



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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Introduction

Let me begin by thanking the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe for the invitation to speak at this hearing. My remarks will outline some thoughts and experiences based on almost ten years of activity on the idea of developing a new approach to security and reform in the Middle East. Much of this activity has been inspired by the European security model, though, as I shall make clear, I believe that the European experience goes only so far as a possible model for the Middle East.

I would like to make six general points. Some of them are self-evident, but they bear repetition as they must underpin any analysis of the way forward. I will then try to address what strike me as seven key questions to be borne in mind in considering this topic. My remarks will then conclude with some thoughts as to a possible way ahead.

General Points

The first general point is that one must remember that the idea of creating some kind of a regional system for the Middle East, which has reform and change at its core, is neither a new nor an “external” idea. Rather it is very much a long-standing idea that comes from the region. The Plan presented by Egyptian President Mubarak for a regional approach to disarmament contains thoughts on a new approach to regional relations, as does the Peace Process proposal presented by the Saudi Crown Prince to the Arab League meeting in Beirut. Regional leaders, such as the former Crown Prince of Jordan have mused publicly about the idea of a new regional system for the Middle East. It is also extremely important to remember that there are reform and change efforts underway in the Middle East, some of which are official (political reforms in some countries, for example) and some of which are NGO based (such as the Alexandria meeting). So there is not a vacuum as regards regional thinking and action on these issues, as is sometimes assumed by Westerners.

Second, ideas for change in the region cannot be, or be seen as, “quick fix” proposals to meet the requirements of a political moment or electoral cycle. These are proposals which call for fundamental change and it is not realistic to imagine that this will necessarily come in the Middle East in months when it took decades for it to do so in Europe and elsewhere. Perhaps we need not necessarily be looking at decades in the Middle East context, but we are certainly looking at years. However, it is important to note that, even if it will take time to reach a fully

fledged regime in the Middle East, the initial steps, however modest, may begin to have a positive impact soon.

Third, this must come from the region. To the extent that extra-regional states are involved, it must be on the basis of true partnership. The imposition, or the apparent attempt to impose, outside models will not work. Nor, no matter how well-intentioned, will attempts to cut and paste various other models and institutions, or to make progress largely contingent upon the desires of extra-regional countries or institutions. The region's sense of itself is such that this course will not be accepted by the people or their governments. However, while the idea of "regional ownership" is very important, the region must also be honest with itself and admit that this "ownership" will not be accomplished in absolute terms anytime soon due largely to region's inability to initiate and sustain truly inclusive dialogues – more on this subject in a moment.

Fourth, no "one size fits all" model will work. The Middle East is a vast and diverse region. Just as there is a need for a region-wide system of some sort, we must recognise that sub-regional and bilateral dynamics will be important within the overall. In the work that I have done over the years, the concept of "Geometry Variable" is critical. Put simply, this idea holds that, within an overall regional framework, different players may advance at different speeds on particular issues. This will be a dynamic process, and we must recognise that a need will exist for a degree of flexibility to allow individual players to move towards agreed goals in their own way.

Fifth, any system that emerges must be a truly Middle Eastern model of regional security. It may be helpful for Westerners to tone down references to the idea of creating a "Middle Eastern OSCE". While such references may be intended to draw attention to an idea in conceptual terms, they seem to ring in Middle Eastern ears as statements that the Middle East has only to adopt a model developed elsewhere for all to be well. In fact, any model which emerges in the Middle East will have to be a unique one, which is specifically designed by the peoples of that region for their own historical, social and political realities. The other regional experiences which exist (such as the OSCE, ASEAN, the OAS and others) can be drawn on in developing ideas for a unique Middle Eastern system and the various projects I have been involved in have done this. But these models are not things that can simply be "transferred" the Middle East. As a more general point, I am increasingly convinced that a need exists for the development of a community of experts who know about both Regional Security Regimes and the Middle East. There are people who know about how regional systems have developed and others who know about the Middle East, but relatively few who have some grounding in both and can make the required connections between conceptual ideas and regional realities.

Finally, while I subscribe fully to the idea that the pursuit of a co-operative Middle East regime, with the promotion of social and political reform at its heart is vitally important in its own right, I am increasingly convinced that it will happen in concert with progress towards the resolution of the issues of the peace process, and, more immediately, the Iraq issue. This does not mean that the development of new regional co-operation ideas should be held hostage to the MEPP or Iraq. The security of the Middle East is about more than the Peace Process. We should never forget that many more have died in the Middle East in conflicts between and

within Muslim countries than in all of the Arab-Israeli wars and that the cases of actual WMD use in the region have not involved the confrontation with Israel. This is not an attempt to downplay the importance or centrality of the MEPP, but it is a call to recognise that there are many issues of regional security that have nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict and that some regional leaders have hidden behind that conflict as an excuse not to address other reform issues.

But we must face the fact that the states of the region are unlikely to be prepared to initiate the steps required to develop a new approach to regional relations unless they can show their publics that the peace process and Iraq are on their way to some kind of acceptable resolution and that perceived “biases” are being corrected.

Questions

Beyond these general points, however, there are some key questions that need to be considered, amongst which are the following seven. As you might expect, there are no easy answers. As a wise man said long ago; if this were easy it would have been done by now.

1. What do we mean by the Middle East?

We must begin by accepting that the term “Middle East” is itself a Western construct, going back to early years of the Twentieth Century. That said, most in the region would agree that, in at least some ways, one can point to something called the Middle East. But what is it? Political scientists have spent much time trying to define what a region is, without achieving consensus. In the end, a sense of region is something that develops over time. It involves ethnic, religious, historical, security and economic factors, in varying degrees. Perhaps the only way to define a region is to say that it is an area within which events in one country have a particular resonance for countries around it that they do not for others further afield. A region can be multi-layered and multi-faceted.

In the work that we have done, the definition of the Middle East that has proved most acceptable to regional participants has been: the states of the Arab League, Iran and Israel, with some form of very close association for Turkey, which will obviously play a critical role in whatever is constructed. Within the Middle East there are critical sub-regions: the Persian Gulf; the Levant; and the Maghreb. And there are also countries which belong to the Middle East and other regions (Africa, the Caucasus, etc.) simultaneously. Finally, there are some countries which are not part of this definition, but whose policies and actions dramatically affect those who are. Flexibility and the concept of “geometry variable” come into play. Finally, the work that we have done has developed the idea that there is a critical role for extra-regional powers in any future regional system, which we have come to define as being the overlapping memberships of the states of the G8, the P5 and the EU and UN as institutions.

2. Are there alternatives to the idea of an indigenous, Middle East-wide regional system for cooperation?

There are always alternatives. The question is; which is the best alternative. My own view is

that an indigenous, region-wide cooperation system must be developed, over time, in the Middle East. But there are at least two possible alternatives.

The first is to “extend” in some way an existing institution, or institutions, such as the OSCE or NATO to the region. This has appeal for three reasons. One, it could be fast. Two it could avoid the region going through a lengthy debate over what the various concepts mean that could lead to definitions the West is not happy with, or just avoiding topics like democracy. Three it would give external countries automatic membership in the regime.

While not immune to these arguments, I do not support this approach. It is not clear that the existing fora such as the OSCE or NATO can shift to accommodate the region. Moreover, I am not sure this would do either of these institutions or the region any good. Decision-making in Brussels and Vienna is already hard enough!

Most importantly, there are no short-cuts to fundamental change. If we really want the states of the Middle East to develop a true regional security system, which recognizes the critical role of social and political reform in regional security, they have to undertake a process of thinking this through and developing their own models. We understand what such ideas as “indivisible security” mean because we went through a process of developing them. The Middle East has to do the same in its own historical and political context. It will take time, but has to be done. Just trying to extend our definitions of these concepts risks their not being accepted as legitimate.

Moreover, it may smack of the West, and primarily the US, trying to rope the regional countries into systems where the West controls the rules, the content and the membership. It is highly unlikely the Middle East states will agree, and their publics will be particularly negative about this. Indeed, presenting the idea this way may simply be seen as a thinly veiled attempt to control the agenda and not allow the region to take a lead in developing its own model of the future. This is not to say that there are not roles for the OSCE and NATO in terms of the possible expansion of their existing dialogue projects with certain countries in the region. But these relationships cannot replace the need for an integrated vision for the region with the Middle East states themselves at its centre.

The second idea for creating a regional security system is to concentrate on sub-regional issues, particularly in the Persian Gulf. A set of sub-regional systems, including the Maghreb and the Levant could then be inter-locked.

Again, there is an attraction in this. Concentrating on sub-regions may help “insulate” issues from the Peace Process. But many issues have both sub-regional and region-wide dimensions. The proliferation of WMD and ballistic missiles cannot be addressed just in the Gulf as Israel must also be factored in. Moreover, the push to make social and political reform a major part of this process will be strengthened if it is region-wide. Splitting up the overall Middle East may have the unintended consequence of demonstrating that different standards of reform are acceptable in different parts of the region. Imagine in the CSCE/OSCE context if the West had accepted the notion that the standards sought in the three Baskets (including the “democratic reform” Basket) could be developed sub-regionally around Europe, rather than according to

standards that applied across the continent as a whole.

Thus, while some issues can and should be addressed on a sub-regional basis, this does not obviate the need for a region-wide approach as well. The way forward is for the creation of a Regional Security Regime to complement sub-regional institutions and organizations and bilateral relations. It may be that a region-wide system would, in the first instance, seek to address those issues that can be tackled at the region-wide level, while establishing the principle that various sub-regional efforts that are pursued must be undertaken within the framework of an overall set of region-wide norms.

3. How can a reform initiative for the Greater Middle East be constructed to guarantee maximum ownership in the region?

There are no guarantees. It should be remembered that there will not be a single initiative; there will be many, some of which will be official, some of which will be purely civil society and some of which will be both. The most effective will probably somehow combine the two and be capable of evolving over time. We are still at a stage where many flowers will bloom on different levels (official, civil society, etc.) and this is probably healthy, if a little confusing at times. The key may not be so much to design a single initiative as to recognise and build on the synergies and opportunities that the different approaches present.

One of the critical points is dialogue within the region and between the region and the extra-regional countries as to how these projects should go forward. For all the talk in the region about wanting to own things, we must remember that no region-wide, and fully inclusive dialogue run entirely by the region is yet possible due to problems with certain key players refusing to recognise each other. Many of those in the region who berate any idea for a discussion do so because “outsiders” would be involved in helping to run it, but those same players refuse to start a serious discussion themselves if it involves certain others in the region – an impossible, and all-too-convenient, reason for not doing anything that might lead to real change. There is thus a role for outside players as facilitators, if the objective is really to include everyone in the region, but facilitation is different from ownership. Those who would put themselves forward for the role of facilitator need to understand that, and to work very hard to make sure that they and their regional interlocutors have a common concept of what facilitation means.

4. Who should own such an initiative: all governments in the region, only "reform countries", democratic civil society or all of the above?

The key question is not this one, but rather who gets to make this decision anyway? If, as noted above, many ideas are going to be in play on many levels, the idea of the ownership of a specific initiative may be moot. At some point, if consideration of the issue begins to gel around one process, this may become a concern. My advice on a basic level is to strive for inclusiveness to the extent possible – talking only to those who share your perceptions may be satisfying, but is not likely to bridge gaps. Our definition in going forward is that any regional system that emerges must be inclusive and must leave a seat at the table for all regional players, even if some of them may not be willing to take it at first.

5. Which basic assumptions do we take: universal values as enshrined in the UN Human Rights Charter; democratic standards such as an independent judiciary, multiparty system, separation of powers, etc.?

The universal values are just that; universal. All of the countries in the region have signed the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other key documents, even if some governments in the region had little intention of honouring many of the commitments. There is now a push, both within the region and without, to make these commitments stick, but it must be done in a way which comes from the region. "Democracy" as we understand and practice it in the West is not necessarily the only model of representative government, for example. It should also be remembered that concepts of democracy, women's rights and so on are not alien to the Middle East. The Charter of Madinah, signed by the Prophet Muhammad over 500 years before the Magna Carta, contains ideas that are in line with what we now regard as democratic pluralism.

My sense is that what is required now is an effort to develop understandings of what the underlying concepts inherent in these documents mean in the Middle East context, culturally, socially, historically and politically and to reinforce them in the current regional context. There is a very important discussion that needs to be held over just what we mean when we use words like "democracy" and "secularism" – I suspect we may find that we have to develop a set of concepts and terms that bridge some gaps.

6. How can the West best help this process, particularly in an era where there is growing regional anger? Has Abu Ghraib weakened the "soft power" that the West needs to push for those reforms?

In the short term, yes. But we should be careful to separate the feelings of the region towards particular governments and policies from its feelings towards the ideals for which the West stands. As I frequently remind my Middle East friends, just as we Westerners have to remember that there is no monolithic Middle East, there is no monolithic "West" either. I sense that most in the Middle East do not hate the West at all – they greatly respect much about the West. Perhaps many Middle Easterners perceive, and are angered by the fact that some Western leaders do not honour their professed beliefs. But then that is not a uniquely Western problem either.

In terms of how the West can help, I think we need to begin with humility; we do not have the answers. Only the region can define what they may be. But it is important for the Middle East to be honest with itself as well. As noted a moment ago in discussion of the "ownership" question, the Middle East is not in a position to launch discussions over ideas that are truly inclusive and region-wide. Facilitation is required – but it is vital that people on both sides have a discussion over what they mean by facilitation.

We in the West should also not be embarrassed to state openly that we have an interest in reform in the Middle East. It is evident that instability in that region will affect us and we have a right to say so and to try to mitigate that instability. Done right, this is not "interference" in a

negative sense.

7. What's in it for the US?

First, the creation of this kind of a Regional Cooperation System in the Middle East supports basic US policies and objectives. President Bush's vision of democracy as a key driver of change in the Middle East is the right one. A system which made social and political transformation a key component of the region's dialogue on security supports this. Such a transformation does not happen overnight, of course, but the creation of new region-wide norms – backed by an ongoing process and by implementation and review mechanisms as part of that – has been shown to greatly assist the process of change.

Second, the creation of a regime which included from the beginning the states of the region and extra-regional partner states would tend to regularize the relationship between the region and the US, Europe and others. As happened in Europe and Asia, the question of whether the extra-regional states have a right to be present in the region would be answered. At the same time, as happened with ASEAN and the associated ASEAN Regional Forum, the region would be able to take a role in establishing some of the ground rules of its relationship with the outside world. This bargain would be a healthy thing for both sides.

Third, as noted above, though not intended to be either part of or to supplant the peace process, this project would tend to support that process.

Fourth, a multilateral regional security system would provide a place whereby the US can talk on a regular basis with countries like Iran. This is not meant to replace the need for full bilateral relations, of course. But it could be a useful way-station on the road to eventual full relations.

Finally, this is a process that can support a renewed trans-Atlantic agenda in the Middle East. There will be differences between the US and Europe as this goes forward, but the basics (both in content and process) are things that we all fundamentally agree on. This will be a multi-faceted process that would unfold over many years and there are many opportunities for the trans-Atlantic community to work together in support of it. It will be important as this evolves to avoid a sense of competition between the US and Europe.

Conclusion

So what is the result of all this? The way forward remains fuzzy, but my sense is that some ideas are emerging around the creation of a regional "System" or "Regime" in the Middle East. They call for the creation of an ongoing "process" in the region involving the elaboration of norms of conduct. These norms may be thought of as a set of three inter-locking bargains: between the regional states in terms of how they deal with each other; between the regional states and their peoples in terms of political, social and economic reform; and between the region and the rest of the world in terms of the expectations and responsibilities each has towards the other. These norms are then subject to ongoing review and implementation. The purpose of such a system will be to give the region a set of tools to help it manage a period of

transition and change.

In considering the basic ideas on which such a Regime must be based, the following ideas are critical:

- The system must be based on a set of rules of conduct for the region and regional states must take the lead in elaborating them, with outside facilitation as required;
- the Regime should not be thought of a static thing, but rather as a Process which will evolve over time;
- such a Process must be inclusive and be open to all regional countries, even if not all of them may elect to join at the outset, and to a group of extra-regional Partners (most likely to include the P5; the G8; and the EU and UN);
- no “one size fits all” approach – geometry variable is critical;
- the process must take a broad definition of security, to include questions of social and political transformation in the region;
- governments may lead in some respects, but there is a critical role for civil society in developing these ideas.