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The United States and Euro-Mediterranean Relations: Evolving Attitudes and Strategies



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Introduction

After 200 years as a Mediterranean power, the United States remains an enigma as a Mediterranean actor. The US casts a wide political and security shadow over the region, but has never articulated a Mediterranean policy, and there is little prospect of it doing so. Similarly, the US is an economic actor of some importance in key southern Mediterranean countries, but is a relatively insignificant actor in pan-Mediterranean terms. With a few exceptions, American aid, trade and investment around the Mediterranean have not, and probably will not play a role approaching that of the European Union. Despite many points of engagement, a "Mediterranean" outlook is not part of the American foreign and security policy tradition. Policy intellectuals and policymakers in Washington continue to apply other regional and functional templates in dealing with the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, and adjacent areas. But new US initiatives toward the Middle East, and evolving approaches to European security, will exert a strong influence on the climate surrounding the Barcelona Process and other Mediterranean dialogues – and could give rise to new cooperative efforts.

A visitor to Washington will search in vain for an entity within the foreign and security policy bureaucracy labelled "Mediterranean affairs." At a time when many of America's partners in Europe and the Middle East have established bureaus focused on Mediterranean issues, the American state and defence departments, as well as the analytic branches of the intelligence community, remain firmly divided between Europe on the one hand, and the Middle East (actually "Near East and South Asia"), on the other. From time to time, individuals within the foreign policy apparatus may take up crosscutting portfolios with a Mediterranean flavour. Overall, however, a Mediterranean outlook remains eccentric even outside the formal policy-making process, where analysts tend to mirror official policy interests. There is, therefore, no standing constituency interested in articulating an American response to Mediterranean initiatives emanating from across the Atlantic. This reality has shaped American behaviour over the last decades, and has encouraged an arms length approach to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), and to a lesser extent, NATO's Mediterranean dialogue

Will this approach persist, even as Europe pursues a more active policy in the Mediterranean? An explicit Mediterranean policy is unlikely to emerge from Washington over the next few years. That said, the post-September 11, 2001, post-Afghanistan, post-Iraq environment has spurred a series of new US initiatives aimed at the "Greater Middle East," and key aspects of American strategy will have a direct bearing on the political economy and security of the Mediterranean. Thus, the stage is set for a more explicit debate about US, European and southern Mediterranean interests and policies, with a range of possible paths, from convergence to heightened competition. To the extent that the "Greater Middle East" framework, or something like it, is taken up on both sides of the Atlantic, current Mediterranean initiatives may well be overtaken by an even broader approach encompassing the Gulf and perhaps Central and South Asia – something reminiscent of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) concept championed by Italy and Spain over a decade ago. Alternatively, wider Middle East initiatives may prove hollow, with a return to regional or even sub-regional dialogues based on narrower interests in north-south cooperation. The prospects for success in all such dialogues will also turn critically on the state of the Middle East peace process, in which the US will remain a central actor.

This paper explores evolving American attitudes toward Mediterranean strategy and dialogue, from the Cold War roots of Washington's wary approach, through the response to the Barcelona process, to the effect of the first and second wars with Iraq. The analysis concludes with a discussion of plausible "futures" and the prospects for a new American policy toward the Mediterranean.

Roots of a Wary Approach

The contemporary wariness of American policymakers toward Mediterranean initiatives has its roots in Cold War experience. For decades, American strategists viewed the Mediterranean largely through the lens of NATO's Southern Region and planning for the containment of Soviet power on the periphery of Europe. For all the importance of the Sixth Fleet in southern European and Middle Eastern perceptions, the Mediterranean was essentially a marginal theatre in the larger Cold War confrontation; less nuclear, less cohesive, and characterized by a relatively diffuse sense of threat. In the earlier years of the Cold War, Washington did have a series of distinctive bilateral relationships with southern European states. Over time these relationships, from Lisbon to Athens, became less distinctive and more clearly part of the overall relationship with Europe. Only Turkey remained – and to an extent, remains – a case apart. As southern European allies became more active in regional and transatlantic diplomacy in the 1980s, Washington began to take more notice of Mediterranean issues and proposals outside the NATO frame; most notably the concept of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean. On the whole, the response from Washington was unenthusiastic, for several reasons.

First, American policymakers in the late 1980s and early 1990s inherited a deep suspicion of regional security initiatives outside an east-west context. In the Mediterranean, regional security dialogues tended to be seen as thinly veiled attempts to limit the forces and freedom of action of the US (as well as the Soviet Union), through naval arms control, nuclear-free zones, or more general notions of the "Mediterranean for the Mediterraneans" as promoted by France, Algeria and others. Regional security initiatives in the Mediterranean and elsewhere were associated with non-aligned interests in a way that made them unattractive to Republican and Democratic administrations alike.

Second, by 1990, and from the perspective of America's Europeanists, Mediterranean initiatives along the lines of CSCM, as well as regional groupings such as the "Five plus Five," appeared as a distraction from more pressing challenges in central and eastern Europe, including the consolidation of a new relationship with Russia. As American interest in NATO enlargement gathered way in the early 1990s, this sense of competing priorities was reinforced. The centre of gravity for American engagement in Europe was firmly focused on Central and Eastern Europe, with Mediterranean issues a very distant, secondary consideration. Only the deepening crisis in Algeria, and the development of a more effective Franco-American dialogue on this subject in the early years of the Clinton Administration, offered a countervailing policy interest.

Third, with the Madrid and Oslo processes in full-swing, American policymakers were actively engaged in Middle East diplomacy. Despite the essential part played by Norwegian interlocutors in Oslo, and the central role of European and other partners in the multilateral negotiations (Arms Control and Regional Security - ACRS - and Regional Economic Development Working Group - REDWG), the American foreign policy establishment remained distinctly uncomfortable with the idea of a more balanced, transatlantic approach to the peace process. This discomfort reflected a natural desire for control and concentration of effort in Middle East diplomacy, together with a widely shared American (and Israeli) unease about a larger – and presumably more pro-Arab – role for Europe. Even in Arab circles, there was an open recognition that American power and perceived influence on Israeli behaviour were key factors encouraging a settlement. In Washington, European calls for Mediterranean dialogue tended to be seen as code for European interference in the Middle East peace process, a perception that continues to influence American attitudes toward Mediterranean initiatives.

For several years in the early 1990s, ACRS (the multilateral "Arms Control and Regional Security" negotiations) became an important if little discussed avenue for American engagement in a wider Mediterranean-Middle Eastern frame. Although centred on the stability of conventional and unconventional military balances between Israel and its Arab neighbours, ACRS also became a venue for consideration of so-called sub-regional issues in the Gulf and the Maghreb. Many of the initiatives undertaken through ACRS, from confidence building and transparency measures, through the attempt to create a network of security centres across the region, have been echoed in Euro-Mediterranean and NATO dialogues. For a period, when the bilateral aspects of the peace process were evolving positively, ACRS achieved impressive results and engaged

a wide range of partners on both sides of the Mediterranean (e.g., Turkey played an important role as a mentor for the conventional forces working group, and Qatar and Tunisia became leading advocates for sub-regional dialogue). The multilateral track of the peace process was also a vehicle for Russian, Canadian and European diplomats and experts to play a significant role alongside the US. Although the US role was central, it was far from exclusive.

Ultimately, ACRS foundered as a result of failures on the bilateral track, and in a more proximate sense, because of Israeli-Egyptian failure to reach agreement on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) questions. The latter issue became prominent in the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference, in which Egypt sought to play a leading role. Less discussed, but arguably as important, was the increasing discomfort of leading Arab states with the activism of sub-regional participants from the Gulf and North Africa. Toward the end of the period of progress in ACRS, significant energy and resources were devoted to these sub-regional initiatives.

Taken together, Cold War marginalisation and immediate post-Cold War suspicions, led to a climate of generalized scepticism toward Mediterranean initiatives among both European and Middle Eastern-oriented foreign policy constituencies in the US. Only in certain defence circles, including those NATO planners charged with attention to Southern Region issues, and within the military commands whose geographic areas of responsibility cut across traditional regional lines (e.g., EUCOM – United States European Command), was there a measurable degree of interest in Mediterranean problems and regional dialogue. Foreign and security policy-makers focused, and continue to focus, on Mediterranean partners where American military forces are deployed and whose bases, airspace and infrastructure figure prominently in regional strategies beyond the Mediterranean itself. By the mid 1990's, Turkey was the leading country of concern, followed by Italy and Spain. In the southern Mediterranean, Egypt and access to the Suez Canal have always figured prominently in the American calculus. The experience of the first Gulf War strongly reinforced these interests. Over the course of the conflict, it has been estimated that some ninety percent of the forces and material shipped to the Gulf arrived via the Mediterranean, by airlift and, above all, by sealift through the Suez Canal.

Despite a general climate of disinterest in Mediterranean matters, and with pressing policy priorities elsewhere, it is arguable that the US and Europe missed an opportunity to give the Barcelona initiative a meaningful transatlantic dimension. During the formative period of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, prior to the Barcelona summit, it was not a forgone conclusion that the US would remain outside the new initiative. Leaderships in both Spain and Italy were apparently amenable to giving the US an observer role, an arrangement that might have also been extended to Russia. Even apart from the question of a formal role, key European interlocutors were keen to engage American policymakers in a serious discussion on development and security in the Mediterranean.

But faced with a lack of consensus on the European side regarding the place of the US in the EU's nascent Mediterranean strategy, European diplomats did not press the question of a role for Washington. Indeed, the most logical framework for American participation in Barcelona would have been in the context of a wider, balanced transatlantic approach to development and security on the West's "peripheries," including Latin America and the Caribbean. No such framework existed, nor does it exist today.

At the same time, the American side was not positively inclined, for reasons noted earlier. Attempts by visiting southern European policymakers to raise the issue with their American interlocutors did not make a significant impression in Washington. Only on the occasion of Spanish Foreign Minister Javier Solana's visit to Washington several months prior to the Barcelona summit in 1995 did the Clinton Administration embrace a discussion of the EU's Mediterranean dialogue. By all accounts, the Spanish delegation was pleased to note this heightened interest on the US side, but the transatlantic engagement on Barcelona was short-lived, and the discussion of a formal US role faded into the background in the run-up to the Summit.

Over the last decade, American perceptions of Barcelona have been mixed. First, there

Barcelona, NATO Dialogue and the US Response



has been a persistent lack of knowledge about the EMP – and Mediterranean initiatives generally – within the American foreign policy establishment, a problem that extends to NATO's own Mediterranean Dialogue. It is no exaggeration to say that only a handful of officials and experts in Washington are conversant with the Barcelona process and parallel initiatives in other settings. Second, the US has an uneven stake in Barcelona's "baskets." The political and security dimension is clearly of the greatest relevance to American interests, with the economic and cultural dimensions far behind. Third, and more positively, there has been a tendency in some quarters to accept a more active European strategy in the Mediterranean as a natural consequence of Europe's economic and security interests. Even those inclined toward a sceptical view of European foreign and security policy initiatives tend to see the Mediterranean, and especially the Maghreb, as a place where Europe can and should play a leading role.

Many US analysts have an implicit model of Mediterranean affairs in which Europe deals with the (largely soft) security issues in the western Mediterranean, while Washington deals with the (largely hard) security issues in the eastern Mediterranean, and by extension, the Gulf. This model, largely accurate as a description of transatlantic approaches to the Mediterranean in past decades has arguably become obsolete as the EU perceives a greater stake in Israeli-Palestinian relations and security in the Levant. Deeper European engagement with Turkey, and membership for Cyprus, has also had the effect of drawing Europe more deeply into eastern Mediterranean affairs. At the same time, American political and security involvement in North Africa has increased sharply as a result of counter-terrorism policies and the transformation of relations with Libya. In short, traditional geographic lines regarding American and European engagement in the Mediterranean are becoming blurred.

In the period since Barcelona, the US has promoted a series of development and security initiatives relevant to the southern Mediterranean. The Casablanca economic summits, aimed at expanding the economic constituency for the Middle East peace process, enjoyed a brief period of attention when the Oslo process was evolving positively, but have been hostage to the rise and fall of the bilateral negotiations, and are now moribund. The "Eisenstadt Initiative" offered modest incentives for investment in North Africa, and attracted some interest among Moroccans and Algerians eager to diversify their relations, but was essentially insignificant given the scale of European economic engagement in the region. More recently, the Bush Administration has offered the vision of a Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) embracing the southern Mediterranean, but the thrust of American trade policy toward the region, as elsewhere, has taken the form of bilateral free trade agreements where possible. As a general observation, all of these initiatives lack a "critical mass" and suffer from inconsistent policy attention.

Only in the security realm, and especially through NATO, has the US been actively engaged in Mediterranean dialogue and cooperation. The US has had a NATO-centric approach to multilateral (actually multi-bilateral) dialogue in the Mediterranean. But even in this context, the US has hardly been in the vanguard of Alliance interest in Mediterranean initiatives. Southern European members, with Turkey, and more recently Germany and Britain, have all been more active supporters of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue since its launch in 1994; a surprising reality in light of America's strategic interests in the region. This can be explained, in large measure, by the extent of American attention to NATO's eastern enlargement and adaptation in the formative period of the Dialogue. Initiatives in the south tended to be seen as a distraction. Practical-minded American diplomats and military officials have been less interested in north-south dialogue *per se*, and more interested in pragmatic defence and defence-related cooperation with southern Mediterranean partners.

As the NATO Dialogue has acquired a more active and practical quality, American attention and support has increased¹. US policymakers supported the enlargement of the Dialogue to include Algeria, and most recently a high-ranking US military official has expressed interest in bringing Libya into the initiative in the near future². In the post-September 11, 2001 environment, American interest in NATO's southern engagement has clearly increased. At the same time, the Alliance faces a continued problem of public acceptance in southern Mediterranean countries, a problem heightened by the US-led intervention in Iraq. More fundamentally, the place of NATO in US strategy has

1. For a discussion of new directions for the Dialogue prepared in 1998-99 for NATO and the Spanish Ministry of Defence, see Ian O. Lesser et al., *The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Initiative: Evolution and Next Steps* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000); see also Thanos Dokos, "NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue: Prospects and Policy Recommendations", *ELIAMEP Policy Paper No. 3* (Athens: ELIAMEP, 2003).

2. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. General Envisions Libya as a Possible Ally", *New York Times*, March 27, 2004.

become less clear-cut. A diminished role for NATO in American policy would almost certainly affect American perceptions about the utility of NATO dialogue in the Mediterranean. By contrast, under conditions of renewed US interest in the Alliance as a vehicle for defending common security interests outside Europe, and especially in the "Greater Middle East," the Mediterranean Dialogue could acquire greater significance for Washington. US policy will likely favour the development of more tangible Alliance engagement in the south, on the pattern of the Partnership for Peace, or even some form of associate membership for interested partners across the Mediterranean – an idea unthinkable just a few years ago.

The war in Iraq has transformed the American position in the Mediterranean in important ways, and will shape American perceptions regarding Mediterranean initiatives. Indeed, the Iraq experience and its effects should be seen as part of a *continuum* of transforming developments, beginning with September 11, 2001 and including the dramatically changed relationship with Libya, the continued deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations, and the terrorist bombings in Istanbul and Madrid³.

The war in Iraq has strongly reinforced a geographic shift in the nature of American stakes in the Mediterranean, a shift evident since the time of the Gulf War of 1990. From the end of the Second World War, it has been possible to describe America's Mediterranean interests as derivative of a wider stake in European security. For decades during the Cold War, this European dimension of Mediterranean security was dominant in American strategy toward the region, and it was, of course, highly NATO-centric. At times, and with increasing force since 1990, American strategists have been concerned about the Mediterranean as a vehicle for power projection beyond the Mediterranean basin – as an anteroom to the Persian Gulf. US attention to the Mediterranean has also been driven by specific crises and potential-crises, from the Western Sahara to Cyprus, as well as persistent instability in the Balkans. If Arab-Israeli dynamics are included, it is clear that Mediterranean problems have occupied an extraordinary amount of the time and attention of successive administrations in Washington, even if the Mediterranean itself has not been a frame for American strategic thinking.

With the events of 1990 and 2003-2004, the "Middle Eastern" dimension of American engagement in the Mediterranean has become dominant. At the same time, the European security dimension has declined, as longstanding security challenges in Europe itself have been resolved. In the early 1990's, the US paid attention to the crisis in Algeria because European allies were concerned about the political violence in that country, and possible spillovers. Today, American interest in Algeria is driven by other, more direct concerns.

September 11, 2001 and the Iraq war have also marked a substantial shift from a US foreign and security policy oriented toward *regions*, to a policy driven by specific *functional* issues. Counter-terrorism heads the list of current functional challenges, together with countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, energy security, and political and economic reform. For the US, these are now global imperatives, with regional applications. Traditional notions of regional strategy and regional partnership – including regional alliances – are out of fashion in Washington. Sharper measurements of interests and cooperation with regard to specific problems are in the ascendancy. In the Mediterranean context, this has meant attention to a series of new priorities, to be pursued with or without international partners, as necessary. The durability of this functional orientation in international policy is an open question. But to the extent that it persists, it will inevitably affect the quality of American relationships on both sides of the Mediterranean. It has already given rise to specific initiatives with Mediterranean application, including the Proliferation Security Initiative aimed at international cooperation in the interdiction of WMD and missile transfers at sea⁴.

American officials (and analysts from a range of political perspectives) have begun to redefine the Middle East in ways that reflect a perceived arc of crisis stretching from West Africa through the Mediterranean to the Gulf, South and Central Asia – in short, much of the globe. The Bush Administration's "Greater Middle East Initiative" reflects

War in Iraq, and Mediterranean Consequences

3. The implications of September 11, 2001 and the War in Iraq on Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation and transatlantic relations have been discussed in a series of conference-based publications by the ZEI (The Center for European Integration Studies) at the University of Bonn. See, for example, Carlo Masala, ed., "September 11 and the Future of Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation", ZEI Discussion Paper C120, 2003.

4. For a comprehensive discussion of the maritime aspects of globalization and security, including the WMD dimension, see Sam J. Tangredi, ed., *Globalization and Maritime Power* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2002).

an interest in reforming undemocratic and often dysfunctional societies across a vast, underdeveloped and unstable region on Europe's periphery. In important respects, the initiative reflects goals that were part of the rationale for the intervention in Iraq, and have been part of the pre-existing Middle East Partnership Initiative: democratisation and the creation of a democratic model for political change across the Middle East (or more accurately, across the Muslim world). With the deepening instability in post-intervention Iraq, this seems a more distant prospect, and the notion of Iraq as a model resonates in few places. Arab and Muslim governments have reacted with distaste to the Greater Middle East Initiative, arguing that political change across the region must come on regional terms and have an indigenous basis⁵. European and Turkish observers too, have been unenthusiastic about a democratisation initiative developed in Washington⁶.

The Initiative is unlikely to move ahead briskly after it is introduced at prospective NATO and G-8 summits in the spring of 2004. But the idea that a wider regional frame, going beyond North Africa, the Levant and the Gulf, is necessary to address a variety of trans-regional problems of security and development is likely to persist, and could affect transatlantic and European approaches to the Mediterranean. The EU may well find that the Barcelona initiative needs to be broadened in scope to embrace partners beyond the Mediterranean basin, an interest that intersects with emerging EU policies toward "wider Europe." If NATO continues to evolve in the direction of an alliance focused on extra-European security, this process is unlikely to stop at the shores of the Mediterranean (Alliance involvement in Afghanistan has already set a strong precedent here). In short, the American-led interest in developing a set of development and security policies toward the south and east, broadly, will have parallels in EU policy, and may outrun well-established Mediterranean initiatives.

On both sides of the Atlantic, but above all for the US, Iraq poses the question of whether the "north" still has a *status quo* posture toward the south. This question is bound up with a larger issue of perceptions about American power, but it is also worth asking about Europe. Governments and observers in southern Mediterranean countries will surely ask this question with increasing frequency in the years ahead. Increasingly conditional strategies toward the south, aimed at shaping the security environment facing Europe and the US in a more active way – "shaking things up," to use terminology popular among American neo-conservatives – may provide a clearer rationale for US, NATO and EU policies toward the south, but they are unlikely to find a receptive audience across the Mediterranean. This tension is likely to become more pronounced as America and Europe come to see their security interests, both internal and external, as tied to the state of societies across the greater Middle East. In important respects, strategy toward the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the post September 11, 2001 (and for Europe, post-March 11, 2004) world is less about traditional foreign policy aims, and more about extended homeland defence.

Looking Ahead: Three Possible Futures

It is a mistake to view transatlantic relations in the Mediterranean as essentially competitive, despite the attractiveness of this model in some quarters on both sides of the Mediterranean. But there are certainly pronounced and longstanding asymmetries in transatlantic approaches to the region. The most basic asymmetry has been noted earlier: the absence of any significant Mediterranean "consciousness" in the US, and the continued absence of an explicit Mediterranean policy to parallel that of Europe. The preponderance of American military power, and the weight of European economic engagement in the Mediterranean is another important asymmetry. Looking ahead, will this pattern continue, or will the US and Europe move toward more directly competitive – or cooperative – postures in the Mediterranean? Several possible scenarios are worth examining.

Heightened Competition?

The asymmetries in transatlantic perceptions and approaches to the Mediterranean could acquire a more tangible form as the challenges of security and political change around the Mediterranean become more central to planning in Washington and Europe. There is already some evidence of this. Across North Africa and the Middle East, Europe has been more attuned to soft security, more favourable to government-led initiatives, more open to dialogue as a confidence-building measure, and perhaps, less tolerant

of the southern Mediterranean's many non-democratic and sovereignty-conscious "strong states." The US, by contrast, has focused on hard security, favours private-sector initiatives for development, prefers practical cooperation over generalized dialogue and, at least since September 11, has been relatively tolerant of strong states with questionable human rights records.

At what point might these considerable asymmetries move into the realm of active competition? The critical factor is likely to be the health of transatlantic relations in overall terms. Provided that there is a basic agreement on political objectives in the south, a healthy transatlantic relationship encourages a division of labour based on different instruments and emphases. Indeed, this is a roughly accurate description of transatlantic relations in the Mediterranean for the past few decades. It has certainly been the perception regarding EU and NATO initiatives in the south, where policymakers have tended to see a useful division of labour. As the EU moves toward a more active Euro-Mediterranean security and defence dialogue, with many of the dimensions of NATO's engagement in the south, the question of competition or compatibility will become more acute⁷.

As Europe comes to see the Middle East peace process as more central to its own security interests, the willingness of the US to accept a more active European role in Middle East diplomacy will be a key test of cooperation in a Mediterranean setting⁸. The failure to develop a more concerted transatlantic approach to Israeli-Palestinian relations could well spur more independent and competitive strategies. Public and elite opinion in the south is another critical variable. The steady deterioration of attitudes toward the US, well documented in recent polls, could encourage the "de-coupling" of European and US strategies in the Mediterranean as European policymakers seek to distance themselves from unpopular American policies (the April 2004 release of a statement, apparently by Osama Bin Laden, offering a truce to states "north of the Mediterranean" who disassociate themselves from the US-led operations in Iraq, plays on this potential for de-coupling)⁹. Under these conditions, Southern Mediterranean partners will face a dilemma. They too may wish to emphasize their less controversial relations with the EU, but will also wish to retain close security ties with Washington.

Heightened transatlantic competition in the Mediterranean is by no means inevitable. Taking a longer view, it is just as likely that common policy challenges will produce a convergence of perspectives and policies in the Mediterranean. Again, the overall quality of transatlantic relations will be a critical factor. However, assuming a return to more positive patterns in US-European relations, the Mediterranean offers promising avenues for closer cooperation. The functional issues of interest to Washington and Europe are similar, from political and economic reform in the south, to questions of energy security, the containment of terrorism, political violence, and proliferation risks, and a resolution of Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In the Western Sahara, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Cyprus and the Aegean, and elsewhere, American and European stakes in crisis management and the resolution of disputes are essentially congruent. The question of Islam in the West looms large on both sides of the Atlantic, although perceptions and approaches differ significantly¹⁰. There may well be a degree of commercial competition, for example over access to new energy projects in Libya or Algeria. But this is unlikely to disrupt a relationship that is fundamentally cooperative.

Turkey is a special case. Washington continues to be strongly supportive of Turkish membership in the EU, and both Europe and the US share a pronounced interest in the continued convergence of Turkey with western practices and institutions. With looming EU decisions regarding the formal opening of accession talks with Turkey (a decision is to be taken in December 2004), it is unclear whether American lobbying will help or hinder Turkey's prospects. Washington has no real standing in the decisions to be taken by the EU over the coming months and years, although it has an undoubted stake in the outcome. A positive decision regarding accession talks, coupled with more coherent European foreign and defence policies, could offer Turkey new avenues in security terms, and might result in a weakening of Turkish ties to Washington. By contrast, a negative decision regarding the opening of accession talks, and a "hollow" candidacy, might encourage a closer security relationship with the US. The more likely

New Convergence?

5. Steven Weisman and Neil MacFarquhar, "U.S. Plan for Mideast Reform Draws Ire of Arab Leaders", *New York Times*, February 27, 2004.

6. "President Sezer: Turkey Should Not be a Part of Greater Middle East Initiative", TUSIAD, *Selected News on Turkey*, April 13-19, 2004.

7. See Álvaro de Vasconcelos, "Launching the Euro-Mediterranean Security and Defense Dialogue", *EuroMeSCo Briefs*, January 2004; and Roberto Alboni, "The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Regional and Transatlantic Challenges", *Opinions* (SAIS Center for Transatlantic Relations, Cooperative Security Program, 2004).

8. See Michael Schmidmayr, "Assessing European-Levantine Relations by the Numbers", *Policywatch* No. 816 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 12, 2003).

9. Recent polling by the Pew Institute highlights the striking decline in international perceptions of the US, especially in the Middle East.

10. See Zachary Shore, *Muslim Europe and the Transatlantic Divide*, AICGS Working Paper Series (Washington: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2004).

consequence of a stalled relationship with Europe will be growing nationalism, even isolation in Turkish policy – a problematic situation for all sides¹¹.

The Mediterranean will also offer new tests for the compatibility of wider security strategies on both sides of the Atlantic. In important respects, including the emphasis on political change in the south and terrorism and proliferation challenges, the European Security Strategy (the "Solana document") adopted in December 2003, mirrors the new American national security strategy document, although with a weaker emphasis on preventive action¹². The new security challenges described in both strategy documents are typical of the Mediterranean environment. Moreover, unlike the Gulf, or South and Central Asia, the Mediterranean is an area where the American and European capacity for action is relatively balanced in political and logistical terms. Given a fundamentally sound transatlantic relationship – and this cannot be taken for granted – the potential clearly exists for greater convergence in transatlantic perceptions and approaches to the Mediterranean.

A Continuation of America's Arms Length Approach

A third scenario involves neither increased competition nor explicit convergence, but rather the continuation of an asymmetrical approach in which Europe focuses more intensively on the Mediterranean, and the US concentrates on problems of a global nature, further afield. In this scenario, Washington takes only a modest interest in Mediterranean initiatives. Despite decades of behaviour in this mold, this may well be the least likely scenario for the future. From both the American and European perspectives, the Mediterranean and its hinterlands are the places where new strategies will be tested. A wider role for NATO will embrace the Mediterranean, but will almost certainly look to stability over a wider geographic area, from Africa to South and Central Asia. A more independent external strategy for Europe will, similarly, involve more active engagement in the Mediterranean and across Eurasia. If European affairs *per se* are no longer the principal field for transatlantic cooperation, Europe and the US will need to decide where they will seek to cooperate. Many of the key test cases will be in the and around the Mediterranean, with the Middle East peace process, or policies aimed at containing the consequences of continued conflict, at the forefront. Failure to develop convergent approaches in the Mediterranean, where basic interests and capabilities are shared, bodes ill for the emergence of more global cooperation¹³.

At the operational level, there has always been a strong tradition of transatlantic cooperation on security matters in the Mediterranean, bolstered by a number of important bilateral relationships. In practical terms, there is no shortage of dialogue and cooperation on security matters, from maritime search and rescue (where there has even been some indirect cooperation between the US and Libya) to training, defence-industrial cooperation and intelligence sharing. NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is increasingly active in the area of practical cooperation, including civil-emergency planning. The more difficult conversations, both north-south and transatlantic, are at the level of strategy and high-politics, where issues of American power and policy are never far from the surface. This reality is especially striking today, as the transatlantic emphasis on counter-terrorism and the containment of proliferation risks has spawned new examples of American engagement around the Mediterranean – cooperation with Libya and defence access arrangements with Algeria are part of this *phenomenon*. But broad, multilateral dialogue on political and security futures in the Mediterranean has actually become more difficult against a backdrop of north-south and transatlantic tensions over Iraq.

The Future of America's Mediterranean Engagement

Looking ahead, the US is unlikely to articulate an explicit Mediterranean strategy, and with the exception of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, will remain aloof from most regional initiatives along north-south lines. That said, the practical content of American engagement in the Mediterranean has increased and could increase further, driven by the prevalence of new security challenges across the region. Several factors will shape how the US acts, and is seen to act, by countries on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The first and most fundamental determinant will be the overall evolution of US foreign

policy. This is not simply a matter of more or less multilateral visions, or leadership style. Regardless of the political character of the Administration in Washington, the trend toward an international policy driven largely by functional rather than regional concerns (a trend with antecedents predating September 11, 2001) will have profound implications for America's role in the Mediterranean. The net result is likely to be a closer measurement of cooperation on specific problems, less predictability in regional relationships, and an emphasis on *ad hoc*, bilateral modes of cooperation. Under these conditions, broad gauge north-south dialogue on security and development is likely to remain the province of the EU.

Second, even if the US-inspired "Greater Middle East Initiative" fails to gather support in Europe and the Middle East, the interest in some form of wider strategy toward the entire underdeveloped and unstable area from West Africa to Central and South Asia, is likely to persist (in the most ambitious conception, it might even extend to Latin America, where the US faces problems of development and stability roughly – but only roughly - analogous to those on Europe's southern periphery). Current thinking focuses essentially on the future of societies in the Muslim world, and the implications for security in the West. Ultimately, the real issues may be north-south on a global basis. For Washington, the ability of existing institutions such as NATO to address global rather than regional security challenges will be a key test. To the extent that EU pursues a more ambitious strategy for security beyond Europe, the stage will be set for marked convergence, or heightened competition across the Atlantic, with obvious implications for the Mediterranean. Again, the least likely scenario is "business as usual." The outcome will, of course, also shape the environment facing countries along the southern shore of the Mediterranean, where the prospect of having to choose between competing American and European strategic visions poses difficult dilemmas.

Third, whether in concert or competition, American and European strategies toward the "periphery" are headed toward wider geographic conceptions that may out-run established Mediterranean frameworks. Over the next few years, NATO and the EU will face decisions regarding the enlargement of existing dialogues that may alter the "Mediterranean" character of current arrangements. If north-south political, economic and security dialogues become more global, this could open the way for the revival of long-standing sub-regional initiatives (e.g., the Five plus Five), which might now acquire a more Mediterranean character. Or, new frameworks, focused more specifically on the Mediterranean, possibly with specific functional mandates (e.g., on energy or migration) could emerge. Washington's role in these efforts is an open question, but without question, the character of American involvement will be shaped by longer-term trends in US foreign policy and the overall quality of transatlantic relations.

11. Ian O. Lesser, "Playing Turkey", *Aspenia* 21/22, 2003.

12. See *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, December 2003.

13. For an excellent general discussion of the outlook for transatlantic relations relevant to the Mediterranean, see Gustav Lindstrom, ed., *Shift or Rift: Assessing US-EU Relations After Iraq* (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2003).