



# EAG POLICY PAPER

Number 5 / January, 2009



## Play it again Sam - A new Transatlantic Strategy for the Middle East?


The new US administration led by Barack Hussein Obama has the chance to introduce new dynamics into US policy towards the Middle East. Automatically, this will reshuffle the transatlantic approach towards the region. Yet, the new US administration inherits old problems starting with the challenge of the Gaza conflict. What should a new transatlantic agenda look like? Experts on foreign and security policy examine this issue from different angles in the following paper entitled "Play it again Sam - A new Transatlantic Strategy for the Middle East?" This Policy Paper is the outcome of the sixth workshop of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) - European and South Mediterranean Actors - Partners in Conflict Prevention and Resolution, held in Larnaca, Cyprus, November 1 - 3, 2008.

### INTRODUCTION



# 1

by Sebastian Grundberger



"Change can Happen". Upon the inauguration of the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama, the world is closely observing with the hope that change will happen. Obama is welcomed to Washington D.C. with great enthusiasm and is viewed as a "visionary" – similar to John F. Kennedy. During his election campaign he raised many high expectations in and outside the United States. His new administration is receiving much trust and credibility in advance. In view of a great deal of problems and challenges he and his administration have inherited from the Bush administration, the crucial issue will be his ability to truly change America's foreign policy. Incumbent administrations always provide space for new policies. Obama and his foreign policy advisers, including his new chief diplomat Hillary Clinton, have a chance to seek their "window of opportunity" given the fact that the world – fairly or unfairly – perceives the Bush administration's foreign policy as a "deadlock".

The Obama team is simultaneously facing serious domestic and foreign challenges. At the forefront of his political agenda stands

the global financial crisis. In foreign affairs, the new president's first task will be to define a new strategy for the Middle East in wake of the Gaza crisis. Rising terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran's nuclear aspirations, growing fundamentalism in the Middle East, as well as the establishment of new powers in the Middle East are merely a few of the issues the new administration must handle. In addition, powers such as Russia and China seek to enhance their roles in the Middle East. In his inaugural speech, President Obama emphasized that his policies will be determined by "hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord". Addressing the Muslim world Obama pledged to "seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect".

In its effort to "change the world" and to apply new approaches the incoming US administration is obliged also to redefine its relationship with Europe. If the Middle East is – as it appears – a core focus of US foreign policy, the Obama administration will seek a new transatlantic strategy for the Middle East. European leaders welcoming the arrival of the new administration have expressed their willingness to assume more responsibility in dealing with the Middle East. Indeed, strong European actors, in

particular the United Kingdom, France and Germany have demonstrated their interest to take on an active role in the region. How will this affect the transatlantic agenda? A new transatlantic strategy for the Middle East must incorporate Europeans to make change happen.

This Policy Paper expressing the views of Middle East experts from Europe, Israel, and the Arab countries introduces recommendations for a new transatlantic strategy and analyzes foreign policy issues which need to be taken into consideration such as Iran's nuclear policy, emerging new powers, and Europe's role in managing nuclear issues. In their recommendations Carlo Masala and Martin Beck advance two options for the US and Europe to embark on in order to promote stability in the region. A focal point of transatlantic cooperation is how to deal with democratizing the Middle East. In her paper Emily Landau poses the question "Iran: Can a deal be struck?" She argues that while the lack of more concrete support that the transatlantic partners lent each other in their respective efforts contributed to the failure to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions so far, still the reasons for failure are much more profound. In her contribution entitled "How to deal with new actors", Antje Nötzold comments on how the transatlantic partners may implement their strategy in the Middle East considering the competition with other international players such as Russia and China in the Middle East region. Finally, Mohammed Abdel Salam describes "The European role in managing nuclear issues in the Middle East" as having increased since 2002. While the US will remain the most powerful deterrent Europe can play an important role in dealing with the regional nuclear issue.

## 2

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR A NEW US-STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

*by Martin Beck / Carlo Masala*

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the US-American policy aims have os-

cillated between democratizing the Middle East by demanding far-reaching political reforms and free elections on the one hand and cooperating with ruling authoritarian regimes on the other. Much too often American policy towards the Middle East appeared to be based on the motto "God bless us with democracy but spare us from democratization." Based on the rational pursuit of strategic interests rather than norms, the following policy recommendations for a future American policy towards the Middle East ask to increase the inner coherence of American policy.

Thereby, the following dilemma of aims and means should be taken into account. On the one hand, if Middle Eastern governments were democratic, many current problems between this world region and the West would be a thing of the past: Democracies refrain from using violence against each other, share similar values and constitute a relatively bad breeding ground for terrorists. On the other hand, the link between peace and democracy applies only to fully-fledged democracies whereas democratizing systems tend to have an increased level of violent conflict behavior. Moreover, not all democratization processes may succeed in consolidated democratic systems.

Thus, promoting democracies in the Middle East requires a long-term perspective. A more risk-averse strategy would be to continue cooperating with ruling regimes in the Middle East, thereby accepting the fact that their authoritarianism is a breeding ground for internal and regional violence, i.e. national and transnational terrorism.

In order to avoid the zigzag course of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, *one* of the following two options should be embarked on.

Option 1: Prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon. Keeping the region in balance is probably the best reassurance for stability in the region which allows the US and Europe to have a wide range of options at their disposal in order to influence policies in the Middle East. Pursuing a strategy of balancing requires strategic allies in the region. Therefore the US and Europe should

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identify and actively support regional balancers. The stigmatization policy towards all rogue states, particularly Iran, should be intermitted since it aggregates regional tensions and alienates regional powers from the USA. Promoting democratic reforms should be pursued only insofar doing so does not contradict the primary aim of preventing the emergence of a regional hegemon.

Option 2: A strategic goal for the US in the Middle East ought to be the spread of democracies in the region. But how to establish democracies in a region without democrats? Firstly, put pressure on ruling regimes to adhere to the principles of good governance. The most promising leverage point is the conditional donation of foreign aid toward regimes that depend on it. Secondly, promote the integration of oppositional movements, particularly Islamist groups that refrain from using violence, into the formal political system. If in the foreseeable future democracies occur in the Middle East, it will be through democratic elite pacts rather than genuine democratic pressure from below.

In both cases it seems to be of utmost necessity to deal with regional problems on a regional basis. Peace mail engineering, as it used to be quite often the case, proved to be not successful. If the US is serious about its efforts in promoting stability in the region (regardless if Option 1 or 2 turns out to be the most adequate strategy) it needs to develop a comprehensive strategy tackling all problems between all actors in the region. This does not mean that it has to initiate another Madrid style peace process but it needs to take into account the various regional needs and dynamics of actors in the region.

Whatever strategy the USA decides to pursue, it should be closely coordinated with the Europeans. They are ready to accept US leadership (plus to bear the costs of the Western policy to a considerable degree) provided Washington is serious in consulting them. In many cases, success conditions for a Western initiative in the Middle

East may be improved if leadership in communicating them is left to European actors who enjoy a better reputation among Arab actors.

### 3

#### IRAN: CAN A DEAL BE STRUCK?

by Emily Landau

We are (once again) at a critical juncture with regard to Iran's nuclear ambitions. The most recent IAEA report indicates that as a result of its ever advancing uranium enrichment activities, Iran is very close to having accumulated enough low enriched uranium that, if enriched to higher levels, would be sufficient for the production of one nuclear bomb.

In an ongoing effort to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, two years of negotiations and almost two years of sanctions have been attempted, with no success so far. In stark contrast to the situation on the eve of the US war against Iraq, the transatlantic agenda with regard to Iran has been characterized from 2002 by a remarkably high degree of concurrence between the US and European states not only regarding the nature of the Iranian nuclear challenge, but regarding the best approach for dealing with it as well.

Nevertheless, one of the factors that contributed to the failures so far was the lack of more concrete support that the transatlantic partners lent each other in their respective efforts. Europe took the lead in negotiations in the 2003-2005 period, but felt that the US failed to bolster the security element in the incentives it offered Iran. Similarly, when the US took the lead on sanctions, it needed European states to bolster these efforts by using their significant economic clout in a more determined fashion, both within the framework of the UN Security Council, and independently of these collectively decided efforts.

In the current situation, as suspicions of Iran's military intent grow stronger, the international community is looking more and

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more deadlocked, with no agreed-upon strategy for moving forward. As a last hope, most eyes are today focused on President Obama, hoping that “yes we can” will extend to a successful resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis.

When assessing the prospects of a US-Iranian negotiation, several issues must be clarified. First of all, what to negotiate about? By now it is clear that the negotiation must be broader than the nuclear issue alone. Because Iran is hoping to attain nuclear status in order to enhance its regional position, negotiations must focus on a broader spectrum of regional security issues: including security in the Gulf and the terms of US exit from Iraq. At the same time, Iran's connections with Hamas and Hizballah will also have to be addressed, as well as Israel's security.

Second, how to ensure that Iran will enter negotiations actually looking for a deal with the US? Time works to Iran's advantage, and Iran has demonstrated its skill in using negotiations to play for time. Assuming that Iran is ultimately interested in negotiating a deal with the West, and there is good reason to believe that it is, its rational choice at the present stage would be to bide its time for another year or so, until it reaches (or comes very close to reaching) the capability to produce a nuclear bomb. Its bargaining position at that point will increase tremendously and thus its ability to negotiate a better deal.

Every effort must be taken to break this dynamic, and convince Iran to be serious now. This necessitates a better understanding of the role of sanctions, and other forms of pressure in the overall effort to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Many seem to treat sanctions and negotiations as alternative routes for stopping Iran's nuclear program – namely, either you apply pressure or you cooperate. In fact, the role of sanctions and credible threats of military force are *to facilitate negotiations*. Their role is to change Iran's rational calculation, and make it come to prefer negotiating se-

riously *now*, before it reaches its goal in the nuclear realm.

To what degree is success in the case of Iran dependent on transatlantic cooperation? It is important to place the transatlantic agenda vis-à-vis Iran in context. Successfully curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions will not be easy, but problems of transatlantic coordination are only one element in the equation, and at this point certainly not the major one. So while better coordination would help efforts, even a highly coordinated approach will not be enough to ensure success. That said, Europe should lend the new US administration every measure of support in its efforts.

## 4

### HOW TO DEAL WITH NEW ACTORS?

by Antje Nötzold

The Mediterranean region and the Middle East have always been in the political focus of several external actors due to its strategic and economic importance. Hence, differing interests and constant struggle for influence between external actors is nothing new. Since the turn of the century some external players including Russia and China, have gained political weight worldwide and have increased their involvement in the Middle East and southern Mediterranean region. The crucial point is that they do neither claim nor ask for the compliance of democratization or human rights as a precondition for cooperation. Those policies challenge the Western system of conditionality and offer alternatives for the ruling powers in the region. The stronger commitment of other external actors not only diminishes the power of conditional cooperation. The US and Europe as well live up to their principle of conditionality only in their rhetoric and theoretical concepts. In reality the EU never used the possibility to stop the flow of money within their cooperation policies EMP and ENP. Otherwise they could lose ground and only maintain

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influence and authority in countries which economically and strategically have nothing to offer to the other external players.

This ironic development leads to a situation similar to the Cold War – balance of power. Therefore, Europe and the U.S. are obliged to react but they should not involve themselves in this game of power for two reasons. First of all, it contravenes the logic of their strategic concepts which still emphasize conditionality in order to foster Western values, human rights, and democratization. Second, they cannot win this game because there will assuredly be another actor whose interests are affected and who might offer more.

With respect to the two recommended options for a new US strategy from Beck and Masala - possible also for adaptation in European policies – the answers of the occident might be the following: Analogous to option 1 – keeping the region in balance and prevent regional hegemons – the Western actors should use all possible capabilities to increase their influence in the region, especially in countries with strategic importance. This would imply only a limited commitment to democratization and to the spread of Western values more as a long-term purpose rather than a precondition. If this option is chosen, the strategic concepts should be readjusted correspondingly. Option 2 – the spread of democracies in the region – would mean the usage of conditionality without exceptions, rhetoric and strategic promises without realization would be foreclosed.

Irrespective which option the US and Europe prefer, three crucial points must be taken into account to achieve influence in relation to the new actors. First, both should agree on common targets and the strategic course of action they seek to pursue. Second, they should base their policy on concrete sticks and carrots, though the carrots must be those the countries are really eager for. Furthermore, they should be endeavored to coordinate their policies with the new actors and convince them that stability on a long-term basis is in their in-

terest, too. To sum it up: The Western actors must have common targets but try less than at present getting the new actors on board and being the ones who set the agenda.

## 5

### THE EUROPEAN ROLE IN MANAGING NUCLEAR ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*by Mohammed Abdel Salam*

Traditionally, European countries have not played a key role in the nuclear non-proliferation process in the Middle East. The American factor was the most influential in engaging nuclear affairs in the region through preventing states' access to civilian nuclear capability sometimes, or by putting pressure on them to restrict their nuclear activities, or the dismantling of some secret nuclear programs, as appeared in the nuclear programs of Syria and Algeria, Libya, Iraq and occasionally the Egyptian program. The US has also been active in all the rounds of negotiations, multilateral or bilateral, which tried to deal with nuclear problems in the Middle East.

But the years after 2002 have witnessed important shifts in the roles of the international powers in the management of nuclear affairs in the region as follows:

1- The shrinking of the role of the US in dealing with some of the major regional nuclear issues; despite the fact that Washington has been able to achieve a breakthrough in removing Libya's nuclear program and revealing Abdul Qadeer Khan's secret nuclear network, they have encountered a problem of credibility in dealing with what has been said about the Iraqi nuclear program in 2003, the absence of official relations to allow full engagement with the uranium enrichment problem in Iran and its stance from not addressing the Israeli nuclear issue. All these have placed limits on their ability to pursue its traditional role to all the issues raised.

2- The growing role of European countries in interacting with the nuclear

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problems in the region: the British intelligence services have played a role in dealing with Libya's nuclear program; the major European countries (Germany, France) also played an active role in negotiating with Iran on the nuclear problem, and their vote trends at the International Atomic Energy Agency have become influential. And some European countries have entered the region as a nuclear supplier in the current wave of nuclear energy programs which may be able to influence the direction of their interactions in the coming period.

Of course, the US will continue to exert a major role in the regional nuclear affairs. Its policy represents a real deterrent to Iran's prospects of possessing military nuclear options, and it is the only country capable of developing a framework to move the situation of the Israeli nuclear file. In addition, it seriously raises the issue of nuclear terrorism. And changing its attitude towards Arab nuclear energy programs, under the administration of President Barack Obama, may lead to its effective presence in the region.

But the main European countries will continue to play key roles in dealing with some of the critical regional nuclear file, in coordination with the US administration, as follows:

1- Contributing to the effective implementation of the incentives policy proposed to Iran in case of the success of the "dialogue" between the U.S. administration and the Iranian government ... intervening as a major player in the case of pending the dialogue ... and putting pressure on Iran through sanctions if the dialogue reaches a dead end.

2- Trying to persuade Arab countries to control their nuclear behavior in the case of the loose nuclear proliferation in the Middle East ... or assisting them in the management of the potential risks resulting from the spread of peaceful nuclear programs in the region ...

3- Following up on the developments of the likelihood of terrorist networks accessing the elements of weapons of mass

destruction, nuclear or chemical, by monitoring the activities of terrorists groups in the areas in which the European countries have influence, and cooperation with the regional parties in preventing any attempts at nuclear, chemical or biological terrorism.

4- Participating in providing ideas for the creation of security arrangements in the region on a large scale which will ultimately help in dealing with the outstanding nuclear issues in the region, especially with their important experience in dealing with difficult regional security issues in the region, as is the case for countries like Norway, Sweden and Greece.

#### **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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**POLICY PAPER**  
**EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP**

NUMBER 5 |  
JANUARY, 2009

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