

# **Cooperation among adversaries. Regionalism in the Middle East.**

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## Introduction

For the purpose of this thesis, the sub-region of the wider Middle East is considered. Eastern Mediterranean sub-region, known as Mashreq or Levant, is also called "the Near East sub-region". It comprises of five territories: the State of Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Republic of Lebanon, Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Syrian Arab Republic. The total area is 1.5 million km<sup>2</sup>. Turkey borders the sub-region to the north, Iraq to the east, to the south by Saudi Arabia and to the west by Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. The population in the Mashreq was 80 million inhabitants in 2005. Average density was estimated at 92 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, ranging from 64 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in Jordan to 615 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. About one-third of the population is rural. Annual population growth ranges from barely 1.2 percent in Lebanon to 3.5 percent in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with a regional average of 2.1 percent in the period 1995-2005.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis follows a definition of European Commission, which understands regional cooperation as "general concept that refers to all efforts on the part of (usually) neighbouring countries to address issues of common interest"<sup>2</sup>. I will offer alternative classifications of regionalism, region building and regional cooperation in the following chapter.

The thesis does not aim to prove that regionalism is a pervasive feature of the

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/> (accessed 11.02.2010)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission. 1995. Communication on European Community Support for regional economic Integration Efforts among developing countries. COM (95) 219.

region. Thinking this way would be ignoring the harsh reality of enduring conflict. So far bilateralism, dealing with other countries on one to one basis, and unilateralism, in the form of assault and rule of other nation, have dominated the conduct of international affairs in the Middle East. Nevertheless, I assume that, due of the fact that nations and peoples of the region are locked in the mad logic of escalating violence, the situation is not sustainable. The paper sheds light on low-scale cooperation efforts that stand a chance of contributing to peace building. By focusing on the social and political factors, I do not wish to imply that other variables are irrelevant. Far from it. My study leaves some variations unexplained. I do not seek to offer a comprehensive explanation of regional integration. Its purpose is to demonstrate certain facets of cooperation in the Middle East. Through more general approach my hope is not to provide complete and definitive solutions to puzzles regarding regional cooperation but, instead, to outline some ideas and arouse curiosity for a fascinating phenomenon of regionalism.

I am rethinking Middle Eastern politics in three ways. First, the inter-state politics of the region is often understood with reference to the defence and security. I do not seek to undermine the opinion that security is the major concern of policy-makers in the region. Instead I suggest a different perspective on the Middle East and demonstrate that in many issue areas, cooperation is desirable and feasible and can form a positive first step for confidence building measures, which is a pre-requisite of a deeper integration. Second, the new approaches to international theory the role of civil society and environment on policy-making will be discussed. Thirdly, the thesis is concerned primarily with multilateral cooperation, but will also discuss bilateral cooperation where relevant.

Andrew Hurrell and Louise Fawcett signal an important concern, relevant for research on cooperation. They note that studies of regionalism tend to slide from description to becoming a moral doctrine as to how international relations ought to be organised.<sup>3</sup> This thesis does not aim putting forward a normative argument for cooperation or regionalism in the Middle East. It illustrates, however, some ideas, coming both from civil society and governments, which are worthy of note in the context of a paradigm shift in the region. The focus is not on how this cooperation could be successfully resurrected, but on the interesting analytical issues that arise from an understanding of why it has been such a difficult goal to achieve.

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3 Fawcett and Hurrell, (eds.) *Regionalism in world politics*, Oxford University Press, 1995

The thesis has relevance for broader issues in international relations. It sheds new light on the implications of regionalism as a vehicle for conflict resolution. The paper also provides an insight on the influence of foreign actors on the collaboration between conflicted parts in the region. It stresses the significance and responsibility of world powers to mediate between the parties and monitor the progress. Lastly, this thesis makes a key contribution by providing a systemic discussion of civil society actors on inter-state cooperation in the cases of trade, water and environment.

The Middle East is not a region easily associated with integration. It is undoubtedly one of the most volatile zones in the world, plagued by crises, conflicts and wars. Nevertheless, the wealth of natural resources, population growth and diversity make it a region of great potential and opportunity. Becoming successful in regional or even sub-regional trade could be viewed as a prerequisite to success or even the ability to survive in an increasingly globalised world. Paradoxically a failure of bilateral agreements might lead to a new, more inclusive solution.

The focus of this thesis relates to the rationale of regionalism. It assesses issues that local state leaders have frequently defined as major problems, for which they have recommended common solutions. In emphasising the significance of international regions as an intermediate level of analysis between the nation-state and the global international system, this research study seeks to assist in identifying the changes taking place in the Middle East. In the case of the target region, the term regional integration in its strict terms cannot be yet applied. However, the task of this thesis is to identify simple forms of coordination and collaboration that intend to improve relations, respond to common challenges and devise institutions to solve collective action problems. It explores the current anatomy of regional cooperation and examines the opportunity for its start-up. It offers an alternative view of politics and international relations in the Middle East. The findings show that cooperation between regimes such as Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine can pave the way to increased stability in the region. The dissertation presents an analysis of patterns of regional cooperation in the Middle East. It explores various theories in international relations and sheds light on the nature of current intra-regional activity. An underlying theme of the thesis is whether collaboration can bring peace to the region.

There are numerous regional integration initiatives in the wider Middle East and

North Africa – Arab League, Maghreb Union, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Pan-Arab Free Trade Area (PAFTA) to name just a few. Most of these arrangements, which aim high but fall short, are omitted in the thesis, due to geographical restrictions. The question of why even the Arab states of the Middle East failed to act together is interesting, since local and outside actors vigorously stress the need for cooperation in dealing with the serious challenges facing the region. There seemed to be good reasons for states in the Middle East to work together in solving the region's common problems. Most of the countries of the Levant share common linguistic, historical and cultural heritage. Yet the absence of any meaningful cooperation among the states in the Middle East remains striking. The matter becomes even more complex if we consider the plethora of efforts for conflict resolution. Throughout the 1990s, countries continued to agree on extensive cooperation schemes, which, if enacted, would have solved many of the challenges facing the region: Madrid Conference of 1991, Oslo Accords (1993), Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace (1994), Camp David 2000 Summit etc. Indeed, for every regional problem in the Middle East, the state leaders could draw on a range of agreements. Palestinian statehood and sovereignty, delineation of borders, security regimes and cooperation, Jerusalem, refugees, the link between the West Bank and Gaza, economic relations, water and environmental issues, international regimes/forces, end of conflict, end of claims, UN Security Council Resolution – there is no single issue that has not been yet discussed or even agreed upon. At summit meetings, the state leaders continued to proclaim their firm willingness to initiate cooperation. Effective collaboration, however, did not ensue. Is there a chance that this stagnation will come to an end?

The thesis draws on international relations theories in accounting for the distinct pattern of cooperation in the Middle East. It analyses cooperation in three key spheres drawn from 'high' and 'low' politics: trade, water and environment. In a nutshell, I find that conventional international relations theories, in particular those that stress conflicting national interests among the local states, overall, offer a plausible account of the trend common in our times. It is, nevertheless, essential to pay additional attention to other important features of the Middle Eastern states – such as the scarcity of water and changing demography, in order to provide a full understanding of the challenges for the regional cooperation.

This essay will assess cooperation in five cases – governments and governance, civil society, trade, water and environment. In the sphere of trade, in the framework of the

Barcelona Process states have made pledges of trade liberalisation and trade facilitation. In reality, however, there was a minimal cooperation and the aim has not been yet achieved, despite the deadline passing in 2010. In water management, the countries struggled to agree on principles and procedures for sharing the limited water resources of the region. While these challenges triggered formal efforts at cooperation, there were few signs of effective cooperation on the inter-state level. In the recent decades the civil society gained momentum and started actively participate in peace-building initiatives. In the Middle East, however, there are some serious restrictions to civil society participation. Chapter 4 highlights those obstacles and draws attention to the public opinion factor and asks the question whether a bottom-up approach can be adopted in stabilising the region. It argues that focusing on international and regional factors alone is insufficient in explaining the prevailing instability in the region and thus inadequate to present solutions. Instead, it highlights domestic factors as crucial to understanding conflict and cooperation in the Middle East. In so doing, it analyses the public opinion and the involvement of civil society actors. It presents various initiatives, fostering dialogue on both regional and local level, deepening the perception of common interests and identity.

### Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters: the *next chapter* assesses key theories in international relations and political science. It starts with various definitions of regionalism and regional cooperation in the context of globalisation, so as to situate the arguments of this paper in broader debates. I highlight the concepts of realism, and transactionalism. I also draw from game theory. I will analyse the various types of regionalisms and apply it to the Middle East. My focus then shifts to empirical assessment, and in *Chapter 2* I examine political situation in the Middle East, and questions whether the differences between regimes influence political leaders' attitude towards cooperation. *Chapter 3* assesses the nature and degree of great-power engagement in Middle East and outlines the international context in which intra-regional cooperation took place. It explains the role of promotion of regional cooperation within the EU and discusses the potential influence of its framework and mechanisms on current cooperation status of the countries in the Middle East. It evaluates the US and EU's contributions of, to the region and their efforts for peace building. Is mediation necessary? Can outside powers bring a positive change or, quite reverse, impede it by reinforcing competition between the actors? In other

words, may involvement by outside great powers act to amplify structural divisions within a region, thereby making cooperation difficult? *Chapter 4* analyses current efforts and initiatives for peace on the civil society level, which involve cooperation between the conflicted countries. It centres on multilateral economic, educational and cultural etc. initiatives coming from public sphere that aim at bringing peace and increase understanding between the peoples. *Chapter 5* outlines the massive direct and indirect cost of conflict. It presents highlights of the report by Strategic Foresight Group that measures costs in financial, economic, social, political, military, environmental, diplomatic terms for the entire region. This section makes clear that a deterioration of the situation in the Middle East will have disastrous consequences not only for the region, but also far beyond and shows the financial benefits of peace. The central focus of *Chapter 6* is on the role of water in the arid region – both as a cause of conflicts and as a chance for cooperation. It illustrates multilateral initiatives that under a motto “Pollution knows no borders” aim at environmental conservation. This chapter provides ample opportunities for exploring the relevance of other approaches, including that of interdependence and use of new technologies. An *epilogue* assesses and discusses their implications for cooperation patterns. It shows unsustainability of the situation and considers prospects for multilateral peace initiatives.

### **Understanding and explaining regional cooperation**

Understanding the regionalism in the context of Middle East is not an easy task. There are context-related challenges to cooperation, such as the profound political uncertainty, socio-political difference between the regimes, economic collapse. From this perspective, it may seem that regionalism is doomed to fail. Such perception has informed my decision to provide a comprehensive understanding of the possibility of increased regional cooperation. The key task of this chapter is to analyse various theories that can be applied to the efforts in inter-state cooperation in the region and to assess how the outcome can be predicted. This thesis tries to understand both whether the global trends of regionalisation can reach the Middle East and to assess efforts at generating ‘regionalism-like’ phenomena can fully take hold in the region. Below, I present five different approaches to understanding regional cooperation in general and specifically in relation to the Middle East. The aim is to outline summarised versions of these approaches and link them to distinct theories of international relations.



In the case of Mashreq, can we speak of "a region"? Bruce Russett<sup>4</sup> defined a region in three factors: geography (physical proximity and separateness), economics (trade interdependence) and culture (homogeneity). Do these criteria apply to the Middle East? The question of homogeneity is disputable. Are there similarities in values and a way of life? More objective measures such as political systems and a level of economic development show clearly that there is a vast difference between the countries. Looking at the GDP, Mashreq excluding Israel accounts for the same amount as the GDP of Israel. For instance Jordan has a per capita GDP of 948 Euros and Israel of 14,724 Euros.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, as the example of the EU-27 shows, the social, economical and historical diversity between the countries should not be an obstacle in the formation of a clear, regional identity. On the contrary, if the differences, for example in the sphere of production and labour structure, are complementary, this can contribute to the success of integration. Politically the Middle East is a very heterogeneous region and regimes range from democracy to dictatorship. I will provide more detailed analysis of political systems in Chapter 2.

Another definition of a region focuses on its interconnection in economic terms. According to Ian Winters regionalism is "any policy designed to reduce trade barriers between a subset of countries, regardless of whether those countries are actually contiguous or even close to each other."<sup>6</sup> As the Chapter 5 shows, this is not the case in Levant. Overall, it has low level of economic transactions in trade and production of goods, labour flows or tourism.

Fabrizio Tassinari defined region-building as "the practice of actors constructing a region (...) carrying out different political projects: they can emerge from outside and above – at the initiative of countries, international institutions, or more generally foreign policy elites or (...) as a result of networking by grassroots movements, firms or sub-national authorities."<sup>7</sup> Regions can form for functionalistic, interest-based or community-building purposes, and can pursue goals as diverse as cultural cooperation, civil society development, and trade or cooperative security in various

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4 JYoung, .C. J.Caporaso, "Comparative Regional Integration", in.Thomas Risse, Beth Simmons (eds.), Handbook of International Relations 2002, P.481

5 Eurostat. Euro-Mediterranean Statistics. <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/> Brussels.1998 (accessed 20.05.2010)

6 Winters L.A..Regionalism vs. Multilateralism. In Market Integration, Regionalism, and the Global Economy ,e R.Baldwin, D.Cohen, A.Sapir, and A.Venables (eds) New York: Cambridge University Press.1999

7 Tassinari, Security and Integration in the EU Neighborhood: the Case for Regionalism. CEPS Working Documents No. 226, 1 July 2005.

sectors. Tassinari points out at the unique character of regions –a unit between a balance-of-power type nation state, and an international organisation, but not aiming at becoming any of them. Regionalism favours cohesion and diversification at the same time<sup>8</sup>. It provides a forum for variable geometries of social and political interaction; it can create an inclusive forum for multilateral interaction.

The thesis employs a definition of regionalisation that follows one of Andrew Hurrell's typologies: "the growth of societal integration within a region and (...) the often undirected processes of social and economic interaction"<sup>9</sup>. This type of cooperation can be more or less formal and may have varying degrees of institutionalisation. Hurrell delineates several additional types of regionalism, including regionalisation, regional awareness and identity, state-promoted regional integration, and regional cohesion.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of such inter-state cooperation is to respond to external challenges, solve a common problem or secure welfare gains. Robert Keohane's primary definition of cooperation is to adjust policies in order to meet the demands of others'<sup>11</sup>

The European Commission distinguishes between "integration" – which objective is the removal of barriers to movement of goods, services and factors of production, and "cooperation" which refers to shared management of common resources and facilitations of transport and communication infrastructures and all other activities leading to increased interdependence of the economies. "<sup>12</sup>

Michael Emerson distinguishes various types of regionalism: Technical regionalism: Objective criteria assign specific public policy functions to the territorial level that best encompasses their costs and benefits. Good neighbourliness regionalism: Neighbouring political jurisdictions organise congenial activities together with a view to building good relations and friendship. Security regionalism: Facing common threats such as illegal migration, trafficking of drugs and people, terrorism and strategic security generally. Dysfunctional regionalism: Vain attempts to construct regional cooperation, frustrated by serious political divergences or inefficiencies between the participants. Institutional regionalism: Focus on the administrative and

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8 Ibid

9 In *The Globalization of World Politics* Fourth Edition Jan 2008 John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (Eds.) *Regionalism in International Affairs*, Edward Best and Thomas Christiansen p.436

10 Ibid.

11 R. O. Keohane, *After hegemony: cooperation and discord in the world political economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 12.

12 European Commission. 1995. *Communication on European Community Support for regional economic Integration Efforts among developing countries*. COM (95) 219.

organisational structures devised to promote regional cooperation. Geo-political regionalism: Relating to the objectives of leading powers to secure a sphere of influence. Eclectic regionalism: Experimenting with many conceivable types of regional cooperation, without a clear strategic view, or evident criteria for selection.<sup>13</sup> Applying the framework to the Middle East shows, that in a case of region-building, all possible scenarios can be implemented. This, on the one hand, gives flexibility in working out common rules and collaboration methods; on the other hand, it risks ambiguities and competing visions.

Bjorn Hettne places regionalisation directly in the context of globalisation and argues that the new approach sees regionalisation as “part of a global structural transformation, or globalization, in which also a variety of non-state actors were operating at several levels”<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, Richard Falk found that the regional dimension of the world order could be seen as “containment of negative globalism” and a “renewal of positive globalism as a world order project”.<sup>15</sup>

EU’s communiqué gives credit to regional cooperation for numerous positive changes. It promotes the sharing of experiences and the transfer of expertise, set and promotes best practice, defies common thematic strategies and action plans, carries out together concrete projects, create networks of people and organisations, reinforces capacities of national and local authorities and advances the strengthening of civil society<sup>16</sup>

## **Chapter 1: International Relations theory: approaches to understanding regional cooperation**

The ‘new regionalism’ thinking that exists in many areas of the world can also be found in the rhetoric adopted by the foreign policy elites of Middle East. Leaders increasingly stress that the challenges posed by globalisation– such as survival of domestic industries and food production, international terrorism, refugees and labour

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13 Emerson, Michael. (2008) The EU’s New Black Sea Policy- What kind of regionalism is this? CEPS Working Document No. 297/July 2008.

14 B. Hettne 'The new regionalism revisited', in Soderbaum and Shaw eds, Theories of new regionalism, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 23–24.

15 R. Falk 'Regionalism and world order', in Soderbaum and Shaw, eds, Theories of new regionalism: a Palgrave reader (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 70–71

16 European Commission EuropeAid Cooperation Office [http://www.enpi-info.eu/files/publications/regionalcooperationbrochure2\\_en.pdf](http://www.enpi-info.eu/files/publications/regionalcooperationbrochure2_en.pdf) (accessed 27.05.2010)

migration flows – are best dealt with through regional cooperation. They try to prove the rationale for regionalism through explicit reference to such regional initiatives as the European Union, stressing the positive impact of regional organisations on peace and welfare of citizens. International relations theories, however, differ substantially in their views on cooperation. Below the perspectives of realism and transactionalism will be presented.

## Realism

Middle Eastern politicians are frequently described as realists *par excellence*. The most common way scholars assess the international relations of the Middle East is by viewing the region as an arena for struggle for hegemony. Classical realism in the version presented by Hans J. Morgenthau offers a useful starting point here. Morgenthau argues that countries and their state leaders “act in terms of interest defined as power”<sup>17</sup>. The struggle for influence and control lies in the centre of international politics. In pursuing a rational foreign policy, a state will attempt to minimise the risks and maximise the benefits in order to cement its power. Historically, the region has been shaped by the power struggle between outside powers during colonialism and the period of formation of the state of Israel. The geopolitical competition between outside powers was also present during the Cold War era.

The starting point of the realist approach is that the international system is anarchic and states are primarily concerned with their survival. The unequal distribution of natural and human resources introduces competition and rivalry between states. Water and land are scarce in the region and, according to realist thinking, will inevitably cause fierce competition between the states. Countries with the greatest material capabilities are the ones most likely to survive in the international system. Also on a global scale, this system triggers competition over resources by the most powerful states. It follows that great power like the US has an interest in supporting Israel with the aim of controlling the territories and resources of the Middle East.

Realists, both classical and neo, are generally sceptical about the prospects of cooperation. The doubt about the likelihood of integration stems from focus on security, dominant in the region. According to Choi and Caporaso regionalism runs

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17 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Six principles of Political Realism. Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition, Revised, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, pp. 4-15

against prudent security concerns<sup>18</sup>. Countries far apart tend not to be security threats. If there are issues that call for cooperation, states might engage – but a key premise of realist approaches is that attention to state interests trumps all other concerns. When inter-state cooperation does not fulfil this criterion, states will disengage from cooperation. The fear of losing sovereignty in cooperation schemes also fits a realist approach – in a realist perspective, state survival is the primary concern, and any initiatives that might lessen sovereignty could be viewed as threats to the continued existence or independence of a state.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has had a zero-sum character. Extreme contradictions of interests have made any compromise appear unfeasible for a long time and the options adopted by each side to administer the dispute have been very limited. Realist main concern are the relative gains that a State can obtain in the international arena. In a 'zero-sum' or even 'negative-sum' game, the aim is to lose less than the adversaries, disregarding the domestic cost of protection or war. Realist policies in the Middle East have proven to be extremely resilient in preserving protectionist measures. As Grieco argues "the fundamental goal of states in any relationship is to prevent others from achieving advances in their relative capabilities".<sup>19</sup> Realism cautions that, even if absolute gains are assured, states that are concerned about relative gains may be unwilling to cooperate. Relative-gains matter because, "states are uncertain about one another's future *intentions*, thus; they pay close attention to how cooperation might affect relative *capabilities* in the future"<sup>20</sup> It seems clear that states cannot predict changes in government or ideology that might turn an ally into an enemy. Correspondingly, states cannot predict how relative gains today will influence future capabilities. A small gain today may therefore result in a loss tomorrow.

Cooperation between states is not impossible, according to Morgenthau, but most states will still act in a prudent manner to maximise benefits that serve national interests. Areas as water and trade are considered issues where national interest is relatively easy to identify. Here realism may offer a coherent approach, in which lack of cooperation can be attributed to conflicting state interests or an unwillingness to allow counterparts to obtain absolute or relative gains.

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18 Jong Choi Young and James Caporaso, 2002, "Comparative Regional Integration", in Thomas Risse, Beth Simmons (eds.), Handbook of International Relations.

19 Grieco, J., 1988. Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism. International Organization, 42(3), 485-507.

20 Ibid

Neoliberal theory criticises realism and states that self-interest often motivates cooperation. One could argue, that neo-liberal concept of striving for the greatest absolute gains from cooperation is beneficial to the countries. While realists are concerned with relative gains, liberals conclude that rational-egoist states may cooperate to achieve absolute gains. Giving up some sovereignty on one issue, but gaining on the other may overall be more favourable than defecting. Additionally, under conditions of interdependence, linking or adding issues may increase the likelihood of cooperation. On any single matter, states might be directly opposed, but on more than one they are most likely to rank preferences differently, which may make possible exchanges across issues. It is especially valid in the Middle East facing numerous challenges: Palestinian statehood and sovereignty, delineation of borders, security regimes and cooperation, Jerusalem, refugees, the link between the West Bank and Gaza, economic relations, water and environmental issues, international regimes/forces, end of conflict, end of claims, UN Security Council Resolution. And in the case of Israel – Syria agreement: the Golan Heights, security arrangements including demilitarization, peace-keeping forces, observers, early warning detection technology, a timetable for withdrawal and demilitarization schedules, repatriation of Syrian citizens to the Golan, border regimes, normalization of relations, such as the exchange of ambassadors, tourism, and economic and other forms of cross-border cooperation, water issues, Syrian relations with Hamas and Hezbollah and with Iran, and an agreement on the Sheeba Farms and Raghar -the Alawite village on the Syria, Lebanon, Israel border.

The surplus of problems listed above shows that prioritising is crucial. The experience in negotiation between the countries of Levant shows that they differ in the perception of what is important. Nevertheless, the neo-liberalist assessment of cooperation, states that ample spectrum of issues can serve to negotiate a bargain. The central and underlying premise of realism, that states maximise benefits and pursue national interests, is shared by neo-liberalism. The concept of national interest is, nevertheless, a problematic notion. Indeed, it is never self-evident, what is in the national interest. The chapter on the economic costs of war will develop this thought. The idea of what is in US or even Israeli interest is disputable. After Bush administration we can observe a shift in the understanding of what lies in the interest of the nation. The theory that US and Israeli interests are interlinked, a few years ago

contested just by a small number of academics like Walt and Mearsheimer<sup>21</sup> who argue, that US and Israeli interests are not always twinned, gains a wider support in Obama administration, with prominent figures like general Petraeus stating that US puts itself in danger by supporting this country (see chapter 3). Correspondingly, what is beneficial to Israel is also ambiguous. Gaining more territory and exerting its influence seems to be an obvious answer, then again, wide circles describe this aggressive policy as a dead-end-road that leads to self-destruction.

### Transactionalism

Transactionalism, also called pluralist or communication approach, states that integration is the only viable way to stabilise nation states and to provide security in the region. The theory, used mostly in the study of European integration, assumes that supranationality is the only way to secure welfare of the citizens.<sup>22</sup> Alain S. Milward, the author of “The European Rescue of the Nation State”, shows that, paradoxically, integration may be the only way to protect state’s sovereignty. Just like most of European states proved incapable in fulfilling their primary duties - the defence of their territory and protection of their citizens, the states in the Middle East feel constantly threatened by war. The concern with security is also reflected in realists’ focus on survival and loss of sovereignty, but the conclusion is very different to that from transactionalism. While transactionalism believes that this insecurity will urge states to collaborate, realism maintains that efforts to counter-balance threatening and structurally dominant state within the region, might act to undermine cooperation. Karl Deutsch also employs the aspect of security, one of the key motives that guide the leaders in Levant. Forming a “security community” that strives to resolve the common social problems by the process of “peaceful change” defined as “the resolution of social problems, normally by institutionalised procedures, without resort to large-scale physical force.”<sup>23</sup> Successful integration is about diminishing the possibility of resorting to violence and making war unthinkable. Deutsch mentions two kinds of integration methods: *amalgamated*, with the existence of supranational institutions and *pluralistic*, separate legal entities, without supreme authority. He distinguishes three conditions for integration: shared values, mutually predictable political, social and economic behaviour and communication.

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21 John J. MEARSHEIMER & Stephen M. WALT, *The Israel Lobby and U. S. Foreign Policy*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

22 Walter Mattli 1999 *The Logic of Regional Integration Europe and Beyond*. Columbia University, New York

23 Deutsch, Karl W.; et al. (1957). *Political community and the North Atlantic area; international organization in the light of historical experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Are these stipulations met by the states in the Middle East? It is still doubtful. Deutsch emphasises communication, as a tool that will inevitably bring cognitive changes. This assumption, however, after decades of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, shows that dialogue alone, however important, is insufficient.

### Game Theory

Political scientists from various theoretical approaches have used game theory to provide insights into why states cooperate in an uncertain international environment. The "cooperation under anarchy" literature argues that mutuality of interests maintains cooperation in an international setting.<sup>24</sup> Mutuality of interests occurs when the gains from cooperation are greater than the benefits of disobeying the rules. Incentives, such as financial assistance or political support, are necessary in order to encourage participating states to cooperate. For example, one country might be tempted to take more water than it was allotted, but realise that the other would probably do the same. With both sides understanding the long-term gains, cooperation becomes more probable.

Experts on Arab-Israeli conflict often argue that the two opposing sides do not hold irreconcilable aims, but that enmity persists because the very structure of the conflict inhibits trust and cooperation. This theory would be compatible with Prisoners' Dilemma<sup>25</sup>. In the problem of the Prisoner's Dilemma, two prisoners are interrogated in separate rooms. Prisoners are given the choice of cooperating with their partner in crime (keeping quiet), or defecting (testify against their partner). If they both cooperate, the lack of testimony from the two prisoners weakens the case. There is still enough evidence, to keep them in prison for a year each. If they both defect, they would go for seven years to prison. If one player defects and the other cooperates, then there is no case against the defector, but a very strong one against the cooperator. The defector receives no prison sentence while the cooperator gets the full ten-year sentence.

A Middle Eastern version of the prisoner's dilemma, then, might consist of Israel and an Arab actor, which both prefer a mutually adopted peace treaty to mutual warfare. Yet because both fear that the other will defect from any treaty, neither cooperates

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24 Oye. 1986. Explaining cooperation under anarchy: Hypotheses and strategies. In *Cooperation under Anarchy*, ed. Oye, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

25 Russett, Bruce/Starr, Harvey/Kinsella, David (2006): *World Politics. The Menu for Choice*, London: Thomson Learning, 230-267.



with the other and war ensues. If Israel adheres to the agreement and the Arab states engage in violence then the Israel will receive 0 points and the Arab states will receive 10 points. If Israel engages in violence and the Arab states adhere to the agreement then the Israelis receive 10 points and Arab states receive 0 points. If both Israel and the Arab states engage in violence then both receive 1 point. If both Israel and the Arab states obey the peace plan then they both receive 5 points. This means that if both the Israelis and the Arab states follow the best possible strategy, they will both continuously obey the peace plan despite any hate or anger aimed towards the other. It seems clear that the course of action which would lead to the most benefit to both parties would be for both the Israelis and the Arab states to cooperate together and to develop and stand by a peace plan. However, the lack of trust in the other party means that both chose to defect. Iterated prisoner's dilemma has the same rules, except that the game is played repeatedly and the players have a memory of previous rounds. This describes the situation in Mashreq even more accurately. After decades of violence and breached trust, the players will not confide to the former enemy.

Robert Putnam's two-level game draws attention to the domestic constraints in the field of international negotiations. Intergovernmental negotiations must overlap with intra-national bargaining in order for a decision to be implemented. This can be easily observed in Israel, where radical parties exert influence through coalition with a ruling party. The government in charge directs talks with its neighbours accordingly to the wishes of the domestic interests groups. In the current Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu minority government, the weakness of the leader was particularly evident when Netanyahu could not prohibit settlements buildings, even though his American ally demanded it. It put the leader of Likud in a particularly difficult position – on the one hand the continuity of American support is essential, on the other hand, as a politician, who wants to be re-elected, he could not ignore his voters and coalition partners. In the same way that Israeli prime minister has to balance between pleasing his voters and allies, President Obama, while conducting foreign policy, has to be conscious of strong domestic lobbies. With congressional elections taking place soon and the presidential election not far behind, there are signs that Obama will feel compelled to restore frayed relations with Israel.

In addition, Israel at times limited its cooperation on water issue, because of the criticism of powerful farmer lobby.<sup>26</sup> The loss of a small quantity of agriculture-sector

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26 Jeffrey Karl Sosland Cooperating rivals: the riparian politics of the Jordan River Basin

water was being valued more highly than improved political relations with its neighbours from which all of Israel would benefit. The issue of water, connected to food supply, is a sensitive one, and the voices of public opinion matter. "When nations negotiate, often the toughest bargaining is not between nations but within them. The reason is simple: international agreements, no matter how much in the national "interest", inevitably have differential effects on the factional concerns (...) experienced negotiators almost invariably insist that the more difficult part of their job consists not in dealing with the adversary across the table but in handling interest groups, bureaucrats and politicians at home."<sup>27</sup> It shows, that the benefits of cooperation must be apparent to a broader public. Chapter 4 will build up on this premise.

## Chapter 2: Governments, governance and regionalism

This chapter interlinks theoretical and practical aspects of the thesis. It considers the links between governance and regional cooperation. It assumes that good governance is an important confidence-building measure for the international actors contributing to human and economic development. Then follows a description of Valley of Peace Initiative, a project supported by political leaders from Israel, Jordan and PA an example of the collaboration project that can contribute to regional development. The chapter concludes with an account of some examples of cooperation between ministries in the respective countries.

### Governance

Bad governance is seen to be major impediment to progress and cooperation in the Middle East<sup>28</sup>. Corruption or inefficiency of government can lead to political instability. Lack of accountability increases risks on the part of cooperating partners and makes them more suspicious of the other party behaviour. Reliability, predictability and the rule of law are essential to make credible commitments and persuade the transnational public and private sector that decisions will not ultimately be reversed due to political uncertainty.

Andrew Heywood defines governance as "a broader term than government (...) it

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(New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2007

<sup>27</sup> Allan, Tony, "Avoiding war over natural resources", in Forum: Water and war, ICRC, 1998

<sup>28</sup> Mohammad K. Shiyab in Michael Mason and Amit Mor (eds.) Enhancing Security in the Middle East: The Challenges of Regional Cooperation, Springer Netherlands 2008

refers in its widest sense to the various ways through which social life is coordinated. Government can therefore be seen as one of the institutions involved in governance (...) The principal modes of governance are markets, hierarchies and networks. The wider use of the term reflects a blurring of the state/society distinction, resulting from changes such as the development of new forms of public management, the growth of public-private partnerships, the increasing importance of policy networks”<sup>29</sup> For the World Bank “governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.”<sup>30</sup>

Transparency International The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2009 is an important indicator of good governance. It measures the perceived level of public-sector corruption on the scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the lowest level of corruption. In the Middle East, with only 2 countries scoring 5 or above and the rest scoring below 3, the perception of corruption remains a serious problem.<sup>31</sup>

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)<sup>32</sup> project reports indicators for six dimensions of governance: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption. The rank indicates the percentage of countries worldwide that rate below the selected country. Higher values indicate better governance ratings. In WGI ranking none of the Mashreq countries performed well in all aspects. Israel ranks highly (75<sup>th</sup> -90<sup>th</sup> percentile) for all variables except for voice and accountability (60<sup>th</sup> percentile) and political stability (15<sup>th</sup>). Syria ranks below 50 percentile in all categories. Its grade on voice and accountability is extremely low, at less than 10<sup>th</sup>, followed by low grade of regulatory quality and control of corruption; the other three criteria pose problems. Jordan ranks on 50-75<sup>th</sup> on most of the criteria, except for voice, accountability and political stability that are slightly lower. The governance in Lebanon requires much improvement on all levels; the corruption level is very high and is regarded as one of the least stable countries of the world. The situation is

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29 Heywood, A. Politics, 3rd edition, Palgrave Macmillian, 2007 p.6

30 The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp> (accessed 25.05.2010)

31 Corruption Perceptions Index 2009 Regional Highlights: Middle East and North Africa [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009/egional\\_highlights](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/egional_highlights) (accessed 25.05.2010)

32 *ibid.*

most dire in West Bank and Gaza – all ranks fall below 15<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The research for 2008 shows a serious discrepancy between the countries of the region. The Voice and Accountability rate ranges from 10 in Syria to 60 in Israel. Political Stability and Absence of Violence ratio is 30 in Jordan to 5 in Lebanon. The greatest discrepancy is in Government Effectiveness, 85 in Israel to 5 in Palestinian Authority. Three remaining criteria: Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption show a similar pattern – vast discrepancy between Israel and other countries, Jordan placed in the halfway.<sup>33</sup>

World Bank publication on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) concludes that governance in which public institutions function responsively, transparently, and with accountability is also essential to reducing poverty and stimulating growth. Economic, social, and human development is being handicapped by weaknesses in the quality of public governance, in which the region lies behind the rest of the world. The report concludes, “Good governance can be viewed as an intersection of four principles of two core values (equal participation and equal treatment under inclusiveness, and transparency and contestability under accountability). Critical dimensions of good governance range from the rule of law, controlling corruption, to public sector efficiency, to citizen voice, and to democracy.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, political reforms are a prerequisite for good governance. According to Freedom house 2010 report<sup>35</sup>, which rates the current state of civil and political rights on a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free), shows that the Middle East continues to lag behind other regions.

"Freedom in the World places Israel on the top of regional ranking, with political rights and civil liberties score: 1 and 2 respectively. It is a sole country with a 'free' grade. The status, however, reflects conditions within Israel itself and excludes occupied territories. Israel is an electoral democracy, governed as most Western regimes. Parliament, or the Knesset, has 120 members who are elected every four years through proportional representation. Because of the world's lowest threshold,

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33 Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Massimo Mastruzzi (2008). "Governance Matters VII: Governance Indicators for 1996-2007". World Bank Policy Research June 2008

34 Better Governance for Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing Inclusiveness and Accountability <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Publications/20261857/Overview.pdf> (accessed 25.05.2010)

35 Freedomhouse <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (accessed 25.05.2010)

at fewer than 3 percent, coalitions of numerous niche parties tend to be unstable. The prime minister is usually the leader of the largest party or coalition. Last elections in February 2009 were prompted after Kadima leader, Tzipi Livni was unable to form a new majority coalition in the Knesset. While Kadima led with 28 seats, Likud by leded Benjamin Netanyahu with one seat less formed a mostly right-wing government with the secular nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu (15 seats), Shas (11 seats), and other parties. Knesset's central election committee voted to ban two Arab parties from the elections on grounds of denying the existence of Israel as a Jewish state and opposing the democratic system. Nevertheless, Supreme Court overturned the ban and the parties were allowed to run. Thirteen members of the current Knesset are Arab Israelis. No independent Arab party has been formally included in a governing coalition.<sup>36</sup>

With scores of 7 in political rights and 6 in civil liberties, Syria is considered to be one of The World's Most Repressive Societies<sup>37</sup> The Syrian government is notorious for its authoritarian rule, although there has been a degree of liberalisation since the death of President Hafez al-Assad. A popular referendum for the president's office is in practice controlled by the regime. Almost all power rests in the executive branch. 250-seat, unicameral People's Council holds little independent legislative power. The only legal political parties are the Baath Party and its several small coalition partners in the ruling National Progressive Front (NPF) who are guaranteed two-thirds of the seats.

Between 2009 and 2010 Jordan's political rights rating declined from 4 to 5 and its status changed from partly free to not free due to the king's dismissal of the parliament and his announcement that elections would not be held until the end of 2010, as well as the security forces' increased influence over political life. Jordan is ruled by a hereditary monarch. King Abdullah II holds broad executive powers, appoints and dismisses the prime minister and cabinet, and may dissolve the National Assembly. The legislature consists of a senate and a house of deputies. The 110-seat lower house is elected through universal suffrage, whereas 55 members of the upper house are appointed by the king. Political parties are legal. The Chamber of Deputies may approve, reject, or amend legislation proposed by the cabinet, but initiative is limited. It cannot enact laws without the assent of the Senate

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Freedom House, Worst of the Worst. The World's Most Repressive Societies 2009, 3 June 2009, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49bf59e20.html> [accessed 26 May 2010]

Lebanon, with political rights and civil liberties score: 5 and 3 respectively, ranks as partly free. Although the 2009 parliamentary elections were conducted peacefully and were judged to be mostly free and fair, sectarian militias' and Syria's influence impede democratic system to develop fully. Moreover, vote buying was reported to be widespread. The 128-member National Assembly elects the president. The president and parliament nominate the prime minister, who, along with the president, chooses the cabinet, subject to parliamentary approval. The post of prime minister is customarily given to a member of the Sunni Muslim community, while the country's president is Christian and the speaker of parliament is a Shia Muslim. Parliamentary seats are divided among major religious communities under a consociational formula that does not reflect their current demographic weight. Shiites comprise at least a third of the population, but they are allotted only 21 percent of parliamentary seats.

The scores 5 in political rights and 6 in civil liberties place West Bank and Gaza in the 'not free' category. The PA has no real authority over its borders or defence policy. The president is elected to five-year terms through universal suffrage. He then nominates the prime minister. The unicameral Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) was expanded from 88 to 132 representatives ahead of the legislative elections in 2006. International observers judged the 2005 presidential and 2006 parliamentary elections to be generally free and fair. In the January 2006 PLC elections, at least five parties competed in addition to the dominant Hamas and Fatah. Hamas won 74 of 132 seats, while Fatah won just 45. The results allowed Hamas to form a government without Fatah support. Israel, the US and the EU refused to recognise the Hamas-led government and cut off assistance to the government. The fracturing of the PA between the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and the Fatah-controlled West Bank in 2007 resulted in a decline in political rights, as elected officials on both sides were prevented from holding office and performing their duties. In 2008, Hamas forces in Gaza arrested hundreds of Fatah members and supporters and shut down the Fatah office in northern Gaza, while in the West Bank, forces aligned with President Abbas arrested hundreds of Hamas members and supporters.

National security paranoia in the Middle East is one of the major obstacles for improving governance. Many fear that opening up channels of external accountabilities can lead to chaos. Such fears are often used to justify repressive, exclusive, and non-participatory governance. That is the case not only in dictatorial Syria, but also in more democratic Israel, where participation opportunities for Israeli

Arabs are limited, due to the anxiety that the country would lose its Jewish character. In PA better governance standards could have eased the polarisation between Fatah and Hamas. The latter rose to power on the back of popular discontent over Fatah corruption. On the whole, the governance picture of the Middle East looks grim. Even in Israel, which does not rank low on the corruption index, top level of political elites, Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and current Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman are to be questioned on a line of fraud and embezzlement.<sup>38 39</sup>

### Economic governmental initiatives

Most regional cooperation projects are initiated in an uncoordinated way and represent niche initiatives by private businesses. The Valley of Peace initiative<sup>40</sup>, however, is a larger scale regional economic development plan, which has received governmental support. It was proposed by Israeli President Shimon Peres and approved by Jordan's King Abdullah and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Aiming at the establishment of Jericho Agro-Industrial Park by the end of 2012, all parties confirmed that they would continue to make their utmost efforts to materialise this initiative and to resolve outstanding issues.<sup>41</sup> It is an audacious enterprise that aims at stabilising the region by means of economic, regional and global cooperation. The Valley of Peace plan extends over the Great Rift Valley, spanning 520 kilometres of the Israeli-Jordanian border, from the Red Sea to the Yarmouk River.<sup>42</sup>

The set of projects includes digging of a carrier for water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. The plan takes into account an airport shared by Jordan and Israel that will facilitate cooperation in tourism between the two countries. Planned railways can facilitate integration of the Middle East and generate economic momentum. The area of the Israeli Jezreel Valley is meant to develop industry in the fields of textile, wood,

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38 Tomer Zarchin Police to question Ehud Olmert in Holyland probe on Tuesday, Haaretz Online <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/police-to-question-ehud-olmert-in-holyland-probe-on-tuesday-1.292018> 24.05.10 (accessed 24.05.2010)

39 Tomer Zarchin Israel Police: Indict Avigdor Lieberman for breach of trust, Haaretz Online <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israel-police-indict-avigdor-lieberman-for-breach-of-trust-1.291999> 24.05.10 (accessed 24.05.2010)

40 The Valley of Peace Initiative information video [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzjiYUY82E8&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzjiYUY82E8&feature=player_embedded) (accessed 16.05.2010)

41 Project website at Japan foreign ministry. [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2010/3/0318\\_02.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2010/3/0318_02.html) (accessed 17.05.2010)

42 Valley of Peace - By Shimon Peres Friday, August 10, 2007 <http://www.isracast.com/article.aspx?id=756> (accessed 16.05.2010)

and food products and to develop a logistical service. The development of industrial agriculture in Jericho will enable the West Bank to export produce to markets throughout the entire Middle East and raise the quality of life in the region. Major new business efforts and tourist attractions have been initiated in Jenin in the West Bank and Gilboa. Palestinians would produce locally made handicrafts and sell them through to other regions of the world. The project has a cultural dimension and involves a creation of a joint language centre, where Israelis and Palestinians would teach each other Arabic and Hebrew, as well as aspects of their cultural heritage.

The Valley of Peace project seems quite grandiose and ambitious. Its cost is estimated at \$10 billion. It has been, however, generating support from private and public investments, including governments of Germany and Japan, Saudi Arabia, US, China and Russia. According to President Peres, the chances that the current development project will succeed are greater than a similar venture he put forward in the 1990s. Since now there is greater awareness of the ecological dangers posed by the likely disappearance of the Dead Sea, and the private sector is more willing to invest in such projects. None of leaders of parties in the Knesset objected to the scheme. The project shows that economic cooperation of Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority is not unimaginable and when the project benefits all parties, there is a possibility of success.

This far-reaching collaboration project could mean creating facts on the ground in a new, positive way and contribute towards prosperity and stability. The cooperative development of agriculture and tourism would boost the economy in two areas. Coordinated activities would result in greater efficiency and saving. However, the planning does not take political change into account. It proposes trade cooperation despite separation wall (e.g. Jenin would sell their produce through Gilboa) and does not strive to remove it. It ignores grave, physical obstacles to cooperation and economic developments such as checkpoints, military road closures, movement restrictions and controls occurring in the West Bank on a daily basis. This initiative can be seen negatively by the other stakeholders as an attempt to normalise occupation and to give more human image of Israel to the rest of the world. There is a risk that such projects would be treated as a substitute and not a vehicle for the political change. For the cooperation to succeed, both political and economic dialogues have to go hand in hand.



## Ministerial collaboration

Even in the period when head-of-state level peace talks were stalled, particular departments of ministries have continued to meet to exchange data and coordinate their activities.

Through the Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS)<sup>43</sup> the ministries of health for Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan began facilitating regional cooperation in public health. They have been sharing data on prevention of infectious diseases and food-borne illnesses. In 2005 and 2006 Arab and Israeli collaboration contained outbreaks of avian flu in the Middle East. This initiative shows how building relationships through joint efforts creates an infrastructure for cross border collaboration during emergencies.<sup>44</sup> Cooperation, coordination, and assistance between the health and agriculture ministries helped synchronise efforts during the outbreaks. The creation of an effective regional system of intervention in the event of disasters may be feasible and could serve the overall aim of achieving regional cohesion. The countries continued to collaborate in public health area even during the outbreak of violence during the summer of 2006. Such collaboration shows that irrespective of political circumstances, the common threat serves as an opportunity to bridge disputes. Ministerial cooperation on water and environmental issues will be described in Chapter 6.

On the top political level, the calls for greater cooperation are heard occasionally. Ehud Barak recently stated that Israel must turn over every stone in its struggle to achieve peace, either as part of a comprehensive regional arrangement or in the spirit of the road map and the vision of two states for two peoples. "This requires cooperation with the regional and global system and above all, close cooperation with the United States. If that requires closing ranks, we must examine how to do so."<sup>45</sup> World Bank's Arab World Initiative meeting, attended by Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank & Gaza and other MENA countries aimed at promoting regional collaboration in the interests of development. According to World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa Region Shamshad Akhtar "The lack of

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43 The Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance <http://www.mecids.org/> (accessed 23.05.2010)

44 Regional collaboration in the Middle East to deal with H5N1 avian flu, British Medical Journal <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/333/7573/856> (accessed 23.05.2010)

45 Yoel Marcu A country with no bosses: What we don't do ourselves, our foes will force from us Haaretz online <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/a-country-with-no-bosses-what-we-don-t-do-ourselves-our-foes-will-force-from-us-1.290904> (accessed 18.05.10)

a common and effective institutional framework for integration; the absence of well structured, readily accessible financial arrangements; and deep differences in competitive, legal and regulatory frameworks across countries have impeded the region's ability to work collectively (...) high unemployment in the region and a growing population of young people looking for jobs, was a spur to finding common solutions."<sup>46</sup>

Even though calls for peace and cooperation from intellectual and political elites in the Middle East occur frequently, the voices do not translate into political reality. Interestingly, the parties that vigorously stress the need for cooperation in dealing with the serious challenges facing the region are mostly outside actors, whose role will be described in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3: The influence of external actors on regionalism**

This chapter provides an overview of the role of two main international actors active in the Middle East. The key question put forward here is whether the great-power engagement can have an impact on the regionalisation. Below I discuss the European and the United States' presence in the region, and assess whether their engagement has affected the prospects for Middle Eastern regional cooperation. The chapter will also analyse and compare the attempts of EU and current US administration to bring stability to the region.

#### **The role of the European Union**

The EU advocates regional cooperation in various parts of the world and promotes region building through classifying of neighbouring countries under regional strategies. The EU considers both intra and inter-regional cooperation to be an important political objective.<sup>47</sup> Due to the fact that the EU prefers to treat countries collectively, foreign policy and aid programmes are established on regional basis. Since the beginning of multilateral talks in the Middle East, the EU has played a very active role in supporting cooperation in the region. European involvement in the

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46 Arab World Ministers and World Bank Group Meet to Spur Regional Collaboration World Bank <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/ISRAEEXTN/0,,contentMDK:22514706~menuPK:315732~pagePK:2865066~piPK:2865079~theSitePK:315726,00.html> (accessed 23.05.2010)

47 European Commission - EuropeAid - Regional co-operation [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/index_en.htm) (accessed 26.05.2010)

Southern Mediterranean countries has increased over the last decade through various instruments described below: foreign aid, cooperation agreements and political dialogue etc. Moreover, the EU is the most important trade partner to all the countries of the region. The strongest push towards a more integrated political and economic structure has so far come from the EU initiated Barcelona Process. This includes promotion of free trade between individual Mediterranean countries and a EU drive to further intra-Mediterranean free trade.

In 2004, the European Commission launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for its southern and eastern partners. Whereas, the Barcelona Process develops the regional or multilateral dimension of the Euro-Med Partnership, the ENP works to reinforce the Barcelona Process on a bilateral basis, through action plans taking into account each country's needs and characteristics. Since July 2008 the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was set up with an aim to revive the initiative Barcelona Process. Most of the EU's support is channelled bilaterally through the European Commission's Delegations in the neighbouring countries.

Karen Smith<sup>48</sup> mentions various reasons why the EU urges third countries to collaborate with each other. First, addressing challenges on a regional basis is a logical approach, since problems such as developing trans-national transport corridors, tackling pollution or combating terrorism and organised crime are usually of a cross-border nature. Working on common challenges can be a confidence-building measure thus promoting increased security, stability, and prosperity.<sup>49</sup> Second, encouraged by its own positive experiences the EU can offer expertise and best practices of regional integration. The EU reached peace after centuries of war on the continent and now it wishes to extend stability into its wider neighbourhood. The success with integration created a conviction that regional cooperation is beneficial for all and that it "provides the basis for peace, economic development and prosperity"<sup>50</sup>. Third, from a materialist standpoint, the EU economic power can be strengthened by expanding markets and facilitation of trade and investment. Dealing with economies of scale is cost and time efficient and more practical than working towards bilateral agreements with every single country. Fourth, from idealist perspective, regionalism promotion is what distinguishes EU foreign policy and

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48 Smith K. (2003), European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World, Polity Press . Cambridge

49 European Commission - EuropeAid - Regional co-operation  
[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/index_en.htm) (accessed 26.05.2010)

50 Smith K. (2003), European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World, Polity Press . Cambridge

contributes towards “building the EU’s identity as a global actor”<sup>51</sup>. Interestingly, the EU is the only donor that provides financial aid for regional cooperation programmes and through political dialogues it aims to provide a framework for discussion of issues of regional interest.

The EU sees instability and lack of regional cooperation in the Middle East as a danger to its security, energy supply and labour market. Helping the countries become well governed and peaceful should make it easier for the EU to preserve its own stability. Accordingly, regional cooperation is seen as a way of achieving security objectives. Collaboration in the areas of cross-border crime, terrorism, illegal emigration and conflict prevention limits the risks coming from neighbourhood to the EU. The European Security Strategy (ESS)<sup>52</sup> adopted in December 2003 with the title “A Secure Europe in a Better World,” states that the resolution of the Arab/Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe. Without peaceful resolution there will be little chance of dealing with other problems in the Middle East. Indeed, the lack of progress in the peace process is affecting the overall Mediterranean policy of the EU. This paralysis of wider European schemes is confirmed by recent decision by the Spanish Presidency to postpone a UfM meeting, in order to “allow greater time for the dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians to begin bearing fruit, which will help create the conditions that will guarantee the success of the summit”<sup>53</sup>. The EU is afraid of the detrimental effects of a bilateral dispute to the overall success of the UfM. Israel's Foreign Ministry expressed their indignation with this decision "We don't see why an organisation that aims to promote cooperation, mostly economic cooperation, among Mediterranean nations should be linked in any way to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. This linkage is simply ridiculous"<sup>54</sup>. With the difficulties of the UfM, some might think that the way forward would be to avoid the Israeli-Palestinian issue or go back to a European-led initiative. However, with peace process back as a central issue on the US’ agenda, there is a growing overall sentiment, that this challenge cannot be ignored.

### **Obstacles to regionalism promotion**

The EU cooperation schemes face several difficulties. Functional activities

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51 *ibid.*

52 Institute for Security Studies, A secure Europe in a better world, European Security Strategy, 2003.

53 The summit of the Union for the Mediterranean postponed 23 MAI 2010 <http://sdapem.wordpress.com/2010/05/23/2128/>(accessed 23.05.2010)

54 DANIEL WOOLLS (AP) Spain says Mediterranean Union summit postponed

[http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jQDpzqvkY\\_K3tn-dU8swLWtHE\\_xgD9FR707G0](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jQDpzqvkY_K3tn-dU8swLWtHE_xgD9FR707G0) 23 MAI 2010 (accessed 23.05.2010)

supporting economic, social, foreign policy and security objectives of the community do not always achieve the aim of boosting cooperation. EU countries tend to think of development assistance and political cooperation on a country-by-country basis. In fact, only 10% of MEDA aid was directed towards regional projects<sup>17</sup>. It causes competition amongst the countries for development funds. Reform promotion is carried out on a country-by-country basis, which develops the countries in an uneven manner. The ENP lacks a strong regional component and the emphasis is on bilateral agreements<sup>55</sup>. Although the action plans encourage cross-border cooperation and trade opening, the main focus is on domestic reforms and building links with EU. The “hub and spokes” system is seen to be more efficient<sup>56</sup> since it gives EU more leverage and responds to the specifics of each country. When the regional groupings are weak, it opts for bilateral agreements, still aiming at eventually achieving cooperation between the neighbouring countries. Another obstacle is that establishing of UfM coincided with the ‘enlargement fatigue’<sup>57</sup>, institutional problems and economic crisis. As internal troubles dominated the agenda of the EU, it started to lose its interest in foreign policy. Within that context it became more difficult for the EU to act as a transformative power in its own neighbourhood. There is a risk that the EU would give up the long-term perspective of community building in the region. As Roberto Aliboni points out, the EU started to lose its impetus towards region building in the Mediterranean region and adopted more traditional intergovernmental methods.<sup>58</sup> As demonstrated in particular in the case of the UfM, the EU having recognised the absence of a political common ground between the countries in the Middle East, it decided to go back to a more cautious pattern of intergovernmental cooperation.

### Instruments and funding

The EU has various instruments to promote regional cooperation both through ENP and UfM. Among EU’s traditional tools of regional cooperation promotion there are economic assistance for cross-border projects, assistance to conflict prevention and crisis management etc. that foster an increase in the capacity of regional groupings, cooperation agreements, political and economic dialogue and conditionality.

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55 Smith K. (2003), *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Polity Press . Cambridge

56 *ibid*

57 Roberto Aliboni and Abdallah Saaf *Human security: a new perspective for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation*, Barcelona 2010 [http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Human\\_security-Euro-Med\\_cooperation.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Human_security-Euro-Med_cooperation.pdf) (accessed 27.05.2010)

58 *ibid*.

Most EU's aid programmes include funding for regional cooperation. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) is the main financial mechanism through which assistance is given. The overall allocation for the ENPI, managed by DG Europe Aid, is almost €12 billion for the period 2007-2013. Around 90 percent of ENPI funds are used for bilateral and regional actions involving two or more partner countries, while the remaining 10 percent are allocated to Cross-Border Cooperation and the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF).<sup>59</sup> The NIF aims at mobilising additional funding for infrastructure projects in the energy, environment and transport sectors. The countries may also benefit from NIF grant for projects of cross border or regional nature. Middle East Peace Projects (Partnership for Peace) supports civil society initiatives that promote peace, tolerance and non-violence in Israel, Jordan and Occupied Palestinian Territory. Annual budget ranges from €5-10 million. Initiatives can be undertaken by each of the target countries, individually or jointly. The aim is to build trust between Israelis and Arabs by increasing regional cooperation in areas such as integrated cross-border issues (environment, municipality issues, community development, technical disputes and alike). The PfP also seeks to strengthen and increase direct civil society relationships and cooperation, based on equality and reciprocity between Israelis and Arabs.<sup>60</sup>

The European Commission regularly initiates regional programmes and formulates plans for increased cooperation. An important part of its strategies is a political dialogue. Several political dialogues are based on joint political declarations. These dialogues encourage collaboration before, during and after meetings.<sup>61</sup> The dialogues vary in intensity, format and level – from regular to *ad hoc*, from informal to official, from presidential to civil society levels.<sup>62</sup>

### Political leverage

Despite having significant instruments for the economic and political change, the EU on numerous occasions has failed to resolve crises. In the eyes of a great majority of Arab public opinion, the withdrawal of EU budgetary support from a Palestinian Authority government in March 2006 after Hamas won in fair elections (supervised by

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59 European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) [http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?lang\\_id=450&id\\_type=2&id=360](http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?lang_id=450&id_type=2&id=360) (accessed 27.05.2010)

60 Ibid.

61 Smith K. (2003), European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World, Polity Press . Cambridge, 76-110

62 Ibid.

the EU) exposed weakness of EU political action.<sup>63</sup> Ignoring democratically elected and later short-lived unity government was particularly damaging to Europe's credit rating. The Danish Cartoon controversy in the same year and various signs of Islamophobia, including Swiss 2010 referendum on minaret ban give an impression among public opinion that Europe is hostile to Islam and to Muslims. The bombing of Gaza of January 2009 which Europe was incapable to prevent and the assassination of a leading member of Hamas in the United Arab Emirates using European passports are just the latest examples of embarrassment of the EU.

At the same time there are great expectations of the different players in the Mashreq with regard to the European Union<sup>64</sup>. Views of the EU among the Middle Eastern countries polled are overall positive.<sup>65</sup> In spite of its failures in delivering a breakthrough in the Middle East, the EU has significant tools to foster regional cooperation in the economic, political, educational, and security fields. With institutional reforms recently introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, the increased importance of foreign policy provides EU with new instruments to deal with the Middle East.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, it can use a network of relationships with the Mashreq countries - established under the Barcelona Process, UfM and ENP. This is an instrument not only to support regional cooperation, but even more so to secure and strengthen peace, which, if achieved, in the beginning would probably lack societal support and be fragile.<sup>67</sup> Economic incentives are the strongest asset of the EU. It can offer “carrots” to the countries for increased cooperation. For example, a prospect beyond its association agreement and gain, as former president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi proposed, “Everything but institutions”. Israel has the potential to further intensify its economic and cultural ties with Europe and

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63 François BURGAT Great Expectations in the Arab World concerning the European Union Monday, 19 November 2007  
[http://www.worldreligionwatch.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=69%3Agreat-expectations-in-the-arab-world-concerning-the-european-union&catid=58%3ATranslation+Database+of+Translation+Examples&Itemid=77](http://www.worldreligionwatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69%3Agreat-expectations-in-the-arab-world-concerning-the-european-union&catid=58%3ATranslation+Database+of+Translation+Examples&Itemid=77)  
(accessed 23.05.2010)

64 François BURGAT Great Expectations in the Arab World concerning the European Union Monday, 19 November 2007  
[http://www.worldreligionwatch.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=69%3Agreat-expectations-in-the-arab-world-concerning-the-european-union&catid=58%3ATranslation+Database+of+Translation+Examples&Itemid=77](http://www.worldreligionwatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69%3Agreat-expectations-in-the-arab-world-concerning-the-european-union&catid=58%3ATranslation+Database+of+Translation+Examples&Itemid=77)  
(accessed 23.05.2010)

65 Israel and Iran Share Most Negative Ratings in Global Poll BBC World Service Published on 6 March 2007  
[http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views\\_on\\_countriesregions\\_bt/325.php?nid=&id=&nt=325&lb=btvoc](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/325.php?nid=&id=&nt=325&lb=btvoc) (accessed 18.05.10)

66 Volker Perthes, Beyond peace: Israel, the Arab world, and Europe, [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net) 22 January 2008 (accessed 12.05.2010)

67 Ibid.

even to participate in the European Economic Area (EEA). The Israel-EU rapprochement, however, cannot mean to isolate Israel from its middle-eastern neighbours. It would be essential to simultaneously help Arab states to become competitive in economic terms with Israel; “this would reduce asymmetries which are an obstacle to cooperation and in the 1990s limited the willingness of Arab states to fully engage in projects aiming to create a “new middle east””.<sup>68</sup>

The conflicts in the Mediterranean are a major test for Europe’s capacity of implementing foreign policy. Due to geographical proximity, military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq of many European countries and terrorist threats, solving Israeli-Arab conflict and bringing stability in the Mediterranean is Europe’s priority. So far, however, the EU has been the biggest “payer not a player” in Mashreq. If Europe wants to assume a monitoring role it should become firm with parties that fail to live up to their commitments.

### **The role of the United States**

The United States does not foster regional cooperation in the same way as the EU – its financial institutions do not give aid to support region building. Nevertheless, the role of the US as the facilitator of inter-state dialogue cannot be ignored. From the very beginning, the US assumed the main responsibility of supporting the peace process as the main driving force behind the bilateral and multilateral peace talks. Then again, unconditional support and preferential treatment of Israel, as well as the war on Iraq in the name of democracy undermine US credibility in the region. President Barack Obama seems to be determined to solve the Middle Eastern conflict but has not the pressure been tried already?

Indeed, previous US presidents have also attempted to solve the conflict. Nevertheless, neither Bill Clinton in Camp David nor George W. Bush in Annapolis succeeded. Can Obama’s policy lead to a change? Possibly. None of the previous efforts was a firm and a clear statement and from the very beginning. Obama’s engagement may add new dynamic to the talks. The fact that Obama administration has been committed to resolving this issue from the very beginning gave a new level of seriousness to the issue. Until recently, critical views in the US on Israel were

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68 Volker Perthes, Beyond peace: Israel, the Arab world, and Europe, [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net) 22 January 2008 (accessed 12.05.2010)



marginalised and considered controversial. They have started appearing in the media since the 2006 John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt publication about the harm to US interests done the pro-Israel lobby, Noam Chomsky's activism and a book by a former president Jimmy Carter, "Palestine: Peace not Apartheid". But the criticism has been limited to small, intellectual circles and has not been expressed publicly by political leaders. Now senior US military commanders, among others widely respected General David Petraeus, say that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is fomenting anti-American sentiment. "Enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbours present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the area of responsibility (...) Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples [in the region]."<sup>69</sup> A major change in the US foreign policy concerning Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that it is no longer a side issue. Another prominent member of Barak Obama's government, chief political adviser David Axelrod, said ending the Middle Eastern conflict was imperative for US security.

Alongside with a firm call for a halt of settlement building, are these signs that US favouritism towards Israel going to end? Is USA beginning to realise that their unconditional support for Israel is not beneficial? Domestic factors would certainly imply so. A new competitor to AIPAC's influence is born. J Street<sup>70</sup> is a pro-Israel, pro-peace American-Jewish lobby advocating for strong US leadership to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to broaden debate around Israel and the Middle East in national politics and the American Jewish community.

Paradoxically, the realist focus on State's interest can push for cooperation between the nations in the Middle East. When the policy-makers realise that the US national interest is not always compatible with that of Israel, and the conflict can hinder its goals, it will foster dialogue and peace resolution. There is a growing sense that Israel is becoming more isolated and the US is becoming more dependent for its regional strategy on Arab states. The Israeli prime minister last week commented that while the two nations had important mutual interests, he was obliged to act "in the vital interests of the state of Israel"<sup>71</sup>. Analogically, President Obama has to act in the interest of the US. Commitment to Israel's security should not threaten US defence. However, in the fostering of regional cooperation, the issue of Israel's

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69 US general: Israel-Palestinian conflict foments anti-US sentiment. Haaretz Online 17 March 2010 <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1157108.html> (accessed 12.05.2010)

70 Jstreet <http://www.jstreet.org/> (accessed 12.05.2010)

71 Ibid.

security cannot be ignored. American security guarantees are necessary to encourage Israeli leaders to bring about the conditions for a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

After decades of escalating violence and failed bilateral peace talks, it seems that international mediation is indispensable. In May 2010 the first round of indirect peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has been completed. US special envoy George Mitchell served as a liaison between the parties. Israel had pledged not to build in the Ramat Shlomo settlement of East Jerusalem for two years in exchange for the security. The State Department statement also said that both Israel and the Palestinians would be held "accountable" for actions that "undermine trust" during the course of the proximity talks.<sup>72</sup> The projected outside mediation can be beneficial to the regional collaboration. A Cairo Speech was one of many positive gestures of US new administration towards Arab world. President Obama has won trust in the Palestinian side which expressed their preference towards mediation through USA." A reporter from Ramallah Nour Odeh lends support to this finding, and concludes: "The proactive and direct American effort is what is giving this process some momentum now. There is really very little trust in the Israeli side. Many Palestinian leaders here do not believe there is a partner on the Israeli side to talk to, but there is a lot more confidence in Obama's administration at this point."<sup>73</sup>

The mediation between two enemies – Syria and Israel appears central. During a visit to Israel by senior adviser to US Middle East envoy George Mitchell Fred Hoff the Turkish president, Abdullah Gul, stated that Syria is also ready to restart indirect peace talks with Israel.<sup>74</sup> This could be used as an opportunity for wider Middle Eastern talks. Lack of Syrian cooperation can backfire badly on the US, not only in the terms of supporting terrorist groups or allying with Iran but also cooperating closer with Russia and China.<sup>75</sup> To balance Israel- US overwhelming military

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72 Natasha Mozgovaya, The Associated Press, Barak Ravid and Jack Khoury, US: Israel pledged not to build in Ramat Shlomo for two years, Haaretz Online <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defence/u-s-israel-pledged-not-to-build-in-ramat-shlomo-for-two-years-1.289198> Published 09.05.10, (Accessed 10.05.2010)

73 Indirect Middle East talks begin. Aljazeera English, MAY 09, 2010 <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/05/201059920449898.html> (accessed 10.05.2010)

74 Ilene R. Prusher Jerusalem In Israel, US envoy maps peace with Syria the The Christian Science Monitor July 14, 2009– <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0714/p06s04-wome.html> (accessed 10.05.2010)

75 Will failure to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict mean a new Cold War in the Middle East?

superiority, Syria aims at forming a "northern alliance" together with Turkey, Iran and Iraq. As suggested by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in the Middle East "no war is possible without Egypt, and no peace is possible without Syria"<sup>76</sup> and it is essential, both for the US and Israel to improve diplomatic relations with this country. With the full-fledged regional cooperation, even if not in the first step, in the long run it is indispensable to involve Syria and Lebanon. Current security threats include Hezbollah and Iranian nuclear ambition, which without the collaboration of Syrian and Lebanese governments cannot be contained. Nevertheless, Syria's new hope for allowing for a new relationship with the US, acquired after the announcement that the US will appoint an Ambassador to Syria, after 5 years of his recall, has faded. US President has renewed sanctions against Syria, saying it supported terrorist groups and was pursuing weapons of mass destruction.<sup>77</sup>

The currently US does not call for regional, multilateral talks. This raises doubts about the coherence of American efforts to foster regional dialogue. Israel is also convinced that the multilateral talks are no substitute for bilateral agreements, which should be carried out with some progress as to have a peaceful settlement at the end.

## Conclusions

The role of external actors seems to be far away from a colonial "divide and rule" approach that lied at the roots of the conflict. Nowadays, the great power involvement in the peace process and their role as a mediator is widely perceived to be indispensable. Having an alternative to bilateral negotiations can be an incentive for all parties. As an example, the idea of a global conference gains wide support. It would emphasise the role of the international community, which was absent in the previous experiences to a large extent, because everyone was favouring the bilateral talks – to "leave the Palestinians and Israelis on their own". That, however, proved to be wrong. The international community should bear greater responsibility for monitoring progress. The foreign involvement would draw the attention to the international legality, as an important component and aspect that needs to be

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Posted By Joshua Landis Tuesday, May 11, 2010 Foreign Policy Online  
[http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/05/11/will\\_failure\\_to\\_solve\\_the\\_arab\\_israeli\\_conflict\\_mean\\_a\\_new\\_cold\\_war\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_e](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/05/11/will_failure_to_solve_the_arab_israeli_conflict_mean_a_new_cold_war_in_the_middle_e) (accessed 16.05.2010)

<sup>76</sup> Paul Salem Syrian-Israeli Peace: A Possible Key to Regional Change Policy Brief No. 70, December 2008 [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/syrian\\_israeli\\_peace.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/syrian_israeli_peace.pdf) (accessed 23.05.2010)

<sup>77</sup> Barack Obama renews US-Syria sanctions Tuesday, 4 May 2010  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8658881.stm> (accessed 16.05.2010)

respected and taken into a consideration by all parties. Considering that bilateral negotiations failed so far, a regional project with more actors involved can ensure the fulfilment of the accords.

The role and leverage of external actors in the process of transforming the Middle East region cannot be underestimated: “There are many lessons to be learned from the Oslo process that have not been learned. One of the clearest is that we cannot do it by ourselves. There is absolutely no basis to trust each other.”<sup>78</sup> None of the external actors is fully prepared to put effective – both economic and political pressure, but coordinated approach of the EU, the US and Russia could make a difference. There is a need for a more active EU involvement in supporting President Obama’s initiatives in the Middle East peace process. Both American and European interests in the Middle East would be best served if the region were peaceful and stable. “Any convincing global political formula for the Middle East requires the appropriate combination of European expertise and American energy.”<sup>79</sup> The international community should foster cooperation by monitoring breaches to the agreements and impose mechanism to resolve emerging disputes. Bearing in mind the complexity and scope of the issues at stake, external actors only have limited influence and capacity. While they can promote political change, the main drive for this change should come from within. Local actors have a crucial role to play, and have potential for a change in the region. The following chapter describes their influence on regional cooperation.

## **Chapter 4: Civil society dialogue and cooperation**

Despite decades of conflict and violence, there are various civil society organisations in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine and Israel, that have crossed the cultural, national, religious and ethnic divides. It is difficult to understand fully regionalism without taking into account interests groups. The chapter starts with a brief outline of the concept of civil society. I argue that an active involvement of the non-state actors is a crucial confidence-building measure and therefore can lead to better governance and greater stability in the region. Then follows a general introduction about the current role and health of civil society in the Middle East and the public opinion about the peace process. Is possible to create peace from below? I will present some

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78 Gershon Baskin, A third party presence is vital, THE JERUSALEM POST, Feb. 8, 2005

79 Álvaro de Vasconcelos. The Union for the Mediterranean: Political Deadlock European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Security. <http://www.iemed.org/anuari/2009/aarticles/a173.pdf>

schemes that strive for cooperation between conflicted nations. My subsequent assessment of the civil society draws attention to the role of think tanks and pro-peace organisations to fostering peaceful co-existence between Israelis and Arabs. The conclusion shows the necessity of involving all stakeholders in the regional cooperation projects and draws attention to the constraints imposed on and by NGOs on the dialogue.

### The concept of civil society

A civil society is a broad concept, encompassing all the organisations and associations that exist outside of the state and the market. The idea of modern civil society goes back to philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Montesquieu, and Alexis de Tocqueville. It was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who explained in his "Philosophy of Right" (1821) that the emergence of civil society is what distinguishes modern from medieval society. Revitalised in the wake of the political changes in the 80's and 90's the concept of civil society became "a key element of the post-cold-war *Zeitgeist*".<sup>80</sup> With the weakening role of the nation state, the civil society acquires more transnational character. Most scholars agree today that civil society protects the individuals and their natural rights against the state and the right to associate according to their individual and collective interests is one of the fundamental freedoms. Cornerstones of civil society are voluntary organisations, NGOs connecting private interests and public commitment. This dimension reflects the commitment of civil society to the principles of good governance understood as the transparency of accounts, the effectiveness of public resource management, and accountability to the general public. An international relations theory argues that domestic features of individual states matter for the kind of interaction that takes place between states in the international arena. As an analytical framework, liberal theories assess how domestic political factors, like institutional features or constellations of interest groups, affect the conduct of foreign policy. In contrast to neo-realists, liberal theorists hold that domestic factors influence state behaviour in the international arena.

### Civil society in the Middle East

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80 Thomas Carothers The Concept of Civil Society Is a Recent Invention <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/pdf/CivilSociety.pdf> (accessed 4.05.2010)

An analysis of civil societies in the Middle East faces several problems. There are various particularities of the status of civil society organisations in the Middle East. First, in Arab regimes they are sometimes regarded as a competitor to state power and a tool of Western influence. For that reason, ruling elites create their own organisations in order to enhance their political control among the population. This is the case in Lebanon and Syria. Second, states exert pressure to limit the influence of the religious non-profit sector. This situation is encountered with religious organisations in secular countries of Mashreq, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Thirdly, the fact that the state sometimes funds the non-profit sector<sup>81</sup> contributes to the risk that government funding can influence the NGOs. This exists in a limited way in Syria and Lebanon, where the state contracts with philanthropic and religious institutions to serve orphans, people with disabilities, and the elderly. Despite some initial steps towards reforms the participation of civil society in Syria and Lebanon remains weak.

In Syria freedom of expression is heavily restricted. Vaguely worded articles of the penal code criminalise articulation that harms national unity, tarnishes the image of the state, or threatens the “goals of the revolution.” Particularly calls for the expansion of Kurdish or regional rights are banned. Many journalists, writers, and intellectuals have been arrested under these laws. All news-formats broadcast media are state owned. However, satellite dishes are common, giving most Syrians access to foreign broadcasts. More than a dozen privately owned newspapers have been established in recent years, and a nuanced criticism of government policy is tolerated. Syrians access the internet only through state-run servers, which block more than 160 sites associated with the opposition, Kurdish politics, Islamic organisations, human rights, and certain foreign news services, particularly those in Lebanon. Social-networking and video-sharing websites such as Facebook and YouTube are also blocked. E-mail correspondence is reportedly monitored by intelligence agencies, which often require internet cafe owners to monitor customers. The government has been more successful in fostering self-censorship through intimidation; a dozen cyber dissidents are currently imprisoned. Freedom of assembly is highly restricted. Public demonstrations are illegal without official permission, which is typically granted only to pro government groups. The security services intensified their ban on public and private gatherings in 2006, forbidding any group of five or more people from discussing political and economic topics. This rule

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81 Civil Society in the Arab Region: Its Necessary Role and the Obstacles to Fulfillment Ziad Abdel Samad The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law. Volume 9, Issue 2, April 2007

has been enforced through surveillance and informant reports. Such activity by the intelligence services has ensured that a culture of self-censorship and fear prevails, and ordinary Syrians are unwilling to discuss politics under most circumstances. Freedom of association is severely restricted - the required registration of all NGOs forbids reformist or human rights groups.<sup>82</sup>

In Lebanon rights to freedom of association and assembly are generally unrestricted. Civil society is vibrant, and NGOs, including human rights groups, operate openly. The Interior Ministry has at times transformed the notification process into an approval process and has been known to conduct inquiries into an organisation's founding members. NGOs must invite ministry representatives to general assemblies where votes are held.<sup>83</sup>

Although, in the Palestinian Authority there are a broad range of NGOs and civic groups, political expression remains restricted. Following the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, freedoms of assembly and association were significantly limited, with security forces forcibly dispersing public gatherings of Fatah and other groups and killing a number of people. Many civic associations were shut down for political reasons in both the West Bank and Gaza in 2008. Hamas itself operates a large network that provides social services to certain Palestinians. Despite the governmental restrictions, civil society is one of the most vibrant in the region. It is a positive sign, but it also reflects political weakness. After Hamas took power in 2006, and EU withdrew financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, it was up to NGOs to apply for a financial assistance and pursue development projects.

Israel hosts an active civil society, where freedoms of assembly and association are respected. Groups that reject Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state are not allowed to demonstrate. In July 2009, the cabinet approved a bill that prohibited state funding for activities that mark the Nakba. Within Israel two civil societies have evolved - consisting of the Jewish population and Arab citizens. In 2009, the Foreign Ministry voiced concerns about the funding of antiwar groups by foreign governments. While the ministry reportedly asked the British, Spanish, and Dutch governments to stop funding one such group, Breaking the Silence, no additional steps were taken.

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82 Freedomhouse <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (accessed 25.05.2010)

83 Ibid.

In Jordan freedom of expression is restricted, negative opinions on the royal family and certain societal taboos are not permitted and in certain cases punished with arrest. The security forces continue to exercise significant influence over Jordanian political life by limiting citizens' freedoms of speech and assembly. Permissions to hold demonstrations are often denied, particularly when they criticise Jordanian-Israeli relations. Police violently dispersed demonstrations protesting Israel's offensive in Gaza, as well as a protest against food imports from Israel. Freedom of association is limited. While many NGOs are able to operate, the government is considering new legislation that would severely limit their independence through supervision of NGO budgets, which can allow to the government the rejection of foreign funding, and vetoing of programmes planned by the organisations.

The analysis above highlights serious impediments to the regional cooperation independent from governmental control. Particularly in Syria, the NGO sector is virtually non-existent. With such hostile climate towards civil society, it faces grave impediments in making a more effective contribution to constructing a transnational dialogue. Despite these obstacles, the informal nature of Track II diplomacy allows serious and potentially dangerous issues to be discussed in an open, non-official forum. Countless civil society organisations entered the arena of inter-state relations in the Middle East in the 1990s, professing to enhance regional cooperation.

### **Public opinion on regional cooperation**

According to public opinion surveys 72% of Israelis and roughly the same percentage of Palestinians would accept peace with the 1967 borders and cessation of violence. Contrary to the popular belief, democracy is viewed positively in Arab societies – 98% of those polled in Egypt, 95% in Morocco, and 90% in Jordan.<sup>84</sup> Opinion polls show that large numbers of Israelis and Palestinians are still in favour of a peaceful solution to the conflict. It seems that the public wants and is ready for peace, but does not believe that it is relevant. Within the nations of Middle East dominates an overall feeling of powerlessness and loss of hope for the end of the enduring conflict. The daily violence and arising tensions have destroyed the little trust remained between the sides, both at the governmental and people-to-people levels. Over 91

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci, eds., *The Rubik Cube of the Wider Middle East*, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2003, p. 10.



percent of Israelis said they felt insecure because they feared terrorist attacks<sup>85</sup>. It is difficult to form a sustainable society with the vast majority of population living in a sense of insecurity. Can people rebuild trust when the governments fail to do so? A general trend in a recent poll conducted by Truman Research Institute<sup>86</sup> reveals that both Palestinians and Israelis do not hope for the conflict resolution in the near future. One of the reasons for the disappearance of a peace camp is that a majority of its supporters have become "peace sceptics." The both sides have lost faith that there is a partner for peace. Both Palestinians and Israel have systematically and substantively breached every agreement signed. While they overwhelmingly support two-state solution, the majority opposes a confederation of the two states. Surprisingly however, they see the confederation, as the least difficult to achieve, comparing with one or two-state solution. Even though the hope is frail, the public still wants to renew dialogue. Just over 60 percent of the Palestinians are in favour of resuming the indirect negotiations between Israeli and the Palestinians.<sup>87</sup> The growing enmity of the citizens towards the "others" cannot be ignored and should be tackled in order to bring a change from bottom-up. In the words of a Haaretz journalist, Akiva Eldar, "baseless beliefs and deeply rooted misconceptions are the main obstacles that prevent Israelis from supporting negotiations"<sup>88</sup>.

### Cooperation initiatives

Despite aforementioned problems, various civil society actors still trust that the pressure for peace has to come from the bottom up. There are various projects working for peace among Arabs and Israelis. Some of the policy groups, foundations and projects are presented below.

The Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) is a coalition of 44 NGOs that promotes coexistence between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East. Through ALLMEP people from diverse religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds can join together in support of real efforts to build lasting peace in the region. An umbrella organisation encompasses a wide range of collaboration areas – from education

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85 The cost of war (2009) Strategic Foresight Group Report [www.strategicforesight.com](http://www.strategicforesight.com) (accessed 10.05.2010)

86 Israeli Poll #31 Palestinian Poll #35  
[http://truman.huji.ac.il/upload/truman\\_site\\_poll\\_31\\_March2010.pdf](http://truman.huji.ac.il/upload/truman_site_poll_31_March2010.pdf) (accessed 11.05.2010)

87 Palestinian Center for Public Opinion, <http://www.pcpo.ps/polls.htm> (accessed 10.05.2010)

88 Akiva Eldar, Don't confuse us with facts, Haaretz Online <http://www.haaretz.com/magazine/week-s-end/don-t-confuse-us-with-facts-1.291302> (accessed 10.05.2010)

through culture, religion to the environment.<sup>89</sup>

Multicultural cooperation is particularly visible in educational institutions. Quite a popular approach among NGOs is to educate youth to build a shared future. Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information<sup>90</sup> is a joint Israeli-Palestinian public policy think-tank dedicated since 1988 to developing practical solutions for conflict. It launched various initiatives e.g. involving more than 220 teachers from Israel and from Palestine in a cooperation programme, run in more than 50 high schools in Israel and more than 30 in the West Bank. IPCRI has also issued new updated curricula. The effort to train teachers in peace education stems from the conviction that educators can bring change. Another educational initiative, Middle East Education through Technology (MEET), under a patronage of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), enables its Israeli and Palestinian participants to acquire advanced technological and leadership tools. It gives a chance to interact with one another, using technology as a medium to bridge the divide. Seeds of Peace was founded after the first terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre. It organises International Camps that bring several dozen Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian teens together. The goal of his organisation was to create a new generation of leadership in the Middle East, one in which both Arabs and Israelis would no longer accept stereotypes about each other. Hand in Hand Bilingual Arab-Jewish schools<sup>91</sup> serve more than 800 students in five cities in Israel. Half the students are Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the other half are Jewish citizens of Israel. Students study in both languages simultaneously.

An obvious choice for an area of collaboration is trade, described in more in detail in the next chapter. Several civil society organisations aim at cooperation in the domain of economics. Since 2008 the ambition of the Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce (IPCC)<sup>92</sup> is to boost trade between Israel and the Arab world and to forge strong relationships with the Israeli and Palestinian business communities. Its principles are based on the belief that economic inter-dependence is a way to create stable and mutually beneficially relations among nations and that an economic stability is a mean to peaceful relations between Israelis and Arabs. Moreover, strong

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89 Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) <http://www.stanford.edu/group/caas/members.html> (accessed 10.05.2010)

90 Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information <http://www.ipcri.org/> (accessed 1.05.2010)

91 Hand in Hand Bilingual Arab-Jewish Schools <http://www.handinhand12.org/> (accessed 1.05.2010)

92 The Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce (IPCC) <http://ipcc.org.il/> (accessed 1.05.2010)

business and social networks can contribute to mutual trust between the nations. The McGill Middle East Program (MMEP) focuses its activities on institutional collaboration between community centres in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Palestine, Jordan and Israel. A network-based, rights-based community practice (RBCP) assists over 120,000 people each year.

The greater part of NGOs in Mashreq is centred on development, human rights and pro-peace actions. OneVoice<sup>93</sup> is an international mainstream grassroots movement with over 650,000 signatories in roughly equal numbers both in Israel and in Palestine, and 2,000 youth leaders. It aims to make the voice of Israeli and Palestinian moderates heard and to achieve the two-state solution, guaranteeing the safety and security for the region and allowing Israel and Palestine to live in peace with all their neighbours. The Regional track focuses on cooperative development and education through joint Palestinian and Israeli programming. The International Track is directed towards promoting mutual understanding among citizens and to strengthen the role of civil society regionally. Additionally, OneVoice's provides Leadership Development Workshops training young Israelis and Palestinians in public speaking, conflict resolution, community mobilisation and leadership. Citizens' Negotiations Platform was after extensive research by a high profile panel of Israeli, Palestinian, and international experts who broke the conflict down into its ten most contentious issues. Over 180,000 Israelis and Palestinians have since voted on these issues, giving their feedback on how each should be resolved. Results showed a high level of consensus, with 76% of both Israelis and Palestinians affirming a two-state solution.

A relatively new type of organisation has been founded in the countries of the West. A new form of Jewish lobby has originated, juxtaposing AIPAC and military lobbies. JStreet and JCall, from the USA and Europe respectively, are Jewish lobbies committed to the security of Israel and advocating for a creation of viable Palestinian state. This Call for Reason presented at the European Parliament on 3 May 2010 raised almost 5 thousand signatures of European Jews demanding that the European Union, along with the United States, put pressure on both parties and help them achieve a reasonable and rapid solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. They believe that the current policies of Israel endanger its future and state that two-state solution is a necessity to ensure survival of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

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93 One voice movement <http://www.onevoicemovement.org/> (accessed 11.05.2010)

## Conclusions

From the list of citizens' initiatives presented above the following conclusions can be drawn – the majority of schemes have been launched in recent years, despite the fact that the dialogue at the political level has stalled. The deepening violence and uncertainty of the past decade has urged NGOs to look for other methods for conflict resolution. The abovementioned activities are low scale enterprises that target small communities, hoping that a change would occur by bringing together people and by putting a human face on those who were previously perceived as an enemy. The cooperation activity concentrates among three nations – Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. An inclusionary bottom-up approach, which includes societal actors, would create more participatory channels of dialogue. An informal, Track II diplomacy, is highly developed in the Israeli-Arab conflict. Numerous non-officials (academic scholars, retired civil and military officials, public figures, and social activists) engage in dialogue, with the aim of confidence-building and conflict resolution. The projects also involve activists from outside the region, ranging from Palestinian refugees to the Western countries, Jewish Diaspora in Europe and US to international volunteers not related directly to the region. This shows that boost to the civil society organisations can come from the outside. An effective and realistic international plan backed by the Quartet would enable the civil societies on both sides to rebuild public support for peace.

Transnational NGOs have to take into account the fact that the societies in the Middle East have their own specific problems. Social barriers sometimes make it difficult for Jewish and Arab communities to cooperate. Moreover, a huge part of Arab population views contact with Israeli civil society as another form of normalisation of occupation. Apart from these efforts to maintain cross-border dialogue, there is a competing approach, boycott and isolation is a quite significantly growing trend both on a governmental level and among civil society actors. Its aim is also a conflict resolution, but through an economic pressure put on the political leaders. For the government and most civil society actors in PA, Lebanon and Syrian boycott of Israel is considered to be the only mean of pushing pressure for a change within the Israeli society. Since 2005 Palestinian civil society has been collectively calling for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with International Law. The internationally growing movement targets especially settlement products, as a means of exerting economic pressure on Israel. The global

campaign is directed at cooperation agreements with Israel, free or preferential trade contracts, joint research and development projects as well any other sort of bilateral or multilateral agreements forged by Israel. Even some Israeli intellectuals, concerned with Human Rights and democracy in Israel support BDS. Gideon Levy, a journalist for Haaretz and a defender of Palestinian cause stated “boycott could compel his government to end the occupation. As long as the Israelis don't pay any price, there won't be a change.”<sup>94</sup> This strategy suggests that the true regional cooperation would be only possible after creating a Palestinian State (or, less realistically, implementing a One-State Solution). A fundamental change of paradigm is needed: the effort should shift to building a Palestinian state from the bottom up, for which there are encouraging signs, even in the midst of the failure of the top-down process. Boycott and cooperation - these seemingly contradictory approaches have a key element in common. Both believe that economic measures can be a vehicle to change. The next chapter considers the possibility of intra-regional trade cooperation as a peace-building factor in the Middle East.

## **Chapter 5. Political impact of trade cooperation**

Approaching the prospects of economic cooperation in the Middle East is a complex matter. Deep-rooted wars, perpetuating in the region, have determined the social, psychological and economic structure of each country. Even though the Mashreq is abundant with natural and human wealth and is strategically located, these potentials have not positively affected the regional markets. Most of the countries in MENA suffer from economic and social difficulties.

The argument of the following chapter is that trade can be an important contributor to peace. However, to reduce complexity in a manageable way, I have defined my object of study to the political aspect and do not aim at developing an economical theory of integration. In the chapter devoted to trade, links between peace and economy will be highlighted. Aspects such as an economic cost of conflict and its implications will be discussed.

It argues that lasting peace in the Middle East is of vital interest to the countries in that region and to the world as a whole. The key question of this chapter is whether

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94 Gideon Levy Boycott the Boycotters Haaretz Online <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/boycotting-the-boycotters-1.290573> 16 May 2010 (accessed 16.05.2010)

regional trade cooperation can be a peace-building measure. It discusses the states' interests in relation to trade cooperation by analysing a report prepared by Strategic Foresight Group on the cost of Middle Eastern conflict. The chapter concludes by discussing whether trade collaboration can be a first step towards stability or a political change needs to come first and give a way to economic integration.

### **Defining trade cooperation**

Theory of Economic Cooperation claims that mutually beneficial trade initiatives create good relations between adversaries. Cooperative business ventures enable the conditions necessary to achieve long-lasting mutual understanding and eventually bring prosperity to the conflicted regions. The theory distinguishes several features of cooperation. First, commercial cooperation for businesses that profit from joint ventures gain a particular interest in maintaining and cementing these valuable relations. Second, it gradually involves wider regional participation of people that benefited through these cooperative activities. Becoming a part of a multinational system that secured prosperity encourages them to stabilise integration. Third, human interaction - people working together under conditions of equality learn to overcome stereotypes about their former enemy.

### **Economic cost of conflict**

Military expenditures in the Arab-Israeli conflict have diverted enormous regional resources away from development purposes and have allowed a regional arms race to dominate the economies of the Middle East. Decades of conflicts have made the Middle East the most militarised region in the world. 7 out of the 10 highest military spenders in the world are from the wider Middle East. The cumulative military expenditure is expected to double in the next ten years. This puts an enormous strain on the economies. The wider Middle East has 5-6 million armed persons (including military personnel, reserves, paramilitary and foreign troops) for its 300 million people. This is the highest per capita ratio of armed personnel in the world.<sup>95</sup>

Strategic Foresight Group (SFG)<sup>96</sup> has published a report in January 2009 on "Cost of Conflict in the Middle East". More than 50 experts have prepared detailed calculations of costs of various conflicts in the Middle East incurred not only by states of the region but also the international community. The report uses the date of

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95 The cost of war (2009) Strategic Foresight Group Report [www.strategicforesight.com](http://www.strategicforesight.com) (accessed 10.05.2010)

96 Ibid.

Madrid conference, 1991, as a point of departure for its calculations and estimates costs up to 2010. The conclusion drawn from the report is that violence in the Middle East has cost the wider region around \$12 trillion in missed economic growth and development during that period.

The conflict has resulted in over 5 million refugees and internally displaced persons. The majority of them are hosted by Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, placing a heavy burden on the economies of the host countries. More than 40% of internally displaced persons from Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestine territories are children. In fact, young people are the biggest victims of wars. For instance the Israeli defence forces have detained 3000 Palestinian children. The Arab/Israeli conflict and the Arab economic boycott of Israel have resulted in the loss of trade opportunities for both sides. Arab States have lost \$10 billion worth of goods for export and Israel \$30 billion annually. Had there been peace since 1991, an average Israeli citizen would be earning over \$44000 instead of current \$23000.

The calculated benefits that may derive from peace note that during relatively peaceful periods in the 1990s both Israel and the Palestinian territories had good economic growth rates. "It should have been possible for all countries to grow at the average rate of at least 8 percent per annum in the last two decades"<sup>97</sup> according to the report by Strategic Foresight Group. The seemingly dispassionate approach of calculating the costs of human misery also points out that beyond the economics and the numbers, there are incalculable losses – of lives, educational and cultural opportunities and psychological, such as sense of insecurity. The cost of conflict is even more significant in human and psychological terms. The report says that Israel has suffered more than 34000 missile attacks since 2000. Almost 1000 Israeli citizens, 70% of them civilians, have lost life during the same period. About 123 minors have been killed in attacks on cafes, schools and buses.

### **Benefits of trade cooperation**

The report also identifies the economic benefits of peace. For example, the remarkable potential for tourism that countries of the Middle East could be used fully in the peaceful environment. The cradle of the world's major monotheistic religions, and an extraordinary secular cultural patrimony has a great potential to flourish.

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97 The cost of war (2009) Strategic Foresight Group Report [www.strategicforesight.com](http://www.strategicforesight.com) (accessed 10.05.2010)

Regional instability, however, imposes major constraints to overall country development. It should be remarked that even in obvious fields of integration, like water sharing, regional cooperation is negligible. The same goes for tourism. The Arab boycott, the travel and other restrictions between Israel and its neighbours, have been serious obstacles for developing this branch. It is noteworthy that to visit some Arab countries, other Arab citizens have to have visas, whereas many Europeans and North Americans do not need any. Joint tourism development of religious places by Israel and independent Palestinian State would lead to tremendous increase in the number of tourists to both countries. The tourism sector has paid very heavily for the conflict. While tourist inflow doubled or tripled in Turkey, Egypt, UAE and Jordan between 1995 and 2005, it declined in Israel costing the country about \$2-3 billion every year. Tourism recovered in 2008 but not to reach the level of 5 million that it would have had there been peace. The report argues that a comprehensive peace agreement will make several projects feasible including water and gas from Sinai, new railway lines from Amman to Haifa, a joint airport at Eilat and the Red-Dead Sea Canal described in the Chapter 2.

## Conclusions

Nowadays there is a growing consensus regarding the positive effects of trade liberalisation on international relations. In addition, some empirical works have shown that trade is more intense between political allies and that the interconnections between economies serve as a strong incentive to avoid conflict and war<sup>98</sup>.

According to neo-liberals, Keohane and Nye, economic interdependence leads to greater cooperation<sup>99</sup>. They stressed that increasing levels of interdependence created a 'demand' for international cooperation<sup>100</sup>. John Mearsheimer contests this view by arguing that countries faced with interdependence will be inclined to emphasise unilateral strategies. Interdependence makes countries vulnerable<sup>101</sup>, and given such insecurities, states will attempt to gain better control or self-sufficiency by

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98 Escribano, Gonzalo (2000): "Euro-Mediterranean Versus Arab. Integration: Are They Compatible?", *Journal of Development and Economic Policies*, vol. 3 n<sup>o</sup>

99 R. O. Keohane, *After hegemony: cooperation and discord in the world political economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 12.

100 Fawcett and Hurrell, (eds.) *Regionalism in world politics 1995*, Oxford University Press

101 Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security*, Vol. 20, no.4 (Spring 1996) <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/copeland.htm>



force, a behaviour that hinders cooperation. What light might these assertions shed on cooperation in the Middle East? Following Mearsheimer's assertion, countries are expected to undertake actions that would decrease their dependence on neighbouring countries. Regarding trade, the Middle Eastern states might see interdependence as a threat to control and self-sufficiency, and thus opt to prioritise domestic production over regional trade cooperation and upholding interdependence. However, using Keohane and Nye's thought, the small trade initiatives can act as a catalyst for profitable economic interdependence or, reversely, peace leads to economic cooperation. The query about the direction of causality in the relation trade-peace becomes a "hen or egg question". It remains unclear whether trade fosters good political relations, or political alliances advance trade agreements. In the first case, increasing economic relations may solve conflict. In the second case, conflict solving remains a political matter. Here the approaches of the states in the region are divergent. Israeli view on general claims that that the peace process needs to focus on economic issues and not political disagreements. Economic cooperation should be the first step, before political arrangements, which has clearly failed in the past. In the words of Prime Minister Netanyahu "Instead of talking about contentious issues (...), the first step to a lasting peace needs to be the fostering of the Palestinians' economic situation. Economic development does not solve problems; it mitigates them and makes them more accessible for solutions. (...) economic peace will support and bolster the achievement of political settlements."<sup>102</sup> The view is shared by Yitzhak Tshuva, a Israeli leading businessman and an investor in the Valley of Peace Initiative described in the second chapter " [Jobs and prosperity are] the only way to get out of the cycle of violence and the dead end in the area (...) Peace will be made not by peace agreements but by making cooperation and goodwill among the peoples of the region"<sup>103</sup>

Arab leaders are often sceptical about economic projects with Israel. There are various reasons to it. First, they are suspicious of Israel's intentions and see closer cooperation with a country much stronger economically as an extension of domination in a political and military into economic sphere. This was the reaction to the "New Middle East" project proposed by President Peres – not as a way of building confidence, but rather establishing *pax hebraica*, with Israel's increased

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102 Raphael Ahren, Netanyahu: Economics, not politics, is the key to peace <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahu-economics-not-politics-is-the-key-to-peace-1.257617> 20.11.08 (accessed 14.05.2010)

103 JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH Dramatic new regional support for Red-Dead seas canal plan Jerusalem Post May 16, 2008 6:33

hegemony. Second, the countries of Mashreq differ in economic regimes – traditionally socialist Syria unwillingly opens its doors to capitalistic methods of trade. Third, liberalisation could mean less control of the ruling elites over the economic sector and consequently limiting their power. Last but not least, economic benefits for Israel can be used as tool to encourage its leader towards a political compromise. By giving in to free trade exchange, Arab countries can loose a bargaining power. They argue that economic cooperation should be a mean to support and enhance peace, which must be created first through a political settlement.

In any case, the solution would be to pursue good political and economic relations simultaneously, in order to bring both peace and prosperity. Economic plans can serve the political negotiations taking place in parallel, with each plan able to move forward independently, and without having to wait for the other.

## Chapter 6: Water and environmental cooperation

Former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Ghali famously said, "the next war in the Middle East will be fought over water, not politics"<sup>104</sup> He asserted the importance of water as the most important source of political and economic stability in the Middle East. Water has been a source of conflict in the past, leading to conflicts in the regions. Some authors (Darwish, Seliktar, Hussein) show that the scarcity of this valuable resource contributes to regional tensions and is one of the main aggravating factors in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Other political scientists, however, more optimistically point to the water as a tool for cooperation (Leyne, Sosland, Weiss, Boren, Jägerskog). Between both contending views, there is nevertheless a broad consensus, that an optimal utilisation of water resources requires a rational cooperative approach by riparian states. Boutros Ghali admits that “ the problem of water among countries who share the same rivers will be through a cross border cooperation and only through a cross border cooperation will we be able to avoid the possibility of confrontation.”<sup>105</sup>

In order to grasp the dynamics of interstate water relations in the Middle East, one

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104 "Talking Point: Ask Boutros Boutros Ghali," [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/2951028.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/2951028.stm) BBC News, June 10, 2003. (accessed 20.02.2010)

105 *ibid*

needs a solid understanding of geographical factors and historical practices. The first part of this chapter illustrates the scale of the problem by quoting data of current hydrologic conditions of the region. The second part describes the role of water in the Middle East conflicts. Third part discusses the possibility of regional solutions to water scarcity, which requires cooperation among states. Can the crisis be turned into opportunity? Could water, rather than land, be the way to cooperation and peace in the Middle East? The peace treaties and agreements and proposed development projects for regional cooperation leave some hope. Following, new technologies and creative solutions to water scarcity will be discussed. Additionally, historical perspective will be providing by a comparison with sharing resources of Indus River. Can Middle Eastern states follow this example? Then I discuss a few examples on environmental initiatives. Concluding remarks will be preceded by brief study of an outside influence on the water cooperation.

## Overview

Water is a topic well suited for an examination of regional cooperation in the Middle East. To an even greater extent than in the sphere of trade, there were serious and extensive efforts to construct regional cooperation architecture for water sharing. It is a sensitive issue since all sides as essential to life and state survival understand the nature of the water resource. Moreover, the strong tradition of farming, and the long history of denial the right to manage their natural resources cause the idea that water rights ought to be the starting point in any negotiation.

This chapter provides opportunities for exploring the relevance of other approaches, including that of interdependence and use of new technologies. Given the intense diplomatic efforts invested in regional water cooperation, the case of water illustrates the wide discrepancy between pledges about cooperation, and actual ability or willingness to act on these pledges. This gap is particularly stark in relation to the Jordan River and Golan Heights. The present chapter also highlights several additional features of regional cooperation in the Middle East, in the field of environmental protection in particular.

The hydrological interdependence of international river basins and its transnational character provides a rationale for cooperation<sup>106</sup>. The issue of interdependence is

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106 Anders Jägerskog (2009) Functional Water Cooperation in the Jordan River Basin: Spillover or

plainly visible when it comes to water resources and environmental protection, and cooperation in this domain seems unavoidable. Nevertheless, on various occasions zero-sum thinking prevails and efforts to protect sovereignty weaken cooperation. Sometimes states assume that a lack of unilateral control is damaging to their national interests. The situation is striking, since the interdependent nature of the problem calls for common solutions. No country cannot ignore water and air pollution. If when Gaza will run dry, and pollution from the Strip will threaten Israeli water reserves. Moreover, since the quality, quantity and timing of water flows to all Middle Eastern countries are sub-optimal, all of them could gain from an improvement of water management in the region.

### Hydrologic conditions of the region

According to *FAO Water Report 34 (2009)* the Middle East region accounts for about 5% of the world's population, but only 1% of the freshwater. The annual average precipitation is 440 mm, varying from 94 mm in Jordan to 823 mm in Lebanon. In typologies that rank countries on their adequacy of water supplies, Israel and Jordan are placed in categories of "absolute scarcity".<sup>107</sup> Dire situation is exacerbated by the growth of population and economic activity. Population aged 20-65 of the Middle East is expected to increase from 29 mln. In 2000 to 90 mln. over three times in thirty years<sup>108</sup>. The future population growth will continue to put additional strain on water supplies, creating the potential for further disputes. Moreover, the water stress in the Middle East is expected to be further exacerbated by climate change over the next decade. If there is no collaboration between countries that share water resources, the fight over natural resources could lead to a war.

### The role of water in Middle Eastern conflicts

After signing the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat said that his nation would never go to war again, except to protect its water resources. Also king Hussein of Jordan identified water as the only reason that might lead him to

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Spillback for Political Security? in Günter Brauch, Hans, Úrsula Oswald Spring, John Grin, Czeslaw Mesjasz, Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Navnita Chadha Behera, Béchir Chourou et Heinz Krummenacher (dir.) *Facing Global Environmental CEnvironmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts*, Berlin, Springer, 633-640.

107 *FAO Water Report 34 (2009)* <http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/catalogues/index2.stm> (accessed 27.02.2010)

108 Lutz, W. 2009. Changing population size and distribution as a security concern. Pages 203-213 in H.G. Brauch, U.O. Spring, J. Grin, C. Mesjasz, P. Kameri-Mbote, N.C. Behera, B. Chourou, and H. Krummenacher (eds.), *Facing GLobal Environmental Change. Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.

war with the Jewish state<sup>109</sup>. As the global population expands, water-supply systems may become instruments of political confrontation and. Major conflict in the region had arguably their origins in water dispute.<sup>110 111 112</sup>

The major outstanding disputes over the distribution and management of transboundary waters in the Mashreq the Jordan River basin among Israel, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinians; and West Bank groundwater between Israel and the Palestinians. The 1967 Six Day War between Arabs and Israelis had its origins in a water dispute between Israel and Syria over access to the Jordan River. At present, Israel's confiscation and domination of Palestinian water resources is a major impediment to the resolution of the conflict. Israel is alleged to have diverted up to 75% of Jordan resources, leaving negligible amounts for Syria and Jordan, and severely cutting access to water for Palestinians. This has led to a situation in which 26% of Palestinian West Bank residents have no access to running water, and spend an estimated 40% of their household expenditure on purchasing water.<sup>113</sup>

### Regional initiatives and agreements on shared water resources

The Middle Eastern countries undertook various inter-state initiatives to facilitate regional water management. Below is an overview of events and agreements in collaborative water relations in the region. Furthermore, it bears stressing that this is a selection of only what appear to be the most relevant agreements.

Shared water resources can also be a catalyst for dialogue. In fact, many examples show water supply issues in the Israeli Arab relations have been primarily the focus of cooperation rather than conflict. Jeffrey Karl Sosland<sup>114</sup> goes even that far to say that in the last 4,500 years the water scarcity has never precipitated a war. He admits, however, that the competition over resources can lead to political tensions.

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109 Darwish, A., 2003 Middle East Water Wars, BBC News [internet] 30 May Available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2949768.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2949768.stm) [Accessed 16 Feb 2010]

110 Ibid  
Hussein)

111 Seliktar, O., 2005. Turning Water into Fire: the Jordan River as the Hidden Factor in The Six Day War. The Middle East Review of International Affairs [online] 9 (2) Available at: MERIA <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue2/jv9no2a4.html>. [Accessed 20 Feb 2010]

112 Ameri, Hussein A. (Dec., 2002). "Water War in the Middle East: a Looming Threat". The Geographical Journal 168 (4): 313–323.

113 Amnesty International October 2009 Troubled Waters. Palestinians denied fair access to water. Index: MDE 15/027/2009. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/027/2009/en/e9892ce4-7fba-469b-96b9-c1e1084c620c/mde150272009en.pdf> (accessed 10.05.2010)

114 Jeffrey Karl Sosland (2007) Cooperating rivals: the riparian politics of the Jordan River Basin (New. York, USA: State University of New York Press

Hazem al-Nasser, Jordanian water minister, shares this view "From our experience, water is an element of peace-building and cooperation"<sup>115</sup> One of the conclusions drawn from the conference organised in autumn 2008 by a think tank Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz<sup>116</sup> was that distribution of limited water resources should be managed regionally. Munther Haddadin, former minister of water resources took up on this idea, initiating "Union of water and energy" for the region supported by renowned politicians as Joschka Fischer and Vaclav Havel. Can the water and energy be for Levant what coal and steel was for Europe? May then, paradoxically, the water bring stability in the region? Functionalist theory would support this opinion, as cooperation in the singular domains would build confidence among the nations. Gilead Sher, Israel's chief negotiator at the Camp David summit and the Taba peace talks in 1999-2001, endorses this opinion "We are great believers in the water issue as a catalyst for regional peace (...) In all previous rounds of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the water section has been very close to concluding between the sides within the agreement framework."<sup>117</sup> As David Boren<sup>118</sup> and Jägerskog<sup>119</sup> point out, whereas collaboration during and after the Second Intifada has halted in nearly every area, cooperation on water has continued. Indeed, the only agreements reached by the government of Israel and PA during the Second Intifada both involved water. The joint Israeli Palestinian Water Committee was the only working group that survived the collapse of the Oslo Peace Accords – continuing to meet up to now. While the issues of refugees, settlements and final borders were fiercely debated at Camp David – water were not cited by either party, as cause for the failure of the talks. It also includes a Water Development Programme, prepared by experts from both sides, which would also specify the mode of cooperation in the management of water resources in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and would include proposals for equitable utilization of joint water resources for implementation in and beyond the interim period. References to environmental issues<sup>120</sup> dealing with cooperation are very general: "Both sides will

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115 Leyne, Jon 'Water Factory' Aims to Filter Tensions," BBC News 7 Sept. 2004 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3631964.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3631964.stm) (accessed 24.02.2010)

116 Shlomo Ben-Ami, Bell J. "¿Una unión del Medio Oriente?", El tiempo 7 de noviembre de 2008

117 Stanley Weiss July 13, 2009 New York Times Online <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/opinion/14iht-edweiss.html> (accessed 21.02.2010)

118 "Water in the Middle East " (2006) Edited by K. David Hambright, F. Jamil Ragep, and Joseph Ginat Foreword by HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan Preface by David L. Boren University of Oklahoma Press

119 Anders Jägerskog (2009) Functional Water Cooperation in the Jordan River Basin: Spillover or Spillback for Political Security? in Günter Brauch, Hans, Úrsula Oswald Spring, John Grin, Czeslaw Mesjasz, Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Navnita Chadha Behera, Béchir Chourou et Heinz Krummenacher (dir.) Facing Global Environmental Change Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts, Berlin, Springer, 633-640.

120 Ibid annex III and annex VI. Annex III, clause 12B

strive to utilise and exploit the natural resources, pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, in a manner which shall prevent damage to the environment, and shall take all necessary measures to ensure that activities in their respective areas do not cause damage to the environment of the other side". Most measures are intended to mitigate different kinds of pollution. Other agreed principles are: developing measures to fight desertification, the need to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for major development programmes, and the protection of forests, nature reserves and natural assets.

Water cooperation with Jordan dates back to the 1950s when, under the auspices of the UN, Jordan and Israel collectively have chosen to coordinate water activities related to Jordan River. The cooperation was later formalised as part of Jordanian-Israeli Peace Agreement of 1994<sup>121</sup> that created Joint water committee (JWC). The peace treaty between Israel and Jordan includes article 6, which is dedicated to water. It designates "rightful allocations of both of them [Israel and Jordan] in Jordan River and Yarmouk River waters and Araba/Arava ground water..." Article 6 addresses the need to define water quantities and quality regarding usage, and the need to develop present and new water sources. It refers to required measures and monitoring in order to protect water resources from contamination.<sup>122</sup> Anders Jägerskog<sup>123</sup> points out that while in the case of Israel and Jordan the relations are relatively smooth, it is highly doubtful whether this has to any large extent to do with the functional water cooperation. Rather, there are strong political factors (such as US pressure, Israeli interest of keeping good relations with Jordan, etc.) acting as a strong forces reinforcing the cooperation).

While Syria has signed written agreements with its neighbours on transboundary rivers, none of these agreements is an international treaty that would have to be ratified by the Parliaments of the respective countries. The agreements are rather non-binding memorandums of understanding. The water from Yarmouk River, which forms the border between Jordan and Syria, is since the agreement in 1987 shared

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121 Israel –Jordan Peace Treaty, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Guide+to+the+Peace+Process/Israel-Jordan+Peace+Treaty.htm> (accessed 15.02.2010)

122 Era Tamar Achiron-Frumkin<sup>3</sup> and Ron Frumkin Water Allocation for Nature and the 'End of Conflict' in Water Resources in the Middle East, Israel-Palestinian Water Issues — From Conflict to Cooperation Springer Berlin Heidelberg

123 Anders Jägerskog (2009) Functional Water Cooperation in the Jordan River Basin: Spillover or Spillback for Political Security? in Günter Brauch, Hans, Úrsula Oswald Spring, John Grin, Czeslaw Mesjasz, Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Navnita Chadha Behera, Béchir Chourou et Heinz Krummenacher (dir.) Facing Global Environmental CEnvironmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts, Berlin, Springer, 633-640.

through the Unity Dam, built on the border between the two countries. There is an agreement between Lebanon and Syria over the Orontes River signed in 1994, which stipulates that Lebanon receives 80 million cubic meters of water per year if the river flow inside Lebanon is 400 million cubic meters per year or more".<sup>124</sup> There has been little cooperation on water issue between two adversaries: Israel and Syria. Syria insists that Israel must withdraw from the Golan Heights as part of any peace deal. Even though in 2007 and 2008 both sides raised their voices of will to negotiate, the efforts turned out to be futile. Conversely, current right-wing government of stresses the strategic importance of the Golan Heights and both Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman dismiss any hopes that Syria will recover the region bountiful in water resources. Syrian politicians realise the importance of water in policy-making of other countries. President Bashar al-Assad stated that the conflict between Syria and Israel has its origin in water dispute "Israel ranks its priorities in the following way: security, land and water, but the truth is different. They consider water to be the most important. Discussing this matter now is premature and its turn will come only after the land issue is discussed."<sup>125</sup> This view is contradicted by Jan Selby<sup>126</sup>, who states that in Israel's policy, water is secondary to the more pressing issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbours. During the talks conducted in 2000 and 2001 at Camp David and Taba, and Geneva Initiative 2002-2003 water was barely discussed and treated as a "technical issue". Then again, perhaps the reason was the will to maintain *status quo* beneficial to Israel. Can Golan Heights be transformed from divisive into unifying? This outlook will be expanded in the latter part of the chapter.

## New technologies and creative solutions

There is a broad consensus that since the local population increases and greater demands are made on already scarce water resources technical solutions to water shortages in the Middle East are necessary. The use of new technologies can "expand the cake" and allow for a more efficient water use. Without technological

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124 Dagge, J. Syria Today: Parting the Waters, by John, January 2010, (accessed on 18.02.2010)

125 Stanley Weiss July 13, 2009 New York Times Online <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/opinion/14iht-edweiss.html> (accessed 21.02.2010)

126 126 'New Security Thinking' in Israeli-Palestinian Water Relations 623

Jan Selby in H.G. Brauch, U.O. Spring, J. Grin, C. Mesjasz, P. Kameri-Mbote, N.C. Behera, B. Chourou, and H. Krummenacher (eds.), Facing Global Environmental Change. Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts. Berlin: Springer Verlag. p. 627)



cooperation, using new sources of water such as desalination and sustainable water management, water resources sharing agreement will not bring a desired effect. Taking into account population growth and the continuing deterioration of existing water supplies, without finding alternatives, the resources will not be sufficient in the near future. Can new technologies have a positive impact on integration, or, conversely, decreasing inter-dependence can lead to greater separation of the countries in the region?

## Desalination

While widely practiced in Israel and Gulf states, desalination used to cost three times what it costs to tap traditional sources. Recent technical improvements, however, give hope that desalination will turn into a more tenable solution.<sup>127</sup> There are alternatives to current water-usage patterns, particularly with regard to agriculture (the main cause of depleting water resources in the region<sup>128</sup>). The neoliberal logic of efficient water management points out that most of Israel's water was allocated at heavily subsidised prices to the economically insignificant (only 4 % of GDP) agricultural sector during the 1990s<sup>129</sup>. There are changes in the water policy influenced by neoliberal doctrine - water tariffs have increased, especially in the agricultural sector, and Israel has commenced construction of a raft of desalination plants which will soon be supplying 400 million cubic metres of water per year, not far off what it currently takes from West Bank aquifers shared with the Palestinians. Desalination plants were projected to be built in the Palestinian territories<sup>130</sup>. The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) states, however, that "the Palestinian side is unwilling to purchase water at such a high cost from sources that are on the Mediterranean Coast and Jordan River, knowing that this water in fact partially belongs to the Palestinians but is inaccessible for them."<sup>131</sup> In the PWA's opinion the desalination plants projects ignore the issue of Palestinian water rights and are a

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127 Jon Leyne 'Water Factory' Aims to Filter Tensions 24 September 2004 Source: BBC Online, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/> (accessed 4.03.2010)

128 AQUASTAT - FAO's Information System on Water and Agriculture [www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/.../index.stm](http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/.../index.stm) (accessed 1.03.2010)

129 'New Security Thinking' in Israeli-Palestinian Water Relations 623 Jan Selby in H.G. Brauch, U.O. Spring, J. Grin, C. Mesjasz, P. Kameri-Mbote, N.C. Behera, B. Chourou, and H. Krummenacher (eds.), *Facing Global Environmental Change. Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.

130 Council approves desalination plant for Palestinians By Zafir Rinat and Haaretz Correspondent <http://www.haaretz.com/news/council-approves-desalination-plant-for-palestinians-1.245793> (accessed 16.05.2010)

131 Palestine Water Authority opposes construction of desalination plant <http://washmena.wordpress.com/2009/03/04/palestine-water-authority-opposes-construction-of-desalination-plant/> (accessed 16.05.2010)

mean of cutting back on Palestinians right to the Jordan River. Particularly sensitive was the moment of announcement of the desalination project by Israeli water authority – during an attack on Gaza, which caused extensive damage to water infrastructure. Amjad Aliewi, water negotiator, confirms this statement by arguing that it is possible to discuss other issues, such as pollution, only after the water rights of the Palestinians have been clearly established.<sup>132</sup>

### Virtual water

The concept of "virtual water" developed by Tony Allan<sup>133</sup> is based on the quantity of water needed to produce a commodity. Virtual water is the very substantial volume of water embedded in water-intensive commodities such as grain. For instance, it takes 1,300 cubic meters of water on average to produce one metric tonne of wheat. When an economy imports a tonne of wheat it is in effect importing 1,000 tonnes of water. The MENA region was importing annually about 40 million tonnes of grain and flour by the end of the 1990s. About 40 billion tonnes of water would be required to produce this volume of grain.<sup>134</sup> This conception, however, faces some limitations – it would mean a drastic change to the structure of the region. Currently, agriculture is the largest contributor to the Gross Domestic Product and foreign exchange in the Middle East, and is the second largest employer<sup>135</sup>. In rural societies, farmers are by tradition politically influential and tend to support protectionist measures. Reallocating the water resources adds a huge burden on the farmers especially when a large portion of those farmers produces their only source of food supply. Furthermore, importing food could pose the risk of further political dependence.

Using more sustainable methods of water management and increasing resources by the usage of new technologies can have positive consequences for the cooperation in the region. "Expanding the cake" can lead to the prevention of disputes and enable fair distribution of resources. Some of these solutions are already being carried out independently by states in the region. However, they would probably be so much more effective if implemented at the regional level. Nevertheless, as the PWA statement shows, this cannot occur before establishing water rights through a

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132Ibid.p. 637

133 Allan T. (1997), "Virtual Water: a long term solution for water short Middle Eastern economies?". Paper presented at the British Association Festival of Science, September 9th 1997, Leeds

134 Allan, Tony, 1998, "Avoiding war over natural resources", in Forum: Water and war, ICRC

135 Salman Adel (1990) Agriculture in the Middle East : challenges & possibilities New York : Paragon House.

political arrangement.

### **Environmental initiatives**

The section above outlines attempts at tackling the water challenge on the governmental level. The cooperation schemes in the Middle East occur also on the civil society level. The Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)<sup>136</sup> is an organisation that brings together environmentalists from Jordan, Palestinian Authority and Israel with an objective to protect shared environmental heritage. They aim at building conditions for lasting peace through sustainable regional development. A document prepared by water experts, Model Water Accord, constitutes an agreement for cooperation in addressing common Israeli and Palestinian water challenges and in managing shared natural resources. FoEME's efforts are focused on the rehabilitation of the Jordan River, Dead Sea, Mountain and Coastal Aquifers and fostering awareness about the regional impact of climate change. Its main project, the Good Water Neighbours, engages grassroots communities throughout Israel, Palestine and Jordan in an effort to rehabilitate the regions shared water resources. The founders of EcoPeace: Jordanian Munqeth Mehyar, Palestinian Nader Al-Khateeb, and Israeli Gidon Bromberg, believe that water provides new ways for dialogue.

A relatively new success story is Green Action, which centres its activities on social issues and Green Action addresses, among other issues, the environmental devastation caused by the separation wall. Since 2005 the organisation promotes fair trade, at which it sells olive oil from Palestinian villages that were cut off from their farming land after the building of separation fence. It works together with peace organisations, such as New Profile, a feminist movement working to demilitarise society and state in Israel hoping to educate the Israeli public about the realities of life among Palestinian farmers and the repercussions of the Israeli occupation.

The Galilee Society initiated a coalition of five Arab and Jewish environmental organisations, in order to strengthen environmental monitoring, advocacy and awareness. Its activists present educational programmes in schools and organise environmental camps. Joint ventures between the Galilee Society and the Union for Environmental Defence prove, for instance, that the Jewish and Arab communities in

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<sup>136</sup> The Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) Available at: <http://www.foeme.org/> [Accessed 20 Feb 2010]

Israel share the same environmental interests and are sometimes even involved in the same cases. After the events of October 2000, when 13 Arab citizens were shot down by the Israeli police, the umbrella organisation Life and Environment launched an initiative "Room for Everyone" with an aim to "identify specific sites of shared environmental challenges that could bring together Arab and Jewish NGOs in a common campaign"<sup>137</sup>

Another valuable organisation is a network of Jewish and Arab volunteers in the Galilee who educate about environment their population groups. Raid Fadila, the Arab director of the NGO LINK to the Environment, is convinced that "the environment can serve as a bridge to peace and coexistence" <sup>138</sup> Life and Environment has initiated the Environmental Justice Committee, comprised of more than thirty social and environmental organisations: Jewish and Arab, secular and religious, central and peripherally located.

The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies<sup>139</sup>, located in Kibbutz Ketura on the Israeli-Jordanian border teaches and prepares future Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and Egyptian leaders to cooperatively solve the region's environmental challenges

### External actors' influence on water conflict

Outside powers have not been directly involved in water issues in the Middle East, nor did they have national interests at stake. The water in the Middle East, even though it is crucial for the economies of the region, has, unlike oil, little significance on a global scale. When it comes to foreign trade it is not one that gives the region any economic advantage. The key actors in managing water issues are, by the Middle Eastern states themselves – unlike the cases of trade and security, where external powers are more active. There are, however some schemes that support local initiatives financially and methodically. The EU, within UfM and the Humanitarian Aid framework assists local developments in the region. The EU gives

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137 Alon Tal, Pollution in a Promised Land An Environmental History of Israel University of California Press Berkeley

138 Environmental E-Bulletin "Earth Dav 2004", April 2004, Issue no. 9 Israel Ministry of the Environment

[http://www.sviva.gov.il/bin/en.jsp?enPage=bulletin&infocus=1&enDisplay=view&enDispWhat=object&enDispWho=News%5EI1767&enZone=april\\_bullo4&enVersion=0&](http://www.sviva.gov.il/bin/en.jsp?enPage=bulletin&infocus=1&enDisplay=view&enDispWhat=object&enDispWho=News%5EI1767&enZone=april_bullo4&enVersion=0&) (accessed 11.05.2010)

139 TODAY'S ZAMAN (Turkey) December 26, 2009

Environmental diplomacy and the Middle East by MICHAEL M. COHEN\*

<http://todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-196626-centerenvironmental-diplomacy-and-the-middle-eastbr-i-by-i-brmichael-m-cohencenter.html> (accessed 11.05.2010)

financial assistance to various projects, including aforementioned "Good Water Neighbours".

As far as the US is concerned, the efforts made to resolve the water dispute in the Jordan River basin were particularly visible on three occasions. In 1953-55, 1976-81, and 1987-90, the US' government was engaged in trying to establish an "international regime" that would oversee the distribution and management of the water among the riparian states. Its tool was to secure an agreement: among all four countries on the first occasion, among all except for Lebanon on the second, and between Israel and Jordan on the third. In the three attempts, outcomes fell short of the objectives; it was clear that in the absence of a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the parties were not going to come to an agreement.

Perhaps water, rather than land, could form the basis of an agreement between Israel and Syria, revolving in part around the disputed Golan Heights, the source of more than 55 percent of Israel's fresh water. Fred Hoff, an advisor on Syria to the Middle East Special Envoy George Mitchell, has developed an original, "green" approach to the peace process in the region. The US proposed common governance of water and natural parks on Golan Heights. Direct Israeli-Syrian talks have been frozen since 2008. Nonetheless, both Israeli and Syrian officials have expressed willingness to negotiations. For example, Israeli Prime Minister's office recently released a statement that "Israel's stance on the Syrian issue is known—it is willing to renew negotiations without preconditions."<sup>140</sup> President Assad also affirmed his intention to begin negotiations: "We still believe that we need to conclude a serious dialogue to lead us to peace."<sup>141</sup> In his proposal "Mapping Peace between Syria and Israel " Hoff recognises the psychological importance of the Golan Heights to both the Syrians and Israelis, and thus any agreement must provide both sides access to the territory. Hoff's proposal would create a Jordan Valley-Golan Heights Environmental Preserve that transfers the territory to Syrian sovereignty while retaining Israel's rights to the water and allowing Israeli citizens access to the preserve. In essence "Syria gets the land and regulated access to the water, and Israel gets the water and regulated access to the land."<sup>142</sup> Bi-national access to the reserve could increase Israeli-Syrian civilian contact and contribute to the peace building. The complete demilitarisation of the area would be guaranteed by the US.

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140 Julian Brody US attention turns Syria Israel Policy Forum  
<http://www.israelpolicyforum.org/blog/united-states-attention-turns-syria> (accessed 11.05.2010)

141 *ibid*

142 *ibid*.

Many intellectuals point to the importance of international community when it comes to resolving disputes. According to the Israeli scholar Bernard Avishai, the US should work with Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and Syria to resolve water conflict. "The best way to resolve the water shortage is to bring water from super-abundant sources in the north — that is, Turkey,"<sup>143</sup> The carrier would have to run through Syria and possibly Lebanon. Turkey has offered to lead such efforts in the past — most recently proposing a "water plan for peace," using water from the Manavgat River to help its neighbours. Israel's role in sharing its water expertise and technology is crucial. Furthermore, if water is shifts it status to public good, the UN could activate global effort to find tenable and environmentally friendly ways to convert seawater into drinking water.

## Conclusions

Water has been conceived in essentially zero-sum terms, as a scarce and finite good. It has contributed to tensions in the past and rivalry over this precious resource. As the global attention is drawn to the global warming, it becomes clear that no nation can address the environmental needs unilaterally. The Middle East is no exception. All countries of the region face environmental challenges brought upon by population growth and industrialization that affect their air and water quality. These ecological issues, of common interest to all parties, could lead to better understanding of each other. Because of the interdependent nature, water and environment would be a natural area for cooperation.

The joint ventures between Jewish and Arab organisations under the "Pollution knows no borders" banner have proved that environmental issues could become a vehicle for building bridges between the peoples. Bilateral or multilateral projects based on common interests regarding water, tourism and protection of the environment could become stabilising elements for the development of political relations.

The example of the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan shows that a peaceful resolution to the water conflict is not utopic. Yet in most of these Middle Eastern disputes, there is one key difference distinguishing them from the Indus

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143 143 Stanley Weiss July 13, 2009 New York Times Online  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/opinion/14iht-edweiss.html> (accessed 21.02.2010)

Basin situation. Pakistan is absolutely dependent on the Indus Basin while India has other sources of fresh water such as the Ganges Basin or the Cauvery Basin in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, allowing India to compromise more easily. In the Middle East by contrast, water is usually scarce for all parties, making compromises difficult. Furthermore, the three western rivers whose waters were awarded to Pakistan are not in areas of India requiring large-scale irrigation nor are irrigation projects to carry their waters to India's agricultural belt geographically feasible. In the Middle East, however, demand for water already outstrips supply, requirements are rising and current supply is unsustainable.

While that treaty lays out an agreement on sharing and managing water resources, it is not a basin-wide agreement: not only are Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians not signatories of the document, there is absolutely no mention of them. Missing from that equation are Syria and Lebanon. If the region's shared environment is to be fully addressed, both of these countries must be part of the deal, this equation cannot be completed until Israel is able to sign a peace treaty with both of them.

In the case of Israel and the Palestinians it is not apparent that the basic collaboration that is taking place between the water professionals is resulting in cooperation in other political areas. The spillover result beyond the water cooperation is not apparent yet.

## Conclusions:

The plethora of literature on the future of the Middle East can be reduced to two main contending views. One predicts that long lasting tensions, competition over power and limited resources will inevitably lead to an outbreak of war of devastating consequences to all countries of the region and to the whole world. The other outlook can be summarised as a positive one, stating that the current impasse can push the states to act cooperatively. Despite the contradiction in these views, the general consensus of opinion is that the *status quo* is unsustainable. The postponement of the conflict resolution decreases the chance for separation and the twin state. The occupation is bound to explode and paradoxically undermine Israel's national security interests and peace with the Arab states. Not only due to the rising internal tensions – such as population growth and poverty, but also because of the changes on the international arena such as Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapon.

The current state of affairs raises doubts about the feasibility of a full-fledged cooperation. It does come into question, however, what is the alternative? The cost of being 'a region without regionalism'<sup>144</sup> is too high for all states in the Mashreq Strategic Foresight Group report presents four scenarios for the region for 2025 taking into account both political and economic development and regional and international scene. The first one, 'where suspicion prevails' entails a two-state solution and the international community keeps pressure on all sides for the situation not to slide into a war. The second, 'where brutality reigns' has Iran testing its nuclear weapons and it is a matter of time before a massive war takes place between Iran and Israel. The third one, 'where equations change' has the US declined in its importance, Russia re-emerging, Iran undergoing a regime change, and a one-state solution. The last 'where people smile' projects a multipolar global order that shifts away from its over-dependence on oil and gas, a movement towards democracy, free movement of goods and people across the region leading to a 'Middle East economic union' by 2050.<sup>145</sup> It is not difficult to decide what is the best option.

This is not the first time in history that the question on the prospects of regional integration in the Middle East has been raised. In fact, the majority of literature on the regionalism in the Middle East was written in the 1990s, when peace talks and the signing of the Oslo Accords created an atmosphere of hope. The current mindset differs dramatically. Newly restarted talks receive little attention and even less illusion. The wide discrepancy between pledges about cooperation, and actual ability or willingness to act on these promises has discouraged both governments and citizens in the region and made them opt for separation rather than collaboration. Scepticism, however, should not mean resignation. Paradoxically, this lack of trust in a success of the peace talks coincides with the time when conditions are favourable for the establishment of a just and sustainable peace. The US and EU are both committed to the peace process, the Arab League is endorsing normalisation of relations with Israel through the Arab Peace Initiative, Syria has expressed its will to restart peace talks, the PA has experienced improvements in security and economic sector and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has begun implementing a non-violent plan to build state institutions in the West Bank. The level of violent clashes between Israel and the Palestinians is also very low.

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<sup>144</sup> Aarts, P. The Middle East: a region without regionalism or the end of exceptionalism? *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 20, No 5, pp 911±925, 1999.

<sup>145</sup> The cost of war (2009) Strategic Foresight Group Report [www.strategicforesight.com](http://www.strategicforesight.com) (accessed 10.05.2010)



Supporters of a wider regional cooperation often draw from the beginning of European integration with European Coal and Steel Community: “Steel and coal created the EU - water, energy and tourism will create the Middle Eastern Union”<sup>146</sup>. Many hope for a spillover - the creation and deepening of cooperation in one economic activity across borders would create pressure for further integration within and beyond that sector. Nevertheless, there is a crucial distinction between the situation at the beginning of the European Community and current situation in the Middle East. The beginning of the European integration process was only possible after the war was over and the borders were clearly delineated. It stands in contrast with the situation in the Middle East, when still many disputes are unsettled. It shows that a complete and final resolution to this intractable conflict must be achieved prior to efforts of regional cooperation in order for the latter to succeed.

Conflicts in the Middle East are interlinked and addressing these challenges within a regional framework is reasonable. According to General Mohammad K. Shiyab, director of Cooperative Monitoring Centre in Amman, achieving positive developments and progress during Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is highly likely to facilitate and expedite peace with Syria and unlock peace with Lebanon. This would certainly have a positive impact on regional stability as a whole.<sup>147</sup> Consequently, the improvement of Syria-Israel relations would have a positive externality on a wide range of issues: addressing the Iranian threat, terrorist activities in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq as well as its with relation to the West. Despite these encouraging prospects, the Israeli and Syrian cooperation is virtually nonexistent. If the conflict resolution is perceived in a wider context and involves multilateral dialogue, the agreement has a greater chance of being implemented. One day, if the conflict is resolved in the Middle East, regional cooperation between Israel and its neighbours will be the best way to consolidate peace and to achieve development.

A comprehensive solution should involve not only inter-state actors, but also pay attention to the needs of the people on the ground. An active, diverse civil society plays a valuable role in helping advance regional stability. The reduction of inequality and the promotion of social justice are intricately related to peace-building. It is

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146 Novik N, Strategic Foresight Group, Workshop on the cost of Conflict: [http://www.strategicforesight.com/Workshop\\_on\\_the\\_Cost\\_of\\_Conflict\\_Middle\\_East\\_2.pdf](http://www.strategicforesight.com/Workshop_on_the_Cost_of_Conflict_Middle_East_2.pdf) (accessed 27.05.2010)

147 Cooperative Monitoring Centre <http://www.cmc-amman.gov.jo/> (accessed 23.05.2010)

essential to mobilise domestic support for cooperation amongst countries and regions of the Middle East. Involvement of all stakeholders in the regional cooperation projects can make a valuable contribution to constructing a dialogue. Without a support from economic and social groups, inter-governmental cooperation is less likely to last. “The ultimate lesson we can glean from Oslo's limitations is that an enduring peace must be built from the bottom up, not from the top down. Instead of relying on the same archaic peacemaking strategy we've used for centuries (...) we can embrace a new model based on nurturing mutually beneficial forms of cooperation on the local level, as well as between cities and organizations.”<sup>148</sup> The solution to the conflict should be comprehensive and involve all levels – government and non-state, domestic and international actors. A profound climate of distrust created the preference for isolation and self-sufficiency rather than cooperation. Regionalism will not be possible unless the general public becomes aware of the substantial gains from cooperation with their adversaries. Truce and economic cooperation are more appealing than instability in the region that can slide towards a multifrontal war. The role of the international community could be very valuable in facilitating the cooperation. Security guarantees proposed by the US would be a realistic solution for Israel's security dilemmas, which would enable to convince the public that Israel's welfare and security would be better served by cooperating than by continuing the occupation.

An objective is to resolve multilateral disputes concerning regional attitudes in general. Therefore, peace has become the sole strategic choice available to all countries and parties in the region, regardless of any provocative actions and statements regionally employed to jeopardise the multilateral dialogue. Jean Monnet famously said that integration will arise out of necessity. Indeed, peace in the Middle East is no longer merely a “choice”. It is a must and a way to establish and secure it could be through a regional cooperation.

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<sup>148</sup> Uri Savir Oslo 15 years on: fruitful lessons from a flawed Mideast pact. Enduring peace must be built from the bottom up. September 12, 2008  
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