



EAG POLICY PAPER

Number 4 / November 2008



Actors Changing Roles - New Dynamics in the Middle East?

This policy paper on “Actors Changing Roles – New Dynamics in the Middle East?” is the outcome of the fifth workshop of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) - European and South Mediterranean Actors - Partners in Conflict Prevention and Resolution - held in Berlin - Germany from May 23 to 25, 2008. In the introduction, Gerrit F. Schlomach describes the general characteristics defining the changing roles of the actors and the new dynamics in the region. Based on a broad understanding of non-state actors, Mohammed Abdel Salam develops a three-step strategy on how to engage with Islamist extremist groups. Against the background of the recent events in the Turkish neighborhood to the South, Cagri Erhan analyzes the recent events in the Middle East with a special focus on emerging or re-emerging actors such as Russia, Iran, Turkey and France. In his contribution Carlo Masala suggests a strategy of counter-balancing mechanisms in order to tackle revisionist regional powers, precisely Iran. Based on a long-term perspective, Martin Beck presents three scenarios for the future developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Finally, Fouad M. Ammor concludes this policy paper in presenting a strategy in order to ease the critical situation of illegal immigration in the Mediterranean area.

1 INTRODUCTION

by Gerrit F. Schlomach

Commentators on Middle Eastern and Mediterranean affairs continue describing the current political and security situation as a transitional one. These descriptions are primarily based on the observation of recent events, like the continuous war in Iraq, the diminished legitimacy of US actions in the region, the paralysis of European engagement, and the deadlock in the Near East peace process following the power struggle between Hamas and Fatah as well as the reshuffling of the Israeli government.

Among the new dynamics we can observe a shift in the regional balance of power following re-emerging actors on the regional agenda, among them Iran and Russia, but also non-state actors. Another observation consists in the changing role of actors.

Syria has improved its attitude towards Israel and its relations with Europe. The French government has re-approached Damascus and has re-introduced Mediterranean affairs to the European agenda following the Paris Summit on the “Union for the Mediterranean” and the Turkish government has demonstrated more activity in the Near East peace process. Finally, we face a new situation regarding irregular migratory flows in the Mediterranean area. In addition to the well known movements towards Europe with 500.000 undocumented migrants per year, the situation in North Africa shifted from being a region of immigration to receiving migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Throughout the past decade, the Middle East has found itself in a situation of permanent change. Following regional events and developments at the global level, this continuous state has both affected the situation at the domestic and regional lev-

"National security is understood first of all as the security of the ruling regime."

els. At the domestic level, most countries in the region suffer from continuous limited political legitimacy. Although some countries have started implementing attempts of reforms, the crucial question of pluralistic political participation remains on the agenda. Demands in the field of economic and social affairs shift into questions of power and security as well as stability of the current regime. Outside powers like the US or the EU have found themselves in a dilemma. This dilemma consists on the one hand in stabilizing the ruling regimes with financial and material support although they are perceived as being responsible for the current internal deadlock. On the other hand outside powers demand change and reform in domestic affairs. Although this claim goes along with opposing non-state actors, it represents a threat to ruling elites.

At the level of international politics, security questions remain high on the regional agenda due to continuous international conflicts, such as the Near East or the Western Sahara conflict. As a newly defining characteristic at the regional level, we have recently witnessed a shift of the regional balance of power triggering new dynamics. On the aftermath of a period of ambiguous US activities in Middle Eastern affairs and a continuous decline of regional medium-size powers like Egypt or Saudi Arabia the seat of regional leadership remains vacant. Revisionist powers like Iran try to fill this gap in order to reorganize the balance of power in their interests and to dominate the regional agenda.

Based on this strategic shift, some observers have judged the spread of non-state actors' influence in the Middle East as one of the most influential characteristics of the current regional landscape. Based on the described situation of limited political legitimacy, this new kind of actors has started challenging the governments and domestic rulers from within the societies representing a broad scope of domestic and transnational lobbies. Following the view of some observers from within and outside the

region on non-state actors, the most dangerous phenomenon in this field has been linked to the rising power of extremist Islamist groups. Although it is difficult to gather all these non-state actors under one umbrella, there is one common feature: In having the tendency to build a "state within a state" based on parallel structures of governance, they are both active in legitimate and non-legitimate political processes. In building political representations in parliaments, at the same time they oppose and challenge these legitimate arenas from outside supported by own economic, media and security institutions. Their power basis depends primarily on their non-legitimate access to heavy armament and light weapons which are used in domestic politics as well as in transnational activities.

2

TOUGH PLAYERS: DEALING WITH NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by Mohammed Abdel Salam

The unprecedented escalation of the non-state actors' influence in the Middle East is one of the most important facts that form the political map of the region at the present stage. It was understood long ago that governments are not the only player in the domestic affairs or foreign relations of states, but the problem has gone beyond that issue. There are cases in the region which indicate that the governments are no longer the main player in their surrounding area, and non-state actors have begun to challenge the state itself, on one hand, and to trigger conflicts in the region on the other hand.

In recent years, the spread of non-state actors has increased, and at times it appears that societies become stronger than the states. But the most dangerous phenomenon associated with the problem of non-state actors in the Middle East has been linked to the rising power of extremist Islamist groups within a number of states. These groups ultimately formed separate entities parallel to governments and not

"The most dangerous phenomenon associated with the problem of non-state actors in the Middle East has been linked to the rising power of extremist Islamist groups within a number of states."

just non-state players within nations, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and al-Sadr's current in Iraq, in addition to other less serious groups such as Hothis in Yemen.

The revolt of these groups against the political regimes was the main regional development during 2007 and 2008. Hamas has staged what it seemed as an armed coup against the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip. Al-Sadr's army has continuously fought against the government and occupation troops in Iraq. Hezbollah had gained control over Beirut, posing severe problems in and to Lebanon. Hothis had clashed with the government in northern Yemen. In all cases, these actions exposed states to the possibility of real breakdowns and created sharp tensions in the states' foreign relations with other regional parties.

Those groups pose acute problems of instability, and put forth critical issues on the agenda of regional security with regard to the prospects of civil wars, disintegration of the unity of nations, establishing small religious states, threatening neighboring countries, or exacerbating the problem of terrorism, raising a wide debate in the region about how "engagement" with them can be in the coming period.

The term "engagement"..." The most dangerous phenomenon associated with the problem of non-state actors in the Middle East has been linked to the rising power of extremist Islamist groups within a number of states." is often the general framework by which to deal with those types of dangerous groups. It is difficult to deal with them through radical options, such as depicting them as terrorist groups, and waging war against them, for one practical reason is that they control a part of the territory and population, often have military wings, and adopt extremist tendencies. Therefore, dealing with them radically will lead to a situation of instability within states. However, these groups should not be dealt with as legitimate actors or as part of the political systems in their current

form, in order not to make them seem as if they were able to impose a final status quo on everyone, or because they were to immediately take a next harsh move.

Consequently, the envisaged manner of the engagement with them has to be through a pragmatic strategy such as the following:

- Containment: By imposing certain conditions on those groups in order to make structural changes in their organizational form and fundamental changes in their actual behavior, in a way turning them into a political power such as other political parties in the country.

- Package deals: To sign with these groups specific deals on highly defined positions, issues or events, mainly related to security problems. This, however, does not mean any kind of recognition, or entailing to them benefits exceed the limits of the deal.

- The red lines: Drawing certain red lines making these groups to understand that if they surpass the concerned rule of engagement, they will face violent response, immediately, in a way affecting their financing, arming or internal or external alliances, or even the survival of their leaders.

Non-state actors which have paramilitary forces in the region are not a baseless phenomenon, roaming birds, or alien creatures. They are entities which have emerged, spread, and gained popularity in their countries, and perhaps in the region, as a result of unresolved real issues. Consequently, attention must be paid to deal with those issues, which represent the foundation of their legitimacy or the reason for their existence.

The non-state actors represent one of the phenomena that will not simply end. Therefore, the continuing blockade of their positions as non-state actors, and the gradual impact on their power bases, are ultimately leading to reduce their influence in their concentration areas. When they begin to lose their legitimacy, they will start disappearing quickly.

"One of the direct impacts of the Caucasus war is that the Bush administration cannot pressure Russia to stop its military action in Georgia and then justifiably engage in pre-emptive strikes on Iran."

3

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TUR- KEY'S ONGOING ACTIVISM

by Cagri Erhan

The summer of 2008 will be remembered for the crisis in the Caucasus rather than the fantastic ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics. Naturally, the most important development regarding the Middle East was the impact of the Caucasus Crisis to the region like elsewhere in the world. The link between the crisis and the Middle East was most related to Syria's support to Russia, Iran's relative silence and Israel's direct involvement in the Caucasus conflict with her arms sales to Georgia. Syrian President Bashar Assad backed Russia's military action against Georgia, making Syria one of the few countries in the world to publicly back the Kremlin. Just two weeks later after, Assad made an official visit to Russia and held talks with Russian President Dimitri Medvedev. Opportunities for a Russian return to the Middle East may arise and Russians may use this. The main aim will be to weaken America's position in the Middle East.

Iran will seek to maximize the benefits of renewed confrontation between the United States and Russia. The breakdown in US-Russian relations could bring immediate benefits for Iran's nuclear program. It will be much harder to enforce U.N. Security Council sanctions leveled against Iran for pursuing its nuclear-enrichment program.

The likelihood of American-led or supported military action against Iran is also diminished. One of the direct impacts of the Caucasus war is that the Bush administration cannot pressure Russia to stop its military action in Georgia and then justifiably engage in pre-emptive strikes on Iran.

Against the background of these events Turkey's activism in the region continued. But this time it happened in collaboration with France despite an essential element of anti-Turkish sentiments in the EU. At the "Damascus Summit" which was held on

September 4 with the participation of Turkey, France, and Qatar, Syrian leader Assad invited three states to discuss the basic conflicts in the region, especially the Israel-Syria peace process. The summit resulted in uttering peace, stability, and hope for the Israeli-Syrian peace. Turkey's efforts as a mediator in the peace process were praised especially by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy. One of the most important and concrete results of the summit was the six-topic Syrian-Israeli peace proposal. It was given to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to be conveyed to the Israeli side to set the floor for future peace negotiations.

This summit proved Turkey's enhancing role in the Middle East as a mediator, facilitator, and constructive actor. This makes Turkey a high-profile actor that has to be taken in to consideration in all arrangements in the region. Parallel to the summit, an agreement between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council has been signed. This proves Turkey's enhancing role in the region and this mostly results from Gulf Countries' Iran threat perception. They have encouraged Turkey to play a more active role as a balance to Iran. There is a growing willingness of France to be involved in Middle Eastern issues. French leader Sarkozy is trying to play that role through Syria. This may cause competition between Turkey and France over the sponsorship of Israel-Syria peace negotiations.

4

Revisionists Powers in the Middle East

by Carlo Masala

The phenomenon of states aiming to revise the regional order in the Middle East is not a new one. Starting from Gamal Abdel-Nasser's quest for Arab unity to Saddam's attempts in the 80's (Gulf-War I) and the 90's (Gulf War II) the region has repeatedly experienced state leaders whose aim has been to redraw the boundaries of the re-

“Arab states should be encouraged and supported in building up counter-balancing mechanism against revisionist powers since it ought to be in their national interest not to come under revisionist suzerainty.”

gion. Interestingly those quests for supremacy (which is the political core of every revisionist strategy) have never been successful.

Nowadays revisionism is, once again, back into the region, challenging existing balances of power. But as always, history does not repeat itself. Today's revisionism in the region is diverse and does not resemble necessarily those of the past.

Iran's attempt to get a grip on nuclear weapons is just one type of revisionism. A new phenomenon is that non-state actors, e.g. Hamas and Hezbollah, have established themselves as powerful revisionist actors in the region whose importance for the Middle Eastern balance of power is nearly as big as the one of state actors, and, in particular, the combined actions of state actors and non-state actors in the region to challenge existing governments and their policies.

In this short piece I try to raise and answer three questions. 1. Where does revisionism stem from? 2. What kind of revisionism is the region facing today and 3. What are potential strategies to deal with today's revisionism in the Middle East.

Revisionist powers perceive a window of opportunity in shaping regional or global orders. Usually they are powers on the rise, meaning that in the self-perception of their ruling elites they experience a relative increase in their power as well as a relative decline in the power of other actors. At the same time, and history tells us, revisionist powers are internally weak powers. They have a divided society and revisionism is used by ruling elites to create rally around the flag effects amongst its citizens (or in the case of non-state actors) amongst its followers.

Today's revisionism in the Middle East is complex. If one looks at the Iranian dossier we must distinguish between aims directed vis-à-vis Israel and those directed against the Arab world. I would argue that Iran with its nuclear program pursues a balancing strategy with regard to Israel while at

the same time having revisionist goals vis-à-vis the Arab world. Therefore Iran's quest for suzerainty over the Arab World is the revisionist core of its current policy. Objectively Iran's nuclear program poses a bigger threat to Arab states than to Israel. Non-state actors in the region are revisionist nowadays because they still challenge existing realities in the region (the state of Israel) whilst undermining the capacity of state actors in the territories in which they operate. By weakening existing governments in the Palestinian territories or in Lebanon they weaken potential and legitimate partners in the peace process.

To deal with today's revisionism in the Middle East a two-pronged strategy might be necessary. On the one hand non-state revisionist actors need to be ignored and delegitimized. Existing state actors need to be strengthened by building up their capacities. Every move to accept non-state revisionist actors by including them into existing cooperative frameworks will contribute to their self-perception of being on an upward trajectory. With regard to revisionist state-actors a strategy of balancing is necessary. Arab states should be encouraged and supported in building up counter-balancing mechanism against revisionist powers since it ought to be in their national interest not to come under revisionist suzerainty. Once stable balance structures are created cooperative offers have to follow in order to give a clear signal that a status quo power Iran would be welcomed in the region. By not excluding cooperation Arab states would play the ball of responsible behavior back into the Iranian camp and thereby showing to those social forces within Iran that do not support a revisionist strategy that a normalization of the relations between Iran and the Arab World depends largely on domestic developments within Iran.

"In the light of recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the likelihood of three scenarios for the future development of Palestinian territories is discussed."

5

ISRAEL/PALESTINE - WHAT'S NEXT?

by *Martin Beck*

The aim of the paper is to adumbrate possible medium- to long-term rather than short-term developments in Israel / Palestine. In the light of recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the likelihood of three scenarios for the future development of Palestinian territories is discussed. Thereby, security implications both for the Israelis and the Palestinians are highlighted.

Firstly, on the basis of a (modified) version of the Oslo peace process, a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be realized (Scenario A). Secondly, the status quo could persist: Periods of negotiations (as initiated in Annapolis last year) could alternate with phases of low communication (Scenario B). Thirdly, the basic orientation towards a two-state solution could terminate (Scenario C).

Both Israel and the Palestinian actors have incentives to make the first scenario become reality. The advantages in economic, political and security-related terms are obvious. Especially regarding security interests, the initial situation is much worse than in 1993 when the secret talks in Oslo started. The failure of the Oslo process significantly lowered the degree of mutual trust. To a certain degree, the positions of the actors are more flexible: For example, debating East Jerusalem is no longer a subject of taboo in Israel. On the Palestinian side, the same is true of the refugee problem. However, the parties are far from agreeing on joint positions. Moreover, both actors face a difficult two-level game. The Palestinian leadership is deeply split as became apparent in June, 2007, when Hamas usurped power in the Gaza Strip and Fatah retaliated by taking over power in the West Bank. Thus, even if Mahmud Abbas signed a peace contract, Israel could not rely on a successful implementation. Also the Israeli

society is deeply divided. To date, the settlers' movement has been acting as a successful veto player. This becomes obvious particularly by the widespread perception that the unilateral withdrawal of the Gaza Strip in 2005 with its less than 8,000 settlers was a major concession—although the overall number of settlers grew significantly in 2005 and thereafter to more than 450,000 thousands in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

In light of the difficulties to realize scenario A, the likelihood of scenario B is much higher than often believed. Actually, negotiation processes may frequently be held if the US-Administration initiates them like in Annapolis. Neither the PLO nor Israel can afford a rejection. Yet, the danger is that rather than aiming at a peace treaty the actors simply try to avoid being blamed as the party that is responsible for a failure of negotiations.

Due to a certain fatigue with the Palestinian issue among Arab elites, Israel can also try to improve its relations with the Arab World by avoiding dealing with the Israeli-Palestinians conflict. Yet, it is very questionable whether such a strategy could ever lead to an unconditional Arab acceptance of Israel as a legitimate state in the Middle East. A truly new situation could at best occur if Israel and Syria managed to compromise on the Golan Heights.

Despite impressive internal stability both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 2007, the most likely coffin nail for the Oslo formula is a collapse of the Palestinian Authority. In the Gaza Strip, this scenario already became partial reality insofar as the Hamas government is outlawed by Israel and the international community. Moreover, as a result of the economic crisis, a total breakdown of Gaza's proto-statehood cannot be excluded any more. If the dynamic initiated in Annapolis vanishes, the latter scenario could also come true in the West Bank. Especially in the Gaza Strip, a humanitarian catastrophe could hardly be avoided. A "side-effect" would be uncontrollable rocket attacks on Israel. A medium-term result

could be that the international community interferes with Israeli approval: The EU and/or the UN could try to manage the humanitarian catastrophe and the NATO could serve as shield for Israel against attacks from the Palestinian territories.

Although many Arab states share with Israel the aim of containing Hamas, cooperation on this issue is not likely to occur: Overall Israeli-Arab relations are too poor and any open cooperation with Israel would harm internal legitimacy of Arab regimes. Moreover, a pure containment policy towards Hamas could further bolster its legitimacy which is not least based on its victory in democratic elections held in January, 2006.

If the Palestinian Authority collapses, the Palestinians could relinquish their aim of achieving a Palestinian state. Thus, the Palestinians could take advantage of Israel's demographic problem by demanding the establishment of a bi-national democratic state on historic Palestine from the Mediterranean Sea to the river Jordan. Since such a demand would undermine the Zionist concept of Israel as a Jewish state, it could paradoxically be the initial point for a successful initiative to establish a Palestinian state.

6

IRREGULAR IMMIGRATION AT THE CENTRE OF REGIONAL SECURITY

by Fouad M. Ammor

Irregular migration is a complex and diverse phenomenon representing a major security concern in the Mediterranean region. It is complex because of conflicting interests. One conflict exists between migrants following their wish of free movement and the states trying to control these movements. You can find another conflict of interest between the stakeholders in the countries of origin, transit and destination. Basically, irregular migration can be understood as a result of the increasing degree of poverty and/or of political situations lacking

stability. Irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa often try to escape violent intra- and international conflicts. Due to its specific character irregular migration does not stop at borders. In this regard it challenges the local, regional and afro-European and international levels.

Irregular migration as a concern of regional security should be analyzed at two well defined levels. First at the level of state sovereignty and second at the level of human security: a) In political discourses, irregular migration has been understood as a menace to state sovereignty and simultaneously to state security. The argument is that states have the right to control who crosses their borders. There is often a misperception that irregular migrants menace the state security. Irregular migration does not occur in important numbers, it represents a "fairly" small proportion of the total of migration. b) The level of human security is often neglected in the debate about irregular migration. We have to recognize that irregular migrants, who are usually women or children, are, in general, victims of all kinds of trafficking (working in jobs under dangerous conditions, excluded from health, education other social welfare provisions...).

Morocco which has been until recently a country of emigration has started to be a country of transition and even a country of destination for some irregular immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. To a lesser extent the same can be observed in Algeria. To discuss this issue, a Euro-African Conference was held in Morocco in 2003 attended by Foreign Ministers from the region (except Algerian representatives). The outcome of the Conference can be summarized in three points: a) the necessity of a comprehensive approach to tackle this sensitive phenomenon, b) the necessity to bridge the economic gap between the countries of the region and c) the need to take into consideration the human dimension of the issue by upgrading legislation concerning these persons at risk.

"Migration zero has already shown its intrinsic limit."

POLICY PAPER
EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP

NUMBER 4 |
NOVEMBER 2008

www.kas.de/eag

Organization

**Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
e.V. - Amman Office**

Michael Däumer
Resident Representative

Gerrit F. Schlomach
EAG Coordinator

Amman Office
Phone +962-6-59 29 777
Fax +962-6-59 33 087
www.kas.de/eag
info@kas.org.jo

**Regional Centre on Conflict
Prevention**

Yasar A. Qatarnah
Director

Amman-Jordan
Phone +962 6-593 4400
Fax +962 6-593 4408
www.rccp-ijd.org
info@rccp-ijd.org

To conclude, regarding the complex and the multidimensional character of irregular migration, it seems necessary to develop an approach along the following lines: a) Based on ethical considerations and shared responsibility, we should recognize that we deal with human beings, not just with figures. b) In order to develop adequate solutions, we have to be aware of the comprehensive character including economic, political, social factors. c) We have to put the challenge in a long-sighted perspective because the increasing need of new and young workers in developed countries. We should wisely prepare the future in order to avoid some false myths and phobias.

In order to cope with irregular migration, states have to actively cooperate between each other. It is useless to stop the trend unless the process of economic development becomes cumulative and steady in the countries of origin. An approach in the field of security policy is important but insufficient because it is expensive and it generates limited results. If towards irregular migration there is no, in the short and medium term, an efficient solution, EU states have to open up avenues in some unskilled sectors for legal temporary and permanent migration. Migration zero has already shown its intrinsic limit.

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 ex-

pressed in this policy paper rests exclusively with the contributors and their interpretations do not reflect the views or the policy of the publishers.

EAG Members

Fouad Ammor - Researcher - Groupement d'Etudes et de Recherches sur la Méditerranée (GERM), Rabat - Morocco
tempusmaroc@yahoo.fr

Martin Beck - Senior Research Fellow - GIGA Institute of Middle East Studies, Hamburg - Germany
beck@giga-hamburg.de

Ahmed Driss - Director - Centre des études méditerranéennes et internationales, Tunis - Tunisia
ahmed2_driss@yahoo.fr

Cagri Erhan - Vice-President of ASAM - Eurasia Strategic Research Center, Ankara - Turkey
cerhan@asam.org.tr

Emily Landau - Director of Arms Control and Regional Security Project - Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv - Israel
emily@inss.org.il

Carlo Masala - Professor for International Politics - University of the Federal Armed Forces, Munich - Germany
carlo.masala@unibw.de

Antje Nötzold - Lecturer - TU Chemnitz, Chemnitz - Germany
antje.noetzold@phil.tu-chemnitz.de

Markus Pösentrup - Assistant of MEP Michael Gahler, Brussels - Belgium
markus.poesentrup@gmx.de

Alessandro Quarenghi - Lecturer at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Brescia and IES/Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan - Italy
aquarenghi@gmail.com

Mohamed Abdel Salam - Head of The Regional Security Program - Al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies, Cairo - Egypt
abdelsalam@ahram.org.eg