

AN OVERVIEW OF THE US AND EUROPEAN POLICIES IN THE MIDDLE-EAST

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Introduction

The Middle East has long been recognised as a problematic region and even more so when viewed from the general perspective of international diplomacy and specifically, great power foreign policy. One of the foremost reasons why the 'Middle East question' is such a thorny one with respect to the US, Britain and Europe may ultimately be put down to their long and 'troubled' involvement and engagement in the region. Even so, it is the intention of this essay to provide a snapshot of the roles played and the policy decisions of the aforementioned actors and how these have impacted on the politics of the region itself.

It is worth noting that this particular war was fought at a time when the US was just emerging from the Cold War, an era which was characterised by a bipolar distribution of power. Some commentators such as Ahrari, Bennis and Halliday among others, have argued that this particular factor, more so than any other, operating together with the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, marked a fundamental shift in the global power structure and continues to have repercussions to this day. In essence, the cumulative effect of the dismantling of the Cold War order resulted in the withdrawal of active Soviet engagement from the international scenario, when for a brief moment the world experienced a power vacuum in which some states rushed to fill. An example of this proposition would be that since the end of the First Gulf War, it may not be amiss to say that the US has

increasingly been playing an enlarged role in the international arena which upon reflection, she perhaps feels obliged or even forced to fulfil, as a consequence of a perceived responsibility from being the sole surviving global superpower. The essay will attempt to further pursue this line of thought, specifically in terms of what this has and will continue to mean for the Middle East region, especially *vis a vis* US policy.

Additionally, the essay will also attempt to analyse the roles and policies of Britain and Europe in the Middle East since the end of the war. At first glance, a major difference that characterises the relationships of Britain and several other European states, such Germany, France and Italy, from that of the US may be viewed from the perspective of their deeper and altogether more extensive, historical relationship to the Middle East. Specifically, the contention here is that the involvement of these powers in the prior construction of the politics and systems of the Middle East may be said to have been a contributory factor to the systemic instability that continues to characterise the region¹. Put simply, being historically involved and linked with developments in the region, these states may have inadvertently influenced the politics of the region. That said, the point of this line of enquiry is primarily to ascertain whether the continued involvement of all these external powers since the end of the war has in fact had a tangible and more importantly positive, effect on Middle Eastern politics. Among such effects would include for example, progress towards democratisation and market liberalisation, or whether the events since then have merely consolidated the *status quo ante* with respect to the political arrangements of the region.

1. See Kuroda, Yasumasa "Bush's New World Order: A Structural Analysis of Instability and Conflict in the Gulf" in Ismael, Tareq Y. and Ismael, Jacqueline S. (Editors) "*The Gulf War and the New World Order: International Relations of the Middle East*", University Press of Florida: Gainesville, 1994.

A further component to this essay will comprise of an analysis of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), or specifically, the exercise of diplomacy by the US, Britain and Europe with respect to the facilitation of resolving the longstanding Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine. The essay will also include a brief discussion on the trajectory and content of US, British and European policy in the aftermath of the simultaneous terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, on September 11th 2001. This section will attempt to analyse in general terms, US, British and European policies since then, with respect to its implications on the Middle East which has since the attacks, been most clearly associated with terrorism, specifically in the sense that the region has been highlighted and subsequently targeted, on the basis that it is a prime breeding ground for international terrorism.

In essence, the aim of this section will be to ascertain whether there is actual substance with regards to this 'new' policy orientation or focus of the afore mentioned actors, or whether it is merely a convenient pretext for the continuation of existing policies. In this context, it worth mentioning that any perceived friction between the West and Muslims in general may be said to be limited to two factors. The first relates to the ability of Muslims to undertake a "cultural accommodation" of Islamic religious concepts to the changed international politics and secondly, their ability to accept equality and mutual respect between themselves and those who do not share their beliefs².

The Middle East: A Brief Survey

Being a region that constitutes the heartland of Islam, the developments in the Middle East have been closely watched by Muslims the world over. Being a complete belief system, Islam has its own rules and regulations concerning warfare and even international relations. For the uninitiated, the basis for all Islamic rules and doctrine stem

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2. Tibi, Bassam "War and Peace in Islam" in Hashmi, Sohail H (Ed) *"Islamic Political Ethics – Civil Society, Plurism and Conflict"*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2003, p. 189

from the Al-Quran and Sunnah, the former being the only universally recognised and revered text in the Islamic world and the latter being the sayings and teachings of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. (pbuh); also of universal significance and acceptance in the Islamic world. With regard to issues pertaining to the conduct of war, there exists a Muslim literary or intellectual tradition that has methodically laid down the dos and don'ts of war. For example, the malicious targeting of women, children and old people are forbidden, perhaps less known is the injunction against the poisoning of the enemy's water sources. These are but a few examples of the depth of penetration of Islamic doctrine and philosophy in the event that war is waged.

In the contemporary scenario, there exist three different patterns of Muslim interpretations about war and peace. The first interpretation relates to the conformism of the Islamic scholar Ahmad bin Khalid al-Nasiri, followed by the more recent conformism of al-Azhar. These interpretations seek to perpetuate, in an altered world, the traditional ethics and religious doctrine on which it rests. The third interpretation is a fundamentalism that is based on a reinterpretation of the concepts of jihad and *qital* that insists on the absolute truth of religious doctrine³. The first two lead to a moderate and peaceful interpretation of Islamic ethics by discouraging the use of force, while the third interpretation emphasizes the warlike aspects of jihad as well as accentuates the dichotomy between the dar al-Islam and dar al-harb.

Following from this brief explanation of the Muslim understanding on the nature of war and peace, it is contended that the emergence of a new world order was in fact a foregone conclusion even prior to the onset of the Gulf War. The significance here is that, in keeping with the three modes of Muslim interpretation outlined, the global scenario was undergoing through massive upheavals with attendant consequences for the Muslim understanding of war

3. Tibi, Bassam "War and Peace in Islam" in Hashmi, Sohail H (Ed) *Islamic Political Ethics – Civil Society, Plurism and Conflict*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2003, p. 181

and peace as well. It is no secret that the changes in international political conditions as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union left 'incertitude'⁴, especially with regards to the question of who wields effective power internationally. As the dust of the Cold War settled, there emerged several strands of thought, one of which postulated the emergence of a multi-polar international structure, with a wider distribution and diffusion of power than during the Cold War. On the other hand, there were others, most notably *Huntington*, who envisioned that the dismantling of Cold War political structures would ultimately pave the way for a 'clash of civilisations'.

However, subsequent events have actually proved that these propositions were not strictly or entirely true. The first came to be disproved almost immediately with the onset of the Gulf War which culminated in the victory of the American-led coalition. What is relevant here is evidenced by the ability of the US to essentially, deploy and utilise its political, military and economic muscle, as seen during the Gulf War, in an exercise of what *Krauthammer* refers to as the 'unipolar moment'⁵ where the US is able to mobilise international opinion and more importantly mobilise international support for its actions unilaterally. The second proposition on the other hand, was disproved in the sense in that the expected re-alignment of states sharing similar cultural or 'civilisational' characteristics did not really occur, perhaps with the exception of Europe, which deepened its political and economic integration when it formally became the European Union in 1993. More importantly, these expectations were not borne out in the Middle East, being the more homogenous especially from a cultural perspective. Indeed, the Middle East may be said to have stagnated in terms of seeing greater political and/or economic integration across the region.

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4. Brigid Starkey "Post Cold War Security in the GCC Region: Continuity and Change in the 1990's in Ahrari, M. E. (Editor) "*Change and Continuity in the Middle east: Conflict Resolution and Prospects for Peace*", Mac Millan Press Limited: Basingstoke, 1996, p.165
 5. Krauthammer, Charles. 'The Unipolar Moment' in *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 70, No. 1 1991 pp.23-24

Returning to the subject at hand, events since the end of the Cold War may be said to have raised the profile of the Middle East in the sense that it is widely perceived to be the region that is least receptive towards changes that are taking place elsewhere. The global spread of tendencies towards democratisation is perhaps an illustrative example. As previously mentioned, this does not hold true for the Middle East, as witnessed today, virtually all states in the region are either absolute monarchies or dictatorships, benevolent or otherwise.

As such, this constitutes an inadvertent constraint on the policy making processes and machineries of external actors, specifically the US, Britain and Europe in the sense that although international conditions, structures and relationships are changing and/or evolving with the necessary re-ordering, re-prioritisation and re-evaluation of interests elsewhere, these changes do not seem to be happening in the Middle East. To illustrate further, because the power structures and relationships in the region have remained relatively unaffected and therefore unchanged, the problem therefore for Britain, Europe and especially the US is compounded because previous mechanisms of the blatantly 'carrot and stick' variety are no longer enough to ensure and maintain co-operation or in some cases, acquiescence, which essentially means that the post Cold War mechanisms must be of a subtler nature than those employed before⁶. To reiterate further, states in the region can no longer be simply categorised by classifying individual states as clients of any particular power.

External Intervention in the Middle East: A Contextual History

Serious American involvement in the Middle East may be said to have taken place at the end of the First World War (WW I). However, at the time US as well as British and French involvement in the Middle

6. Herrmann, Richard K, "The Middle East and the New World Order: Rethinking US political strategy after the Gulf War" *International Security* Volume 16, Issue 2 (Autumn 1991) 69-71 Barnett, Micheal N. "Regional security after the Gulf War" *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 111, Issue 4 (Winter 1996-1997) 616-618

East was strictly limited to securing the strategically important oil reserves or in simple terms, the involvement of these external powers in the region at the time meant little more than establishing and maintaining trade relations.

However, the US would find that it was destined to have an enlarged role in the region at the end of World War Two (WW II). Incidentally, this was also when it came to realise that it was the only great power to emerge out of the war with its military and economic might left intact. This is especially relevant in the context of its relationship with the Middle East because it meant that the US was able to assert its growing power in the region without too much resistance by the other great, mainly European powers that were terribly weakened and devastated in the aftermath of the war.

Again the primary motivation for the continued and now expanding interest of the US in the region is attributable to the strategic importance of the oil reserves there and hence may be said to be primarily economic in nature. However, another reason for the increased American interest in the region pertains to the creation of a homeland for the dispossessed European Jews in what would eventually be the state of Israel. In essence, the US administration of the day had pursued a policy of relocating the dispossessed Jews to Palestine. This was done so that it could alleviate the migratory pressures that were rapidly increasing with the numbers of Jewish immigration into America. However, this policy was carried out regardless of and despite the protests of neighbouring states and the local population.

In contrast to the history of US involvement in the region, Britain was already very deeply involved in the path that the Middle Eastern states, then in the early stages of conception, were to take. For example, the British government then had traded promises with the Grand Sharif (essentially, ruler) of Mecca, whereby independence and the subsequent control over the Arabian peninsula would be granted in exchange for Arab support in defeating the Turkish Ottoman Empire in the First World War (WW I).

The British were also responsible for carving up Iraq, which had led to the creation of the tiny Kuwaiti emirate, the essence of the exercise of which was to secure their continuing supply of oil. In hindsight, this was perhaps one of the most divisive policies that the British had implemented before formally abdicating its political interests in the region, as the tiny emirate would go on to become the focal point of the Gulf War (1990-1991). The lesson here, as alluded to above is that the systems and structures of political arrangements in the Middle East as defined and implemented by colonial and external powers in the past has resulted in a legacy that continues to be contested to this day, most notably in the form of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The US and the Middle East

Following from that, it is perhaps not amiss to say that the primary reasons and motivations for US involvement in the Middle East centres on two key issues, the first economic (securing control over Middle East oil supplies) and secondly, political, where Israel is strengthened so that it may ultimately serve the function of a proxy and/or buffer for US power in the region. It is widely accepted and understood that US policy in the Middle East had actually shifted from establishing and cultivating partnerships with Arab states to that of relatively unconditional support for Israel. This policy shift may be summarised as the US being faced with the choosing between non-compliant or belligerent Arab states as partners or allies or whether by the creation of an Israeli state it would acquire a relatively legitimate pretext for its continued and ever more extensive and intensive involvement in regional affairs.

As witnessed by history, the US opted for the latter choice. However, it is worth noting that perhaps due to primarily Cold War considerations, it did not totally neglect or abandon relations with the Arab states. More importantly, the creation of Israel meant that the US had an automatic ally in a fairly hostile region that was firstly, indebted to and secondly, dependant on her. As a result, it is contended that a condition of regional mistrust and suspicion had been initially created and ultimately perpetuated by the forced creation of the state of Israel

and further bolstered by a US policy stance that was overtly biased towards Israel.

Moving forward to the era of the 1980's, it must not escape notice that the Iraqi regime, although virtually penniless after the long, drawn-out war with Iran was one of the most well-equipped and experienced of all the other armies in the gulf at the time, apart from the Israeli armed forces (courtesy of British and American arms manufacturers and export credits). As such, it is also not surprising that having witnessed the end of the Cold War, the Iraqi regime may have sensed a power vacuum in the Middle East, where it is arguable that there was a perception (albeit mistaken) of a 'withdrawal' or relaxing of sorts of the American presence, perhaps most acutely felt in the gulf area.

In either case, the Iraqi regime did not lose time in capitalising on its perceptions which culminated in invasion of Kuwait. Since then, it is widely known that Iraq had effectively, sought US 'permission' prior to its invasion where then ambassador April Glaspie indicated that the US held a neutral position with regards to Iraq's regional aspirations. However, the swiftness of the UN sanctioned and endorsed, US led coalition's response in the wake of the invasion does not appear to give that impression at all⁷.

In the post Gulf War scenario, this state of unequal and inconsistent treatment did not escape the attention of the populations or indeed even that of the political elites of the other Middle Eastern states, specifically with reference to the disproportionate amount of aid, assistance and investments, be it economic, financial or military, that has been and continues to be provided directly to Israel with very

7. Falk, Richard "Democracy Died at the Gulf" in Ismael, Tareq Y. and Ismael, Jacqueline S. (Editors) "The Gulf War and the New World Order: International Relations of the Middle East", University Press of Florida: Gainesville, 1994.

little strings attached (if at all) primarily by the US⁸. This sense and/or perception of injustice or bias deepens when these other states are asked to give assurances or evidence with regards to democratisation, liberalisation and so forth when approaching the international donor community or agencies for assistance.

Britain: In Search of a Role?

In contrast to its role in its colonial/imperial heyday, Britain is effectively a spent power in the Middle East. Essentially, the extent of the British sphere of influence and by extension its interests, in the region may be said to be centred mainly in the Gulf area.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that since the end of the Gulf War, Britain has perhaps been the staunchest supporter of US involvement and policy in the region. Indeed, it is perhaps not unfair to say that British Middle Eastern policy very closely mirrors that of its American counterpart. This is perhaps best illustrated by the continued British participation in the enforcement of the 'no-fly-zones', established in Iraq at the end of the Gulf War. However, in terms of absolute influence, it has to be said that the British role in the region is subservient to that of the US. As a consequence, with regards to its policy making abilities, it would seem that the British are content to merely follow the American and European lead, where this is meant in the sense that British involvement and engagement in the region appears to be contingent on the policy initiatives of either the US or Europe.

The European Community

The involvement of the European community in the Middle East since the Gulf War may be said to be limited to the broad area of strengthening trade or cooperation agreements and a continuation of

8. For example, the US promised USD 10 billion to Israel in loan guarantees, in exchange for an Israeli commitment to halt further expansion of settlements on the occupied territories.

the Euro-Arab dialogue⁹. Essentially this may also be said to be true regarding its conduct in the region even before the onset of the Gulf War. However, how European policy differs from that of the US or Britain is mainly in the way that it not only pursues bilateral (trade) relationships but it also encourages the processes of regional integration. As such, it is arguable that the European policymaking framework and process is based on more solid and perhaps even more transparent institutions and ultimately, policies than either the American or British counterparts would seem to be.

This is meant in the sense that apart from securing their own community interests, the Europeans are perhaps not averse to the idea of other regions having a similar pattern of co-operation to theirs, and to this end even encourages the development of regional relations. However, this does not mean that the policies that govern the EU's relations with the governments of Middle Eastern states are contained within a single or monolithic operational framework.

For instance, the Barcelona Process¹⁰ may be said to constitute the primary institutional framework that arose out of the previous formulations that constituted the bulk of (former) community policy in the Middle East. Essentially, the Barcelona Declaration is the blueprint that regulates and articulates the extent and depth of European involvement in the region. Having said that, there also exists other mechanisms or structures such as the Gulf Co-operation

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9. EU and the Middle East Peace Process – Position and Background (Europa) http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/mepp/faq/index.htm see also, EU relations with the Gulf Region and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Iran, Iraq and Yemen http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/gr/index.html, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/iran/intro/index.html, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/iraq/intro/index.html, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/yemen/intro/index.html, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/gulf_cooperation/intro/index.htm
 10. Euro Mediterranean Partnership – The MEDA programme (Europa) http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/med/fw_medin_en.htm

Council¹¹ (GCC) comprised of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The European project in the Middle East also extends to the area of development assistance, specifically through the Middle East Development Assistance (MEDA) programme.

Apart from its involvement in the two aforementioned ways, there is also an on-going dialogue with Yemen over its entry into the customs union of the Middle Eastern states. Further, Europe also has a direct relationship with both Iran and Iraq. As of 1996, the EU has been actively involved in the United Nations-approved 'oil for food' programme with respect to Iraq. In fact, the EU was the biggest consumer of Iraqi oil prior to the escalation of the conflict regarding Iraq's alleged refusal to disarm its weapons of mass destruction and related facilities.

The Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)

The MEPP is perhaps the cornerstone by which the policies and actions of the actors mentioned above should perhaps be measured against. With regards to this particular area of diplomacy, it becomes very hard to determine as to where the actual intentions of the US, Britain and Europe lies.

For example, successive US administrations beginning with the Carter administration have publicly tried, albeit to varying degrees of success, to make Israeli and Palestinian government and representatives, sit down and essentially, hammer out a solution to the longstanding claims of each party. For the Israelis, it is very tempting to summarise their plight as one of security, or lack thereof. Essentially, the Israeli demand for the need to feel secure both from within and without its borders may be the most vocally and persistently articulated demand, in tandem with recognition as a legitimate state by the rest of the world (especially those that have not already done so) in general, and specifically, by Israel's predominately Arab neighbours. One may

11. Op. cit.

further be tempted to conclude that these are in fact very reasonable demands and could, if accommodated, mark the beginnings of peaceful relations and a pave the way towards relative stability in the region.

However, it is arguable that it is perhaps a common perception both inside and outside the Middle East that Israel is essentially bargaining from a much stronger position in comparison to her Arab neighbours, so to speak. Again, this perception is tied to the observation that were it not for the comparatively large amounts of foreign investment, not to mention economic and military assistance increasingly flowing into Israel, she would perhaps be in a position of relative parity (especially economically) with the rest of her neighbours, and would consequently be more able to appreciate their respective fears and concerns and hence pave the way for more constructive inter-state relations. It is further contended that this factor, whether a merely exaggerated perception on the part of Israel's Arab neighbours or actual in fact, may perhaps be one of the biggest stumbling blocks with regards to a mutually satisfactory conclusion to the MEPP, because either way, the Arab states, and more specifically the Palestinians do in fact feel that they are negotiating or bargaining with Israel from a highly disadvantaged position.

The specific policy or diplomatic actions or more precisely, interventions have largely been initiated by the US. As earlier stated, Britain's diplomatic role and effective policy stances in the Middle East is essentially mirrored upon and ultimately, subservient to that of the US. Whilst the EU, bearing in mind the fact that it has only formally existed since the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, has only fairly recently began to show signs of coherence in its common policies, or specifically in the formulations of the Common Foreign and Security Policy¹² (CFSP), the successor to its predecessor European Political Co-operation (EPC).

12. Basic Concepts: Common Foreign and Security Policy, Council of the European Union Website <http://ue.eu.int/pesc/default.asp?lang=en> Also CFSP Overview on Europa Server http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cfsp/intro/index.htm (EU Security Policy and the Role of the European Commission – An Overview (European Security and Defence Policy, ESDP). http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/esdp/index.html

Even so, it must be noted that the EU diplomacy and involvement in the region is perhaps most constructive out of the three, seeing as that it has emerged (although rather late) onto the stage as an actor that is willing enough to engage both parties, i.e. the Israelis and the Palestinians directly, without too much preconditions, assurances or guarantees as the Americans are wont to do. For example, the US had for many years, refrained from including the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) from discussions and forums regarding the future of the Middle East simply on the grounds that the PLO was a terrorist organisation.

Even when the US later changed its stance, and actually began to negotiate with the PLO, which by extension meant that the US acknowledged the PLO's status as the principal and official representative of the Palestinian peoples' concerns, it only came after the PLO stated that it would explicitly acknowledge that it was in favour of a two-state solution. This is an important point simply because if it were not for the Palestinian acknowledgement that Israel had the right to exist as a separate state, the MEPP could not move forward. As such the consequences of such a move on the part of the Palestinians had resulted in the beginnings of a relationship between several Arab states, most notably Jordan and Syria, and Israel.

In essence, whilst the establishing or opening of formal communications with Israel may seem trivial, it is contended that the development is in fact a positive one, if it is seen as a small but important step on the road towards fostering regional understanding and eventual peace. Also, with regards to the American role that led to the Arafat-Rabin summit in the US, it must be said that the 'multi-track' negotiations strategy devised by the US played a large role in contributing towards the formalisation and consolidation of relations between the two Arab states and Israel, and as such would seem to be a small victory and perhaps a vindication of US Middle East policy.

However, on the other hand the demands of the Palestinian camp, although varied and numerous and seemingly complex are on the whole perhaps more specific and thus perhaps more achievable as

opposed to that of Israel's. Among the most pressing issues would be the halting of further expansion of settlements in what the UN has clearly identified as the 'occupied territories' in Security Council Resolution 242 and also the status of Palestinian refugees and their right of return, pursuant to UN Resolution 194. Therefore it is contended that the onus is on Israel to prove its ability to act responsibly and comply with the UN resolutions mentioned as it appears to be the only way out of another stalemate with regards to the MEPP and a final resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As such, this translates into a corresponding obligation on the part of primarily the US, Britain and the EU to further facilitate the process.

To this end, the EU is perhaps the party that may be said to be making the most visible steps towards creating the enabling conditions that would firstly pave the way for firstly, a relative economic equilibrium' through its engagement with the Middle East as a regional entity. Whereas, the US and Britain seem to still favour the Cold War methods of engagements, i.e. through aid/assistance agencies and bilateral relations.

Post September 11th Middle East

It must be noted that in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks, most if not all of the regimes in the Middle East were quick to declare their solidarity with President Bush and the US, specifically with regards to the rejection of using terror as a means to an end. However, subsequent actions by the US have shown that this show of solidarity whilst appreciated did not in the end, contribute significantly towards a re-think or reassessment of American priorities and policies towards the Middle East. It is further arguable that since September 11th, US policy may be said to have lost a certain quality of 'restraint', which ironically, up until the terrorist attacks was heavily criticised as it was seen to be a factor allowing for and contributed to the perpetuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is perhaps illustrative of the change in US - Middle East policy orientation that appears to be a characteristic of the current Bush administration.

Unlike his predecessor Bill Clinton, who had made conspicuous efforts to help the MEPP along, President Bush's initial approach may be characterised as being more 'hands-off'. Be that as it may, the most discernible trend in current US policy is its unilateralist stance, which arguably presents another obstacle in the path towards peace in the Middle East. In addition, the loss of this 'restraint' did not necessarily mean that the US was prepared to again seriously tackle the MEPP. Ultimately, this essay contends that it took September 11th to effectively, shock the current administration into re-engaging with the MEPP. Even so the 'new' unilateralism of the US instead of having a placating effect on the Arab-Israeli conflict was instead seen to encourage and consequently legitimise heavy handed actions of the Israeli state, which it must be said, was quick to capitalise on the US tragedy in dealing with its own brand of terrorists, or specifically the militant Palestinian groups.

Another point worthy of note is that although most of the regimes in the Middle East there had unhesitatingly declared their solidarity and support for the US, public opinion and reaction is on the other hand totally opposed to any form of co-operation or agreement with western powers, or specifically the US (and Britain) that would lead to the explicit and most importantly military, interference of these powers in the region.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11th, Afghanistan became the only country that was immediately singled out as a target for US retaliation. However, the repercussions of the intended US action on Afghanistan, which strictly speaking, was located on the periphery, reverberated throughout the region. It did not help matters that many of the perpetrators of the attacks were from Saudi Arabia, the de facto heart of the Middle East. The implications of this discovery may be said to have contributed towards a hardening of US policy in the region. As such, it is not too difficult to determine that owing to the broadly defined 'licence' that the US claimed as its prerogative, and coupled with intensifying conflict in the occupied territories of Palestine, the region would soon feel itself to be under a sort of siege. In these terms, it is therefore plausible to suggest that the MEPP will

be stalled (yet again) until such time where a degree of stability, as that during the immediate post Gulf War years, would negotiations be able to resume.

International Involvement in the Middle East: A Summary

It is contended that the Middle East has actually become a more problematic and complex region since the end of the Gulf War of 1990-1991. In the present context, the complexity of Middle Eastern politics with respect to the policies of the powers or actors discussed above, have effectively been deepened. To illustrate, unlike the EU, or even South East Asia for that matter, the level of multilateral or even bilateral, relations among states in the Middle East are comparatively underdeveloped, in addition, the existing infrastructure of common regional forums are also underutilised.

As such in this respect, the US, Britain and Europe are unable to deploy effectively diplomatic and policy measures that are able to positively affect the region as a whole. Instead the measures have to be implemented piece-meal and fragmented making the already volatile region even more so since each state or regime is effectively having to secure for itself favourable relations without the benefit of an effective common, regional forum¹³. Ultimately, this works to the detriment of providing a unanimous and consensus based solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict which is a core problem in the region.

The respective policy stances and proclamations of specifically, the US and British governments since the declaration of the war against terrorism is also feared to be an additional obstacle because it threatens direct (military) action in a region whose regimes are already struggling to assert their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of their respective publics.

13. Barnett, Michael N. "Regional security after the Gulf War" *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 111, Issue 4, Winter 1996-1997, pp. 616-618

Although it may be said that the EU has by far the best institutional, administrative and policy frameworks on which to build its future relationship with the Middle East, events surrounding the US-led military intervention in Iraq, has seemed to prove otherwise. This is meant in the sense that although the EU may have an effective framework with regard to managing its relations with external or third parties, the European commitment towards a CFSP was sorely tested, as witnessed by the divisions over the issue of military deployment in Iraq.

Conclusion

In concluding, the question that must be asked to Muslims in relation to the issues raised above has to do with the response that is required to restore a balance especially in terms of the involvement of external actors in the Middle East. Muslims must not be afraid to take advantage of contemporary technological advances in various fields, most important of which relate to the distribution and dissemination of information. To reiterate further, the perception that Muslim countries are ineffective or are seen to be less than involved must be countered. Additionally, negative or skewed portrayals of Islam and Muslims in the foreign media, especially in the days following 9-11 and the recent spate of bombings in Europe must also be vigorously addressed and countered¹⁴.

Finally, there is an urgent need for the Gulf States to see themselves as collective key players in the regional effort to reclaim their autonomy and to make their voices heard in the international arena. Their capacity to be seen and heard especially in terms of their capability of handling disputes and conflicts must be made known to the world so as to create a climate of confidence in their abilities to manage their region effectively.

14. Perceptions of Islam in the BBC and other Western media, BBC World Service Training, London, 3 April 1995 by Dr Azzam Tamimi, <http://www.ii-pt.com/web/papers/media.htm>, accessed on 22 Aug 2005.

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