
WESTERN SECURITY EFFORTS AND THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

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There are strong, practical reasons for all Alliance members to cooperate on bringing security to the Greater Middle East, but doing so requires a realistic assessment of domestic politics, a true understanding of the long-term political and socio-economic problems in the region, and a commitment to deal with the root causes beneath the resultant instability, violence, and terrorism.

NATO retains a powerful role in bringing stability to Europe. It still provides a structure for uniting different European countries through a collective framework of security with the guarantee of U.S. military capabilities.

Now, however, the primary challenges to the West are “out of area.” The Balkans remain the only area in Europe that is not militarily stable, but North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia all present the threat of Islamic extremism and terrorism. Friendly regimes in these regions need security guarantees and assistance from the outside, and the struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that the West can do far more to deal with failed regimes and regional threats if it acts collectively.

FOCUSING ON THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

The Islamic extremism behind the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, focused the world’s attention on the threats emanating from these regions. The Bush administration’s position is that the Greater Middle East is a Western, not a U.S., responsibility, and the need for NATO missions is no longer a theoretical force-improvement priority, but, rather, a tangible and immediate need.

It is not yet clear how aggressively the administration will attempt to refocus Western security efforts;

however, it has begun to push for four major initiatives:

- A steady build-up of the NATO security presence in Afghanistan, creating a single NATO command in Afghanistan by 2005 that will effectively put NATO in charge of the peacemaking/nation-building effort, as well as defeating the remnants of the Taliban and al Qaida there.
- Modifying the posture in Iraq so there is a U.S.-led NATO command to deal with military and security assistance after the transfer of power, with a U.N.-led political and economic effort.
- Restructuring the U.S. force posture and deployments in Europe to suit greater interaction with the Middle East and Central Asia by reducing the U.S. presence in areas like Germany and creating new facilities and bases in Eastern and Southern Europe.
- Shifting from the creation of largely generic power projection capabilities in NATO to actual deployments.

Many European countries disagree with parts of this program, particularly with playing a role in Iraq. At the same time, however, both Europe and the United States have good reasons to cooperate in this region including the need to work together militarily,

dependency on Middle Eastern oil, and the threat of terrorism by Islamic extremists.

Force Transformation Problems

Even \$400 billion-plus defense budgets leave the United States with some of the defense modernization problems of its European allies. The Iraq war has shown that the United States faces serious strains in fighting even one prolonged low intensity conflict. This is not because the United States cannot use its immense advantages in high technology conventional forces to fight additional or much larger wars; it is rather because it cannot do so with its present force structure and maintain the deployment and rotation cycle necessary to retain its skilled professional forces. The major shifts necessary to enable the United States to fight asymmetric wars efficiently have only begun.

The United States, therefore, needs more than political coalitions. It needs war-fighting coalitions.

Yet, in spite of America's problems, European countries are all too aware that U.S. military modernization and force transformation is greatly outpacing their own. This is partly a result of far more efficient force structures and much clearer and more functional force improvement priorities in the United States. It is partly the result of the fact that most European nations are far more concerned about economic and social priorities and the future of the European Union (EU), than strategy and defense spending.

However, it is also because the United States devotes more money to defense. Although Europe cannot afford to replicate anything like the U.S. mix of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets, precision long-range strike systems, infrastructure for power projection, and development of net-centric warfare capabilities, it is only spending something on the order of \$140 billion for limited coordination among traditional forces with no clear current mission.

Britain is the one European state that has really begun to find an effective compromise between independent action and the need to depend on U.S. systems and

support in major projection contingencies; but even it is still making gradual cuts in its forces and modernization plans.

France's force plans are less mortgaged by under funding, and more innovative. It has done better than many other European powers in finding a new balance between modernization, reform, and military spending — although a large part of French forces still lack meaningful deployment to any area where they may really be needed.

While Germany still has some highly capable force elements, it is spending less than half of what it was (by percent of gross domestic product) during the Cold War — and much less than France and Britain or even most of Europe, let alone the United States. This, simply, is far too little to modernize its forces. Moreover, Germany is now politically committed to gross under-spending through 2007, and the German approach to preserving outdated force structures and conscription may be politically correct in terms of domestic politics, but is extraordinarily wasteful in terms of military capability.

Most of the smaller European states have been slow to abandon their traditional approach to force planning and, instead, specialize for meaningful power-projection capabilities. Norway, for example, is one of the few smaller states to specialize effectively around missions like Special Forces, rather than try to sustain an unaffordable traditional mix of land, naval, and air forces. Poland and Spain have also shown that they can project forces with limited budgets. But far too many European countries are becoming a military home for the aging.

Energy Dependence on the Middle East¹

The Greater Middle East involves truly vital strategic national security interests for Europe as well as the United States. The industrialized nations of the world are becoming steadily more dependent on a global economy fueled by Middle East energy exports, and this dependence is growing rapidly regardless of whether or not individual states are increasing their direct imports from the Persian Gulf and North Africa.

This is because the size of direct imports of petroleum is only a partial measure of strategic dependence. The United States and European economies are increasingly dependent on energy-intensive imports from Asia and other regions. The U.S. Energy Information Administration does not make estimates of indirect imports of Middle Eastern oil — that is, the oil that the nations that export finished goods to the United States and Europe must themselves import in order to produce those goods. If these imports were included, the resulting dependency figure for the United States, for example, might well be 30-40 percent higher.

Moreover, the industrialized states are increasingly dependent on the health of the global economy. For example, with the exception of Latin America, Mexico, and Canada, all of the United States' major trading partners are critically dependent on Middle Eastern oil exports.

The Enduring Security Problems of the Middle East

The threat of Islamic extremism is another uniting strategic interest, and one that will endure long after today's problems with Iraq, the Taliban, and al Qaida are over. The problems of Islamic extremism and terrorism have a deep cultural and ideological genesis. They are affected by the broad failure of secular politics and ideologies in much of the Middle East, and by the radical social and cultural changes imposed by the collapse of many agricultural sectors, hyper-urbanization, and sweeping changes in media and communications like satellite television and the Internet.

The resulting "culture shock" and political problems almost ensure a long period of instability as many in the Middle East try to find security in religion and a rebirth of Arab culture. At the same time, the impact of Turkish and Western colonialism, religious tension, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and hostility toward the unaffordable materialism of the West combine to create hostility towards the United States and Europe. These problems are affected by major economic and demographic pressures.

Regional economic development has been poor since

the end of the oil boom in the late 1970s. The World Bank's report on global economic development for 2003 shows that growth in per capita income in constant prices dropped from 3.6 percent during 1971-1980 to -0.6 percent during 1981-1990, and was only 1 percent from 1991-2000 — reflecting static income over nearly 20 years in a region with extremely poor equity of income distribution.

Some states like Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have so much oil and gas wealth per capita that they may be able to buy their way out of their mistakes indefinitely. Most Middle Eastern states, however, suffer severely from economic mismanagement and excessive state control of the economy. Structural economic reform has begun in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Bahrain. This reform, however, remains highly uncertain and none has yet developed it to the point where it has a serious prospect of success.

The other Middle Eastern states have uncertain near-to mid-term economic prospects, and this is true of most oil exporters as well. Saudi Arabia, for example, has experienced over a decade of budget deficits and its oil wealth is becoming increasingly marginal as its population grows far more quickly than its economy. The Israeli and Palestinian economies have been crippled by war. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are all experiencing serious economic and demographic problems, and the Iraqi economy is already weak and could face future shocks. The Iranian economy is in a serious crisis, compounded by deep ideological conflicts.

The end result is that a combination of fluctuating oil revenues, high population growth rates, and a failure to modernize and diversify the overall economy threatens to turn the past oil wealth of the exporting states into oil poverty.

These economic pressures are compounded by major demographic problems. The total population of the Middle East and North Africa has grown from 78.6 million in 1950 to 307.1 million in 2000. Conservative projections put it at 376.2 million in

2010, 522.3 million in 2030, and 656.3 million in 2050. This growth will exhaust natural water supplies, force permanent dependence on food imports, and raise the size of the young working age population (15-to-30 year olds) from 20.5 million in 1950 to 145.2 million in 2050. With over 40 percent of the region's population now 14 years or younger, there will be an immense bow wave of future strain on the social, educational, political, and economic systems.

In addition, political structures remain fragile and largely authoritarian regardless of the formal structure of government. In broad terms, no state in the region has managed to create a secular political culture that provides effective pluralism.

The resulting social turbulence is compounded by the region's extremely young population, overstretched and outdated educational systems, and the failure of the labor market to create jobs for many of the young men entering the labor force. Emigration creates another source of social turmoil, while religious and cultural barriers, and the issue of employment of women make greater other problems in productivity and competitiveness with developed regions.

IS 2004 THE YEAR OF NATO AND THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST?

There are serious practical challenges to forging cooperation within NATO over the Middle East. Several key factors are involved:

Iraq

Regardless of the genesis and justification of the Iraq war, the nations of Europe now cannot turn aside and easily allow the U.S. and British-led coalition to fail. At the same time, Iraq's problems are as much political and economic as they are military, and it is far from clear what a NATO mission would really entail.

- Iraq simply may not become stable and viable enough for a major U.S./European role of the kind the United States envisions. Whether it will want the United States in any kind of leading advisory and tutorial role is another issue entirely — and it

may be only marginally more tolerant of NATO and a major European presence, unless it can play this off against the United States.

- The United States may well defeat the insurgents, but if it does not, it is asking NATO — specifically NATO-Europe — to take on an open-ended security mission that will involve real combat. The multinational division has shown that a very diverse mix of Polish, Spanish, Ukrainian, and other forces can work well in a peacekeeping mission in a relatively stable area using NATO procedures. Sustained low intensity conflict and terrorism may well be a different story. It is also unclear whether, even if a number of European defense ministries perceive this mission to be desirable, they will be able to obtain the necessary political support.
- The United States is talking about serious European power projection, and the EU and NATO discussions to date raise serious doubts about how well any European country other than Britain really understands the costs and difficulties of projecting large forces at long distances.
- Giving such a mission to NATO does at least indirectly challenge both the current French and German policies on Iraq, and means a major commitment to NATO versus other interests. A large German or French role also means major American compromises.
- Mission length will be an issue in both Iraq and Afghanistan. It is easy to get into such roles. The fact that peacekeeping forces are in their fifth year in Kosovo and eighth year in Bosnia show it is much harder to get out.
- The economic and oil issues in Iraq will become steadily more important during 2004, and so will the questions of who gives and manages what in terms of aid, debt forgiveness, and reparations.

Afghanistan

Europe and NATO are already playing a major role in Afghanistan. Germany, in particular, has shown

leadership in dealing with Afghanistan's economic and political problems. However, there are the following practical issues:

- Progress in the Loya Jirga aside, the challenges of transforming "Kabulstan" into Afghanistan are going to remain serious and involve a host of nationwide political and economic challenges, as well as military ones. This nation-building presents more problems in terms of costs and resources. In addition, it simply is not clear that there is a feasible plan that can overcome Afghanistan's internal divisions, the weakness of its central government, and critical economic development problems.
- The security problem extends deep into Pakistan, and is heavily driven by Pakistani Islamic extremists, al-Qaida, and new Salafi movements. The role of NATO in dealing with these issues must be defined, and they may well present as many challenges as in Afghanistan.
- More generally, it simply is not clear where the "Greater Middle East" stops. If it can include Afghanistan and Iraq, it can also include Pakistan, the Caspian, and Central Asia. In the process, the risk that new tensions and differences will emerge over given cases grows.
- Afghanistan is in Russia's backyard, and involves Russian security interests. Unless Russia has a clear role, it may find the prospect of a major NATO mission there less than enticing. Also unclear is that such a mission can be fully decoupled from Islamic extremist movements in the rest of Central Asia. China and Iran will also be interested (and interesting) players.

The Arab-Israeli Challenge

An equally serious regional challenge is the Arab-Israeli peace process.

No issue does more to polarize the Arab and Islamic world than the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This aspect of hostility is directed largely against the U.S. and not against the West in general, as European

governments and public opinion are far more critical of Israel than any U.S. political party or the American people.

The Road Map appeared to offer a way out — a compromise around which the West could unite — but it remains inert. Israel and the Palestinians already have two failed leaderships and political structures unable to move towards a real peace. They may well have two failed peoples, where the majority on each side is too angry and fearful to compromise or see the other's valid needs.

A combination of the Israeli security fence and settlements and Palestinian terrorism could push Israel into taking steps that make a meaningful Palestinian state on the West Bank almost impossible — if, indeed, the demographics and economies of Gaza and the West Bank have not already done so. Certainly, the U.S. and European inability to agree on the details of Israel's borders and issues like the status of Jerusalem when formulating the Road Map are not going to become an easier challenge in the future.

This situation raises the following questions:

Can a NATO/European role in Iraq and Afghanistan be decoupled from the Arab-Israeli peace issue? Probably in American eyes, but not in European ones, and probably not in those of Arab or Islamic people in terms of hostility towards missions closely tied to the U.S. A better option in peace-making would be for the leadership role to be taken by Britain and other European nations the U.S. is willing to trust as fully sensitive to Israeli concerns.

Can NATO ignore the possible need for a joint peacekeeping mission to deal with the Arab-Israeli crisis? The war is not yet brutal and draining enough for the political leadership and popular opinion on either side to accept a peace of exhaustion and a peace of trust has long been impossible. The worse the prospects for a peace based on trust, however, the more some form of outside military role may be necessary. Reaching agreement on this within NATO is going to be far from easy, however,

and any military effort will almost certainly have to be linked to an equally long and expensive economic aid effort.

Iran

Europe may join the U.S. in seeking to block Iranian proliferation, but it does not see Iran as part of an axis of evil. Where the U.S. has sought to sanction Iran, Europe has sought dialogue, cultural exchanges, and economic ties — an approach that seems more successful and more likely to give moderate forces in Iran influence and power. The Bush administration may be turning away from sanctions and containment, but any unified security policy towards the Greater Middle East must deal with Iran.

The War on Terrorism

None of the previous discussion has come to grips with the need to deal with the broader problem of Islamic terrorism, and the need to develop better-integrated and more effective approaches to counter-terrorism and homeland security. In many ways, significant improvements are already taking place. There is far better intelligence sharing and cooperation between countries, better dialogue on homeland defense, and better cooperation in Interpol. NATO is developing a function as a clearinghouse for national intelligence and analysis.

The need to continue building on this progress and momentum is vital, but this raises almost as many issues about the level of spending, and the ability to agree on common policies as the military security mission.

The Clash Between Civilizations versus the Clash Within A Civilization

Finally, hidden away beneath all of these security and diplomatic issues is the broader question of how the West should address the conflicts and tensions within the Arab and Islamic worlds, and particularly the challenge Islamic extremism poses to the stability and political systems of the nations in the region and, therefore, to others.

The problems in the West's approach to the Greater Middle East are compounded by a lack of

understanding of Islam, Iran, and the Arab world, and sometimes by overt or tacit cultural and racial prejudice. In the case of the United States, both ties to Israel and the shock of 9/11 add to these misunderstandings. In Europe, the issues are colored by the attack on Spain this past March and the threat of future terrorism, as well as the cultural and economic shock of legal and illegal immigration — despite the fact that European demographics virtually force Europe to depend on labor immigration from the Arab and Islamic worlds for well beyond the coming generation.

Yet, Huntington aside [Samuel Huntington, author of *The Clash of Civilizations*], the real problem is not a “clash of civilizations” between the West and the Arab/Islamic world, but the clash *within* the Arab/Islamic world. The real problem is whether it can deal with its own political, cultural, economic, and demographic pressures through reform and evolution or if it will face a prolonged period of violence and revolution. It is also whether Algeria and Iran are the avatars of what Islamic extremism will bring to the region.

It may well be that the forces at work within the Arab/Islamic world are so great and have so much momentum that the efforts of the West to support evolution and reform can only have a marginal impact, as in the past. There has been plenty of dialogue, some economic aid, a flood of wasteful arms sales, and little substantive progress. The same is true of military and security aid efforts. Some ten years of Mediterranean Dialogue in NATO have so far produced virtually nothing but dialogue. A more meaningful relationship there would be useful.

CONCLUSION

The West cannot hope to deal with the problems of instability, violence, and terrorism within the Arab/Islamic world unless it makes a real attempt to deal with root causes. It must also develop an ideological partnership with moderate regimes and Arab and Islamic intellectuals if it is to have any chance at defeating a hostile ideology.

The Bush administration has touched upon all these issues in its call for democracy in the Arab world, as have similar European calls for reform, but, so far, there is little evidence that anyone is shaping the nuanced and practical policies required to meet the very different needs of the very individual Arab and Islamic states. How do regimes with no true political parties or experience with pluralism become real and stable democracies? How do they resolve the need for a matching rule of law and human rights in secular political cultures? What is to be done to deal with the problems of demography and the need for major economic reforms? Intended or not, current efforts have generally appeared to those in the region to be calls for regime change favorable to the United States, rather than support for real, practical reform.

If the West only deals with the Greater Middle East in NATO security terms, the best it can hope for is a mix of containment, continued extremism, and occasional war. To eliminate terrorism or achieve energy security, the root causes of the region's problems must be addressed in as thorough and as practical a manner as any military mission. ●

¹ For specific information on global MENA oil dependency projections see Energy Information Agency, International Energy Outlook, 2003, Washington, DOE/EIA-0484 (2003), May 2003, pp. 42, 45, 185, 237; International Energy Agency, World Energy Outlook, 2002 Insights, Paris, IEA, 2002, pp. 91-93, 106-107; and BP/Amoco, BP Statistical Review of World Energy, London, BP, 2003, pp. 6-7, 17.

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