic education of Palestinian youth.

In spring 2008, the EU actors—Commission, Council, European Parliament and EU Member States—should take the Commission progress analysis of ENP partner countries as a starting point for enhancing their support for basic education in South Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries. All related parties should give impetus to the efforts to reach the targets set forth in the May 2004 Framework for Progress in the Dead Sea, Jordan. Without a sustained comprehensive approach to education in the Middle East, it will be hardly possible to prevent radicals from filling the gap through educational or semi-ideological institutions under their sole control. Consequently, this would result in an unpreventable flow of human resources to terrorist networks.

9

Containing Terrorism by Promoting Value Change in the Middle East

by Martin Beck

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001, constituted a consensus in the Western world that it is in its genuine interest to contain Middle Eastern terrorism. Even though the objective is indisputable, the means are not. Since short-to-medium-term measures, which have been taken since 9/11 generated—at best—mixed results, we are in need of long-term strategies. Therefore, the aim must be the transition of regimes in the Middle East since there can hardly be any doubt that

Middle Eastern authoritarianism is a major source of terrorism. If opposition groups in the Middle East had the chance to organize and articulate their interests in a participatory political system, their incentive to use violence would diminish.

Beyond the promotion of democratization by institutional change, encouraging political value shifts seem to be promising. Value-oriented change aims at the successive absorption of democratic principles. Accordingly, Western actors developed and applied programs of “good governance” and “critical dialogue” to the Middle East. Yet, these approaches proved to be of only limited success. To a high degree, this unsatisfactory outcome can be traced back to two conceptual inconsistencies. Researchers have neglected to observe that Western strategies aim to pursue goals directed against the genuine interests not only of Islamist oppositional groups but also of Middle Eastern governments. When authoritarian elites claim to accept democratic values they do so for tactical reasons. Yet, the actual implementation of these values is in tension with their genuine interest since principles of good governance restrict by definition the room for manoeuvre of the ruling elite towards the ruled. The logic of democracy promotion by dialogue is based on the assumption that Middle Eastern elites got involved and finally lost in a argumentative process by default.

Secondly, many Western attempts at good governance promotion and critical dialogue have been pursued without obligation. The European Union, in particular, cannot be cleared of having formally established a partnership dialogue when, its aim was to convince Middle Eastern actors of the superiority of democratic values.

Two lessons should be learned from these findings. Firstly, the West’s concept of promoting its values should apply to ruling elites and oppositional Islamist groups alike. Provided that authoritarian Islamist groups refrain from using violence, they should be considered as target groups of a “critical dialogue” as much as authoritarian ruling elites. Secondly, instead of talk shops of noncommittal character, obliging critical dialogues should be established. The basic Western approach is not to exchange ideas about values with Middle Eastern actors but to promote value change in this world region. This is a perfectly legitimate aim if two preconditions are fulfilled. Firstly, the values promoted must be universal—and the West is indeed obliged to prove that the encouragement of good governance is not abused as a policy of Westernisation. Secondly, credibility is of utmost importance, which is why the West should apply its norms in an impartial manner instead of being discriminatory on the basis of short-term strategic interests.

About the Expert Advisory Group (EAG)

This project aims to explore a constructive and sustained relationship between European and South Mediterranean actors in Conflict Prevention and Resolution, in the context of past and present collaborative efforts in the Middle East and North Africa. The main objective is to create a knowledge-based network in order to advise relevant actors from both shores of the Mediterranean on current political and security developments on an ad-hoc basis.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention and the members of the group agree with the general thrust of this policy paper but not necessarily with every individual statement. The responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in this policy paper rests exclusively with the contributors and their interpretations do not reflect the views or the policy of the publishers.

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