

Middle Eastern Threats to the Atlantic Community

The Atlantic community consists of democracies and market economies who share basic values and whose interests in a stable and peaceful Middle Eastern region coincide. In spite of these joint interests, politics on how to pursue them diverge sharply between European countries and the United States. With regard to weapons of mass destruction, divergences include the relationship with the political actors, the imminence of the threat related to weapons of mass destruction, the instruments of their non-proliferation and the responses to proliferation. These differences signal a principal disagreement not only on non-proliferation and arms control, but also on broader issues of the world order.

The Middle East: An Explosive Region

The Middle East – extending from the Egyptian borders with Libya and Sudan to the Eastern boundaries of Iran – contains approximately two thirds of the world's reserves of crude oil. With the Suez Channel, it links the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic, and it is the neighboring region to unruly Caucasus and resource-rich Central Asia. Beyond its essential role in the world's energy supply, the Middle East thus must be recognized as an area of strategic importance in its own right.

The region contains some of the most dangerous and longest-burning conflicts in the world. The Arab-Israeli conflict overshadows the rest in virulence. This conflict has led to five hot wars and extended periods of bloodshed in Palestine proper. While Israel has succeeded in concluding peace treaties with two neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, Syria (and Iraq) remain enemies, and the Palestinian issue is far from being settled, as the present unrest documents. Southern Lebanon, where the radical Shiite Hezbollah militia enjoys tolerance by

Syria and support by distant Iran, continues to be a source of danger to Israel. Whether a settlement for Palestine would pacify the region for good can only be speculated about: other conflicts could be equally explosive once energies are freed from the presently central Israeli-Arab contest. First, there are the disputes about supremacy in the Arab world, which drove Syria and Egypt into the Gulf War coalition against rival Iraq. The Arab-Iranian dispute has led to Iran's occupation of a group of islands in the Strait of Hormuz that are also claimed by the United Arab Emirates, provoked the eight-years-long, extremely bloody war between Iraq and Iran and feeds the arms race around the Persian Gulf. Arab-Turkish disputes concern a strip of territory in Turkey's South and, more important, the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris, the most important lifeline of the »fertile crescent«. In addition, a dozen or more minor territorial, ethnical, religious and sectarian disputes adds to the volatility of peace and conflict in that area.

The presence of weapons of mass destruction in that kind of region creates a most serious headache. Our experience with deterrence that functions – or at least does not explode into a conflagration in which Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) are used in significant numbers with catastrophic effect – is fairly limited. The East-West Conflict, to be frank, was fortunately soft in that regard. The two protagonists did not share contiguous borders, had no territorial dispute, did not compete for the same resources, had no religious squabbles worth talking about, had no ethnic differences and did not share a history of bloody wars against each other. For the countries in the Middle East, very few of these benign conditions apply. We must thus be most careful when transferring experiences from the East-West-Conflict onto this very different region. Iraq, a state armed with WMD, dared to attack Israel, a nuclear weapon state in all but name, with inter-

mediate-range missiles. Iraq did not put biological or chemical warheads onto these missiles; the calculation of the leadership was obviously that Israel would ride out the attacks and wait for the results before deciding about retaliation. In East-West terms that would have been seen as an incredible, irresponsible gamble. In the Middle East, it was sort of »normal« behavior. Our European deterrence experiences are thus a very uncertain guide for addressing security in this very different region.¹

There are several scenarios that demonstrate the seriousness of the situation. In another Middle East War, Israel would be acutely anxious that the two mainstays of its defense for survival – its air-bases that are the condition for air superiority against manpower-strong Arab armed forces, and assembly points for its huge reserves – would come under instant attack by chemical and, possibly, biological weapons, denying Israel a chance to defend itself. In turn, Israeli nuclear weapons would probably be on high alert from the beginning to preserve the survivability of this »deterrent of last resort«.

In another Iraqi-Iranian war on the Persian Gulf, chemical weapons would probably be used at even a larger scale than before. If Iran and Iraq manage to procure nuclear weapons, their use for the sake of war termination could not be excluded, notably by the weaker side. Likewise, a nuclear armed Iraq might be tempted in another Gulf War rehearsal to attack Israel with chemical rather than conventional armed missiles, in the hope that Israel would enter the war, but would be deterred from using its nuclear capabilities by the fear of Iraqi retaliation in kind. The possibilities for escalation are unpredictable.

Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East: The State of Affairs²

In the Middle East, we know for sure that one undeclared nuclear weapon state exists, i. e. Israel. The size of its arsenal has been estimated somewhere between 50 and more than 200 warheads. The diversity of its nuclear armament has been reported to include artillery shells, gravity bombs, and missile warheads. In connection with the impending supply of nuclear-capable, diesel-engin-

ed submarines originating in Germany it has been speculated that Israel can mount warheads on sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Usually, Israel is credited with more than first-generation gun-type or implosion warheads. It is generally believed that the miniaturization/yield expanding technology of boosting has been mastered, and since the famous revelations of Vanunu, a former employee of the Israeli nuclear complex who published details about Israel's nuclear arsenal, the possibility that Israel possesses hydrogen weapons has been discussed.³

After Israel, Iraq is the only Middle Eastern country that has come very close to becoming a nuclear weapon state. How far Baghdad was removed from a physical capability when the Gulf War hit, and afterwards the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) dismantled the remainders of the multifaceted program, is still a matter for conjecture. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Iraq could produce the fissile material needed for nuclear weapons without the signature (notably the heat of enrichment or reprocessing activities) being picked up by US or other satellites. Close control and observation of Iraq, and the determined will to act if signals indicate dangerous activities, is a precondition to prevent an escalation of Middle Eastern risks from the present state of affairs.⁴

It is likely that Iraq has preserved some amount of chemical weapons and/or chemical weapons agents, and that the biological weapons program has progressed on a low level of activity.⁵ The delivery vehicles program, unfortunately, was permitted to continue below the 150 km range, but it is likely that Iraq has exploited this permission to work on more fundamental technologies to

1. Scott D. Sagan/Kenneth N. Waltz, *The spread of nuclear weapons*, New York: Norton, 1995.

2. cf. Anthony Cordesman, *Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East*, Washington, D.C. 1999; E.J. Hoo-gendorn, »A Chemical Weapons Atlas«, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Vol. 53, Sept./Oct. 1997, 35–39.

3. Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1998.

4. Tim Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets: The Hunt for Iraq's Hidden Weapons*, London: Harper Collins 1999.

5. Anthony H. Cordesman, »Iraq« Alexandria, VA: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 1998; Anthony H. Cordesman, »Iraq's past and future biological weapons capabilities«, Washington, DC: CSIS, 1998.

enhance its skills for longer-range ballistic delivery vehicles as far as could be done without actual testing. In addition, it is probable that some vehicles survived in disguise the end of the Gulf war and the ensuing efforts of UNSCOM to disarm Iraq. Nevertheless, as long as United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 687 is applied, it should be possible to stop an emerging Iraqi threat in its tracks, if necessary by brute force. The problem is much more the politics of UNSC diplomacy than intelligence failures or lack of offensive options.⁶

Iran is generally regarded as possessing chemical weapons after some reported retaliatory use during the first Gulf War. Iran is a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, thus it should be possible to clarify all ambiguities over a period of years. Biological weapons capability has been inferred for Iran, but rather casually and without firm evidence.⁷ By and large, the same story applies to the nuclear sector. The country is credited with a nuclear weapons program – and certainly there were corresponding activities during the reign of the Shah – but the evidence is far from the one obtaining in the case of Iraq. Iran is, obviously, eager to conduct a comprehensive nuclear research program, opening all avenues in nuclear technology. Its procurement activities point to a distinct interest in enrichment technology, something that is not a logical priority in a country without operating research reactors and in a world market where light water reactor fuel can be bought at low prices and without difficulties. This is bound to raise suspicions, even though the inspections and »visits« of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to some undeclared sites have not resulted in any hard evidence that would prove the existence of nuclear-weapons activities.⁸

Iran's missile program, built on the Soviet Scud and considerable input from North Korea, is impressive. The Shahab II is credited with a range of 1500–2000 km and has been tested successfully once. Whether this missile is reliable in a mass-produced version and capable of carrying a warhead right to the target remains an open question. Its appearance is disturbing in itself, as it puts part of Europe in its range.⁹

Syria's chemical weapons production is seen as multifaceted and quantitatively significant.¹⁰ Syria

produces several nerve agents in addition to traditional agents such as mustard gas. Much has been speculated, but few hard facts are known, about the country's biological weapons activities. The nuclear program is rudimentary, and there is no evidence whatsoever of a strong push for nuclear weapons. Syria's missiles' range is around 1000 km – again developed with North Korean assistance – and appears to be aimed at its regional rivals, Turkey, Israel, and Iraq.

Saudi-Arabia bought – during the frenzy of the first Gulf war – a dinosaur missile, the CSS-2 with a range of some 2,500 km, from China, to have some counter to the Iraqi and Iranian missile threats. The CSS-2's inaccuracy is pathetic, and it would make military sense with a WMD warhead only. However, Saudi-Arabia – closely aligned to the United States – is not reported to possess or strive for WMD, even though reports of support to the Pakistani nuclear weapons program have surfaced from time to time.¹¹

Egypt is, of course, the most important Middle East country in the Arab world. Its nuclear ambitions, nurtured under President Gamal Abdel Nasser, were renounced when Anwar al Sadat took power. Egypt has become a very active member of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Cairo's diplomats focus much energy – notably in the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United

6. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq and the war of sanctions: conventional threats and weapons of mass destruction*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999; Graham S. Pearson, *The UNSCOM saga: chemical and biological weapons non-proliferation*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.

7. Michael J. Eisenstadt, »Iran«, Alexandria, VA: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 1998.

8. Shahram Chubin, »Iran's national security policy: capabilities, intentions and impact«, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994; David A. Schwarzbach, »Iran's nuclear program: energy or weapons?«, Washington, DC, NRDC, 1995, (Nuclear weapons databook/Natural Resources Defense Council); Anthony H. Cordesman, »Iran and nuclear weapons«, Washington, DC: CSIS, 2000.

9. Wyn Q. Bowen, *The Politics of Ballistic Missile Non-proliferation*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000; Federation of the American Scientists, Intelligence Resource Program, Missile Proliferation Summary, <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/missile/summary.htm>, 2001.

10. Ahmed S. Hashim, »Syria«, Alexandria, VA: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute 1998.

11. Bowen 2000; Federation of American Scientists 2001.

Nations and in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Process – on putting pressure on Israel, the only nuclear weapon state in the region. But they are careful not to rock the boat and are always prepared to compromise at the right moment. Being avowedly non-nuclear, Egypt has nevertheless preserved a chemical retaliatory option, and has been reported to work on biological weapons as well. It has acquired Scud missiles from the Soviet Union, and participated in the Condor missile program with Argentina and Iraq until its abandonment in the eighties under the pressure of the Missile Technology Control Regime. Egypt has been reported to continue with missile development, with the assistance of North Korea and/or Chinese/Russian assistance.¹² It has kept a very low profile about all these activities and has distinguished itself as the leader of protest against Israel's nuclear weapon capability. It was Egypt, under the leadership of its Foreign Minister Amr Musa, that has persuaded a number of Arab countries not to become full members to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) as long as Israel abstains from the NPT.

The picture would be incomplete without Libya. Colonel Muammar Ghaddafi once had clear nuclear intentions, trying to buy the bomb first, and, after these attempts led him nowhere, trying to buy relevant assistance from both the Soviet Union and Belgium. Belgium was dissuaded from continuing nuclear assistance to Libya, and the Soviet Union was too careful to transfer technology that could prove of military value. Finally, Ghaddafi settled for a chemical weapons program and succeeded in obtaining a turnkey chemical weapons factory from a German businessman who ended up in jail once the matter was revealed. The original plant at Rabta suffered from a huge fire, but there have been reports about a second, underground, plant, and, anyway, it is not unlikely that Libya has some stocks of chemical weapons agents.¹³ Libya's missile program was comparably adventurous, but indigenous production never reached maturity. Libya is stuck with Scud-Ds, and, possibly, North Korean upgrades. This is enough of a capability, however, to hit parts of Italy.¹⁴

The trend of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has been stagnant in the last two decades.¹⁵ No new programs have appeared, and

some old ones have been stalled or reversed, though not in the Middle East, with the exception of the forced interruption of Iraqi efforts. Three developments, however, work into the opposite direction: the availability of foreign assistance, notably in the form of experts-to-hire, could shorten the development of full-fledged, sophisticated programs considerably. Secondly, the evolution of bioengineering makes the production and the storage of biological weapons much easier than it used to be. Thirdly, the range of missiles is slowly expanding, notably with North Korean, Russian and/or Chinese assistance. However, the transition from one to two-stage missiles is a difficult one, and in-flight stability becomes even a greater headache with three stages (or true inter-continental range). It is for that reason that the time when Iranian missiles are estimated to be able to reach Central and Western Europe has been, once more, rescheduled to after 2010 in more recent intelligence estimates.¹⁶

Who is Threatening Whom, and Why?

The actual threat possibilities that the capabilities of Middle Eastern states may imply for Europe depend upon these capabilities and upon the overall political relationship between them and the European country in question.

To start with, the country most concerned is certainly Turkey.¹⁷ It is within the reach of the missiles of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Saudi-Arabia. Israel can be discounted as a source of threat as it is actually allied with Turkey by way of

12. Bowen 2000; Federation of American Scientists 2001.

13. E.J. Hoogendorn, »A Chemical Weapons Atlas«, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Vol. 53, Sept./Oct. 1997, 35–39.

14. Bowen 2000; Federation of American Scientists 2001.

15. Harald Müller, »Neither Hype Nor Complacency: WMD Proliferation after the Cold War«, in: *The Non-proliferation Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Winter 1997, 62–71.

16. Recent conversations with German and Spanish intelligence officials.

17. On Turkish security, cf. Duygu Bazoglu Sezer, »Turkey's Political and Security Interests and Policies in the New Geostrategic Environment of the Expanded Middle East«, Washington, DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center Occasional Paper No. 19, 1994.

several military cooperation agreements. With the Saudis, Turkey has no quarrel whatsoever. However, for its immediate neighbors Syria, Iran and Iraq, the same cannot be said. By its own choice, Iran is a party in the Middle East conflict, and the Turkish-Israeli entente is a source of dispute. In addition, the Kurdish population lives on the Iranian as well as the Turkish side of the border, and this could create troubles. Iran and Turkey are also competitors for the preferred route of Caspian oil to the world markets. The quite thorough suppression of Islamist political movements in Turkey could prove another bone of contention. However, relationships between the two countries have gone reasonably well. The Kurdish issue¹⁸ appears to link them rather than to divide them, as Iran is weary of its own minorities. Turkey's position as a bulwark against Iraq makes it useful for Iran, and this common pool of interest may, in the end, be more important than the dividing issue of the Middle East.¹⁹

With Iraq, things are very different. Turkey has intruded into Iraqi territory several times in recent years in order to combat the PKK, the Kurdish Worker's Party, and though Iraq is as tough towards its own Kurdish population as Turkey, if not worse, the infringement of its national sovereignty, exploiting the military weakness of Iraq after the Gulf war and under the imposed no-fly-zone imperative, does not amuse Baghdad. Turkey has been serving as an «aircraft carrier» for allied forces during the Gulf war and for the enforcement of the Northern no-fly-zone, is virtually allied to Israel and exacerbates the situation of Iraqi agriculture with its huge Ataturk dam project.

That construction endeavor in Southwest Turkey imposes a distinct diminution of the headwaters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, the lifeline of both Syria and Iraq. Once completed, the dam system will permit Turkey to regulate at will the water flow into its downstream neighbors. Ankara has already indicated that it views the project as a national affair and is not willing to consider the «neighborhood rule» that has come to govern the handling of most multi-country river flows.²⁰

If anything, Syria is even more aggravated by this development. In addition, there is an open territorial dispute concerning the border area be-

tween Turkey and Syria along the Mediterranean coastline. And Syria is the main target of Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, since utilization of Turkish airspace could enable the Israel air force (coming through the open waters of the Mediterranean) to circumvent Syria's air defenses directed against Israel and to attack Syria's forces »from behind.«²¹

Turkey, in other words has to calculate seriously the capabilities of its neighbors. As NATO ally and candidate for EU accession (though not in the very near future) Turkey's security cannot be divorced from the European one, whatever the barriers to quick accession to the European Union might be. European countries thus cannot stay aloof if Turkey is seriously attacked.

Greece is within the reach of some of the Middle Eastern military assets, but its good relationship to Arab countries makes it a very unlikely target. Italy was once the victim of a single Libyan missile attack – against the Liparian island of Lampedusa in the wake of the US retaliatory attack for the Lockerbie terrorist attack – but, significantly, the missile fell short of the target. Italy is also well within reach of the Shahab II, but, again, it has no trouble with Iran.

Central and Western Europe could be within the range of Iranian and Iraqi missiles within a decade or so, provided these countries pursue determined programs, get some foreign assistance, and achieve technical success, neither of which condition can be taken for granted. These odds notwithstanding, it makes sense to consider that possibility in the course of a sober threat assessment.

18. Henri J. Barkey, »Turkey's Kurdish Dilemma«, in: *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Winter 1993/94, pp. 51–70.

19. Henry J. Barkey (ed.), *Reluctant neighbor: Turkey's role in the Middle East*, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press., 1996.

20. Natasha Beschoner, »Water and Instability in the Middle East«, London: IIS, Adelphi Paper 273, 1992/93, chap. 27.

21. Alan Gresh, »Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and their Impact on the Middle East«, in: *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2, Spring 1998, 188–203.

US and Western European Positions: Common Interests, Different Strategies

Given the primary economic and strategic interests of the West, from a Western perspective it would be by far the best solution if the conflicts in the region would come to a rest. The West has no need of imperial preponderance in the Middle East. This is a matter of the past that will, presumably, never come up again. And if the Middle Eastern countries could somehow settle their differences, one of the major concerns of Western policy could be disposed of.²²

The Western interest with regard to WMD proliferation in the Middle East should thus be very clear: prevent it where possible, contain it and slow it down where it happened, reverse it where the opportunity arises, find responses to it where reversal is not a real-world option for the near future. A Middle East armed with weapons of mass destruction not only provides a recipe for catastrophe, presenting an example of a virtual Armageddon to the rest of the world which would leave every moral person – the origins of the morality notwithstanding – traumatized because of the number and state of victims; it would not only threaten the rest of the world with a serious and possibly fatal disruption of the supply of essential raw materials. It might well extend beyond the regional boundaries in military terms, given the range of the delivery vehicles at hands, and the interconnectedness of strategic interests and alliances.

It should be emphasized that, up to this point, there is nothing dividing the European from the American interest. On the general level discussed so far, the interests of the transatlantic partners coincide. Unfortunately, this is no reason to celebrate unity. In politics, the devil is in the detail of what to do as much as in the detail of what the facts are. And concerning the what to do, starting with the assessment of the size and direction of threat and extending into strategies and tactics, Europeans and Americans do not, alas, see eye to eye at all.

Threats are not immutable facts. They are political animals, subject to evolution and change. Whether or not a relationship to another country emerges as a threat is very much a matter of the interaction between the potential threatener and

the potential target. European countries are no helpless victims of mightily threatening Middle Eastern »rogues«. They are in a position to shape their relationship to those countries which, singly, are much weaker and in much more dire straits security-wise than the European Union as a whole and, as a corollary, its member states.

Security diplomacy, of course, is no appeasement. Basic interests, attitudes, principles and values are not at disposal. Where a Middle Eastern country, WMD armed or not, pursues dangerous, illicit or aggressive policies, such as Iraq against Kuwait in 1990, it has to be opposed. Likewise, Israel's existence and security will remain an important policy objective of the Europeans. Beyond that, possibilities for a flexible and creative diplomacy abound.

Turkey and its Neighbors

As a first line of action, the Europeans should make it clearer to the Turkish accession candidate that accession presumes viable relations of all EU members (and, by implication, the countries wishing to accede) with their neighbors. Repeated mini-invasions in order to combat the militant exponents of a national minority is simply out of order – this view coincided with the European line that Turkey has to accommodate relevant Kurdish grievances and settle that issue non-violently. Likewise, Turkey should be pressed hard to enter into a reasonable water-sharing arrangement with its Southern neighbors. Europe with its trans-border regimes for the Rhine and the Danube can ill afford a regression into unregulated use of river waters that may have been adequate for the 19th, but certainly not for the 21st century. With this position delineated clearly, Europe is in no danger that its security might be compromised by Turkey's over ambitious water use plans.

As far as the Turkish-Syrian border dispute (that has not been virulent for a long period) is concerned, the Europeans, in concert with NATO, should make it crystal clear that Turkey's territory is sacrosanct. It can be ruled out, given the sober

22. Philip H. Gordon, *The transatlantic allies and the changing Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998.

approach of Syria to power politics,²³ that Damascus would confront both the EU and NATO over an issue that, after all, is a very minor one given overriding national interests such as reclaiming the Golan heights, securing a reliable water flow or developing the fledgling trade ties to the Western world. This leaves the Middle Eastern conflict as a source of contention; this will be dealt with further below. Otherwise, the relationships between Turkey and its neighbors should not emerge as a WMD/missile threat to Europe.

Iran and Islamic Fundamentalism

It is on Iran that one of the major European-American disagreement emerges. There is little doubt that Iran takes an active part in its regional environment including the Gulf, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the early Khomeiny years, the country displayed a missionary hyper-activism; beyond supporting Hizbollah, this was clearly to be seen in the close ties to Sudan and events in Saudi-Arabia and Bahrain that bore an Iranian imprint. This zeal has markedly receded in the last decade. Iran continues to oppose the Oslo peace process (which is not in great shape anyway) and to lend assistance to Hizbollah. Beyond this, its foreign policy has become much more cautious and geared more to preserving traditional national interests.²⁴

Iran is one of the countries in the world with the most serious security problems. It had to repulse an aggression, absorb the large-scale first use of chemical weapons without any international diplomatic, military or moral assistance, survive a war in which the whole world was supporting the enemy – the aggressor – and in which it confronted several times the navy of the United States close to its own shores. It learned about the extensive WMD programs of Iraq and has to be aware that these programs might be presently revived. It borders highly unruly regions in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Its neighbor to the East, Afghanistan, is run by another brand of Islamism which is hostile to Shia, the Muslim minority faith that reigns in Iran. Relations to Afghanistan are tense, and Kabul, in turn, is supported by nuclear-armed Pakistan. Altogether, this is not an enviable position in security terms.²⁵ Nevertheless, these secur-

ity problems have never been addressed by the West in any reasonable way. Iran has been under constant embargo, constraints and pressure since 1979 – initially no doubt self-inflicted – and has been left to deal with its own problems by way of self-help. In that security situation, consideration of WMD should not come as a surprise.

Even under Khomeiny, Iran abstained from direct aggression against its neighbors. Since then, this conservatism has become even more distinct. Over the last few years, Teheran has pursued an intense diplomacy with its neighbors around the Gulf. The latest fruit of these efforts has been the recent Iranian-Saudi security agreement. One can conclude that, if Iran is pursuing WMD and missile capabilities, the purpose is to guarantee national security and state survival in an extremely unruly environment, while a diplomacy of reassurance towards its neighbors is the first line of Iranian security diplomacy.

The United States has been conducting a policy of confrontation and isolation. The Europeans, in contrast, have tried, though cautiously, to engage in a »critical dialogue«, in the hope that a sensibly pursued engagement may, in the end, support the forces of change and reform that are, no doubt, available in the country in big numbers; if the last elections indicate anything it is that they represent the clear majority of the population.

Europeans have continued to trade with Iran while the US has largely embargoed that country. It should be kept in mind, however, that European export control offices have been very prudent before granting export permits for the transfers of goods and technologies that are subject to licensing. Apart from Iraq, where exports are governed by UNSC 687 and follow-up resolutions, Iran is the destination with the highest rate of denials. Taking into account that companies do not even apply for licenses when they receive advice, on an informal inquiry, that a denial was

23. Daniel Pipes, »Syria Beyond the Peace Process«, Washington, DC: The Washington Institute Policy Papers No. 40, 1996.

24. Shahram Chubin, *Iran's national security policy: capabilities, intentions and impact*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994.

25. Anthony H. Cordesman, »India, Pakistan, and Proliferation in the Middle East«, Washington, DC: CSIS, 1998.

impending, this shows that the EU members are not on a sell-out to Iran, but pursue an export policy that parallels the approach of critical dialogue.²⁶

European-Iranian relations, while not brilliant, are not bad either. They are certainly not in the state of mutual threat. As unwelcome as an expansion of Iranian WMD capabilities would be as an element of instability and insecurity in the region, it would not really present a military threat to Europe on the basis of political analysis. This diverges considerably from US assessments, where such Iranian capabilities appear as a grave threat to US national interests.

Another Gulf War?

The most frequent scenario in which regional WMD and long-range missiles figure as a serious threat to the West is a replay of the Gulf War: a regional conflagration that would jeopardize the flow of crude oil to the rest of the world with a possibly devastating impact on the world economy and global stability would provoke another massive Western intervention. The aggressor (which could be Iraq or Iran according to the prevailing discussion) would then employ its WMD and missiles to compel the West into abstaining from such intervention.²⁷

Popular as it is, the scenario is lacking credibility. The distribution of destructive capabilities between the West and any regional aggressor will remain highly asymmetrical for the indefinite future. Any aggressor knows that the West could retaliate against an attack on Europe or the US with devastating force, even if the decision were made to stick to conventional means only. If the Gulf War gives any indications, it is that the sanctuary of deterrence would be regime survival and the preservation of the existence of the state; Iraq never dared to attack Turkey, the NATO member, though it was clearly within reach of its missiles. Its attacks on Israel that served the strategic purpose to split the coalition were confined to conventional munitions. In other words, intra-war deterrence was at work, and the WMD means in Iraqi hands were not used because the core values of the regime were not under attack. It is much more likely that an attempt to conquer

Baghdad would have responded to by the employment of WMD.

Middle East rulers, while calculating their interests and the means to pursue them in different terms from the West, are by no means completely irrational, as precisely the Iranian and Iraqi examples demonstrate.²⁸ They – particularly Saddam Hussein – might be more willing to take risks than Western policymakers. But their risk-taking knows boundaries as well. Intervention remains possible if and when the most vital interests are at stake. What would be impossible in a WMD/long-range missile environment would be pushing the enemy into unconditional surrender. This, however, has not been the Western style of warfare since 1945, and certainly not since the end of the Cold War. Rather, the political objectives of interventions were narrowly circumscribed, and they included never explicitly the removal of the hostile regime, even though this might have been the unspoken desire of Western leaders in the Gulf and Balkan campaigns.

Iraqi Sanctions, Litmus Test for International Regimes

International regimes – the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Missile Technology Control Regimes have always been regarded by the Europeans as the main line of defense against the proliferation threat in the Middle East and elsewhere. There was not a big difference within the Atlantic community on this point. In recent years, however, the United States has lost its enthusiasm for supporting these regimes. The outrageous exceptions claimed by the US Senate in the ratification resolution to the Chemical Weapons Convention were a first, serious indicator of this tendency: the refusal to permit chemical probes taken in the US to leave the US and the right given

26. Fred Halliday, »Western Europe and the Iranian Revolution, 1979–97: an Elusive Normalization«, in: *Middle East and Europe*, 1998.

27. Peter R. Lavoy (ed.), *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press., 2000.

28. cf. James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, New York: Putnam's Sons 1995, 359.

to the US President to refuse inspections if they contradicted the US national interests undermine squarely the CWC verification system. In the negotiations for the Protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention, the US figures, together with China, among the most obstinate parties, believing that the Convention is unverifiable, that illusions and complacency might be created by an ambitious system, and that US commercial and military secrets might be given away if the system were made intrusive. On the other hand, the Europeans were among the steady supporters of a strong protocol; the negotiations turned out to be as much within the Western group as between the West and the rest.²⁹ In the Missile Technology Control Regime, it was Canadian and European initiatives that led to the present outreach effort and the attempt to universalize the regime through a »Code of Conduct« for dealing with missiles and missile technology; throughout, the US was much more reluctant and skeptical. In the NPT context, the US was certainly very helpful in shaping the compromise that led to the consensus resolution of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, but the refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty means nothing less than the US refusing to pay its price for the bargain that led to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, thereby severely undermining global support for the Treaty.

Instead, the US gives priority to military responses to proliferation, defensive and offensive alike. The regimes are accepted and even supported as long as they do not require compromises by and constraints on the United States. Since regimes must always rest on give-and-take exchanges among the different parties, this attitude runs counter to the spirit and very nature of international arms control and non-proliferation agreements. It is all the more serious as compliance and enforcement measures – possibly the weakest spot in the regime construction – must rely on the consensus of the vast majority of regime members. Regimes cannot be enforced over an extended period of time in the way resolution 687 is presently being enforced by the US with UK assistance – on a national, unilateral basis.

On the other hand, it has to be recognized that the Europeans have not addressed the enforcement problem in any consistent manner. The division on how to deal with Iraq is an obvious case

in point: France leads the front that works for a relaxation of the sanctions against Baghdad. The UK is the only country lending military support to US enforcement actions. The rest of Europe sits uncomfortably between the two without any convincing alternative.

Regimes are legal orders. They depend on their norms being shared among the vast majority of their members. On the basis of this consensus, redress can be sought for ambivalent behavior and outright breaches. Most of these problems can be resolved by regime-internal negotiations. In extreme cases, sanctions will be in order, and in instances of a momentous threat to security military action might be deemed to be necessary. Preparations for sanctions and military actions must be known, reliable, and convincing. We are far from that situation; and ironically, the only country prepared for enforcement, the US, is willing to enforce not rules, but its own, idiosyncratic national policies.³⁰

Ultimately, the policy towards Iraq is the litmus test. The economic sanctions that were imposed as long as the WMD programs were not convincingly abandoned and dismantled are not tenable as the civilian population has proven to be the main victim, not the regime. The international discussion about »intelligent« and »tailored« sanctions is well taken.³¹ It will no doubt result in an improved instrument that, however, then has to be adapted

29. Jean Pascal Zanders/Elizabeth/M. French/Natalie Pauwels, »Chemical and biological weapon developments and arms control«, in: *SIPRI Yearbook 1999*, 565–595; Graham S. Pearson, »The Protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention is Within Reach«, in: *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 30, No. 5, June 2000, 15–20.

30. Harald Müller, »Compliance Politics: A Critical Analysis of Multilateral Arms Control Treaty Enforcement«, in: *Non-proliferation Review* Vol. 7, Summer 2000, 77–90; Michael Moody/Amy Sands, »Introduction«, in: *Non-proliferation Review* Vol. 8, Spring 2001, 1–9; Brad Roberts, »Revisiting Fred Iklé's 1961 Question, »After Detection – What?«, *ibid.* 10–24.

31. David Cortright/George A. Lopez (eds.), *Economic Sanctions: Panacea or Peacebuilding in a Post-Cold War World?*, Boulder: Westview Press; Larry Minear et al., »Toward more humane and effective sanctions management: enhancing the capacity of the United Nations system«, Providence, RI: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, 1998, Occasional paper 31; Daniel W. Drezner, *The Sanctions Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999.

and applied thoroughly by the international community. The EU should lead the way; it would be an important step to repair the apparent rifts in the Atlantic community if the Europeans and the US could coordinate their approaches carefully.

Nevertheless, the issue of military sanctions as the ultimate means of enforcement remains on the agenda. If the sanction regime on Iraq changes, agreement must be restored on when and under what circumstances to conduct what kind of military action against Iraq which is still under the reign of UNSC Resolution 687 and the ensuing implementation resolutions. It would be the ultimate defeat of the non-proliferation regimes, indeed of multilateral arms control as a whole, if Iraq could defy the content of 687 ten years after the war.³² The military risk which a revived program would entail must be stated clearly, and by all members of the Security Council. The insistence on restoring an inspection regime – a point on which the permanent members were never in disagreement – should be clearly restated.

The Palestine Conflict in the Proliferation Equation

In the end, the proliferation problem in the Middle East cannot be solved without a solution to the conflict over Palestine. As long as the conflict continues, there is hardly a prospect for reasonable and detached considerations of regional arms control opportunities which could help to lay to rest the proliferation problem.

There is basic agreement between Europe and the United States on Israel's right to secure, threat-free borders and the necessity to establish, in due course, a Palestinian state. But there exist considerable divergences on the distribution of blame for the stalemate in the peace process and on the necessity to apply stronger pressure on Israel to make the big territorial concessions that are needed to come to a final settlement. Most in Europe would agree that all settlements in Gaza and the overwhelming number of those in the West Bank should be either evacuated or put under Palestinian authority, that small corrections around Jerusalem might be in order, provided there is adequate compensation, and that administrative authority over East Jerusalem must go to the Palestinians. There is some understanding for

the Arab view that Israel's nuclear capability, under present circumstances, serves less as an existential deterrent but as an umbrella under which territorial annexation is taking place.

Israel's determined refusal to entertain any conversations about the nuclear issue – even on the whereabouts of a nuclear weapon free zone once it was established – and to refrain even from closing the aged Dimona reactor meets with European criticism and US acquiescence. Europeans fear strongly that Arab willingness to succumb to the rules of the NPT may wane if the status quo continues without any sign of change at either the nuclear or the Palestinian front, while the US appears to be content as long as there is no climactic change for the worse. While Europeans do not refuse in principle cooperate with Israel in the military sector the degree and intensity of US-Israeli collaboration creates some concern. The fear is that the persistent experience of unequal treatment on proliferation issues – harsh pressures or military action against Arab countries, tacit tolerance of Israeli WMD and missile activities – will enhance Arab resentment to a point where they see no interest in continuing to abide by the rules of the non-proliferation regimes. The refusal by major Arab countries, led by Egypt, to sign the CWC is seen as a sobering sign.³³

Europeans, in other words, emphasize Israeli security in the borders of 1967 and are critical Israeli policies that go beyond this objective. The United States is much more inclined to condone whatever policies Israel conducts, restricting the expression of concern to quiet diplomacy until a high threshold is passed. Europeans suspect that this difference is very much related to the fact that the European stance rests on a moral commitment reflecting a recognition of guilt of the perpetrators and collaborators of the holocaust, or shame of insufficient support for the Jewish cause during these years, and/or the deep sympathies for the survivors and their progeny, while, other than in Europe, in the United States powerful political

32. Roberts, op. cit.

33. Abdulhay Sayed, »Overcoming Prejudice: A Syrian Perception of the Israeli Threat in the Arab-Israeli Region of Conflict«, in: James Leonard et al., *National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East*, New York/Geneva, UNIDIR Research Papers 37, 1995, 61–82.

organizations support aggressively Israeli policies and request the US government to lend assistance or at least acquiescence to them. In the European view, this hampers the US role as the honest broker and, simultaneously, the enforcer of non-proliferation in that region, while the US accuses the Europeans of putting their economic interests in the Arab world above principle.

A Question of Principles

In contrast to a more alarmist view, Europeans see the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East as no immediate threat to their national security.³⁴ Their priority is still the strengthening of multilateral arms control and non-proliferation agreements. Next comes a diplomatic approach towards the region and individual countries therein with a view to addressing national insecurities and grievances and to creating an environment more conducive to progressive economic development and less to radicalism and interstate conflict. The Barcelona process launched in the nineties has successfully tried to engage the countries around the Mediterranean in cooperation with the EU as well as with each other; it is the cornerstone of the European Union's regional policy and is meant as integral part of a long-term security policy.³⁵

Beyond these diplomatic tools, the Europeans believe that the deterrent effect embodied in the overwhelming military superiority of the Western Alliance will suffice to dissuade any country in the region from attacking the territory of European countries with weapons of mass destruction. Whether a nuclear component must be implied in this deterrent posture or not is contested, but not the matter as such. The assessment extends to the case of an armed conflict as long as the survival of the hostile power is not at stake.

Missile defense is largely of interest as a tactical tool to protect the soldiers and deny hostile forces the battlefield advantage of WMD use. It is seen as a much less urgent priority in terms of homeland defense, not the least because confidence in the reliability of available technology is not too high.

In contrast, the US regards the missile threats emerging from countries like Iran and Iraq as

grave and imminent. It does not believe that deterrence is a reliable tool, particularly in the course of a military intervention; Washington sees the distinct danger of these countries using their WMD capabilities for deterring the US from intervening by threatening missile attacks against the US homeland.³⁶ The trust in diplomacy, arms control and multilateral regimes has declined dramatically in recent years, while the emphasis on military countermeasures and the trust in the feasibility of missile defenses has risen commensurably.

As a consequence, missile defense has become the priority number one for the US to counter the perceived threat, followed by new weapons such as deep-penetrating nuclear warheads with very small yields to hit underground WMD storage sites or command posts. Diplomacy, arms control and non-proliferation measures are acceptable complements as long as they do not restrain the pursuit of the military options that the US wants to acquire or maintain.

The US-European disagreements are no minor differences on technical issues.³⁷ They reflect a deep cleavage about principle and visions for world order. The Europeans see order in agreed multilateral norms and rules that reflect the interests of all major parties. The US tends to rely on its unique military and economic power. If these views cannot not be somehow reconciled, the Atlantic community may be in serious trouble. ◀

34. Richard N. Haass (ed.), *Transatlantic Tensions: the United States, Europe, and Problem Countries*, Washington, DC: Brookings, 1999.

35. »Peace and security in the Middle East and the future of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership«, conference report, Ebenhausen, SWP, 1998; Sven Berendt/Christian-Peter Hanelt (eds.), *Bound to Cooperate: Europe and the Middle East*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2000.

36. cf. Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, Washington, D.C., 1998.

37. Robert D. Blackwill/Michael Stürmer, *Allies Divided: Transatlantic Policies for the Greater Middle East*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997.