

## *Summary of Discussions*

### SWP / AICGS Working Group **Diverging Strategic Perspectives on the Middle East**

1st Colloquium, Washington DC January 24, 2003  
at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS)

#### **The United States and Germany in the Middle East**

Historically, the United States has taken the lead in the attempts to resolve the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis because it uniquely possesses the ability to influence Israel and offer security guarantees. Although this makes U.S. involvement essential, the emergence of the Quartet, which in addition to the U.S. includes the European Union, United Nations and Russia, has demonstrated the value of and need for a multilateral approach to this problem. The Quartet has achieved greater legitimacy and credibility both within the Middle East and abroad particularly because it reflects more than just the U.S. or European view. While some observers think that the Quartet is indicative of an increasing willingness of the U.S. to embrace multilateral solutions, more cynical observers believe that the U.S. is manipulating the situation so that it can share the responsibility/blame when things go wrong.

The value of EU participation should not be discounted, however, because of its stronger influence among Arab nations, financial support for the Palestinian Authority and reforms, and its ability to get involved where the U.S. cannot, i.e. the EU is now playing a role in Cairo at the ceasefire talks with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Thus, it is clear that transatlantic cooperation is the key to the success of the Quartet. However, this cooperation is being threatened by the U.S.'s unilateralist foreign policy, i.e. Iraq, because it shapes the EU's impression of how the U.S. views its use of power. This could create a backlash from EU that carries over to the Quartet and other Transatlantic relationships.

The principal advantage of the Quartet has been the creation of a common policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict. This makes it more difficult for the disputing parties to "forum shop" for the most sympathetic ear: neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are able to play one entity against another. In order to bolster this approach, the Quartet members have to "stick together" and push their initiatives forward even if their traditional "clients" in the region resist. The trade-off is that the individual Quartet members can no longer independently push forward their own views on how to resolve the conflict and some members of the Quartet have had to agree with some positions that they would otherwise disagree with in order to preserve the Quartet.

One of the most notable characteristics, or flaws, of the Quartet is that it does not include a single Arab state. Although the Quartet has informally consulted with Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, these key Arab countries, which represent the emerging Arab consensus, should be more seriously involved in the process. The Arab nations in the Middle East have as much of a vested interest in peace because the continued conflict creates instability within their own countries: it is a domestic issue, not a question of foreign policy.

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Although the Quartet has produced the "Roadmap", which reflects the broader input of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinians, it not clear that this will meet the parties' desire for a clear way forward: will anyone take first step if the last step is not clear? The sequential steps outlined in the Roadmap do not reflect that fact it has proven nearly impossible to get the parties to follow sequential steps because the level of distrust is too high for anyone to move first. A set of parallel steps seems the more logical way forward towards a sustainable agreement.

Following the 1991 Madrid meetings, multilateral working groups were established to operate in parallel with the bilateral peace negotiations and address regional issues concerning economics, environment, refugees, water, arms control and security. These groups were significantly hampered by the fact that they had to stay "one step behind" bilateral processes. It eventually became clear that the multilateral groups could not make any meaningful progress until the core conflict has been resolved. Nonetheless, these "Track 2" efforts, especially in security, have kept some of the momentum going and the people who are involved will bring a sort of "institutional memory" to the peace process when it is fully revived.

In spite of these multiple efforts to move the peace process forward, success or failure is primarily, if not solely, dependent on the political dynamic (and behavior of government) within Israel post-elections and what happens in the Palestinian community in terms of armed struggle.

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#### **Agenda :**

#### **Session I:** *Multilateral, bilateral, unilateral: What works where?*

American diplomats have tended to favor direct mediation between Arabs and Israelis. The iconic image of Clinton the White House lawn bringing Arafat and Rabin together for a handshake in September 1993 speaks volumes for how Americans often see their role in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. But Americans have, at times, sought others' participation. The Madrid negotiations of 1992 are an example, and the creation of the "Quartet" in 2001 is another. At the same time, EU representatives are committed to multilateral approaches, but they have faced internal divisions in their policies toward the Middle East. What situations call for direct mediation? What situations best lend themselves to multilateral processes? Are there times when one was pursued when the other should have been?

#### **Session II:** *The Quartet in concept and practice*

Although many perceive the Bush Administration to have a penchant for unilateralism, it has shown a strong inclination for multilateral support on Arab-Israeli peacemaking. In particular, the administration pursued the creation of a "Quartet" encompassing the U.S., Russia, the E.U. and the UN to coordinate statements and actions on Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Has the Quartet been a successful experiment? How has it done on issues like donor coordination and diplomatic unanimity? Does it consist of the right groups, or should other groupings be explored, perhaps for different purposes?

#### **Session III:** *The Quartet as viewed from the outside*

The Quartet excludes key regional actors like Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, all of which have been long and intimately involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Is there room for an international structure that does not include these key states? Does the Quartet structure for help or hurt regional powers' peacemaking efforts? Does the Quartet feel unified? How do regional powers balance interacting on a bilateral basis with members of the Quartet, and interacting with the Quartet as a whole?

#### **Session IV:** *Multilateral institutions and regional organizations: Madrid implementation and beyond*

The Madrid negotiations created a series of multilateral working groups that sought to build confidence and further cooperation among regional governments. Could major powers have played a more constructive role getting this cooperative work off the ground? What lessons does the post-Madrid experience hold for the efforts of multilateral actors to promote regional change?