

139th Bergedorf Round Table

Iraq and its Neighbours: Strategies for Stability

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Summary

I. What is at stake?

The debate started with a general assessment of the situation in the Middle East. What were the consequences of the Iraq war and what framework determines the region today (p. 25–27)? Why is it so difficult for the main actors in the region to make a comprehensive deal and why do many of them resist compromise (p. 27–29)? Turning from the region to Iraq, the participants discussed the recent achievements of the Iraqi government and the obstacles to national reconciliation (p. 29–32). Next, the discussion focused on two major challenges for Iraq and the region: terrorism, which is spreading from Iraq to its neighbours (p. 32–33) and the flux of Iraqi refugees, which has an enormous effect on the host countries, especially on Syria and Jordan (p. 34–35).

II. Regional actors

Participants from the region agreed on the vision of a unified and independent Iraq, which is stable and poses no threat to its neighbours (p. 36–37). Syrian participants underlined Syria's will to play a constructive role in the region and to help stabilize Iraq (p. 38–39). Similarly, Iranian participants stressed Iran's interest in promoting stability in Iraq. They denied that Iran was a threat to regional security and explained why Iran was not seeking to develop a nuclear bomb (p. 39–41). Subsequently, the role of the Gulf States was discussed (p. 42–43). With regard to Israel, Syrian participants criticized Israel's occupation of foreign territory, but also indicated their will to make peace (p. 43–44). Concerning Turkey's role in the Middle East, it was argued that Turkey could become a mediator between the conflicting parties, but only if it finds a solution to the Kurdish issue (p. 44–45).

III. External actors

After discussing the prospect of increasing competition between the US, the EU, China, India and Russia over energy resources in the Middle East (p. 46–47), participants turned to the role of the US in the region (p. 48–50). Participants from the region demanded to schedule a quick withdrawal of the US troops, others stressed that US troops were indispensable in Iraq at the moment and could not be replaced by Iraqi troops (p. 50–51). Concerning the role of the EU in the region, the EU was asked to strengthen its engagement and to recover its own voice independent from the US (p. 52–54).

IV. Possibilities for cooperation

There was consent that conflicts in the Middle East are interconnected. There was dissent about what conclusions to draw from this finding. Does this mean to wait with resolving the Iraqi problem until all the other conflicts in the region have been resolved or not? What would be an effective regional approach (p. 55–57)? The participants considered possibilities to set up a system of collective security in the region to replace the current balance of power system. What would be conditions for the creation of such a system? Which existing systems could serve as models for the Middle East (p. 57–63)? Another point of discussion were current and future formats of regional cooperation, such as Iraq's neighbouring countries' conference or the Arab League (p. 63–64). Many participants agreed that arms control could be a starting point for conflict resolution in the Middle East. While a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone was considered a good idea, it was doubted to be a realistic option (p. 64–65).

V. The future of the Middle East

The discussion started with different outlooks for the Middle East. Could lasting stability become possible if all players were to move ahead in a more pragmatic way (p. 66–68)? Next, participants discussed what would be conditions for a stable Iraq, what kind of political system would be preferable and who should stabilize the country (p. 68–70). Participants from Syria and Iran proposed concrete measures the neighbouring countries could undertake to stabilize Iraq (p. 70–71). Concerning concrete contributions of the EU, one participant proposed that the EU and Syria should ratify the Association Agreement, that Iraq should be involved in the Euromed Process and that the EU should admit Turkey (p. 71–73). Finally, concrete recommendations for regional and external actors in the Middle East were discussed for their approach to a comprehensive peace deal (p. 73–78).

Protocol

Welcome



I welcome you warmly to the 139th Bergedorf Round Table, “Iraq and its Neighbours: Strategies for Stability”, in the oldest city of the world and at this excellent university. Close relations exist between the University of Damascus and European and American universities and I am sure that their work will inspire our discussion.

The Middle East is an unstable region characterized by a host of tensions and conflicts. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime did not create a stable Iraq with a positive spillover effect to the whole region. Instead, day by day, the Iraqi and US forces are forced to undertake huge efforts to contain terrorism and factional division in Iraq in order to assure a minimal level of security.

We have gathered politicians, diplomats and experts to analyse the current situation and to discuss how, on this basis, to stabilize Iraq and the region. What are the interests of regional and external actors and how should we approach conflict resolution and security in the region? What are possible outlooks of the region and recommendations for the different players? How can Iraq’s neighbours contribute to stability in Iraq and the Middle East?

The discussion will be moderated by Volker Perthes.

von Weizsäcker

Perthes



Our discussion will proceed in five steps.

As a first step, we will assess the situation in the Middle East in general and in Iraq in particular. What consequences has the war on Iraq had for the regional order? How are Iraq's neighbours being affected by the instability in Iraq? How is the new Iraq developing and how is it meeting its major challenges? What are the obstacles to conflict resolution in the region?

We will then turn to the regional actors: What interests do countries like Syria, Iran, Turkey, the Gulf States and Israel have, and what role do they play in the region? What visions do these countries have for a future Iraq?

The third part of our discussion is devoted to external actors, their interests and their policies in the region. Why and how are external actors increasing their involvement in the region? How long will and how long should the US stay in Iraq and how will the role of the EU evolve?

In the fourth part, we will discuss how to approach conflict resolution and how to assess the possibilities to replace the current balance of power in the region by a system of collective security. Would arms control be a first step towards more security in the Middle East?

Starting with the outlook for the Middle East we will, in the final part, think of ways to stabilize Iraq and the region. What are the conditions for a stable Iraq and what concrete measures could be taken to promote them? How could the EU contribute to stability and what concrete recommendations could there be, not only for the regional actors, but also for future US policy in the region?

The Protocol contains an edited and authorized version of the participants' spoken contributions.

I. What is at stake?

1. The Middle East today

Let us begin by assessing the situation in the Middle East in general.

The war on Iraq represents not just a “regional earthquake”, but rather a geopolitical revolution for the Middle East. For the first time since the era of independence, one Arab country has been completely occupied by an external force. In the region, the US has not only become a hegemonic power, which could project power into the region, but has also become a neighbour. Political weights in the region have shifted to the three non-Arab participants in the regional system: Iran, Turkey and Israel. Borders have not been changed but the frontiers of domination have come into motion. In addition, there have been enormous problems since 2003 related to the instability and the insurgency in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Iraq came to the neighbouring countries and in return Jihadists came from or through neighbouring countries to Iraq.

What is taking place in the Middle East is not an intentional geopolitical revolution, but an eroding of order with unpredictable consequences for the future. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Britain set the framework for the Middle East by defining respective spheres of influence and control after the expected downfall of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. After World War II and the independence of the states in the region, this “Franco-British” framework was taken over by a framework set by the Cold War, in which the different states of the region aligned with one of the two superpowers. After the end of the Cold War, the region was left to its own devices. With the US intervention in Iraq, this last framework was overthrown anew and removed by the hegemonic conflict between the US and Iran. This conflict is reframing all subregional and local conflicts in the Middle East. The nuclear crisis with Iran has to be seen in this context. Today, Iraq is the centre stage for regional interests, but also for the future role of the US, the dominant power in the region.

As a consequence of the US intervention in Iraq, the bronze medal has been won by Turkey, the silver medal by Israel and the gold medal by Iran.

There is no hegemonic struggle between Iran and the US. Iran is acting defensively and is not struggling for hegemony in the region. There should not be so much strategic attention paid to Iran because Iran is not the major problem in the region.

Perthes

The war in Iraq represents a geopolitical revolution in the Middle East...

... political weights have shifted, frontiers of domination have come into motion

Fischer

The hegemonic conflict between the US and Iran is reframing all conflicts in the Middle East

Sajjadpour

No, there is no hegemonic conflict between the US and Iran

The hegemonic conflict between the US and Iran is reframing all subregional and local conflicts in the Middle East.

Fischer



Al-Masri In order to understand what has happened in Iraq, we must go back to the structural change that occurred within the international system at the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then there has been one dominant superpower that defines its national interest by maintaining the unipolar moment. This has led to policies that have created a mess in the region. Regional players, such as Syria and Iran especially have to adapt themselves to this new regional environment. They regard this change in the environment as a threat to their national security.

Maleki The Iraq invasion was imprudent and premature and now Iraq's neighbouring countries have to pay the price for the strategic mistakes of the US. After 9/11, the US wanted to show the world its determination to respond appropriately to the attacks by invading Afghanistan and later on Iraq, however military interventions should not be the first, but rather the final solution.

Hollis Europeans have been describing the Iraq War as "America's Suez", which the US has done to itself. Regional players blame the US for having created the mess and are asking it to fix it. However, if this was "America's Suez", the US is not as powerful as it was when it went into Iraq and therefore it cannot fix the mess by itself.

Leverett The Iraq war was a very profound strategic mistake by the US, but it is a mistake that has been made and now we are all charged with the responsibility of trying to bring a new kind of stability to this region.

Touq The situation in Iraq imposes direct and indirect costs on neighbouring countries. Concerning direct costs, the Iraqis living in neighbouring countries represent a considerable financial burden. E.g. in Jordan, the Iraqis enjoy the same benefits in terms of education, health care and food subsidies as the Jordanian population. Besides, all neighbouring countries have witnessed an increase in defence spending in order to maintain their level of internal security. E.g., in Jordan 14,000 additional police officers have been employed. Concerning indirect costs, money spent on defence and security matters in neighbouring countries could have been spent on development projects in the region.

Economic development in the Middle East is only a façade

Economic figures show that in many countries in the Middle East there is economic development, however this is not experienced by the majority of the people, but only by a small elite. Economic development in the Middle East is only

Key players in the region are not willing and ready to do a comprehensive deal.

Hollis

a façade. The economies in the Middle East, excluding the Gulf States, are weak and economic growth rates are low.

Promoted by some states in the region, sectarian fault lines are emerging and reflect the sectarian divisions in Iraq. The casting of politics in sectarian terms, both inside the countries and in the region as a whole, is extremely dangerous and adds fuel to already existing problems.

It is narrow-minded to analyse regional roles and alliances on a sect-based approach. E.g., Syria's political alliances are not based on ethnic, religious or sectarian affiliation, but on respective issues and projects. Thus, the analysis that Syria is always supporting Hamas is wrong—it does so only occasionally. A sect-based approach is also insufficient in Lebanon and Palestine: In southern Lebanon, mainly Shiite groups are fighting Israeli forces whereas in the West Bank and in Gaza, it is Sunni Hamas, groups like the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), that are doing so, also include Christians. There, Shiites, Sunnis and Christians are basically fighting together.

2. Reasons for paralysis

The Middle East is characterized by a host of tensions and conflicts. There is an urgent need for conflict resolution and a comprehensive deal between the regional actors. Instead of moving in this direction, we observe a kind of paralysis—where does it stem from?

Key players in the region are not willing and ready to do a comprehensive deal for the following two reasons: First, zero-sum thinking predominates. Second, many actors in the region believe that, at the moment, they have more to gain from resisting compromise.

Regarding the first reason: In the Middle East and also in Iraq, there is no conflict resolution in prospect, because there is no collective interest in peace for its own sake or an identifiable deal that would constitute a win-win outcome for the key players. In the absence of a willingness to make concessions and compromises by all the main players, the goal of the majority of them is not to reach peace agreements, but rather to bargain and get as much out of the trading process as possible, short of agreeing a resolution. Players in Iraq and in the region are asking



Benli Altunisik

Sectarian fault lines are emerging in the region

N. Kabalan

A sect-based approach is narrow-minded

Perthes

Hollis

Key players in the region are not willing and ready to do a comprehensive deal

There is no collective interest in peace for its own sake

The US still thinks that it can alter the nature of the playing field and move the goal posts, to render any deal-making more to US satisfaction.

Hollis



Zero-sum thinking has come to inform global affairs

to be rewarded for any contributions they might make towards stabilising Iraq, but there is nobody from whom they can expect rewards.

The reluctance of the regional actors to compromise can be explained by the prevalence of zero-sum thinking. Such thinking means that the loss of the one is seen as the gain of the other, compromise is weakness and talking to your enemy means giving in. In the West, the tendency to see international relations in this vein has evolved since 9/11 and the declaration of the war on terror such that the notion of talking to terrorists is now depicted as rewarding them for their terror. In the US and Europe, and to a lesser extent in the Arab world, there has also been a propensity to label almost any enemy or unpalatable characters as “terrorists”.

On the other side of the spectrum, those who are not engaged in this western war on terror, or are at least not signed up to it, have in turn labelled the US and Israel as imperialists. Talking to them is deemed useless because, first of all, they are said not to want peace anyway; second, these imperialist enemies will not trade or bargain and will not treat their interlocutors as equals and deserving of a bargain. Consequently, so the logic goes, it is a concession to talk to your enemies, they cannot be trusted and deals cannot be made. Therefore, on both sides, there is the inability to talk to the other.

Before the Iraq War, many European countries were urging the US to adopt a multilateralist policy, upholding international law, but there was no chance of this in the face of the dictum “Either you are with us or against us”. This best illustrates how zero-sum thinking has come to inform global affairs.

Actors in the Middle East can be grouped into four categories

Regarding the second reason: Actors in the Middle East can now be grouped into the following four categories:

(1) Those actors in the region who believe that they have more to gain from resisting compromise and even from one more round of conflict. Among these actors I would include the Hamas leadership in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Indeed it would be quite reasonable for any of these four to conclude that they have more to gain than to lose from avoiding a deal under the current circumstances.

(2) The US, meanwhile, has neither the appetite for another round of conflict nor, under the current circumstances, for a comprehensive peace deal. Instead, the US still thinks that it can alter the nature of the playing field and move the goal posts, to render any deal-making more to US satisfaction. According to this logic, before doing a deal the US has to lower the expectations of the Palestinians,

History has taught Iraq that playing the role of a troublemaker in a region full of tensions and conflicts is political suicide.

Shaways

has to marginalize Hamas, undermine Hezbollah and believe that it is on a winning streak in Iraq.

(3) Yet other actors believe themselves to be too weak to afford a deal that would institutionalize their weakness. I would include among these: Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the Iraqi government and the Palestinian refugees.

(4) Lastly, there are those actors who would do a comprehensive deal—for the deal's sake—but none of them are in a position to prevail. Among these are: Jordan, Egypt, the EU member states, the Kurds and, with a question mark, Saudi Arabia and the other GCC and Maghreb states. Such states have to be cautious that any deal done would not be perceived by their populations as a sell-out or a capitulation.

The US seeks to put the region in a more favourable position before considering striking a comprehensive deal. This is a deeply rooted conviction, which is very hard to reverse or modify, and not necessarily just a neocon current. However, this sort of outlook borders on the delusional. If you were to listen to the foreign policy debate going on in the context of the US presidential campaign, you could think that something has been introduced into the water supply in Washington, D.C. that has made it difficult for the US political class to grasp how dangerous the situation in the Middle East is at the moment and how much in danger the position of the US is.

3. Iraq today

After having considered the situation in general, let us turn to the situation in Iraq. What regional role has Iraq been playing since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime? How is national reconciliation proceeding?

Under Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraq became an element of instability in the Middle East. Its irrational politics led to wars and conflicts with its neighbours. History has taught Iraq that playing the role of a troublemaker in a region full of tensions and conflicts is political suicide.

The new Iraq has adopted a different prospect for its future and its regional role, based on a safe and peaceful Iraq. Iraq seeks today to be an element of regional stability, a vision that is based on two pillars: cooperation with its neighbours and internal stability.



Leverett

The US political class is not able to grasp how dangerous the situation in the Middle East actually is

Perthes

Shaways

Today Iraq seeks to be an element of stability

Democracy in Iraq is not in the common interest
of either the external or the internal actors.

Zalewski

Iraq wants to achieve optimal
relations with its neighbours

Concerning Iraq's cooperation with its neighbours, Iraq's foreign policy is based on openness towards its neighbours and the establishment of a wide and diverse network of relations. Iraq actively participates in the conferences and activities of the neighbouring countries. The goal of achieving optimal relations with its neighbours is also mentioned in Article 8 of the Iraqi Constitution, which indicates the necessity to comply with the principles of good neighbourhood, without interference in the internal affairs of one's neighbours.

In Iraq, many internal reforms
have been encouraged...

Concerning Iraq's internal development, a lot of work has been done to ensure the elements of a multi-dimensional and comprehensive internal reform. National reconciliation has been encouraged through a number of legislative measures, e. g. general amnesty and the election of governorate councils as a step towards democracy's rule, through a fair representation of all components of Iraqi society.

... e.g. the local enforcement plan...

The local enforcement plan has been implemented. It establishes law enforcement on everyone and restricts the right to carry weapons only to the government and its formal apparatus. Thanks to this plan, the level of violence has been reduced all over the country and the terrorist and armed groups are losing ground.

... or the investment legislation

Considered to be the largest in history, the Iraqi budget for 2008 is about 47 billion dollars. A big part of the budget is used for the reconstruction of Iraq and for expanding the provision of social service for its citizens.

This year, the Iraqi economy will grow about seven percent. With the investment legislation, Iraq seeks to attract foreign investors. The government is working with the main Iraqi parties to expedite the application of oil and gas legislation to organize the process of investing in the country's resources and the fair distribution of these revenues to all the people of Iraq.

M. Kabalan

The improvement of the security situation in Iraq in recent months has not been reflected by any equivalent development in the political process. Even if the US tried to include all political parties, it has been too cautious because of its fear of antagonising certain sections of Iraqi society.

Zalewski

Democracy in Iraq is not in the common interest of either the external or the internal actors. Concerning the external actors, this is because Iraq's neighbouring countries are not democracies. Concerning the internal actors, not everybody in Iraq believes that it will be possible to solve Iraq's internal problems within a democratic order. It is difficult to develop democracy when people vote on a confessional and ethnic basis.



Today, the Iraqi people is divided into Sunnis, Shias and Kurds. For the Middle East, nationalism has not had the terrible consequences it has had for European history. In the Middle East, nationalism emerged from the struggle against the French and British occupation and unified the Arab nations. After the invasion of Iraq, the US was quite successful in eradicating the national consciousness in Iraq. Today, it acknowledges that it made a mistake, but now it is too late.

After the US intervention, the Iraqi central state fell apart and new identities emerged. Confessional and ethnic identities replaced the “Iraqi” identity. One indication of the weakness of the Iraqi central state is that the police does not work effectively. That means the state is not able to exert its power and its monopoly of violence on its own territory. Certainly, security issues can be addressed by military force, but this has only short-term results in a situation where long-term improvement is necessary.

The situation in Iraq is not only a problem for the neighbouring states, it is above all a power struggle in Iraq. When the United States used the Iraqi opposition to change the former regime, it brought in a group of politicians who tried to take revenge on other sectors rather than win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. They issued laws that benefited certain sectors vis-à-vis other groups. They divided Iraq into three different regions, creating a vacuum and instability. For example, the leaders of the northern region called Kurdistan refuse to fly the Iraqi flag in their region. Iraqis have to resolve their power struggle and establish a political system where every citizen has the same rights and equal opportunities before they can ask their neighbours to help them.

The Kurds did not fly the Iraqi flag because they do not feel they are part of Iraq, but because the flag showed symbols of Saddam Hussein and his party, which was unacceptable to the Kurdish people and even to the majority of the Iraqi people.

The Iraqi Kurds do not want to become an independent state. In October 1992—at a time when Iraqi Kurdistan already had gained de facto independence from Iraq—the Kurdish Parliament voted unanimously that Iraqi Kurdistan would become a region within a united, democratic and federal Iraq. Since then all major Kurdish parties have been working to reach this goal. Massoud Barzani, the Presi-

Omran

Eradicating the national consciousness in Iraq was a mistake

Hermann

The Iraqi central state is weak

Al-Masri

In Iraq, a power struggle is taking place

Shaways

The Iraqi Kurds do not want an independent state

Iraqi political forces have not pursued national reconciliation very vigorously. This is because the positions of the major communal groups on fundamental issues are in many respects irreconcilable.

Leverett



Iraq can only be ruled by a system that includes all components

dent of the Autonomous Kurdish Government in Iraq, called the Iraqi Constitution a guarantor for the unity of Iraq. In Baghdad, many important Kurdish personalities and leaders are working to build the new Iraq.

History teaches us that Iraq cannot be ruled by one component of the Iraqi people, but only by a system that includes all components. Since the overthrow of Saddam's regime, the Iraqi parties have tried to establish such a system: All governments since 2004 have been formed out of coalitions of different components of the Iraqi people. In the beginning, the Arabs did not participate in the government, but their participation is increasing.

Leverett

Iraqi political forces cannot achieve reconciliation on their own

Iraqi political forces have not pursued national reconciliation very vigorously. This is not because they do not feel responsible or because they do not want to or because they are waiting for a more secure environment to do so, but because they cannot do so on their own. The positions of the major communal groups on fundamental issues are in many respects irreconcilable.

Thus, the views you can observe in the US Presidential campaign on how to achieve reconciliation in Iraq are both mistaken. Senator McCain's view of staying in Iraq for a hundred years corresponds to the logic that the lower the level of violence, the more space in which Iraqi political forces can try to reach national reconciliation. Senator Obama's view of withdrawing forces reflects the logic that until US forces are reduced, Iraqi politicians will not deal with Iraqi problems, including national reconciliation.

4. Terrorism

Perthes

What kind of role is terrorism playing for Iraq and for its neighbourhood and what are the causes of terrorism?

Al-Muallem

Syria is worried about the al-Qaeda activities in Iraq

What we are facing in Iraq today is the destruction of its infrastructure by terrorist attacks. Syria is worried about the expanded al-Qaeda activities in Iraq, which are spreading throughout the region and to Syria; during recent years, many cells of al-Qaeda in Syria have been defused. That is why Syria cooperates with certain Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, on fighting terrorism. However, this is not enough; the US, the Iraqi government and neighbouring states must cooperate to prevent a further enlargement of al-Qaeda activities in the region.

The security situation in Iraq and particularly the struggle against terrorism are the greatest challenge for the new Iraq. Until now, they have shaped the complete political process in Iraq.

Shaways

The security situation in Iraq and particularly the struggle against terrorism are the greatest challenge for the new Iraq. Until now, they have shaped the complete political process in Iraq.

Iraq's neighbour states are all interested in a strong Iraq that will be able to enforce the rule of law, to secure its own territory, to fight terrorism and to prevent terrorists from committing assaults in neighbouring countries.

In 2005, Iraqis committed two terrorist attacks in Jordan: In August, a Katyusha rocket was fired at United States warships anchored at Aqaba in Jordan; in November, bombings in three different hotels in Amman killed 60 people. Now, nearly every month in Jordan, a cell of al-Qaeda is discovered and dismantled—not necessarily Iraqis. This situation can only be stabilized by a strong Iraq.

During the Cold War, there existed three trends in political thinking: the Marxist school, the fundamentalist school and the Pan-Arabist or nationalist school. In Syria, Pan-Arabism, which is closely related to secularism, was predominant. Syria suffered from fundamentalism and tried to eliminate terrorism under the slogan of human rights. After the collapse of the USSR, Marxism faded. Today, the fundamentalist school is represented by al-Qaeda and other extremist groups that commit terrorist attacks. The Pan-Arabist school is represented by the secular Baath party in Syria. Only the secular current of the Pan-Arabist school can effectively fight extremism and can serve as a basis for the political culture of the future in the region.

Along with some structural shortcomings in the region the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the US military presence are causes of terrorism. Osama bin Laden has been using these two arguments from the beginning of his terrorist struggle in the early 1990s. Hence it seems that as long as territory is occupied by Israel and US troops are present in the Middle East, there will be no peace in the Middle East.

Since 2003, the invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq, the political setting in Pakistan has been changing fundamentally and no one can predict where the country is heading and whether it will become another hotbed of terrorism. If the West really wants stability in the Middle East, it has to redefine what kind of policy is constructive and what kind is not. In any case, a paradigm shift is needed.



Shaways

Touq

Iraq's neighbours are all interested in a strong Iraq

Ammoura

Zahrani

Israeli occupation and US military presence are causes of terrorism

Whoever is interested in stabilizing Jordan and Syria should be interested in resolving the Iraqi refugee problem.

Wenzel



5. Refugees

Perthes

The refugee issue is another challenge for Iraq's neighbours. What is the impact of the Iraqi refugees coming to Syria and Jordan? How can we tackle this issue?

N. Kabalan

The impact of the refugees on Syria is enormous

One and a half million Iraqi refugees are living in Syria, sharing our water, our energy resources and our food supplies. The impact on the Syrian economy and social systems is enormous. The refugee issue has to be addressed by the international community.

Omran

Along with the Iraqi refugees, more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees are living in Syria and, during the war in Lebanon last year, more than one and a half million Lebanese refugees came to Syria. Syria is not asking for rewards for accepting these refugees. We do so because of our solidarity with our Arab brothers.

Wenzel

Whoever is interested in stabilizing Jordan and Syria should be interested in resolving the Iraqi refugee problem. These countries, which have weak economies, limited water resources and a weak social infrastructure in terms of issues like education and health care, are overwhelmed by the impact of the refugee influx. In Damascus alone, there are 300,000 Iraqis who should be going to school, but only 50,000 do so. Apart from the economic and social burdens, the influx of refugees is changing the confessional composition of the Jordanian and Syrian populations and is introducing new forms of transnational criminality. The fact that the number of refugees fluctuates does not defuse the situation—it makes no difference whether we are talking about 400,000 or 600,000 refugees in Jordan or about 800,000 or 2 million in Syria.

The influx of refugees is not as visible as one might think

The influx of refugees is not as visible as one might think because for the first time in history refugees are coming from an urban background and are moving to an urban situation. These people arrive in Jordan or Syria in their cars with their savings, they have friends and they can find a foothold. However, the longer they stay, the more difficult their situation becomes: Since refugees are not allowed to work, after they have depleted their savings they become needy. We have to think about the refugee issue from a long-term perspective.

Hadad

One fifth of the Iraqi population is living outside of Iraq. More Iraqi refugees have come to Syria than to any other neighbouring country. These people stem from

If the refugee problem is not tackled with international help, it will become a source for radicalism and terrorism.

Hoff

the middle class and are well educated. They must return and rebuild their country. Syria is offering and greatly helping to ease the misery of the Iraqi refugees, but neither the US nor Europe care about this.

There are a high number of refugees who cannot return because they are traumatized or belong to religious minorities—the situation of religious minorities in Iraq has deteriorated markedly since the overthrow of the former regime.

The host countries have to find ways to cope with this situation. Helping Syria and Jordan and offering cooperation on this issue could prepare the ground for further cooperation and a decrease in tensions.

Last year I visited some refugee camps at the Iraqi-Syrian border and I discovered that Syria is doing a great job in dealing with this problem. However, if the refugee problem is not tackled with international help, it will become a source for radicalism and terrorism.

I appeal to the European governments and NGOs to help Syria in tackling the refugee issue and especially in helping to tackle shortages in education for Iraqi pupils. To educate Iraqi pupils in Syria is in the vital interest of Syria, but capacities are exhausted.

Syria is trying to bring the German NGO, HELP International, which is already active in Jordan, to Syria to work for humanitarian purposes. The problem of the Iraqi refugees is that they do not live in camps, but with the Syrian people. Thus, it is more difficult to help them.



Wenzel

Many refugees cannot return

Hoff

Syria is doing a great job in dealing with the refugee problem

Omran

II. Regional actors

Perthes The development of the Middle East depends in the first place on the behaviour of regional actors. What interests do countries like Syria, Iran, Turkey, the Gulf States and Israel have and what role do they play in the region? What kind of Iraq do Syria, Iran and the Gulf States want?

1. What kind of Iraq do its neighbours want?

Perthes What is Syria's vision for Iraq?

Al-Muallem
Iraq should be united, independent,
sovereign...

At the Summit Conference of the Arab League in March 2007 in Riyadh, Syria presented a vision for a future Iraq according to two principles. First, Iraq has to be united and independent and its sovereignty and territorial integrity have to be respected. The unity of Iraq can only be achieved by a national reconciliation conference organized by the Iraqi government. In the Iraqi central government of national unity, all components of the Iraqi people must participate. Second, Iraq as a founding member of the Arab League is and remains an integral part of the Arab Islamic nation.

Syria is worried about the division of Iraq into its northern and southern parts. The definition of respective spheres of influence and control in the Middle East according to ethnic and religious groups—a kind of “Sykes-Picot Agreement II”—must be prevented. The Iraqi government has to revise the legislation concerning the distribution of the oil revenues of Iraq and guarantee a fair and equal distribution.

Altaqi
... secular and democratic

Syria has always sought a unified, secular, democratic and stable Iraq. It has no interest in another weak confessional neighbouring state in addition to Lebanon, since it believes that instability would make the region increasingly vulnerable to the influence of external powers.

Perthes What kind of Iraq does Iran want?

Zahrani
Iraq should not become
a US base against Iran...

Iran desires an independent, unified, economically and politically developed Iraq with a central government that is strong enough to secure its territorial integrity. Such an Iraq would favour cooperation between Iran and Iraq on many issues. If the US presence supports this aim, it will be accepted. However, if the US seeks to use Iraq as a base against Iran, or if Washington tries to instigate hostility be-

If US forces would withdraw soon without any problems from a stabilized Iraq, the US would be the winner of the Iraq crisis and would have much time to think about other issues, e.g. the next target, which would be Iran.

Maleki

tween Iran and Iraq, Iran will try to prevent this development, as would any other rational actor.

Neighbouring countries like Iran that are concerned about the situation in Iraq will not help the US to stabilize Iraq as long as they feel threatened by attacks from US bases in Iraq—a concern that is even greater than the threat from al-Qaeda.

Let me point out three scenarios for Iraq, which would be bitter, vague and good for Iran.

First, the bitter scenario would be a strong Arab Iraq. This would be an Iraq that again would try to gain leadership of the region or patronize Arab states as Iraq did under Saddam Hussein. In this kind of scenario, eventually a strong Arab Iraq would tend to attack Iran or Kuwait in order to gain more access to the Persian Gulf.

Second, a vague scenario would be a developed Iraq that is integrated into the GCC. This scenario is based on the assumption that Iraq will greatly increase its production and export of oil, maybe even to a larger extent than Iran (e.g. four million barrel per day). In this kind of Iraq, many US and EU companies will be in Iraq drilling for oil.

Third, a good scenario would be a democratic, independent, united, functioning and developed Iraq with the limited access to the Persian Gulf it has today (Iraq has about 15 to 60 kilometres of access to the Persian Gulf depending on the tide), gradually exploiting and producing oil but with limited capacity. In this scenario, Iraq would have very good relations with Iran and Iran would advocate Iraq becoming a member of the Economic Cooperation Organization to promote Iraq's economic development.

Concerning a US presence in Iraq, the best scenario for Iran would be a slow US withdrawal. If US forces would withdraw soon without any problems from a stabilized Iraq, the US would be the winner of the Iraq crisis and would have much time to think about other issues, e.g. the next target, which would be Iran. As long as the US has difficulties in Iraq and US military capacity is necessary in Iraq, the US will not attack Iran.

The GCC states have nearly the same position vis-à-vis Iraq as does Iran. They need a strong Iraq, but an Iraq that is not strong enough to be able to intimidate its neighbours again.



M. Kabalan

Maleki

... or seek leadership of the region

Touq

Syria is being blamed for much of the chaos in Iraq, but this is not true. A great portion of the chaos in Iraq is inborn in the country; another great portion is not fuelled by Syria, but by other states of the region.

Moubayed

2. Syria

Perthes

What role does Syria play in the region?

Moubayed

Syria wants to play a constructive role

Syria showed that it could play a constructive role in the region by contributing to the release of Allan Johnston, the British journalist working for the BBC who was kidnapped by a group of Palestinian militants in March 2007, and released nearly four months later.

However, Syria's capacity to contribute to a resolution to the Iraqi issues must not be overestimated. E. g., the Iraqi-Syrian border is very difficult to monitor. In the 1980s Saddam Hussein used to send car bombs to Syria across this border. Even though national security was at stake, the Syrian government was unable to prevent these car bombs from crossing the border. Today, the situation has not changed very much.

Al-Masri

Syria made compromises without being rewarded

Syria cooperated with the US after 9/11 and has made compromises and concessions without being rewarded. The US has not even addressed Syria's security concerns in the region. Instead, the American administration has issued ultimatums to Syria to do more and make more concessions. For example, Syria withdrew its forces from Lebanon and then Israel started intervening, thus creating new threats to Syria's security.

Moubayed

Syrian gestures are not acknowledged

Unlike many other states in the Middle East, Syria opened an embassy in Baghdad, which was logistically very difficult. This was a symbolic gesture by Syria that it recognizes the Iraqi government and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the new Iraqi system established by the US. However, Syria received nothing in return for this gesture. If Syrian gestures are not acknowledged, Syria will lose interest in cooperation and compromise.

In the same way, after 2003 many Syrian companies applied for tenders for the reconstruction of Iraq, but they were turned down under US pressure as part of the isolation strategy towards Syria. As a natural result, Syrian companies lost interest and did not apply for any more tenders after 2005.

The chaos in Iraq is not fuelled by Syria

Altogether, Syria is being blamed for much of the chaos in Iraq, but this is not true. A great portion of the chaos in Iraq is inborn in the country; another great portion is not fuelled by Syria, but by other states of the region. E. g. in November 29, 2006, Nawaf Obaid, a senior Saudi analyst, published an article in the Wash-



ington Post explicitly stating that Saudi Arabia was willing and able to deliver weapons and logistical support to Sunni militias in Iraq in order to protect Sunnis if the US leaves. From Syria, you never hear that kind of statement.

After the publication of the article, official Saudi sources immediately claimed it was untrue and Nawaf Obaid was sacked from his advisory role to the government of Saudi Arabia.

Syria is a credible international player that respects international law and is ready for peace with Israel. In 1974, Syria signed the Separation of Forces Agreement with Israel following the Yom Kippur War, which is still valid today. The peace process between Israel and the Arab countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians, which started in 1991, offered a bilateral and a multilateral track. Syria did not participate in the multilateral track because it saw the multilateral dialogue as an outcome of bilateral agreements. After 17 years of negotiations, 80 percent of the issues have been almost resolved, but they have failed to complete the negotiations.

To resolve the remaining 20 percent, we have to tackle the easier issues and not start with the more complex ones, e.g., we could work on resolving the problem of Sheeba Farms, a small area of land with disputed ownership located on the border between Lebanon and the Golan Heights, which would not be as difficult to resolve as the Golan Heights issue.

3. Iran

Since the Islamic Revolution, the West has assessed Iran as the major threat in the Middle East. As a result, it supported Iraq in its eight years of war against Iran. On the contrary, it was not Iran, a country that has never invaded any foreign country that was actually a threat, but Saddam, who attacked Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1992.

Such western misjudgements and intelligence failures in regard to the Middle East are not unusual. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter toasted the Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi as follows: "Iran under the leadership of the Shah is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world." Within a year, the Shah's leadership was over. Another misjudgement was the US justification to invade Iraq because of its possession of weapons of mass destruction—we all know that

Hermann

Ammoura

Syria is ready for peace with Israel

Zahrani

Iran poses no threat in the Middle East...

Western politicians and media outlets have been constructing the idea that Iran is a threat for such a long time that it has become a reality and the basis of western policy towards Iran.

Zahrani

... and does not seek to develop a nuclear bomb

there were none. Thus, when talking about accusing Iran of seeking to develop a nuclear bomb, I would like to remind you all of the past. The US experience has taught us that a threat is not necessarily where you want it to be.

Iran does not seek to develop a nuclear bomb. First, it does not need a nuclear bomb for deterrence. There are different conceptions of deterrence: In the West, deterrence is linked to the possession of nuclear weapons, but Iranian decision-makers usually believe that Iran does not need a nuclear bomb to deter attack because Iran has been successfully deterring the US since the eighties through means other than nuclear weapons. Second, Iran does not seek to develop a nuclear bomb because it already has conventional superiority in the region; developing a nuclear bomb would mean abandoning this superiority due to regional proliferation, which would be a likely consequence of Iran becoming nuclear.

The Iranian people have been hurt by the loss of technology and economic benefits during the past twenty-five years through unjustified sanctions based on varying justifications and not through accusations of trying to build a nuclear bomb.

Against all these arguments, western politicians and media outlets have been constructing the idea that Iran is a threat for such a long time that it has become a reality and the basis of western policy towards Iran. For Iran, it has become almost impossible to deconstruct this western construct.

The Iranian threat is a western construction

The Iranian threat is not only a western construction. Neighbouring countries like the GCC States also feel threatened by Iran. Iran has to reassure the other countries in the region, particularly the GCC, that it does not have any ambitions to develop nuclear weapons.

Touq

The GCC States also feel threatened by Iran

Hermann

Iran itself feels threatened by the West

Iran itself feels threatened by the West, especially by US troops, which are stationed in Iraq, in Afghanistan and in the Gulf. Iran's goal was to make all foreign forces leave the region, however now American and French soldiers are stationed at both of the strategically most important straits, in Bab-el-Mandeb and in the Strait of Hormuz.

Altaqi

Iran's emergence as a regionally powerful country is due to the weakness of the regions' states and their conflicts. This fact constitutes a potential for conflicts, and this possibility can be prevented only by establishing a security system in the Gulf, which should engage Iran as a guarantee for success.



Iran is carefully balancing military actions. In 1998, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan attacked the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e Sharif and killed eight diplomats. As a reaction, the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami sent about 35,000 troops, aircrafts, tanks and armoured vehicles to Iran's north-eastern border to Afghanistan. US intelligence officials warned the Pentagon and the White House that an Iranian attack on Afghanistan was imminent. In this tense situation, former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani advised against an attack because, as he said, Afghanistan was like a marsh where you can easily enter, but never come out. Then Khatami abandoned his plans to attack the Afghan city of Herat in the west of Afghanistan. Later, the Pakistani government told the Iranian government that the attack on the consulate was a plot designed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban to draw Iran into a war in Afghanistan in order to provoke the US to support the Taliban regime against Iran.

Iran is playing a constructive role in the region: It is doing a lot in northern Afghanistan, investing in buildings and infrastructure such as roads, electricity, support with gas and educational structures. From April 2008, there will be a bus line between Mashhad and Quetta in Pakistan. This also represents a possibility to stabilize at least a part of the region.

Iran is more active in resolving the Iraqi issue than any other neighbour. Iran is supporting the Iraqi government—the essential player in Iraq—not in order to use it as a puppet and to heighten its influence, but because Iran is interested in a functioning and stable Iraq. Iran is the only state in the region to send its President to Iraq—many major regional powers do not even have an embassy in Baghdad. Instead of recognising Iran's constructive role, the West suspects Iran of seeking to destabilize Iraq.

Why are the political leaders from Europe and from Iraq's neighbouring countries not visiting Iraq? They should not leave this field to the Iranian President.

The Jordanian Prime Minister was the first Prime Minister to visit Iraq with a large delegation of his government. All Iraqi officials who travel to the West go by way of Jordan, and when they come to Amman they have the opportunity to meet with all the political representatives. I myself met the Iraqi President, the Prime Minister, the two Vice Presidents and several ministers when they came to or travelled via Jordan.

Maleki

Iran is carefully balancing military actions ...

Hoff

... is playing a constructive role ...

Sajjadpour

... and supports the Iraqi government

Hermann

Touq

The policy of the Gulf States towards Iran is an encouraging example of a constructive policy in the region.

Hermann



4. The Gulf States

Al-Masri

When it comes to the Arab World there are two groups of states. One group of states, which the US calls “Moderate Arab States”, support the US because they have adopted a bandwagon strategy that defines their national interest by allying themselves with the US to protect their regimes, and the other group of states which has adopted a balancing strategy to deal with the threat to their national security. The first group is composed of the Gulf States, Jordan, and Egypt. The second group includes Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Hermann

The Gulf States are pursuing a constructive policy towards Iran

The policy of the Gulf States towards Iran is an encouraging example of a constructive policy in the region. Of course, the Gulf States feel threatened by the possibility of an Iranian nuclear bomb, but they do not follow the US advice to isolate and confront Iran. Instead, Saudi Arabia has proposed that countries in the Middle East establish a consortium for enriching uranium for peaceful nuclear projects, with the actual processing of the material being done in a neutral country. In addition, the GCC is assessing the possibility of signing a free trade agreement with Iran and President Ahmadinejad was invited to the GCC summit in 2007 and to be King Abdullah’s personal guest during the Hajj. These kinds of meetings provide opportunities to tackle issues concerning Iran directly and indirect issues concerning Lebanon and Iraq. This kind of policy seems to me to be the only way to stabilize the region.

Mützenich

Saudi Arabia is initiating numerous activities

Saudi Arabia has achieved a new role in the Middle East, where it is initiating numerous activities, and it is playing this role very publicly. For example Saudi Arabia attempted to bring together Fatah and Hamas, to mediate between the conflicting parties in Lebanon and to integrate Iran into a regional order. This is remarkable because this kind of active and, in part, even public diplomacy was rarely discernible in the past. Empathy, meaning the ability to take opinions other than one’s own into account, is the driving force behind such suggestions. In addition, Turkey and Iran are also active with regard to their respective initiatives in the Near and Middle East. The western states should react positively to these processes.

N. Kabalan

Saudi foreign policy is strongly influenced by the US, which is causing tensions between Saudi Arabia and its neighbours, particularly with Syria. At the moment, some hard-line Saudi royals are taking over decision-making policies in the Kingdom. This is a very dangerous threat to stability in the region.

There is no alternative to the recognition of Israel's right to exist. In order to reach a peace agreement, the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel that were signed in 1978 can still be regarded as a model.

Schlie

Over the next decades, the GCC is going to play an increasingly important role in global finance and in the international economy. Today, the collective current account surplus of the GCC is at least as important for the financing of global economic imbalances as China's. On a per capita basis, it is considerably more important than China's. If the increasing economic importance of the GCC would go along with deepening integration, e.g. the evolution of a common currency, this could have a stabilising effect on the whole region.

GCC integration is helping a regional order to emerge, but US policy has been at best ambivalent about that in contrast to European integration, where US policy has generally been supportive. However, GCC integration would be in the interest of the US and of the whole region.

In the Gulf, the most important non-state actor is business. The development of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf is a success story because politics is not on their agenda, but business is. By investing in other Arab countries, the GCC countries are exporting their business philosophy. Common business interests could be a starting point for the creation of a collective security system. A free trade agreement between the GCC and Iran, as proposed by the GCC, or the qualified industrial zones, as being implemented in Jordan and Egypt, are first steps in this direction. Enlarging the GCC would be another option.

5. Israel

Between many Arab States and Israel there are no diplomatic relations and Israel's right to exist is still not recognized by all the actors in the region. What role can Israel play in the region and how can peace with its neighbours become a reality?

Israel is a relevant player in the region and its legitimate interests have to be considered. We in Europe have learned from experience that a stable regional order and regional integration are only possible if the existence of all relevant players is accepted and if their interests are taken into account.

There is no alternative to the recognition of Israel's right to exist. In order to reach a peace agreement, the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel that were signed in 1978 can still be regarded as a model. The Middle East needs a stable Iraq, but it also needs security for Israel and a viable state for Palestinians.



Leverett

The GCC States will gain in importance

Hermann

In the Gulf, the most important non-state actor is business

Perthes

Fischer

Israel's interests have to be considered

Schlie

Annapolis does not exist anymore.
Today, instead of moving forward, we are
moving backward from Annapolis.

Ammoura



Hadad
Israel has to implement
UN Resolutions 242 and 338

Syria is ready for peace with Israel, but Israel has to meet the following requirements: First, Israel has to implement the UN Resolutions 242 from 1967 and 338 from 1973, which call for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied during the Six Day War. This means that the Golan Heights have to be returned to Syria. According to the Arab Peace Initiative, all Arab countries will recognize Israel if Israel withdraws from the occupied territory. Second, Israel has to recognize a Palestinian independent state with Jerusalem as its capital within the borders of 1967. Third, Israel must recognize the right of return of the Palestinian refugees.

Ammoura

Israel is not trying to build confidence with Arab countries. It was not the Arab countries, but Israeli that occupied foreign territory and the violation of international law has caused a flux of refugees—Palestinian refugees from Palestine, Syrians from the Golan Heights and Lebanese from Lebanon.

Perthes

How do you estimate the effect of the Annapolis Conference for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

Ammoura
Annapolis does not exist anymore

Annapolis does not exist anymore. Today, instead of moving forward, we are moving backward from Annapolis: New Israeli settlements are being constructed, people are being killed, Gaza is besieged and the wall continues to be built. Unfortunately, there is no strong will to find a political solution for the conflict. Why did President Bush not begin to engage in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict earlier in his presidency?

Leverett

There will be no viable two-state solution to the Palestinian issue. From this starting point, we need to think about a regional security order without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

Touq

Solving the Iraqi problem will not boost the Annapolis process. I doubt that Annapolis will have any consequences until the end of the year—a sixty year-old conflict is not going to be solved in the next six or eight months.

6. Turkey

Perthes

Is Turkey a regional or external actor in the Middle East? What role could it play?

The definition of the Middle East has evolved. In the 1970s and 1980s, Turkey was not a regional actor in the Middle East, but this has changed since the 1990s. Without Turkey, no security system will be possible.

Benli Altunisik

Turkey is not a part of the Middle East, but it is an Islamic country with a relationship with Israel. That gives it a unique position to be able to play a moderating role between conflicting parties in the region.

The definition of the Middle East has evolved. In the 1970s and 1980s, Turkey was not a regional actor in the Middle East, but this has changed since the 1990s. Without Turkey, no security system will be possible.

The current Turkish government wants Turkey to become a mediator for the different conflicts in the region. Turkey has already played a constructive role in fostering the Israeli-Syrian track, the Iranian-EU track and in mediating in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. However, the Kurdish issue and its extension in the form of the PKK represent Turkey's Achilles' heel. If Turkey is able to resolve these issues, it will conceivably be able to play a constructive role in both building regional frameworks for cooperation and in helping to resolve some of the regional conflicts. The recent incursions into Iraq could create an opportunity for a Turkish opening towards the Kurdish issue, towards the Iraqi Kurds and towards Iraq in general. The invitation of the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who is a Kurd, is a sign of this dual track policy which simultaneously aims to deal militarily with the PKK and open a diplomatic dialogue with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.

Since the Kurdish issue concerns both domestic policy and foreign policy, any prescriptions must have two dimensions.

Most of the Turkish people realize today that the Kurdish issue cannot be dealt with by military means alone, but that it also has an economic, social, political and cultural dimension. Even if it has been difficult to discuss these dimensions with the PKK, the prescription is to continue these discussions, which would also keep the EU process going.

The external dimension of the Kurdish issue concerns first of all relations with Iraq and with Iraqi Kurds. Apart from the incursions and the fight against the PKK, Turkey is strengthening its economic ties with Iraq. Especially in the northern part, Turkey is investing billions of dollars. Furthermore, there is a plan to open up a consulate in Basra and to establish an industrial zone there as well. There is already a consulate in Mosul. This is a promising path towards playing a more constructive role for Turkey in the creation of a stable Iraq.



Touq

Turkey is not a part of the region

Benli Altunisik

Turkey could become a mediator in the region ...

... but only if it resolves the Kurdish issue

III. External actors

1. The Middle East as a stage for external actors

Perthes What role do external actors play in the Middle East and how will their role develop in the future? What are the interests of the US, the EU, China and Russia and how are they pursuing them?

Altaqi The international powers have conflicting interests in the Middle East, and each of them is interested in securing the flow of energy supplies. Thus, the Middle East has a high potential to become a region of conflicts over energy resources and energy transit routes.

The external powers have conflicting interests in the region...

Hermann The Middle East is so vital for the global economy that no external player can afford permanent instability. The major converging interest of all external players in the Middle East is the safeguarding of energy deliveries in order not to jeopardize their own prosperity.

Zahrani The competition between external powers for Middle East oil will increase. One reason for the US presence in the region is that the US has foreseen this competition for oil. However, the great powers have to resolve their energy rivalry among themselves instead of battling it out in the region itself. It is certain that without Iraq's oil reserves, the US would not be present in Iraq, regardless of possible weapons of mass destruction.

... and their competition for oil will increase

In the 2006 US National Security Strategy, Iran was identified as the main threat. This was the first time that a Third World country was described as the main threat to a superpower. However, the issue is not the threat of weapons of mass destruction, but the fact that a hostile Islamic regime is controlling huge reserves of oil and gas over which the US is competing with China and India in addition to Japan and Europe. Already in 1953, when the British presented the coup plan against the Mosaddeq-led Iranian government to the CIA, Frank Wisner, the Directorate of Plans of the CIA, refused to cooperate. Then the British guaranteed the Americans their share in the oil and they accepted.

Hermann To increase their influence in the region, some external players concentrate on military power while others send their companies. Since the US has lost a great deal of its appeal and its soft power, France has taken the opportunity to open a naval base in Abu Dhabi, thus offering complementary alternatives to the US security shield.

If the US gets serious about being, from the perspective of other players, a responsible hegemon, then it can re-legitimate its leading role in the Middle East.

Leverett

NATO and ASEAN will play important roles in the Middle East because of the dependence of their member states on the energy resources from the Middle East. The contours of a multi-layer regional order are becoming apparent. The prelude for NATO influence in the region could have been the French naval base President Sarkozy agreed upon during his recent trip.

However, we should not concentrate too much on the West, but also on the rise of China and the return of Russia. The rivalry of three major external players in the Middle East makes the situation much more complicated. In Iran, for example, the construction of two out of three major refineries was recently commissioned to Chinese companies because German companies are not allowed to build anything in Iran, including refineries. Chinese energy policy in Africa represents a taste of the energy policy in the Gulf we might see in the future. Russia is trying to bring Iran into its orbit. Russia's attempts to extend its grasp over the pipelines and energy routes in Eastern Europe and Central Europe would be nonsense without Iran on its side.

China, India and Russia are increasing their involvement in the Middle East. For China and India, this is obviously primarily driven by an interest in access to the region's energy resources and these countries are using a multiplicity of tools to develop energy relationships with the Middle East. Trade and investment between these rising powers and the Middle East are expanding dramatically, a trend that will continue.

The degree to which these rising powers will be able to translate their economic engagement in the region into real political influence is still dependent on how well the US pursues its policy. If the US gets serious about being, from the perspective of other players, a responsible hegemon that tries to resolve regional conflicts in a serious way and that deals in a constructive way with a rising Iran, then the US can re-legitimate its leading role in the Middle East. If the US does not become a responsible hegemon, countries in the region will end up resorting to these hedges with China, India and Russia with greater and greater frequency.

A number of countries in the Middle East are hedging against a further deterioration in the quality of US engagement in the region. The Sino-Saudi relationship, Iranian-Russian relationship and Iranian-Chinese relationship all have to be seen in this context.



NATO and ASEAN will play important roles in the region

We should not concentrate too much on the West ...

Leverett

... but also on China, India and Russia

The Iraq war has to be seen in the global context and as part of US global strategy. Since the end of the Cold War, the global hegemon has been trying to rebuild the global order but, rather than order, it has created chaos and insecurity.

Al-Masri



2. The United States

Perthes How do you assess US foreign policy during recent years and the role the US will play for the future of the Middle East?

Al-Masri
The US is trying to impose an order on the Middle East

The Iraq war has to be seen in the global context and as part of US global strategy. Since the end of the Cold War, the global hegemon has been trying to rebuild the global order but, rather than order, it has created chaos and insecurity.

Shortly before the expiration of the US ultimatum to Iraq, at a session of the UN Security Council on February 14 2003 that I watched on TV, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin warned against the impending Iraq war. In this moment I believed that we were moving towards a global order that would be different from the one the US wanted to impose on the world and on the Middle East. Unfortunately, this was an error and in the end the US concept of global order based on pre-emption and preventive war prevailed. Today, most of the countries in the Middle East are feeling insecure because of the regional order the US is trying to impose.

Moubayed US policy in Iraq and the Middle East over the past couple of years has been based on two principles: looking for scapegoats and searching for success stories.

First, US policy was always looking for scapegoats, e.g. in 2003 before the Iraq War it started to categorize Syria as a rogue state. The rationale was that Syria had close relations with Iraq, was still Baathist and opposed the war. This categorization alienated the Syrians and created bad blood in the US-Syrian relationship at a time when Syrian cooperation would have been very fundamental.

The US has been arming tribes in Iraq without thinking about the long-term consequences

Second, the US has been searching for success stories without having a long-term project. E.g., in the case of the Awakening Councils, the US has been arming tribes in Iraq without thinking about the long-term consequences. What will happen to these arms if one day the US leaves Iraq and the Awakening Councils are disbanded? Iraq's neighbours are not comfortable when they observe such an uncontrolled distribution of arms in Iraq.

Altaqi Since the invasion of Iraq, the US has been using that country as a starting point to remodel the Middle East and spread democracy. However, when former US Secretary of State Collin Powell visited Damascus after the fall of Baghdad, he did not only ask Syria to play a constructive role in Iraq, but to accept an end to the

If the US were as bad and tricky as they are sometimes described in the Middle East, they would already have left Iraq.

Fischer

Middle East Peace Process without resolving it and to sack the Palestinian factions residing in Damascus and exert pressure to disarm Hezbollah.

Parallel to the geopolitical revolution in the Middle East, there has been a neo-conservative revolution in the US. The consequences of this revolution have been a US foreign policy that moves from one disaster to another and the decline of US popularity and credibility in the Middle East. This decline is the reason why Europe has the great opportunity to become a major player in the region.

If the US were as bad and tricky as they are sometimes described in the Middle East, they would already have left Iraq.

There are three reasons why the US is unable to resolve the issues in Iraq: First, the US concepts of a future Iraq that are at the basis of US policy are permanently changing. Thus, the US has to find one single concept it can rely on as a consistent base. Second, the US blandishes the situation in Iraq, but it has to face the realities. Third, the US does not recognize the interests of the relevant actors in the region, such as Iran or Syria, but pursues a strategy of isolation. As long as this continues, there will be no solution to the problems.

In 2006, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia sent a letter to President Bush saying that Saudi Arabia had two nightmares concerning the US and Iran: First, that Iran could acquire nuclear weapons and become the dominant regional power, second that the US could go to war with Iran in order to stop its acquisition of nuclear weapons. The only way to avoid these two nightmares was for Iran and the US to deal with these problems. Today, there is a third Saudi nightmare, namely that the US will make a deal with Iran at the expense of the GCC states or the Arab world more broadly. This deal could be that in return for giving in on the nuclear question, the US would acquiesce in Iranian dominance over Iraq and heighten Iranian influence in Lebanon and in Palestine. However, a deal like that would not be politically sustainable in the US, even if a US administration wanted to go through with it.

US-Iranian relations are contradictory. On the one hand, US-Iranian relations will not be normalized in the near future. On the other hand, for decades Iran and



N. Kabalan

US foreign policy moves from one disaster to another

Fischer

Sajjadpour

Leverett

Saudi Arabia has three nightmares concerning the US and Iran

Zahrani

The US and the Iraqi government have to agree on a pragmatic timetable to assure an “honourable exit” of the US from Iraq.

Al-Muallem



the US have been cooperating occasionally on relevant ad hoc issues, e.g. in Afghanistan, in Lebanon, in Iraq and in Bosnia. These cooperative efforts have also had strategic implications.

3. US presence in Iraq

Perthes How long will—and how long should—the US stay in Iraq?

Al-Muallem When the US invaded Iraq in 2003, it had no strategy for the time after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime. The only thing in post-Saddam Iraq Americans thought about in advance was how to invest in Iraqi oil. Today, five years later, the US is pursuing the simple strategy of “We will stay until we achieve our goals”. Unfortunately, however, these goals are not clear.

Nobody knows how long the US will stay in Iraq. This will depend on who is elected US President in November of this year. According to Senator John McCain, the US will stay one hundred years in Iraq. According to Senator Barack Obama, the US will withdraw tomorrow.

Leverett
US troops will stay in Iraq for a considerable period of time

Regardless of who becomes the next US President, US troops will stay in Iraq for a considerable period of time. Even if both Democratic candidates are committed to the reduction of the American military presence in Iraq, both intend to maintain significant residual forces in Iraq. In case of a Clinton administration, these forces would be around 50,000 or 60,000 soldiers; in case of an Obama administration, the number could be a little bit lower. Even in a McCain administration, US forces in Iraq will be reduced, too, simply because the US military is not going to be able to sustain more than 100,000 soldiers in Iraq indefinitely.

Al-Muallem
An “honourable exit” of the US has to be assured

As long as the US is occupying Iraq, organisations resisting the occupation will find public support. Syria considers resisting the occupation to be legitimate as long as the occupied territories cannot be liberated by political and peaceful means. Thus the US and the Iraqi government have to agree on a pragmatic timetable to assure an “honourable exit” of the US from Iraq.

Schlie Iraq cannot be stabilized without the US. The Iraqi police, security and military forces still require strong US support. Although there have been many failures

The idea that America should play no role in the region is a non-starter.

Fischer

and misperceptions in the past, we have to recognize the tremendous US efforts in Iraq. The operational effectiveness of the US armed forces and civilian missions must remain paramount. America has been actively involved diplomatically in finding solutions to the current problems, making sure that Iraq will not become a place where the territory can be used as a sanctuary for terrorist activity.

As long as US troops are occupying Iraq illegally, there will be no legitimate solution for the Iraqi people that acknowledge their rights, their history and the diversity of their culture.

A schedule for withdrawal would not only be an element of stability, but also will re-institutionalize the Iraqi state, since the US presence in Iraq is a major source of divergence between Iraqis.

The US should announce a schedule for withdrawal from Iraq. As a result, the Iraqis would gain more responsibility and start dealing with their own internal situation more seriously. A withdrawal of the US would undermine the argument of the terrorists that their goal is to kick the US out of Iraq.

For the security of Iraq, US troops are at the moment indispensable and cannot be replaced by Iraqi troops. If the US would withdraw immediately from Iraq, a power vacuum—after a violent overthrow, the second dangerous threat to a stable order—would emerge that would suck all the regional powers into confrontation and war, declared or undeclared. Everybody who doubts this should look at the history of Afghanistan where, after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, a power vacuum emerged, which led to civil war and the Taliban regime. A similar development in Iraq would be a nightmare for all the players in the region and security and stability would be farther away than they are today. Thus, at the moment, there is no alternative to the US presence in Iraq and the Middle East, and the idea that America should play no role in the region is a non-starter. Even Iran, which wants to prevent Iraq from becoming a base for US attacks against itself, has to recognize this fact.



Ammoura

Altaqi

A schedule for withdrawal is needed

Touq

Fischer

At the moment, there is no alternative to US presence in Iraq

Compared to its position in the international system, the EU has not done enough to assist the countries in the Middle East in resolving their conflicts.

Sajjadpour



4. The European Union

Perthes How is the EU concerned with the Middle East, what are its interests and what role should the EU play?

Fischer Europe's security is defined in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Revolutionary developments, a nuclear capacity on the part of Iran or, even worse, a nuclear arms race between major players in the region would change Europe's strategic posture completely. Thus, positive developments in the Middle East are in the vital interest of Europe.

Barbara Security in Iraq also extends to Europe. Security in Iraq is not limited to Iraq's neighbouring countries but also extends to Europe. The bombings of Madrid in 2004 and of London in 2005 proved that Europe's borders have become penetrable and that Islamic extremism is a matter of concern to the EU. At the present time, Europe not only has political and economic interests in the Middle East, but also a political interest in its security. Thus, the EU should play a bigger role in creating stability and security in the region.

The EU cannot limit its interest to guaranteeing the security of European companies working in Iraq. The European Council Statement in 2003 urged the opening of discussion and dialogue with all neighbouring countries. Isolating one country like Syria or isolating one party like the Baath Party, which is supported by sizable groups of the Iraqi population, is not a solution. Security and stability need a consolidated dialogue with all neighbouring countries with the participation of the international and European communities. The dialogue should include all segments of the Iraqi community based on a solid legal foundation.

First of all, security requires a legal foundation so that it can be effective. International law and the Security Council have failed in regards to the Iraq case. Security is greatly needed in order to reinforce the rule of law. Several European countries participated in the invasion of Iraq, and these governments were held accountable by their people. Therefore they have been changed. Consequently, these countries have to pay their share to establish security in Iraq.

Sajjadpour Compared to its position in the international system, the EU has not done enough to assist the countries in the Middle East in resolving their conflicts. If the EU is doing something, it is nothing solid that promotes cooperation or conflict resolution.

Since 9/11, Europe has lost its own voice and betrayed its values in following the US unconditionally.

Omran



Since 9/11, Europe has lost its own voice and betrayed its values in following the US unconditionally. Once, Europe's values were freedom, democracy and a set of independent ethics to distinguish good from bad. Today, however, Europeans do not dare to speak out loudly anymore on what is good and what is bad. If they were to do so, they would have to blame the US for its intervention in Iraq and its disastrous crisis management, and they would have to recognize Syria's engagement in hosting the refugees from neighbouring countries. Europe should recover its independent ethics, which means to judge without looking at whom you are judging.

When we talk about law and order, we have to agree on the kind of law we want: the law of the jungle or international law in accordance with the United Nations Charter? This leads us to the principal moral question, namely whether we believe that "might is right" or that "right is might". In the first case, an action by the most powerful is legitimate because of its power, whether it has been acquired by a strong economic position or by the possession of weapons or energy resources or whatever. In the second case, we have fixed moral standards of "good" and "bad" regardless of the standards of the most powerful. The EU should return to its former conviction that "right is might".

The West should stick to its principles. If democracy is a western principle and elections are an element of democracy, then the West has to accept the election of Hamas. To accept Hamas and to work with it would be a window of opportunity. If the compliance with international norms and agreements is a western principle, then the West has to implement UN resolutions against the occupation of Syrian and Palestinian territory by Israel.

When I first came to Europe, I thought that the European countries always had a common long-term strategy and a common position. The longer I stayed, however, the more I discovered that this was not necessarily the case. Our reaction was to start dealing with particular European countries on decisive issues, particularly in the political sphere, instead of dealing with Europe as a whole.

In the Middle East, the capacity of western actors to develop long-term strategies is over-estimated. Similar to actors in the Middle East, Europeans very often act on a day-to-day basis without any idea of a larger strategy. In return, in the West,

Omran

Europe should recover its own voice ...

Ammoura

... return to its former conviction that "right is might" ...

Zahrani

... and stick to its principles

Touq

Perthes

In the Middle East, the capacity of western actors to develop long-term strategies is over-estimated. Similar to actors in the Middle East, Europeans very often act on a day-to-day basis without any idea of a larger strategy.

Perthes



Middle Eastern actors are often supposed to dissimulate their priorities and to demonstrate a kind of long-term conspirational thinking.

Michaelis

The EU should be prepared for a burden-sharing debate with the US

The new US Administration will have many more expectations towards the EU in Iraq. There will be a serious debate about burden-sharing in the Middle East and in Afghanistan, but also in the rest of the world. The EU already has a fairly pragmatic, meaningful and substantial policy with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict but not with regard to the whole of the Middle East. In order to be prepared for this burden-sharing debate, the EU has two sets of homework for 2008: It first needs to develop an applicable policy concept with regard to Iraq and Iran and, second, it needs a strategic vision regarding the US role in the region.

IV. Possibilities for cooperation

1. A regional approach?

When we think about conflict resolution in the Middle East, what kind of approach should we follow? Should we concentrate on particular conflicts or should we think about a comprehensive approach?

One of the results of the American intervention in Iraq is that subregional conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the Israeli-Arab Conflict or the conflict in Lebanon, which already existed, have been interconnected into one big conflict. Relevant players like Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel or Turkey have their stakes in all of these conflicts—stakes that are extremely high for all players. Thus a step-by-step approach that tries to settle one conflict after the other will not work. Instead, we need a broader regional approach, one which comes out of the region—I say this also against the background of the European experience.

To develop this kind of approach, we have to define basic common principles. First, borders are untouchable and territorial integrity has to be preserved. Second, conflict settlement will occur only by peaceful means. Third, transparency regarding military activities and the level of military force is indispensable.

The fact that the conflicts in the Middle East are interlocking and that we are unsure whether we can resolve them singly or collectively is causing paralysis. This paralysis is understandable because so much is at stake: the future of the whole region and therefore the futures of all the key internal and external actors, the nature of the regional system, the relative power of state and non-state actors. There are many potential losers and winners. However, paralysis is not a policy.

The conflicts in the region cannot be resolved unilaterally—neither by the US, nor the Europeans, nor the neighbouring countries.

As the conflicts in the region are today more interconnected than in the past, dealing with them is becoming more difficult. Especially the Iraqi issue and the crisis over the Iranian nuclear programme cannot be tackled independently of one another. There has to be a trade-off between the US and Iran: US concessions in the nuclear crisis in exchange for Iranian cooperation in stabilizing Iraq.

Perthes

Fischer

As a result of the Iraq war, conflicts in the region have been interconnected

Hollis

Hoff

Benli Altunisik

Waiting to resolve the Iraqi problem until all the other conflicts in the region are resolved would mean waiting years if not decades.

Touq



N. Kabalan
We need to work out a comprehensive package

We cannot solve the Iraqi problem without addressing other relevant conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the situation in South Lebanon and the conflict over the Golan Heights. Until now, these conflicts have been addressed more as an effect rather than a cause of other conflicts. In an overall analysis, we need to find the roots of these conflicts and then we have to work out a comprehensive package to resolve them.

Schlie

The Iraqi issues and regional agreements are intrinsically linked. Without stability and good governance in Iraq, there will be no solution to regional security.

Altaqi

Rather than working on resolving the Iraqi conflict, we need a vision for an overall reconciliation between the regional players regarding Iraq. Each state has its own interests, concerns and opportunities for Iraq. This region needs international engagement in order to establish a collective security system.

Al-Muallem

Although the conflicts in the region are interconnected, the resolution of the Iraqi issue must not wait until all the conflicts in the region are resolved.

Touq

First, the issues in Iraq have to be resolved

Waiting to resolve the Iraqi problem until all the other conflicts in the region are resolved would mean waiting years if not decades. This would be a catastrophe for the region. The possibility to resolve many conflicts in the region depends on the resolution of the issues in Iraq because of two reasons. First, a strong, unified Iraq could have a constructive spillover effect on the whole region. Second, based on the concessions the US and Iraq's neighbouring countries will have to make in order to tackle the Iraqi issues, a mutual understanding will emerge that will help to resolve other conflicts in the region.

Hermann

You cannot promote a successful regional design without working on step-by-step approaches on the ground.

Shaways
We should start with tackling smaller problems

Solving smaller problems will contribute to the solution of major problems. E. g., Iraq could solve some minor problems with Iran concerning the border of 1974. Iraq can contribute to tackling the refugee problem in Syria by helping Syria with its water supply. Iraq could settle the border conflict with Kuwait.

It is not possible to solve all problems at once, but this does not mean that a regional approach is wrong.



Michaelis

Although we can observe an increased if not absolute interconnectedness of problems in the Middle East, we must not fall into the trap of setting up the vision of a “grand design approach” that cannot be realized because of its complexity. It is not possible to solve all problems at once, but this does not mean that a regional approach is wrong. Instead, an effective regional approach should concentrate on the main problems while at the same time including all necessary aspects of the regional dimension. Instead of an institutional top-down approach, which would correspond to the European way of handling problems, this would be a pragmatic bottom-up approach.

At the moment, the relevant actors in the Middle East realize that regional approaches are more effective than approaches that neglect the regional dimension. This explains why, in contrast to the Oslo Agreements, the Conference of Annapolis includes a regional dimension. In Lebanon, the Arab League has been taking the regional dimension more and more into account and in Iraq, after years of deadlock, the neighbouring countries have initiated meetings.

Although conflicts in the region are interconnected, it would be rather ambitious to address them all in one go within a security framework encompassing the whole broader Middle East region. At present, it seems more promising to promote subregional security arrangements and see whether they can eventually grow into one. The best way to do this would be to build upon already existing formats. For Iraq, this would be the neighbouring countries’ meetings. For the Gulf, this could include the systems of maritime security already in place along with further confidence-building measures. These processes could be supported and thus reinforced from the outside. But ownership on the part of the regional players remains essential.

2. A system of collective security?

Could a system of collective security in the Middle East help to resolve the interlocking conflicts and to stabilize the region?

Over the last hundred years, all security systems in the Middle East have collapsed. The security system established by the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was based on British and French proxy states, collapsed because of emerging Arab nationalism. With the departure of the British from the Persian Gulf in the early

Michaelis

We should concentrate on the main problems

Tarraf

We should promote subregional security arrangements

Perthes

Zahrani

Until today, all security systems in the region have collapsed

Today, the Middle East is regulated by a balance of power. That is why Iraq's neighbours pursue their conflicting short-term interests in Iraq even if they share a long-term interest.

Benli Altunisik



1970s, President Richard Nixon announced his “twin-pillar policy”, which aimed for regional security, likewise relying on Iran and on Saudi Arabia. This security system collapsed at the latest with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In the 1990s, the US established its “dual containment” policy, whereby the US was to contain Iran and Iraq, especially after the Gulf War of 1991. The idea was to balance Iran and Iraq in preserving their mutual hostility. This policy was replaced after 9/11 when US intervention was first a probable threat and then became a reality as a precondition and the consequence of the Iraq War.

Benli Altunisik

The balance of power should be replaced by a system of cooperative security ...

Today, the Middle East is regulated by a balance of power. That is why Iraq's neighbours pursue their conflicting short-term interests in Iraq even if they share a long-term interest, e.g. a stable and united Iraq that will resist extremism. This dilemma will not be resolved until the balance of power is replaced by a system of cooperative security. Instead of working on an OSCE type of cooperative security, which is too ambitious as a model for the region, Iraq's neighbouring countries' meetings could become the nucleus of a system of cooperative security. However, there are two problems: First, even if Turkey initiated the neighbouring countries' meetings, the Kurdish issue and the PKK factor have sometimes undermined Turkey's effectiveness in this regard. Second, as long as Iran and Syria are isolated by the US, they will have no interest in deepening this framework.

... from which all players would gain

All players in the region would gain from a security system. A security system would stabilize the region, military spending could be decreased and thus the social and economic problems of the region could be tackled. The Middle East has the highest military spending per capita in the world. In 2000, it was about 6.3 percent of GDP. Besides, a regional security system would help to overcome divisions in the region, which favour the intervention of external players.

Michaelis

Now, it is the historic moment to found a regional organisation

In the Middle East, we are witnessing a historic moment where we are called upon to found a regional organisation. After World War II, NATO developed in 1949 as an institution that served the security needs of the member states facing the threat of the Soviet Union. In 1967, ASEAN basically responded to American concerns that the Vietnam War could have a domino effect in Southeast Asia. CSCE was created in 1973 to preserve stability and the status quo. Today, the Middle East faces the prospect of Iran becoming a regional hegemon, the question of how to integrate Israel and the question of what role the US will play in the future.

The Middle East could take the path of East Asia, which had been regulated by a balance of power and has recently shifted to a system of collective security consisting of numerous organisations.

Michaelis



The Middle East could take the path of East Asia, which had been regulated by a balance of power and has recently shifted to a system of collective security consisting of numerous organisations: ASEAN, ASEAN plus one, ASEAN plus three, the East Asia Summit and the Asian Regional Forum. This spread of organisations reflects the rise of China. The driving forces behind this spread of organisations are smaller countries. If we look at the Middle East, where are the relatively smaller countries that come up with ideas with regards to regional formats and initiatives to tie countries down?

The Middle East must move from a balance of power to collective security, because only elements of collective security can, first of all, contain the US-Iranian conflict over hegemony and, second, resolve the issues in Iraq, where otherwise the conflicting interests could get out of control.

Fischer

When we talk about the balance of power, we have to realize that the world of today differs from the world of the 19th century. Today the spread of ideology and the proliferation of actors make it more complicated to balance the powers, and the US is far from being able to do so in the Middle East. A collective security system requires all actors to be as rational as possible.

Schlie

The Middle East cannot be stabilized based on the balance of power, because of its numerous conflicts and contradicting ideologies. However, the nation states in the Middle East are not mature enough to create a system of collective security. Such a system could only be created in cooperation with external powers, as in the creation of ASEAN. Another possibility to establish a collective security system would be by creating several subsystems that could be connected to a larger regional security system later on. So promoting stability in the region requires an international consensus.

Altaqi

A security system could only be created in cooperation with external powers

The real problem is that the West has been trying to define the security system of the Persian Gulf based on a problem-solving approach that concentrates on security for both Israel and oil supplies to the West. I have conducted six surveys during the Hajj regarding Israel with Muslim pilgrims from all over the Middle East, e. g. from Turkey, from Egypt and from Iraq. Each time, one of the results was that Israel is not perceived as a natural player in the region.

Zahrani

What should be done is to base the security of this region not on problem-solving but on critical theory. Based on this theory, the real issue is the security

Security in the Middle East is indivisible.
You cannot look at Iraqi security without
looking at regional security and the
security of the neighbouring countries.

Touq

of what and the security of whom. In the mind of the region, it is the security of the people that is paramount and not the security of oil and Israel. As long as oil is in the interests of the people of the region, it must be secured.

The way the West has been looking at the oil has led to the creation of “rentier states” in the region. These states are not accountable to their people because the government pays oil money to the people instead of the people paying taxes to the government. This kills democracy and human rights in the region and leads to a developmental lag. Hence, if we really think about the security of this region, the traditional method of problem-solving must be changed with the help of critical theory.

M. Kabalan

We should think about resolving
and not managing conflicts

We regard a regional security system as a mechanism to manage rather than resolve conflicts, but there is no need for more mechanisms to manage conflicts. We should instead start thinking about how to resolve these conflicts. If we are not able to do so, the balance of power would be the best means of preventing war in the region. The balance of power could be enhanced by allowing all countries in the region to possess nuclear weapons and hence establish something like a balance of terror.

Touq

The basic problem is the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Security in the Middle East is indivisible. You cannot look at Iraqi security without looking at regional security and the security of the neighbouring countries. The basic problem is the Arab-Israeli problem, in spite of the fact that some Arab countries have peace treaties with Israel and even if some Gulf countries and countries in North Africa have trade relations with Israel. A system of collective security cannot ignore Israel.

Perthes

What would be other conditions for the creation of a system of collective security?

Al-Masri

A collective security system
in the region is an illusion

A collective security system first of all requires trust among the players, second an agreement about who is going to participate and at whom the security system is directed, and third the will of all parties to have peace. However, at the moment the key players in the Middle East distrust each other, jump on the bandwagon of external powers rather than seek balance against the major threat and do not all share an interest in peace. Therefore, a collective security system in the region is an illusion and I suggest sticking to the balance of power, which is the main mechanism used to balance conflicting interests.



A system of cooperative security would have two conditions: the resolution of US-Iranian hegemonial competition without conflict and US-Iranian rapprochement.

Leverett

In the Middle East and elsewhere, and in the absence of peace, the balance of power has proved to be an effective mechanism for preventing war. Perhaps a system of collective security would be a more effective mechanism for this, but the conflicts in the region would have to be resolved in order to make this happen. One of the main obstacles to a cooperative security system is that for most Arab countries, it would be a problem to see Israel become part of a security system in the Middle East. Even establishing an Arab security system excluding Israel would be difficult. The national defence pact of the Arab League will not work anyway because, even if we do think of ourselves as one Arab nation in cultural terms, this is not true in political terms. Each country in the region is pursuing its own interests.

M. Kabalan

How could we approach the creation of a system of collective security in the Middle East? Which existing systems of collective security could be models for the Middle East?

Perthes

The destabilising effect of Iraq for the order in the Middle East is underestimated. If things proceed in the way they have done during the last few years, each player will lose more than he will gain. The alternative is to take into account the legitimate interests of the players and to work step-by-step on new agreements to approach a system of collective security.

Fischer

We should start working on new agreements step-by-step

Regional security in the Middle East is more feasible within a minimalist than within a maximalist approach. Although maximalist approaches are very visionary and could copy models from other regions, they lack practicality. Instead, a minimalist approach would be less visionary, but more practical.

Sajjadpour

A minimalist approach is the best we can hope for. NATO, OSCE and the EU started out with a small number of member states and then expanded and grew. This could be a model for the region.

Touq

A minimalist approach is the best we can hope for

It is not practical to work on a security pact similar to NATO or to the Baghdad Pact because the systems of the countries in the region are too different for

Shaways

The spillover effect of one economic sector could promote cooperation in other sectors and on other issues. The Middle East could begin cooperating on science and technology instead of coal and steel.

Zahrani

them to agree on one common security concept. Furthermore, there is no conventional enemy that can be attacked through a security pact similar to NATO. Instead, umbrella organisations have to be built to enhance relations between the countries of the region with structures which are as simple as possible, e.g. for humanitarian and economic actions and for labour and other common topics.

Zahrani

One short-term solution would be to base the system on integration in the context of a new regionalism. In this case, cultural and historical similarity is a very important factor.

Economic cooperation in the region has to be enhanced

What is missing is economic cooperation among these societies. This will occur only when the societies become so advanced that their institutions begin to complement one another. Hence economic cooperation could be a starting point for a system of collective security. The spillover effect of one economic sector—just as it happened in Europe—could promote cooperation in other sectors and on other issues, including security. The Middle East could begin cooperating on science and technology instead of coal and steel.

Benli Altunisik

Economic cooperation is not a starting point for regional integration in the Middle East. Security cooperation is.

Tarraf

Simply copying the European system will not work...

European integration has been a unique experience that started off in a very specific historical situation, characterized by the total military and moral defeat of one of the European powers, Germany, and the ensuing confrontation between two political and military blocks. This brought about a readiness and the need to build the whole system from scratch. Simply copying the European system is therefore not an easily available option.

Hollis

... because of Europe's particular history

The Middle East cannot take the example of Europe post World War II without taking into account the experience or legacy of World War II. There is no precedent for a comprehensive security arrangement without a comprehensive war.

Perthes

How do you assess the future regional order of the Middle East?

Leverett

We will never entirely escape the balance of power in the Middle East, but in the long run a regional security order has to encompass robust cooperative security



elements, alongside more traditional instruments of bilateral alliances like military deployments or collective security arrangements.

In the end, the Middle East will be regulated by a combination of the balance of power and cooperative structures. The Middle East will go for variable geometries. Along with the GCC, there could be other overlapping formats. It will be an untidy kind of system.

3. Existing and new formats of regional cooperation

When we think about dialogue and cooperation in the region, which formats exist, are they useful and what would be ideas for new formats?

The neighbouring countries' conference meets at two levels: at the level of the foreign ministers and the level of the interior ministers. The fact that the representatives of these countries come together and talk about current issues is already an achievement, upon which we can build further cooperation and conflict resolution.

Even if regional governments do not share this analysis, the overwhelming feeling among the Arab people is that the Arab League is not a functional institution. The same goes for the Iraq neighbourhood meetings. Even if these are a good venue for the governments to meet and talk to each other, ordinary people think that they are not leading anywhere. This is partly right, e.g. the Iraq neighbourhood meetings were not decisive in achieving the recent improvement in the security situation. Unless Iraq's neighbouring countries start working on a different formula and in a different way, nothing will happen or improve.

Even if the Arab League has its difficulties, Syria supports the Arab League and considers it to be an advanced form of Arab cooperation and solidarity and as one of the last and still existing institutions of Arab security.

The Baghdad Conference on March 10, 2007—a meeting Syrian officials took part in along with officials from Iraq's neighbouring countries, from the G8 and from the permanent members of the Security Council—was openly criticized because of its lack of discussion: Unlike this meeting here, every representative delivered

Michaelis

In the end, the Middle East will go for variable geometries

Perthes

Benli Altunisik

The neighbouring countries' conference is an achievement

Touq

The existing formats are not regarded as functional

Omran

Al-Muallem

I propose to create a round table of foreign ministers

The Middle East spends more than six percent of its GDP on arms and a large part of this military spending goes to the US, the EU, China and Russia.

M. Kabalan



a prepared speech. To promote open discussion and dialogue, I propose to create a round table of the foreign ministers from the neighbouring countries, the G8 and the permanent members of the Security Council to discuss the Iraqi issues one by one, openly and frankly.

Tarraf Permanent structures in the region should be reinforced. Holding summits alone cannot have the impact that permanent, rights-based structures, assigned with specific mandates, could have for cooperation and integration in the region.

4. Arms control

Perthes Could arms control or a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) be a starting point for conflict resolution and security cooperation in the Middle East?

M. Kabalan
I propose a moratorium on any arms sales by western powers to the Middle East

If it is not possible to establish a delicate balance of power, a collective or cooperative security system, I would then propose a moratorium on any arms sales by western powers to the Middle East. This would greatly contribute to conflict management and conflict prevention, which is not only the responsibility of the regional powers in the Middle East, but also of the global powers. If the regional actors are not able to establish arms control in the Middle East, at least the great powers should do so. The Middle East spends more than six percent of its GDP on arms and a large part of this military spending goes to the US, the EU, China and Russia.

In November 2005, the then German government decided to sell two Dolphin submarines to Israel and the current German government confirmed this decision. These submarines can probably be equipped with nuclear cruise missiles. In January 2008, President Bush contracted a twenty billion dollar arms deals with the GCC States. These kinds of arms sales must stop.

Altaqi
Germany's submarine deal with Israel prevents a regional agreement between Israel and the Gulf States

Europe has a cynical attitude regarding armament in the Middle East. The Dolphins deal will prevent a regional agreement between Israel and the Gulf States because it gives Israel the possibility of a second nuclear strike from submarines. Before 2005, Germany had already donated two Dolphins to Israel, which were delivered in 1997, and then another Dolphin was sold and arrived in Israel in 1999. With these first three Dolphins—one in dry-dock, one in Haifa and one on the high seas—Israel was capable of launching one nuclear strike. With another two Dolphins, Israel will be capable of launching a second nuclear strike. At the same

Arms control is an important instrument not only in reducing the use of weapons and military spending, but also in identifying other common interests and building other institutions.

Mützenich

time, Germany and Europe are pretending to encourage the limitation of armaments and weapons of mass destruction in the region and are preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. We cannot deal with or account for any country's nuclear programme without counting states that leak nuclear technologies.

Disarmament can be used as assurance that nobody attacks the other. Those who are superior have to start on an initiative of nuclear disarmament.

Arms control is an important instrument not only in reducing the use of weapons and military spending, but also for identifying other common interests and building other institutions—not only institutions consisting of governments, but also of NGOs. This is taught not only by European history, but also e.g. by the Bangkok Treaty of the ASEAN states, which created an NWFZ for Southeast Asia and then proved to be a door opener for other states to enter ASEAN, such as Cambodia, Laos or Vietnam. An NWFZ in the Gulf that also included other states of the Middle East could create a shared security concept and a common institution and dialogue. Besides, an NWFZ would reduce the influence of extra-regional actors and be a starting point for a security system.

An NWFZ is more of a slogan than a realistic option. Even ten years from now, it is unrealistic to imagine that Israel would engage in a full-fledged open process of denuclearization. However, a starting point to a nuclear bargain in the region could be that Israel would agree not to replace its principal reactor at Dimona when it ends its operational life in a few years. This reactor is also supposed to produce plutonium, which can be used for nuclear weapons. Such a reduction of Israel's nuclear development will happen only under US leadership.

Another part of a long-term regional security order would be a more forthright approach to dealing with the spread of civil nuclear technology and, at the same time, controlling the proliferation risks of that process. If this approach is to work, it will have to include Israel.

Syria supports the concept of an NWFZ in the Middle East.



Sajjadpour

Mützenich

Arms control is an instrument for identifying common interests

We should aim for an NWFZ in the Gulf

Leverett

An NWFZ is more of a slogan than a realistic option

Omran

V. The future of the Middle East

1. Outlook for the Middle East

Perthes

What would a positive outlook for the Middle East in 2010 look like?

Fischer

The precondition for any lasting order in the region is a US-Iranian rapprochement

The precondition for any lasting order in the Middle East would be a US-Iranian rapprochement through pragmatism, which implies policy changes on both sides. Presidential elections in the US in 2008 and Iran in 2009 could open a window of opportunity. The successors to George W. Bush and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad should halt their struggle for hegemony in the region and agree on a comprehensive dialogue aimed at finding solutions for the interconnected conflicts in the region. On this basis, the individual conflicts could be tackled as follows:

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Iran could make an offer to the US to contribute to substantial peace talks. In the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, there is no conflict of interest per se and, based on political will, steps could be defined regarding how both sides could move ahead.

In Lebanon, Iran could exert its influence on Hezbollah to play a more constructive role in Lebanese politics. This implies that Israel would be accepted as a relevant player and that its legitimate interests would be considered.

In the same way, in the Gulf, the US and the Gulf States could accept that Iran is a legitimate player in the region who, in a peaceful, transparent and pragmatic way, will develop its role and influence. In return, Iran could accept the claims of the US, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States to play their respective roles in the region.

Last but not least, the US and Iran should realize that they share an interest in preventing the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan from getting out of control and should cooperate on promoting stability in both countries.

All players should move ahead in a more pragmatic way

If all players would move ahead in a more pragmatic way, lasting stability could become possible. The task of the US and Iran is to work actively on conflict resolution and not to defend their hegemonic claims. If the new administrations understand this, there is reason for some constructive optimism in the Middle East. If not, tough developments in the Middle East are still to come.

The coming month will show if the relevant players will succeed in stabilizing the region or if the region will face disaster and political revolutions.

Al-Masri

The future development of the competition between the US and Iran and thus the future of the region is totally uncertain. There is a wide range of possibilities,

The precondition for any lasting order in the Middle East would be a US-Iranian rapprochement through pragmatism, which implies policy changes on both sides.

Fischer

reaching from a proliferation of civil wars in the region to a US-claimed success story of democracy. In the future, as long as there is a unipolar system with the US aiming at hegemony in the Middle East, we will be closer to the first possibility than to the second.

Perhaps Iran will learn from China and its behaviour as a mighty partner in an environment without any established security system: China is basically denying its own might vis-à-vis others because it is clear that it will become a regional hegemon.

For at least the next quarter of a century, the US will have the unique capability of projecting military power into the Middle East. Neither China, nor India, nor Russia want to replace the US as a hegemon in the Middle East. However, since they see trends in US policy in this region that they think are potentially problematic for their interests, they are looking for possibilities to contain the US as it exercises its hegemony in ways that could prove problematic for their interests.

In terms of a preferable security order, it is better for all concerned, not just the US, if the US plays this hegemonic role in a constructive and responsible way that meets the needs of players in the region and other players outside of the region. However, there are no guarantees that the US will pursue its policies and exercise its hegemonic role in that way.

I am very pessimistic about the future of this region. Although Syria is ready to be part of a political solution in Iraq, the Syrian regime is isolated from the US, from Europe and from some Arab countries. This unjustified isolation is weakening the Syrian regime and favours the region being handed over to extremists.

Maybe the neighbouring countries of Iraq share the same analysis of the situation in Iraq, but they share neither the same vision for a future Iraq nor a common strategy or approach for coping with the Iraqi issues. As long as this is the case, Iraq's neighbour countries will be of no great help.

Five countries around the Persian Gulf, which the Arabs call the Arab Gulf, possess two thirds of the global oil reserves, but today they contribute only one third to global oil production. Thus in the future the dependence of the world economy on these states will increase. The possession of these energy resources will shape the regional order of the Middle East.



Michaelis

Leverett

Neither China, nor India, nor Russia wants to replace the US as a hegemon in the region

Al-Muallem

I am very pessimistic about the future of the Middle East

Touq

Hermann

The possession of energy resources will shape the regional order

To stabilize Iraq, any solution should be comprehensive and should include Iraq, Syria and Palestine.

Hadad



Fischer The principal question for the future of Iraq is the future US strategy. The next year and especially the early months following the US election will be the defining period for the strategy of the next administration. However, the future of Iraq is also linked to the behaviour of the relevant players in the region and their attitude and reaction towards the US presence.

2. How to stabilize Iraq?

Perthes What would be the conditions for a stable Iraq?

Touq
The Iraqis have to agree on a common vision for the future of their country

First of all, the Iraqis have to agree on a common vision for the future of their country. When you talk to the Iraqi President and the two Vice Presidents representing different parts of the Iraqi people you will hear different concerns and analyses of the situation. The only thing they agree on is that the neighbouring countries have to help Iraq.

Schlie In the next three to five years, transparency will be essential for the Iraqi government. Otherwise, there will be no credibility. Reform and stability are urgently needed if the Middle East is to meet the challenges it faces.

Leverett
Cross-communal deals could lead to reconciliation

There has to be a regional approach for Iraq that not only deals with security issues, but also with helping Iraqis make the kinds of cross-communal deals that will lead to reconciliation.

N. Kabalan For a secure and stable Iraq, there are the following prerequisites: a strong state protected externally by a strong and non-factional army and internally by an independent police and security force, ruled by a proper judiciary system; a strong economy using Iraq's massive resources currently depleted by the occupying forces along with a welfare system that attracts millions of Iraqi refugees to return to Iraq; a stable and secure regional environment without pre-packaged US-made democracy recipes.

Hadad There are four conditions to stabilize Iraq. First, the Arab countries assist Iraq in solving its problems. Second, a national Iraqi conference is convened and supported regionally in order to create dialogue among all Iraqi factions. Third, a timetable of withdrawal of the US troops is established. Fourth, Iraqi division is prevented.

Unfortunately, the last Iraqi elections were conducted on a sectarian basis.

Altaqi

Any solution should be comprehensive and should include Iraq, Syria and Palestine. There will be no peace in the region without Syria.

The precondition of any further thinking is the security of the people, because if you are not able to guarantee the security of the people you will lack any support for new concepts. If we fail to build some sustainable security structures in Iraq, it will be very difficult to move on in the Middle East as a whole.

What kind of political system would be preferable for a future Iraq?

Iraq needs a federal system to overcome the following contradiction: On the one hand, polls show that most Iraqis want to live in a united Iraqi state; on the other hand, every time Iraqis have gone to the polls since Saddam was overthrown, they have voted overwhelmingly for parties that define themselves in ethnic and sectarian terms. A federal system would combine a unified state with a devolved state.

We need real democracy, not just elections. Elections in Iraq may lead to more sectarian division in the country. Federalism will not solve that problem. Thus the Iraqi case is not an encouraging model for the Arab world.

Neither Iraq nor Lebanon can serve as a model of democracy, resistance to corruption or any other European project. Lebanese democracy does not work—a democracy that leads to civil war every ten years is not a democracy. The conflict in Lebanon could break out at any moment and Syria has to be cautious.

Who should stabilize Iraq?

On the one hand, Iraqis should be more active; on the other hand, they have to be allowed to choose their own path.

Everything depends on where Iraq is heading: towards theocracy, secular nationalistic government or whatever. Unfortunately, however, the last Iraqi elections were conducted on a sectarian basis. The Iraqi people voted on the basis of sectarian considerations and not for political programmes or visions. The future will show whether or not the Iraqi people will be allowed to use democracy as a tool to decide where they are heading.



Hoff

First, we have to assure the security of the people

Perthes

Leverett

Iraq needs a federal system

Touq

Iraq needs real democracy, not just elections

Altaqi

Perthes

Altaqi

In order to prevent a power vacuum, the Iraqi army and security apparatus has to be rebuilt and each US unit that leaves Iraq has to be immediately replaced by a well-equipped and well-trained Iraqi unit.

Al-Muallem



Shaways Europe after World War II is the best example that political will can change a great deal. Iraq's political will can change a great deal, but only if it is not swayed by the strong wills and determination of its neighbours.

Maleki For the future, the best way for the US would be to return to the November 2007 declaration between President Bush and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. This declaration is about a long-term cooperation and friendship between Iraq and the US. Iraq has been recognized as an independent state and there is no word about a mutual defence cooperation. Once this declaration is ratified by the US Congress, it would become a pact or a treaty.

3. Concrete measures

Perthes What would be concrete measures to stabilize Iraq and its neighbourhood?

Al-Muallem
Syria and Iraq have to intensify security cooperation on the Syrian-Iraqi border

Syria and Iraq have to intensify security cooperation on the Syrian-Iraqi border, which is 680 kilometres long and mainly located in the desert. Both countries already exchange information concerning border issues on a daily basis. There are regular meetings between senior officials from both countries in Damascus, and Syria has stationed liaison officers at the border.

In order to prevent a power vacuum, the Iraqi army and security apparatus has to be rebuilt, and each US unit that leaves Iraq has to be immediately replaced by a well-equipped and well-trained Iraqi unit. The army has to be rebuilt on a national and not on a sectarian basis to foster reconciliation and unity.

Maleki
Iraqi military forces have to be rebuilt

To promote stability in Iraq, Iraqi military forces have to be rebuilt. The dissolution of the Iraqi army was an error the US could have avoided if it had taken the Iranian experience into account. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, many people advised Ayatollah Khomeini to dissolve the Iranian military forces because they were pro Shah, but he refused to do so. He just replaced the generals and officers, the army was not dissolved and the majority of the soldiers were not sacked. A few months later, Iraq attacked Iran and the Iranian army resisted.

Furthermore, I propose the following five concrete measures:

First, higher education in Iraq has to be promoted. The universities have been in a bad state since Saddam took power. Second, Iraq needs new transport projects, e.g. railroads from Iran to Iraq or from Iraq to Syria. Roads between Iran and

Stability and security in the region starts from domestic reforms towards democracy, freedoms, human rights and transparency in the individual countries.

Shaways

Iraq should be reconstructed. Third, there should be a ban on energy contracts between companies and one of the autonomous region of Iraq. Some oil and gas companies have signed agreements with Iraqi Kurdistan. This is very dangerous for the territorial integrity of Iraq. Fourth, environmental programs have to be established. Under Saddam's regime, most of the marshes and lagoons in southern Iraq were drained in order to implement Saddam's security plan: In order to crush the Shiite uprising of the early 1990s and to be able to advance faster with the military units, 90 percent of the marshes in southern Iraq were drained. Fifth, border trade between Iraq and Iran, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait should be encouraged.

We need confidence-building measures in the region. The more states are destroyed, the more non-state players we will get. But non-state players cannot win, and all they can do is bring the others to sit at the table, where trust would be the main condition. The US is still impeding the establishment of multilateral security cooperation regarding Iraq. However, regarding the refugees, considerable assistance could be provided by the three countries, e.g. one confidence-building measure would be building cities for the refugees. Besides, Iran, Syria and Turkey should target the Iraqi economy, e.g. through a free trade zone between Turkey and Iraq.

Helping Iraq to overcome its problems means promoting stability in the whole region. Stability and security in the region starts with domestic reforms towards democracy, freedoms, human rights and transparency in the individual countries.

Iraq has to be integrated into the regional environment to strengthen the economy and security in the entire region. Terrorist groups can only be fought within a framework of regional cooperation. There are many fields in which we should work together, e.g. in trade, investment, transportation, communication, etc. However, many neighbouring countries do not cooperate with Iraq—they do not even send their ambassadors to Baghdad.

4. How can the EU contribute to stability?

How can the EU contribute to stability?

The EU can provide real support by promoting the rule of law in Iraq, which is the basis for a viable state with a developed economy and a functioning social



Altaqi

We need more confidence-building measures

Shaways

Iraq has to be integrated into the regional environment

Perthes

Zalewski

The EU and Syria have to sign the Association Agreement and a bilateral Action Plan and Iraq should be involved in the Euromed Process.

Touq

The EU should offer concrete training missions for the Iraqi police and Iraqi army

infrastructure. The EU should offer concrete training missions for the Iraqi police and Iraqi army and thus promote security in Iraq. The experience of Afghanistan has shown that it is very difficult to lead these missions to success, but this should not discourage the EU from becoming involved in this field in Iraq. For example, the Polish mission in Iraq in regard to the training of the Iraqi army is perceived as being fairly successful.

Besides, energy cooperation between Iran and the EU could stabilize the region. This kind of cooperation is not possible at the moment, but in several years it could become reality.

Touq
The EU and Syria have to sign the Association Agreement ...

The EU and Syria have to sign the Association Agreement and a bilateral Action Plan and Iraq should be involved in the Euromed Process. The EU has a format for most of the countries in the region, including the GCC—but for Iraq, as for Syria, there should be a gradual approach regarding the Association Agreement. At the moment there are too many conditions on the EU side. In a bilateral agreement with Syria, the EU should follow a minimalist approach. This means not to require EU standards in all domains, but start e.g. with economic standards and economic reforms, and on this basis encourage Syria to tackle political issues and human rights.

... and Iraq should be involved in the Euromed Process

Regarding Iraq's involvement in the Euromed Process: Iraq should be involved, either through bilateral Action Plans or through European Neighbourhood Policy. Instead of including Iraq in the Euromed Process, a new formula could be devised. The goal has to be to initiate a political and economic process in Iraq that has a value for the other countries in the region. Concerning the European Neighbourhood Policy, countries that are advancing quickly in the process of political or economic reform should be given a special status, e.g. Jordan and Morocco.

Tarraf

Including Iraq in the Euromed Process would probably not contribute much to addressing the most pressing need in Iraq, which is the improvement of the security situation in the country. On the other hand, ratifying and implementing the Association Agreement between Syria and the EU could have positive effects of mutual benefit. Increase in trade and investment, in the flow of goods and people and in prosperity, improved transparency, promotion of the rule of law within Syria should be in our mutual interest. It is unfortunate that we are not in a position to ratify the Association Agreement due to persisting major differences of opinion on political issues.



Europe has progressively raised the threshold request for an Association Agreement, and pressure on Syria has increased. The Europeans, by their behaviour are oiling the wheels of the Americans, who are working to isolate Syria.

Altaqi

Another thing the EU could do would be to admit Turkey. This would be a positive signal for all the Arab and Islamic countries that the EU is not a “Christian Club”.

Touq

The EU should admit Turkey

The term “Christian Club” is a catch phrase that sounds good in commentaries about the EU, but it is in fact a distraction from the underlying strategic debate within Europe regarding the question of its borders. This debate can be summarized by describing its two poles: The one side is concerned that Europe’s “absorption capacity” has been exhausted after the last accession round and that European integration and European institutions are already overstretched and becoming dysfunctional with the current number of 27 member states. The other side is concerned that by closing the debate on its geographical borders, Europe will lose its ability to project itself beyond its own borders, to shape its neighbourhood by encouraging transformation within neighbouring countries. This not only has implications for Turkey, but beyond Turkey also for the impact the EU can have in the Middle East.

Tarraf

The EU could foster the backing of governments in the Middle East states among their peoples by cooperating with the Middle East on the use of renewable energies. Although the Middle East is rich in energy resources, some countries will have future difficulties in ensuring their own domestic energy supply. These countries should promote the use of renewable energies assisted by western technological expertise. Geographical conditions for the use of solar energy, wind energy and hydro energy are good in the region. Since these renewable energies can be deployed in smaller units than conventional energies, they could serve to develop less populated rural areas and bring access to media. Many western companies and governments would be keen to develop renewable energies in the region.

Hoff

5. Recommendations

I have five recommendations for the Middle East:

First, map out the consequences of inertia and no deals at all. Second, calculate the consequences of two or three new rounds of conflict. Conduct a risk analy-

Hollis

We should agree on a united Iraq

Europeans and actors in the region should think about how to influence the US approach to the region.

Michaelis



sis and decide if all the players can really afford not to try to contain the situation. Third, commit to a united Iraq over all other scenarios and facilitate internal Iraqi consultations and accommodations. Do not try to dictate a government from the outside. Fourth, opt for unconditional US-Iranian talks about all the actual issues in dispute between them. Fifth, use Annapolis as the framework for confronting choices on the Israeli-Palestinian front.

Michaelis

Striving to make the unity of Iraq a starting point for tackling the issues is a kind of “Realpolitik”. However, I am sceptical whether this kind of cluster will change the equation. Instead, a policy change in the US would do so. Europeans and actors in the region should think about how to influence the US approach to the region. One possibility would be that Syria and Iran change their policies and lure the US into a different policy approach to the region. This would, however, require quite radical changes in their policy.

Leverett

Everyone has already signed on to a united Iraq

I do not see the outcome if everyone agrees on a united Iraq because everyone has already signed on to that. There is no single state that wants to see Iraq dismembered and all of the major political groupings in Iraq have at least, in a formal sense signed on to the idea—even the Kurds. Besides, there is no agreement on what exactly the formula “united Iraq” means.

Hollis

The agreement of all internal and external players on the goal of a united Iraq should be the basis upon which the Iraqis themselves design and form a government in such a way that it meets the requirements of unity. This would put the US and the neighbouring countries in a supportive and facilitating, but not in a leading role. Neither Iranian nor US preferences should predominate over what is worked out internally in Iraq.

Perthes

Could you elaborate recommendation four and five?

Hollis

There have to be US-Iranian talks about everything that is at issue between both countries

On recommendation four: Opt for unconditional US-Iranian talks about their actual issues. There has to be a broader range of talks than just on Iraqi internal security, and the suspension of uranium enrichment has to go as a condition for talks. There have to be bilateral talks about everything that is at issue between the US and Iran, irrespective of the region. There is no way that this can take off this year, until the Bush Administration has gone, so I suggest we use the next nine

A US-Iranian rapprochement requires a comprehensive series of strategic understandings between the US and Iran about a host of regional problems: the nuclear issue, Iraq, Lebanon, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict etc.

Leverett

months to prepare the ground and Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia could conceivably provide facilitation, a venue and an umbrella.

On recommendation five: Use Annapolis as the framework for confronting choices on the Israeli-Palestinian front in three ways.

First, use the Arab Peace Initiative more effectively. E.g., the leaders of the Arab Peace Initiative could offer that if x numbers of settlements are evacuated by Israel in the West Bank or if x numbers of dunams are handed over to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, an initial phase of the Arab Peace Initiative will go into effect, which means some level of economic engagement directly with the Palestinian state, which would involve countenancing some indirect contacts with Israelis to take effect.

Second, there are a number of ways in which the Arabs could call the Israelis' bluff. E.g., there could be an Arab statement saying that, beyond the promise of normalisation and peace, if Israel withdraws from all occupied territory, rewards would start to appear as soon as Israel begins to withdraw. A series of statements like that from the Arab League would flush out the spoilers.

Third, open an Israeli-Syrian track, which would just consist of talks to explore the ground and contain the possibility for an escalation of the conflict. If there are serious and wide-ranging talks between Syria and Israel, the chances for a new round of war in Lebanon might be diminished. Neither party should assume that by talking to the other they are conceding anything and they should find out during the course of talks what there might be to gain.

This is the kind of gradualism you also have in the context of the road map implementation.

This gradual approach could also work on the US-Iranian and US-Syrian front.

The US has to begin talks with Iran and Syria. There will be no solutions for the conflicts in the region and no long term stability without these two countries. The US has to encourage reform in the region in a non-obtrusive manner and avoid the creation of a feeling of threat among the regional states.

A US-Iranian rapprochement requires a comprehensive series of strategic understandings between the US and Iran about a host of regional problems: the nuclear issue, Iraq, Lebanon, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict etc.

Annapolis should be used as the framework for confronting choices on the Israeli-Palestinian front

Michaelis

Touq

Leverett

The threatening language of the US and EU towards Iran, e.g. the assertion that the military option is still on the table, should be suspended.

Sajjadpour



- Sajjadpour** There are not enough bridges to bring the different players together.
The Iraqi government was a bridge for US-Iranian talks on Iraq. These first US-Iranian talks since the revolution had first of all a great symbolic value. There are many potential bridges, e.g. the EU and the UN. Existing bridges like the neighbouring countries' meetings should be strengthened.
Furthermore, the US has to reveal to the countries in the region its intentions and goals and what it wants from Iraq's neighbouring countries.
- Hollis** The US has to stop trying to sort out Iraqi issues purely to save face before it goes.
- Leverett** To a large extent, the US has stopped trying to sort out the Iraqi political issues, because all the efforts to impose a political solution on Iraq since the beginning of the occupation have failed. On a growing number of issues, the dominant view in the Bush Administration about Iraq's political future is: "We do not really have a position on that."
- Moubayed** Rather than imposing sanctions on Iran or threatening Iran or Syria with regime change, the US should think about rewards for cooperation. Iraq's neighbouring countries are not charity organisations and will not cooperate as long as no rewards are to be expected.
The US says that Syria is not in a position to negotiate, but negotiation is one of the key components of the mentality of the regional actors.
- Altaqi** Destroying the region's states and labelling them as "failing" facilitates the emergence of non-state actors and general chaos. At a certain point, it will be impossible to tackle this problem. Rather than thinking about destroying more states in the region, the US should work on stabilising the region, and that will be possible only with the help of all the countries neighbouring Iraq. And for known reasons, the US is trying to impose the solution that fits its own interests and not those of Iraq.
- Benli Altunisik** Excluding countries with a strong influence and declared interests will not work.
- Sajjadpour** The threatening language of the US and EU towards Iran, e.g. the assertion that the military option is still on the table, should be suspended. This language has

In the debates over the region, too much attention is being paid to the role of external powers like the EU or the US: But external powers cannot solve the regional problems.

Tarraf

been used during the US election campaign not against the Iranian government or its people, but against the Iranian nation as a whole.

We have to get the language right and come up with a different terminology rather than use terms that are understood differently in Europe and in the region. E.g. in the UN resolution on Iraq of 2003, the term “occupation” was used for the US presence to hold the US accountable for their actions in Iraq, but it was a problem for the Iraqis. In addition, the term “conditionality” has the wrong tone because it suggests that somebody is in a position to impose conditions on somebody else. Instead, I would propose using the terms “trade”, “exchange”, “cost”, “benefits” and so on without turning negotiations into a bazaar. In addition, the term “confidence-building measures” has become adversely associated with the multilateral side of the discredited Oslo Process and should not be used anymore.

Let us think of Iraq not only as a challenge, but also as an opportunity for a broader security cooperation in the region if the following conditions are met: First, the Iraqi government becomes an independent player. Second, the regional neighbourhood consisting of 48 states should be committed to practically promoting security in the region. Third, Iraq should take part in existing regional structures like the GCC.

To strengthen economic growth, the GCC States, the EU and the US should work on a sort of grand development pact. Within this plan also the refugee issue could also be tackled. This development plan should encompass not only the Iraqis in Syria and Jordan, but also other problems in the region, including the Palestinian refugees, poverty and unemployment.

In the debates over the region, too much attention is being paid to the role of external powers like the EU or the US: But external powers cannot solve the regional problems. In the end, the political leaders in the region bear the responsibility for fostering peace and stability in their region. External actors can support and encourage them to give priority to peace. This approach certainly implies taking into consideration the threat perceptions which exist within the region.

The dynamic for conflict resolution has to come more and more from within the region. Even if it is not entirely peaceful, at least it will belong to the region and it will diminish the amount of interference from the outside.



Hollis

We should not use terms that are understood differently in Europe and in the region

Sajjadpour

Touq

The EU und the US should work on a sort of grand development pact

Tarraf

Too much attention is being paid to the role of external powers

Hollis

The dynamic for conflict resolution has to come from within the region

It does not speak well for the self-respect
of the people in the region that they
defer to whatever the US is going to do.

Hollis

It does not speak well for the self-respect of the people in the region that they defer to whatever the US is going to do. It sort of compounds the sense of powerlessness. However, there is every possibility of the players in the region stealing the initiative as opposed to just saying “It is too complicated”, or “It is somebody else’s fault” or “It is beyond our ability to solve”.



Closing remarks

I have been attending to 52 Bergedorf Round Tables since 1973, and this has been one of the most difficult ones with regard to the situation on the ground and our capacities to contribute to its solution.

All participants from Iraq's neighbouring countries have stressed that their countries are interested in a unified and stable Iraq and that their respective governments are pursuing a constructive policy towards the region, but there have been few concrete proposals as to how Iraq's neighbours could make a contribution to the unification of Iraq and to meeting the conditions for stability.

We agreed that Iraq cannot be stabilized without its neighbours, that the conflicts in the Middle East in general are interconnected and thus cannot be tackled independently from one another. However, we neither clarified exactly how the conflicts in the region interlock, nor did we develop concrete options to resolve the various conflicts. Some participants even raised doubts as to whether all actors in the region are interested in conflict resolution.

Many of us claimed that the Middle East must move from a balance of power to a system of collective security that can control the conflicting interests of the regional players. However, we did not answer the question of how to design and implement such a system and there were many doubts as to whether a system of collective security in the Middle East actually could become a reality.

Furthermore, many of us highlighted that the EU should play a bigger role in the Middle East and that the region could learn from European experiences. However, we did not discuss how this transfer of experience could be managed.

Altogether, many questions remain regarding how to develop substantial strategies for stability in Iraq and the Middle East. Nevertheless, we have come across some fundamental agreements and ideas and thus I hope that our discussion will encourage others to pick up where we have left off.

von Weizsäcker